

Australian pseudo-left hails Syriza's fraudulent referendum in Greece

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The Australian organisation, Socialist Alternative, has published a series of articles on this Sunday's Greek referendum which epitomise the desperate attempts by the pseudo-left milieu internationally to maintain illusions in the Syriza government as the bankrupt character of its pro-capitalist program is ever more exposed.

For a number of years, Socialist Alternative has promoted Syriza—a coalition brought together on an explicitly bourgeois, parliamentary program—as a model to be emulated by the “left” around the world.

Like their counterparts internationally, Socialist Alternative enthused over the election of the Syriza government in January of this year. A breathless piece, by one of the organisation's leaders, Mick Armstrong, published the day after the election result, declared that Syriza's victory was a “stunning victory for the left” in “probably the most important parliamentary elections since World War Two.”

Within a month, Syriza had utterly betrayed its election promises and signed a deal with European authorities to continue the austerity measures that have devastated the Greek working class and created a social crisis of depression-era proportions. Since then, Syriza has sought to meet the demands for ever more austerity by the European banks and financial institutions.

The referendum that Syriza has called on the EU's austerity measures this Sunday is a continuation of these policies. It is a cynical fraud, aimed at placing political responsibility for the crisis on the Greek population and legitimising further rounds of cuts.

An on-the-spot report on the referendum posted on July 1 on Socialist Alternative's publication, *Red Flag*, presents a damning picture of the indifference of the pseudo-left to the plight of the working class. Walking the streets of Athens, amid mass suffering and the political shipwreck of Syriza's pro-capitalist program, *Red Flag's* Colleen Bolger presents the referendum as a flowering of democracy and a quasi-revolutionary challenge to the European financial institutions.

Bolger declares that, “Alexis Tsipras' announcement after midnight on Friday that he would call a referendum... has broken all the rules. Prime ministers rarely ask the people who elected them what they think. Negotiations over matters of finance and state are conducted by ministers and the heads of banks in fine hotels. But for one week, these matters will unfold principally in the streets, cafes and workplaces of Greece.”

Socialist Alternative dresses up a cynical maneuver as a flowering of democracy. In reality, the very framing of the referendum question was dictated by EU ministers and the heads of the European financial institutions.

The claim that the referendum has been called to provide Syriza with a popular mandate to oppose austerity is also transparently false. The government already had such a mandate. It won a national election in January by appealing to the anti-austerity sentiments of millions of Greek workers and young people—sentiments that it immediately betrayed upon assuming power.

The real purpose of the referendum was outlined by Syriza's Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis, in his submission to the Eurogroup meeting on June 27—the Saturday before Bolger's piece appeared. Varoufakis explained that, “If our government were to accept the institutions' offer today... we would be defeated in Parliament with the result of a new election being called within a very long month...”

Underscoring Syriza's commitment to the entire framework of austerity, Varoufakis stated, “then, the delay, the uncertainty and the prospects of a successful resolution would be much, much diminished.” In other words, the referendum is a political charade aimed at ensuring a “successful resolution” and a new deal between the Greek government and European finance for further austerity.

Bolger absurdly claims that the “the rich are mortified by the prospect that waiters, taxi drivers and cleaners” will secure some sort of victory in the referendum.

In fact, Syriza's prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, has repeatedly stated that if the “no” vote is victorious, the

government will continue negotiations for the imposition of austerity. The same day Bolger's article appeared, Tsipras declared, "Come Monday the Greek government will be at the negotiating table after the referendum with better terms for the Greek people."

The terms of such negotiations were indicated in Tsipras' letter to the major European institutions in June, in which he offered to accept virtually all of their austerity demands. Bolger refers to such statements, as an afterthought, and blandly states that they are "at odds with the position of many on the left."

Bolger also hails Syriza's imposition of capital controls declaring, "The choice to allow people to access cash to go about their lives but stop investors from shifting millions to overseas accounts shows that there need not be a separation of politics and economics."

As every honest commentator has noted, the Greek capitalist class has already moved its wealth outside of the country. In the less than sixth months since Syriza's election, an estimated €50 billion has left Greece in capital flight.

Syriza only imposed controls after the European Central Bank cut off funding to Greek's banks over the weekend. Since being elected, they have rejected every measure that would be central to any struggle against austerity, starting with the repudiation of the debt, nationalisation of the banks, capital controls, and an appeal to the working class throughout Europe to oppose the agenda being demanded by the major European powers.

In a second piece on *Red Flag*, posted yesterday, Bolger sought to cover her tracks, posturing as an opponent of Syriza's right-wing and in the process contradicting claims made in her article just two days earlier.

Yesterday's article notes that "rumours flew around that a deal would be reached" between Syriza and the EU on Wednesday, which would have resulted in a cancellation of the referendum, or an explicit call from Syriza for a yes vote. She states that the European ruling classes "thought they could bring Tsipras to heel in the usual ways and that in office, he would see how things are done. He gave them every reason to think that would work."

In her piece posted on Wednesday, Bolger had assured readers, "Do not doubt that Tsipras means to win the referendum." Bolger does not attempt to resolve the glaring contradiction between the two statements, instead cynically stating, "It is impossible to forecast events beyond hours, let alone days."

In fact, the record demonstrates that amid widespread (and correct) suspicion that Tsipras was preparing a deal, *Red Flag* sought to deflect opposition to Syriza's manoeuvres by presenting its referendum as a genuine campaign against

austerity.

Bolger attempts to establish a distinction between Tsipras and Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, on the one hand, and the so-called "left" of the party.

Among them, she names Socialist Alternative's co-thinkers in Greece, in the Red Network and Left Platform. Far from being opponents of the party's "right", these organisations play a central role in Syriza, functioning as a safety valve by sprouting left rhetoric, while insisting that the working class must remain subordinated to the government, regardless of its right-wing program.

A statement by the Red Network, which *Red Flag* posted on June 30, was typical of the role played by these tendencies. It absurdly claimed that the referendum demonstrated that "Syriza is not (and will not easily be transformed into) an austerity party."

Seeking to silence any exposure of Syriza, the statement asserted that "no force on the left has the right to hesitate: all together we owe it to rapidly set up the 'no' front—the front of victory of the workers and popular forces." It proceeded to declare: "Regardless of the mistakes made since January... now is not the time for academic debate. It is time to fight."

In other words, the working class must be prevented from learning any lessons from the bitter experiences through which it has passed, or from the class role of Syriza as a pro-capitalist outfit that has carried out the dictates of finance capital.

Such arguments, which are aimed at blocking the working class from independently intervening on the basis of a genuinely socialist and internationalist program, reflect the class interests of the privileged sections of the upper middle-class that the pseudo-left represents. Under conditions of unprecedented crisis in Greece, their politics are preparing the way for a reprisal of the catastrophic experiences of the twentieth century, including military rule and dictatorship.



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