

Socialist Project's Panitch and Gindin defend Syriza's betrayal of the Greek working class

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Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, the leaders of Canada's Socialist Project group and well-known "Marxist" academics, have leapt to the defence of Syriza, providing alibis and excuses for its imposition of the European Union's savage austerity demands.

In a series of articles and interviews, they have insisted that Syriza had no option other than to bow to the demands of the EU, the instrument of the most powerful sections of European capital, above all the German bourgeoisie. Panitch and Gindin are bitterly opposed to any challenge to Syriza from the left, claiming that a split from the party or the defeat of the Syriza government would be a "disaster." They even praise Syriza leader and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras on the grounds that he, unlike the "neoliberal social democrats," has termed the austerity measures he has imposed on the working class a bad deal.

Panitch and Gindin are themselves deeply complicit in Syriza's betrayal. The pair spent much of the late spring and summer in Athens, consulting with and providing advice to the Syriza leadership. They actively intervened at public meetings, with Panitch also chairing debates involving Syriza leaders. All the while, they continued to write articles and give interviews aimed at promoting Syriza and the perspective that they and Syriza share of "entering the state" to oppose neoliberalism to a North American and world audience.

Throughout, Panitch and Gindin have insisted that there are only two plausible perspectives for those opposed to the diktats of the EU, European Central Bank, and IMF: to collaborate with the troika, as advocated by Syriza, or a "Grexit," that is the abandonment of the euro for the drachma, on an entirely nationalist and capitalist basis.

Excluded from start to finish in all their musings is any possibility that the Greek and European working class could intervene into events armed with a socialist and internationalist program. The revolutionary mobilization of workers across the European continent in opposition to austerity and the EU, for the expropriation of the ill-gotten gains of the financial elite, and in the fight for workers' governments is a prospect that Panitch and Gindin denounce as wildly unrealistic and dangerous.

Immediately following Tsipras's acceptance of terms that effectively transform Greece into a neo-colonial protectorate of the major European powers, including billions in austerity measures and the establishment of a €50 billion privatization fund, Panitch and Gindin rushed to defend Syriza against any criticism from the left. In a piece entitled "Treating Syriza Responsibly," they hailed "Syriza's unique capacity on the international left to build the type of party capable of both mobilizing against neoliberalism and entering the state to try to actually do something about this."

In subsequent articles, they blamed the working class for Syriza's betrayal of its vow to oppose austerity, claiming that the Greek workers were not in favour of a radical struggle against the EU and had only supported Syriza because it insisted on keeping the euro. "Those," declared Panitch and Gindin, "on the revolutionary left who hoped that after Syriza's election this leadership would get swept away by a massive popular upsurge for Grexit in the face of the limits and contradictions of a Syriza government were, as usual, dreaming in technicolor."

This is all lies. Whenever Greek workers have had the opportunity to do so, they have expressed their hostility to austerity and their readiness to fight. Take the massive "No" vote in the July 5 referendum. It came in the face of an EU-organized shutdown of Greece's banks and threats by Germany to expel Greece from the EU.

Panitch and Gindin's fatuous claims notwithstanding, Syriza never sought to "mobilize" anyone against neoliberalism. Syriza made no attempt to mobilize the Greek, let alone the European, working class. Rather its appeals for modification of the austerity terms were entirely directed to the EU's governments and bourgeois elite and to the Obama administration. And when the EU rebuffed its pleas, Syriza agreed to implement austerity measures that far surpass even those implemented by its right-wing predecessors.

This is because Syriza, by virtue of its class composition, history and program, is a bourgeois party. And the privileges of the sections of the upper-middle class and bourgeoisie for whom it speaks are bound up with the maintenance of the euro and Greek capitalism's ties to the EU.

Panitch and Gindin's own callous indifference to the working class is exemplified by their July 17 article "The Real Plan B: the new Greek marathon."

The article asserts even more emphatically their support for the Syriza government. "However sobering" the austerity terms that Syriza is committed to implementing, the left, Panitch and Gindin proclaim, "should move beyond outrage and protest...and instead struggle with what kind of changes in the state remain possible to support the needs of the majority of the Greek people who voted OXI (i.e. No to austerity)."

The co-leaders of the Socialist Project then outline proposals for the Syriza government to distribute Band-Aids to a society hemorrhaging under the impact of the brutal austerity measures imposed by the EU and its Greek bourgeois agents, Syriza included. These include "addressing basic community needs through self-organized democratically run collectives" i.e. setting up soup kitchens, urban farming endeavours, and the like, and seeking a commitment from the new owners of privatized firms to set up "industrial parks where new

jobs might be created.”

Continuing in the same vein, Panitch and Gindin urge Syriza ministers to continue to “attack neoliberalism and speak to a socialist vision of solidarity and democracy.” Also, “for every negative” austerity bill they implement, Syriza ministers “should creatively put forth a positive bill that confirms” their continuing commitment to the fight against neoliberalism.

In other words, while carrying through an unprecedented assault on public spending and a fire sale of state assets to private investors, Syriza ministers must never forget to proclaim their verbal commitment to the ideal of a socialist future sometime in the distant future. A more cynical and deceitful propaganda campaign could hardly be imagined.

Syriza’s emergence as the enforcer of EU austerity against the Greek working class constitutes a devastating exposure of the program of “entering the state”—a program with which Panitch in particular has long been associated. A student of the late British academic Ralph Miliband and his successor as the editor of the *Socialist Register*, Panitch in the 1970s and 1980s touted the possibility of advancing toward “socialism” through nationalizations carried out by left social-democratic governments, inspired by the likes of the British Labourite MP and Fabian Tony Benn—that is, without the revolutionary mobilization of the working class and the overthrow of the capitalist state and on a nationalist basis. More recently Panitch has lauded Syriza for supposedly overcoming the Twentieth Century gulf between reform and revolution!

Panitch and Gindin’s defence of Syriza has been so brazen that it has caused a certain amount of handwringing within the pseudo-left circles in which they operate. In attempting to rebut their critics, Gindin and especially Panitch have made a number of comments that underscore just how conscious has been their opposition to a perspective based on the revolutionary mobilization of the working class.

In an interview with the Real News Network, Panitch staunchly defended Tsipras against charges of betrayal and capitulation, while saying that “yes...if you were a certain type of historical tendency rooted in the Russian Revolution, you could see Tsipras as Kerensky.” This is a reference to the “populist socialist” Kerensky who, as head of Russia’s provisional government in 1917, implemented the counterrevolutionary program of the bourgeoisie, continuing Russia’s participation in World War I, opposing peasant land seizures, and suppressing the working class. In October 1917 his government was swept aside by the Russian workers under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky.

Elsewhere, Panitch and Gindin have replied to the supporters of the erstwhile Syriza faction Left Platform by saying that real defiance of the EU would require a “political revolution.” They then go on to point out, for once correctly, that Left Platform—which has formed Popular Unity, since being kicked out of Syriza for its muted criticisms of Tsipras’s capitulation to the EU—has no program for revolution and is entirely orientated to implementing its “anti-austerity” program through the Greek state.

In fact, Popular Unity’s program is almost identical to that of Syriza, including in its opposition to the mobilization of the Greek and European working class. The one major difference is that it advocates abandoning the euro for the drachma, a measure that via devaluation will result in further massive impoverishment of the working class. (See: Election program of Greece’s Popular Unity is a political fraud)

Panitch and Gindin dismiss a revolutionary challenge to capitalism

as impossible, arguing indefatigably for “realistic” politics. But it is their politics that have proved utterly unviable from the standpoint of the class interests of the working class and a key link in the chain of betrayal that has enabled the international bourgeoisie to impose a major defeat on the Greek working class.

With Syriza now experiencing a sharp decline in support due to its exposure as a pro-austerity party and the imminent prospect that it could lose this Sunday’s election to the conservative New Democracy, Panitch and Gindin have nothing to say. Neither has published a comment on events in Greece since mid-August. Instead they have simply moved on and are now hailing the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the British Labour Party as opening the way for this right-wing party, or at least sections of it, being transformed into an instrument for fighting for socialism.

Panitch and Gindin’s defence of Syriza is entirely in accordance with the role they and their Socialist Project play in Canada—that is, as advocates and attorneys for the labor bureaucracy and vociferous opponents of the fight to win the working class to the program of revolutionary socialism.

Revealingly in one of their articles they compare Syriza to a purportedly militant local union leadership that faced with the threat of a plant closure accepts a contract containing concessions far greater than those negotiated by their right-wing predecessors.

Gindin, who for years served as a trade union functionary, in particular has close ties to the union apparatuses. As research director of the Canadian wing of the UAW and subsequently the Canadian Auto Workers, Gindin played a leading role in organizing the 1985 break-up of the UAW along national lines. This split served to divide one of the most powerful sections of the North American working class, enabling the automakers, with the ever more flagrant support of the UAW and CAW (now Unifor) to pit workers against each other in a race to the bottom in wages and working conditions.

Workers in Greece and internationally must draw the political lessons from Syriza’s criminal betrayal and from the continued defence of the party by pseudo-left groups around the world. A break from their nationalist, anti-Marxist politics is an essential precondition for the development of an internationalist and socialist party of the working class capable of preparing for the revolutionary struggles now developing.



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