

# Syriza discusses the need for state repression

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Demands for police repression of protests by Greece's alternate minister for public order have elicited a pledge from Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras that the Syriza government will do what is required to maintain "law and order."

In a front-page article in *To Vima* last Friday, Yiannis Panousis attributed occupations of universities, Syriza's headquarters and the grounds of parliament by anarchist groups to the actions of "pure-blooded leftists."

Denouncing those who believe that a "left government means an unprotected country and city (without personal, social, national security, without an army and without policing and perhaps without judges or prisons)," Panousis wrote, "The hour of the Left in Greece is not the hour of the dead-end ideologies and superficial slogans, but the time of institutional consolidation, political legitimacy and social cohesion."

Panousis's statements represent the public floating of a hitherto internal discussion on government policy.

A criminologist and former member of the Democratic Left (a right-wing splinter from Syriza that helped impose austerity measures as part of a coalition government from 2012), his appointment as public order minister was made precisely to reassure the ruling elite in Greece and internationally of the Syriza-led government's determination to preserve "law and order."

The decision mirrored Syriza's alliance with the xenophobic Independent Greeks and the more high-profile appointment of party leader Panos Kammenos as defence minister in charge of the armed forces.

It was Panousis who declared after the January 25 election that "The police will have weapons at protests," repudiating Syriza's previous commitment to abolish the riot police.

In recent weeks, he has called for the restoration of

the municipal police, abolished by the previous Greek government, suggesting it be renamed the Community Mediation Agency. He addressed the Regional Police Directorate in Peloponnese, telling his fascist-minded audience, "We are trying to explain to everyone the new identity of the Greek police. We are asking for consensus not only in tackling crime, but also in the police's new social and preventive role."

"Greece can't cope with any more migrants," he stressed.

Panousis' *To Vima* article was supported by leading figures such as Education Minister Aristides Baltas and Minister of Justice Nikos Paraskevopoulos, who described Panousis's views as "self-evident" truths. Tsipras's office was anxious only to make clear that Panousis was not criticising "the government's policy nor cabinet ministers, nor the political forces that support [the government]," and that Syriza "remained steadily committed to defending the nation of laws, rights and law and order."

This open defence of police repression within the highest echelons of Syriza must serve as a grave warning.

Prior to Syriza's victory in January's general election, opposition to the austerity agenda dictated by the troika—the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund—led to more than 30 general strikes against governments led by the conservative New Democracy, including the coalition formed in 2012 with the social democrats of PASOK.

Time and again protests were met with brutal repression by a riot police force with extensive links to the fascist Golden Dawn. An official investigation into such links led to the arrest in December 2013 of 50 people, including 10 police officers. This did nothing to halt police violence. Amnesty International issued a report noting a "long-standing culture of impunity, entrenched racism and endemic violence, including the

excessive use of force against protesters and ill treatment of migrants and refugees.”

Anti-austerity protests in Athens were repeatedly banned throughout 2013 and 2014, and protesters and journalists badly beaten.

With social tensions at the breaking point, Syriza was built up by the Greek media as a political alternative that supposedly could oppose austerity measures while maintaining Greece’s membership in the European Union and doing nothing to impinge on the rule of Greek capital.

A key role in reinforcing such claims was played by the pseudo-left groups, including the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, Britain’s Socialist Workers Party and the International Socialist Organization in the US. They all hailed Syriza as their new model—proof that the fight against austerity did not require a revolutionary struggle against capitalism in Greece as part of a unified offensive of the European working class for a socialist Europe.

Their endless denunciations of the “sectarian” critics of Syriza were directed first and foremost against the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International, which analysed and exposed the bourgeois class character and right-wing politics of Syriza. They all apologised for Syriza’s alliance with the Independent Greeks, declaring it to be a necessary application of “realpolitik.”

Syriza has to date been able to exploit the good will of Greek workers and the ongoing negotiations with Greece’s creditors to strike something of an oppositional pose—even as it pledged to implement the vast bulk of the troika’s austerity measures and repay all loans, raided pension funds, and reinstated the privatisation programme. But that period is coming to an end.

Syriza has a deadline of just two weeks to submit a list of cuts that will satisfy Greece’s creditors. Whether it succeeds and Greece remains within the euro zone, or fails and there is a Greek exit, there will be further savage attacks on millions of working people who are already barely able to survive.

Behind the smokescreen provided by its apologists, Syriza is making its preparations for the time when rhetoric will no longer suffice to cover for its imposition of austerity.

In June 2012, Tsipras held talks with the Greek Defence Ministry and army high command to make clear his readiness to defend “the country’s territorial integrity and national independence.” In October 2014, he met with the Defence Ministry to discuss Greece’s geostrategic goals, praising the “selfless stance” of military personnel. Prior to taking power after the January election, he reassured the chief of the general staff of the Greek Army and the leader of the Greek police that there would be no “power vacuum.”

Syriza has already become a byword for duplicity and treachery—acting always as a loyal defender of the Greek bourgeoisie and a political vehicle for a privileged petty-bourgeois layer epitomised by former academics such as Panousis, Paraskevopoulos and Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis. Prompted by Panousis, it has now made clear that it will be more than ready to use state violence to crush social opposition from the working class.

Should this happen, Syriza’s defenders on the pseudo-left will have blood on their hands. With many having their own factions within Syriza, they have played a direct role in politically disarming the working class and allowing the ruling class to prepare the repressive apparatus of the state for counterrevolution.



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