

# The Political Lessons of Syriza's Betrayal in Greece

International Committee of the Fourth International  
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## 1. An immense strategic experience for the working class

The September 2015 election that returned the Syriza (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) government, led by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, to power in Greece concludes a definite stage in what has proved to be an immense strategic experience for the working class.

As it swept into office in January, Syriza pledged to end European Union (EU) austerity measures. The EU’s savage social attacks had placed Greece at the center of the relentless global assault on living standards and basic rights of workers that has proceeded since the 2008 crash, and millions of workers and youth internationally looked to the struggles of the Greek working class. Media coverage, criticisms of Syriza from reactionary EU politicians, and the statements of Syriza itself all led masses of people to believe that Tsipras and his finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, were firebrands ready to take on Greek and international capitalism.

Both within and outside of Greece, countless parties presenting themselves as “anti-capitalist” or “left” hailed Syriza’s rise to power as a triumph for the left and a model for the struggle against austerity in Europe and internationally.

In the ensuing eight months, however, Syriza comprehensively betrayed its election promises. After signing an agreement to extend EU austerity measures in February, only weeks after coming to power, it trampled the landslide “no” vote in the referendum on austerity that it organized in July and rammed a massive new austerity bailout through parliament.

This blatant violation of the popular vote left the masses shocked and stunned. Tsipras narrowly won re-election in September against the right-wing New Democracy (ND) party, amid mass abstention, after Syriza ran as the favored party of the EU and the banks. As Syriza begins its second term in office, it is intensifying austerity measures that have already condemned millions to joblessness, poverty, and hunger.

Masses of people are being brought face-to-face with the bankruptcy and treachery of political parties that have dominated protest movements and what passed for left politics over an entire historical period. Following the theories of postmodernist academics such as Ernesto Laclau, these organisations declared the current epoch to be “post-Marxist.” Rooted in affluent sections of the middle class, they insisted that the working class was no longer a revolutionary force, but had been superseded by a multitude of social constituencies defined by national, racial, gender or lifestyle identities.

For decades, these parties palmed off their politics as radical or anti-capitalist, when they were, in fact, no such thing. Their first experience in government has exposed these pretensions as a fraud, providing political cover for pro-capitalist policies designed to advance the interests of the top 10 percent of society at the expense of working people.

In a post-election trip to the United States in September, Tsipras frankly laid out his long-term, pro-business agenda. Questioned by former US

President Bill Clinton at the Clinton Global Initiative in New York, Tsipras said: “Foreign investors are welcome, and they will find a government with a clear mandate to bring about change to the country. ... In a few years, Greece will become a prime destination for foreign investment, this is my opinion and my desire.”

How will Tsipras attract investment to Greece? As governments across Europe press savage attacks on wages and benefits, Syriza hopes that its cuts will allow it to continue offering international and Greek investors the most super-exploited and, therefore, most profitable labor in Europe.

Tsipras’ program is founded on the destruction of fundamental social rights that workers in Western Europe have enjoyed for generations. Employers in Greece have been released from the cost of maintaining universal health care. Syriza’s pension cuts are part of a broader plan, discussed in the media, to require workers to pay into supplementary pension schemes, effectively ending their right to a state-funded pension. Greece’s scaled-down monthly minimum wage of €683 is now closer to wage levels in China, or the poorest Eastern European countries, than to minimum wage levels in wealthier euro zone countries like the Netherlands or France.

The Syriza experience points to the necessity of a fundamental political re-orientation of the working class, youth, and socialist-minded intellectuals. Faced with a global economic crisis unprecedented since the 1930s and a savage onslaught by the entire capitalist class, the working class cannot defend itself by electing new, “left” capitalist governments.

The only way forward is through a genuinely revolutionary policy, mobilizing the working class in Greece and internationally in struggle. It requires a direct assault on the capitalist class, the confiscation of their wealth, the seizure of the major banks and productive forces, in order to place them under the democratic control of working people, and the creation of workers states across Europe and the world. Such struggles require the building of Marxist parties to offer political leadership to the working class, in ruthless struggle against parties like Syriza.

This is the historical significance of the International Committee of the Fourth International’s (ICFI) defense of the historical continuity of Trotskyism against parties like Syriza, which it has come to call the “pseudo-left.” The ICFI alone warned workers internationally that Syriza was not a “radical left” party, but a pro-capitalist party, hostile to the workers, which would betray its promises to end austerity. The criticisms of Syriza advanced by the ICFI have been completely vindicated.

Tsipras’ record has shown that the ICFI’s struggle against the pseudo-left was not a factional dispute, but a struggle between two irreconcilably opposed class tendencies. While Syriza sought to tie the working class to the dictates of finance capital and the needs of the Greek capitalist class, the ICFI fought to develop a revolutionary perspective for the working class.

## 2. Cover-ups and rationalizations for Syriza's betrayal

The first step in the continuing struggle against austerity is to reject the apologies for Tsipras' record advanced by Syriza and its allies. The same forces that, eight months ago, promoted Syriza's election as the way forward in the struggle against austerity, are now strenuously covering up the significance of these events.

Some still hail Syriza, despite its actions, as a "radical left" party. The Left Party in Germany congratulated Syriza on its re-election, declaring that the Greek electorate had decided, "in a crisis, a left-wing government is better than a return to the corrupt old parties."

Others advance the demoralized view that Syriza's capitulation to the EU was the only possible response to the Greek crisis and, therefore, in no way constituted a betrayal. This is the approach of Stathis Kouvelakis, a philosophy professor at King's College in London and a leading member of Syriza's Left Platform faction (now of the Popular Unity party). At a meeting of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain, he declared:

I think the word 'betrayal' is inappropriate if we are to understand what is happening. Of course, objectively we can say that there has been a betrayal of the popular mandate, that people very legitimately feel they have been betrayed.

