



Perspectives in Greece

Greece's radical left after Syriza

2 November 2017, by **Antonis Davanellos**

Given Syriza proved unequal to the task of stopping austerity, was building a broad party involving different currents from the radical left, including revolutionary and reformist forces, worth it? Was the fight for a left government the correct path to take?

Syriza was founded in early 2004. Its foundation was based on the previous accumulated experience of the Greek Social Forum (GSF), which was a united front in the social movements. It united in action forces with different ideological traditions and backgrounds (as we would say: reformists, centrists and revolutionary Marxists).

It was a time of intense capitalist aggression, a time of crisis of the traditional left, a time of decline in the strength of the trade unions and social organisations. In this situation, the GSF managed to organise a wave of big mobilisations against neoliberalism and massive anti-war protests. The GSF was the main form that the international movement against neoliberal capitalist globalisation took in Greece.

At the same time, the GSF was an affirmation of the value of the united front, provoking a refreshing debate in the Greek left, in which Stalinist traditions remained strong.

After the events in Genoa in 2001, a debate started in all the European left

around the issue of if and how we could express in the political struggle the unity in action we had already established in the streets. It was clear that this included the prospect of a common intervention in the elections. In 2004, we accepted this challenge, taking part in the foundation of Syriza.

Syriza was the Greek form of the general international debate about "broad parties" of the radical left. While accepting the challenge and participating in Syriza, DEA held a view on broad parties that was different from the prevailing current of that time, as expressed for example by certain sections of the Fourth International.

First, we did not consider broad parties as the "final answer" to the question of the party. We understood them as a transitional process in very specific conditions, in the background of a crisis of the resistance movement and the left.

Second, for this reason, we never promised and we never accepted the dissolution of our organisation. And we never downgraded our own independent "tools" of building and maintaining political relations with the people (newspaper, journal, meetings, public events).

Third, from the beginning we argued publicly for the need for an organised left wing current inside Syriza. DEA,

despite enjoying the respect and the appreciation of a broad layer of Syriza members, never joined the leading majority – not even during the more "radical" phase of Alexis Tsipras.

This approach proved to be of extreme value at the time of the crisis. It – partly – explains the speed of the reaction of the left wing of Syriza in 2015, in comparison with what had happened, for example, in Brazil or Italy.

During these 11 years, the experience of Syriza contributed to the creation of a wide layer of political activists in Greece. This layer is stronger in quantity than in many other countries in Europe. This layer is also stronger in political quality: it is trained in political struggle and it has overcome the infantile disorder of dispersing forces in "social movementism".

This is the reason we – who confronted aggressively the politics of the Syriza government – defend the experience of Syriza's first period of radical action.

We believe that this layer of political activists has not said its final word. We believe that these people will lead the struggles against the Tsipras government and will play a very important role in the configuration of the new situation, in shaping the "post-Syriza" era.

The Tsipras government, after it signed the third memorandum with the creditors, is implementing typical neoliberal policies. It is cutting wages, pensions and social benefits; it is pushing forward privatisations and creating a more “flexible” industrial relations system. With these reactionary economic policies, the Tsipras government is also unable to implement even the most elementary democratic reforms, which have no financial cost. It has to rely on the repressive apparatus of the state in order to rule.

The question of the “government of the left” was always a thorny issue for revolutionary Marxists. The first time it was proposed as a strategy inside Syriza, in 2008, we rejected it as a parliamentary-reformist strategy, and it was not accepted. Everything changed with the outbreak of the crisis and mostly with the massive struggles of 2010-11. Back then, the people were struggling with massive and tenacious action to overthrow the memorandums, and they understood that in order to achieve that goal, they had to overthrow the government.

But despite the scale of the struggles and the persistence of the masses, there was not (or not yet) a revolutionary situation in Greece: the confrontation had not reached the level of “a struggle of life or death”, the confrontation didn’t have the clear shape of a “struggle of one class against the other”, and the working class lacked its own independent social organisations that could claim actual power. These limitations “deflected” the will for overthrow towards claiming a government of the left, even through an electoral victory.

It was obligatory for us to accept this context and seek for the most radical political line within it. So we reintroduced in public debate the discussions about the government of the left that were had out in the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, which understood it as a transitional policy towards socialist emancipation.

We fought towards this direction and we developed all our tactical movements along this line. This allowed us to remain steady in our

working class orientation and sustain the respect for our organisation by both a broad layer of the rank and file of Syriza and by activists outside Syriza.

Today, our self-criticism on the slogan of a government of the left consists mainly of two points.

The first has to do with objective factors. It was proven that a transitional policy that includes a government of the left presupposes a higher level of direct political intervention of the masses through their own social organisations than the one we had in Greece in 2015.

The second has to do with subjective factors: the balance of power between reformists and revolutionaries in the party and in the social movement. The project of a “government of the left” presupposes a much bigger political determination for confrontation than was held by Syriza as a whole in 2015.

It is important to note that DEA never claimed in public that Syriza would actually manage to carry through the “government of the left” project in a successful, genuine way. For us, this slogan was rather an ideological framework for our actions – actions that included the confrontation with the leading group around Tsipras inside Syriza – than an estimate of what would finally happen.

In the midst of major events, ideas are always important, even if they “lie under the surface”. At the time of the crucial test, the leading majority of Syriza brought its Euro-communist background to the surface and turned to this set of ideas.

The Tsipras government capitulated so quickly because it refused to confront the local ruling class during the crucial first six months of 2015 and because it had the illusion that it was possible to achieve a consensual solution through negotiations with the EU, reversing the pre-existing position of Syriza and changing it to “remaining in the eurozone at all costs”. The result of these two major retreats was the signing of the third memorandum by Alexis Tsipras.

During the first Syriza

government, your organisation played a central role in stiffening the resolve of the left within Syriza, such as the Left Current, to oppose the capitulation. Out of the mess of Syriza, a new political party, Popular Unity (LAE) was formed to keep alive the hope that there is an alternative to the path taken by Syriza.

What is the mood among the working class and what is LAE’s orientation to both fostering resistance to austerity and building the forces of the left? And what is LAE’s position on EU membership? Whilst in Syriza, DEA’s slogan was “No sacrifice for the euro, no illusions in the drachma”. Has this now changed after the experience of Syriza?

In 2013, DEA together with the Left Current (the left wing tendency of the party of Synaspismos), founded the Left Platform (LP) in Syriza. The LP was the centre of resistance against Tsipras, and the centre of the rapid and massive split in the summer of 2015, when around 50 percent of the members and cadre of the party followed us out of Syriza.

The LP co-founded Popular Unity (LAE by its Greek initials) with two organisations that left Antarsya. In the September 2015 elections, LAE failed to elect its own parliamentary group, gathering 2.9 percent of the vote instead of the 3 percent that is the threshold to enter the parliament. It was a failure that can be attributed to the extremely small time we had at our disposal (around 20 days to organise a “new party” and an electoral campaign), and mostly to the unanimous slanders by the mass media against the “left wing of Syriza”, which called us “dangerous adventurers”.

A few months later, around 5,000 organised activists participated in the founding conference of LAE. It is clear that LAE gathers the largest part of the organised anti-memorandum left in Greece, outside the ranks of the Communist Party.

It is worth saying a few things about the evolution of the Communist Party. Its leadership appears to be implementing a left turn in the field of

ideas (it is talking about socialism, it rejects the strategy of intermediate “stages”, it is reviewing critically the history of the party, reopening the debate about its strategy during the resistance in 1940-44 and the ensuing civil war). But this is happening mostly in order to preclude any collaboration with other left wing forces, any kind of joint action even in the smallest things. So this looks more like the Stalinist policy of the Third Period than a return to genuine Marxist politics.

Inside LAE, DEA argues for a democratic organisational form, which would enable other forces to join ranks with it, including Antarsya and other forces that left Syriza. We are trying, yet again, to build a “common current of the anti-memorandum radical left”.

But we are trying this in a different political situation.

The rapidness of Syriza’s capitulation (the swift turn from the “No” in the referendum to “Yes” a few days later) and the cynicism of governmental policy after that, have provoked demoralisation in a wide part of the people. The collapse of confidence in Syriza has been rapid, but for now it is silent. It is not expressed with a rise in active participation in mobilisations, but with a turn to the individual struggle to survive in the midst of the crisis.

Even for the smallest mobilisation to happen, a much bigger organised effort from the political forces of the left is needed. The contribution of LAE to this is obvious. Through our previous actions, we have inherited a common program of goals against austerity: defend wages and pensions, fight against flexibility, against privatisations, against foreclosures of houses of indebted poor people etc.

LAE also unanimously supports the nationalisation-socialisation of the banks and the suspension of debt repayments, with the goal of cancelling the debt. These are crucial “nodes” for a needed transitional program of reversing austerity towards socialism.

But new questions always emerge.

You asked about our older slogan “No sacrifices for the euro – no illusions in the drachma”. It was an “algebraic” slogan at the time of the rise of Syriza. When faced with the rigid position of the creditors and the EU leaders, who demanded many more sacrifices, we then had to radicalise the slogan and support openly and clearly an exit from the eurozone, as a necessary precondition to reverse austerity and cancel the memorandums. LAE is also in unanimous agreement about this position.

But while exiting the eurozone is indeed a necessary precondition, this doesn’t mean that it is enough for a left wing, working class program. We argue that an exit from the eurozone and a confrontation with the EU leaders would have emancipatory content only if combined with a wider program of anti-capitalist measures that lead to socialism. Other comrades inside LAE believe that an exit from the eurozone is an objectively progressive solution, as it paves the way for the Greek economy to begin growing, which would objectively create bigger potentialities for the workers and the popular classes.

In a way, this is a rehashing of the controversy between supporters of revolutionary socialist strategy and supporters of the “national independence” strategy, meaning the strategy of “intermediate stages”, which occurred in the left in the 1960s and 1970s. Such a discussion is now under way inside LAE.

This debate becomes even more important in the wake of the Brexit vote, the rise of Le Pen in France and the referendum in Italy. Certain fractions of the ruling classes in Europe seem to be losing confidence in the eurozone and turning toward protectionism and policies of “national preference”. This trend is obviously enhanced by the electoral victory of Donald Trump in the USA.

In Greece, there is no serious fraction of the capitalist class that envisages better prospects outside the eurozone or argues for a return to the drachma. But this can change, because the crisis of Greek capitalism is extremely deep, because everyone knows that the third memorandum leads to a dead end, and

because many capitalists are afraid that at the end of the road of “internal devaluation” inside the eurozone lies, not some reward from the creditors, but bankruptcy and expulsion from the eurozone. The first voices, from deep inside the establishment, about the need to prepare for all these eventualities are already being raised in the press.

Syriza has also signed up to participate in the European Union’s attempts to create a fortress Europe by rounding up refugees into camps and deporting many back to Turkey. Can you describe the situation for refugees inside Greece and particularly on the Islands? Across Europe we’ve seen the rise of parties of the far right. Has Golden Dawn been able to capitalise on the disappointment with Syriza and the refugee crisis?

The fate of the refugees was determined by the reactionary, racist agreement between the EU, Turkey and Greece. It is worth noting that in order to “oversee” the implementation of the agreement, a battle fleet of NATO has established its presence in the Aegean Sea (mostly due to the insistence of the Tsipras government) and is also keeping an eye on the situation in Syria and on the Russian warships that are stationed in the eastern Mediterranean.

The agreement assigns Turkey responsibility for holding the majority of the refugees within its borders. It is also “caging” some refugees (more than 60,000) within Greece, making their efforts to reach Central Europe and ultimately Western Europe extremely difficult. In order to deter refugees from entering Greece, it organises an abhorrent reception here: they are rounding them up in isolated camps, mostly in the islands, providing no hope or prospects.

During the harshest days of this winter, the situation in the camps became completely unbearable. There have been revolts against both the horrible conditions and against some racist attacks that were organised by the far right.

In a country that every summer

welcomes 21 million tourists, the government claims that it's hard to offer decent hospitality to 60,000 people! The positive thing is that, despite all this, a large part of the Greek population shows determined solidarity.

Today, for the organised anti-racist movement, the main tasks are: First, to change the situation in the camps by imposing a democratic-social control of the conditions there, and to push for the transfer of the refugees to open, decent spaces of hospitality, inside the cities. Second, to demand that refugee children be accepted with full rights in public schools, and also that refugees have full access to health care in public hospitals. Third, to oppose Golden Dawn and the far right's efforts to organise a racist backlash.

Golden Dawn's leadership and many of its militants are on trial, accused of being members of a criminal organisation. As a consequence, they have retreated carefully: their "storm troopers" were withdrawn from the streets, and there was a drastic decline in incidents of racist violence.

But the massive disillusionment in Syriza is providing new opportunities for Golden Dawn. It consistently comes third in the political polls, with an estimated 8 percent of the vote. The leadership is trying to exploit this opportunity with a parliamentary turn: they present a more "respectable" profile, they talk mostly as "nationalists" and not as neo-Nazis, trying to instil in supporters a belief that there is a prospect of a playing a role in a future government. But this turn also causes tensions within

Golden Dawn.

At the same time, a wide range of other far right politicians are launching initiatives to establish a broad nationalist party, one that will be able to cooperate with New Democracy if the handling of the crisis in Greece requires a government of the "hard right".

Our task is not to sit back and make predictions about the evolution of the neo-Nazis and the far right. We must continue to mobilise to break Golden Dawn, an organisation that is a serious threat to the workers' movement and the left. And the best way to do this is to connect the anti-fascist struggle with the struggle to reverse austerity and cancel the memorandums.

Source: Red Flag, 1 February 2017.

Greece, SYRIZA in Power, and the Concept of a "Workers' Government"

7 January 2016, by **Steve Bloom**

Let's start our investigation, however, with a quote from a different article that IV includes in the same collection, the one by Catarina Pr ncipe and Dan Russell titled **Asking the Right Questions**. Pr ncipe and Russell directly express the same disorientation as Thornett regarding the tasks of revolutionaries in Greece in 2015: "Those of us who don't have to confront the question of state power just yet nonetheless must learn the right lessons both from SYRIZA and the history from which it was born."

I would say, however, that we cannot even begin to "ask the right questions," let alone "learn the right lessons," until we realize that starting in January 2015, immediately after winning the election, the key confrontation that SYRIZA had to engage was, precisely, with "the question of state

power"  specifically with the nature and limitations of the governmental power that had come into its hands, and therefore with the need to construct an alternative power based on a mobilized mass movement in order to fulfill the campaign promises that Tsipras had made to the people of Greece.

In a sense, of course, "the question of state power" is one that revolutionaries confront at all times in one way or another, even in activities like a strike, or a campaign to free political prisoners. But I will insist that SYRIZA faced this question immediately and acutely, as soon as the election results became known in Greece last January.

A collective error

All of the contributions compiled by

the IV editors follow a consistent pattern of thought, reflecting this same general disorientation: What went wrong in Greece, we are told, is that Alexis Tsipras failed to pursue the right governmental policies after the January 2015 election. I disagree, though it is true that Tsipras failed to pursue the right policies.

What went wrong in Greece was, instead, that both Tsipras and the left opposition within SYRIZA approached their tasks as if the governmental power that came into Tsipras's hands in January was the key and decisive tool to wage an anti-austerity struggle against the EU, disagreeing merely about what specific administrative steps the government itself should or should not take. Both Tsipras and his critics within SYRIZA failed to engage the reality just identified: that as soon as a governmental coalition was created in January, SYRIZA then had

to “confront the question of state power” in a very real and immediate sense.

The governmental power that came into Tsipras’s hands was at best only a blunt instrument. The real hope was to develop a struggle which could transcend and overwhelm the limitations imposed on any government by the realities of the Greek bourgeois state and its relationship to the European Union. The importance of mass mobilization gets honorable mention in the contributions compiled by IV. But it is, clearly, conceived in these articles as a supplement to the actions that Tsipras might have taken as head of state. A proper conception of tasks, however, would be the reverse.

Although I disagree with the rejection by OKDE-Spartakos (Greek section of the Fourth International) of an electoral bloc between ANTARSYA and Popular Unity in September, their statement explaining this rejection ([OKDE-Spartakos statement on the upcoming elections](#)) does in fact nail the political essence of the problem by pointing out “what led to the total devotion of SYRIZA to the memoranda and the euro: governmentalism, management and reform of the state.”

And this observation by OKDE leads directly to our discussion about Alan Thornett’s conception, or misconception, of a “workers’ government.” Thornett writes as if the Communist International, in 1922, was approaching things from the same vantage point as Pr ncipe and Russell in 2015: elaborating a process whereby such a government might take office through electoral means and then use its position as a tool to advance the interests of the masses without directly “confront[ing] the question of state power.” But “governmentalism, management and reform of the state” was not the agenda of the Third International. The Comintern was, actually, focused on a completely different question: How to seize control of the government and then use that control as a tool to actively “confront the bourgeois state” itself, with the goal of overthrowing bourgeois power and replacing it with a different kind of state power.

Thornett writes:

We have argued, throughout the crisis and confrontation in Greece, that the situation posed by it raised the possibility of a workers’ government. A government which, though taking office through a parliamentary election (with capitalism still intact), would act consistently in the interests of the working class even if that meant taking actions “in order to defend itself and implement its programme” that would be contrary to the capitalist mode of production and take it in a socialist direction. It was uncharted waters but it was a clear possibility.

This did not happen because the SYRIZA leadership capitulated on its key demand “in fact its rational for existence” which was to oppose austerity.

Not quite. This did not happen because the government that was elected in January attempted to maneuver within the agreed-upon confines of bourgeois power relations, rather than to create and then rely on alternative institutions of power. Alexis Tsipras, holding as tightly as anyone might have hoped to his anti-austerity agenda, could not have acted in the way Thornett proposes without consciously and actively promoting the development of an alternative state power in Greece, at least in embryo. There was no possibility for the anti-austerity struggle to gain ground without a self-organized mass movement from below, one that would begin to pose a threat to the bourgeois state itself. This, and only this, could have forced genuine concessions from the EU.

The Tsipras government consciously chose a different path, however, a path of negotiations at the top that turned the masses into passive bystanders. Although there is a feedback loop of cause and effect at work here, I would tend to say that the chain starts at a point which is the opposite of the one Thornett identifies. Tsipras did not fail to create a workers’ government because he abandoned his commitment to the struggle against austerity. He abandoned the struggle against austerity because there was no other

choice if he conceived of his task as “governmentalism, management and reform of the state” that is, if he could not conceive of creating a genuine workers’ government.

Thornett continues:

The debate around the formation of such a government (effectively a provisional government) under such conditions is not new, of course. It was discussed by the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1922, after the immediate revolutionary wave generated by the Russian revolution had receded and the Comintern had to come to terms with the reality that the struggle was going to be a much longer one and that struggles for power would not necessarily follow the soviet model.

The proposition advanced by the Comintern was that such a government “elected to office with capitalism still existing” could be the vehicle for developments beyond the limitations of capitalism, despite the restrictions which capitalism would attempt to impose on it “irrespective of whether the leadership of such a government saw itself as playing such a role when it was elected to office. In other words it would be a transitional government.

This is not bad so far as it goes. But it stops short of the question that was actually at the heart of the theoretical work being done by the Communist International in 1922. The Third international did not conceive of a “workers’ government” coming to power and then, through the administrative process of that government, advancing the interests of the masses without overthrowing capitalism. It was, instead, interested in a different process: how to move from a workers’ government of this type, if it ever does come to power, to a genuine revolutionary government based on a revolutionary state. Thornett’s description ends with the formation of the “transitional government.” For the Comintern, however, that is where the most interesting and crucial work begins. It developed the document we are considering for the sole purpose of thinking through how communists might use the “workers’ government”

in order to promote a genuine transition to a communist dictatorship.

The perspective of the Comintern

Thornett quotes the Communist International theses as they describe the reality in question. But he fails to make a distinction that is crucial if our goal is to understand what the words he cites were actually trying to say:

The resolution on tactics at the Third Congress of the Comintern said the following. In fact it could have been written for the Greek situation today:

“As a general propagandistic slogan, the workers’ government (or workers’ and peasants’ government [where peasants exist]) can be used almost anywhere. As an immediate political slogan, however, the workers’ government is most important in countries where bourgeois society is particularly unstable, where the relationship of forces between the workers’ parties and the bourgeoisie places the question of government on the agenda as a practical problem requiring immediate solution. In these countries, the slogan of the workers’ government flows unavoidably from the entire united-front tactic.”

It goes on: “Such a workers’ government is possible only if it is born from the struggles of the masses themselves and is supported by militant workers’ organisations created by the most oppressed layers of the working masses. Even a workers’ government that arises from a purely parliamentary combination, that is, one that is purely parliamentary in origin, can provide the occasion for a revival of the revolutionary workers’ movement. Obviously, the birth and continued existence of a genuine workers’ government, one that pursues revolutionary policies, must result in a bitter struggle with the bourgeoisie, and possible civil war. Even an attempt by the proletariat to form such a workers’ government will encounter from the outset the most determined resistance from the bourgeoisie. The slogan of the workers’ government thus has the

potential of uniting the proletariat and unleashing the revolutionary struggle.”

Note that these two paragraphs from the Comintern text are talking about two different things. The first (the one that does, indeed, sound like the Greek situation in 2015) is merely considering the question of slogans. The second, however, is describing a “workers’ government” not as a slogan, though it does refer to the slogan in its last sentence, but as an actual government that might come to power because communists raise this slogan. It is striking that the reality described in the second paragraph is not at all like Greece in 2015. There was no “workers’ government . . . pursu[ing] revolutionary policies,” and no “bitter struggle with the bourgeoisie” unless someone believes that the negotiations between Tsipras and the EU can properly be characterized in that way. We had only the potential/acute need for such a struggle. There was certainly not a “possible civil war.” The mass actions that might have pushed things in that direction had already receded.

The SYRIZA government arose “from a parliamentary combination,” but it did not “provide the occasion for a revival of the revolutionary workers’ movement.” Quite the opposite occurred, in fact. The masses in Greece, after the January election, chose for the most part to simply await results that the government promised to bring about without a struggle, through a process of negotiation.

If Thornett had said, simply, that the conditions in Greece were consistent with raising the slogan, or idea, of a “workers’ government” that would have been true enough, and in keeping with the thinking of the Comintern. But when he asserts that the same two words can be used as a descriptive characterization for the actual government that was formed by Tsipras and SYRIZA “even as a potential for what the SYRIZA government might have been” he and the Third International have parted ways. The institutions of mass struggle that a “workers’ government” of this type requires simply were not present. Neither Tsipras nor any wing

of SYRIZA had the perspective of working for their development as their primary task.

It now becomes possible to directly identify Thornett’s key error of assessment: “We have argued, throughout the crisis and confrontation in Greece, that the situation posed by it raised the possibility of a workers’ government.” That’s wrong, since “possibility” here clearly does not mean “extremely remote possibility” but something closer to “tendency to push in the direction of.” There was, in fact, no such tendency at work. There was only an extremely remote possibility. Yet it is clear that Thornett pins all of his hopes on precisely that most-unlikely turn of events:

Although the Tsipras leadership had begun to compromise on its programme as soon as it was in office (and even before), the Syriza Government retained the potential to move radically to the left whilst it maintained its anti-austerity stance. Costas Lapavistas offers the same thought in another piece published by IV as part of its collection ([Awakening the European Left](#)), telling us that Tsipras might have jumped the right way “when the real class issues were put on the table.” (They weren’t on the table in January??!!) This possibility was still in play, Lapavistas suggests, “until the week after the referendum.”

Perhaps. Such a development is certainly not excluded theoretically. But it was, as just noted, extremely remote. And I cannot imagine the Comintern ever proposing a policy that depended for its success on which way a particular head of state might jump. No, I will be so bold as to assert that the Communist International would have advocated an active policy to help push the working-class movement itself to jump the right way, regardless of what any particular leader chose to do. This, by itself, suggests that Lapavistas and Thornett share a perspective that has little in common with that of the Communist International in 1922.

A government with a reformist strategy doesn’t spontaneously transform itself into a workers’ government of the type we are

discussingâ€”at least not very often. Such a possibility is, therefore, not one we ought to expect or plan for. It should have been clear from the outset that the Tsipras government was a reformist government with a reformist strategy, and this realization should have guided the orientation of revolutionariesâ€”rather than a hope and a prayer that events would somehow push Tsipras to suddenly become the class-struggle leader he has never been.

Revolutionary goals: 1922 and today

As we have already noted, the Comintern's theses were intended to prepare a cadre for the necessary struggle within and with any government of this type that might ariseâ€”in order to guarantee an actual transition to a genuine proletarian state. The Third International was not attempting to develop a strategy for the class struggle in the context of capitalist society. We can now take our examination of this one step further, because the Communist International in 1922 also understood that this transitional form could, in fact, not be relied on to solve the immediate crisis of working-class self-defense. In and by itself it was completely inadequate.

Here is what the Comintern theses have to say:

Despite its great advantages, the slogan of a workers' government also has its dangers, just as any united-front tactic has. As a precaution against these dangers, the Communist parties should not lose sight of the fact that although every bourgeois government is at the same time a capitalist government, it is not true that every workers' government is actually proletarian, that is a revolutionary instrument of proletarian power.

The Communist International should anticipate the following possibilities:

1) A liberal workers' government. There is already a government of this

sort in Australia; there may also be one before very long in England.

2) A Social-Democratic workers' government (Germany).

3) A workers' and peasants' government. This is possible in the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, etc.

4) A workers' government in which Communists participate.

5) A genuine proletarian workers' government which, in its purest form, can only be represented by the Communist Party.

The first two types of workers' government are not revolutionary workers' governments but rather governments that camouflage a coalition between the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary leaders of the working class.

...

Communists are prepared to march with workers . . . who have not yet recognized the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Under certain circumstances and with certain guarantees, the Communists are equally prepared to support a non-Communist workers' government. But the communists must at all costs explain to the working class that its liberation can only be assured by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The other two types of workers' government (number 3 and 4 in the above listâ€”SB) are types that the Communists can participate in, although they still do not represent the dictatorship of the proletariat; they do not represent a necessary form of transition toward the dictatorship, but they can serve as a point of departure for attaining this dictatorship. The full dictatorship of the proletariat can only be accomplished by a workers' government composed of communists."

