

Greek rent subsidy scandal forces resignation of two Syriza ministers

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In a scandal underscoring the social gulf separating workers from reactionary pseudo-left parties of the affluent middle class like Syriza (the “Coalition of the Radical Left”), two Greek ministers were forced to resign this week in a rent subsidy scandal.

Thanks to a 2015 law passed by Syriza, Deputy Minister for Labor Rania Antonopoulou and her husband, Economy Minister Dimitri Papadimitriou, obtained €23,000 over two years in state rent subsidies for their apartment in the upscale Kolonaki neighborhood of Athens. This is nearly 50 percent more than the gross salary of a Greek minimum wage worker, of €683.76 per month, over that period. They obtained these rent subsidies even though they in fact owned the apartment and declared an annual household income of over \$500,000.

At the same time, the Syriza government of which they were a part continued to impose billions of euros in devastating European Union (EU) austerity measures on the Greek people.

Antonopoulou initially tried to ride out the scandal after it broke in *Eleftheros Typos* on Friday. However, she resigned after it was announced on Monday that Syriza Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras had met her to express his “disappointment.” Papadimitriou resigned yesterday.

Both husband and wife are high-ranking economics professors on leave from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. As a professor and senior scholar at the Bard College’s Levy Economics Institute, Antonopoulou specialized in feminist economics and globalization and did consulting work for the UN and the International Labor Organization. She became a minister immediately after Syriza won the January 2015 Greek election.

Papadimitriou has been president of the Levy

Economics Institute since 1986. He served in top finance and government posts and in various associations including—fittingly enough—the Hellenic-American Bankers Association. He became economy minister in November 2016.

Such cynical profiteering by wealthy individuals falsely purporting to be “left” vindicates the *World Socialist Web Site’s* (WSWS) critique of the privileged class basis and reactionary outlook of the Stalinist and anti-Marxist middle-class tendencies that make up Syriza. They took power pledging to end six years of EU austerity that had slashed wage levels by 30 to 40 percent, hiked taxes, and devastated Greece. After only a few weeks in power, Syriza betrayed its pledge to end the EU austerity Memorandum; it then went on to impose billions in new EU cuts.

The WSWS alone warned about Syriza before January 2015—while pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organization in the United States, Podemos in Spain, Die Linke in Germany and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France all hailed Syriza as a great step forward for the left.

Shortly before Syriza’s election, the WSWS warned: “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.”

Politically-connected Greek academic economists at US universities were a key constituency in Syriza. As Tsipras repeatedly crossed the Atlantic to visit the United States starting in 2013, they played a key role in

helping win Washington's support for the prospect of a Syriza government.

The most prominent was University of Texas at Austin professor and then briefly Syriza Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis. In a 2013 *New York Times* column titled "Only Syriza Can Save Greece," Varoufakis and fellow UT Austin economist James Galbraith tried to reassure Washington that Syriza would do the bidding of Wall Street and the Pentagon. "Syriza doesn't intend to leave NATO or close US military bases" in Greece, they wrote, adding that the banks could safely buy Greek debt under a Syriza government, "because they know it will be paid."

Antonopoulou's pet project for a "Greek New Deal," which she played around with for a while at Greek taxpayers' expense, reflected this social layer's anti-worker outlook. Speaking to German state broadcaster *Deutsche Welle* in February 2015, she explained that her plan was meant to give the unemployed "a publicly funded job at minimum wage," which the EU had just cut 20 percent to its current abysmal level. However, she said, financing her plan was "difficult."

Syriza refused to tax the rich or defy the EU, and Antonopoulou predictably found no money for her project. Nothing came of her "Greek New Deal" except her own handsome salary.

In July 2015, under the predictable threat of a cut-off of credit from the European Central Bank (ECB), Syriza capitulated to the EU. Even after Greek workers delivered a landslide "no" vote in Syriza's own referendum on austerity, they stampeded to impose more EU austerity packages in order to keep the ECB from expelling Greece from the euro currency. Throughout, they refused to make any appeal to the European working class to defend Greece against the EU.

Their pro-imperialist outlook, their cowardice and their treachery were, as the WSWS noted at the time, rooted in definite material class interests, which Antonopoulou and Papadimitriou personify.

The WSWS wrote, "Syriza legislator Dimitris Tsoukalas (with declared personal savings in 2013 of over €1 million), Finance Minister Tsakalotos (whose stock portfolio is worth over €500,000), Economy Minister Giorgios Stathakis (€426,000 invested with JP Morgan), former Syriza leader Alekos Alavanos (€350,000 in savings, a stock portfolio and 11 real

estate properties), and former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis (whose wife Danae Stratou is a millionaire) cannot imagine or tolerate a break with the EU because—like the rest of the Greek ruling elite—they would lose a great deal of wealth if Greece exited the euro and their assets were re-denominated in a heavily devalued national currency."

And that summer, as Syriza plundered billions from the Greek people with more cuts to schools, pensions, and other basic services, it also passed the rent subsidy law that Antonopoulou and Papadimitriou used to siphon of tens of thousands of euros into their pockets.

The basis of socialist and left-wing politics, as the great Marxists have always insisted, is the working class. While the International Committee of the Fourth International seeks to build itself as the leadership of a revolutionary movement in the international working class, its petty-bourgeois pseudo-left opponents are going down in history as a collection of militarists, swindlers, and parasites.



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