However, the notion of betrayal usually means that at some moment you make a conscious decision of renegeing on your own commitments. What I think actually happened was that Tsipras honestly believed that he could get a positive outcome by putting forward an approach centered on negotiations and displaying good will, and this is also why he constantly said he had no alternative plan.

What a miserable cover-up for Syriza! Kouvelakis substitutes cheap psychological speculation for a class analysis. He asks his listener to believe that, despite EU leaders' repeated statements that they would tolerate no let-up in austerity, Tsipras truly believed that he could persuade them to end their austerity demands by announcing that he had no strategy but to accept whatever deal the EU gave him.

This explanation explains nothing. Firstly, Tsipras had spent over two decades in politics when he took power, and was, at that point, in close contact with heads of state and leading financiers internationally; it is not credible to claim that he was the political innocent portrayed by Kouvelakis. However, even if one were to grant that Tsipras was the most naive man imaginable, Kouvelakis' defense of Syriza does not explain why, once the EU predictably insisted on austerity, Tsipras did not develop an alternative to total capitulation.

The class considerations dictating Tsipras' decisions are not difficult to comprehend. He acted to preserve the interests of the top 10 percent of Greeks in maintaining the euro currency, the banks, and Greece's alliance with the EU and NATO. Any attempt to mobilize the mass opposition that existed to austerity through strikes or protests would have cut across the pro-capitalist agenda that he has plainly spelled out in the aftermath of the September elections.

Above all, Tsipras' intentions as he took office in January are, in the final analysis, irrelevant. His main decisions—signing an EU austerity protocol in February, trampling the "no" vote in the July referendum and instead signing a new austerity bailout, and finally tabling an austerity budget in October—demonstrated an unwavering determination to impose the EU's austerity diktat. These actions constituted a blatant betrayal of Syriza's election promises to end austerity.

Kouvelakis' clumsy attempt to whitewash Tsipras' record is

indissolubly bound up with his broader concern: blocking the emergence of an alternative on the left to Syriza.

At the same SWP meeting, Kouvelakis said, "I want to add a more general reflection about what is the meaning of being vindicated or defeated in a political struggle. I think what, for a Marxist, is necessary is a kind of historicized understanding of these terms. You can say, on the one hand, that what you've been saying is vindicated because it's proved true. It's the usual I-told-you-so strategy. But, if you're unable to give a concrete power to that position, politically you are defeated."

Kouvelakis' message is utterly cynical. To opponents of Syriza from the left, he says, in effect: "Despite your criticisms of Syriza, you were unable to prevent us from implementing our betrayal. We, who held state power, carried out reactionary policies. But you, who criticized us, can do nothing more than say: 'I told you so.'"

But the experience of Syriza's betrayal will have political consequences, even if apologists for Syriza, such as Kouvelakis, try to deny it. The working class has received a painful and unforgettable lesson in the class character of the pseudo-left.

The International Committee of the Fourth International does not hesitate to state that it understood the political situation and told the workers the truth. This is how a revolutionary proletarian tendency establishes its authority in the working class and prepares to lead it in a socialist revolution. It is through this process, and no other, that the working class will "concretely" settle accounts with Syriza and other reactionary governments around the world.

## 3. How the International Committee warned the working class about Syriza

The ICFI's internet publication, the *World Socialist Web Site*, intensively covered the Greek debt crisis that erupted in 2009, after the election of George Papandreou of Greece's social-democratic Pasok party. From the beginning, it warned workers not to place any confidence in Syriza, the Greek Communist Party (KKE), Antarsya, and similar groupings oriented to Pasok and Greece's Pasok-dominated union bureaucracy.

In May 2010, at the time of Pasok's adoption of the first Greek austerity package, the WSWS warned: "An independent political strategy of the working class runs into immediate conflict with the trade unions and the middle class organizations that work to demobilize opposition. In Greece, the trade unions and their allies, including the Greek Communist Party and Syriza, are determined to maintain their alliance with Papandreou and their role in the political establishment. ... By promoting a perspective of influencing Papandreou's social-democratic Pasok party, these layers—like their counterparts elsewhere—consciously seek to subordinate workers to the state, to nationalist politics, and to the banks' austerity program."

Pasok then led the most devastating social offensive against the working class in Europe since World War II—first under Papandreou, then within a "technocratic" government imposed by the EU, which included ND and the far-right Laos party. Living standards plunged, impoverishing millions. This shattered Pasok, which, together with ND, had been Greece's main party of government since the collapse of the CIA-backed junta of the colonels in 1974.

As Pasok collapsed in the May 2012 election campaign, and Syriza ran second behind ND, the WSWS warned of Syriza's reactionary program: "The 'Growth Pact' currently being discussed in the EU, and on which Tsipras is clearly setting his hopes, consists of providing additional funds for ailing banks and 'structural reforms' to improve competitiveness, i.e., flexible working conditions and lower wages. Cuts in public spending

would continue unabated. Should Syriza actually win the Greek election, it would play an important role in the enforcement of such attacks.”

After ND won the 2012 elections, the major imperialist governments began grooming Tsipras, who toured the key European capitals and then, in 2013, Washington, DC and New York. Analyzing the promotion of Syriza by the imperialist powers, the media and the pseudo-left parties, the WSWS concluded: “In the coming class struggles, Syriza will confront the workers as an enemy. Its aim, whether in or out of power, is to contain popular opposition to austerity policies and maintain the political domination of finance capital over the working class.”