The reader should note two points in particular in this passage:

"Communists must, at all costs, explain to the working class that its liberation can only be assured by the dictatorship of the proletariat."

A workers' government that is not yet

a proletarian dictatorship can, nonetheless, "serve as a point of departure for attaining this dictatorship." That's the reason Communists are willing to participate in and support a "workers' government" which is based on the reality of an alternative state in embryo, or on the attempt to create such an alternative state. This reality of an alternative state in embryo (or the potential for it), on which the workers' government attempts to rely, is what gives it the character of a transitional government, not any specific governmental policy.

Thus we can see once again that the entire focus of the Communist International in adopting these theses was "the question of state power," of creating a proletarian dictatorship. It was never how to advance the interests of the working class and oppressed in the absence of any struggle to create a proletarian state.

The Greek people should never have been dependent on which way Alexis Tsipras, left to his own devices, decided to jump. The primary task was to encourage the struggle itself to jump the right wayâ€”leaving Alexis Tsipras behind if he refused to jump along with the mass movement. Like the Comintern in 1922, we, today, need to be focused on "the struggle for power" as something that we are directly and immediately concerned with, even if the transition to an actual proletarian state is not immediately on the agenda. That's true both because the question of creating a proletarian state is the primary concern of the revolutionary movement, and because only a strategy that is focused on this concern can, in fact, lead to the kind of fight-back we need today in order to win concessions from the austerity-mongers, even within the context of bourgeois society.

If we think about time in a political sense, the socialist revolution is further off today than it was in 1922 when the Comintern considered this question. That affects many things in terms of our tactics and strategy. But it does not change the most fundamental thing: that a revolutionary policy must have the goal of pursuing revolution, of bringing it closer by our actions today even when we cannot make revolution

today.

Thornett actually describes the kind of struggle that would have been needed in Greece to bring revolution closer:

Such a strategy would depend on an interaction between the mass movement in the work places and on the street where the mass movement pushes its representatives within government to implement an escalating series of radical demands that would in turn empower the mass movement. Demands which, however moderate (or reasonable) they may seem in themselves, will run up against the limits of that which capital will allow. It is from this process that institutions of workers democracy can emerge.

The point is, however, that this level of struggle does not happen, or at least not very often, without a conscious effort by some political cadre with sufficient critical mass and implantation in the class struggle to make it happen. When the cadre sit back instead, waiting to see which way a particular leader might jump, nothing is likely to happen.

Conclusion

I am not among those who believe that if the Communist International

suggested a certain course of action in 1922, we today must slavishly adhere to that same course of action. I repeat: much has changed since 1922, both in the world and in our understanding of it. But if we are going to cite the perspectives of the Comintern to defend a particular policy we have an obligation to be accurate in our assertions, and thorough in our understanding.

I could not agree more with Thornett's conclusion:

A wide discussion on all this could hardly be more urgent. Politics is becoming more volatile across Europe. The crisis remains unresolved. Austerity is being forced in relentlessly. Jeremy Corbin's election as Labour leader is a reflection of this. Whether it is Podemos in Spain or some broad based party that does not yet exist there will be more parties with a mass radicalisation behind them, that will be thrown into this situation and will face all these problems and challenges all over again.

The European workers movement cannot afford another debacle such as the one that had been created in Greece by the leadership of SYRIZA.

But another debacle cannot be avoided by tinkering around the edges of a policy that believes victory in a bourgeois election can lead to seizing control of the government without "having to confront the question of state power just yet." Political formations like SYRIZA, or Podemos in Spain, or the British Labor Party under Jeremy Corbyn, will only succeed if they break definitively with trying to work out some favorable arrangement without directly challenging the capitalist system, begin to engage, objectively even if not yet consciously, in an immediate confrontation with the bourgeois state itself.

If a working-class party succeeds in gaining governmental power before the capitalist state is overthrown, the only truly meaningful action it can take is (in the words of Michael Lebowitz at [socialist project](#), discussing precisely this same set of events) "to use its power as government . . . to support the development of a new state from below."

In the absence of that, all the rest is only wishful thinking.

October 2015

[Old and new project](#)

Austerity and the drachma

31 October 2015, by Sotiris Martalis

Since the election, the left has been debating crucial questions about how to go forward—including how those who want to continue the struggle against austerity should approach the issue of the euro and whether they should welcome a "Grexit" from the eurozone.

Sotiris Martalis is a leading member of the Greek socialist group Internationalist Workers Left, a former Central Committee member of SYRIZA and now a leading voice of Popular Unity. Here, he examines the

views put forward by socialist economist and fellow Popular Unity supporter Costas Lapavistas about "Grexit" and a national currency. [1]

In any clear transition program, which could only be put into practice by a massive radical left force, exiting the euro will be, at a certain stage, a necessary step; but it is not sufficient on its own. Separating any exit from its wider context only allows for the growth of dangerous illusions regarding the supposed liberating role of national currency as such.

Seven months of the Tsipras government clearly demonstrated that any anti-austerity policy that aims to benefit the subaltern classes, but which is not willing to risk a rupture with the European authorities (European Commission, Eurogroup, European Central Bank, etc.) and the euro is condemned to be transformed into its opposite—that is, a pro-Memorandum policy.

Such a willingness was, in fact, contained in SYRIZA's founding program with its anticipatory formula:

"No sacrifice for the euro." In other words, if we are forced to choose between sticking with the euro and its institutional architecture or defending the people, we will defend the people.

After the experience of Cyprus [which was forced into a new round of austerity by the EU in March 2013], SYRIZA's Left Platform as a whole and the Red Network in particular further developed this position in the process of internal conflicts and debates about SYRIZA's orientation. The "no sacrifice for the euro" slogan was no longer adequate by itself—it was necessary to prepare for an inevitable conflict with the Eurocracy and an exit from the euro as a necessary condition of implementing a policy against brutal austerity.

But is a rupture with the euro sufficient on its own?

A number of comrades have responded affirmatively to this question. Indeed, some claim to have a technically worked-out solution—a "road map" for resolving the crisis that benefits the popular classes by means of a "transition to a national currency," meaning the drachma.

Dimitris Belandis, a former member of SYRIZA's Central Committee and now a member of Popular Unity, argued that Popular Unity's electoral defeat could be explained by the fact that the party "did not provide a technically prepared solution for the problem of exiting the euro." He added that "some political forces (some inside ANTARSYA, or Alekos Alavanos, who created the 'Plan B' group in 2013, etc.) had already developed such an approach, but the Left Platform and Popular Unity did not use it."

In fact, there have been various elaborations in this respect. The most advanced of these has been [put forward by Costas Lapavitsas and Heiner Flassbeck](#) in their "Program of Social and National Rescue for Greece." Their plans certainly are "technically prepared." But it is not at all clear that their response addresses the question of how to get ready for a class battle which can lead to a victory against austerity.

Basically, their proposals bank on the

likelihood of a rapid recovery from the crisis in the national economy by means of transitioning from a "strong" currency, the euro, to a "weak" currency, the drachma. However, the history of capitalism, including its recent history, tells us that these two questions are not necessarily connected.

Let's examine in more detail Lapavitsas' perspective in order to see if it can work as a guide to action for Popular Unity or, more generally, for the radical left.

What Is the Goal?

[In their proposed program](#), Lapavitsas and Flassbeck argue that a) "restoring national sovereignty over monetary policy" can establish the basis for b) a "strong policy of public investment to improve its infrastructure and to give a boost to private investment"; a plan that will be accelerated to c) "recapture the domestic market—since it would act as barrier to imports—and to expand exports." Notably, he provides a particularly optimistic forecast for ending the crisis based on exiting euro because d) "it is reasonable to expect strong growth rates soon after the exit shock."

What will serve as the "motor" for the dynamic takeoff of the national economy? Lapavitsas has no doubts: the devaluation of a new currency. In [an article from his blog titled "The necessity of a national currency,"](#) he writes: "The devaluation of the national currency would contribute to the recovery in the Greek economy by stimulating domestic production and exports. According to the best estimates, the effects of inflation [linked to devaluation] would stay around 10 percent during the first year and then fall afterward."

It is clear that Lapavitsas is talking about an ambitious plan to escape Greek capitalism's crisis—a crisis which has been shaking international capitalism as a whole since 2007-08. Against this point of view, we could point to the international discussion among Marxists emphasizing the conclusion that there is no peaceful or "easy" exit from the current crisis. We

can note that the large majority of economists who make these sorts of forecasts believe that if the relation of forces between capital and labor established during the period of neoliberalism is not reversed by major sociopolitical upheavals, any exit from the crisis (whenever it may come...) will have bitter effects for the exploited and oppressed classes. But we do not wish to engage in this Byzantine debate.

Lapavitsas' position poses a very simple question: If there is such a simple and rapid exit available to Greek capitalism's crisis, why has no minority fraction of the ruling class (one that has the slightest influence) oriented itself towards such a solution? Why have the capitalists—who presumably know their interests better than the rest of us—remained united in their orientation? That is, stick with the euro "at all costs."

One way to answer this question is to insist that the decisive elements of the ruling class are "sellouts" to the European rulers, thus crudely reproducing dependency theories. A different response would be to recall that capitalists only understand protectionism and currency devaluations as weapons to be used for competitive purposes. Clearly, in this sense, we are talking about well-known instruments here, but ones that can only be used for certain purposes and for a limited amount of time because competitive devaluations are rapidly copied by other "national economies" (and so on). Thus, the crisis only becomes deeper and more dangerous for the system as a whole.

What Means Can Be Used?

The purpose that one is fighting for may become clearer if we consider the means that one turns to in order to achieve it.

[Lapavitsas and Flassbeck emphasize](#) that "if it is to be handled successfully by a government of the left..., the most important factor in confronting the difficulties of exit [from the euro] is popular determination and will." Here,

we see a repetition of a basic assumption of the Tsipras leadership team—that is, the engine of historical change is located principally in government. Moreover, the government isn't clearly characterized as a genuine government of the left or as a "workers' government" or some other sort.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid mischaracterizing his position, let us examine the lengths to which such an orientation must go in order to combine the will of the government with the necessary popular determination.

We know that the working class and popular masses, in their great majority, mobilize around various proposals based on concrete material conditions. SYRIZA's initial promise to restore the minimum wage of 751 euros per month meant a) a commitment to raising working-class purchasing power, relatively quickly, after the losses suffered during the period governed by the two Memorandums and b) the general working class orientation of SYRIZA's program. Yet it was precisely the complete abandonment of these points that was openly proclaimed, in the clearest possible manner, by the betrayal of Tsipras' government when he signed the agreement for a Third Memorandum in Brussels on July 13.

In ["The necessity of a national currency"](#), there is a reference to a "definite, gradual increase in the minimum wage." The plan does not specify the amount of the increase, nor does it provide criteria for what constitutes "gradual."

Likewise, Lapavistas states that "it is important to increase the minimum wage, but it is also necessary for the organized workers movement to support the transition effort to put the country on a more solid footing." This statement can only lead to the presumption that the needs of the workers will be subordinated to the

priorities of the national economy.

Trade union experts (including most clearly and recently by Elias Ioakeimoglou, a leading economic advisor with the INE/GSEE Labor Institute for the General Confederation of Greek Workers) have shown that a substantial increase in wages is a necessary condition for any reduction of unemployment, thus contradicting the views of those who relegate solving the problem of joblessness to a future economic recovery.

I do not know where Lapavistas' certainty comes from about his forecast that the new currency's devaluation would be limited to 10 percent. But whoever makes proposals such as these must also propose an equivalent increase (at least) in wages, which must be carried out in parallel and simultaneously. Carrying out such a simultaneous increase is improbable in conditions of rapid inflation, even if an automatic wages-to-inflation index is established. If this is not done, then what is being proposed, in fact, is that the recovery of the "national economy" should be financed through a transfer of wealth out of the income of wage workers.

This plan, which takes as given a significant increase in tourism, exports and so on, is based on the illusion of a "negotiated" exit from the euro with the Greek "elites." In [his article](#), Lapavistas counts on the "possibility of remaining in the European Union," even while leaving the eurozone. "As such, Greece would not become isolated, but would pursue a different orientation from those countries at the heart of the EU." This plan is based on the illusion of an "agreeable" exit from the euro with the European institutions.

Recently, comrade Dimitris Belandis, a former member of the SYRIZA Central Committee and now a member of Popular Unity, criticized the Red Network, attributing to us an

underestimation of the inevitable conflict with imperialism. However, from our point of view, it is actually the idea of a "negotiated" exit with the main imperialist forces that fails to take this conflict into account. It constitutes a sort of parallel illusion—different, but analogous to the one that the Tsipras team adopted when they hoped for an "honest compromise" with the Eurocracy.

The value of Lapavistas' work consists in demonstrating the need for cancelling the debt, proving the necessity of nationalizing/socializing the banks, and giving absolute priority to the question of unemployment. It also has the merit of attempting to organize all these objectives under one coherent, socio-political plan.

These critical elements of his contribution must find their way into a clear transitional program, starting from where the real conflicts are felt most sharply: over austerity and the Memorandums' concrete and cumulative effects. And this must include a socialist perspective for the complete emancipation of society.

Asserting the need to exit the euro cannot be the point of departure for such a campaign. As part of such a program and its implementation—which can only be undertaken by the large forces of the radical left, and only in the context of renewed social mobilization—exiting the euro remains a necessary step, but not a sufficient one on its own.

If that goal becomes detached from the overall framework and disassociated from the suffering of the popular classes, it may leave room for the growth of dangerous illusions as to the allegedly liberating role a national currency can play. And illusions such as these carry consequences in terms of the social bloc that remains to be constructed.

October 29, 2015

[Socialist Worker](#)

What can we learn from Greece?

19 September 2015, by **Mikael Hertoft**

The question about reform and revolution is not about the speed of the development, it is not about patience or impatience and it is not about violence.

Revolutionary socialists work to cause a break with the existing system and a break with the ruling class.

Social democratic currents all over the world and often communists too, have time after time refrained from steps that could lead to a break with the bourgeoisie.

In contrast to that, revolutionary currents understand that in a society in crisis, a break with the ruling class can be the only way to bring society forward and out of the crisis.

Such a break can only succeed if it is based on a strong public will to change and a movement to come out of the crisis.

Committees for food distribution, committees for self-reliance etc. - such structures play a role in almost all revolutions.

Reform and revolution is not about making compromises. Revolutionaries as well as reformists are making compromises from time to time. It is about standing firm and fight when the right time has come.

A substantial difference between revolutionary and reformist policies is what you see as the most important arena.

Reformist policy is seeking a negotiated compromise, and therefore the most important arena and fighting place is the negotiation room, which is often surrounded by big mystery and

secrecy. When you enter the negotiations, you do not want to show the opponents your cards, and therefore you cannot tell the people what you want.

On the contrary, revolutionary policy considers the entire society as a fighting place and sees the broad population as the active force. The political party therefore must go open out with clear policies to the population. It must be trusted when it says that it will defend social and economic interests of the broad population and the top priority must be to raise proposals suitable for mobilizing and organizing the population

Secret negotiations are favorable for the ruling financial capitalists and bureaucrats and are harmful for the workers.

We can state that Syriza in the period since they achieved governmental power let themselves caught in a trap of negotiations.

The strange referendum

The strangest point in the entire Greek development was the referendum of July 5. Here, Alexis Tsipras asked for a mandate to refuse the dictate of the EU and he was met with enthusiastic public support. A massive majority of 62 % voted no to the proposals from EU and thus Syriza in principle had a majority for more radical policies. But they jumped up like a tiger and fell down like a lamb. Less than 14 days later, Syriza bowed to EU.

Why? What was the purpose of that pantomime? You can probably see it as a last attempt to put pressure to EU. Tsipras tightened his tie and went in to Aunt Merkel with a slim attaché back containing two folders. In one was the result of the referendum, showing what the Greek people wanted. In the other a proposed agreement in Greek, German and English, which Tsipras wanted Merkel to sign - the solution of the crisis. But Merkel didn't care.

Here is another difference between revolutionaries and reformists. Revolutionary as well as reformists use activation of the population: what we on the left in the old times called "mobilizations" with an awful word. But for the reformist politician, that is just a supplementary tool to get a better position in the negotiations. For the revolutionary, the activation of the population is the center of the political line.

For the European left, this must lead to broad discussions and self-reflections. The next battlefield can be Spain with Podemos, and it is necessary that they learn from Syriza.

In Denmark, I hope that the Red-Green Alliance will learn something from this. It confirms the anti-EU position held by the party since its foundation. Everybody must learn that you should never enter negotiations without considering what to do if your counterpart says no to your demands! If we have aspirations to be in front of the defense of the social and economic interests of the working people and, further on, of the transformation of society, then we must build a party on a broad basis capable of initiating and promoting popular activities.

Time for an exit from austerity

19 September 2015, by Antonis Davanellos, Miguel Urbán Crespo, Olivier Besancenot

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, unavoidable—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 debt—upon which SYRIZA was elected in order to oppose business as usual—could have been, by and large, assimilated by European capital.

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.

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."

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.

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. Published in French at Mediapart.fr and in Spanish at Anticapitalistas.org.

Against the neocolonial consolidation of the Eurogroup - Lessons from Greece for a Europe of social and democratic rights

18 September 2015, by **Catherine Samary**

But the strategy of the leadership of Syriza - of not confronting the EU, hoping for a compromise that would be "positive" for everyone - is a failure. This is nothing compared to the discouragement that a "promemorandum mutation" of Syriza would produce - something that is not yet inevitable and will be decided in the coming weeks and months. On this level, the real question is not Grexit or not, but that of power (with or without the euro), with whom, to do what?

The reflections that follow are part of the logic of the positions synthetically

expressed by the title of the collective Attac /Copernicus work *Que faire de l'Europe: désobéir pour reconstruire* [2]: that a fight within/against the EU is possible and necessary by accepting the need to go through breaks and crises. Does the Greek crisis change this judgment? How can we prepare the breaks?

The events in that are taking place in Greece require us to take a step back to broaden the debate - at the same time as urgent solidarity activities. We must identify and denounce the neocolonial mechanisms that are at

work, without accepting that they are inevitable, far less go along with the threatening projects of a consolidation of the "historic core" of the EEC, arrogating to itself full powers against all its peripheries, which are dispossessed of rights. But where are the peripheries in globalized capitalism and in its old European heart in crisis?

Beyond the leadership of Syriza, which clearly had an optimistic view of the outcome of negotiations with the leading bodies of the EU, recent contributions emanating from Die

Linke [3] confirm that within the European Left there existed a "positive" perception of the Union, implying a closed attitude towards the positions of the left of Syriza. The recent contribution of Alexis Cukier ("reflection after the defeat") on the whole of this phase [4] goes back over these perceptions and their evolution.

But a critical approach to the EU, one that is realistic about the inevitable confrontations, also existed. And hostility to what we call austerity policies was the basis of an ongoing recomposition. The logic of a break with the leading bodies of the EU also included, and still does, a variety of positions within the radical left in Greece and elsewhere, which it is essential not to simplify. The agreement on the slogan of Syriza, "not one sacrifice for the euro" implied preparing for a possible Grexit. But for some of the radical currents, any negotiations were already a betrayal, or were at best illusory, not to say counter-productive: the renunciation of battles within the EU "for another Europe" in favour of a general line of exit then became a general orientation.

Most of the left criticisms of the choices made by the Syriza government present as "confusion" and quasi-oxymoron what made possible the victory of Syriza: the commitment to fight within the EU against austerity policies. This is to accept the idea that the implementation of this double line by the leadership of Syriza, without preparing the confrontation, was the only possible choice - whereas the internal debate in Syriza about this had not finished. But it is also to consider in general that the only "clear" choices were/would be either to stay in the euro by submitting to the Eurogroup, or Grexit (and a general line of exit). Given the politically dramatic character of the first option, it is difficult to see how not to choose the second. But this binary choice is problematic and dangerous. It tends to consolidate a "line" whose coherence should be to propose to the anti-austerity left all over Europe to fight to leave the EU - and EMU - without conducting battles within the EU, asserting that they are impossible.

For Frédéric Lordon [5], "the future of the left is being played out between these four propositions":

1. The euro radically prohibits any possible progressive politics.
2. If any further demonstration was necessary, the criminal treatment meted out to Greece over six months of brutalization (re-baptized "negotiation") proves that the enterprise of "transforming the euro", or the hypothesis that "another euro is possible" are chimeras which, by successive disillusiones, lead only to a dead-end and to political despair.
3. To abandon to the far right (which by the way will do nothing with it) any political perspective of finishing with the euro and its institutions is a political error which condemns the European left to indefinite impotence.
4. Unless it wants to continue yearning for what will not happen - "another euro" and the "social Europe" that goes with it - the rearmament of the European left therefore imperatively calls on us to imagine life after the euro.

The debate that was transcribed in *Regards*, between Etienne Balibar and Cédric Durand [6] also outlines a choice which would counterpose the trap of falling back on nationalism and that of submission to the EU. The pessimistic theorization of Cédric Durand was clearly expressed in the book that he coordinated and introduced *En finir avec l'Europe* [7] - where he advocated "putting Europe between brackets." As I wrote, contesting him in a critical article - "Finish with the EU, not with Europe", which I will develop further - he omitted in his presentation of the debates the existing positions of struggle within/against the EU, incorporating the idea that it would be necessary to provoke a crisis of this Union (positions such as those expressed by Michel Husson and Pierre Khalfa.)

Such an orientation was clearly expressed in the collective *Attac/Copernicus* book, mentioned above. For example: "It would be illusory to think we can get out of the financial, economic and social crisis

that the peoples of Europe are enduring without going through a European political crisis. Once this crisis has opened up, the left government in question would take a certain number of unilateral actions, explaining that they are intended to be extended to European level.

"It would be a question of taking unilateral cooperative measures, explaining that they are not directed against any other country, in contrast to competitive devaluations, but against the economic and political interests of the oligarchies and that the more countries that adopted them, the more effective they would be. So it is in the name of another conception of Europe that a government of social transformation will have to implement measures that break with the present rules of the Union. Disobeying the treaties would open up a confrontation with the European institutions in the name of the interests of all European peoples."

However, the road of resistance to the EU (or of a "transitional logic" of struggle against/within the European Union) was outlined for the first time in Europe by Syriza. It was a major turning point which seemed to be taking shape in the referendum. Lordon pays lip-service to it, in the article quoted above, and then quickly skips over it: what is the point of discussing how such an approach could have been developed, since he wants to hammer home that it is an "illusion" and go back to the binary choices defined above?

This binary approach is being consolidated with the present course of Tsipras, identifying any orientation of struggling "for another Europe" with a naïve "Europeanism" having a "positive" approach to the EU and believing in its reformability. A healthy and effective debate implies fully integrating all the positions which exist.

The position defended here - struggle within/against the EU - is in the logic of "not one sacrifice for the euro" that Syriza defended. It therefore differs radically from any submission to the dictates of the European authorities (which implies making a judgment on compromises that are acceptable or not, the "red lines" not to cross) - and

therefore the question of power (better to resign than to carry out the policies of the Right along with it).

This view shares with the supporters of the line of exit the criticism of any illusions about the possibility of reforming the EU without challenging frontally its institutions and treaties. So we must not be afraid of this confrontation (as it is formulated in the resolution of the Belgian LCR "trial of strength in Greece: the urgency of the strategic debate on the left" [8] of which I share the general approach - I will come back later to certain of its hypotheses), but prepare it in the best conditions possible.

Such an objective made it necessary to combine (not to oppose or ignore) certain proposals that were discussed or partially put in practice in order to consolidate the relationship of forces behind the negotiations: the perspective defended here, the Grexit, should be envisaged in the way that Michel Husson has expressed it [struggled to carve out a space for itself against the crowded field of left-of-center parties]. And Catarina is a member of the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) in Portugal, which has combined an emphasis on social mobilization and relatively successful electoral work. However, in the current moment, if Podemos in Spain appeared to some to be on the fast track to power, that trajectory has been complicated by SYRIZA's retreat and the political ambiguity of Paulo Iglesias' strategy.

Meanwhile, today in Argentina, the revolutionary groups which constitute the Left and Workers Front, as well as those outside the Front - which together won over 900,000 votes in primary elections in August—have sharply diverging views about what sort of alliances are needed and with which forces.

Indeed, it is difficult to assess such a wide range of experiences. In all the instances named above, revolutionaries felt compelled to find a way to relate to some sort of significant political dynamic of struggle from below and sought to break out of their relative ideological and social isolation, while taking on a responsibility to lead. Some of these experiences have led to better

outcomes (from a revolutionary point of view) than others, so it is not necessarily wrong to try.

My point is simply to say that the idea of building "mass workers parties" is a lot easier said than done, especially when the goal is not simply getting a party with a lot of members, but one which, as Catarina and Dan advocate, can lead toward a "rupture" with the system.

My second concern touches on Catarina and Dan's reading of socialist history and what they believe this implies for how revolutionaries should relate to "mass workers parties."

They argue that "the most relevant lesson from pre-war [First World War] social democracy for the class struggle today is that we must first build parties that will become dominant in the workers movement through the fight for reforms."

Unfortunately, they continue, "some revolutionaries have made...building small revolutionary groups...into a virtue by misinterpreting the experience of social democracy in general and the Bolsheviks in particular." What we ought to recognize, instead, is that the "Bolsheviks were not attempting to build a special 'revolutionary' party but a social-democratic one," they write.

I take a different view. I believe that Catarina and Dan are reading the Bolsheviks wrong because they counterpose "revolutionary" to "social democratic" in the context of pre-First World War Russia. Put another way, I suspect that Lenin would have been surprised to learn that he was building a party focused solely on the "fight for reforms." There's a longer discussion to be had here about exactly how and when the Bolshevik faction became the Bolshevik party, but that's not important for this particular discussion.

Historian Lars Lih does contend - and Catarina and Dan are clearly informed by his analysis—that Lenin really did not make any innovations in political or organizational party forms

distinguishable from the German SPD until after 1917. But whether one accepts Lih's contention or not—for the record, I do not—that is a long ways from claiming that Lenin simply aimed to build the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party though a narrow focus on the "fight for reforms." What matters here is that Lenin insisted, at every stage, on several practices for socialists which I believe are, in fact, "the most relevant" lesson for us today.

