

Pseudo-left embrace Syriza's alliance with the Independent Greeks

Chris Marsden
16 February 2015

The decision by Syriza to form a coalition government with the Independent Greeks (Anel) provoked initial political embarrassment for the party's innumerable pseudo-left apologists.

For years, Syriza has been held up as a model of a new kind of "broad," "inclusive" and "left" party to be emulated everywhere. But Syriza took office in coalition with a ferociously nationalist, right-wing split-off from New Democracy, the main party of the bourgeois right in Greece.

Anel calls for the forced deportation of undocumented immigrants and opposes granting citizenship to second-generation immigrants. It upholds above all the authority of the Greek Orthodox Church and the armed forces. The party's leader, Panos Kammenos, who is pledged to "protect the armed forces from some of the strange mentalities within Syriza," was given the post of defence minister.

Despite all of this, it did not take long for the pseudo-left to move from first providing political apologies for Syriza's actions to fully embracing the alliance with Anel as a model to be emulated.

Alex Callinicos of the UK Socialist Workers Party offered up friendly criticism of Syriza, which he described as "the main party of the urban working class," for forming a coalition that was "unnecessary."

Left Unity now heads its website with the appeal, "Build a Syriza here." It suggested that the coalition "is likely to be short lived," before stressing that any criticism offered was only as "unconditional friends and supporters of the Greek struggle against austerity."

The Socialist Party republished an excerpt from *Xekinima*, organ of the Greek affiliate of the Committee for a Workers International, denouncing the Greek Communist Party (KKE) for supposedly forcing Syriza into this "dangerous trap" by refusing to join a coalition itself.

Appreciating the difficulties facing their political allies, Haris Triandafilidou of Syriza penned a piece that was republished in the *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*. She offered up an unashamed endorsement of Anel, so as to calm "the concerns of numerous Syriza

supporters in other European countries," which included the claim that Anel was pledged "to popular sovereignty, the protection of the constitution, national pride and parliamentary democracy" and was "committed to equal rights (isonomy), solidarity, justice, meritocracy and equality"—positions she said "that rarely had matched the right-wing extremist profile pinned on the party."

Of particular significance for the pseudo-left was her insistence that "pro-memoranda and anti-memoranda attitudes have overtaken the political division between right and left ... If the left wants to persevere and serve the purpose of promoting emancipatory processes, creating scope for action, providing a voice and political home to subaltern societies, it cannot refrain from taking certain tactical steps in order to get closer to its strategic goals."

The claim that divisions between "left" and "right" no longer have meaning, compared to the attitude of organizations to the "memoranda," the austerity agreements between Greece and the Troika (the IMF, European Union and European Central Bank), has been taken up by the pseudo-left groups to justify their own alliances and proposed alliances with nationalist and far-right groups and parties throughout Europe.

The most forthright presentation of the broader significance of the Syriza/Independent Greeks alliance is made by Kevin Ovenden on the website of Counterfire, an SWP splinter. Citing the "political logic" behind the alliance between Syriza and Anel, he asks, "How can a party of the radical Left be in alliance with that Greek Ukip? [United Kingdom Independence Party] Well—the memorandum cuts through politics in Greece orthogonally (at right angles) to the Left/Right divide."

Anel, he admits, "is a nationalist, xenophobic, anti-German party," but, "Most of the Left Platform—led by Panayiotis Lafazanis" were in favour of the alliance with Anel "because they share the strategy of building broad 'popular alliances' shaped by what they frame as a 'national struggle' against the Troika."

"We are at the beginnings of this process. Not the end," he

predicts. “There will be much more of this kind of thing.... Some genuinely believe this to be a correct policy.”

The direct comparison of Anel with UKIP is a devastating exposure of the politics of the pseudo-left. All such groups in Britain have spent years declaring UKIP to be far-right, racist and dangerous—largely as a means of lining up workers behind the Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy. Now they not only apologise for Syriza allying with a similar formation, but even declare in favour of forming their own alliance with UKIP—if this means winning access to parliament and the privileges and wealth this bestows.

Counterfire is in an intimate alliance with the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain in the all-but defunct Stop the War Coalition, and its authors also often write for the CPB’s *Morning Star*. In a discussion thread begun by Counterfire’s Clare Solomon, a reader of the *World Socialist Web Site* asked her:

“Syriza are in government with UKIP style Independent Greeks. Would Counterfire advocate a similar coalition in the UK eg Left Unity (or indeed any tendency describing itself as left incl[uding] counterfire) and UKIP as a “necessary evil”?

Solomon initially responded “Nope” and called it “a terrible plan.”

This was too much for Matthew Willgress. “Is it really [Counterfire’s] position this is a ‘terrible plan’,” he asks. “Of course the Britain comparison is more than a little abstract.”

Solomon Hughes, ex-SWP and a writer for the *Guardian*, replied, “Personally I think Syriza’s deal with the Independent Greeks is fair enough” and then outlined a similar scenario for Britain that would dictate the same response:

“If A UK far left government got elected whose primary issue was to renegotiate or cancel a Euro debt that was really killing the country, and if they needed one more seat... So the choice was, no government against the debt, or one minister for UKIP, in an otherwise very left wing government, then that is not an unreasonable choice, even if a bit weird [sic].”

Willgress concurred.

Josh Clarke expressed concern that “Having a very authoritarian right wing minister in charge of Defence and talking to the generals in Greece at that point won’t be a minor problem.”

To which Hughes replied, “Actually I am not sure that is the worst Ministry... The real problem with the Independent Greeks having a Defence Ministry post is that they might accidentally start a war with Turkey—or I think a conflict with Macedonia. I don’t think a question of an army coup is on the cards at all...”

Solomon closed the discussion, stating that, “It may just

work out, all sorts of things happen at sea, so to speak.”

There is no political line that the pseudo-left groups will not cross. They are neither socialist, nor “left” in any real sense. Rather, they articulate the class interests of a privileged middle class layer who want nothing more than a minor redistribution of wealth so that more ends up in their own pockets. In return, they are ready to assume office and do whatever is asked of them, including an alliance with rightist forces that in Greece opens the way for military intervention against the working class.

The turn to alliances with right-wing nationalist forces did not begin in Greece. It was prefigured in Ukraine during the Maidan protests, when the pseudo-left embraced a movement led by the fascist Right Sector in alliance with US and German imperialism. Ilya Budraitskis, a leader of the Pabloite Russian Socialist Movement (RSM), called for a “conversation” about working alongside the far right was that was “important not only in the Ukrainian context, but also for the future...”

In the UK, last year saw the line-up of the pseudo-left behind the Scottish National Party during the independence referendum campaign—on the basis that a common commitment to “national self-determination” was the basis for a long-term political alliance with the main capitalist party in Scotland.

Commenting on the significance of this stand, the Socialist Equality Party of Britain noted that the political logic of this alliance would soon be played out in the rest of the UK. We wrote in our October 28, 2014 Congress resolution:

“This apologia for nationalism has nothing to do with Marxism, socialism or the working class. It puts the pseudo-left in the same political trench as numerous far-right groups. In the aftermath of the referendum, they are demanding that the 2015 general election be transformed into a plebiscite on [Scottish] separation. Meanwhile, Left Unity has stressed the need to ‘advocate a new constitutional settlement for England; we should campaign for an English republic.’”

Welcoming the alliance with the Independent Greeks and speculation on a similar arrangement with UKIP shows the precise meaning of the calls to form a UK equivalent to Syriza. It would represent the creation of an anti-working-class party, combining vague social rhetoric with nationalist appeals for “unity” aimed at defending the capitalist order.



To contact the WWSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wwsws.org/contact