When Syriza came to power in January 2015, after a year of mounting strikes and protests against ND’s austerity measures, the WSWS commented: “For working people, a Syriza government would not represent a way out of the crisis; on the contrary, it would represent an enormous danger. Despite its left-wing façade, Syriza is a bourgeois party that rests on affluent layers of the middle class. Its policies are determined by union bureaucrats, academics, professionals and parliamentary functionaries, who seek to defend their privileges by preserving the social order. While its leader, Alexis Tsipras, promises the voters a (very small) lessening of the terrible austerity in Greece, he never tires of promising the representatives of the banks and governments abroad that they have ‘nothing to fear’ from a Syriza government.”

These warnings were vindicated by Syriza’s record in government. From the beginning, it feared and opposed the aspirations of millions of people who had voted it into office. Instead of appealing for international protests and other forms of mass opposition to EU austerity, Syriza sought to wage a charm offensive aimed at the European ruling classes. Its perspective was to obtain a marginal loosening of austerity policies from the EU, via limited debt relief and other concessions secured by appealing to the generosity of European bankers.

Tsipras’ first finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, later told the *Observer* that he went into the initial EU negotiations proposing “standard Thatcherite or Reaganesque” economic policies, which he had co-authored with a “Board of International Advisors” that included the Thatcherite Lord Norman Lamont, chancellor of the exchequer in the British Conservative government of John Major, as well as former US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers.

Syriza officials abased themselves before the EU, encouraging Berlin, the banks, and the other EU powers to escalate their demands and threats against Greece. On a February 11 visit to Berlin, Varoufakis declared that German Chancellor “Angela Merkel is by far the most astute politician in Europe. There is no doubt about it. And Wolfgang Schäuble, her Finance Minister, is perhaps the only European politician with intellectual substance.”

Syriza took not a single measure to defend the working class against the predations of the Greek bourgeoisie, whose interests were the primary consideration in its negotiations with Greece’s creditors. It allowed Greece’s financial elite unrestricted ability to loot the economy, sending tens of billions of euros out of the country in the months following Syriza’s election. No attempt was made to impose controls stemming capital flight, much less any move to nationalize the banks or to infringe on the wealth, power and privilege of the Greek ruling class.

Once Syriza felt confident that popular enthusiasm and expectations of change had been dampened, and the political situation stabilized, it promptly caved in to the EU. On February 20, it agreed to extend the austerity Memorandum and to propose a package of new austerity measures, ditching the very limited reforms promised in its Thessaloniki Program, the basis of its election campaign. Four days later, it pledged to cut spending on health care, education, mass transit, local government, and other essential social services. After this, whatever political maneuvers Tsipras used to impose these cuts, there could be no question about Syriza’s reactionary class character.

Over the spring, as the EU refused to make even cosmetic concessions, Tsipras sought ever more desperately to find a way of justifying to the Greek people the cuts he had accepted.

On April 30, when Tsipras first floated the idea of holding a referendum on EU austerity, the WSWS warned: “To reach an agreement with the EU, Syriza is preparing to enforce deep social cuts that blatantly violate Syriza’s campaign promises to end EU austerity. Tsipras indicated that Syriza would therefore consider organizing a referendum to try to obtain a veneer of democratic legitimacy for policies dictated by the EU that have been overwhelmingly rejected by the Greek people.”

Ultimately, in June, Tsipras announced a referendum on EU austerity, scheduled for July 5, and called for a “no” vote. Even Syriza’s supporters now admit that this was a cynical political fraud, as the WSWS had warned. Tsipras planned to lose the referendum and use the resulting “yes” vote as a pretext to resign, paving the way for a right-wing party to take power and impose the cuts.

One supporter and admirer of Syriza, the long-time Pabloite Tariq Ali, wrote in the *London Review of Books*: “It’s no longer a secret here that Tsipras and his inner circle were expecting a ‘Yes’ or a very narrow ‘No.’ ... Why did Tsipras hold a referendum at all? ‘He’s so hard and ideological,’ Merkel complained to her advisers. If only. It was a calculated risk. He thought the ‘Yes’ camp would win, and planned to resign and let EU stooges run the government.”

This assessment only further confirms earlier accounts of the cynical calculations underlying the referendum maneuver. Varoufakis, Syriza’s former finance minister, told the *Guardian* in the wake of the referendum and Syriza’s capitulation: “I had assumed, and I believe so had the prime minister, that our support and the no vote would fade exponentially.”

A profile of Varoufakis published in the *New Yorker* magazine describes the former finance minister on the eve of the referendum as having “the peace of mind of someone who was certain of an election result and already savoring the satisfactions to follow. His government, the left-wing Syriza party, would lose. The people would vote ‘yes’—that is, in favor of making more concessions than Varoufakis and Alexis Tsipras... had said that they could stomach. Varoufakis would resign as a minister, and would never again have to endure all-day meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg ...”

The only possible outcome of Tsipras’ referendum gambit and the subsequent defeat, Varoufakis told the *Guardian*, was “the further strengthening of Golden Dawn,” a Greek fascist party.

Nonetheless, Syriza’s allies hailed the referendum as a decisive step, even a flowering of bourgeois democracy. The International Socialist Organization in the US published a statement from the Red Network, part of Syriza’s Left Platform. It claimed that Tsipras’ “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.”

“SYRIZA,” it memorably declared, “cannot be easily transformed into a party of austerity.”

For its part, the WSWS warned: “Were Tsipras to concisely explain to working people the content of his referendum, he could say: heads the EU wins, tails you lose. Coming only months after Syriza won an election pledging to end five years of austerity, the referendum has been called to give political cover for a surrender to the EU. Had Syriza intended to fight, it would have had no need to call a referendum on EU austerity already rejected by the Greek people.”