Put in brief terms, Lenin sought to combine the following:

1) A tenacious fight (some would go so far as to say ruthless) for a Marxist approach to all political and theoretical questions, as explained and publicized in party programs and publications;

2) An unyielding insistence that those who adopted this program and these views must build a disciplined and democratic organization -be it a self-organized faction or independent party; and

3) A creative spirit of engagement with new developments and struggles in a variety of settings—splits, fusions, trade unions, student revolts, mass strikes, nationalist rebellions by oppressed nationalities, soviets, Duma elections, etc.

At the heart of all this was the belief that the working class could and would rebel against capitalism and that the job of revolutionaries was to build a political organization designed to make that struggle more sophisticated, better organized and crystal clear on the need to overturn social relations and the states that enforced those relations. How exactly we accomplish this today and the order of the steps to be taken is a question that must be answered in practice, based on specific national contexts.

My third bone of contention with Catarina and Dan is when they argue that revolutionaries must orient to building "mass workers parties" because these projects are the "only way to keep the far left relevant to

ordinary people." I entirely agree that building some sort of broad party may well be a critical initiative for revolutionaries. However, it is obviously not the "only way" the far left can fight to win influence and a base.

Here's a short list of other ways revolutionaries may organize effectively: leading a strike; fighting against public school closures as a teacher, parent or student; organizing protests against police brutality; mobilizing against anti-immigrant or fascist bigots in the streets; building a union; publishing books, newspapers and magazines; hosting public meetings, study groups and conferences.

If these efforts can be done under the umbrella of a "mass workers party," so much the better. But historically speaking, it is very often the case that such initiatives came before any sort of larger-scale "mass workers party" unity was possible.

Consider these concrete examples: In Britain, the Socialist Workers Party's launching of the Anti-Nazi League against the rise of the far right in the 1970s and after; in the U.S., the International Socialist Organization's efforts to campaign against the racist death penalty, begun in the mid-1990s; and in Brazil, the PSTU's long-running work to build struggle-oriented union coalitions. Meanwhile, in the 2000s, various individuals connected to the Fourth International—some of them from countries where they were involved in broad left projects, and others not—played a central role in launching the World Social Forum movement.

These are some examples among many that could be cited. They are different in scale and scope, but the point is that left organizations, guided by their understanding of united front methods, were able to initiate these activities without necessarily touching on the question of "mass workers parties." The successes and difficulties of the initiatives are open to debate, but it has to at least be said that these were concrete ways of being "relevant" to at least some "ordinary people" who have a lot at stake in those struggles.

Fourth, in concluding their essay, Catarina and Dan offer three strategic ideas for further consideration.

They argue rightly, as I see it, that "broad left parties don't emerge out of thin air, or because of the goodwill of small radical or revolutionary groups: they are the product of shifts born of broader political mobilizations that existing parties were unable to tap into."

To my reading, this insight ought to actually temper their insistence on the broad party form being necessarily the main strategic focus for the left. But they are right to emphasize that this means any attempt to fill such a void must be done with eyes wide open and a sense of both the political trajectories of, and the balance of forces within, the various reformist and revolutionary elements involved.

Next, they content that the old social-democratic parties' acceptance of neoliberalism has led to their "Pasokification"—a reference to the near-total collapse of Greece's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK by its Greek initials). Prior to 2012, PASOK regularly captured around 40 percent of the vote in national elections and dominated the country's trade union federations. However, PASOK's decision to enforce Troika-directed austerity in Greece shattered the party's base, reducing it to under 5 percent of the vote in January 2015. This debacle set the stage for the rise of SYRIZA, with its previous commitment to reversing the austerity agenda.

Although under very different circumstances, the British Labour Party, which in the previous election won over two-thirds of the 59 seats in parliament from Scotland, lost all but one of those seats in elections earlier this year, with the Scottish National Party jumping from six to 56 seats in 2015.

Catarina and Dan are right to point to the potential "Pasokification" of social-democratic parties, but again, I would caution against overgeneralization. The resurgence of interest in the Labour Party based on left-winger

Jeremy Corbyn's campaign; Jean-Luc Mélenchon's split to the left of the French Socialists and his alliance with the Communist Party; whispers of an alliance between the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and Podemos; even Bernie Sanders' run inside the Democratic Party—all remind us that powerful currents of self-preservation survive within the "old" parties.

Sometimes the left can take advantage of these developments, but just as often, the worst neoliberal social-democratic—or even liberal-bourgeois, Peronist, nationalist or other—party can undergo a facelift, voluntarily or otherwise, and win back part of its base.

I want to focus on one other disagreement I have with Catarina and Dan's article: their approach to the capitalist state. They argue that the new "mass workers parties" ought to aim at taking "state power" on the understanding that if "what socialists can accomplish using the capitalist state is limited, it does have relative autonomy from business...Not recognizing this possibility means giving up hope and denigrating all reforms short of revolution."

Purely as a matter of clarity, from a Marxist (and certainly Leninist) point of view, it is better to say that a "mass party" like SYRIZA can win an election, form a government and assume office (uncomfortably and temporarily) within the apparatus of a capitalist state—but this doesn't amount to taking "state power."

This may seem pedantic, but when Catarina and Dan speak of the need for "campaigns to achieve state power and implement progressive policies," I think they are sliding over an enormously important point of theory and politics without so much as a comment. They simply ignore the long-running debate among revolutionaries about whether the capitalist state can be reformed or must be overturned—"smashed," [as Marx and Lenin liked to say](#)—and replaced with a system of democratically run workers councils.

The more immediate question is this:

Can we say that SYRIZA really assumed "state power?" Haven't the last eight months gone to show that Tsipras, as long as he accepted the rules of the Greek state and the broader European state apparatus, was not really in power at all? In Athens today, what is striking is that the only "relative autonomy" the capitalist state seems to enjoy is its autonomy from the democratic will of the working class. Didn't Tsipras' betrayal of the July 5 referendum demonstrate that?

If Catarina and Dan agree with that point, then I want to ask them about their formulation of the question. Why should stressing, as I think we ought to do, the extremely tight bonds between the capitalist state and the bourgeoisie—as opposed to sections of the state apparatus enjoying relative autonomy from this or that section of private capital—prevent revolutionaries from fighting for concessions from an enemy class and the state mechanisms and organisms by which it guarantees its rule?

Far from "denigrating" the strategy of mobilizing workers and the oppressed to demand rights and concessions from a capitalist state, the dialectic of reform and revolution, as classically advanced by Rosa Luxemburg, remains central to understanding any

confrontation with capitalism. Radical parties may, under certain conditions, even win a majority in parliament based on a commitment to break with austerity, but this then forces a showdown in the streets, factories, schools and hospitals. In any case, this ought not be seen as a "typical pattern," but [a question of potential, and not necessary, strategy](#) .

So where does that leave us? I believe that Catarina and Dan are absolutely right to criticize any rigid rejection of revolutionaries initiating or joining projects which bring different currents of the left together in attempts to challenge neoliberalism and social democracy from the left. We agree that a dual focus—on class struggle and social mobilization on the one hand, and electoral contests on the other—can and ought to be mutually reinforcing. And we agree that creating "mass workers parties," or even relatively large organizations, which can begin to cross over from criticism to social force, offer certain strategic advantages.

But I think these points of agreement co-exist with a disagreement that building "mass workers parties" is the "only viable path toward an eventual rupture with not just austerity but capitalism itself." When examining all the different national contexts in

which such a strategy would have to be applied, I think the circumstances simply don't exist in each one for initiating or joining such efforts.

Moreover, I don't believe efforts of the left that don't involve relating to or launching a broad left party formation in some form are doomed to irrelevance. And I think Catarina and Dan's analysis doesn't give sufficient thought to another aspect of the organization project of the revolutionary left—how to train, sustain and organizationally knit together succeeding generations of people drawn to revolutionary politics. In short, there is no need to counterpose recruiting members to a socialist project in the ones and twos with thinking about when it makes sense to launch larger initiatives—in fact, in today's world, I believe the two must be closely linked.

If we agree on the need to learn from the most successful examples of these new projects, Popular Unity in Greece chief among these, then I hope this exchange has clarified where we differ, even if sharply—not in order to settle academic disputes, but in the interest of comradely debate, mutual respect and international solidarity.

September 17, 2015

[Socialist Worker](#)

Awakening the European Left

17 September 2015, by [Costas Lapavitsas](#), [Sebastian Budgen](#)

In the conversation below, building on his [March interview with Jacobin](#) , Lapavitsas looks back at the tumultuous events of the past year, evaluates Popular Unity's prospects going forward, and discusses what a Grexit from below would look like.

It's been an intense period since we last spoke, marked by several major events. The breakdown of negotiations, the call by Tsipras for a referendum, and then effectively the day after the referendum, a capitulation to the

eurogroup. Was this sequence a surprise to you, how do you analyze what happened?

These were obviously very dense historical events, highly accelerated. I'm sure that people will keep talking about them in the future, and they will also look for more evidence, because there is an element of obscurity about them, we don't know exactly what happened.

What I could do right now is tell you how I experienced them and how they feel at the moment.

I supported Syriza in good faith, fielded elections under its banner, and fought for the success of its radical program. The call for a referendum by Tsipras looked like a clear decision by the leadership to push the radical line to the end.

I and many others were enthused by it, and the support by the poorest part of the population was breathtaking.

So you weren't surprised by the decision?

I was very surprised by the decision. It seemed like a very determined act that was going to take Greek politics to the point of no return. I had hoped for such a development previously but the leadership never gave me much confidence that it was going to do it.

Then Tsipras called for a referendum and it seemed that we were indeed heading for a radical break. The response by the popular strata was remarkable, and the referendum result was astounding in the face of naked scaremongering. It appeared that important events were about to take place in Greece and more generally.

Important events did take place but, of course, not in the direction I had hoped for. The complete sellout that followed was breathtaking.

It indicated that the leadership of Syriza had called for the referendum without strategic determination, it was just a tactical move.

You think they called for the referendum thinking they were not going to win it, or that they would win it and it would be used as leverage for capitulation?

They certainly did not expect to win it with a thumping majority. That I can tell you. What the precise calculation was I don't know and it doesn't really matter. But I can tell you they did not expect to win it quite in that way.

It was a big shock, I'm sure, to them and to others as well. The vast sellout that followed proved that the

referendum was just tactics and settled the discussion about the nature and the future of Syriza.

Even so, the referendum might well prove to be a strategic act in practice because the resounding victory of "No" has given to the radical left a legitimizing basis. It is because of the "No" in the referendum that we exist as a political force.

But, given that what was accepted by Syriza the day after was worse than what was being voted on anyway, how does it make any sense from Tsipras's perspective? Was it simply because the leadership got blindsided by the results and panicked? Or was it because they were really expecting to use the results of the referendum to negotiate some substantial improvements?

Tsipras made a huge mistake by calling for a referendum, that's clear. But I think that you need to move into the realm of psychology to understand the decision-making by the Syriza leadership at that point.

I don't really know why they did it. I think that rationality was abandoned by that group of people a long time ago. They live in their own world and believe in their own fictions. I can't tell what the calculation was behind the referendum and how they meant to use it.

It's also possible that they panicked when the result presented itself, realizing the enormous difficulties in dealing with it and turning the "No" into a "Yes". I don't know what calculations they made and to be honest it doesn't really matter.

You must have thought about it though?

I think that what is important is not the petty calculations about the referendum but what the actual turnout shows about the leadership. For a long time many of us had been in two minds whether the leadership, particularly Alexis Tsipras, had some mettle in it.

Which way would Tsipras jump when the real class issues were put on the table? Until the week after the

referendum, the answer was still in the balance. Tsipras had managed to keep everyone guessing, there was an element of doubt, which meant that people couldn't decide for sure what this guy would do when the critical political and social dilemmas emerged sharply.

The week after the referendum the question was answered. Tsipras didn't have the mettle. He didn't have what leaders of the Left are expected to have when confronted by ruthless class interest. He sided with the ruling class.

So apart from the meeting he had with the representatives of the opposition parties, one of his first acts was to replace Yanis Varoufakis as finance minister with Euclid Tsakalotos. How would you characterize both those as economists and political actors, contrasting them, leaving aside the celebrity magazine rubbish?

The act of replacing Varoufakis with Tsakalotos, in hindsight, was the first indication that the "No" of the referendum was not going to be a "No" in practice. It's true that Varoufakis had had some trouble in conducting the negotiations and being accepted by the lenders.

But his replacement was much more than that. Tsipras was basically telling us, "I'm not going to go the way of the No".

When I look more closely at Varoufakis and Tsakalotos, I have to say that both are disappointing, though for different reasons. Varoufakis has made hundreds of different declarations during this crisis and it's hard to know what he truly believes in.

I'm far from the only person who thinks that. It's hard to know what is the opinion of Yanis Varoufakis is on any particular subject. That's widely perceived in Greece. It is, of course, true that he has had an incredibly difficult job. But it is hard to see the guiding principle in the way in which he handled the job.

Tsakalotos is made of different stuff. He has distanced himself from

Varoufakis and never played the media in the same way. However, deep down, Tsakalotos is even more disappointing than Varoufakis because he has made an enormous compromise.

Unlike Varoufakis, it was always clear what Tsakalotos believed in: a kind of redistributive and transnational reformism within the European Union, that's what he has always argued for. His tragedy is that the bailout deal he has personally signed allows for no such reformism, and he knows it.

The biggest surrender, the greatest loss of credibility, was actually made by Tsakalotos. He now finds himself in a pitiful moral position, which perfectly sums up the conservative transformation of Syriza and the abandonment of left-wing beliefs.

But, in theoretical terms, he's more consistently a Marxist than Varoufakis, or not?

Not really. Both of them have, of course, read and understand Marx as well as being highly-trained economists. But I wouldn't call Tsakalotos a consistent Marxist. Certainly he appreciates Marx, he understands the categories, there's no question of that.

But his preference was always for a kind of redistributive reform of the capitalist economy within the confines of the European Union and the European Monetary Union that allowed for none of Marx's inherent radicalism. And now he has abandoned even that vision.

It's true what you say about Varoufakis. It's amazing that he can speak so much, give so many interviews, and publish so much on his blog and still be so difficult to read as a person. His voting record on the agreement itself is very erratic. He abstained first – he wasn't present for the first vote; he voted against the agreement for the second vote; and then he voted for it at the third vote. And what we've seen from outside Greece is that he's blowing hot and cold about both Tsipras and Popular Unity. Now he's launched this rather idiosyncratic idea of this

"European network". Can you offer any insight on what his game plan, if there is one, might be or does he just want to be the center of media attention?

I don't think there is a game plan, to be honest. Yanis Varoufakis has had an incredible career, he's become a global celebrity on the back of Syriza success. That's finished, it's irretrievably gone. All the main actors of this period will be judged very harshly by history because it has been a dramatic failure.

Varoufakis is now, in my reading, trying to rescue his political career, trying to find a new political role for himself in the coming period. But his stock is not high among the Greek left, and internationally there is a lack of trust in what he says. This idea of this [European network](#), or party, will not go very far, I think.

Now, of course, one thing that did come out in the aftermath of this sequence was his "revelations" of his Plan B which he had been working on which involved a plan to hack illegally into the tax records of the Greek state using an external agency and then use this information to be able to produce a parallel payments system in the case of an exit from the euro. First of all, were you aware of this at the time, and also what you think of this "plan B" (or "plan X" as he calls it)?

Look, this is not serious. That's not what anyone would understand as a plan to change the currency of Greece. Perhaps an idea of this kind was floated, some discussions were had, something was drafted. I never saw any of that, but I'm prepared to say that a brief outline was drafted.

Yet, there was no plan and I can prove it. Yanis Varoufakis has himself uploaded on his blog a communication by Jamie Galbraith in which Jamie mentions a phone call to me that took place well after these events were over. Now, Jamie was very closely involved with Yanis at all stages, he was one of his close confidants, he travelled to Greece very frequently.

He states explicitly – as he also told

me in that single phone call – that there never was a Plan B. Their group had never formulated a Plan B. In fact he called me to check whether I had developed a plan because they knew that I had been working on these ideas on my own and quite separately from anything that official Syriza was doing.

There never was a serious Plan B by the Syriza leadership and the reason is that they were never seriously interested in having one. To have a Plan B, you have to understand the class politics of the monetary union and the European Union, you have to be prepared for acute class struggle and you have to prepare the people for conflict.

Such a plan cannot be produced in an evening. It's impossible. Moreover, it requires a leadership that has some steel in its backbone, and I'm afraid that the Syriza leadership has none.

Would you say that one of the weaknesses of the Left Platform as well was that the struggle over a Plan B was kept as an internal party concern and it wasn't taken outside the party, and there wasn't much popular pedagogy about a Plan B, outside of the inner circles as it were? That allowed for a certain number of accusations to be thrown at people around the Left Platform that they were the "plot for the drachma", that they were obsessed with the currency question at the expense of everything else (and the media added rumors about threats to arrest the governor of the national bank and take over the gold reserves and whatnot).

Do you think, retrospectively, that there was a certain kind of legitimism, that all these issues were kept within the party and not taken outside to an open national debate about these questions?

I would say two things about the Left Platform and how it handled this issue. First, it was extremely difficult to raise the question of the Plan B for a very long time. Cast your mind back to January, February, March, April, even much of May: Syriza had enormous domestic support and great

international support.

It was practically impossible for a small opposition group within the party to come out openly with arguments and positions about a Plan B that contradicted the main thrust of the leadership.

Second, and possibly in hindsight, during the last couple months of the Syriza government the Left Platform could have been bolder, braver, more decisive, about pushing these alternative ideas into the public domain. It could have been more determined in coming out with documents, making points, forcing a critical debate about the actions of the leadership.

Not doing so was a mistake and we are paying the price right now because people are turning around and asking "Where were you then?" It's not an entirely fair criticism, of course, because the Left Platform had always registered its misgivings, but there it is.

In my case, moreover, it is even stronger than that. I've never been a member of the Left Platform formally but I've been extremely close to it. Throughout this period I've always registered publicly my criticisms of what the Syriza government was doing, usually at some personal cost.

But perhaps I, like the rest of us, could have been even more forthcoming. The documents were there, the problems of the official line were clearer and clearer . . . in the end, we didn't and we have to live with that.

So the current sequence consists of a left split away from Syriza to create the new organization of Popular Unity, elections being called for September, a certain amount of differentiation within the ranks of Syriza with figures such as Zoe Konstantopoulou announcing their support for Popular Unity, while other sections perhaps more formally close to the Left Platform allying themselves with the leadership of Syriza.

Finally, some talk at least of a national unity government between Syriza and the centrist parties if, as is likely,

Syriza does not have an absolute majority.

The new configuration of Greek politics is very much a work in progress. It's impossible to sum it up at this stage, it's just begun. I can tell you that the split was forced by the Syriza leadership by calling an election when they had other options which they had aired for a bit but in the end decided the risks were too great and abandoned them. They went for an election in the hope that they would win it, isolate the left of Syriza and live happily ever after in the promised land of the new bailout.

The Left Platform worked out what was happening and acted very rapidly as soon as it became clear that the leadership would call an election. It was clear that the Left Platform could not possibly fight the election as a part of a Syriza that had signed up to the new bailout because that would have meant abandoning every principle, every programmatic statement, everything it had stood for. That forced the issue: a new political formation was created, Popular Unity.

Popular Unity is not a party and I don't think it is going to become one. It was conceived initially "and basically remains" an anti-bailout front that accepts all individuals and bodies which want to work for a consistent anti-bailout strategy.

What makes it different to Syriza is, first, its credibility since its MPs actually said "No" in Parliament and, second, its anti-bailout program which states clearly that implementing an alternative path for Greece is impossible without exiting the monetary union.

For Popular Unity the introduction of a new national currency is a means of implementing the radical program the country needs.

Naturally, Popular Unity has turned first to the left and addressed the small parties of the extra-parliamentary left that have shared part of its approach for a long time. This fact has pluses and minuses.

The plus is that there are very many excellent people in the extra-

parliamentary left which could make strong contributions to both the political practice and the program of Popular Unity. The minus is the well-known baggage of the extra-parliamentary left: factionalism, looking inwards and, in the case of Greece, "know-all-ism", which could actually be found throughout the Greek political spectrum.

So Popular Unity is a work in progress, since it is a very task to marry all these organizations and currents within the Left. It's a very dynamic mix and, like all dynamic mixes, it could potentially fall apart, or even explode.

At the same time, Popular Unity has managed to attract quite a few small organizations and individuals that come from the other direction of the political spectrum. It is not true that it is simply an alliance of left fragments.

We have a significant number of people "individuals mostly but also some small organizations" that do not come from the Left. They understand the importance of saying "No" to the policies of the bailout and the need for a national currency. They have been welcomed with open arms.

So including your right wing "sovereigntist" types, like ANEL?

Individuals from ANEL but, of course, not the party itself. I don't think there's any problem with that. This is a longstanding left-wing tradition. The Bolsheviks in Soviet Russia did the same thing after the revolution.

If the individuals have a consistent and honorable track record on the key issues and they're serious about their commitment to the political direction of the Popular Unity, that's fine.

The reason I'm asking the question is that, in France, this has taken a rather sharp form in the past few days. Jacques Sapir "a former student of Charles Bettelheim and one of the leading left economists, who is quite close to your position on the euro" followed Stefano Fassina's [22] call for the creation of what he describes as "an alliance of national liberation committees"

against the euro and an end to "sectarian" refusals to create alliances with right-wing sovereigntist groups and with the National Front (who have of course cited Sapir and others in their anti-euro propaganda). What do you think about that?

Yes, I'm aware of that and I really don't know what came over Sapir, whom I've known for a long time. I can only explain it as a (I hope) temporary but very major lapse of some sort. I'm truly sorry about it. It's not a good development.

I would obviously differentiate between Stefano Fassina and Marine Le Pen. I think that the French and other European anti-euro and eurosceptic left forces should have nothing to do with the organized extreme right and certainly the fascist right.

They should build Chinese walls between them, and should refuse any kind of give-and-take with those people. The call that Sapir has made is a very bad mistake and the kind of thing that ruins one's political standing forever.

In the case of Greece, I hasten to add, things are a bit different. First, ANEL are not fascists and in any case Popular Unity has no truck with them as a party. Second, and more to the point, the Greek fascists, Golden Dawn, are actually turning tail on the question of the euro, contrary to what the rest of the European extreme right appears to be doing.

They are certainly talking about "National Production," I presume in corporatist form, which is what extreme rightists and fascists always do, but it is somehow going to happen in Greece without changing the national currency.

This is obviously nonsense, and it's quite interesting to remember that they used to make a lot of noise about the euro. In any case, they are now following a different line compared to the European extreme right, which makes life a lot easier for us.

Popular Unity are the only body in Greek politics which openly and

clearly says that a radical program for Greece could not be implemented without a national currency. I would like to stress that the Communist Party is also not very brave on this issue, and is actually playing some shameful politics.

Indeed, the CP is fudging the issue in quite a unique way that would have been amusing, if it was not so bad. Presumably, the question of the euro will resolve itself in the way every other major social issue will resolve itself, namely with the rise of workers' power, perhaps after a socialist revolution.

In the meantime, apparently, exiting the EMU could be disastrous for workers, and so people should grit their teeth within the EMU and fight for socialism, which will eventually solve everything. This argument is sad not only because it is incoherent but also because the CP has very important forces that could be brought to bear in the struggles that lie ahead.

So what do you think are the prospects for Popular Unity? That all bets are off and anything could happen between now and the election, or that it has to admit it won't be forming the next government and therefore will have to play a different role, in opposition, to whatever government is formed?

I think you would have to be living on a different planet to believe that Popular Unity could form the next government in Greece. Forming a new government on the 21st of September is not what Popular Unity is about.

What really would be a great success would be to for Popular Unity to emerge as the third largest party in Greek politics, with a significant proportion of the votes, possibly in double digits. That would indicate a strong dynamic that could lead ultimately to power. After all, it would make no sense at all for Popular Unity to aim to be a party of opposition. It should target power in the short term.

The question is whether it will achieve this aim in the forthcoming election, and the evidence is very mixed. The first week or two after its formation

were generally chaotic. People were confused, asking what was going on, and what exactly is Popular Unity? This is quite natural. In politics you don't gain visibility and name recognition just because you appear on the scene.

In addition, during those early weeks, there have been enormous organizational problems – no institutional structure, no mechanisms and procedures, nothing. That has had an impact on democratic processes within the organization, and many key decisions have had to be made on an ad hoc basis. All that has been very difficult and many mistakes have been made, I have to say.

The critical period for Popular Unity will be the last two weeks before the election. It must do two things. First, come out with a clear programmatic statement that would help it become more visible. Working people want to be able to make a choice and come to a decision on a strong basis.

Second, make well-known people its public face, and thus gain credibility among the electorate in the little time that is left. I think that it has an excellent opportunity to become a decisive force in Greek politics, but it will depend very much on its own actions, on how it delivers in practice.

One of the immediate consequences of a good result for Popular Unity would be to deprive Syriza of an absolute majority and then they will have to choose coalition partners. Most likely, they will look to their right but, depending on how the chips fall, an alliance with Popular Unity may be their only option for staying in government. What would be the red lines of such a discussion?

Let me first of all say the reason why Syriza will probably not have a majority, never mind form a government by itself, is not Popular Unity, but the complete sellout by its leadership, which is beginning to be understood by the electorate very, very widely and is being registered in the polls.

It's not Popular Unity that is depriving Syriza of a majority but the astounding

fact that a party of the Left that has promised so much has delivered practically nothing and in the end actually adopted wholesale the program of the opposition! When a party “especially of the Left” loses credibility in that way, it never really regains it.

Don't forget that Syriza exploded in the polls out of nothing, it has never had strong social and organizational foundations. It has been said many times that it could implode just as fast, and its sellout might well indicate that this process has started. That, however, leaves a practical political problem after the election. If Syriza can't form a government by itself, what will happen?

There are five main parties in parliament at the moment: Syriza, ANEL, New Democracy, which is the traditional party of the right, Pasok, which is the old social-democratic party, and To Potami, a new outfit that God knows what it stands for but which somehow positions itself as center-left.

