

New Syriza leader Kasselakis exposed as pro-capitalist, austerity supporting Reagan worshipper

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Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left-Progressive Alliance) continues to haemorrhage support, following the election as party leader of former shipowner and banker Stefanos Kasselakis. Kasselakis was elected on September 24 following the party's rout in Greece's general elections this summer.

The party's abysmal performance in the local elections held in the first two weeks of October saw the ruling conservative New Democracy (ND) the clear winner. ND took six of the seven prefectures in Greece in the first round on October 8, with Crete won by the social democratic PASOK. For the first time since 2014 Syriza's candidate did not reach the second round of the mayoral elections in Athens, and was reduced to calling for a vote for the victorious PASOK candidate Haris Doukas. The results came after the first nationwide opinion poll since Kasselakis took the leadership. Published in late September, it showed Syriza had the support of just 14 percent of those polled.

Syriza trashed its mass anti-austerity mandate in 2015 to impose measures more brutal than previous ND and PASOK-led governments, leading to it being booted out of office in 2019 and it has never recovered from this betrayal.

Kasselakis was an unknown in Greece until this year, having lived in the United States. He worked first as a trader at Goldman Sachs and then ran several shipping companies.

In 2008 he volunteered for Joe Biden's presidential primary campaign and worked at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)—one of US imperialism's leading think tanks. As the WSWs noted on his election as Syriza leader, in a geopolitical situation with two wars raging in Ukraine and the Middle East, Kasselakis was parachuted into Greek politics with the active intervention of Washington to ensure that Athens' pro-NATO alignment is maintained.

Media coverage attempted to gloss over this by painting Kasselakis as a progressive and focussing on him being Greece's first openly gay party leader. But the right-wing

content of his politics was no secret.

Writing in an op-ed for the conservative *Kathimerini* in July he declared, "If the intention is to govern again, SYRIZA should just copy the US formula as soon as possible. Unequivocally embrace the political center as well; make clear that prudent fiscal management is non-negotiable; and showcase the management talent of its prospective cabinet."

The first fruits of Kasselakis's leadership was Syriza's statement in response to the Palestinian uprising launched from Gaza on October 7. This was condemned, while "expressing solidarity to the people of Israel" and cynically lamenting the "continual violence coming from all sides in the region."

In a speech to the Federation of Industries (SEV) employers' union on October 10 Kasselakis declared that Syriza "was passing in the next stage of its historic road, that of a modern Left that doesn't demonise the word 'capital' but sees it as a tool of prosperity to reduce huge inequalities through strong growth."

The implications for the working class of this right-winger becoming Syriza's leader were starkly posed by an investigative report published on October 21 in Greek daily *I Efimerida Ton Syntakton*. It laid bare Kasselakis' vicious anti-working class perspective, collating information in articles he wrote for right-wing Greek-American newspaper the *National Herald* between 2007 and 2015.

In 2007 he expressed support for the attempts of the ND government under Kostas Karamanlis to establish private universities. These proposals were shelved in the face of massive student opposition. Attacking PASOK for opposing the measures after having initially supported them, Kasselakis wrote, "If [PASOK] had the political courage to support the change, with which [it] initially agreed, students would still have been beaten up by the riot police, but at least the state of education would have been radically challenged and would have changed."

Kasselakis also expressed support for the sort of austerity policies that after 2010 would be implemented by successive PASOK, ND and Syriza governments at the behest of the European Commission, European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund “troika”. He wrote that it was necessary to take advantage of the relatively lower wages in Greece compared to the rest of Europe “in order to strengthen the competitiveness of Greek companies abroad or foreign ones in Greece”. He added, “Greece for some years needs the application of Reagan’s supply side economics”.

In February 2012, at the height of the austerity attacks implemented by the coalition government of ND, PASOK and the far-right LAOS headed by unelected banker Loukas Papadimos, Kasselakis wrote approvingly of the lowering of the minimum wage. This was a “positive measure” given that “it makes the country more competitive while at the same time keeps small businesses afloat.”

In the same piece, Kasselakis complained that the government was not going far enough. Referring to the sacking of 15,000 civil servants in 2012 he wrote that this “seems like a very small number”. “In my opinion, they should have already sacked many more people and invested the money in cutting taxes.”

In a self-absorbed response to the revelations, that has turned him and his party into a laughing stock, Kasselakis stated in a radio interview, “I don't remember these articles. I don't remember who I was when I was 24 years old. I was a kid who was working in a very difficult industry [finance], working very hard. I was in a relationship with a girl that I wasn't happy with, I was trying to get on my feet and help my parents. The finance industry still had a lot of toxicity and turmoil in it during this period. I was a child of the expatriate community at the time who was very angry about what was happening in Greece.”

The most revealing comment made by this multi-millionaire capitalist ideologue in the interview was that while he was a supporter of Mitsotakis at the time he “chose to go with [Syriza leader] Alexis Tsipras because of his good governance during the 2015-19 period.”

In September 2015, before the elections that followed Syriza’s betrayal of the mass rejection of the troika’s austerity in a referendum the previous July, Kasselakis, who had at one point favoured an ND/Syriza coalition, concluded in the *National Herald* that Syriza was fine to govern alone, as Tsipras is “no longer against making 180 degree turns.”

Prior to resigning from Tsipras’s government in July 2015—knowing it would face huge opposition from the working class for its betrayal—then finance minister Yanis Varoufakis wrote that in negotiations with the troika, Syriza was proposing nothing more than “standard Thatcherite or

Reaganesque” economic policies, including tax reductions and privatisations.

The revelations of Kasselakis’s earlier writings prompted three senior members of Syriza—Nikos Filis, Panos Skourletis and Thodoris Dritsas—to distance themselves from him. Kasselakis took to Facebook on October 23 to declare, “Messrs Vitsas, Skourletis and Filis who appeared on television in the last few days to oppose their own party have chosen to place themselves outside Syriza.”

According to some reports, a split is likely within the coming weeks. Following their de-facto expulsion, the “Umbrella” faction of the party to which Dritsas, Skourletis and Filis belonged released a statement voicing “concern” over “the collective sense that we are participating in a party which is tending towards bearing no relation to the Left in any political sense. Everything that we knew about the character and social priorities of Syriza are changing violently and unilaterally.”

Whatever happens, there is nothing principled about this opposition to Kasselakis. It is animated by fear that he is speeding up the party’s descent to oblivion. Dritsas, Skourletis and Filis all held senior ministerial positions in Syriza’s government at various points between 2015 to 2019. They bear direct responsibility for the unprecedented austerity imposed during that time, in coalition with the right-wing, xenophobic Independent Greeks, while fiercely repressing working-class opposition. At the same time, with Syriza agreeing Independent Greeks head Panos Kammenos installation as defence minister, military spending was increased in real terms, including the signing of a defence pact with Israel and Cyprus in 2016.

Kasselakis pro-Israeli stance and his anti-working-class diatribes in the *National Herald* are consistent with Syriza’s actual record in power. Its ever more pronounced rightward lurch is a stunning confirmation of the record of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which opposed every effort by the pseudo-left internationally to proclaim this party as the way forward for working class.

The ICFI’s writings on Syriza and other pseudo-left tendencies comprise the necessary theoretical arming of workers to take forward this struggle. The essential lesson to be drawn by workers and youth internationally is the necessity to build sections of the (ICFI) in Greece and in every country.



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