

Left Platform: Syriza's last line of defence

Robert Stevens**28 May 2015**

After four months in office, the Syriza government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras is in a deep crisis, with Greece's state coffers almost empty and the country's main banks on the verge of collapse.

Syriza came to power on a wave of opposition to the staggering levels of unemployment, poverty and social devastation, the result of more than five years of austerity. After signing a February agreement with the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) "troika", committing it to completing the austerity programme in place, Syriza has been seeking agreement on what scale of austerity it is politically able to impose.

After cutting public spending by €2 billion and seizing another €2 billion from the state assets of the country in order to pay back over €13 billion to the creditors, financial and political circles calculate that Greece cannot now make further debt repayments without receiving external funding. A further €1.6 billion is due to the IMF in June.

Syriza has offered one austerity proposal after another, but has been continually rebuffed for not being comprehensive enough. After months of delays, Syriza is now being called on to impose unprecedented attacks on the living standards of an already pauperised population. With the crisis reaching an endgame and Syriza's anti-austerity credentials in tatters, its Left Platform, an amalgam of pseudo-left forces, Stalinists and Maoists, are demanding of the Tsipras wing that the party retain some semblance of its previous anti-austerity garb.

At Syriza's 2013 conference, the Left Platform won 60 seats on the Central Committee and has about 30 percent of Syriza's MPs in its caucus. It plays a critical role in deceiving the working class in Greece and internationally, touted constantly by pseudo-left forces internationally as the "radical" anti-austerity element within Syriza. Indeed Tsipras is currently being hailed in ruling circles for showing his mettle and facing down the "hard-line" Left Platform that was recently referred to by Britain's *Economist* magazine as "The Wild Ones."

One of the main components of the Left Platform is the Internationalist Workers Left (DEA). Antonis Davanellos is a leading DEA figure and a member of Syriza's Central Committee and Political Secretariat. In a May 18 article, he wrote, "We made the [February 20] commitment to repay the debt 'in full and on time,' and we renounced any 'unilateral action' to implement our party's program, which would have built a more solid alliance of workers and popular masses in support of the government." In return, "We got nothing" in the form of concessions, he adds.

Since February 20, Davanellos notes that Syriza has proceeded to ditch its anti-austerity rhetoric in response to the troika's demands. He explains how, despite this, "[W]e tried to defend the 'red lines' that the government promised would not be crossed—even though these were far less than the commitments that Tsipras made at the Thessaloniki International Fair in September 2014, which in turn were inferior to the program approved by SYRIZA at its founding conference." As a result of this political collusion, Davanellos admits, "Today, the 'red lines' have disappeared."

Noting that Greece, "has almost exhausted the reserves of public funds, bringing the critical moment very, very near", he warns, "The political consequences of this retreat—because it is no longer possible to speak about a 'compromise'—will be dire. SYRIZA cannot be transformed into an austerity party."

On the contrary. Syriza has been revealed as precisely such a party.

Commenting on the demands of the Left Platform, George Pagoulatos, a professor at Athens University of Economics and Business, told the *Financial Times*, "The fight within Syriza is now between the pragmatists and those who want to claim the mantle of anti-austerity that Tsipras is about to lose."

In his statement to this week's Central Committee Tsipras said, "I will not accept the agreement [to be reached with the troika] passing through parliament with borrowed votes," adding, "If I bring an agreement to

parliament, it will be honest and beneficial for the people. So I will not accept negative votes from MPs of Syriza and the [right-wing coalition partner] Independent Greeks [Anel].”

In the event, a resolution of the Left Platform to the meeting won the support of almost half the members on the body. It was supported by 75 votes (44 percent of those attending) to 95 against, with one abstention. The text of the resolution stated that the troika intended “to milk even the last euro from the country’s reserves and to push an ‘unprotected’ government to full submission and exemplary humiliation.”

It states, Syriza has “no other option but to proceed to a counterattack with an alternative plan that is based on SYRIZA’s pre-electoral pledges and the government’s programmatic announcements. What is required is “a progressive policy against the Memoranda, [that] includes first and foremost the suspension of servicing the debt.”

Leading figures within the Left Platform are in favour of Greece withdrawing from the euro zone and reverting back to its former currency, the drachma and “an eventual exit from the eurozone.”

However, the resolution in reality calls for an “acceptable compromise”, based on four planks, including low primary budgetary surpluses and a debt restructuring. It then formally demands other measures be implemented, which Syriza ditched from its programme long ago, such as the nationalisations of the banks. While verbally opposing further cuts in wages and pensions, the resolution hardly differs from the Tsipras wing in its pathetic proposal for the “indispensable reinstatement of collective conventions and the gradual rise of the minimum wage to 751 euros [its 2009 level].”

Kathimerini noted of the Central Committee vote, “Still, some members of the Left Platform were said to be concerned about the repercussions of an overly militant stance.”

Just prior to the vote, Left Platform leader Panagiotis Lafazanis told parliament, after a representative of the fascist Golden Dawn referred to him as the leader of a faction, “I represent the government and the government has a collective policy. At this moment this is the policy that I am outlining and expressing.”

The claims of the Left Platform to be in any way progressive are exposed by its filthy record. They were enthusiastic supporters of Syriza’s coalition agreement with the xenophobic Independent Greeks (Anel), claiming they were a dedicated anti-austerity tendency.

Prior to January’s election, Lafazanis paved the way for

Syriza’s imminent collaboration with Anel, stating, “We will work with forces, which will responsibly be able to follow policy against the memoranda, policy in a progressive direction. This is the basis of our cooperation.”

The Left Platform are opposed to the unity of workers in Greece, Europe and internationally in a common struggle against austerity and the capitalist system, based on the fight for socialism. They offer no alternative to austerity, but rather austerity implemented by Syriza in the interests of the Greek bourgeoisie.

What is being prepared in Greece is a major confrontation between Syriza and the working class. As the full social and political implications of Syriza’s pro-capitalist programme becomes evident, the Left Platform are seeking to prevent the development of an independent movement in the working class.

Stathis Kouvoulakis is a leading Left Platform representative and a member of Syriza’s Central Committee. In a debate in April organised by Britain’s Socialist Workers Party, he warned that Syriza had won the support of many workers and young people and “if you don’t actually do what is necessary to keep that type of support, then it will backfire in an enormously unpredictable way. The popular anger might turn against Syriza quite quickly, much more quickly than a lot of people think, because the political landscape in Greek society is not at all stabilised.”

He stressed, “It is not a peaceful situation in which we can say, ‘We have stable constituencies’ and so on and so forth. Everything is in flux OK so it can backfire in a very violent way.”



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