Tsipras’ referendum scheme backfired, however, as the Greek people delivered a landslide 61 percent “no” to EU austerity, in a vote sharply polarized along class lines. They defied a barrage of threats from the EU and the Greek media that the EU would react to a “no” vote by expelling Greece from the euro zone, setting off an unprecedented financial crisis. The clear implication of the vote was that the Greek working class was

prepared for a confrontation with capitalism.

Syriza was dismayed and terrified by the victory of the “no” vote, for which it had called in order to deceive the masses. “Taken by surprise,” Ali writes in the *London Review of Books*, “they panicked. An emergency cabinet meeting showed them in full retreat. They refused to get rid of the ECB [European Central Bank] placeman in charge of the Greek State Bank and rejected the idea of nationalizing the banks. Instead of embracing the referendum results, Tsipras capitulated.”

After a couple of frenzied weeks of talks with EU heads of state, Tsipras accepted a €13 billion (US\$14.34 billion) austerity package, the single deepest package of cuts ever dictated by the EU.

The WSWS warnings about the character of the referendum were confirmed by what followed. The “no” vote made clear the fighting mood in the working class and the illegitimacy of Syriza’s policies, but it did nothing to mobilize the working class in mass struggle. The referendum had left the political initiative in the hands of Tsipras—that is, with the forces of austerity.

The working class and the vast majority of Greeks who voted “no” in the July referendum were totally disenfranchised in the ensuing September 2015 elections. Both major candidates, Tsipras and ND’s Maimarakis, ran openly pro-austerity campaigns. Amid mass abstention, Tsipras won re-election by default, due to the lack of any electoral alternative to austerity, as the undeserving beneficiary of deep-going popular hostility to ND.

Since his re-election, Tsipras has led Syriza in a wild assault on the social rights of the Greek working class, coordinated with the EU. His austerity budget included a 20 percent cut in minimum pension levels, and Syriza is leading attempts to cut state protection from eviction for homeowners in arrears on their mortgage payments, setting the stage for possible mass evictions of hundreds of thousands of families. These barbaric attacks are confirmation, if any more were needed, that the working class can only defend itself in determined struggle against Syriza.

#### 4. The origins and evolution of Syriza

The betrayal carried out by Syriza did not fall from the sky. Though Syriza marketed itself as a “Radical Left” party, the policy it carried out flowed inexorably from its history: it was, from its inception, a bourgeois party hostile to the working class and to Marxism.

Syriza emerged in 2004, as various petty-bourgeois parties coalesced around the Synaspismos (Coalition, or SYN) organization. At the time, Tsipras was a young leader of SYN, which was, along with the KKE, the main remnant from the collapse of Greek Stalinism. The groups it attracted, such as the DEA (Internationalist Workers Left, an anti-Trotskyist party that denounced the USSR as a “state capitalist” society) emerged from the student movement that had developed after the collapse of the colonels’ junta in 1974.

This student movement developed under conditions where capitalism had been discredited in wide layers of the Greek population by the crimes of fascism, the Greek Civil War and successive Greek military dictatorships. Students readily joined protests or backed strikes called by Pasok-controlled unions, which provided them with publicity and a certain political influence. This did not signify, however, that these students supported the perspective of proletarian revolution.

Rather, they evolved in line with a broad international shift to the right in the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia after 1968. That year, the Soviet army suppressed the Prague Spring uprising, and the French Communist Party blocked the seizure of power by the working class after the French general strike of May–June 1968. Stalinist parties were being exposed as defenders of the established order, amid a broad radicalization of the

working class and the youth. No longer could they play the role they had played earlier, in line with the counterrevolutionary foreign policy of the Soviet bureaucracy, to control social protest and block revolutionary struggles in the working class.

The middle class layers represented in the student movement did not, however, react to the exposure of Stalinism by trying to build genuine revolutionary parties in the working class. Rather, they used left or socialistic phraseology to justify repudiating the working class as a revolutionary force and rejecting the struggle to build revolutionary parties like the Bolshevik Party, which, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, had overthrown capitalism in Russia in 1917.

As noted by Panagiotis Sotiris—a leader of Antarsya, one of Syriza’s main rivals in Greek petty-bourgeois politics—they sought, instead, to build in the middle class. At that time, he told *Jacobin* magazine, “we were thinking exactly that unitary experiments such as the left regroupments within the universities had a more strategic character. They could help this kind of recomposing of the radical left, as opposed to traditional forms of organization building or party building.”

The theoretical and political underpinnings of this form of petty-bourgeois politics were provided by postmodernist and “post-Marxist” intellectuals, such as Ernesto Laclau, an Argentine professor, who trained many current leaders of Syriza at Essex University in Britain. His widely-read 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, co-written with Belgian academic Chantal Mouffe, mounted an all-out attack on the working class and Marxism.

Laclau and Mouffe called upon their readers “to discard the idea of a perfectly unified and homogenous agent, such as the ‘working class’ of classical discourse.” Rejecting the existence of the working class and of the objective socioeconomic basis for socialism or socialist revolution, they wrote: “The search for the ‘true’ working class and its limits is a false problem and as such lacks any theoretical or political relevance. Evidently, this implies ... that fundamental interests in socialism cannot be logically deduced from determinate positions in the economic process.”

As time went on, Laclau developed his rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class into an ever more explicitly irrational hostility to any attempt to comprehend capitalist society.

Denouncing the “imperialism of ‘reason’” in a 1991 essay entitled “God only knows,” Laclau wrote: “Let us just consider the debate about whether the working class is still the main historical subject or if the latter’s role has passed to the new social movements. I would argue that this way of formulating the problem is still imprisoned by the old approach which it attempts to supersede, because it maintains the idea that there has to be a *single* privileged agent of historical change, defined by a historical and social totality that can be rationally grasped. But it is precisely this last assumption which has to be questioned.”

Such were the wildly irrationalist conceptions that prevailed in the middle classes as SYN was being formed in February 1989, amid the crisis and collapse of Andreas Papandreou’s Pasok government. SYN was an electoral coalition between the KKE and the Greek Left Party. The latter was dominated by the “Eurocommunists,” a Stalinist tendency that had split from the KKE, but it also included bourgeois politicians like former Pasok member Nikos Konstantopoulos.

The Eurocommunists’ critique of Stalinism had nothing in common with the Marxist opposition to the Kremlin bureaucracy that had been developed by Trotsky and the Fourth International. Whereas Trotsky advocated a political revolution by the Soviet working class to overthrow the parasitic bureaucracy, reestablish workers’ democracy and defend the essential social conquests of the October Revolution, Eurocommunism was a development of Stalinism to the right.

The Eurocommunists reflected the growing influence of the type of anti-Marxist conceptions articulated by Laclau within the Stalinist parties themselves. They sought, by explicitly renouncing revolution, Marxism

and the October Revolution, to distance themselves from Moscow in order to collaborate more closely with their own ruling classes. This tendency, which predominated in the Italian and Spanish Communist parties, was a precursor of the drive by the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy under Mikhail Gorbachev to restore capitalism and liquidate the Soviet Union.

The formation of SYN was the prelude to an epoch-making betrayal of the working class by all shades of Greek Stalinism. When Andreas Papandreou's government collapsed, but ND failed to win a majority in the ensuing elections, SYN entered into a coalition government with ND. This brought the Stalinists into an alliance with the Greek right, which had drowned the opposition of the working class in blood, both during the Greek Civil War of 1946–1949 and under the 1967–1974 junta of the colonels. This coalition was later widened to include Pasok, as well, until it fell in 1990.

The KKE and the precursors of Syriza had signaled to the bourgeoisie that they were now firmly in the camp of the capitalist order. During its coalition governments with ND, SYN officials served as interior and justice ministers. Thus, they controlled the files regarding the mass murder and torture of workers, members of the Trotskyist movement and of the KKE itself during the Greek Civil War that followed World War II, and the colonels' junta. Not only did SYN fail to investigate these crimes, it allowed the destruction of numerous files that would have made possible the prosecution of those responsible.

A year later, SYN's allies in the Soviet bureaucracy dissolved the USSR and restored capitalism, looting the Soviet working class and throwing open the former Soviet Union to imperialist intervention. With these monumental crimes, the KKE and the precursors of Syriza showed that they had broken whatever links they had retained with the struggles of the working class in the twentieth century. The KKE left the SYN alliance in 1991, however, leaving SYN as a stronghold of the former "Eurocommunists."

Both SYN and the KKE had completed their transformation from parties tied to the counter-revolutionary policies of the Soviet bureaucracy to outright bourgeois parties.

The other tendencies in Syriza—the DEA, Maoist and ecological groups, and KKE split-offs—would go on to join Syriza on the basis of this pro-capitalist evolution. By the early 2000s, as Panos Petrou of the DEA writes in an article on the founding of Syriza, SYN "was in electoral decline, facing the threat of not being able to win enough votes to pass the threshold for being represented in parliament. This was the result of its center-left policies during the previous years, which made the party look like a satellite of Pasok."

The formation of Syriza in 2004 was a maneuver aimed at projecting a more "left" face and keeping SYN alive by absorbing other parties that had joined the anti-Iraq war protests. As Petrou notes, "for the leadership of SYN, Syriza was mostly an electoral alliance to help it surpass the threshold of 3 percent of the nationwide vote to enter parliament."

Their role reflected the increasing wealth and conservatism of the social layers inside Syriza. As press coverage of Syriza ministers' large savings accounts and multiple residences made clear, the former students graduated to careers that placed them in the affluent middle class. Having benefited from the financialization of the European economy, a rising real estate market, and the introduction of the euro, their reading of Laclau and similar writers had firmly convinced them of the merits of capitalism.

Their moods found finished expression in Laclau's dismissal of the class struggle and of the very notion of social class itself. In his 2007 work, *Ideology and Post-Marxism*, he declared, "the subjects of an 'anti-capitalist' struggle are many and cannot be reduced to a category as simple as that of 'class.' We are going to have a plurality of struggles. Struggles in our society tend to proliferate the more we move into a globalized era, but they are less and less 'class' struggles."

The Syriza government's role in driving an enormous retrogression in

the living standards of Greek workers testifies to the reactionary implications of such irrationalist and anti-Marxist conceptions. The obscurantist insistence that reality cannot be rationally understood, and the dismissal of the working class, has provide theoretical fuel for petty-bourgeois parties that are "left" in name only. Syriza imposes its irrational austerity policies, which are tantamount to the economic suicide of Greece, with total disregard for the broad mass of the working population.

## 5. Syriza's "left" accomplices

The essential precondition for a struggle by the working class against austerity is a break with such corrupt pseudo-left politics. Their bankruptcy was evident in the failure of the parties in Greece that posed as "left" critics of Tsipras' first government to win any significant vote in the September elections.

The Popular Unity (Laiki Enótita) party—which brought in Maoist groups from the Antarsya coalition to support the Left Platform after it left Syriza—failed to win even the 3 percent minimum needed to place a candidate in parliament.

A coalition cobbled together by the remaining Antarsya factions, including various Pabloite and Maoist groups, and the EEK (Workers Revolutionary Party) of Savas Michael-Matsas, obtained 0.85 percent.