All these parties have exactly the same program for the country, namely the new bailout program. You could not put a sheet of paper between them in that regard, and their only differences are about how best to implement the bailout.

It is easy to see, then, that after the election, no matter what these parties are saying now, there could be alliances among them to form government. It wouldn't surprise me at all if a government was actually formed between Syriza and New Democracy.

For, what are the programmatic differences between them? Such a government would obviously be a political Frankenstein and it wouldn't survive for very long because the bailout program is disastrous, but it might still come to pass. Similarly, it would surprise me even less if Syriza formed a coalition government with Pasok and To Potami.

Something like that will probably materialize, which would obviously be shameful for Syriza supporters and members, but such is such becomes

the life of politics when a sellout has been made.

For Popular Unity, if the issue of alliances came to the table, it should be against any kind of alliance with a party that has adopted a pro-bailout position. Syriza is beyond the pale, because its program is now the bailout.

I have no trust at all in its leadership and, as far as I'm concerned, Syriza is finished for the Left. Of course, not its members, voters, and supporters, but its leadership is dead and buried for the Left.

An alliance between Syriza and Popular Unity would also be a political Frankenstein and I wouldn't want to be around to witness it.

And you think that view is shared among Popular Unity leadership?

I would be very surprised if it wasn't shared. I would be very surprised.

One of the things that has emerged out of this shakeup is a certain realignment among the European left. We mentioned the declarations by Stefano Fassina. Jean-Luc Mélenchon as well has terminated his solidarity with Tsipras and welcomed the formation of Popular Unity and is now agitating for a European-wide Plan B conference with Oskar Lafontaine [23]. What do you think of those proposals and do they herald a realignment of the European left, with a greater clarity about the limitations of the European Union and EMU?

Yes, I think they do herald a new beginning, the reawakening of the European left from a very long slumber. I think the European left went on some kind of bad trip for several decades. It lost its bearings, it adopted lock, stock and barrel arguments that have essentially emanated from the ruling class.

It came to believe that the forms of political and other integration at the European level “the European Union, the monetary union” were somehow inherently progressive and what the Left needed to do was to

improve them. It's almost as if the Left lost all memory of its historical past, of its place in European politics, its role in the history of Europe.

During this period it has been incredibly difficult to say to people, look, these institutions have been created by the capitalist class, they are not inherently good, we have to be critical of their very existence and not merely arguing about the sub-clauses of legislation.

It has been incredibly difficult, above all, to put alternative proposals on the table that disputed the existence of these institutions from a left-wing standpoint.

The experience of Syriza has shaken these Europeanist beliefs to the core. At long last, the Left of Europe, the leading radical thinkers and politicians in Europe, have begun to see what's going on.

I should hasten to add that [Oskar Lafontaine](#) has been fully aware of the direction taken by the monetary union long before Syriza sold the pass. Yet, it's a very important development that others have now come to a similar conclusion. It is very hopeful.

Still, I don't know whether we need a Europe-wide conference for a Plan B. I think more work needs to be done before that. The French left, the Spanish left, and especially the German left, need to come out with their own proposals about how to restructure the monetary system of Europe and what to do about the EU.

As socialists we don't want simply to go back to a system of competing national currencies. Our cornerstone is internationalism, but a kind of internationalism that is not contingent either on the European Union or on the European Monetary Union.

It is of paramount importance to have contributions that reflect national specificities on these questions. We've had proposals from Greece, but for a Europe-wide conference for a Plan B we would need a lot more from other countries. Holding a conference before such work has been done would be jumping the gun.

Perhaps I could draw a useful parallel

with the [Zimmerwald Conference](#) following the outbreak of First World War. In some ways, what we see right now is the emergence of a Greek Zimmerwald left which might be a first step in forming a Europe-wide Zimmerwald left.

Syriza was actually a political front with organizations holding many types of beliefs, and it fought elections on the basis of achieving radical change while remaining within the EU and the EMU, and even changing those! This project has, of course, proved impossible and a split has occurred within Syriza.

Popular Unity now argues that to implement a radical program it is necessary to reintroduce a national currency and to confront directly the EU. It is in favor of European solidarity, but on a different footing. This is a kind of Zimmerwald moment for the Greek left, and it might prove the beginning of a Europe-wide Zimmerwald left.

Holding a Europe-wide congress for a Plan B might be the moment when such a left would materialize, bringing again the promise of a socialist future. Let's prepare for it.

You have spent most of your adult life in the UK, I believe. So, you must be as surprised as the rest of us to see this thing which we had all thought dead and buried a long time ago, namely the Labour left, revived in old and yet new form around Jeremy Corbyn. As we know, the British Labour left has a complicated and not very happy relationship with the European debates: first of all opposing entry into the Common Market, but on a rather nationalist basis, and then switching over with many of the unions and so on into supporting the European Union as a sort of battered shield against Thatcherism and the Conservative Party's policies.

Now we see this new phenomenon around Corbyn, we see some journalists like Owen Jones talking about a "Lexit," a left-wing exit from at least the monetary union for those countries involved. Is there a chance finally, do you think, of shifting the

terrain of the debate in the UK to a more healthy basis around Corbyn and the Left? Corbyn himself isn't particularly critical of the EU but there is the referendum coming up in the UK and we all thought it would be dominated by UKIP and the right wing forces. What do you think, from a sort of insider-outsider perspective?

I think Jeremy Corbyn represents a very hopeful development. First of all, his rise is a nice surprise, which is a very rare thing in politics. It's good to see that the Left in Labour is not dead yet, there's still life in it.

When I first came to Britain in the 1970s, the Labour left was very much alive and parts of it would not be out of place in a variety of Communist parties across continental Europe. Many of its people were very strong working-class Marxists. It then withered away and British politics became all the poorer for it, not to mention much duller.

But British society has continued to look for something fresh and new that would reject the dreary old neoliberal stuff peddled by the mass media and so on. The social radicalism that is so manifest in Britain setting it apart from other European countries is searching for political radicalism.

It is apparent that this radicalism must have an integral eurosceptic component that would be sharply distinct from UKIP and the rest.

Ed Miliband, despite his own personal predilections, never succeeded in providing an answer, although I see that some of his people are very active in the Corbyn campaign, so clearly there is some continuity.

For some reason that I don't really understand, Jeremy Corbyn appears to have touched a sensitive spot, including among the youth. Mysterious are the ways of British politics.

Be that as it may, it represents a great opportunity, but it would result in something sustainable only if the eurosceptic terrain is appropriated by left-wing radicalism. Britain needs a set of policies that would restructure the economy and bring about a deep

redistribution of income and wealth, while being critical of the very existence of the EMU and the EU.

It seems to me that only on that basis could promising and interesting things happen in British politics. Britain has a lot to offer to the rest of Europe in this regard because it has kept out of the disaster of monetary union, and the British people do not suffer from the blind Europeanism that one often finds in continental Europe. I do not wish to denigrate the baleful impact of British parochialism but, believe me, ardent Europeanism could be worse.

It's not clear to me whether Corbyn has either sufficient leadership vision, or the mental and theoretical makeup to deliver what is necessary. But some of the people in his team are very good "top notch" and I'm sure that they could jointly deliver the jolt that British politics needs.

I would ask them to look more closely at Greece because they can learn from its experience and strengthen their case, but they would have steer well clear of Syriza, which expresses nothing progressive any more.

It's possible to accept and agree with you entirely that the questions of the currency and monetary union are the key link in the chain in the present conjuncture without accepting necessarily that it is the only question of importance in Greek politics or European politics. And there have been a certain number of criticisms of you from the left that the focus and the way you presented your arguments for Grexit don't clearly articulate Grexit to anything that would be associated with some kind of left, or socialist, or emancipatory program.

Of course, one response is that this is an emergency program and we can talk about these other questions later (although we know that stageism is a problem in politics). And another response would be to say that yes, Costas Lapavistas was arguing this in a context where he was in Syriza and the key question was try to legitimate the debate around Plan B on a national level and not just talk to

people on the Left, but now the lines have moved.

And I think there still is a question in some people's minds that says, ok, we agree with Grexit, but what is the connection between Grexit and positive social change? Your argument up until now has been it's the necessary but not sufficient condition, which is fine, but then should it not be articulated to other things, other demands, other processes, that are not deferred to some indefinite horizon?

Let me say that I don't accept this criticism. I don't accept any part of it, and it's not because I'm stubborn. Much of this criticism still simply doesn't get what is happening in Europe. Sorry to be so brutal and upfront but it's the reality.

From the very first moment, back in 2010, when I spoke about Grexit, I said that there could be two types of exit, progressive and conservative. Exit could certainly happen in a conservative way, they could even roll the tanks out. But I have always said that this has nothing to do with the Left, whose aim must be to achieve progressive exit.

A key point in this respect is that the monetary union and the currency are a focal point of class conflict in Greece and in a lot of other European countries. Class politics is integral to the euro debate.

The Left should aim to change the currency not because it has a fetish about money, but because it appreciates that money is the pinnacle of a set of institutions representing class and, the case of the euro, national domination. To change the currency there would have to be class struggle that would alter these institutions and implement social change.

This is at core an argument about the rebirth of the Left in Europe and the re-founding of socialism for the 21st century. That has always been the project for me.

Changing the currency in Greece and altering the monetary arrangements of Europe would require so many things

to be changed that it would offer the chance of profound social transformation in favour of labor and against capital.

To be more specific, to change the currency, it would be necessary to have a debt write-off. But a debt write-off is a class question par excellence as well as bringing to the fore the question of dominant and subordinate countries in Europe.

To change the currency, it would also be necessary to lift austerity. But lifting austerity means attacking finance capital and reversing financialization in a most decisive way. It also means altering the direction of fiscal policy to serve the interests of the working people by reducing unemployment. These are class issues again.

To change the currency, it would further be necessary to nationalize the banks and put them under proper public administration, while implementing a debt write-off for household and business debts. This is again a class issue.

To change the currency, not least, would require a development program for Greece that would redirect development away from the problematic path of financialization and would strengthen agricultural and industrial production. That again is a matter of class struggle that ought to be resolved in the interests of labor.

To change the currency, finally, it would be necessary to transform the state to allow intervention in the economy in the interests of labor, while strengthening democratic rights.

More broadly, for a progressive change of the currency, it would be necessary to create a new set of relations among European powers that would move beyond the confines of the essentially diseased European Union.

Europe needs new monetary relations that are not based on competition among nations but nor do they reproduce the diseased practices of the monetary union. That would provide a fresh basis for economic and

social solidarity in Europe.

Okay but there's one thing you missed in that list of measures. It could be criticized as a statist, top down conception of what a socialist path would be. And you've been attacked by people in, for example, the Argentinean left who say, "We had devaluation and currency changes here which led to social and political disaster".

Don't you think, now you're free from defending the Syriza perspective and are now in Popular Unity, there is more room to talk about self-organization, self-emancipation, self-activity of workers and popular classes in Greece and not just the question of the state acting in those interests? Don't you think a more interesting dialectic could be sketched out now that you don't have to defend the position of Syriza as a whole?

Well, I couldn't agree with you more.

But you don't spell it out. You seem to think it's too obvious to mention.

Let me spell it out now, then. I personally and the people I've collaborated with have always argued for progressive exit to happen with explicit and active popular participation.

We need popular participation for progressive exit because we need people to be aware of what's happening, to support it, to form collective bodies of their own, and to be active in implementing the change.

For me that is not a matter of dispute. I belong to a tradition that has always argued for socialism from below. I haven't changed my mind on that. We could never have socialism from the top.

But, having said that, we still have an important dimension here that has to do with the nature of money. You see, money is a very peculiar phenomenon that crystallizes the spirit of capitalism in unexpected ways.

With money, you can have local and particularistic versions of it that would allow for social solidarity, transcending markets, strengthening

the spirit of cohesion and community. These are very good things and elements of them could be found in "green" money, "time" money, and so on. But, with money, there is also the overarching, single entity that keeps the market together. The nexus rerum, as Marx said, the glue that also keeps the capitalist society together.

There is no replacing that function of money in a simple way, or in any way at all short of transforming capitalist society altogether. It follows that we need monetary solutions that would

apply to society as a whole, and this means at the level of the state. They could never happen merely at the level of the community, or of the local.

In short, we certainly need initiatives about exiting the euro that would involve the grassroots, but they must also happen at the level of society as a whole, of the state, otherwise the problem would never be solved.

To be specific, we need a new central bank; we need a new foreign exchange policy; we need a new reserve policy. These could never be produced at the

level of a community. So the Left needs to marry the two dimensions. But then this has always been a key task for socialists.

In Europe today, a continent that is being suffocated by a diseased monetary system, we have to answer it in practice, we have to hack a path through the conceptual and practical undergrowth.

September 9

[Jacobin](#)

The capitulation of Tsipras leadership and the role of 'left europeanism'

16 September 2015, by Alan Thornett

Syriza has split and new elections have been called for September 20. A major recomposition is taking place on the Greek left. A new formation, Popular Unity (PU) has been created based around the former Left Platform (and Red Network) of Syriza that is carrying forward the banner of opposition to austerity in Greece.

The capitulation has created a dangerous situation for the people of Greece. There is a real danger that Syriza could fail to be the biggest party and the rightwing could be back in control. Currently Syriza and New Democracy are neck in the polls and Golden Dawn will seek to benefit. Tsipras has not ruled out a coalition with PASOK if he fails to form a government in any other way.

Internationally positions on the capitulation are being adopted. The leadership of De Linke in Germany and Podemos in Spain, for example, are supporting Tsipras although they have significant minorities supporting PU. In fact the whole De Linke organisation in the North Rhine-Westfalia Lander has refused to support the position.

Most significantly a number of leading figures of the European left including Mélenchon, Zoe Konstantopoulou, Oskar Lafontaine, and Yanis Varoufakis are calling for a summit of the European left to discuss a plan B for Europe in the wake of the climbdown.

The scale of the capitulation

A number of crucial questions are raised by this capitulation: Was there a viable alternative? What were the key political factors which led to the capitulation? Where does this leave the perspective of building broad left parties? Do we still call for governments of the anti-austerity left? Is it possible to oppose austerity and stay in the Eurozone? What does this say about the role of left Europeanism? Where does this leave the issue of a workers government? Did Syriza receive adequate support from the European left whilst in office?

The draconian terms attached to the deal were and are far worse than

those already rejected by a remarkable 61% majority vote in the referendum on July 5 a vote which could hardly have been a clearer rejection of the politics and economics of austerity pursued by previous PASOK and New Democracy (ND) governments with such disastrous results. In fact the vote was more than 61% in the working class districts and amongst young people even up to 90%.

The result moreover was in the face of ferocious scaremongering by the media and the elites. Whether it was the result that Tsipras wanted is hard to tell.

What is clear is that his subsequent capitulation was and is a deeply humiliating climb down that will inflict untold suffering and humiliation on the people of Greece for many years. In fact it went beyond humiliation. It was a massive attack on democracy and meant that the Greek government had surrendered the right to run the country.

It was a defeat not only for the Greek working class and the Greek left but for the European movement and the

European left” particularly in countries where there is a strong level of resistance.

It meant that the clearly expressed will of the people was subverted by the dictate of the EU elites and the European Central Bank (ECB), which starved the Greek banks of money.

Only days earlier at the mass rally, on the Friday before the referendum (an event that greatly strengthened the No vote), Tsipras had hinted that he and his government would resign if the vote went for Yes” since he was not prepared to introduce austerity. “There are plenty prepared to do that” he said, “but it will not be me”.

The reaction of the left inside Syriza to the capitulation

To say that the deal was a dramatic reversal of Syriza’s recent history is an understatement. In 2012 Syriza had stood on a platform that also included the repudiation of the memorandum and the restoration of the cuts, the socialisation of the banks and major industries, the restoration of the minimum wage and collective agreements, and a debt audit to prepare for a moratorium on repayments.

When it was elected to office in January of this year, it was the most left wing government in Europe in the post war period. It refused to contemplate any kind of coalition (or national government) with any pro-austerity party (including PASOK) and reaffirmed its total opposition to austerity.

It had a coalition arrangement with the right-wing but anti-austerity ANEL party which was unsupportable but not a major factor in the situation. It was a party with a democratic structure and minority rights and (consequently) had a large and organised left inside it” in the shape of the Left Platform and the Red Network” that had almost a third of the votes at the last party conference.

It was no surprise, therefore, that the capitulation split Syriza wide

open” both in Parliament and in the party itself. In Parliament the deal was only adopted with the support of the pro-austerity opposition parties” including PASOK and the center right New Democracy (ND). 37 Syriza MP (mostly of the Left Platform) voted against the Memorandum and 7 more abstained. Just before the vote 109 Central Committee members signed a letter expressing their opposition to the deal.

The response of the Tsipras leadership to this revolt was to remove Left Platform MPs from ministerial positions. Six Left Platform ministers and deputy-ministers who had opposed the deal were sacked and replaced with pro-deal MPs.

Outside of Parliament a declaration was issued by 13 organisations of the Greek left it included the Left Platform, the Red Network, the CWI section and two of the component organisations of Antarsya calling for the formation of a broad political front which will give voice to the anti-austerity struggle.

Tsipras resigned (without reference to Syriza’s Central Committee or its democratic structures) and a fresh election will now be held on September 20” the seventh in 8 years.

The announcement of a new election triggered frantic moves to set up a new radical left formation in time to participate in the election” which was a change of course from the declaration of the 13. 24 MPs resigned from Syriza including Panayiotis Lafazanis, the former energy minister, to form such an organisation” called Popular Unity. 53 Left Platform and Red Network members of Syriza’s Central Committee resigned a few days later and are expected to join it.

The emergence of Popular Unity triggered a major recomposition process on the Greek left.

There has been a wave of resignations from Syriza at regional and local level. Most appear to be joining PU but not all. The Syriza MP and Parliamentary Speaker, Zoe Konstantopoulou, is apparently is going to stand ” in

parallel” with PU. She said in her letter to the President that the deal is “blatant blackmail by foreign governments of European Union member states on this government and on the members of parliament.”

Very significantly the youth organisation of Syriza has voted at its Central Committee to leave Syriza and join PU.

Most of the 13 groups that signed the declaration have joined PU. This has split Antarsya in the process. Several Antarsya groups including: ARAN (Left Recomposition), and ARAS (Left Regroupment) have joined PU. The Antarsya groups that have decided not to join include NAR (New Left Current), SEK (the IST section), and OKDE-Spartakos, the Greek section of the FI.

Kostas Skordoulis, a leading member of OKDE-Spartakos, interviewed in Left Voice, said the following: “Today, the PU wants to repeat the same failed experiment. They want to re-establish the good SYRIZA of 2012 with the same program. We did not relate to SYRIZA then, we are not going to relate to PU now.” The KKE have taken a similar position.

Popular Unity now represents, through its origins in the Left Platform and the Red Network, the continuity of the anti-austerity struggle in Greece. What is left of Syriza, under Tsipras, is now, likely to become the new PASOK. It will be the party best placed to force the austerity agenda on the Greek working class the coming period in Greece and will no doubt play that role.

My principal purpose here, however, is not to follow the development of PU in detail -which is a rapidly evolving situation - but to discuss the politics of the capitulation of the Tsipras leadership to the neo-liberal agenda and to start to draw a balance sheet of it for the benefit of future struggles.

The reactionary character of the

deal

The terms attached to the bailout deal—the third ‘Memorandum’ in the current crisis—are draconian in the extreme. They include swinging VAT increases, public sector wage cuts, pension ‘reform’, draconian welfare cuts and extensive privatisation. It hands the fiscal policy of the country over to the Troika. It gives the power to sell off Greece’s public assets, including ports and airports and energy supply, to a foreign agency that is empowered to pass on the proceeds to its creditors. It abolishes the economic sovereignty of Greece and reduces the country to dependency status. It is like reparations imposed on a defeated people.

The EU elites never accepted the establishment of a Syriza government with a programme of opposing austerity. They intended from the outset to smash it. It was a party elected on a programme that presented a clear alternative to the policies pursued by the ND of Samaras and previously by PASOK. Its existence was a practical (and dangerous) demonstration to the workers of Europe that such a government could win electoral support and with it the possibility to follow an anti-austerity path and break with the demands of the European capitalism.

The deal was and is the collective punishment of the people of Greece for daring to challenge the austerity agenda and in particular for daring to vote against it in a popular vote in the referendum. The EU is saying loud and clear ‘if you stay in the Euro you play by our rules’. They are saying that democracy means nothing and neoliberalism is the only acceptable economic and political framework. Any EU member state that opposes the neoliberal policies of austerity will be brought to its knees in the same way as with Greece.

Moreover there is no debt relief attached to the bailout package. Any suggestion of such relief was blocked by Germany, which reinforced its position as the dominant power in the EU in the course of these events. This

reflects the real aim of the elites, which led by Germany, was never just to force the Greek government into submission but to impose on it the maximum humiliation in order to discredit the project it represented and deter others (such as Podemos for example) from challenging for governmental power.

The deal follows a six-year period during which Greece, the Greek economy and the working class have already suffered severe damage. Greek GDP and industrial production have plummeted, as has the standard of living. Welfare has been destroyed. Unemployment has reached record levels with women and young people the worst hit. Protective labour laws and regulations have been scrapped. Health and social services have been decimated.

The response of the Greek working class to this brutal assault was to make Greece the epicentre of resistance to austerity Europe-wide. There were almost 30 general strikes and multiple sectional strikes and local strikes. There were thousands of demonstrations and protests, neighborhood mobilisations, occupations and social movements. Despite all this the brutal terms of the Memorandum continue to be forced through. It is precisely this mass struggle and the need for a political dimension to it that gave Syriza the popular support that took it into government.

Like the first two ‘bailouts’, however, this one will achieve absolutely nothing other than more misery, poverty, depravation, and a 25% decline in the economy. The fact is that the Greek debt is impossible to pay irrespective of the measures imposed on Greece. Even the IMF accepts this.

The brutality of the EU elites

It is true, of course, that Tsipras was put under massive pressure by the EU elites led by Germany and its hard line finance minister Wolfgang Schauble. It was an exercise in political brutality – political water boarding as was said

that the time.

The Greek banks were forced to close. Cash withdrawals and financial transitions were severely restricted. There were daily predictions that the banks were on the verge of collapse. People were told by the elites and the media, as well as by the right wing in Greece, that rejection of the deal meant automatic expulsion from the Euro. Just to rub it in Schauble arrived at the ‘negotiations’ with a proposal that Greece should be expelled from the Eurozone for an initial period of five years.

The banks, and the threat of expulsion from the Eurozone, were, and still are, the weapons of choice of the EU elites when confronting a left government opposing austerity. Parties such as Podemos in the Spanish state that aspire to governmental office in order to fight austerity should take careful note of this.

Such pressure, however, was inevitable once a serious challenge was mounted to the core politics of the EU, which was (and is) the austerity agenda. Failure to recognise this was naïve and dangerous.

Equally the notion that the elites might be shifted from this agenda by a clear expression of the democratic will of the Greek people, in either an election or a referendum—which was the strategy of the Tsipras leadership to the extent that it had one—was doomed from the outset. It was never going to happen. This was a major miscalculation: a total (and dangerous) misunderstanding of the realities of taking office in a crisis-ridden country in the EU and the Eurozone today.

None of this should have been a surprise. If one thing was clear when Syriza was elected to office on a wave of enthusiasm six months ago it was that it was heading for a massive confrontation with the EU elites.

The reactionary nature of the EU should be clear now if it was not before. We have seen an ideologically driven assault on the people of Greece by the EU elites to shore up the crisis-ridden construct of the EU, of the Maastricht Nice and Lisbon treaties,

and above all, of the single European currency. We have also seen the emergence of Germany as the undisputed superpower of the EU and even more of the Eurozone.

The Euro was never just a currency (no currency is but the Euro much more so). It has always been a political and economic instrument designed (with the mechanisms built into it in the shape of the so called Stability and Growth Mechanism) to enforce austerity on the individual member states as and when necessary. To act as a supra-national enforcer tasked to ensure that the member states fully comply with both the rules of the EU and the neo-liberal agenda, which is at the heart of the EU itself. This is its ideological rationale.

To administer the Euro, the Maastricht Treaty established the ECB which alone could set interest rates in the zone covered by the new currency. It eliminated the ability of member states to conduct their own monetary policy—the money supply and interest rates. Fiscal policy—control of debt, deficit and government spending—was also constrained.

This analysis of the EU and the Eurozone has long been held by many sections of the left (including SR). It was not hyperbole (as some claimed) or dogma but an objective recognition of the reality of role of the EU which has now been clearly demonstrated in its application to Greece since the end of 2009.

Was there a viable alternative to capitulation?

So why did the Tsipras leadership capitulate in such a dramatic way in front of the onslaught from the elites and the financial institutions? Was it, as Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch argue (<http://links.org.au/node/4507>), because there was no viable alternative to capitulation available?

No it was not. There is and has always been a clear and viable alternative to the austerity agenda in Greece—though fighting for it and

implementing was never going to be easy. Not that living under the terms of the deal (which is the capitulation option) would be easy either. In fact it will require massive hardship and sacrifice. Which would have been harder in the short term can be debated. Which would have been the best long-term option is not in question.

In fact Syriza was in a remarkably strong position following the referendum result to launch an anti-austerity initiative and consolidate the position of the government. The pro-austerity parties were completely defeated by it—more comprehensively than at any time since the start of the crisis. This is even more profoundly so than after they lost the election in January. The ND leader and former PM Antonis Samaras resigned as soon as the result was announced. They were in total disarray.

Opposing the deal did, however, mean seriously preparing for the confrontation with the banks and the EU that would inevitably arise—and with no guarantee of success. This was, however, what Syriza had been elected for. It was its reason for existence.

It was quickly clear, however, that Tsipras was less than enthusiastic about doing this or indeed about the referendum result. He called a (cross party) meeting of the “council of political leaders” under the president of Greece (including the rightwing parties) and at that meeting, Tsipras, the leader of the victorious No campaign threw in the towel and accepted the terms and conditions of the defeated Yes campaign. They must have been astonished. It was an astounding sequence of events.

Tsipras argued that he was forced to climb down because the bulk of the people of Greece were not prepared to leave the Euro. He argued that the Greek people only voted No because he had assured them that they could both reject austerity and also stay within the Euro?

