

Der Spiegel lionizes Syriza

Peter Schwarz
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“When in doubt, then to left” is the title of Jakob Augstein’s weekly column for *Spiegel Online*. His most recent comment sheds some light on what Augstein, son of *Der Spiegel*’s founder Rudolf Augstein, really means by this. Even when the right-wing character of something leaves no grounds for doubt, he describes it as “left.” In other words, he serves as a left fig leaf for *Der Spiegel*.

Augstein’s column on February 26 lionizes “the left government in Greece,” which has “put up a brave fight against the euro states.” Although the Greek finance minister and premier completely capitulated to the dictates of the European Union and the German government, Augstein absurdly presents “the athletic Varoufakis and the boyish Tsipras” as the rebirth of the ancient hero Odysseus.

He quotes—first in ancient Greek, then in German—the introductory words of Homer’s *Odyssey*: “Tell me, O muse, of that ingenious hero who travelled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy.” He then proclaims Varoufakis to be that “ingenious hero” in whose hands lies “the game of Greece’s future, the future of the euro and the future of Europe.”

“It is good for the Greeks,” concludes Augstein, “that they still have such ingenious men.”

The weekly newspaper *Der Freitag*, which Augstein bought in 2008 and where he has served as chief editor for two years, develops the cult of the Greek finance minister even further. The profiles of Karl Marx and Varoufakis grace its front page in the style of the Stalinist side-by-side profiles of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

The editorial staff published a German translation of Varoufakis’ “How I became an erratic Marxist” as the cover story. However, in order to avoid frightening the moderate liberal readers of the *Freitag*, it was given the new title, “The Free Thinker.” In this essay, Varoufakis openly states that his goal is “to save European

capitalism from itself.”

In his *Spiegel Online* column, Augstein defends the capitulation of the Greek government with the claim that it “asserted itself in the most recent negotiations with the euro group, in truth, to a much greater extent than German public opinion was prepared to recognize.” He claimed that the Greek government had received an extension of financial aid, shaken off the burden of the measures dictated by the troika, and is once again master in its own house.

Augstein could have established the falsity of his pronouncements by simply reading his own magazine. On Tuesday, *Spiegel* correspondent Gregor Peter Schmitz reported from Brussels that Tsipras and Varoufakis had broken their campaign promises and completely subordinated themselves to the dictates of Brussels and Berlin.

Had they wanted to “end unconditionally” the earlier work of the troika in Greece, they would have had to have carried out “a ‘thorough expenditure review of every Greek ministry for these institutions,” wrote Schmitz. The list of cuts sent by Varoufakis is “no more than a first step.” It must be “worked out in detail” by the end of April and then needs “the approval of the EU institutions and the IMF once again.”

“To the representatives of the euro zone, the fundamental resolve expressed by the list” is important, Schmitz wrote. “The main thing it said was that a Greece ruled by Syriza will also more or less accept the rules stipulated by the aid program.”

Schmitz also explained why the eurozone finance ministers behaved in a somewhat more conciliatory way toward Syriza in the end: “One wanted to make it a little easier for Tsipras to save face with the Greek voters.”

This is also Augstein’s task. The fact that he reacts to the capitulation of Syriza with a hymn of praise in the

form of a type of cult worship, while the Greek population reacts with anger, bitterness and indignation, says a good deal about the social milieu that he represents.

As long as its lifestyle, wealth and the bourgeois institutions in which it is lodged remain unthreatened, this milieu is liberal, has a heart for the weak and “when in doubt, then to the left.” However, as social tensions intensify and threaten to shake the structure of bourgeois rule, it becomes utterly ruthless and is prepared to go to any extreme to defend the existing order.

Augstein, an heir to millions, had previously kept his distance from Syriza and its sister party, the German Left Party. He is now enthusing about Tsipras and Varoufakis at precisely the moment when they have openly come out as defenders of the bourgeois order.



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