Under the conditions of extreme crisis prevailing in Greece, these paltry results are an indictment of the role played by these tendencies from January to September 2015. They drew no serious support because they never fought to fundamentally differentiate themselves from Syriza or to win the masses to a revolutionary perspective.

The Left Platform worked loyally within the Syriza government from January to July, serving to block opposition to Syriza from the left. It promoted the lie that, despite having pledged to impose austerity in February, Syriza might still carry out left-wing policies. One resolution it addressed to Syriza's leadership asserted that, "despite the seriousness of your initial compromise, you still have the time to salvage this situation by changing direction and assuming the necessary radical and socialist policies."

The Left Platform's attempts to posture as an opponent of EU austerity are a political fraud. At the end of July, it led the push to avoid a roll-call vote inside Syriza's central committee on the austerity measures Tsipras had negotiated. It thereby allowed the austerity measures to pass, while simultaneously avoiding taking a position against them.

When the Left Platform's toothless criticisms became an irritant to Tsipras' dealings with the EU, after Syriza had signed the July austerity deal, he dissolved his own government and removed them from Syriza's list of legislative candidates. It was then that the Left Platform decided to leave Syriza and to set up the Popular Unity party, to continue peddling illusions in Syriza and block a politically independent struggle of the working class against the Tsipras government.

Panagiotis Lafazanis, the leader of the Left Platform who had served as Tsipras' energy minister, declared: "Popular Unity wants to continue the best programmatic traditions of Syriza. We want to stick to more radical commitments."

Unsurprisingly, Lafazanis' appeal for a defense of Syriza's reactionary record convinced several factions of Antarsya that the time was ripe to enter into a direct alliance with the Left Platform inside the Popular Unity party.

As for Michael-Matsas and the EEK, they saw it as an opportunity for a "regroupment" with other factions of Antarsya, setting up a new left cover for Syriza and the Greek ruling class.

The orientation of these tendencies was not to the working class, but to

Syriza. In the end, workers correctly saw them as just part of the whole political setup that had betrayed them.

One only has to compare how these elements occupied themselves in the eight months from January to September with how Lenin and the Bolshevik Party utilized the eight months separating the coming to power of the Provisional Government in February 1917 and the October Revolution. The latter relentlessly challenged the illusions of the masses in the Provisional Government, fighting to break the grip of the bourgeois parties and their apologists over the working class. Under far more complicated political conditions, they succeeded in winning ever-greater influence over the working class and thereby preparing the October Revolution.

There was not a trace of such revolutionary intransigence among the forces supposedly to the left of Syriza. All of them prepared the coming to power of Syriza by working to promote illusions that a Syriza government would lead a struggle against EU austerity, then spent the eight months between January and September adapting themselves to the Syriza government, spreading lies about its policies, and making certain that it had a clear path to completing its betrayal.

## 6. “Broad left parties” and the preparation of new betrayals

The Syriza government was not only a bitter experience of the Greek working class. It also exposed similar pseudo-left parties in Europe and internationally, who aided and abetted its coming to office and now bear political responsibility for Syriza’s attacks on the Greek workers. Workers internationally must be warned: should the ruling class allow them to take power, they will prove just as reactionary as did Syriza in Greece.

These parties are already well established across Europe with Podemos in Spain and the Left Party in Germany. Like Syriza, they emerged after the liquidation of the Soviet Union, as various petty-bourgeois tendencies worked out alliances with Stalinist forces. They advance a political agenda consisting of hollow anti-austerity rhetoric, combined with pro-imperialist policies tailored to the interests of privileged sections of the middle class.

Before Syriza, the Communist Refoundation (*Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*, PRC) in Italy had provided the most prominent example in Europe of the consequences of this orientation. *Rifondazione* emerged out of the dissolution of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) amid the drive to restore capitalism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In addition to a faction of the PCI, the party consisted of anti-Trotskyist Pabloite revisionists, led by Livio Maitan, Maoists and anarchist tendencies. Since 1991, it has joined a series of Italian governments that have implemented austerity measures at home, while participating in imperialist wars ranging from Yugoslavia to Afghanistan.

As *Rifondazione* repeatedly participated in reactionary governments, its defenders were quite conscious that they were building bourgeois parties that would carry out reactionary policies and attacks on the working class.

In one public discussion of the role of parties like Syriza and *Rifondazione*, which it called “broad left parties,” the Pabloite journal *International Viewpoint* admitted “that the relationship with the state and the party’s understanding of its role in society” had become a pressing issue. It remarked that these parties carried out “at particular moments a crossing of the Rubicon leading explicitly to institutional management at the highest level of the state or explicit support to social-liberal [i.e., pro-austerity] governments.”

This discussion, which took place two years before the coming to power of Syriza, underscores the political bad faith of its pseudo-left promoters. While they hailed Syriza as a great step forward for the left, they knew

they were continuing a long series of political betrayals. The pursuit of these utterly cynical politics relied upon their contemptuous and crassly pragmatic approach to history.

According to Alain Krivine, the leader of the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France, the NPA “does not resolve some issues, it leaves them open for future conferences. For example, all the strategic debates about taking power, transitional demands, dual power, etc. It does not claim to be Trotskyist, as such, but considers Trotskyism to be one of the contributors, among others, to the revolutionary movement. Unwilling, as we had to do under Stalinism, to arrive at policy by the rear view mirror, the NPA has no position on what was the Soviet Union, Stalinism, etc. Policy is based on an agreement on the analysis of the period and on tasks.”