There is a problem with this argument. The fact is that despite what Tsipras was saying, the bulk of the media and the European elites

(not to mention the Yes campaign) were screaming at the top of their voices that a No vote was a vote to leave the Eurozone. People therefore must have felt that in voting No they were at the very least taking the risk of expulsion from the Euro. It is, therefore, not at all clear that such opposition to leaving the Euro was as solid as Tsipras presented it.

In any case no attempt had been made since Syriza had taken office (or for that matter before) to prepare the population for this situation or for any other perspective other than that of somehow persuading the elites to back down through negotiations. There had been no attempt to discuss with the people of Greece how an exit could be made to work and why they should not be intimidated by the threat. Varoufakis claims to have made some limited preparations, before he was removed from office, but these were not in the public domain.

This is important because any alternative course of action (to capitulation) would have meant standing firm against the EU elites when they threatened expulsion from the Eurozone and/or the EU and being prepared for exit if necessary—though whether the elites would have carried this through given the immense damage it would have done to the whole European project is another matter.

It meant being prepared to default on debt repayments and repudiate the debt when appropriate/necessary. The political preparation for debt repudiation had been powerfully delivered by the Debt Truth Committee (and it is clear from those who had been involved that those around Tsipras were not keen on the initiative) which had pointed out in its report that the Greek debt was illegitimate, illegal, and odious and that Greece had very right to refuse to pay it.

It meant being prepared to take control of key institutions of the capitalist state, in particular the banks and the financial sector including the Greek central bank. It meant the implementation of capital controls to protect the economy. It meant a big increase in taxes on the rich (on

wealth and income) the top 10% and the top 1% in particular. It meant a big increase in taxes on the big companies. It meant cancelling the tax breaks to the shipping companies and the Orthodox Church.

It meant taking measures to revive consumption and reducing taxes on low incomes. It meant cutting the charges on a range of public services including public transport, electricity, and water. It meant an extensive plan for public job creation (green jobs in particular) along with a programme to rebuild the public services destroyed by years of austerity and to pave the way for carbon reduction and ecological transition.

These measures are in any case indivisible since taking control of the banks and the financial levers of power is "as far as the EU elites are concerned" incompatible with Eurozone membership. It was precisely the refusal of the Tsipras leadership to recognise this reality, or to contemplate taking such measures, that led to the absence of a plan B and to the remarkable and disastrous collapse.

Most of these ideas are not new of course. Many of these demands have been advocated and fought for by radical left and Marxist parties for many years. They are not and have never been some kind of dogma (or obsession) by such radical left parties (as some of their critics appear to think). When the confrontation with the capitalist state comes they are indispensable tools in the hands of the workers movement and can determine the outcome of the struggle.

The EU and radical left parties

Does the collapse of the Tsipras leadership in front of the EU elites and the Troika disprove (or diminish) the need for broad radical parties of the left such as Syriza previously represented in Greece or parties like the Red Green Alliance in Denmark or the Left Block in Portugal or LU in Britain. Absolutely not. In fact the totality of the Syriza experience confirms their importance.

The fact that Syriza was able to win an election, form a government, and put itself in a position to confront austerity with a mass movement behind it providing it was prepared to stay the course demonstrates their potential. No other left party has had this potential in the post-war period.

The fact that it failed to stay the course is to some extent a separate discussion. There is no guarantee that any party, or leadership, radical left (or revolutionary actually) will stay the course in such conditions of harsh and uncharted waters. That is what makes this discussion so important.

What it does call into question is the political positions of such parties on the key issues and the way they conduct themselves once in office. The key factor in this regard (though it is far from the only factor) was the issue of membership of the EU and in particular membership of the Eurozone. It was the threat of expulsion for the Eurozone which was cynically weaponised by the EU elites, that, more than any other factor brought the Tsipras leadership so dramatically to heel.

One thing (above all) is clear if it was not clear before. That it is impossible for a radical left government to oppose austerity inside the Eurozone today unless it is prepared to exit the Euro or be expelled from it if necessary.

Being a member of the Eurozone is to play by the rules of the Eurozone and nothing short of full compliance is acceptable to the elites. And all the key factors involved in conducting a struggle against the elites are bound up with Eurozone membership. The banks cannot be controlled and there can be no default on debt repayments, or debt repudiation, without violating EU and Eurozone rules and triggering the possibility of expulsion. In other words EU membership defined everything.

(Whether expulsion from the Eurozone would result in expulsion from the EU itself is unknown since not only has it not happened before but there is no provision for it in any of the EU treaties.)

Although Syriza was elected on a policy of no sacrifice for the Euro "which implied fighting against austerity irrespective of expulsion threats by the elites" this was never implemented by the Tsipras leadership in government. In fact Tsipras made staying in the Eurozone a strategic objective. He gave the impression that life outside of the Eurozone could not to be contemplated. It was a big mistake. In fact the only possibility of concessions from the elites he ever had was to call their bluff over expulsion and be prepared to see it through.

To oppose austerity inside the Eurozone today not only means being prepared to face down the threat of expulsion but preparing your supporters and your electoral base for that eventuality. This was never done. It also means ensuring that there is a coherent back-up system to provide solidarity in terms of food and other necessities in order to keep the economy going if this was going in a period of transition. The alternative to this is capitulation to the Troika and all that this entails in terms of, poverty, deprivation, social crisis, and humiliation.

This has been clear for a long time, however. I made the following points on the situation in Greece in the introduction to a pamphlet I wrote on the EU, entitled Behind the EU Crisis, in May 2012:

"The pamphlet argues that the key to a fight back in Greece and elsewhere is debt audit and debt repudiation. The refusal by the working class to take any responsibility for a debt which it did not create. In Greece it does not call directly for exit from the Eurozone but argues that in order to advocate debt repudiation you have to prepare for exit (or expulsion) from the Eurozone as a probable consequence. It insists that you cannot pursue an effective demand for debt repudiation if you advocate staying in the eurozone."

Transitional

method and workers government

We have argued, throughout the crisis and confrontation in Greece, that the situation posed by it raised the possibility of a workers government. A government though taking office through a parliamentary election (with capitalism still intact) would act consistently in the interests of the working class even if that meant taking actionsâ€”in order to defend itself and implement its programmeâ€”that would be contrary to the capitalist mode of production and take it in a socialist direction. It was uncharted waters but it was a clear possibility.

This did not happen because the Syriza leadership capitulated on its key demandâ€”in fact its rational for existenceâ€”which was to oppose austerity. In fact what made it such a confrontation was that there was only event two basic options collapse or confront the threats (of bank closure and Eurozone expulsion) and begin to take control of the intuitions of the capitalist state.

Although the Tsipras leadership had begun to compromise on its programme as soon as it was in office (and even before), the Syriza Government retained the potential to move radically to the left whilst it maintained its anti-austerity stance. This was a stance that was totally unacceptable to the European elites and European capital. Anti-austerity was, as we have long argued, a transitional demand in the context of the struggle in Europe today.

The biggest single factor in the rise of Syriza, since 2012, had been its call for a government of the anti-austerity leftâ€”which had found a huge resonance in the Greek working class. Both the KKE and Antarsya (to their shame) rejected the call.

Yet there was a clear objective need for such unity. A prolonged period of heightened class struggle: of strikes, protests, and mobilisations, that had made Greece the epicentre of struggle

in Europe, had reached an impasse. A new dynamic was needed that could only be provided by a governmental demandâ€”by a call for a government of the anti-austerity left. Years of hard fought class struggle had not resulted in the formation of soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies and dual power on the streets, but in mass support for an anti-austerity government of the left parties via a parliamentary majority.

The debate around the formation of such a government (effectively a provisional government) under such conditions is not new, of course. It was discussed by the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1922, after the immediate revolutionary wave generated by the Russian revolution had receded and the Comintern had to come to terms with the reality that the struggle was going to be a much longer one and that struggles for power would not necessarily follow the soviet model.

The proposition advanced by the Comintern was that such a governmentâ€”elected to office with capitalism still existingâ€”could be the vehicle for developments beyond the limitations that capitalism, despite the restrictions which capitalism would attempt to impose on itâ€”irrespective of whether the leadership of such a government saw itself as playing such a role when it was elected to office. In other words it would be a transitional government.

The resolution on tactics at the Third Congress of the Comintern said the following. In fact it could have been written for the Greek situation today:

“As a general propagandistic slogan, the workers' government (or workers and peasants government [where peasants exist]) can be used almost anywhere. As an immediate political slogan, however, the workers' government is most important in countries where bourgeois society is particularly unstable, where the relationship of forces between the workers' parties and the bourgeoisie places the question of government on the agenda as a practical problem requiring immediate solution. In these countries, the slogan of the workers' government flows unavoidably from

the entire united-front tactic.”

It goes on: “Such a workers' government is possible only if it is born from the struggles of the masses themselves and is supported by militant workers organisations created by the most oppressed layers of the working masses. Even a workers government that arises from a purely parliamentary combination, that is, one that is purely parliamentary in origin, can provide the occasion for a revival of the revolutionary workers movement. Obviously, the birth and continues existence of a genuine workers' government, one that pursues revolutionary policies, must result in a bitter struggle with the bourgeoisie, and possible civil war. Even an attempt by the proletariat to form such a workers' government will encounter from the outset the most determined resistance from the bourgeoisie. The slogan of the workers' government thus had the potential of uniting the proletariat and unleashing the revolutionary struggle.”

Such a strategy would depend on an interaction between the mass movement in the work places and on the street where the mass movement pushes its representatives within government to implement an escalating series of radical demands that would in turn empower the mass movement. Demands which, however moderate (or reasonable) they may seem in themselves, will run up against the limits of that which capital will allow. It is from this process that institutions of workers democracy can emerge.

Challenging capitalism in this way would not be easy, of course, but there again, there is no easy way of challenging capitalism. Such a government would be faced with a stark choice. It could either take radical measures to defend itself and its mandate (i.e. move sharply to the left and challenge the capitalist institutions) or collapse and accept the conditions demanded by the elites. There was a strong leftwing current inside Syriza that would oppose such a collapse and a mass movement on the streets that would back them up.

To defend such a government under

these conditions would have required not only require a mass movement in Greece but the development of solidarity action across Europe. It implied the building of radical left parties across Europe to prepare for such a situation.

Eurocommunism

When it comes to the political factors behind the capitulation, the factor that stands out above all others is attitude to the EU, and the Eurozone, and the influence Eurocommunism and left Europeanism in this regard. Tsipras comes from the Eurocommunist wing of Synaspismos, the biggest single component of Syriza, of which he was a central leader.

Eurocommunism is the most dangerous of these trends because it is linked directly (historically) to a reformist perspective. It has its origins in the reaction of a number of Western European CPs to the Soviet repression of the Prague spring in 1968. In turning away from Moscow, they decided that socialism could be achieved without a revolutionary break with the existing institutions of the capitalist state –that they could work within the framework of Western democracy and co-operate with its institutions.

This was spelled out most clearly by Santiago Carrillo, leader of the PCE (CP) in the Spanish state. He said “in his book Eurocommunism and the State published in 1977” that the aim was to: “Elaborate a solid conception of the possibility of democratising the apparatus of the capitalist state, transforming it into a valid tool for constructing a socialist society, without needing to destroy it radically by force”. This task is to be achieved, he said, without becoming “identified with social-democracy”.

Eurocommunism was then given a new lease of life with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Stalinist parties at the end of the 1980s when many of them, led by the Spanish, French and Italian parties embraced it with enthusiasm. Some converted directly into social democratic parties. In 1991 the Italian PCI, the biggest CP in

Western Europe, dissolved and became the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) an explicitly social democratic party which then morphed further into a fully neoliberal organisation.

Rifondazione Comunista emerged as a radical left party in reaction to this. It played a major role in the mass mobilisations of the late 1990s and the early 2000s, particularly the Genoa mass mobilisation in 2001 around the G8 summit. It went into sharp decline after it entered the Prodi government (in fact the cabinet) in 2006.

In Greece, Eurocommunism developed in the 1970s when the Greek CP (the KKE) split into two separate parties: the KKE of the “interior” and the KKE of the “exterior”. The “exterior” denoted a pro-Moscow orientation whilst “interior” denoted a break with Moscow and a Eurocommunist orientation.

Synaspismos was formed as an electoral alliance between the two parties. In the early 1990s, however, the pro-Moscow KKE pulled out of the alliance and purged its membership of Eurocommunists and Synaspismos became an independent organisation.

It became heavily involved in the rise of the anti-globalisation movement at the end of the 1990s, and the Genoa mobilisation in particular, and it evolved into a diverse organisation embracing a number of traditions “including Eurocommunism as its strongest wing. Tsipras comes from that wing of the party. He became its president in 2008 when he stood for mayor of Athens.

Left europeanism

Left europeanism is a leftist view of the EU that criticises its austerity agenda, its racism, and its lack of democracy but fails (or refuses) to recognise the full extent of the reactionary anti-working class role that it is designed to play. It sees the EU as progressive in relation to the individual member states, and seeks its reform rather than its demise. On the EU it is influenced by some of the ideas of Eurocommunism without

sharing its worldview or reformist framework.

Some of the radical left parties in Europe see the EU as progressive as against the member states and have a perspective of working within it and seeking to reform it from within and so can be called left europeanist. The Scottish Socialist Party recently published a pamphlet on the EU referendum that specifically calls for the EU to be reformed from within, reversing its previous view. This is reflected in Die Linke and Podemos for example. The leaders of both of these parties have supported Tsipras in his decision to sign the deal on the basis that he had no alternative.

In Britain, in recent years, the left has been more pro-EU today than at any time since the EU was established “although there has been a marked change since the role of the EU in Greece has become clear. Virtually the whole of the left, led by the Labour left, and the bulk of the unions, campaigned for EU exit in 1975. Today the unions are overwhelmingly pro-EU” despite their current tactical position over Cameron’s ambitions to opt out of the Social Chapter and the Working Time directive.

The Greens have always been pro-EU, though they opposed the Maastricht Treaty in the 1990s. Today they are more pro-EU than ever. The SNP and Plaid are the same “partly because both Scotland and Wales see themselves as beneficiaries of EU regional development assistance. The radical left is not immune from this ether.

Both of these political trends “Eurocommunism and left europeanism” are seriously problematic under today’s conditions as demonstrated in Greece. Eurocommunism much more so.

Nationalistic opposition to the EU

Not all opposition to the EU from the left is progressive. We can take, for

example, the KKE in Greece and the CPB in Britain, who seek credibility from their opposition to Eurocommunism and left europeanism. The KKE's dogmatic and nationalistic demands for exit in Greece whatever the conditions and consequences (ignoring the reality of public opinion on the ground) were as damaging in preparing the Greece population to deal with the threats of expulsion when they came as the refusal of the Syriza leadership to contemplate EU exit as a point of principal.

The right approach in Greece (as argued above) was the one Syriza had but abandoned, which was no sacrifice for the Euroâ€”in other words total opposition to austerity but preparing

the population for the confrontation that would result and the exit if it came. In other words winning the population to a position of exit whilst fighting to defend their living standards than on the basis of some nationalist defence of sovereignty.

In Britain the CPBâ€”which is the Pro-Moscow side of the split with the Eurocommunist Democrat Left in the early 1990s has similar politics. They promoted NO2EU in the European elections from a little Englander/defend British sovereignty, perspective. Their main partners in this were the late Bob Crow (and the RMT) and the Socialist Party.

Conclusion

A wide discussion on all this could hardly be more urgent. Politics is becoming more volatile across Europe. The crisis remains unresolved. Austerity is being forced in relentlessly. Jeremy Corbin's election as Labour leader is a reflection of this. Whether it is Podemos in Spain or some broad based party that does not yet exist there will be more parties with a mass radicalisation behind them, that will be thrown into this situation and will face all these problems and challenges all over again.

The European workers movement cannot afford another debacle such as the one that had been created in Greece by the leadership of Syriza.

The catastrophic consequences of the announced international capitulation of Syriza ... and the criminal responsibility of Mr. Tsipras

30 August 2015, by **Yorgos Mitralias**

The fact that all these changes and "unimaginable" reversals of the political map of the country took place in less than a month makes the stunned citizens even more embarrassed and confused. However, a somewhat closer look at the evolution of the Tsipras government would have been enough to prepare us for its final Ovidian metamorphosis. Indeed, we should have been warned by their continuous retreats during their first five months of negotiations with the creditors. - and above all, by the rightward spread that began on the very day of the formation of Tsipras government with ministerial appointment of individuals without any social base who not only had not the slightest connection with Syriza, but were insulting them in public just days before the election! As, for example, Mr. Mardas who, on January

17, 2015 - that is to say just a week before the victory of Syriza - published a particularly foul article against Syriza MP Rachel Makri: "Rachel vs Kim Yong and Amin Dada" which concluded with the very rhetorical question (highlighted by himself) "are these the people who are going to govern us?". Ten days later this same Mr. Mardas became, by the grace of the Dragasakis/Tsipras duo, Deputy Minister of Finance and, together with the Minister of Interior Mr. Panoussis [24] assumed the role of ideological mentor, pillar and Inspector General of the new government, with practical duties that far exceeded his economic competence, which were more and more extended by successive decisions of Mr. Tsipras.

If we add to all this the long and

gradual "normalization" of the party and its sympathizers, in order, in view of its coming to power, to neutralize the most "disturbing" elements and at the same time offer "those on top" the necessary pledges that ... "you have nothing to fear from us" then the Tsipras government's pro-memorandum metamorphosis appears as an almost "natural" outcome "of a route doomed to lead to that result. What is more, an outcome whereby a Tsiprist "normalized" Syriza into European Social Democracy will turn out to be equally "natural", especially since we are already witnessing some "disharmony" in its relations even with the European Left Party. In short, no surprise since the worm of betrayal of July 13 was a long time in the body which gave birth to "the first left-wing government in the history of Greece". In the same way that the worm of

betrayal of August 4, 1914 existed in German social democracy -and internationally- who negated its whole reason for existence by voting for war credits for the slaughter of the First World War.

While taking account of differences, the present capitulation of Syriza and its government will have the same or even worse consequences in Greece than those resulting from the betrayal of the SPD in Germany in that fateful August of 1914. However, even though the disastrous consequences for the Greek Left have already begun to be measured, it is a remarkable fact that no one here in Greece is concerned at the no less disastrous consequences of the Tsipras Government's submission to neoliberalism outside Greece, in Europe and the whole world.

Without hesitation, we believe that Mr. Tsipras and his staff bear downright criminal responsibility in creating the dangerous situation provoked by their particular capitulation, in the ranks of the international left, the social movements and among progressive citizens of Europe! But realistically, what more could you expect from people who, for months or years, have turned their backs so ostentatiously on movements of solidarity of "those from below", which developed almost everywhere in Europe and beyond [25] while at the same time they still

preferred to seek allies just in the places where all one could find was sworn enemies among the international Social Democrats and the various brands of Hollande, Renzi and Schultz!?

Indeed, given that Syriza was until recently the flagship and at the same time the source of inspiration and hope to the European left - already enmeshed in a deep crisis- at the beginning of the 21st century, one can say that its capitulation will have catastrophic consequences similar to those that had a century ago the capitulation of what was at that time the flagship party of the international labor and socialist movement, that is to say, German social democracy. Here it is no longer a question of a simple working hypothesis to be confirmed by events. From all corners of Europe, but also beyond, we are confronted by an avalanche of messages reporting a feeling of deep disappointment, anxiety or even despair that is spreading among millions of citizens in and outside Europe, who believed that under the leadership of Syriza, they could finally fight together successfully against austerity and the "debt-system."

One must admit that the situation created in the international socialist and progressive movement by Syriza's capitulation is terribly dangerous. It is not just that there are thousands and thousands of people who are forced to

abandon all activism and to withdraw into themselves; nor that there are as many who feel paralyzed and choose to wait passively for the course of events. It is especially that Syriza's betrayal comes at a very critical historical moment, when the racist extreme right is advancing almost everywhere in our continent, which already makes immediate and direct the threat that many of the citizens Europeans disappointed by Syriza will fall prey to this racist and neo-fascist self-proclaimed "anti-systemic" extreme right.

Bearing in mind all the above, our conclusion is that it is of the utmost urgency for the resistance front against the Memoranda, which is under construction, to heed with all speed - today and not tomorrow - the call of millions of citizens in Europe and the world who continue to invest their hopes for a Greece which resists neoliberal barbarism, by taking international initiatives of concrete and visible struggle. Time is running out and any equivocation could be fatal for us. Moreover, it is by assuming these so very important internationalist tasks that the Greek Left could not only move on but also bring the difficult struggle in Greece to a safe conclusion.

Athens, August 21, 2015

Translated by Julian Silverman

'I think that the dilemma of 'reform or revolution?' is still valid'

30 August 2015

How do you read Tsipras' resignation and what are the implications?

The collapse of the SYRIZA government is a direct outcome of the massive OXI vote in the referendum of the 5th July. This massive 62% in favour of OXI was an explicitly class

vote. It was a vote against the strategic choices of the Greek and European capital i.e. neoliberalism, austerity policies, memoranda, the euro.

I have many good reasons to believe that Tsipras and his fraction in the party had built their plans for

negotiations with the troika on the basis of the defeat of OXI. They miscalculated the social dynamics. When Tsipras agreed on the 3rd memorandum, he knew very well that his government has lost its legitimacy among the people.

But there is more than that. It has to

do with the class nature of SYRIZA as a party and the illusions for a "left government". Reformists believe that the state is a neutral apparatus and it is sufficient to put some leftists in key positions and then they can use the state to implement their policy. A "left government" is nothing more than a group of leftwing politicians trying to administer the bourgeois state. This schema has never worked, or to be more precise, has never worked in favour of the working class. The SYRIZA government was not an exception. The schema of "left government" was doomed to failure right from its initial conception.

My last point concerns all those in the international left who supported SYRIZA and the idea of "left government". It's time for them to draw a balance sheet of this experience and point to the underpinnings of their analysis.

What is Syriza's future after the departure of the Left Platform?

With the departure of the Left Platform SYRIZA has lost its last left alibi and it now emerges as the main political formation capable of implementing austerity politics. It is moving rapidly to fill the vacuum created by the main bourgeois parties. The crisis of political representation of the Greek bourgeoisie is now going to be administered by SYRIZA. In fact, it is the end of SYRIZA as we used to know it ie. as a left reformist party.

At this point, I would like to add that SYRIZA is facing a tsunami of departures. Regional Party Committees and individual members (and recently the Secretary of the Party) announce their resignation from the party every day but without joining "Popular Unity", the party founded by the Left Platform. If this rate of departures continues in the next weeks, then SYRIZA party structures are in the verge of collapsing.

What does the formation of the "Popular Unity" Party represent for the Greek Left?

Undoubtedly the formation of the "Popular Unity" (PU) Party by SYRIZA's Left Platform will result in a

major re-composition in the Greek Left.

A couple of weeks ago, there was a declaration signed by well known militants (including Lafazanis, leader of SYRIZA's Left Platform) representing 13 organizations of the Greek Left (among them two Trotskyist organizations: DEA/the sister organization of the American ISO in Greece and "Xekinima"/the Greek section of the CWI plus two of the component organizations of Antarsya: ARAN and ARAS) calling for the formation of a broad political front which will give voice to the OXI vote.

Then the Left Platform changed course and announced the formation of "Popular Unity". On Monday 24th August, PU submitted an application to the Greek Supreme Court to be recognized as a formal political Party. Alavanos, ex-leader of SYRIZA and now leading the group "Plan-B", has already formally joined PU.

The "Communist Tendency of SYRIZA", which is the Greek section of the IMT (Alan Woods), announced that it is also going to join PU. Personally, I do not know if they will join formally being part of this project overcoming DEA's objections or this is part of their entryism tactics. It is expected that more "personalities" and groups are going to be admitted in the PU as the election time approaches. The landscape of the Greek Left is changing very quickly.

What is Popular Unity's programme?

The aspirations of the PU is to become the "good" SYRIZA of 2012 by defending the "Thessaloniki Program" with the sole addition of a rather critical stance towards the "euro". PU defines itself as an anti-memoranda, anti-austerity and conditionally an anti-eurozone political party.

PU has been described by its leadership as a broad political party extending from the left socialdemocracy to the far left. Kostas Isihsos, one of PU's prominent members and an ex-minister in the SYRIZA government interviewed by Russian media, stated that the PU will defend the "original" SYRIZA

program.

There are discussions among PU members whether the new party will be SYRIZA No2, a "good" SYRIZA or it will embark for something new with a new program.

For purely electoral reasons the option of "good" SYRIZA is gaining ground.

What are the different political projects within Antarsya?

For the past 3 years in ANTARSYA, two different political projects coexist in creative tension: one that sees ANTARSYA as a transitional political formation towards a broad radical anti-EU left front mainly represented by ARAN and ARAS and another one that sees ANTARSYA as an existing anticapitalist front that has to be further implanted in the workplaces and in the social movements with the prospect of being transformed into a genuine mass revolutionary working class party in the future. This second project is supported by OKDE-Spartakos and the SEK to varying degrees. And I am saying in varying degrees because SEK is already a party and therefore sees ANTARSYA as an anticapitalist front in which the revolutionary party operates.

The interesting case is that NAR, which is by far the biggest component organization of ANTARSYA, is constantly oscillating between these two projects, its final position being determined by its internal balance of views. During the last year, the NAR majority inclined towards project 1 and so ANTARSYA-MARS was formed.

Is an alliance between Popular Unity and Antarsya (or sectors of it) possible?

The different projects in ANTARSYA are a distorted reflection of the debate that takes place internationally on "the broad parties strategy".

Today, Antarsya's project 1 relates very favourably to the formation of the PU and seeks some kind of electoral alliance with it or even a fusion on the basis of the common declaration signed by the representatives of the 13 left organizations. Project 2 keeps a distance although SEK participates

in the discussions with PU and OKDE-Spartakos does not.

Last week there was a meeting between Antarsya and Popular Unity. It is not yet clear to many in Antarsya if the meeting was within the framework of Antarsya's open call to other left organizations issued 10 days ago or it was a continuation of the discussions that started between some sectors of Antarsya and Lafazanis. After the meeting, a joined communiqué was issued that says virtually nothing apart from the already known: that the atmosphere was friendly but there were programmatic differences mainly concerning the policy towards the Eurozone.

