

The political fraud of Syriza's referendum on EU austerity in Greece

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Since Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called a referendum on European Union (EU) austerity last Saturday, the entire enterprise has been exposed as a political fraud. It is designed to engineer a further capitulation to the EU's demands, regardless of the outcome of the vote.

On the eve of the referendum, the Syriza government is in full-scale retreat. If the "yes" vote carries, the Tsipras government is preparing to resign and give way to a more openly right-wing regime, dedicated to implementing whatever the EU demands. In his speech Monday calling for a "no" vote, Tsipras signaled that his government would step down after a "yes" vote, declaring that "we will respect this [vote], but we cannot serve such a mandate."

If the "no" vote wins, Tsipras declared in a nationally televised address Wednesday that he will only use it to boost his positions in negotiations on austerity with the EU. In exchange for a €30 billion bailout, however, Tsipras has already made clear that he is willing to impose virtually all the EU's demands. He is asking only for a slower phase-in of deep pension cuts and a partial exemption for the Greek islands of regressive increases in sales taxes (VAT).

Were Tsipras to concisely explain to working people the content of his referendum, he could say: heads the EU wins, tails you lose. Coming only months after Syriza won an election pledging to end five years of austerity, the referendum has been called to give political cover for a surrender to the EU. Had Syriza intended to fight, it would have had no need to call a referendum on EU austerity already rejected by the Greek people.

The referendum has been set up to create the conditions for a vote for austerity, giving a pseudo-democratic veneer to the escalating assault on the

Greek working class. While there is widespread hatred of the years of brutal austerity, both Syriza and the EU have done everything they can to confuse and demobilize popular opposition.

The EU, predictably, is pressing for drastic austerity and regime change in Greece. On Wednesday, an anonymous high-ranking German conservative told the *Times* of London that Berlin will block any EU deal with Greece and expel it from the euro unless the "yes" vote wins and both Tsipras and Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis resign.

Varoufakis responded yesterday by promising that he also would resign if the "yes" vote carries. He added that he would help his successor implement whatever austerity package the EU demanded. While Varoufakis still claimed to be calling for a "no" vote, he had publicly disowned this position the day before, ordering guards to remove a banner draped over the Finance Ministry that read, "No to austerity and blackmail."

Varoufakis's announcement, on the eve of the referendum, that he is all but cleaning out his desk amounts to publicly broadcasting Syriza's pessimism and demoralization. Listening to Syriza officials speak, one concludes that they not only expect a loss, they more or less welcome defeat, knowing as they do that there is plenty of money to be made from it. It is a clear example of the political duplicity and rottenness of this type of pro-capitalist, pseudo-left party.

The conflicting signals Syriza sends reflect the class interests it represents. It is a bourgeois outfit using democratic jargon to posture as a left-wing party giving voice to broad popular opposition to EU austerity. However, it is deeply committed to the structures of European capitalism, including the euro currency and the EU. The EU, for its part, will tolerate no opposition to its austerity agenda, and Syriza's anti-austerity

posturing has been exposed time and again as empty political theater.

Upon taking office, Syriza has done everything it can to smother opposition to austerity in the Greek and European working class. Tsipras and Varoufakis jetted around European capitals for a few weeks, fruitlessly looking for a deal with the EU, then signed a February agreement extending the austerity Memorandum Syriza had campaigned against. After the EU still refused to restore the flow of credit to Greece, Syriza looted billions of euros from the public coffers this spring to repay its creditors.

As these funds finally ran out last weekend, Syriza called its referendum on austerity as Greek banks closed and the state faced imminent collapse—the conditions of economic turmoil most likely to secure a panicked capitulation to the EU. Some Greek officials even suggested that this was their goal. After European officials responded by ending their bailout of Greece and threatening to expel Greece from the euro, a shocked Varoufakis responded that Syriza had intended to obtain a deal with the EU before the referendum, and ultimately campaign for a “yes” vote.

Syriza’s cowardice and dishonesty give political expression to the outlook of the sections of the affluent middle class and of the Greek bourgeoisie that it represents. These layers, who fear that an expulsion from the euro and a return to a weaker Greek national currency would slash the value of their bank holdings and stock portfolios, enthusiastically defend the EU and the euro. These moods are shared by the privileged parliamentarians, academics and trade union executives inside Syriza itself.

The Syriza government and the Greek referendum call are an immense experience of the Greek and international working class. Millions of workers in Europe and around the world are witnessing the political bankruptcy of parties like Syriza and its international allies—Podemos in Spain, the International Socialist Organization in the United States, the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany—that cater to the affluent middle class.

As the EU points a gun to their heads, broad sections of workers in Greece intend to vote “no.” Such a vote can have meaning and deal a real blow to EU austerity policies, however, only in struggle against Syriza as well. It is evident that, whatever the outcome of the

referendum, the ruling elites in Greece and across Europe will use it as a pretext to escalate attacks on the working class.

The working class faces a struggle against European capitalism and its pseudo-left defenders such as Syriza. The central precondition for waging such a struggle is the building of a new revolutionary political leadership in the working class. Reactionary instruments of the affluent middle class such as Syriza can bring the working class nothing but disaster.



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