

Yanis Varoufakis in Australia: A political cover for his role in Syriza's betrayal

James Cogan
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Yanis Varoufakis, the finance minister in the Syriza-led Greek government until he resigned on July 6, began a speaking tour in Australia last weekend. After media interviews through the week and a lecture on Thursday at the University of Sydney, he will be the featured speaker at events in Melbourne today and at the Sydney Opera House tomorrow.

The rise of Syriza from a minor party in Greece prior to 2010 to form government in January, through to its decision to repudiate the overwhelming “no” vote against austerity by the Greek people in the July 5 referendum, has been an immense strategic experience for the international working class. Syriza is a case study in how pseudo-left bourgeois parties—and the individuals who lead them—will utilise “left” and socialist rhetoric to deceive the working class and gain political power, in order to impose the dictates of the financial and corporate elite.

With the exception of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, Varoufakis was the best known representative of the Syriza government. He led its negotiating team with the so-called “troika” of Greece’s creditors—the European Central Bank, other European Union governments and the International Monetary Fund. Just four weeks after Syriza won the Greek elections promising to end austerity, Varoufakis signed an agreement to continue the measures that have ruined the lives of millions of Greek workers, farmers and small business people.

At the University of Sydney on Thursday, Varoufakis admitted to the audience that he had extracted “blood out of stone” in order to repay €9 billion that was due in debt repayments.

Yanis Varoufakis knows Sydney well. After university study in Britain, he held a position as an economic lecturer at the University of Sydney from 1988 until 2000, during which time he became a dual Greek and Australian citizen. While he returned to Greece in 2001, he has maintained his connections with social layers who would describe themselves as the academic, media and political “left” in Australia.

The former Syriza finance minister is not primarily in Australia to reacquaint with old associates. His visit is part of a frenetic schedule of political speeches he has given since late August, addressing rallies and meetings in France, Italy, Russia, Germany, Spain, Austria, Ireland, as well as nine major events in London and other British cities. In the last three months, he has appeared alongside politicians ranging from former French Socialist Party economy minister and investment banker Emmanuel Macron; British shadow chancellor John MacDonnell and shadow cabinet minister Diane Abbot; European Green figure Daniel Cohn-Bendit; and an appearance with post-modernist academic Slavoj Žižek and WikiLeaks’ editor Julian Assange.

Varoufakis was introduced at the last mentioned event, held at London’s Royal Festival Hall on November 16, as “radical,” “dangerous” and “subversive,” promoting him as an implacable opponent of austerity and finance capital.

After the experience of the Syriza government, to present Varoufakis in such a fashion depends upon the complicity of the media and political allies in covering up his crucial role in the historic betrayal of the Greek working class. Varoufakis’s backers around the world envisage Syriza-type movements being needed to carry out comparable betrayals in their own countries. They hope to build up and exploit his reputation to help channel anti-capitalist sentiment behind their own fraudulent “anti-establishment” projects.

In Australia, amid growing signs of economic crisis and social tensions, the promotion of Varoufakis has been performed by the self-styled liberals of the official media, particularly the state-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), and the *Sydney Morning Herald* and other Fairfax Group publications. Attendance at his speaking engagements has also been encouraged on social media by layers connected with the Labor Party, the Greens and pseudo-left organisations such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative.

At the University of Sydney, Varoufakis asserted the pro-austerity nostrums that countries in debt had to “tighten their

belts” and “live within their means.” He insisted that Greece had no alternative but to undertake the measures necessary to remain in the common euro currency. He documented the well-established fact that the purpose of the troika loans was never to help countries recover, but to channel tens of billions of euros into the virtually insolvent German and other European private banks. His sole complaint was that the scale and terms of the bail-outs made it impossible for the Greek state to ever repay the loans used to save the financial elite. The austerity measures guaranteed the country would remain mired in deep slump and the population in mass poverty and unemployment.

Varoufakis did not refer to Syriza’s betrayal of the July 5 referendum or condemn the social devastation being imposed by the government in which he served. Instead, he absurdly presented himself as someone who, as an individual, had taken a defiant stand by resigning in July.

Varoufakis’s attempt to wash his hands of the actions of the Syriza government was challenged from the audience by Nick Beams of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) and a member of the international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Beams asked: “Is it not a fact that the biggest attack on democracy in Greece came from the Syriza government, of which you were such an integral component, when it trampled on the massive July 5 vote of the Greek people in order to carry out the dictates of the troika and the banks.” Beams called on Varoufakis to explain to the audience, “what it is like to perpetrate a betrayal of this magnitude, to prepare it, organise it, lie about it and carry it out?”

In a brief exchange that followed, Varoufakis declared that “your first question is one that finds me in painful agreement.” He acknowledged that “the Greek government betrayed the Greek people.” However, he denied any role in the betrayal and tried to put all the blame for Syriza’s rejection of the referendum result on Alexis Tsipras.

“The prime minister,” Varoufakis said, “was not interested, or did not have the energy, or the spirit, to take that ‘no’ and honour it. On that night, sir, I did not steal into the night, I resigned. Stand up and tell me that I should have stayed in government to implement the surrender document, the surrender treaty?”

Varoufakis was not interested in an answer to his question. When Beams stood up and declared that an opponent of austerity would have sought to lead the opposition represented by the referendum vote in a political struggle to oust Tsipras and against the European troika, he quickly moved on to the next question.

The record establishes Varoufakis’s complicity in Syriza’s betrayal. In June, the troika presented his negotiating team with the terms of a new financial bailout

that involved even harsher austerity measures. Fearful that more cutbacks could provoke a social explosion in Greece, Syriza called the referendum on July 5 in which the Greek population were asked to vote on the troika’s demands.

Varoufakis has stated in media interviews that both he and Tsipras, even as they publicly campaigned for a “no” vote, confidently expected that the population would accept deeper austerity. They called the referendum with the aim of using a “yes” result to declare they would respect the “will of the people” and hand over government to rival parties and technocrats who would implement the agreement. They expected that the dire media warnings of economic catastrophe would intimidate voters into supporting the troika’s plan.

Instead, in a courageous act of defiance that was supported by tens of millions of workers across Europe and the world, the Greek working class repudiated austerity, with 61 percent voting “no.” Within hours, a reportedly distraught Tsipras had informed the troika that he would sign up to a new bail-out in outright defiance of the vote. Varoufakis demonstrated his essential agreement by walking away. He made no attempt to lead a fight against Tsipras, despite the mass support such a struggle would have won amongst workers in Greece and Europe. He told the ABC’s “Late Night Live” radio program on July 13 that he had “jumped more than I was pushed” and had resigned in order to “steal away into the night.”

On Thursday, Varoufakis responded to the question from the WSW by declaring that he “respected” Tsipras’s decisions and that it would have been “sectarian” to oppose or criticise Syriza’s abject betrayal and pro-capitalist program.

Politically serious workers, youth and intellectuals should carefully read the statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International, “The Political Lessons of Syriza’s Betrayal in Greece.” Any genuine struggle against the austerity agenda of the financial elites will involve the political exposure of pseudo-left types personified by Yanis Varoufakis who are defenders of capitalism and deeply hostile to socialism and the working class.



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