Whether Antarsya is going to form an electoral front with the PU, OR some component organizations of Antarsya (namely ARAN, ARAS and their satellites in MARS) are going to merge with the PU, OR Antarsya or part of it will remain autonomous is going to be determined by the outcome of the

balance of forces inside Antarsya and mainly by what the NAR majority will decide. This will be monitored in a series of meetings of the Antarsya National Council and of the Local Committees that will be held next weekend.

What is the response of OKDE-Spartakos to the formation of Popular Unity?

OKDE-Spartakos has been constantly arguing for independent class politics, for the autonomous political expression of the working class and the social movements which in the present period in Greece is reflected by the autonomous presence of Antarsya. In a series of documents we have genuinely justified our disagreement with the "Broad Party Strategy" and the reasons why we opposed the SYRIZA project based on a revolutionary Marxist analysis and the best traditions of the Fourth International. Our analysis has been tragically verified. It took a 3rd memorandum imposed upon the Greek

working people so that the class nature of left reformism is exposed. Today, the PU wants to repeat the same failed experiment. They want to re-establish the good SYRIZA of 2012 with the same program. We did not relate to SYRIZA then, we are not going to relate to PU now. In fact, I think that the dilemma "reform or revolution?" as posed by Rosa is still valid. A call for an electoral alliance (an electoral front) with the reformists at the expense of the anticapitalist program is nothing less than a call for an accommodation to the existing state of affairs. We favour the "United Front" which is formed around specific issues and does not require a programmatic agreement among the organizations involved. On this basis, I think we should be open to cooperate with other left organizations including the PU in antifascist, antiracist work and on other crucial issues as prioritized by the social movements and their intervention and ours converge.

[Left Voice](#)

The good drachma? A modest contribution to the debate

27 August 2015, by Michel Husson

The conclusion often drawn from this observation is that there is definitely no alternative policy possible inside the euro zone. For Stathis Kouvelakis, "it became clear that to break with the neo-liberal, ultra-austerity policies of the memorandum in the context of the euro area was a very costly chimera. The idea of the "good euro" and "making Europe move forward", the obstinate refusal of a plan B and confinement in a gruelling process of pseudo-negotiations have led to the greatest disaster of the left of social transformation in Europe since the collapse of the USSR". [26].

Jacques Sapir draws the same conclusion: "in reality, no change in the EU from the interior is possible.

The "Radical Left" should set as its primary objective rupture, at least with the institutions whose semi-colonial content is the greatest, that is to say, the Euro, and it must think about its political alliances from this objective. For this left, the time of choice has come; it will break or be condemned to perish". [27].

It is possible that there is no other choice than Grexit, in Greece, today. This can be discussed. But this does not imply a new strategic direction for the whole of Europe. This binary choice - either a form of capitulation or Grexit - is a shortcut that eliminates all intermediate items of construction of the relationship of forces. Certainly, the debate has often been

raised in these terms, and for a long time. In the light of the Greek experience, many now align themselves around euro exit as the only alternative way. But this mixes two debates: the first concerns Greece, now; the second is more general and focused on the strategy of rupture in Europe.

I will start here from a comment to my article, "The political economy of crime" [28]. As I have been directly involved in the debate in Greek as a member of the Commission for Truth on the Greek Debt, I am speaking here in the first person]]. "Interesting, but then why have you always argued against euro exit? You seem to have taken time to understand that the euro

and the adjustment plans imposed on Greece go hand in hand. Your point of view lacks consistency". In fact I have never been "against euro exit", as evidenced by, among other contributions, this extract from an article published in 2011: "Euro exit is no longer, in this schema, a prerequisite. On the contrary, it is a weapon to be used as a last resort. The rupture should rather be around two points which would generate real margins of manoeuvre: nationalization of the banks and renunciation of the debt" [29].

The key issue for Greece, as everyone will agree, is the unsustainable nature of the debt. The priority measures to be taken are then a unilateral moratorium, and then a complete or partial cancellation of the debt. But why do these measures require an exit from the euro? I have never been able to understand how one could establish a logical link between these two types of measures.

Suppose that Greece leaves the euro. First case: it continues to pay the debt. This is absurd, you would say, but a lot of advocates of euro exit, strangely, did not specifically exclude this hypothesis. If the debt was to be repaid in Euros, its real weight (in drachmas) would increase because of devaluation. If it was repaid in drachmas, this would be tantamount to a partial cancellation, of 20% if for example the drachma was devalued by 20%, but this hypothesis is excluded legally: the *lex monetae* does not apply.

In any case, the creditors will not accept such a haircut without reacting and without taking retaliatory action involving speculation against the new currency. This same comment applies to the second case where euro exit would be accompanied -logically - by a complete or partial cancellation of the debt. As John Milios notes [30], it is easy to imagine "a situation where Greece, once out of the euro, could not find the necessary reserves to support the exchange rate of its new currency and has to borrow in the euro area or elsewhere. But any loan in the current phase of capitalism leads to a program of austerity. So who is going to finance the country in order to support the exchange rate of

the new currency?"

The creditors would therefore still be there, and the passage to the drachma would give them a sizeable weapon. This weapon would lose its effectiveness if Greece's foreign trade was balanced. This is the second argument in favour of euro exit: thanks to devaluation, Greek exports would be boosted and foreign trade would be permanently balanced.

But this scenario forgets at least two things. The first is the dependency of the Greek economy [31]: any recovery in activity would result in an increase of imports including food, medicines and oil (whose prices would be increased by devaluation). We can and must, of course, imagine industrial and agricultural policies that would reduce this dependency, but their effects would not be immediate.

The other oversight concerns the behaviour of capitalists whose priority is to restore their profits. Recent experience shows that a reduction in wages in Greece has not translated into lower prices but an increase in exported profit margins, to such a point that the European Commission has questioned Greece's "missing" exports [32]. This point is important: by making the currency the alpha and the omega of the Greek question, the class relations internal to Greek society are ignored. However, euro exit as such does not call into question the oligarchic structure.

The other advantage of euro exit would be to make possible again central bank financing of the government deficit, regardless of the financial markets. But, here too, euro exit is not a prerequisite to the search for other modes of financing. The nationalization of the banks, with an imposed quota of government securities, would be another possible channel of financing, or again the requisition of the central bank. This would be another form of rupture that would have nothing to do with the call for a "good euro".

The supporters of euro exit have managed to lock up the debate in this binary choice: the idyllic "good euro" or euro exit. That the balance sheet of the Greek experience leads to

confining the strategic debate to this binary choice is understandable but it is facile.

There is no easy way out of the dramatic situation in which Greece is today locked. Euro exit, now, for Greece, would perhaps be less costly than the application of the third memorandum, still more monstrous than the previous ones. But this is not a royal road, and this should be said, honestly. Then, there is the risk of making it the solution to all the problems of the Greek economy, whether they concern the productive structures or the power of the oligarchy.

Euro exit is almost always presented as a sort of magic wand to escape the domination of financial capitalism, as well as the internal contradictions between labour and capital. As if euro exit was equivalent to exit from neo-liberal policies. Will the big firms and the Greek rich then by some miracle stop their large scale tax evasion? Will Greek ship-owners by some miracle agree to finance pensions?

This fixation on the question of the currency is, therefore, dangerous to the extent that it relegates to the second rank a whole series of issues which have to do with class relationships that do not stop at the borders. Greece is not a "proletarian nation" subjected to the yoke of the euro, it is a social formation structured by class relations. The cumulative total of capital flight for ten years is of the same order of magnitude as the total Greek debt, this has nothing to do with the euro and the return to the drachma would not change it. It would even enable the tax evaders to repatriate a portion of their capital, realizing capital gains proportional to the rate of devaluation.

We are of course in favour of tax reform and many other things, retort the supporters of euro exit. But these programmatic elements are in practice relegated to the second rank, and in addition, it is not possible to demonstrate that euro exit would make them easier to implement. Rather than criticizing Tsipras for not having prepared a plan B, assimilated with euro exit, he should be criticized for not having established capital

controls from the first day, which he refused to do in order to reassure the institutions of his goodwill.

The argument in favour of euro exit ultimately rests on a fundamental postulate, thus formulated by Jacques Sapir: "the questions of a change of currency and of default are closely related" [33]. He lists the problems to be dealt with in case of "Grexit": 1. the question of the Central Bank reserves; 2. the question of liquidity; 3. the question of debt; 4. the question of the commercial banks. And he stresses that "it is very important that the Greek government announces the default on its debt at the same time that it notes that the Euro can no longer be legal tender on its territory."

It is this simultaneity between default on the debt and abandonment of the euro which is debatable. Logic would suggest a different sequence: first

default on the debt, because that is the necessary condition for a reorientation of the Greek economy. Then, the accompanying measures which derive from this, namely the nationalization of the banks, the requisition of the central bank, capital controls, and the possible creation of a parallel currency. It is a program that has consistency, which involves fundamental rifts with the European rules of the game, but which does not require a priori exit from the euro.

Euro exit is not in itself a program, it is only a tool to be used where appropriate, and it must demonstrate its necessity, beyond incantation. This fetishization of the currency unbalances the construction of such a program, develops illusions on the "good drachma" that are equivalent to those about the "good euro" and ties the social issues to a national-monetary logic.

John Milios, the former "chief economist" of Syriza, explains it very well: "There is no reason for the social movement which opposes neoliberalism and capitalism to stop because Greece has the euro as currency. If that was the case, a new currency could be required to support this new path. But we must start from this movement, not the reverse. It is for this reason that I consider that the question of exit from the euro is secondary. From a point of view which is not theoretical but political (how to change the relationship of political and social forces), I consider the euro as a false problem. I do not participate in the debates on the currency because they evade the main question, which is, how we reverse the long-term strategy of Greeks and European capitalists in favour of austerity." [34].

27 July

[Alencontre](#)

Greece: Was, and Is There, an Alternative?

17 August 2015, by **Richard Fidler**

Five-and-a-half months later, fresh on the heels of a July 5 referendum in which the Greeks had reaffirmed their opposition to austerity by a majority of 61%, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras surrendered to the country's international creditors. Three days later, government leaders "while professing their own reluctance and opposition to the imposed "agreement" "voted with the same capitalist parties and politicians they had defeated in January to accept even greater austerity. The terms of surrender include a far-reaching loss of sovereignty, rendering Greece a debt colony of the eurozone.

Syriza is now sharply divided, 32 of its MPs, most of them associated with the party's Left Platform, having voted No (a further 7 abstained) to the first batch of the brutal austerity terms imposed by Greece's creditors: the European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the International

Monetary Fund. Now committed to implementing these and impending measures imposed by these creditors, known as the Troika, Tsipras lacks a parliamentary majority and is dependent on the votes of his neoliberal opposition.

This is a stunning defeat for the people of Greece and for Syriza, whose election to government was the first major breakthrough in Europe for a new, ostensibly anticapitalist, party formed in the period of neoliberal austerity.

Tsipras correctly lays primary blame on the Eurozone lenders' unyielding opposition to any renegotiation of the huge debts, mainly owed to the banks (and behind them, the Troika) incurred by previous neoliberal governments. The fruitless attempts by the Greek government to seek substantial relief from the Troika's draconian memoranda have been

amply documented in the media. Writing from Athens on July 17, Tariq Ali, among many others, [described the strategy of the European Union leadership, and its consequence](#).

When capitalism went into crisis in 2008, the scale of the disaster was such that Joseph Stiglitz [former chief economist at the World Bank] was convinced it was the end of neoliberalism, that new economic structures would be needed. Wrong, alas, on both counts. The EU rejected any notion of stimulus, except for the banks whose recklessness, backed by politicians, had been responsible for the crisis in the first place.

Taxpayers in Europe and the United States gave trillions to the banks. The Greek debt by comparison was trivial. But the EU

January election; the prospects for a recovery and revitalization of the Greek left in the coming period; and some promising initial reactions to the Greek events in the European left.

In doing so, I will canvass some of the suggestions made concerning the measures the government might have taken to reinforce its bargaining position and to strengthen Greek workers' ability to fight for a sovereign and progressive alternative to eurozone domination. Among other things, this should correct the misrepresentation that the Syriza left and other critics have simply called in recent months for an "immediate Grexit," that is, an immediate and unilateral break from the Eurozone. [35] Since I have no firsthand knowledge of Greece, I rely on the contributions of various protagonists in this epic battle.

I

Syriza, a new party of the anticapitalist left

In the wake of the government's acceptance of the bailout terms, the focus will now be on what can be done in the coming weeks and months to fight the new austerity, and whether it is possible to re-imagine a strategy for a left government capable of resisting the country's new neocolonial status and rebuilding a left alternative, whether as Syriza or in the form of some new regrouping of Syriza militants with other currents in the left and popular movements.

But to understand what is possible at this stage, I think it is useful to begin with a look at the nature of Syriza and its early debates. The formation of Syriza, a new party albeit with deep roots in Greece's political culture, was a major step forward in uniting the fragmented Greek left. (For an outline description of each of the radical left organizations and their relations to each other historically, see [Map of the Greek Radical Left](#).)

The early history of Syriza is explained in a couple of informative articles by Panos Petrou, a leading member of the International Workers Left (DEA, by

its initials in Greek), a revolutionary socialist organization that cofounded Syriza. These are entitled, respectively, [The Making of Syriza](#) (June 11, 2012) and [Where is Syriza Headed?](#) (December 19, 2012). Reading these articles, which I won't attempt to summarize, I am struck by the many similarities between the formation of Syriza and the regroupment process that led to the formation of Québec solidaire during the same period, although of course in each case there are distinctive histories reflecting their different circumstances and component groupings.

The story is picked up by another member of the DEA within Syriza, Sortiris Martalis, in a [report](#) to the March 2013 meeting of the International Committee of the Fourth International. I quote from it extensively, boldfacing for emphasis some passages that are especially pertinent to current debates:

There are six points that I want to highlight.

1. SYRIZA has a history going back more than a decade. Its foundation, in 2001, was the result of the conjunction of two elements. The first was the united action of revolutionaries and reformists in the movement against the effects of capitalist globalization. The second concerned the left reformist party Synaspismos' search for electoral alliances to overcome its weakness — the party risked not reaching the threshold of 3 percent necessary to have seats in the Greek parliament.

These two elements gave us the possibility of implementing a united front tactic. [...]

During the last decade, SYRIZA has gone through numerous different phases. There has been united action in movements like the one which succeeded in 2007 in blocking efforts to change the Constitution to allow the privatization of the universities, or the youth revolt that began in December 2008 with the killing of a 15-year-old student, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, but [which] also took place in a wider climate of corruption, diversion of public money and beginnings of a

The Troika leaders evidently hoped to isolate the government and ultimately to force its defeat as a demonstration to anti-austerity parties elsewhere in Europe that There Is No Alternative (TINA).

However, it is also clear that Syriza, as a party, was not prepared to address the strategic challenges it would encounter in attempting to implement the program on which it had been elected — which attempted to reconcile opposition to the debt repayment and austerity with continued membership in the Eurozone. In that light, I want to address three major aspects: the debate over strategy and program within and around Syriza and how that was reflected in the months since the

social crisis.

SYRIZA has also known divisions, as during elections to the European parliament in 2004 or during the national elections in 2010. These divisions took place when the reformist leadership attempted to create an alliance with the social democratic party PASOK.

SYRIZA can't then constitute a general model if we consider this coalition of independent forces, with their newspapers and their organizations, outside the context of the social and political movement of resistance. Another factor is the political support won by the left in Greece. This "and I speak of the left, not the center left" represents around 33 percent of the national vote, comprised of SYRIZA, the Communist Party, or KKE, and ANTARSYA, the Front of the Anti-Capitalist Left. Beyond this, there are around 45 radical anti-capitalist organizations.

2. If we want to explain SYRIZA's success, we should keep in mind that the working class in Greece has waged many struggles in recent years to defeat the policies of the ruling class: more than 29 general strikes, most lasting for 24 hours and three lasting for more than 48 hours; the occupation of government buildings; the movement of the Greek indignados, who occupied the parks, including Syntagma Square outside parliament in Athens; the "We will not pay!" movement against unjust taxes, price increases for public transportation, tolls to use the motorways and privatized roads, and so on.

[...]

Despite these struggles, it is true that the resistance movement has not succeeded in reversing the policy of the ruling class. That is why it sought to do so through the ballot box when the situation presented itself in May and June 2012. Working people used SYRIZA as a tool to this end "and not the KKE, which had previously recorded votes twice as high as SYRIZA's totals.

Three reasons lie behind the vote for SYRIZA:

â€¢ SYRIZA was active in the movement, unlike the KKE, which applied a profoundly sectarian policy.

â€¢ SYRIZA provided a political alternative with its demand for a government of the left.

â€¢ SYRIZA called for left unity "in particular, unity between SYRIZA, the KKE and ANTARSYA, despite their differences, and starting from the needs expressed by the popular majority.

We should also not forget that during the inter-election period, from May to June, SYRIZA firmly resisted all pressure to join a government of "national salvation" with the bourgeois parties.

3. It seems right now that working people see SYRIZA as a political instrument they can use, in addition to the struggles they participate in. The comrades of the KKE and ANTARSYA made an elementary error in seeing SYRIZA's proposal for a left government as something that would simply manage capitalism. ...

SYRIZA has argued for the transitional objective of a left-wing government in the specific situation of Greece on the basis of programmatic agreement of all parts of SYRIZA on cancelling the Memorandums "the [...] austerity plans concocted by the troika and a sector of the Greek ruling class" and overturning the austerity policies of the ruling class.

[...]

4. It is obvious that the reformist leadership of Synaspismos has an approach which envisages the constitution of a left government as the result, above all, of purely electoral tactics. That is why it adapts to the pressure of "realism" and tries to win votes by approaching social democratic political forces "or more precisely, those originating from a social liberal politics.

With the aim of conducting a clear, transparent and loyal opposition to this tactic, we formed, at the last conference of SYRIZA, the Left Platform, which brings together the

"left current" of Synaspismos and the forces of the "RProject," creating a left opposition supported by 27 percent of delegates at the conference.

RProject represents a quarter of the Left Platform. It amounts to a "red" network of activists and organizations which lead struggles not only in the national political field, but also inside the local structures of SYRIZA and workplaces, as well as in the trade unions, where a reorganization is taking place under the pressure of the economic crisis and the government's attacks. The RProject is trying to build an alliance of forces sufficient to constitute an obstacle to the adaptations and oscillations of the reformist-oriented leadership of Syriza.

Our basic program for Syriza is:

â€¢ Unilateral cancellation of the Memorandums, as well as cancellation of the loan agreements, and the overturning of all the austerity laws;

â€¢ An increase in wages and pensions in a manner that takes account of the depth of the crisis, plus defense of public schools and hospitals;

â€¢ Nationalization of the banks and the renationalization of the big public enterprises that have already been privatized—like, for example, an important part of the port of Piraeus, which is now in the hands of the Chinese enterprise COSCO;

â€¢ Increased taxation on capital;

â€¢ A fight for the return of capital that has left the country;

â€¢ Control over capital flows.

This amounts, in fact, to a transitional program, opening the possibility for the working class and its allies to win a clear majority behind advancing in the direction of the overthrow of capitalism. This socialist perspective should emerge with more clarity during further struggles "and within the debates that should accompany them "on both the national level and the European level.

5. The main difference with the

comrades of ANTARSYA, a coalition of anti-capitalist groups that got 0.33 percent of the vote in June 2012, revolves around the fact that SYRIZA does not support an exit from the eurozone or the European Union.

ANTARSYA's main argument is that the euro is an instrument of the ruling class, and therefore Greece must leave the currency. **We think that Syriza holds a more correct position: "Not a single sacrifice for the euro."**

Let us leave aside the fact that a minority section of the ruling class supports an exit from the eurozone, hoping that, through a currency devaluation that would follow, it can reduce wages still further.

Also, can anyone give me an example of a currency that is not an instrument in the hands of the ruling class? I don't even want to focus on the effects of an exit from the euro that will favor sectors of the Greek economy with significant funds outside Greece and that will harm the working class, small peasants and so on.

The left should begin the difficult resistance to austerity and not involve itself in the dilemmas "whether to keep the euro or go back to the drachma" of the ruling class. If, in addition, we do exit the euro, it must be accompanied by a powerful movement in defense of wages and pensions, and with a strategy of extending the struggle beyond Greece, synchronizing it, in different forms and rhythms, with other countries of the so-called periphery, and by building links with the most combative sectors of the German and French working classes, among others.

6. My final point concerns the fight against the fascists "the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn. This amounts to a significant front of struggle. The essential point is that the fascists have failed, at least up until now, to win the streets and public areas, apart from specific actions.

But maintaining this advantage depends on one thing: it is necessary that the initiative remains in the hands

of the left, which has succeeded, for now, in responding with united action in this area "with the exception, once again, of the KKE, which acts in a sectarian manner, although debates have begun within it about this policy.

The struggle must be organized on an international and European scale. Wherever the chain is broken, the conditions will exist to build a stronger European left. If the weak link is Greece, I hope that we will respond well to win the first stage, which will require massive solidarity to be consolidated.

To summarize the approach: Fighting to take the government "on the basis of programmatic agreement of all parts of SYRIZA on cancelling the Memorandums" and fighting austerity, while advancing a transitional program that entails "not a single sacrifice for the euro," but not proposing an exit from the eurozone or the EU (as Antarsya proposes).

What, then, was the relationship of forces among the various tendencies within Syriza before this year's election victory? What were the major issues of debate within the party? Some indication can be gained from the party's first congress, held July 10-14, 2013, just over a year after it had nearly won two national elections "falling just short of the center-right New Democracy party and pushing the main center-left PASOK into a distant third place. Again, I rely on a [participant's report, this time by Panos Petrou](#) of the Internationalist Workers Left (DEA). It may well foretell the conflicts that will develop within Syriza in the wake of the leadership's decision to implement the Troika program notwithstanding its own disagreement with that program.

That congress adopted a [political resolution](#) that still constitutes the "full program" of Syriza. From its opening paragraphs it registered its identification as part of "the great social and political movement of subversion." Syriza, it said,

"has been established as a unified, democratic, multi-tendency, mass party of the contemporary Left for the strengthening of an already powerful popular movement of subversion with

the aim of cancelling the memoranda, erasing most of the debt and implementing a program of social and productive reconstruction. This alternative radical social and political plan "which will express and be based on the alliance between the working and popular classes, on the one hand, and the middle classes of the town and the countryside, on the other, and which will be structured by the needs of and give voice to the large groups of the socially, economically, and educationally excluded " will lead to the Government of the Left and will support it when it is in power."

At the congress the Left Platform proposed amendments advocating repudiation of the entirety of Greece's debt; "nationalization under workers-popular control of the whole banking system and all strategic sectors of the economy"; for a "united front of left-wing parties, including the Communist Party and ANTARSYA"; and stating that "a left-wing government... must be ready and prepared for a rupture with the eurozone and the European Union."

These amendments were rejected. "They won from 30 percent to over 40 percent of the vote," Panos Petrou reported. "The amendments on repudiating the entire debt and on being prepared to leave the eurozone proved to be the most popular " they were supported by over 40 percent of delegates, a higher percentage than the organized forces of the Left Platform."

However, said Petrou, "this should not be interpreted as the SYRIZA Congress deciding to "moderate" the party's program.... The document was basically the same one that passed at last year's preparatory conference."

It appears that despite the scepticism within Syriza about Greece's ability to defeat austerity within the strictures of eurozone membership, there was little real discussion in the party before its election on how to prepare both the party and public opinion for a possible exit from the eurozone. [36]

II

Syriza's program for government... and what it faced

Syriza's election platform, known as the "[Thessaloniki Program](#)," set forth a set of proposals for immediate action by a Syriza government. It asked voters for a strong mandate to negotiate with Greece's creditors:

â€¢ Write-off of the greater part of the public debt's nominal value;

â€¢ A "growth clause" in repayment of the remaining part, so that it is growth-financed and not budget-financed;

â€¢ A moratorium in debt servicing to save funds for growth;

â€¢ A "European New Deal" of public investment financed by the European Investment Bank.

â€¢ Quantitative easing by the European Central Bank with direct purchases of sovereign bonds.

â€¢ Action on the issue of the Nazi Occupation forced loan from the Bank of Greece.

"On the basis of this plan," the program said, "we will fight and secure a socially viable solution to Greece's debt problem so that our country is able to pay off the remaining debt from the creation of new wealth and not from primary surpluses, which deprive society of income." And Syriza promised to lead in recovery and reconstruction by, among other things:

â€¢ Immediately increasing public investment by at least â‚¬4 billion;

â€¢ Gradually restoring salaries and pensions, to increase consumption and demand;

â€¢ Investing in knowledge, research and new technology;

â€¢ Rebuilding the welfare state, restoring the rule of law and creating a "meritocratic state."

The choice before voters, it said, was between "European negotiation by a

SYRIZA government, or acceptance of the creditors' terms on Greece by the [outgoing] Samaras government."

Syriza committed to establish a "National Reconstruction Plan" that would "replace the Memorandum as early as our first days in power, before and regardless of the [debt] negotiation outcome." It was focused on "four major pillars to reverse the social and economic disintegration, to reconstruct the economy and exit from the crisis." These were (1) the humanitarian crisis, (2) restarting the economy and promoting tax justice, (3) regaining employment, and (4) transforming the political system to deepen democracy.

This was the program on which Syriza was elected to government.

Much of this program â€" correctly gauged to respond to the concerns and interests of the widest numbers of austerity victims, and to offer them immediate relief â€" was actually implemented in legislation and administrative measures in the months following the Syriza election victory. For a list of the main accomplishments (and shorter lists of unfulfilled and unkept promises) as of June 18, see "[A Handbook to the First Months of Syriza-ANEL government](#)."

Unfortunately, many of these accomplishments (perhaps most) are now annulled under the terms of the Troika dictat, and will be reversed as the government duly proceeds to implement its draconian measures.

As indicated, the priority for the Syriza leaders upon taking office was to obtain relief from the Troika that would facilitate implementation of the rest of its program of emergency measures.

