

Syriza's Left Platform in crisis over Greek austerity agreement

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The Syriza-led government in Greece has drawn up an initial list of “reforms” for discussion with the Eurogroup. This follows its signing of the February 20 austerity extension agreement with euro zone finance ministers.

The agreement has not stemmed Greece's sovereign debt crisis, while allowing the European Union, European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) “troika” to tighten their vise-like grip over the country.

Greece's total foreign debt stands at around €320 billion (177 percent of GDP) and the government must pay back billions of euros to its creditors in the coming months, including €9.3 billion to the IMF. By the end of this week, €300 million must be paid to the IMF and a further €1.5 billion by the end of the month. Additional debt repayments of €6.7 billion to the ECB fall due in July and August.

Greece's banks are to all intent insolvent, with the central bank announcing last week that deposits were still being withdrawn at a rate of €800 million a day, up from about €400 million a day in January.

This weekend Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis moved to allay any fear in ruling circles that Greece would default on its debt, stressing that the IMF would be paid off at all costs. “We are not going to be the first country not to meet our obligations to the IMF. We shall squeeze blood out of stone if we need to do this on our own, and we shall do it,” he said.

One could not better sum up the role of the Syriza government. It will stop at nothing in imposing social devastation in Greece.

On Monday, *Daily Telegraph* columnist Ambrose Evans-Pritchard wrote, “Greece is preparing to tap its final pension reserves at the country's central bank if needed to avert a devastating default to the International Monetary Fund and keep the government going over the next two weeks.”

With Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Varoufakis now fine-tuning the first of its austerity measures, the Left Platform within the party, who have long claimed that Syriza would lead a struggle against austerity, have been thrown into crisis.

The Left Platform is an amalgam of Stalinists and pseudo-left forces including the International Workers Left (DEA, the Greek affiliates of the US International Socialist Organisation). At the party's 2013 conference it won 30 percent of the overall vote and 60 seats on the central committee of the party.

At last weekend's Syriza Central Committee meeting, the Left Platform won four seats on the party's 11-seat political secretariat.

Following Syriza's election, Left Platform leader Panagiotis Lafazanis, who was handed control of the energy ministry, insisted that his faction had a list of “red lines” which could not be crossed.

The Left Platform's first opportunity to register any opposition came at last week's caucus meeting of parliamentary deputies. Tsipras asked deputies to register their opposition to the Syriza-Eurogroup deal if they disagreed. Although the Left Platform has about 30 deputies in parliament, many declined to vote against the deal, with Lafazanis only abstaining.

Dimitris Belantis and Stathis Kouvelakis, two central committee members, authored an “Open Letter to the MPs of Die Linke—and to other parties of the radical Left in Europe.”

The letter was timed to coincide with the February 27 vote on the Syriza-Eurogroup agreement in the German Bundestag. The vote to continue austerity in Greece received all party support and was passed by the largest-ever majority for a vote on an austerity programme. Die Linke (the Left Party) voted overwhelmingly for the package, the first time it has formally endorsed a Greek austerity programme.

The Open Letter states that the Eurogroup agreement and Syriza's accompanying list of proposed reforms "make it impossible" for the government to implement its election program. Those documents, it notes mean, "Increasing the minimum wage to 750 euros [that is, its 2009 level] cannot be in the short-term decided 'unilaterally' by our Parliament. It can only be a long-term perspective, subject to the condition that it doesn't harm the country's 'competitiveness'."

Stating that, "The privatizations which are already completed will be left," the open letter adds, "No objection of principle to privatizations is to be found at any point in the text."

"The 'modernization' of the social security system... actually means drastic cuts in welfare," it admits.

The letter continues, "Almost no bill may pass in Parliament without prior consent of the Troika, which has now been renamed as the 'Institutions', and it can't be introduced without measures compensating its financial cost."

After describing the austerity agenda their own party is implementing, the authors state that support for the agreement will destroy whatever pretensions Europe's "radical left" still purport to have: "For us, it is clear that the ratification of this agreement by the European parliaments, with the consent of the parties of the radical Left, goes against the interest of the Greek workers and of the Greek people."

The Belantis/Kouvelakis intervention was a cynical ploy, as Die Linke had already declared in advance of their plan to vote for the austerity agreement. In the vote Friday, virtually all the Left Party's 64 deputies voted in favour.

Kouvelakis responded by glossing over the significance of the Left Party voting for an austerity programme that he himself described on his Facebook page as "pure neo-liberal shit." Answering a comment on Facebook stating, "I am sorry but your open letter will receive a closed answer," Kouvelakis replied: "really? [T]hree Die Linke MPs voted no the deal and about ten others abstained."

The Left Platform followed up the Open Letter by putting an amendment to the Tsipras majority's proposal for the austerity programme to be adopted to a meeting of Syriza's Central Committee over the weekend.

In a desperate attempt to save face, the mealy-mouthed amendment stated, "In the immediate future, SYRIZA, *despite the agreements of the Eurogroup*, should take the initiative of implementing steadily and as a matter of priority its commitments and the content of its

programmatic governmental statement." [emphasis added.]

Ignoring that Syriza had just signed an austerity agreement, the amendment declares that the party must put forward the "perspective of an alternative plan promoting the full realization of our radical objectives."

The "main conclusion" of the amendment was a vague proposal that anyone in Syriza, including Tsipras, could agree on: "[D]ecisions should be taken following a discussion in the leading party instances, which have, jointly with the party and the party branches as a whole..."

The amendment was supported by figures in Syriza beyond the Left Platform faction, with 68 in favour, 92 against and six abstentions.

The Communist Tendency faction of Syriza, the Greek section of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT), offered its "critical support" for the amendment.

Presenting their own resolution to the meeting, Stamatis Karagiannopoulos of the CT said if only Tsipras and Varoufakis would listen, Syriza could still have a bright future. Addressing the "Comrades of the party leadership," the resolution stated that, "despite the seriousness of your initial compromise, you still have time to salvage this situation by changing direction and assuming the necessary radical and socialist policies."

Within a month of coming to power, Syriza has ditched its claims to oppose austerity and erased every "red line" of the Left Platform and its apologists. Its imposition of further brutal austerity measures will bring it and all its component parts, including the Left Platform, into open conflict with the working class and demonstrate before millions their role as defenders of capitalism and its institutions.



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