

Lessons from Greece: The pseudo-left in power

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The events in Greece since the coming to power of the Syriza-led government in late January are an immense strategic experience of the working class internationally.

The actions of the “Coalition of the Radical Left” rank among the greatest betrayals of the working class in recent decades. Brought to power on a wave of popular opposition to the dictates of the European Union, Syriza has now accepted what amounts to the transformation of Greece into a colony of German and European imperialism.

This betrayal is all the more brazen because it occurred within days of a massive popular repudiation of EU ultimatums, in a referendum called by the government itself as part of a cynical political maneuver.

On Monday, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras’ former finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, gave an interview to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation confirming that Syriza, while publicly calling on voters to reject the EU’s austerity demands, neither anticipated nor desired a “no” vote in the referendum held on July 5. The real aim was to obtain a “yes” vote, so that Syriza could blame the Greek people for its own capitulation.

Asked by interviewer Phillip Adams if it were true that Tsipras did not expect a “no” vote, Varoufakis replied: “I wasn’t expecting a ‘no’ vote either.” He added that with “a whole week of banks that were boarded up and ATMs that would churn out a maximum of 60 euros per card per person per day, I had assumed and I believe so had the prime minister that our support and the ‘no’ vote would fade exponentially...”

Varoufakis said that on the night of the referendum, after more than 61 percent of the population had voted against the EU’s austerity demands, there was, in the prime minister’s office, a “certain sense of resignation,” “an air of defeat.”

The interview confirms the analysis made at the time by the *World Socialist Web Site* that the call for a referendum was a “reactionary fraud, designed to lend a veneer of democratic legitimacy to the looting of Greece by the banks.” It also substantiates the account provided last week by *Daily Telegraph* columnist Ambrose Evans-Pritchard,

who wrote that Tsipras’ plan was “to put up a good fight, accept honorable defeat [in the referendum], and hand over the keys of the Maximos Mansion.”

The Greek working class has suffered a serious political defeat. The reaction within Greece and internationally is one of shock and anger. How is it that a government, which claimed to be left-wing, even socialist, is now supporting attacks on the working class that go beyond anything that went before? The ability of the working class to recover from this defeat, and avoid similar betrayals throughout Europe and internationally, requires a clear understanding of the political forces that are responsible.

This means, first of all, understanding the nature of Syriza and its political co-thinkers, which the WSWs has defined as “pseudo-left.” The actions taken by Tsipras flow inexorably from the class basis of Syriza, a bourgeois party resting on more privileged layers of the upper-middle class. Syriza could not resist the demands of the European banks, because to do so would require mobilizing the working class against the national bourgeoisie within Greece itself, which functions as a fifth column of European imperialism.

While groups like Syriza at times employ radical-sounding or Marxist phraseology, they do so only to cover for right-wing policies and a defense of the capitalist system. In Greece, the pseudo-left has come to power, and its character has been conclusively demonstrated.

In response, Syriza’s promoters are desperate to justify what it has done and make sure that any criticism of Syriza does not lead to a break with the petty bourgeois politics that produced the disaster. As a measure of self-defense, they are seeking to whitewash their own role, putting on their life jackets, politically speaking, as they prepare to flee the sinking ship.

One of their strategies is to scrounge around for a supposed “left faction” within Syriza. The International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US is promoting the views of the Internationalist Workers Left (DEA), a leading force in Syriza’s so-called “Left Platform.” For six months, following Syriza’s election victory and assumption of

power, the Left Platform performed the task of covering for the lies and maneuvers of Tsipras. Its empty criticisms were aimed at convincing the working class that Syriza could be pushed to the left.

The Left Platform's actions over the past two weeks exemplify its unprincipled and dishonest role. On July 1, it issued a statement, published on the ISO's web site, declaring, "The government's decision to reject the ultimatum of the lenders, to refuse to sign a new Memorandum imposing hyper-austerity, and to ask for an expression of the will of the people by referendum on July 5 is a decision that transforms Greek politics."

The referendum, the statement declared, "frees Syriza and the popular hopes for change from the dead end of continuing negotiations with the lenders." The call for the referendum, it continued, "proves what we, among the most critical voices inside Syriza, insisted in the months that have passed since the election: Syriza cannot easily be transformed into a party of austerity... A victory on July 5 will not return the situation to where things stood when the negotiations collapsed, with the despicable ultimatum of the lenders."

How quickly such claims have been exposed!

Even after Syriza returned to negotiations with the EU and made clear it would accept still more onerous demands than those rejected in the referendum, DEA leader Antonis Davenellos declared (July 10) that the "unexpected size" of the "no" vote had "given an important boost to the government and the leadership of Syriza." Davenellos added that "it is perfectly understandable that the government feels obliged to take part in new negotiations with the lenders," with the supposed aim of achieving an "honorable compromise."

Syriza had to be defended at all costs, Davenellos insisted. "The link between the power of the people expressed in the 'no' vote and the radical left strategy and tactics needed to confront the new conditions after the referendum cannot be anything other than the party of Syriza."

More of the same is to be found in *International Viewpoint*, the pseudo-left publication of anti-Trotskyists who broke with the Fourth International more than a half century ago. This publication, which is affiliated with the Antarsya (Anti-capitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow) group in Greece, wrote on July 7: "The victories of Syriza, like the advances of Podemos in the Spanish state, show the road to take in all the countries of Europe..."

On July 13, even after Tsipras' shameless capitulation, Antarsya member Panagiotis Sotiris denounced those who criticized Syriza in an article published in *Jacobin* magazine. While declaring that the previous several days had marked an "end of the road for both Syriza and Tsipras," Sotiris

attacked the "pathology of sectarianism and the micro-intrigues of the radical left."

He proposed to salvage what he could of the stinking muck of Syriza. "We need exactly the convergence of political forces and movement dynamics that could," he wrote, "in a certain way, dialectically incorporate and at the same time go beyond the legacy of Syriza as broad front, the experience of Antarsya as anti-capitalist unity, the experience of all the forms of organization in the movement."

The actions of Syriza have demonstrated to working people internationally that all of these supposedly "anti-capitalist" groups and movements are deadly traps for the working class. If any of them had been in Syriza's position, they would have acted in precisely the same way that Tsipras did.

These events have vindicated the political analysis of the International Committee of the Fourth International. On the basis of a class appraisal of Syriza, the WSWs, well before Syriza's election in January, exposed it as a bourgeois party that would betray the aspirations of Greek workers and youth. Throughout its entire history, the ICFI has carried out a ruthless critique of such political forces, insisting that only on the basis of such a critique can an independent political movement of the working class be forged.

The final word in Greece has not yet been heard. There will be more struggles to come. No one can claim that this defeat was inflicted on the working class because the workers did not want to fight. What was lacking was political leadership.

After these events, it is impossible to deny the critical significance of perspective, theory and program. We urge our readers in Greece and internationally to study the program of the ICFI, thoroughly examine the experience of the past six months, and take up the task of constructing the revolutionary socialist leadership of the international working class.



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