The NPA did not want to talk about the key historical experiences of the twentieth century, the Marxist movement or on the central issues of revolutionary strategy facing the working class. The policies the NPA formulated on this ahistorical basis could only have the most short-sighted and reactionary character, dictated by its superficial impressions of media coverage and what its leaders learned from their conversations with government politicians.

As Krivine’s remark makes clear, however, the leadership of the NPA saw this as an advantage. It allowed them, while continuing to pose as “left,” to engage in unprincipled tactical maneuvers, such as endorsing “broad left parties” like Syriza as a great hope for the struggle against austerity, when they knew these were parties of austerity and war.

In Greece, the NPA joined the entire international pseudo-left fraternity in hailing Syriza’s coming to power as a victory. The NPA declared, “The election victory of Syriza is excellent news. It fills everyone with hope who is fighting against austerity in Europe,” while Germany’s Left Party issued a press statement that read: “The election in Greece is not just a turning point for Greece but for all of Europe. It opens up opportunities for a democratic renewal and a fundamental change of direction of the European Union.”

Another example of this was Xekinima (Start – Socialist Internationalist Organisation), a Greek party affiliated to the international tendency led by the Socialist Party (England and Wales). Having entered and then left Syriza, it backed Syriza in the January 2015 election.

In an interview with the Socialist Party in the run-up to the election, Xekinima leader Andros Payiatsos said that despite ample evidence that Syriza was “doing everything possible to come to an understanding with the forces of the market,” the masses “will have to fight and they will fight, pushing a Syriza government to the left.”

Even more categorical was the DEA, the Greek affiliate of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the United States. Part of Syriza’s Left Platform, it wrote: “In these new circumstances, the role of Syriza as a political party is irreplaceable. The functioning of its organizational bodies and membership, with collective participation and democracy throughout the party, is not an optional extra, but a precondition for the final victory of Syriza, and the final victory of the whole of the left and of our people.”

In Brazil, the United Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), one of the main parties that emerged from the breakup of the Latin American revisionist movement led by the late Nahuel Moreno, called for a vote for Syriza, describing it as “the main tool of Greek workers to overthrow the parties of the Memorandum and the looting” of Greece.

Whatever criticisms these tendencies made of Syriza’s pro-capitalist program, they all made them from the standpoint of demanding that workers subordinate themselves to Syriza’s electoral drive and view their struggles as a means of pressuring Syriza to the left.

None of them made a class analysis of Syriza. While hailing the party’s victory as a product of social struggles, they all covered up the fact that Syriza was a bourgeois party that had been brought forward as a means of

quelling workers struggles and ramming through austerity measures that the Greek right had been incapable of imposing.

These parties' promotion of Syriza was not an error or a theoretical failure of analysis. They supported Syriza and its policies because they represented, in their various countries, the same affluent layers of "left" academics, union functionaries, parliamentarians, and professionals, and sought to advance their class interests through similar policies. When the ruling class allowed Syriza to take power, all of them saw this as a model and hoped that they would be given the opportunity to play a similar role in their own countries.

While they felt forced to moderate, in public, their enthusiasm for Syriza, after it imposed the multi-billion-euro austerity package in July, they continued to support it.

Thus, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of France's Left Front hailed Tsipras after he imposed the EU austerity package, trampling the "no" vote in the July 5 referendum, declaring, "We support Alexis Tsipras and his struggle to permit the resistance of the Greek people." The Left Front's press release similarly turned reality on its head, declaring, "The government of Alexis Tsipras has resisted like none other in Europe. It is therefore accepting an armistice in the war waged against it. We condemn this war, those waging it, and their objectives."

Pablo Iglesias, who repeatedly campaigned with Tsipras as the general secretary of Spain's Podemos party, which hopes to follow a similar road to power as Syriza, excused Tsipras' austerity policies on the basis that the alternatives were either "agreement or exit from the Euro." He added, "Alexis' principles are very clear, but the world and politics have to do with the correlation of forces. ... What the Greek government has done is, sadly, the only thing it could do."

Again, the sharpest warnings are appropriate: parties that make such statements about Syriza's austerity record are looking to follow in its footsteps.

The political and class gulf separating the ICFI from these tendencies is unmistakable. While the ICFI sought to warn workers of what Syriza was preparing, the pseudo-left provided political cover to its reactionary policies.

## 7. The role of Michael-Matsas' EEK

The International Committee fought with every means at its disposal to make its perspective and analysis known to the Greek workers, and to warn them about the role Syriza would play. However, it did not have a section in Greece.

Political responsibility for this lies with Savas Michael-Matsas, the general secretary of the Greek Workers Revolutionary Party (EEK). He led the only section of the ICFI that supported Gerry Healy during the 1985 split of the ICFI with the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), which was led by Healy in Britain. Michael-Matsas broke with the ICFI on the most unprincipled basis, refusing all discussion with other sections and maintaining that they had no authority to even meet without the permission of Healy, whom he described as the ICFI's "historic leader." The political basis of his behavior was agreement with Healy's national opportunist orientation, which Michael-Matsas shared.

After his split with the ICFI, Michael-Matsas proclaimed a "New Era for the Fourth International," in which Trotskyism would be liberated from "abstract propagandism" and "the practices of the defeats and isolation of Trotskyism." In practice, his "New Era" consisted of supporting Pasok in Greece and hailing Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika as the beginning of the "political revolution" in the Soviet Union. In the decades since, he has worked in the periphery of Syriza.

The EEK enthusiastically promoted Syriza in the months preceding its election victory. It claimed it could help the population push Syriza to the left by developing a political alliance with it, a "powerful United Front of all workers' and popular organizations ... from KKE, Syriza, Antarsya to EEK, the other left organizations, anarchist and anti-authoritarian movements." The EEK called on anyone who had hopes in Syriza "to demand from their leadership to break with the bourgeoisie, the political staff, all opportunists and suitors of capital's power."

