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Perspectives in Greece

# Time for an exit from austerity

- Debate - Perspectives in Greece -

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**Opinion polls in advance of elections in Greece on September 20 show the former ruling SYRIZA party of ex-Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras in a dead heat with the center-right New Democracy, and the left-wing SYRIZA rebels of the newly formed Popular Unity shaking up the elections by winning enough votes to take seats in parliament.**

**Two months ago, on July 5, more than 60 percent of Greeks voted "Oxi!" in a national referendum, rejecting the terms of a new austerity agreement that European governments and international financial institutionsâ€”commonly referred to as the "Troika"â€”were demanding that the SYRIZA government sign in return for a bailout. The voters showed they still supported the radical anti-austerity program put forward by SYRIZA in the January elections that brought it to power. But in an incredible about-face, Tsipras signed an even harsher austerity agreement only days later.**

**Anger with Tsipras' capitulation to drastic cuts in social spending, wages and pensions have cut the former prime minister's approval rating sharply, opening the door to the possibility of a narrow victory by the conservative New Democracy. But while Tsipras has moved to the right, SYRIZA's influential Left Platform refused to accept the Memorandum. It has left SYRIZA and participated in founding a new political front called Popular Unity, with other sections of SYRIZA and left groups outside the party.**

**Here, we publish a joint statement by Olivier Besançon of New Anti-capitalist Party in France; Antonis Davanellos, a member of the Political Council of Popular Unity in Greece; and Miguel Urbán Crespo, a member of European Parliament representing Podemos in Spain. Referencing the threat of a Greek exit from the eurozone â€” dubbed "Grexit," they call for an exit from austerity â€” or "Austerexit."**

THE LAST several months have been seen a great deal of commentary about the relationship between the Troika and the Greek people. Some economists have worked very hard, sparing no effort, sometimes even shouting their heads off, to spread the good news to the four corners of Europe. These lawyers for the European creditors have saturated our television screens with figures that leave no room for doubt about the idea that austerity plans were the only viable option for pushing the Greek economy onto the right path.

At first, with the apologetic posture of those who feel compelled to demand additional sacrifices from the popular classes, they told us that these new turns were, tragically, unavoidableâ€”a sort of necessary evil. Later, exasperated by our stubborn inability to understand, and even our frank hostility in certain cases, they began to argue that management by experts must be immune from democratic consultation, expounding, incidentally, on the immaturity of the Greek people.

However, these neoliberal puppets are the first to say that in Greece, the fundamental problem isn't so much economic as profoundly symbolic from a political point of view.

Because it is obvious that even the strictest application of the program on wages, employment and pensions, including the non-reimbursement of the Greek debtâ€”upon which SYRIZA was elected in order to oppose business as usualâ€”could have been, by and large, assimilated by European capital.

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All of these demands required nothing more than modest financial expenditures when compared to the colossal fortunes held by the creditors. And in any case, they would have cost very little in relation to the profits obtained by those speculating on the European banking system, especially the German and French, who have feasted on 6 to 7 percent interest rates on the Greek public deficit.

In light of what goes on in the financial circuits, annulling the debt presented no problem whatsoever for anyone who had not forgotten what happened in January 2015, when the European Central Bank put more than one trillion Euros on the table, printed expressly in order to purchase public and private debt. Thus, nothing prevented annulling the Greek debt, except for the ruthless will "which was completely political" of the creditors to condition any debt buyback on bringing the Greek government to heel.

Which is exactly what happened with the Tsipras government, despite the massive power of the "no" vote expressed in the July referendum, a power which Popular Unity intends to keep alive in the coming elections. Through all this, the accounting experts, parroting the current groupthink, have taken a malicious pleasure while sticking their hands in our pockets, endlessly repeating a trite and tortured lie "that the Greek debt will have to be paid by taxpayers from other countries.

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THIS WILLINGNESS to pit one people against other people is as old as the hills, and its function is to obscure the real causes of the current struggle. At this moment, this is being played out in a real political effort, which aims to rip out at the roots the anti-austerity protests which have broken out all over. Essentially, for those EU leaders, this had more to do with imposing a demonstrative political defeat than with any attempt to carry out remote-control calculations.

From the 1957 Treaty of Rome to the 1986 Single European Act to the 1992 Maastricht Treaty to the 2005 European Constitution Treaty, the political and economic elite has only ever been motivated by the desire to construct a large economic market with the goal of satisfying the immediate interests of certain capitalists and financiers in order to compete with the United States and, later, with Asia. This was to be accomplished through step-by-step and patient financial construction, which, at each stage, endlessly promised the reshaping of Europe, transforming it and making it more social.

Today, this Europe is dying right before our eyes, imploding under the weight of the contradictions of the capitalist crisis, a crisis of overproduction and capitalist profitability, aggravated by austerity policies which feed the economic recession. While the economic quagmire and social stagnation that defines this Europe is leading its peoples to reject it as they discover, with growing bitterness, that social rights and democracy have nothing in common with the European Union.

The Greek case serves only one purpose "that is, to send us an eminently political message, to highlight that there is no place for any alternative to the austerity promoted by the government. Any and all electoral change must conform to the limits imposed by austerity, be they hard or weak versions. Demanding anything else runs the risk of expulsion. From here forward, the choice is defined by the Troika: "Memorandum" or "Grexit."

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FACED WITH this blackmail, our answer is, we are "With Greece" and for an exit from austerity "what we call an "Austerexit." There is an urgent need to bring together social and political resistance with the movements that, in different countries, are struggling, day after day, to expel austerity from our daily lives.

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From the very beginning, this great united European campaign, from which we are today orphans, for an "Austerexit," must join with the militant forces which have been rebelling for months in Greece and the Spanish State. We must recognize that, inexorably, one period has come to a close. From this summer on, nothing is the same for anyone.

Whatever our specific political affiliation or our nationality may be, we cannot ignore the fact that applying even the smallest progressive measures necessitates an immediate test of strength with the creditors—that is to say, with capital.

From this point forward, we know just how antithetical membership in the euro currency system is with a policy of emancipation in the Greek case.

For us, what is most critical is to end the policy of austerity, be it within the framework of the euro if the situation permits it, or outside it, if the people cannot achieve their aspirations. We do not confuse the means with the ends—we are not partisans of this or that currency because the real question before us is to know who controls the monetary system. Whether the credit system is based on a national or European currency does not change much as long as either of these remain under the influence of the traditional groups of the financial speculators who make up their own banking laws.

Expropriating the shareholders in this sector, by nationalizing the banks as a public monopoly under control of the bank workers and customers, is a burning issue in Greece, as well as a common goal for all the peoples of Europe. If we believe that it is necessary to break with Europe, with its treaties and its banking system, by no means do we renounce internationalism.

More than ever, an alliance of peoples is a necessity in order to confront the expanding diktats of austerity. Falling back on patriotism and chauvinism only stokes the long-term growth of the far right. We do not imagine that exiting the Europe of capital will hand us some sort of umbrella against austerity. Instead, it must be a point of departure for building another Europe, as faithful to the interests of the people as the current system is to the interests of the bankers. We reject the reign of the Troika as strongly as that of our own national ruling classes.

For all those who no longer wish to submit, we propose to discuss together the organization of a great European-wide conference of social and political resistance in the coming weeks and to debate the meaning we can give to this campaign for a "Austerexit."

*Translated from the French and Spanish by Todd Chretien for [socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org). Published in French at [Mediapart.fr](http://Mediapart.fr) and in Spanish at [Anticapitalistas.org](http://Anticapitalistas.org).*