

What is behind Varoufakis's “Democracy Movement to Rescue Europe?”

Ulrich Rippert
15 February 2016

With grandiloquent gestures and trailed by an enormous media contingent, the former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis welcomed visitors to the founding congress of a new European “democracy” movement at the start of last week. Its aim was “the salvation of Europe,” he said in the announcement for the event.

The meeting place was the historic Berlin Volksbühne theatre on Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. The tickets were sold out weeks beforehand.

At the press conference on February 9, over a hundred journalists from many countries crowded into the room and applauded after Varoufakis delivered his statement. One day later, the former finance minister was able to present his views to an audience of millions on the Sandra Maischberger television talk show.

On the darkened congress podium, a narrow spotlight illuminated Varoufakis. The substance of his opening talk was in inverse proportion to the dramatic staging. It lasted an hour and was filled with banalities.

“The European Union will be democratised—or it will fall apart!” he declared, and called for the establishment of “pan-European networks” of left-wing movements, artists and intellectuals to counteract the “nightmare” of “incompetent EU bureaucrats,” lobbyists, the Euro Group, bankers, “media moguls,” “experts” and Frontex.

Varoufakis, who played a key role within the Syriza government in imposing the brutal austerity measures of the EU and the German government on the Greek population, a political betrayal with few equals, now proclaims his readiness to democratize and humanize the EU institutions.

Does he really believe that everyone has forgotten what happened between January and July last year? In the same overblown manner he announced a year ago that the Syriza government would renegotiate all the agreements with the EU institutions and under no circumstances accept the dictates of Brussels and Berlin.

What followed is well known. To every demand from Berlin and Brussels, Syriza and Varoufakis responded with retreats and then consent. In order to conceal his complicity

with the EU, he played the clown during the EU negotiations. He refused to wear a tie, to tuck his shirt into his trousers, and generally played the bad boy.

In order to impose the austerity measures, he organized a fraudulent referendum together with Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras last July. Immediately after the population rejected the EU austerity measures with a stunning “no” vote, the Syriza government reneged on its promises and agreed to implement a drastic austerity programme with devastating consequences.

Varoufakis's subsequent resignation as finance minister changed nothing. It was part of the fraud and subordination of Greece to the dictates of Brussels and Berlin. German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and the EU institutions had demanded his resignation along with agreement to the austerity programme.

Later, Varoufakis went on record admitting that the referendum was a cynical manoeuvre, and that he and Tsipras had hoped for a low turnout and a “yes” vote in order to justify their capitulation to the EU.

Varoufakis's talk of democracy will disgust millions of embittered workers in Greece and throughout Europe. Rarely was the working class betrayed so shamelessly by such an overblown political scoundrel.

Varoufakis knows very well that the EU is an instrument through which the European and international financial aristocracy exercises its power and dictatorship. It can no more be democratized than the boards of Deutsche Bank or the European Central Bank.

In Greece, the core of his policy was the subordination of the country to the EU, and it remains so today. His pretentious chatter about democracy and civil rights serves to cover up his defence of the EU and his hostility to the working class.

All this was also known by those assembled in the Volksbühne. But he was feted nonetheless and received long rounds of applause. His cynicism and arrogance, his genuflections to those at the top and kicks in the teeth to those below were evidently attractive to his fan base.

“Are we radical?” Varoufakis asked his audience. “Damn right,” he said. “We are very radical. If you’re right, you can never be radical enough.”

His “radical proposals” included the following: To resolve the European crisis, he called for the democratization of EU institutions and increased transparency. His democracy movement, called DiEM25 (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025), was open to all “progressive forces,” even, and especially, liberals, he stressed.

The ex-finance minister then outlined his “three steps of EU reform.” As an immediate first step, DiEM25 demands that all future meetings of the European Council and the Euro Group be broadcast on the Internet via a live stream.

As a second step, within a year “all state problem areas”—migration, debt, investment backlog, poverty and banking—should be “Europeanized.” He and DiEM25 will submit detailed proposals for this shortly.

Third, in two years, new European treaties should be negotiated at a kind of constituent assembly, with delegates from all EU countries. The new treaties will enter into force in 2025.

Lapping up the applause like a pop star, Varoufakis then announced the next fifteen speakers.

The first was Katja Kipping, the chair of the Left Party, whom he introduced as the “flower of German politics.”

Then followed, via video link, the former French housing minister, Cecile Duflot. She was followed by the Left Party parliamentarian Diether Dehm, Elsa Köster of Blockupy Germany, the Cologne theatre director Angela Richter, and a long list of EU parliamentarians. The trade union bureaucracy was represented by IG Metall Executive Committee member Hans-Jürgen Urban.

A typical speaker in the evening session was Dr. Ulrike Beate Guérot, who was presented as a political scientist. She is founder and director of the “European Democracy Lab” in Berlin, and is, by her own account, engaged with the future of European democracy. This is just one of the many academic, political, cultural and other institutions and initiatives that are funded generously within the framework of the EU or within the orbit of European politics.

The speakers and audience members made clear the real content of the new “democracy movement to save Europe.”

Varoufakis is a representative of a particular layer of EU profiteers who for years have established themselves in the environs of various EU projects and are paid generously from EU funding pots. This very-well-paid EU jet set is closely linked to the EU institutions and 40,000 high-paid Brussels EU bureaucrats and is affected by their decisions.

This affluent EU constellation, represented in politics, culture and science, and which includes the trade union bureaucracy with its European Works Council system, feels

threatened by the growing crisis of the EU and is anxious to defend its privileges.

That is what characterizes DiEM25. Behind the defence of the EU is primarily the defence of their own sinecures and privileges. They regard the break-up of the European Union and the return of national borders as a threat to their privileged position.

“Is Europe going to break up?” asked financial daily *Handelsblatt* last week, citing the head of the Berlin office of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), who, in the face of profound differences on refugee policy and economic and social crises in many member states, declared, “Europe is facing a crucial test.”

Above all, the social crisis is taking on ever more dramatic forms. With 26 million officially unemployed, soaring youth unemployment and increasing poverty, social tensions are reaching the breaking point.

Varoufakis and his DiEM25 are responding with an aggressive defence of their social position. It is striking that not a single social demand is raised in their manifesto. Instead, it states that the “lack of a coherent strategy in foreign and immigration policy and the fight against terrorism” must be overcome.

Varoufakis’s Movement to Save the EU complements the policies of German imperialism. In the German Chancellery as well plans are being made to mobilize privileged sections of the petty-bourgeoisie to carry out social attacks, police state measures and military rearmament in the name of defending the EU.

This is why the red carpet was rolled out for Varoufakis in Berlin and why he was feted in the editorial offices and on talk shows. It was therefore no coincidence that Gesine Schwan, who twice ran for the office of German president as the favoured candidate of the Social Democratic Party (2004 and 2009), attended the founding ceremony of DiEM25.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact