

One year since Syriza's betrayal in Greece

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This week marks one year since the historic betrayal carried out by the Syriza (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) government, led by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, against the Greek working class.

Swept into office in January 2015 on a wave of working-class militancy and a pledge to oppose the austerity policies demanded by the European Union (EU), seven months later Syriza rammed through a far more draconian program of austerity than had been attempted by even its right-wing predecessors.

The consummation of this betrayal unfolded in the week between July 5, when the Greek people, in a referendum called by the Tsipras government, delivered a landslide vote against an austerity package demanded by the “troika”—the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank—and July 13, when the Syriza government accepted a bailout agreement that contained even deeper cuts than those that had just been overwhelmingly rejected.

While the entire coterie of pseudo-left organizations, both in Greece and internationally, had hailed the calling of the referendum vote as an indication of the determination of Syriza and Tsipras to fight, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned in a June 27, 2015 statement that Tsipras’s referendum constituted “a reactionary fraud, designed to lend a veneer of democratic legitimacy to the looting of Greece by the banks at the expense of workers and broad sections of the middle class.”

As it turned out, Tsipras’s cynical maneuver backfired. While he and his fellow Syriza leaders had counted on Greek working people being intimidated by the threats of European imperialism and voting “yes” to the austerity package, allowing him to blame them for his own capitulation, they instead voted massively “no,” signaling their readiness for a real fight against capitalism. Shocked and terrorized, Tsipras and his cabinet moved as quickly as possible to seal their reactionary deal with the “troika.”

Today, Greek workers are suffering the consequences. The country’s economy has shrunk by around a quarter and continues to plummet. What little remained of a social safety net is being shredded under conditions in which half of workers under age 25 are jobless and pensioners have seen their incomes slashed by roughly one third. New cutbacks are now being implemented, along with a series of regressive taxes that

fall most heavily on the working class and poor.

The Syriza government, meanwhile, has been negotiating with the EU on mechanisms that will make this austerity regime permanent, imposing conditions reminiscent of the Great Depression of the 1930s for decades to come.

There is rising anger against the Syriza government, manifested in the three-day strike against its austerity measures by broad sections of the Greek working class in May. Under these conditions, the most decisive question—not only for workers in Greece, but internationally—is making a serious political analysis of how the betrayal was carried out, a balance sheet of the critical strategic experience through which the working class has passed.

Only the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International have provided such a consistent and coherent analysis. It did not wait until the betrayal was consummated to do so, but rather warned well before (January 24, 2015) that Syriza’s coming to power would not “represent a way out of the crisis,” but rather “an enormous danger.”

The WSWS went on to explain: “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.”

We were denounced by the petty-bourgeois pseudo-lefts—who share Syriza’s opportunist politics and upper-middle-class constituency—as “sectarians” for not joining them in extolling Syriza’s election as a victory for the working class. Nothing could be done, they insisted, to interfere with the working class going through the “experience” with Syriza, from which it would somehow emerge politically clarified and strengthened.

The same elements who enthusiastically sowed illusions in Syriza, from the French New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) to the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US, the Left Party in Germany and the Brazilian PSTU, now vehemently oppose drawing any lessons from this “experience,” which has led only to betrayal, setbacks and disorientation within the working class.

For these political groupings, gravitation to Syriza was not a matter of political confusion or mistaken identity. Indeed, from its program to the character of its leadership up to and including the imperialist agent Tsipras, it would be impossible to ignore

the reactionary, bourgeois character of this party. Rather, they rallied to Syriza because they embrace the same kind of politics and, if brought to power, would carry out the same kind of viciously anti-working-class policies.

These politics find shameless expression in the pages of *International Viewpoint*, the pseudo-left publication of anti-Trotskyists who broke with the Fourth International more than a half century ago. It marked the anniversary of the betrayal by publishing a July 13 statement by Antonis Davanellos, a leader of the Greek state capitalist group Internationalist Workers Left (DEA) on last month's conference of Popular Unity, an alliance of Greek pseudo-left organizations, most of which came out of Syriza's Left Platform.

Led by former ministers in Tsipras's cabinet and ex-Syriza central committee members, these groups previously dedicated themselves to promoting the illusion that Syriza could be pushed to the left. Their real function was to provide a left cover for the Tsipras government as it carried out the policies demanded by the European banks. They stayed inside Syriza even after last year's betrayal, leaving only when it became obvious that they were about to be thrown out.

Tellingly, Davanellos begins his statement by dismissing those who place "particular emphasis on a political-theoretical evaluation of the Syriza period," insisting instead that the task is to develop "a new alliance" based upon "political positions that are, at times, quite far apart."

The reality is that what predominates within Popular Unity is a stridently nationalist agenda based upon engineering a "Grexit," withdrawing from the euro and reintroducing the drachma. It is no more an anti-austerity program than are the policies of Syriza, merely demanding that the imposition of austerity be transferred from the EU to the Greek bourgeoisie.

When Davanellos talks of political positions that are "quite far apart," what he is really referring to are the efforts by himself and kindred pseudo-lefts to provide a left cover for what is an extremely reactionary nationalist program.

He acknowledges that Popular Unity members were "delighted" by the success of a Brexit campaign in Britain dominated by the extreme right and tinged with xenophobia, and indicates that similar currents run through the Greek pseudo-left alliance.

He refers to proposals at the conference for the formation of "defense committees of national sovereignty" and policies to "control the borders" of Greece. In this regard, Popular Unity only echoes the viciously anti-immigrant policies being implemented by the Syriza government. Beginning in April, the Tsipras government began the roundup and forced mass deportation of refugees back to the killing fields of the Middle East.

The task undertaken by Davanellos and his ilk is to lend such reactionary nationalist policies a phony "socialist" cover.

At the end of his account, Davanellos concludes, "In the wake of Syriza's capitulation and the disintegration of the left,

Popular Unity is the critical site for the regroupment of the anti-Memorandum radical left."

If there is a "disintegration of the left" in Greece it is the direct product of the politics of these organizations, which paved the way to Syriza's betrayal and worked to block the working class from drawing the lessons of this experience. If they are bent on "regroupment," it is only to prepare themselves for carrying out even worse crimes in the future.

The analysis made by the International Committee of Syriza and its relentless struggle to expose all of its pseudo left apologists have been fully vindicated.

As the ICFI insisted in its November 2015 statement "The Political Lessons of Syriza's Betrayal in Greece:"

"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."

This assessment has been borne out not just in Greece, but in Spain with Podemos, in Britain with Jeremy Corbyn's ascendancy in the Labour Party and in the US with the Democratic Party campaign of Bernie Sanders.

The only way forward lies in building genuinely revolutionary Marxist parties to provide political leadership to the working class in an uncompromising struggle against pseudo-left parties like Syriza. It is high time for those who have begun to draw the lessons of these experiences to act upon them by affiliating with the ICFI and taking up this fight.



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