Like Syriza's entire political periphery, the EEK left out one key point: Syriza is a bourgeois party. Michael-Matsas was proposing that the working class unite behind a series of organizations that have definitively established their support for capitalism and their hostility to the working class and socialism.

To urge workers to demand that Syriza's leadership "break with the bourgeoisie" could serve only to sow illusions in this party and conceal the inevitability of it turning viciously against the working class. The call upon the "leadership" of Syriza—that is, well-heeled political criminals like Tsipras and Varoufakis—to break with "all opportunists and suitors of capital's power" is to demand that they jump out of their own skins.

Defending his political operations in Greece, Michael-Matsas attacked the ICFI as "sectarian" for exposing Syriza's bourgeois character and warning of its inevitable betrayal of its promises to the working class. Writing in the aftermath of the Syriza election victory, he argued that, while the ICFI "can say some correct things about the bourgeois nature of Syriza's leadership, they also discount the significance of Syriza's victory ... The sectarian groups are blind to the opportunities because they are indifferent to the mass movement."

Nine months later, it is not hard to draw a balance sheet of the "opportunities" and the "mass movement" that stimulated Michael-Matsas' enthusiasm for Syriza. Syriza offered the European bourgeoisie the opportunity to continue its austerity policies and extract tens of billions of euros from millions of impoverished working people.

As for a "mass movement," Syriza built nothing in the working class, nor did it even try. Syriza today remains an electoral machine for a group of bourgeois politicians and their supporters. It manipulated and exploited powerful opposition to austerity in the working class in order to secure Greek capitalism's alliance with the EU and with NATO and, as a not-unintended byproduct, the careers and personal fortunes of leading Syriza politicians.

Michael-Matsas accused the ICFI of being "sectarian" because it did not praise Syriza to the skies, as did the EEK. The ICFI not only warned that Syriza had a bourgeois leadership—a point that Michael-Matsas complacently grants—but that it was a bourgeois party and that workers had to oppose Syriza for that reason.

That is, the ICFI maintained the ABCs of a Marxist orientation: calling for struggles of the working class against the capitalist class. For the EEK, however, whose split with the ICFI in 1985 marked its definitive break with Marxism, this was beyond the pale.

The EEK praised Syriza, wrote in vague but glowing terms of the "significance" of its victory, and hailed it as a wonderful and informative experience for workers to pass through. As the ruling class handed the Greek workers the poison pill of Syriza, the EEK did everything it could to discredit the ICFI's warnings about what was being prepared. The EEK functioned as a hardened accomplice of Syriza and a reactionary tool of Greek capitalism.

## 8. Build the ICFI!

It must be bluntly said that the experience of the Syriza government has

been a major defeat for the working class. The critical task now is to draw the political lessons of this defeat and politically rearm the working class—in Greece, across the EU, and internationally—for the struggles it will wage in the coming period.

Events have proven that the working class cannot defend even its most minimal interests by relying on bourgeois governments, even those staffed by so-called “radical left” parties, or by attempting to pressure such governments to carry out policies favorable to it. The policies of Syriza show that workers have no choice but to take the revolutionary road.

The ruling class is reminding the working class why the Russian proletariat was compelled to overthrow capitalism in 1917. Its strategy is to tear up all the social concessions granted to the working class in the capitalist countries of Europe in the twentieth century, in response to the political and ideological challenge posed by the October Revolution and the existence of the USSR. Workers are to be thrown back decades, and reduced to the level of their impoverished fellow workers in Eastern Europe and Asia.

Blame for the defeat in Greece lies not with the working class. The Greek proletariat showed no lack of determination to struggle and repeatedly demonstrated its revolutionary instincts. It enjoyed the solidarity of masses of workers across Europe, themselves under escalating attack from the EU, who reacted to Syriza’s attacks on the Greek workers with anger and disbelief.

Despite the deepening oppression and anger of the working class, however, it could find no way of spontaneously articulating its political interests and raising itself to the level of its historic tasks. It was not able to suddenly improvise a political leadership capable of leading it in struggle against the merciless offensive of the EU and the banks.

Instead, workers’ social opposition was repeatedly channeled behind Syriza—a party that cynically appealed to mass discontent on the basis of lies, while consciously preparing to violate its promises. Syriza relied on the services of an entire layer of political tendencies that built up illusions that it would resist the dictates of Greek and international finance capital. This broad swath of pseudo-left parties stands exposed as reactionary tools of finance capital.

The central task is the political rearming of the working class and the building of a new revolutionary leadership, based on a remorseless critique of the parties, personalities, and political conceptions that were responsible for the defeat. This has been the significance of the work carried out by the International Committee of the Fourth International in relation to the Greek events.

In Greece, in Europe and throughout the world, the working class can defend itself only through the building of new working-class parties, which are entirely independent of all sections of the capitalist class, based on an internationalist revolutionary program, directed toward the establishment of workers’ power, the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a world socialist society.

The International Committee of the Fourth International is the only political organization that seeks to organize and unify the working class internationally in the struggle against capitalist exploitation, poverty and war. Its decades of struggle in defense of Marxist and Trotskyist principles embody a colossal political experience and a thoroughly worked out perspective to arm the working class for the new revolutionary epoch now opening up. The political and historical issues at the center of its six decades of struggle to defend the continuity of Trotskyism have now become burning mass questions.

The decisive strategic question today is the building of the ICFI. We call on politically conscious workers, intellectuals and youth in Greece and internationally to fight for the perspective elaborated in this statement and to join the ICFI, the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

13 November, 2015



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