However, the government was in a weak bargaining position. Its position in government was tenuous; elected with a 36% plurality vote, it had to rely on the votes of its right-wing governmental partner ANEL. And its economy was already devastated by a debt load equivalent to 175% of its GDP. It faced a largely hostile corporate media in Greece as elsewhere. The state institutions were dilapidated, [infused with a culture of](#)

[deceit and corruption](#), and will have to be rebuilt from top to bottom.

The new government had no support among the other 18 European governments involved in the debt relief negotiations. Southern European governments, already implementing harsh Troika-imposed conditions, feared a Greek success would expose their own acceptance of austerity to their electorates and boost the electoral prospects of anti-austerity parties. Germany, supported unconditionally by some other governments (Finland, Netherlands, for example) was determined to maintain its control of the eurozone, the main underpinning of its hegemony in Europe. Social Democratic (actually social-liberal) government leaders, like France's Hollande, did not want to antagonize Germany, correctly fearing that they might be next in line for harsher austerity measures.

Finally, Syriza was faced by the weakness of the anti-austerity left in Europe, incapable of mounting substantial and sustained actions in support of Greece â€" many on the left still (like a majority of Greeks) enamored with the European Union as a paradigm for modernized and progressive globalization.

Despite the lack of bargaining clout, the new government fought strenuously in the months following its election against Troika resistance to its demands, determined to reach an accord with the eurozone. Meanwhile, its reserves were declining rapidly as capital fled to save havens; it is estimated that Swiss banks currently hold Greek private deposits of â‚¬80 billion â€" the amount of the total debt at stake in the new Memorandum! [37]

And both Syriza and the social movements were in suspended animation from February to June while awaiting the outcome of the negotiations. [38] Little information was available. The Troika insisted on complete secrecy â€" impeding the government from publicizing its proposals â€" while publicly denouncing the Greeks as having made no proposals!

After the Troika's "take-it-or-leave-it" ultimatum on June 25, a desperate Tsipras unexpectedly called a referendum asking voters to indicate whether they approved (Yes) or disapproved (No) these conditions. The overwhelming No (OXI) vote of 61.3% to 38.7% (in a turnout of 62.5% of the electorate) constituted a huge victory for the government in the face of the hysterical right-wing campaign centered on threats that a No vote would lead to a "haircut" on Greek bank deposits, a collapse of the banking sector followed by aggravated depression of the Greek economy and a Greek exit from the eurozone with a new, strongly devalued currency. [39]" Since there was no other option on the ballot, it is only a rough indicator of public opinion at that point. However, the hectic one-week campaign for the No, which mobilized tens of thousands in the streets, indicated shifts in attitudes toward the Eurozone and the EU, and certainly stronger opposition to the Troika's austerity program than registered in the January election.

In the wake of the referendum victory the main opposition party leader, Samaras of New Democracy, resigned. Tsipras then played his last card. He met with the pro-austerity opposition leaders and together they agreed he should return to Brussels with an altered version, ratified by Parliament, of the plan previously submitted by the Troika "and rejected hours earlier by the voters "coupling fiscal restraint and structural reforms with substantial debt restructuring and in immediate negotiations on a new three-year memorandum. [40]

A new, "nightmarishly harsh" Memorandum

What they got was even worse in some respects. Reporting from Athens, Leo Panitch said the final "agreement," imposed on Tsipras after a gruelling all-night session of what had earlier been termed "fiscal waterboarding," was similar to the new Greek proposal, but "the terms of conditionality to obtain the debt relief and investment funds that might be released over the course of this new three year memorandum are nightmarishly harsh."

Here are the major terms, as

summarized from [a leaflet distributed by the Red Network](#), an alliance of socialist organizations that is the leading force in Syriza's Left Platform:

1. The IMF does not leave. Greece is committed to ask for the "support" of the bloodthirsty organization from March 2016 (when the current financing agreement with the IMF expires), in questions of supervision, as well as financing!

2. The base of the value-added sales tax is broadened in order to increase revenues, with food bought in restaurants transferred to the highest tax rate. The hated Unified Property Ownership Tax (ENFIA) remains in place for the entire duration of the program. ...

3. No more collective bargaining agreements. For those who don't understand the formulation about conforming to "best practices and EU directives" as mentioned in the agreement, there is also the clear-cut formulation, "Labor market policies should not return to past policy settings which are not compatible with the goals of promoting sustainable and inclusive growth." Massive layoffs are explicitly foreseen.

4. An "Armageddon" in the state pension system. [Reductions in social security payments; freezing of pensions at current levels until 2021; retirement age ceiling increased to 67 years by 2022, with some exceptions; pensioners' contribution to health funds increased from 4% to 6%, etc.] ...

5. Real estate property worth 50 billion euros will be transferred to TAIPED (Public Utilization Fund of Private Properties), which gains full autonomy from government interference. This property will be liquidated to pay back the debt and recapitalize the banks. In current price estimates, half of the Peloponnese is estimated at 50 billion. Twenty-five billion will certainly be channeled towards debt repayments (it is, of course, doubtful that this figure can be

amassed). It is a lie that this fund will function under exclusive Greek control; the fund "will be managed by the Greek authorities under the supervision of the relevant European institutions."

6. Any government involvement in running the banks is prohibited. Thus, the last instrument of some form of independent policy on the part of the public sector is forbidden. The banks will be recapitalized in order to hand them over to the private sector!

7. Electricity distribution is handed over to big capitalists, with all the consequences this entails for the energy security of the population, the quality of service and, most importantly, the price of electricity.

8. The activation of automatic mechanisms of public spending cuts are foreseen in case of deviation from goals regarding primary surpluses (everyone knows the goals are unrealistic, so new cuts "in pensions, wages, social welfare programs, etc. "should be considered inevitable).

9. Sunday is explicitly a working day from now on.

10. Liberalization of closed professions as prescribed by the agreement. The only ones mentioned in it are passenger and vehicle ferryboat services in order to allow the entry of foreign capital into Greek shipping.

11. What remains of popular and national sovereignty has vanished. The cynical passage in the agreement reads: "The government needs to consult and agree with the institutions on all draft legislation in relevant areas with adequate time before submitting it for public consultation or to parliament."

12. Excluding the humanitarian crisis law, all other measures adopted by the government in the last five months must be revised. The re-hiring of the cleaning workers at the Ministry of Finance, of workers in public television,

school guards and other municipal workers are all up in the air.

13. The financing needs of the resulting bailout will approach 90 billion euros, according to the agreement.

14. If any part of the agreement does not proceed as expected, the fault will lie exclusively with Greece.

15. The agreement admits that there are concerns regarding the sustainability of Greek debt. But where does the problem with the debt lie? "This is due to the easing of [austerity] policies during the last twelve months, which resulted in the recent deterioration in the domestic macroeconomic and financial environment." Subsequently, any "haircut" of notional debt is ruled out. Only longer grace and repayment periods are envisaged.

16. Investment package: This is not worth 35 billion euros, as supporters of the agreement have written boastfully. In the next five years, the European Commission, in tandem with the Greek authorities, will "mobilize" sums up to 35 billion (via different European programs) for investments. The only guaranteed money envisaged for investments is...1 billion euros, a sum that is even if adequately managed by the government is truly ridiculous in a country with a 27 percent unemployment rate.

Business commentary, both in Greece and abroad, is largely in agreement (with a few exceptions) that the new memorandum will not even allow the Greek economy to grow. European correspondent Dick Nichols, [writing in Links, International Journal of Socialist Renewal](#), cites a typical assessment:

Christian Odendahl, chief economist at the Centre for European Reform, believes that the Greek economy will be 4.2%

smaller by 2018 because "Greece's third bailout is bound to fail for the same reasons that the two last programs did. A government who ... claimed to be ending austerity will now be forced to do the opposite."

The majority of economists consulted by European financial media incline towards this position....

The prospects are very sombre. With the Greek government now committed to running a primary surplus of 1% this year, leading to 3.5% by 2018, seriously increased domestic public investment is ruled out, leaving nearly everything dependent on the "animal spirits" (Keynes) of the investing class....

A harbinger of the kind of "recovery" Greece can expect will come soon when the bond traders who snapped up Greek public debt when its price slumped during the moments of greatest political tension will make a killing as demand for the asset returns.

Was Tsipras obliged to sign this "agreement"? At that point, on July 13, it must be said that he had few options. As he put it, in a [July 29 interview with a Greek radio station](#),

[In] Brussels several terrifying scenarios were put on the table. I knew that during the 17 hours in which I had to wage this struggle, alone, under difficult conditions, if I did what my heart wanted to do - to get up, bang my fist on the table and leave - the foreign branches of Greek banks would collapse on that very day. In 48 hours the liquidity that allowed a -60 daily withdrawals would dry up and, worse, the ECB would decide on a reduction of the Greek banks' collateral and would even demand repayments that would have led to the collapse of the whole banking system. In that case, a collapse

would have meant not a reduction of savings but their disappearance.

Despite all, I waged this struggle trying to reconcile logic and passion. I knew that if I got up and left I would probably have to return under still more disadvantageous conditions. I was facing a dilemma. World public opinion was proclaiming "#ThisIsaCoup", to the point that it became the leading hashtag on Twitter worldwide that night. On the one hand, there was logic; on the other hand, political sensibility. On reflection, I remain convinced that the right decision was to opt for the protection of the popular classes. Otherwise, harsh reprisals could have destroyed the country. I made a responsible choice.

In the end, he told the newly re-established public broadcaster Greek Radio-Television (ERT): "It is my responsibility that I signed a text I did not believe in, but I am obliged to implement this text. I shall not escape from my duties." However, by resurrecting, together with the opposition pro-austerity leaders, the plan that the voters had just rejected, Tsipras had made his bed with the Troika.

As John Milios, Syriza's former chief economic advisor [says](#), "The government transformed the 61.3% 'no' into an 83% 'yes' in the parliament and agreed to the memorandum."

The Syriza-led government had staked its entire strategy on convincing the Troika that it must grant serious debt relief. That strategy failed. Tsipras says that "what happened is a defeat for Europe" and that "the message is that there is no meaning in elections." [41]

But it is above all a defeat for Greece, and for Syriza, which lacked a strategy to build on the courage and determination to fight austerity so magnificently displayed by the Greek masses in the referendum.

III

Was there an alternative?

Critics on the left, in Greece and elsewhere, argue that the government might well have achieved a more favourable outcome, but only if its negotiating stance had been backed from the beginning by a bold strategy based on combining citizen mobilization with unilateral action that would have limited the options available to the Troika. This would have comprised (among other things) suspension of debt payments immediately upon taking office, socialization of the banks, creation of an electronic currency for internal Greek use, and reform of taxation.

I find substantial support for this view in the position taken by the Truth Committee on Public Debt established in April by the Greek Parliament on the initiative of its Speaker, Zoe Konstantopoulou, a leading member of Syriza. The committee was coordinated by Eric Toussaint, President of the Belgian-based Committee for the Abolition of the Third World Debt (CADTM). Toussaint was a key advisor to Ecuador's President Rafael Correa when his government defaulted on its debt to private bondholders in 2008, buying back a major share of it at just 35 cents on the dollar. (Ecuador, by the way, is part of the dollar zone; the Yankee buck is used as its national currency.) [42]

In "[Greece: Alternatives to the Capitulation](#)," Toussaint explains what the Committee had already found when it issued a preliminary report on its audit:

The Truth Committee on Public Debt established by the President of the Greek Parliament has documented in its [preliminary report](#) [43] made public on 17 and 18 June 2015 that the debt claimed by the present creditors must be considered illegitimate, illegal and odious. The Committee has also shown that its repayment is unsustainable. On the basis of arguments derived from international and domestic law, the Greek government should have taken

a sovereign decision to suspend debt repayment for the time that the debt audit takes to run its full course.

Such a suspension of debt payment is quite possible. Since February 2015, Greece has paid €7 billion to creditors without receiving the €7.2 billion previously agreed upon in the bailout program that ended 30 June 2015. Other amounts that should have been paid to Greece have not been transferred: the interest earned by the ECB on Greek securities, the projected balance for the recapitalization of banks, etc. If Greece suspends debt payment to its international creditors, it will save nearly €12 billion by the end of 2015 and the creditors would be compelled to make concessions. A radical reduction in the amount of debt could lead the way either to negotiation or to repudiation.

Contrary to the widespread claim that suspending payment would result in exiting the euro, it would have been possible to stay in the euro if a series of sovereign measures of self-defense and economic recovery such as a strict control on banks, currency, and taxation (see below) had been implemented. It would have been perfectly possible to eschew the ECB's, the Eurogroup's and the EC's unacceptable and illegitimate injunctions. The Tsipras government decided otherwise, and this has led to a tragic subordination to EU supervision, to more austerity and to the selling off of the Greek national heritage. [44]

The "sovereign measures of self-defense and economic recovery" mentioned by Toussaint include the following actions by the government:

1. Turning the Greek banks (the government is the major shareholder in the big banks accounting for 80% of the Greek banking sector) into public-sector companies, followed by an "orderly liquidation" that protected small shareholders and savers while recovering the cost of "cleansing the banks from major private shareholders who have caused the crisis and then abused public support."
2. Retrieving control over the central bank by firing the current CEO appointed by the previous neoliberal

government.

3. Creating an electronic currency (denominated in euros) for internal use in the country.

The public authorities could raise pensions and salaries in the public services and grant humanitarian aid to people by opening credit accounts for them in electronic currency that could be used for several kinds of payment: electricity and water bills, payment for transport and taxes, purchases of food and basic goods, etc. Contrary to a baseless prejudice, even private businesses would do well to voluntarily accept the electronic method of payment as it will allow them to sell their goods and settle payments to the government (payment of taxes and for the various public services they use). The creation of this additional electronic currency would reduce the country's needs in euros. Transactions in this electronic currency could be made by mobile phones as is the case today in Ecuador.

4. Maintaining restrictions on capital flows.
5. Dissolution of the agency tasked with privatizing state property.
6. Levying heavy taxes on the income and assets of the richest 10% of the population.
7. Significantly reducing taxes on small incomes and wealth and on essential goods and services. Providing basic utility services (public transport, electricity and water) free of charge.
8. Establishing "substantial deterrents" to tax evasion.
9. Rebuilding public services destroyed by years of austerity (e.g. health and education) and paving the way for the necessary ecological transition.
10. Providing active support to small private ventures that are key to the Greek economy.
11. Issuing public debt securities within national borders to finance, for example, "massive development of public transport to replace private

cars; developing the use of renewable energy; creating or reopening local railway services throughout the urban and semi-urban sectors of the country; renovating, rehabilitating or constructing public buildings and social housing while reducing energy consumption and providing quality amenities.”

Asked by Rosa Moussaoui, special correspondent in Athens for [L’Humanité](#), whether this alternative amounted to an exit from the euro, Toussaint replied:

I don’t think so. The choice was not necessarily between Grexit and remaining in the Euro Zone equipped with a new austerity plan and continuing to pay the debt. It was possible to stay in the Euro Zone by disobeying the creditors through legal means. Human rights violations are at stake here. The Greek authorities should have suspended the debt payment; retrieved control over the Bank of Greece ...; and created a complementary electronic currency that could have helped to cope with the liquidity crisis, whilst remaining within the Euro Zone.

However, as Toussaint notes in [“Alternatives to the Capitulation”](#):

[T]he Greek people will soon understand that if they want a future that includes justice and emancipation, Greece must get out of the euro zone. In this case, the above propositions remain valid, especially the socialization of banks similar to the nationalization of France’s banking system after the Liberation. These measures should be combined with a significant monetary reform, inspired by the system implemented by the Belgian government after World War II. This reform will specifically aim at deflating the incomes of those who got rich at the expense of others. The principle is simple: during the changeover to another currency, there should be no automatic parity between the old and the new currency (the existing euro against a new drachma, for example) beyond a certain limit.

And he succinctly [sums up the consequences](#) of the government’s concessions to the Troika:

Contrary to claims that in return for these detrimental concessions Greece will get three years of respite and will significantly boost its economic activity, it will in fact be impossible to create the primary fiscal surplus announced in the plan considering the continued check on household purchasing power and public expenditure.

Harmful consequences are inevitable: in a few months or early next year at the latest, creditors will attack the Greek authorities for failing to comply with their commitments in terms of primary fiscal surplus and will introduce new demands. Neither the Greek people nor their government will have any respite. The creditors will threaten to bring the promised disbursements to a halt if new austerity measures are not implemented. The Greek authorities will be caught up in a spiral of concessions.

Many of these recommendation were echoed in a [statement submitted by the Left Platform](#) at the July 10 meeting of Syriza’s parliamentary caucus.

Toussaint writes as if the measures his committee recommends are still possible, notwithstanding the new memorandum. This seems unlikely if “as all the evidence indicates” the government adheres to its commitment to the Troika to implement its terms.

IV

Where now?

The Syriza left now faces a huge task of preparing not only to win back the party for its members but to help build the mass movement against austerity, the potential for which was demonstrated in the referendum No vote.

The left has a solid base in the party. Besides the more than 30 MPs who have voted against the Brussels “accord,” it was opposed in a statement signed by 109 of the 201 members of the Central Committee. (One has since revoked his signature.)

The party’s youth group has issued a [strong denunciation](#) of the leadership’s capitulation and criticized its lack of “an alternative plan of rupture that could have functioned both as part of the negotiations and as a choice for the government”:

Parallel to this, the long indulgence in the technical aspect of the negotiations, waiting for an “honorable compromise” that was considered to be certain, left no space for the enthusiasm and dynamism that the participation of society would have created, against the dominance of the technocrats and the pursuit of a political exercise unperturbed by change. Furthermore, we refrained from “unilateral” actions that could have shifted the field of conflict towards the interior, consolidated our relationship with the people we represent, given the starting signal for new struggles, guaranteed the means to ensure the implementation of our programme.

However, in accordance with the logic of the Troika memorandum and its impositions, Tsipras promptly moved to free himself and the party of interference from the left.

He has fired six ministers and vice-ministers, members of the party’s Left Platform, replacing them with Syriza members favourable to the agreement. He sought and received the resignation of a spokesman for the Syriza parliamentary caucus who had also voted against the agreement and had called (along with 54 other MPs) for a plenary debate in parliament on the preliminary report of the Debt Truth Audit Committee.

The Central Committee met July 30 for the first time since the referendum to discuss how Syriza would deal with the Memorandum. The left called for a special congress of the party to discuss the measures before the full austerity package came to a parliamentary vote around August 20. Sortiris Martalis of the DEA and Red Network in Syriza reports, in [Socialist Worker](#):

The Left Platform called for a continuous congress “that is, a congress of the same delegates who attended the last congress. That way,

the party could meet before the government signed any further austerity agreement.

But Tsipras said that the party should have a special congress in September or October "after a new agreement is signed. He also said that he will ask for a referendum for all the members of the party as to support his policy or not.

At the Central Committee meeting, 17 members of the Communist Organization of Greece (KOE) resigned from the Central Committee, accusing the leadership of transforming SYRIZA from being a party against the memorandums to a party that supports the memorandums.

Tsipras has [said](#) that Syriza MPs who do not comply with the party's "collective decisions" should resign their seats. There is speculation now that he may call an early election. Will he deny nomination to supporters of the party's left wing?

Meanwhile, Greece has resumed payments to the IMF and is preparing to repay the ECB. And the government is ramming through parliament the legislation demanded by the Troika.

On July 13, the Brussels agreement was adopted with the support of the pro-austerity opposition parties after only four hours of debate, overriding the Speaker's objection that sufficient time had not been allowed to debate the agreement in depth before voting.

On July 22-23, the first set of laws "977 pages of legislation presented to the MPs 24 hours in advance" was put to a vote. It enacted a reform of the legal system that the creditors insist on and the previous government had tried unsuccessfully to introduce in the face of near-unanimous opposition by the Greek Bar. Again, the Speaker objected, [noting](#) that

the fact that it is precisely this legal text that foreign governments chose as a condition to start negotiations towards a third Memorandum of Understanding shows the extent of their contempt towards the principles on which parliament, popular sovereignty and indeed democracy

ought to operate.

Tsipras has asked for the resignation of the Speaker, Zoe Konstantopoulou. She has refused.

The government's acceptance of a new memorandum opens a new situation in Greece, one of renewed and greater austerity, with a government and parliament that have effectively surrendered their sovereignty. The focus of resistance necessarily shifts to the streets, and the left must look for every opportunity to help lead and generalize this process. At the same time, debate is needed on the programmatic demands that can articulate a viable alternative in this period.

Is it time for a Grexit?

In view of the clear demonstration in recent months that it is impossible to defeat austerity within the eurozone, this debate entails developing ways in which to broach the issue of Greece's departure from the euro "a "Grexit" as a credible and realistic perspective that is accepted by the Greek masses.

In a [recent article](#), Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch (friends and comrades of mine in the Socialist Project) call for "constructive pressure on the Syriza government... pressing Tsipras to inaugurate this new phase by actively linking the government and the party with the solidarity networks, with the aim of deepening and expanding them in every community."

While that is certainly a correct orientation for Syriza's left in this period, in view of Tsipras's actions since his about-face it seems far-fetched to believe that he and his government will lead in doing this. That said, Gindin and Panitch devote much of their article to absolving Tsipras of charges of "capitulation" to the Troika, and they attack the left for implying "that there was a viable alternative centered on an immediate eurozone exit ("Grexit") that the government should have undertaken." The charge is repeated more than once:

The Left Platform "advocates for an easy immediate Grexit...."

"The central problem is that even the most detailed plans now being advanced are presented as a set of alternative policies, but in fact amount to demands for an immediate political revolution. They fail to confront whether this is possible given the balance of forces inside Greece...."

As I have indicated, a host of measures could have been taken short of a Grexit. In fact, most of those who see Grexit as a necessary and inevitable outcome of the crisis propose Grexit as a result, not a premise, of a series of transitional measures that will convince the majority of Greeks that Grexit is doable, although certainly not "easy" or "immediate." One example of this political approach is the work of Eric Toussaint and his Truth Committee on Public Debt, specifically denounced by Gindin and Panitch as "the most detailed plans" which, they claim, offer only a "technical response to a political problem."

Gindin and Panitch say they themselves "believe that leaving the eurozone will eventually be necessary," but they seem to think this issue should not be raised because Greek public opinion continues to support Tsipras. They take this as a given, and still look to Tsipras and his supporters as inaugurating actions that can, over time, rally public opinion to non-eurozone alternatives. "They see the struggle in terms of an internationalism based on each country adding to the "little fires" that Syriza started and which will lead to changing the European Union," they write.

But the new memorandum forces Tsipras and his government to be firefighters, implementing the further impoverishment of the nation and overcoming resistance to it, not the inspiration for new fires. And if indeed the European Union can be changed, why should Greece "eventually" have to leave the eurozone?

In the wake of the Troika coup, there may well be a greater audience for alternatives to the euro and the EU in Greece. However, as many in Syriza

know, a quick or “immediate” Grexit should not be the focus of the left response to the new memorandum.

As John Milios, until recently Syriza’s chief economic advisor, [points out](#) in a recent interview:

Austerity and neoliberalism are not an issue of the euro alone. If one country changes its currency, the working class of this country does not come to power or end austerity....

However, the problem facing the Greek working class is not a technical problem that can be resolved by a simple rearrangement of the monetary policy of the country, such as the choice of currency. I can easily imagine a situation where a Greece that exits the euro cannot find the necessary reserves to support the exchange rate of its new currency and takes a loan from the eurozone or others. But any loan in the present phase of capitalism means an austerity memorandum. So, who is going to finance the country in order to support the exchange rate of the new currency?

Second, devaluation of the new currency would most likely favor the exporters. But the working class does not belong to the exporters.

The interviewer interjects: “They [the working class] need fuel, food, and medicine.”

Yes, meanwhile, the exporters are the big capitalists and they are simply going to raise their profitability. This is similar to internal devaluation via cutting wages. Are they going to increase our wages because they have more profits? This is not about finding a trick to make Greek capitalism more effective....

[T]he wealthy and large enterprises ... have already sent their money abroad. This small fraction of society will be favored by a new devalued currency. The working class, on the other hand, will face the devaluation of its purchasing power.

In the course of social change that challenges neoliberalism and capitalism, there will be no reason to stop because Greece has the euro. In this case, a new currency may be

needed to support this new course. But we have to start from this course, not vice versa. This is why I regard the question of exit to be secondary.

Speaking not in theoretical but political terms “that is, how to change the relations of political and social forces” I regard the euro to be a non-issue. I do not participate in discussions about the currency because they put aside the major question of how to overthrow the long-running strategy of Greek and European capitalists to promote austerity.

Michel Husson, a leading French Marxist economist, argues along similar lines. [\[45\]](#) It may be, he says, that there is no choice but Grexit at this point. “It’s debatable. But this does not mean we should deduce from that a new strategic orientation for Europe as a whole. This binary choice “either a form of capitulation, or Grexit” is a shortcut that eliminates all the intermediate choices in building the relationship of forces.”

The key question for Greece, says Husson (I paraphrase), is the non-sustainability of the debt. The measures to be taken as a priority are a unilateral moratorium, then a total or partial cancelation of the debt. But does this necessitate an exit from the euro? I don’t follow the logic.

Suppose Greece exits the euro, but continues to pay the debt. If the debt is to be paid in euros, it costs more in drachmas, owing to devaluation. Of course, this amounts to a partial cancelation, say, of 20%, but that is legally excluded. *Lex monetae* does not apply. [\[46\]](#)

Fixation on the currency, Husson adds, is dangerous in that it downplays a whole series of issues having to do with the relationship of class forces, which does not stop at borders. Greece is not a “proletarian nation” under the European yoke, it is a social formation structured by class relations. The amount of capital that has fled Greece in the last ten years is equivalent to the total Greek debt. This has nothing to do with the euro and a return to the drachma would not alter anything.

Instead of criticizing Tsipras for not having prepared a plan B (likened to Grexit), he should be criticized for not having instituted capital controls on the very first day in office, which he refused to do in order to reassure the institutions of his good will.

What is needed first (says Husson) is default on the debt, the necessary condition for a reorientation of the Greek economy, followed by nationalization of the banks, capital controls, and possibly creation of a parallel currency. This is a coherent program involving fundamental breaks with the European rules of the game, but it does not necessitate a priori a Grexit.

Is Grexit key to resisting austerity?

