

The confessions of Yanis Varoufakis: The pseudo-left as a social type

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Yanis Varoufakis resigned as Greek finance minister on July 6. He did so in agreement with Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, with the aim of facilitating a swift sell-out to the leaders of the euro zone who wanted him replaced.

The previous day, a massive two thirds of the Greek electorate had voted “no” to accepting the demands of Greece’s international creditors for further austerity measures. Tsipras was intent on betraying that mandate and wanted nothing to stand in the way of his doing so.

Since his resignation, Varoufakis has written and given interviews on his role in discussions that delivered up the Greek working class and youth to the mercies of the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund (the troika). His attempts at self-glorification prove that both Varoufakis and Tsipras knew there was no possibility of securing a compromise with the euro zone leaders on austerity. Rather, they held out this chimera in order to neuter popular resistance to the troika’s dictates while they sought to maintain Greece’s continued position within the EU on behalf of the bourgeoisie.

On July 13, the *New Statesman* published an exclusive interview with Varoufakis, modestly entitled, “Our battle to save Greece.” The appearance of the interview came just three days after Varoufakis failed to attend the parliamentary vote authorising Tsipras and Varoufakis’ own replacement, Euclid Tsakalotos, to negotiate a new bailout with the Eurozone leaders. Varoufakis nevertheless proclaimed his support for the negotiations.

The Eurogroup, Varoufakis stated in the interview, is controlled “completely and utterly... by the finance minister of Germany. It is all like a very well-tuned orchestra and he is the director.” He described the position of German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble as “consistent throughout. His view was ‘I’m not discussing the programme’...”

Asked whether France, which has been portrayed as more sympathetic to Greece, provided an alternative, he answered that “in the final analysis, when Doc Schäuble responded and effectively determined the official line, the French FM [Foreign Minister] in the end would always fold and accept.”

Varoufakis may as well have been speaking of himself—oppositional noises invariably followed by

capitulation.

When asked, “So why hang around until the summer?” under these conditions, Varoufakis replied bluntly that as far as he was concerned, “one doesn’t have an alternative.”

The problem was, he says, “The negotiations took ages, because the other side was refusing to negotiate.”

Asked whether he had tried working “with the governments of other indebted countries,” Varoufakis said: “From the very beginning those particular countries made it abundantly clear that they were the most energetic enemies of our government, from the very beginning. And the reason of course was their greatest nightmare was our success: were we to succeed in negotiating a better deal for Greece, that would of course obliterate them politically, they would have to answer to their own people why they didn’t negotiate like we were doing.”

Asked finally about the prospects of success for the renewed post-referendum negotiations, he replied, “If anything it will be worse.”

Varoufakis said nothing at the time about any of this. At every turn, he and Tsipras instead insisted that just one last push was needed to secure a deal—in order to prevent workers and youth drawing the necessary political conclusions.

Likewise, they made no appeal to the working class in Germany, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Ireland and the rest of Europe to break with their own corrupt pro-austerity governments. To do so would have forced Syriza to also “answer” to the “people” and risk the wrath of the bourgeoisie—which is just as much Syriza’s “greatest nightmare” as it was for the governments Varoufakis now condemns.

Speaking to Australia’s *ABC Late Night Live* on the same day the *New Statesman* article was published, Varoufakis admitted that he and Tsipras had in fact expected a “yes” vote in the referendum—which would have allowed Tsipras to declare defeat and accede to the Eurogroup’s demands.

“I had assumed, and I believe so had the prime minister, that our support and the no vote would fade exponentially, but the Greek people overcame fear, they set aside their pecuniary interests, they ignored the fact their savings could not be accessed, and they gave a resounding, majestic no to what was in the end an awful ultimatum on behalf of our European partners,” he said.

On the evening of the referendum, Varoufakis said, “I was travelling on a beautiful cloud pushed by beautiful winds of the public’s enthusiasm for the victory of Greek democracy in the referendum.”

However, “The moment I entered the prime ministerial office... I was confronted with an air of defeat, which was completely at odds with what was happening outside.”

What he identifies here is the appalled reaction of Syriza’s leadership to the scuppering of their planned immediate surrender. Even so, Tsipras, as Varoufakis knew full well, was intent on a more protracted version of the same course of action.

