

Australian pseudo-lefts defend Syriza's austerity pact

Mike Head
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At a revealing public forum at Sydney University on Tuesday night, the Australian Greens and Socialist Alliance, a pseudo-left group, lined up together behind the capitalist government led by Syriza in Greece and explicitly defended the agreement it signed with the European authorities on February 20 to impose the austerity dictates of finance capital.

In Australia, as around the world, the events in Greece have become a political litmus test. The response of pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Alliance to the January 25 election of Syriza and its grovelling capitulation, within just four weeks, has exposed the fact they have likewise become a part of the bourgeois political establishment.

Each of the speakers at Tuesday's event—Dick Nicholls of Socialist Alliance, Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon and former World Bank analyst Adam Rorris from the recently formed pro-Syriza Australia-Greece Solidarity Campaign—insisted that Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's government had no choice but to abandon its election promises to repudiate the austerity measures and seek the cancellation of much of Greece's public debt. All of them wrote off any struggle for a socialist alternative by the working class.

Nicholls, a *Green Left Weekly* correspondent, was the most vehement defender of Syriza's February pact. He declared that despite Tsipras and his ministers coming under criticism for doing so, they had to make "concessions." This was the "least evil result in the circumstances." The only other alternative, he said, was a "sudden exit" from the euro zone, which would not have popular support.

Nicholls was also adamant in backing Syriza's capitalist program. "The Greek economy has to become more productive," he emphasised, "and for that it needs private investment, as well as increased public

investment." In other words, Syriza must create the right conditions for Greece's corporate elite and foreign investors. Nicholls said Syriza favoured a "socially just and environmentally sustainable economy," but even that was "a long way down the track."

Nicholls specifically endorsed the economic platform that the Syriza-led government's finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, an avowed defender of capitalism, wrote with US economist James Galbraith under the title "A Modest Proposal for Resolving the Eurozone Crisis," in which they argued that writing off some of Greece's debt would positively benefit American and European capitalism. Varoufakis was a lecturer from 1989 to 2000 at Sydney University's Political Economy Department.

Rorris, the next speaker, underscored Syriza's efforts to assure the international financial elites that it represents no threat to their interests. He boasted of his success in getting former Liberal Party leader John Hewson to sign a statement by 40 Australian university economists before the January 25 election. The academics pleaded for the "troika"—the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund—to give some debt relief to Greece so that the country had a "more sustainable pathway." Their statement also urged any future Greek government to "get serious in dealing with public financial management problems," which necessarily means further cuts in social spending.

Rorris stressed that Syriza was genuinely committed, and not "begrudgingly," to such "better economic management." That was why it decided, in the February agreement, to "recognise the debt as legitimate, give the banks a running veto on its plans, and commit to a budget surplus by next year."

On behalf of the Greens, who have been part of Australia's political establishment for more than two decades, Rhiannon said she was "excited" by Syriza's challenge to "neo-liberalism." She condemned "some on the left" who criticised the February austerity pact, insisting that "the left and progressive forces" had to unite around Syriza's defence.

Echoing the claims of Varoufakis himself, Rhiannon insisted that if Syriza failed, the only beneficiaries would be the Greek fascists of Golden Dawn and their counterparts across Europe. In reality, the opposite is true. By imposing the austerity dictates of the financial markets and suppressing and demoralising the resistance of the working class, Syriza will serve as an antechamber for fascism, just as similar regimes did during the 1930s.

In so far as Syriza criticises the troika's austerity agenda, it is to plead to the US and European powers for a more stimulatory economic policy in order to rekindle growth. US imperialism, however, no longer has the resources to undertake any such policy. Instead, it is intent on using its military power to offset its decline and prevent the re-emergence of rival powers, including Germany.

This *World Socialist Web Site* correspondent asked the panelists how they had the political gall to claim that Syriza represented a way forward for the working class in Greece, Australia or anywhere else in the world when Varoufakis had publicly stated that the Syriza-led government's goal was to "save capitalism" and Syriza had already repudiated its anti-austerity election stance.

The question was greeted by derision and laughter by the audience of about 200 people, mainly supporters of the Greens and various pseudo-left groups. The response is a telling exposure of the politics of this middle class social layer, which is hostile to an independent political struggle by workers for a socialist perspective. None of the speakers deigned to reply.

Two members of pseudo-left state capitalist groups, Socialist Alternative and Solidarity, whose Greek affiliates are part of Syriza, raised tactical differences with the bargaining stance adopted by Syriza in the negotiations leading up to the February deal. They complained that Syriza would discredit itself by implementing the austerity measures. At the same time, they reiterated that "left" unity behind Syriza was "not up for debate." They agreed with the three speakers that

"solidarity" with Syriza was the paramount issue of the day internationally.

Amid a deepening economic and political crisis in Australia, where ordinary working people are increasingly hostile to both of the traditional ruling parties, Labor and Liberal-National, this milieu is trying to lay the groundwork for a Syriza-style coalition to fill the political vacuum. Nicholls said Socialist Alliance had attempted once before to create such a formation, and "we have to try again." Rhiannon said Syriza "pulled it off" in Greece, "and we need to do it here!" The Greens could have a "critical role" in such a project, she said, but it was "bigger than any one party."

None of these organisations has anything to do with socialism. They are seeking, like Syriza, to cobble together new political mechanisms to enforce the requirements of the bankrupt and crisis-ridden capitalist system. Resting on sections of the capitalist elite and affluent middle class social layers, like their counterparts in Syriza's "radical left" coalition, they are coalescing along definite class lines: for the defence of the capitalist order and the subordination of the working class to it.



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