

Syriza's betrayal of the Greek working class

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With extraordinary speed, the Syriza-led government in Greece has repudiated the landslide “no” vote in Sunday’s referendum on European Union (EU) austerity demands.

Only four days after Greek workers and youth voted overwhelmingly to reject the dictates of the EU, the Syriza government has presented a proposal for €13 billion in austerity measures for the consideration of European finance ministers and government heads meeting this weekend. The Greek government is hoping the brutal measures will secure it a €53 billion EU bailout.

The proposal, which was approved overwhelmingly by the Greek parliament Friday morning, is even more savage than the €9 billion austerity package Greek voters rejected in the referendum. It includes:

- A gradual increase in the retirement age from 62 to 67, completed by 2022, along with “disincentives” to early retirement.
- The elimination of a solidarity grant for poor pensioners and a 50 percent increase in health costs for pensioners.
- A socially regressive increase in the VAT (sales tax) on most goods to 23 percent, applied also to Greece’s numerous, often remote and impoverished islands.
- Cuts to public-sector salaries imposed by “unifying” the wage grid for government workers, together with further attacks on labor laws.
- The completion of all currently planned privatizations, including regional airports and the ports of Piraeus, Thessaloniki and Hellinikon.
- Cuts to fuel subsidies for farmers, along with stricter enforcement of tax laws to increase the tax burden on small businesses, property owners and the self-employed.

With consummate cynicism, Syriza leader and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has sought to present

this direct repudiation of the will of the Greek people as a triumph of democracy. In fact, the outcome entirely confirms the initial assessment of the *World Socialist Web Site* that the decision to call the vote was “a reactionary fraud, designed to lend a veneer of democratic legitimacy to the looting of Greece by the banks.”

The shameless prostration of Syriza to the demands of the EU is the inevitable conclusion of its entire course since taking power in January. From the beginning, it sought nothing more than marginal modifications in EU policy. It immediately pledged not to take any unilateral measures to repudiate Greece’s €300 billion debt, nor to impose controls to stem the flight of capital from Greek banks.

Syriza rejected any appeal to the mass opposition to EU austerity in the European working class. Instead, the government sought to ingratiate itself with the major banks and European imperialist powers, as well as the Obama administration. The European governments, led by Berlin, treated Tsipras with well-deserved contempt, knowing that they had absolutely nothing to fear from the Syriza leader.

When the EU withheld funds from Greece, the Syriza-led government began looting billions of euros in cash reserves from local governments, hospitals and universities to repay its creditors. When these funds ran out and the EU threatened to cut off credit to Greece and expel it from the euro zone, Tsipras called the referendum. According to an inside account of Syriza’s discussions by the *Daily Telegraph*’s Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, Tsipras assumed that the “yes” vote would win, allowing him to resign, call new elections and let a new government impose the cuts.

Syriza was stunned by the landslide “no” vote delivered by the Greek masses. At that point, only two alternatives were possible: utilizing the vote as the starting point for a mass mobilization of the opposition

to austerity that erupted last week, or abject capitulation. Predictably, Syriza chose capitulation.

While the threats from European banks and governments played a role, Syriza was motivated far more by its terror over the radicalization of the Greek working class. Tsipras and his coterie of government officials saw the mass demonstration prior to the referendum and the landslide “no” vote as a calamity.

Syriza’s move to impose an unprecedented EU austerity package is a serious defeat for the working class. Not only does it place the Greek masses at the mercy of the EU, but to the extent that the cowardly actions of Syriza are understood as “left” politics, the most reactionary political forces, such as the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party, will be strengthened.

The events in Greece are a major strategic experience of the international working class. They have clearly exposed the role of Syriza and similar pseudo-left parties around the world, rooted in the affluent middle class and schooled in postmodernism. According to the professors and parliamentarians who lead these organizations, the era of the class struggle and Marxism is over.

In fact, the working class is getting a ferocious education on the realities of capitalism as revealed by Marxism: the ruthlessness of the ruling class, the domination of finance capital, the irreconcilable conflict between the interests of workers and capitalists.

The working class is seeing as well what a pseudo-left party does when it comes to power. Confronted with the conflict between European capital’s demands for austerity and the social anger in the working class, Syriza fled into the arms of the banks.

Resistance to austerity required immediate actions against the EU and the Greek bourgeoisie: the suspension of payments on Greece’s debt, the imposition of currency controls, the nationalization of the banks and major industries under workers’ control, an appeal for joint action and support from the working class in Europe and internationally. None of these measures could be taken, however, due to the class character and orientation of Syriza.

Syriza legislator Dimitris Tsoukalas (with declared personal savings in 2013 of over €1 million), Finance Minister Tsakalotos (whose stock portfolio is worth over €500,000), Economy Minister Giorgios Stathakis (€426,000 invested with JP Morgan), former Syriza

leader Alekos Alavanos (€350,000 in savings, a stock portfolio and 11 real estate properties), and former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis (whose wife Danae Stratou is a millionaire) cannot imagine or tolerate a break with the EU because—like the rest of the Greek ruling elite—they would lose a great deal of wealth if Greece exited the euro and their assets were re-denominated in a heavily devalued national currency.

No one can claim that the outcome in Greece is the result of a refusal of the working class to fight: the workers voted “no” on EU austerity and mobilized large sections of the youth and the middle class behind them. The central obstacle that emerged to the working class in Greece was the reactionary role of Syriza.

Trotsky described very well the role of apologists for Syriza today when he wrote: “This impotent philosophy, which seeks to reconcile defeats as a necessary link in the chain of cosmic developments, is completely incapable of posing and refuses to pose the question of such concrete factors as programs, parties, personalities that were the organizers of defeat. This philosophy of fatalism and prostration is diametrically opposed to Marxism as the theory of revolutionary action.”

All those who function today as Syriza’s apologists—Podemos in Spain, the New Anti-capitalist Party and the Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France, the International Socialist Organization in the United States, the Left Party in Germany—do so because, were they to come to power, they would behave no differently. This entire slew of petty-bourgeois groups can bring the working class nothing but disaster.

The fundamental question is the resolution of the crisis of working class perspective and political leadership, which requires the building of the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution under the leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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