According to his account, “At that point I had to put it to the prime minister: ‘If you want to use the buzz of democracy outside the gates of this building, you can count on me. But if on the other hand you feel like you cannot manage this majestic ‘no’ to an irrational proposition from our European partners, I am going to simply steal into the night’.”

Tsipras, he says, “didn’t have what it took, sentimentally, emotionally, at that moment, to carry that no vote to Europe and use it as a weapon.”

Instead of opposing Tsipras, and in order to facilitate a betrayal, Varoufakis “decided to give him the leeway that he needs to go back to Brussels and strike what he knows to be an impossible deal. A deal that is simply not viable.”

Varoufakis concluded by comparing the agreement reached to the 1967 coup that installed the regime of the generals—only this time carried out with banks rather than tanks—before warning of the political consequences:

“In parliament I have to sit looking at the right hand side of the auditorium, where 10 Nazis sit, representing Golden Dawn. If our party, Syriza, that has cultivated so much hope in Greece ... if we betray this hope and bow our heads to this new form of postmodern occupation, then I cannot see any other possible outcome than the further strengthening of Golden Dawn. They will inherit the mantle of the anti-austerity drive, tragically.”

He says this, even as he describes to the *New Statesman* “feeling on top of the world” and “relieved I don’t have to sustain any longer this incredible pressure to negotiate for a position I find difficult to defend.”

Unlike Greek workers and youth, he can perhaps afford to be sanguine about the prospect of a resurgent fascist movement.

Varoufakis is of the highly privileged social layer for which Syriza speaks and whose interests are bound up with the continued capitalist exploitation of the working class. Should the defense of capitalism require at some point the unleashing of state violence or the use of fascist bands, then there will be those within Syriza’s ranks who will not hesitate to do so.

As for Varoufakis, if past experience is to be a guide, then he and his wife Danae Stratou would likely transfer their millions of euros in assets abroad and then follow their money. After all, he has done so many times before.

In a biographical sketch on his blog, he explains how, as a

teenager, “Given that students were the first and foremost targets of the military and paramilitary forces, my parents determined that it was too risky for me to stay on in Greece and attend University there. So, off I went, in 1978, to study in Britain.”

His “break from Britain,” he continues, “occurred in 1987 on the night of Mrs Thatcher’s third election victory. It was too much to bear. Soon I started planning my escape...”

He returned to Greece from Sydney, Australia in 2002, becoming an adviser to PASOK leader George Papandreou. However, “Soon after Greece’s implosion... everything that I had worked to create at the University of Athens collapsed,” “my salary shrank” and there were “death threats to members of my family that followed my insistence to discuss publicly the Greek bankers’ latest scandals... Taken together, these three factors meant that the time had come to move out of Greece once again”—this time to Austin, Texas.

Varoufakis’ comments are revealing of far more than his own political proclivities. He was, after all, until recently almost universally lauded by the pseudo-left groups, and still is by many.

Paul Mason, economics editor for the UK’s *Channel 4 News* and a former leading member of the Workers Power Group, wrote the foreword to a newly published edition of Varoufakis’ *The Global Minotaur*. He describes how his “straight-talking changed the modus operandi of Euro summits, probably forever,” and how he has “laid bare the central problem of the world economy.”

He continues, “We don’t know how the fight between Syriza and the eurozone will end—but we can be certain it will involve compromise. Politicians live in the world of compromise; theorists do not. But by the end of it, the radical left will know what it means to fight for a new, fairer kind of capitalism, in the teeth of resistance from the old kind.”

Mason accurately reflects the fascination exerted on the pseudo-left by Varoufakis and the rest of Syriza’s leaders. Their readiness to “live in the world of compromise” is one they both admire and wish to emulate in securing a governmental role for themselves.

Though perhaps not as rich or successful as Varoufakis, they come from the same social layer. They too want only to create a “new and fairer kind of capitalism.” By this they mean one in which the super-rich one percent give the top 10 to 20 percent of the population a bigger slice of the economic cake in return for, in the words of Varoufakis, “saving capitalism from itself”—or, to be more precise, from a revolutionary challenge by the working class.



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