That said, there is at least one prominent voice in Greece who calls for making Grexit the axis of an anti-austerity strategy: Costas Lapavistas, not a member of Syriza but elected to parliament in January on its list. He is a professor of economics at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. On the eve of the election, he co-authored *Against the Troika: Crisis and Austerity in the Eurozone*, [\[47\]](#) a detailed study of the European Monetary Union that predicts its imminent disaster and outlines an alternative path for Greece.

An important book, *Against the Troika* makes a strong case for the revival of national currencies as an alternative to the euro as constituted. The authors refer to “a kind of “impossible triad” that would be faced by a Left government in the periphery [of Europe].”

It is impossible to have all three of the following: first, achieving effective restructuring of the debt; second, abandoning austerity; and third, continuing to operate within the institutional and policy framework of the EU and particularly the EMU. A Left government would be wasting its time and energy “not to mention undermining itself politically” if it

attempted to achieve the ‘impossible triad’. The real aim ought to be to achieve deep debt write-offs and to change economic policy drastically, while negotiating a new relationship with the EU and the EMU.

The most powerful lever available to the EU, therefore, would be the interruption of ECB liquidity. Unfortunately there could be no decisive response by a Left government to the liquidity threat within the confines of EMU. This is ultimately the reason why the ‘impossible triad’ holds.

Lapavitsas sees two possible tactics that could be employed by a left government to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the lenders. The “national central bank would provide Emergency Liquidity Assistance for a period, even in the face of opposition by the Eurosystem. Similar tactics would be to declare a bank holiday followed by restrictions in bank operations, while appointing a Public Commissioner for the financial system.”

Finally, the government of the Left could impose capital controls. It is worth stressing that taking these measures is perfectly plausible within the confines of the EMU, and indeed the EU has itself deployed them at various times in the course of the crisis.... Their adoption would demonstrate the determination of a Left government to achieve its primary aims, thus allowing for more effective confrontation with the EU. They would also be important to forestalling the emergence of a massive crisis that could potentially result in a bank run.

Such measures would also be useful in preparing the ground for exit from the EMU, if the country was eventually forced in that direction. It ought to be restated, nonetheless, that these measures could not decisively solve the problem of liquidity as long as the country remained in the EMU. The only real solution for that would be to create capacity to generate liquidity autonomously, which would mean introducing a new national currency. It is of great importance for a Left government to be clear on this score.

Lapavitsas suggests that to create the necessary liquidity, the government could issue short-term paper (scrip), denominated in Euro, that could be used to initiate the emergence of a parallel monetary system, “even if still in Euro.”

And a left government should be prepared for confrontational exit from the eurozone, he says.

The first step in this process would probably be the declaration of default on the debt, which could take a variety of forms but the content would be the same: cessation of payments of interest and capital and a unilateral call for negotiations on what will be paid and how. Settling the issue of debt would of course be a long-drawn-out process that would require popular mobilisation, a Debt Audit and strong legal support.

It cannot be overstressed that the path of confrontational exit requires political legitimacy and active popular support, if it is to be handled successfully by a government on the Left. It is important that the government should make it clear that exit would be forced on it by the EU refusing to accept reasonable terms on writing off debt and lifting austerity. It is also important to obtain open political support by putting the issue squarely to the electorate and the organised labour movement.

This is not a proposal for “immediate Grexit.” But it does involve a public commitment from the outset that the government is prepared to take measures leading to that outcome. As a general outline, it is a useful canvassing of the potential steps. However, as Lapavitsas emphasizes, its application should not be detached from the political context. It was correct for Syriza to campaign for office on a promise to seek a solution to the crisis within the eurozone. But it lacked a strategy to respond to the foreseeable obstacles it would face in the negotiating process, the issue that the authors usefully explore in this book. It should be required reading for every European left activist. Clearly, many of these issues and possible responses have been posed sharply in the months since Syriza’s electoral victory, and they inform to varying

degrees the alternate approaches we have discussed here, including those of the Debt Audit Committee.

A proposal for a new political project in Greece...

In a [remarkable balance-sheet of the recent Greek experience](#), Stethis Kouvelakis, a member of Syriza’s Central Committee, offers these observations on “What now should we do?”

At this moment ... Greek society at large is still in a state of post-traumatic shock. Our camp has been stunned by the reversal of the dynamic sparked by the thunderous “no” of the referendum, all within the space of a few days. When we move outside of the activist circles and the more politicized layers of society, we see that contradictory feelings are prevalent. There is a mixture of disillusion, anger, and profound unease about what is to come, but also a margin of tolerance of the choice that has been made by the government and by Tsipras himself.

The nodal point for recovering from this climate and for a restart is the following one: the 62 percent for “no” is at the moment deprived of any structured expression. Its political consolidation and articulation is the number one immediate task for all of us. This political consolidation cannot be viewed as the linear extension of any existing formations – neither Syriza nor Antarsya nor other formations or sections of those groups.

We should now speak in terms of a new political project. A new political project that will be class-based, democratic, and anti-Europeanist, and in a first phase will take the form of a front, open to experimentation and to new organizational practices. A front that will bring together moves from above and initiatives from below – similar to those that sprang up during the struggle around the referendum with the creation of the “committees for the No,” but also afterwards....

As regards its goals, as they were recently summarized in a fine article by Eleni Portaliou, my comrade of many years, the undertaking is centered on the following basic axes:

â€¢ The liberation of the country, and the Greek people, from the shackles of the eurozone, with immediate elaboration of a plan for exit from the memoranda and euro and across-the-board confrontation with the EU that, in my own view, should go as far as withdrawal.

â€¢ The reconstruction of this ruined country â€” of its economy, of its state, and of its social fabric â€” headed by the working classes and the popular bloc, who are called on to lead this process.

â€¢ This project is profoundly class-based. It will be grounded in the leading sectors of the working class who voted “no” and rejected austerity by more than 70 percent in the referendum of July 5, and its backbone will be constituted by forces coming from the best traditions of the workers and of the revolutionary movement in their multiple expressions.

At the same time it is also national.

By “national,” Kouvelakis explains that he is referring to the “national-popular” in the Gramscian sense â€” “that the laboring masses must emerge as the leading force in society, that they must become â€”the nation’ in order to reorient that â€”nation’ in a different direction.

The project is also national in the sense that at this moment there is a problem of national sovereignty in Greece â€” that is to say, of the existence of popular sovereignty and of democracy itself. The new agreement that has been signed by the Greek government doesn’t simply perpetuate troika rule, it deepens it. We are now in a situation where the Greek state and any elected Greek government essentially do not have in their hands a single lever to exercise any policy at all.

... and in Europe

The Grexit debate is fundamentally a debate over whether capitalist austerity â€” and capitalism â€” can

be overcome within the international institutions through which capital exercises its hegemony. In the last analysis, there is no enduring solution within the confines of the Greek state to the country’s financial crisis or the brutal austerity that accompanies it. This perception is clearly expressed in a [noteworthy statement](#) by two radical parliamentarians of Die Linke (The Left Party), the German counterpart of Greece’s Syriza.

For Nicole Gohlke and Janine Wissler, [48]

The capitulation of the first genuinely leftist government within the European Union since the outbreak of the economic crisis to the German government and the other European governments that follow Germany’s lead is ultimately our own defeat, and a defeat for the entire European left as well.

We must take this moment to rethink the central strategic premises that have guided our politics these past months, i.e. our principled “yes” to the EU and our categorical “no” to leaving the eurozone.... As a party of the European Left, we are obligated to discuss this question with our comrades throughout the continent and in Greece in particular. We cannot abandon them in this difficult situation....

Since being elected, Alexis Tsipras was blackmailed by the rest of the European heads of state, to whom he ultimately capitulated. He admitted as much to the Greek Parliament. His defeat is not a personal failure, nor is it due to some sort of egotistical drive to retain power on his part.

Nevertheless, the central premises of the Greek government’s political strategy â€” the non-negotiability of staying in the eurozone while simultaneously rejecting a politics of austerity â€” would not (and could not) have had any other result. Ultimately, this strategy gave the Greek government no choice but to submit to the diktat of Merkel and SchÃ¼ble. We supported our Greek comrades in their strategy and had hoped that some sort of middle path could be found, but in retrospect we have to concede that no such middle

path existed....

Remaining in the eurozone, say Gohlke and Wissler, “has forced the Syriza government â€” at least for now â€” to switch tracks from being a bitter enemy of austerity to the executive organ of the troika dictatorship in Greece.” Syriza, and the Left in Europe, needed a Plan B that would point the way toward a “left-wing Grexit.”

It is no easy matter to conceive of a “self-determined, left-wing Grexit,” they concede. “In the short term, a Grexit could mean a deepening of social fault lines, economic collapse, and further impoverishment of the Greek people.” In addition to the economic arguments, there is the political challenge: how to convince the majority of the population that Grexit is necessary?

It is undeniably the case that when asked if they would like to remain in the Eurozone â€” decoupled from the austerity program that remaining in the eurozone entails â€” a majority of Greeks respond with “yes.” But would the same be true if this question were posed with a clear focus on the link to austerity?

The Greek people’s preference for what seems like the easier solution (i.e., remaining in the eurozone while ending austerity) is not necessarily incompatible with a readiness to accept the consequences of a Grexit should it prove necessary â€” particularly if breaking with austerity while remaining in the eurozone proves to be impossible. This is precisely what the 61 percent of Greeks who voted “oxi” in the referendum on July 5 expressed.

Although Alexis Tsipras sought to emphasize that the referendum was not primarily a vote on the question of Greece’s preferred currency, for most Greeks it was clear that they were making a choice between remaining in the eurozone (and thereby continuing austerity) on the one hand, and a clear rejection of the offer made by the “institutions” (and thus the possibility of a Grexit) on the other....

The message that emerges from 61 percent of the population voting “oxi”

in the referendum is amplified by the very real relation between social position and voting behavior: the financially disadvantaged and socially marginalized voted against the deal in huge majorities. The referendum thus seems to indicate that remaining in the eurozone unconditionally is not necessarily a goal shared by the majority of the population, but is rather a project of the ruling and propertied classes of Greece.

The Die Linke MPs note that some of their Greek comrades “demonstrated their willingness to think boldly and take risks.”

For example: in the heat of sharpening contradictions immediately before the referendum, [then Finance Minister] Yanis Varoufakis suggested a raft of unilateral counter-measures to the prime minister’s cabinet as a reaction to the European Central Bank’s closing of Greek banks.

His suggestions can be read as a first step towards a self-directed exit from the eurozone. He suggested: 1) printing Greek promissory notes or announcing the government’s intention to introduce a separate currency (still tied to the euro), 2) enacting a haircut on Greek bonds held by the ECB since 2012, and 3) taking control of the Greek central bank.

Could actions like this “a rudimentary Plan B” have won the support of a majority of the population? It is of course difficult to say, they admit. “The lack of a strategic alternative to remaining in

the eurozone, however, not only weakened our negotiating position, but was also disorienting for people looking to the new government for hope and inspiration both in and outside of Greece.”

The mistake of not having a Plan B, however, “is the responsibility of the entire European left.”

In light of this mistake, we must engage in thoroughgoing self-reflection and self-criticism. For our common defeat suggests that truly left politics in Europe can from now on only be oriented against the institutions of the EU. It follows that, for a socialist government in the European periphery, left politics may only be possible outside of the straightjacket of the Eurogroup altogether.

It is probable that the Greek events are provoking similar rethinking about the European Union and its monetary system in other parties of the European left. For example, the Portuguese Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) issued a statement “[Democracy against financial colonialism](http://www.bloco.org/media/20150726-resoleng.pdf)” on July 26, in the name of its National Committee. The Bloco, like Syriza, is an alliance of far-left parties with independent socialists. (A roughly translated English version is available [here](http://www.bloco.org/media/20150726-resoleng.pdf) - > <http://www.bloco.org/media/20150726-resoleng.pdf>.)

The statement denounces the European Union as an undemocratic device designed to “institutionalize the neoliberal order” using the single

currency (the euro) as a key mechanism. The Portuguese left opposed this form of European integration, says the Bloco, but once it was completed sought to reform it through creating a “better relationship of forces” nationally and internationally.

However, the Left must learn from the Greek experience. “The Left that commits to refuse austerity and the Fiscal Pact must be empowered and prepared to restore all sovereign options essential to respect for national democracy.”

The Bloco de Esquerda, as we have always said... rejects more sacrifices in the name of the single currency. To express this alternative is, more than ever, a battle for democracy: putting the fiscal pact to a referendum and starting a process of public debt restructuring are essential steps in this direction.

Even if this results in a break with the European Monetary System, the Bloco is committed to building the broadest possible alternative around the forces fighting austerity and for democracy, the statement concludes.

The debate over the lessons of the Greek experience is continuing, and will extend to other countries, not just those in the European Union. It is of great importance to socialists everywhere as we seek to elaborate credible strategies not only to defeat neoliberal austerity but to prepare the transition to a post-capitalist future.

August 7, 2015

Escaping the Euro Dream

15 August 2015, by Nicole Gohlke and Janine Wissler

Until now the debate within Die Linke around its stance toward the EU has largely been restricted by the party’s understandable desire to stand with and support the Syriza government, as well as a longstanding belief on large parts of the German left that any

opposition to the EU runs the risk of backsliding into nationalist populism and is thus to be avoided. This refusal to entertain visions of a radical social transformation outside the bounds of the EU has necessarily limited Die Linke (and other important parts of

the European left) to vague calls for a reformed, mildly social-democratic EU.

Syriza’s experience with the troika has begun to prompt a rethinking of this stance. Though Gohlke and Wissler

are by no means the only figures in the party calling for such a rethinking, this contribution represents one of the most prominent of the last weeks. The events of the past weeks in Athens and Brussels are prompting sharp strategic debates all across the continent, and Germany is no exception.

The Terms of the Debate

On July 17 the parliamentary faction of the Left Party rejected the latest austerity program being pushed on Greece, with fifty-three MPs voting against and two abstaining. Die Linke's vote demonstrated a clear "oxi" to the blackmailing of the Greek government by Angela Merkel, Wolfgang Schäuble, and [Sigmar Gabriel](#).

Although that may seem unsurprising coming from a leftist formation, it represents in all honesty a redefinition of our position, given that in February of this year a large majority of our parliamentary fraction voted "yes" to the bailout extension, while a minority abstained and an even smaller minority voted "no."

Granted, the February vote was a different one, incomparable in terms of the gravity of the decision being put to a vote. The argument in favor of supporting Greece's newly minted leftist government by giving them time to maneuver had to be taken particularly seriously at the time, despite the fact that the blackmail tactics and neoliberal demands of the European institutions were already plain to see.

Unlike in February, Die Linke voted "oxi" this time because the German government had forced the most severe austerity package since 2010 onto the Greek government. Unfortunately, Alexis Tsipras and the majority of Syriza MPs saw no way out of this blackmail, and accepted the austerity package.

This defeat represents an occasion to reflect, ask questions, and exercise some self-criticism. The capitulation of the first genuinely leftist government

within the European Union since the outbreak of the economic crisis to the German government and the other European governments that follow Germany's lead is ultimately our own defeat, and a defeat for the entire European left as well.

We must take this moment to rethink the central strategic premises that have guided our politics these past months, i.e. our principled "yes" to the EU and our categorical "no" to leaving the eurozone. Doing so means rethinking our political strategy as a left party as a whole. As a party of the European Left, we are obligated to discuss this question with our comrades throughout the continent and in Greece in particular. We cannot abandon them in this difficult situation.

It is of little use (and counterproductive) to denounce Syriza as traitors and declare their political demise. That is the job of our political opponents seeking to suffocate the [political awakening](#) happening in Greece. Equally as unhelpful, however, are knee-jerk reactions and blind, unquestioning loyalties.

We should neither reject nor uncritically support everything the Syriza government has attempted to end the widespread and ongoing impoverishment of the Greek people. The sort of disdainful moralism that says we as Germans and "outsiders" have no right to develop an opinion or a critique of what is happening in Greece will not help us to learn any political lessons from the situation either.

We owe both ourselves and our Greek comrades an honest and solidaristic debate about both the strategic successes as well as mistakes of the past months, especially if we wish to continue to fight together against austerity in Europe and prepare ourselves for coming European struggles. Thus it is crucial that we be confident enough to critically reflect on what has happened, to discuss Greece's exit from the eurozone as a possible alternative, and attempt to understand what the current defeat and the massive "oxi" vote means.

In Bad Faith

Since being elected, Alexis Tsipras was blackmailed by the rest of the European heads of state, to whom he ultimately capitulated. He admitted as much to the Greek Parliament. His defeat is not a personal failure, nor is it due to some sort of egotistical drive to retain power on his part.

Nevertheless, the central premises of the Greek government's political strategy – the non-negotiability of staying in the eurozone while simultaneously rejecting a politics of austerity – [would not](#) (and [could not](#)) have had any other result. Ultimately, this strategy gave the Greek government no choice but to submit to the diktat of Merkel and Schaeuble. We supported our Greek comrades in their strategy and had hoped that some sort of middle path could be found, but in retrospect we have to concede that no such middle path existed.

Former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis [recently published](#) a telling account of the Eurogroup negotiations, in which he reveals that the suggestions of the Greek side were never really even taken seriously – doing so, after all, would have entailed a serious discussion about alternatives to austerity and the possibility of concessions from the Eurogroup.

This means that, in reality, the closed-door "negotiations" in Brussels were not negotiations at all, but rather a series of meetings in which the Eurogroup repeatedly decided that the compromises Syriza was willing to make were still miles away from what the Eurogroup sought to squeeze out of the country.

This dynamic culminated in Varoufakis – Greek minister of finance and official representative of an EU member state – being ejected and excluded from the Eurogroup meeting. His attempt to consult the Eurogroup's bylaws subsequently revealed that the Eurogroup does not formally exist, and thus does not offer any rights or privileges to individual member states. And thus it was that the supposedly fair European rules of the game were shattered on the rocks

In light of these facts, we must accept that the Syriza government's strategy that focused on negotiation and diplomatic dialogue has failed. Not even the charismatic personalities of Tsipras and Varoufakis, nor extensive expertise and deep negotiating tactics, were enough to win real influence or shift the balance of forces within the European institutions even slightly.

The message that the defeat is intended to send is this: it does not matter how many general strikes are conducted, it does not matter if you elect a new government and the majority of the population votes “oxi” in a popular referendum. These things will not help you and will not change your country’s politics.

A Left-Wing Grexit

option, or whether it was simply further political blackmail to force more concessions out of Syriza in light of the party's lack of a strategic alternative, is difficult to say.

What, then, could our Plan B look like? This undertaking strikes us a difficult one that poses more questions than it offers answers. Though there are many important contributions on the issue of a Plan B, particularly from the Greek left itself, there has yet to exist a detailed scenario for a left-wing Grexit.

A self-determined, left-wing Grexit is by no means a simple or an easy solution. The economic consequences thereof in particular remain highly controversial amongst left-wing economists and social scientists. At this point they appear to be more or less unpredictable. In the short term, a Grexit could mean a deepening of social fault lines, economic collapse, and further impoverishment of the Greek people.

increased taxes on the rich without first having to seek the troika's approval. These options are at least worth exploring. Such a move would of course mean taking on an almost incalculable political risk for the parties involved. It would entail a leap into the unknown, accompanied by the fear of being held politically responsible for missteps and unexpected consequences that may arise from it.

His suggestions can be read as a first step towards a self-directed exit from the eurozone. He suggested: 1) printing Greek promissory notes or announcing the government's intention to introduce a separate currency (still tied to the euro), 2) enacting a haircut on Greek bonds held by the ECB since 2012, and 3) taking control of the Greek central bank.

What Do the People Want?

But is that really the case, or should we instead understand this moment as one of a contradictory dynamic within a scenario of polarized class conflict? It is undeniably the case that when asked if they would like to remain in the Eurozone – decoupled from the austerity program that remaining in the eurozone entails – a majority of Greeks respond with “yes.” But would the same be true if this question were posed with a clear focus on the link to

austerity?

The Greek people's preference for what seems like the easier solution (i.e., remaining in the eurozone while ending austerity) is not necessarily incompatible with a readiness to accept the consequences of a Grexit should it prove necessary – particularly if breaking with austerity while remaining in the eurozone proves to be impossible. This is precisely what the 61 percent of Greeks [who voted](#) "oxi" in the referendum on the July 5 expressed.

Although Alexis Tsipras sought to emphasize that the referendum was not primarily a vote on the question of Greece's preferred currency, for most Greeks it was clear that they were making a choice between remaining in the eurozone (and thereby continuing austerity) on the one hand, and a clear rejection of the offer made by the "institutions" (and thus the possibility of a Grexit) on the other.

The Greek media sought to project just such a mood and stylize the referendum in this way. Panic and alarm about shuttered banks, images of long lines in front of (nearly) empty ATMs, a collapse of public life – the media established a doomsday scenario as the backdrop to the referendum in Greece, which the Eurogroup in turn used as a threat.

The message that emerges from 61 percent of the population voting "oxi" in the referendum is amplified by the very real relation between social position and voting behavior: the financially disadvantaged and socially marginalized voted against the deal in huge majorities. The referendum thus seems to indicate that remaining in the eurozone unconditionally is not necessarily a goal shared by the majority of the population, but is rather a project of the ruling and propertied classes of Greece.

A Common Defeat

The referendum also demonstrated how the brave actions of our comrades and the initiative to launch the referendum could lead to an enormous re-politicization of Greek society and renewal of the social movements.

Many felt this possibility when Gregor Gysi and representatives of the Blockupy coalition spoke in front of tens of thousands at the closing rally at Syntagma Square. The mobilization around the referendum and the very overwhelming "oxi" vote indicate that there is most certainly an enormous desire for political alternatives and a Plan B within Greece itself.

Our comrades in the government had five months to convince a majority of the population of the utility of a Plan B. We had five months to demonstrate to the Greek people that we were doing everything possible to fulfill our electoral promise of ending austerity while remaining in the euro. But having a Plan B also means [establishing red lines](#) that we are unwilling to cross. It also means that – should an end to austerity inside the eurozone have proved impossible – then a real and plausible alternative to capitulation had to exist.

At the same time it would have been necessary, perhaps along the lines of Varoufakis's suggestions, to begin making serious preparations for the worst-case scenario, i.e. preparing to issue promissory notes, to print a new national currency, to nationalize the banks, and to introduce capital controls.

Whether or not our comrades in Syriza could have won over a majority of the population to an exit from the eurozone in the case of a final breakdown of negotiations is of course difficult to say. The lack of a strategic alternative to remaining in the eurozone, however, not only weakened our negotiating position, but was also disorienting for people looking to the new government for hope and inspiration both in and outside of Greece.

The responsibility for the mistake of not preparing a Plan B and not fighting to win over majorities in favor of such a strategy is not that of Syriza alone – it is the responsibility of the entire European left. We all owe it to ourselves to reflect critically on the fact that we neglected to utilize or even entertain the thought of utilizing our last remaining strategic resource: a break with the institutions and the eurozone, thereby developing the

scenario of a left-wing Grexit. Thus we have neither reason nor justification to act as if we had known better than our Greek comrades.

No one can claim that we would have performed better or more intelligently than they did. In fact, illusions about the space for maneuver and scope for reform within the EU are probably even more widespread on the German left than they are in Greece. These sorts of illusions were consistently nourished by our own party in the last European elections, while some currents went so far as to claim that principled left-wing criticism of the EU and its institutions was impossible.

In light of this mistake, we must engage in thoroughgoing self-reflection and self-criticism. For our common defeat suggests that truly left politics in Europe can from now on only be oriented against the institutions of the EU. It follows that, for a socialist government in the European periphery, left politics may only be possible outside of the straightjacket of the Eurogroup altogether.

Shattering the EU Illusion

So what questions have to be reevaluated in the EU debate? In Germany, a major reason why Die Linke often finds it difficult to criticize the EU as an imperialist project is because it is portrayed as a historical lesson learned after the second World War. As the story goes, the once warring great powers of Europe joined together in a new geopolitical alliance which would make future armed conflict on the continent a thing of the past.

Philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas take this point of departure to [praise the EU](#) as a post-national construct and an alternative to the European nation-state. But even though the EU has greatly transformed the political relations between its constituent member states, economic competition between said states has not been lessened by this transformation whatsoever. Indeed: the negotiations around

Greece's latest bailout extension make them easy for all to see.

That the EU introduced a common currency but not a common wage, social, or budgetary policy is not a mistake or an accident, nor is it a temporary condition of an as-yet-unfinished European Union. The construction of the euro and Germany's aggressive export strategy are harmful to economically weaker countries like Greece, particularly since the various states do not share a common or coordinated economic policy. Instead of constraining the power of the German economy and political establishment, the EU simply provides it with a post-national alibi.

It is now clear that from now on "German" is to be spoken in Europe, as Volker Kauder gleefully declared a few months ago. Given this state of affairs, we must determine to what extent an EU-wide "reboot" of the European project constitutes a useful demand for class struggle in Europe.

The consequences of EU policies are very different depending on whether we are talking about Germany or Greece, Great Britain or Portugal. A state-driven reconfiguration of European social policy would require a synchronized political shift in nearly all twenty-eight member states. Even then, major corporations and financial markets would still serve as powerful opponents of any possible social reform.

We do not believe that concrete solidarity between the peoples of Europe is possible by making positive reference to an EU that is imagined and enacted by national governments as a common currency area and economic zone. The various struggles

against austerity and for improved living conditions across Europe (which admittedly are yet to be united in common cause) appear to us as much more promising prospects. Not to be ignored is the concrete struggle against old and new forms of fascism and racism; this means fighting [Pegida](#) in Germany, the [National Front](#) in France, and [Golden Dawn](#) in Greece.

It is time to make the policies and politics of the EU the subject of the real social struggles existing in the various member states, rather than continuing to speak of a "social EU" for which we will be unable to build a social movement in the foreseeable future. Our politics must contribute to establishing, expanding and deepening pan-European networks of solidarity between political actors and activists in European, national, regional, and local movements.

Following Greece's subjugation under the diktat of the institutions, it is both unlikely as well as inappropriate to expect that our comrades in the European Left will continue to view the EU or the euro in a positive light, as membership in the eurozone has revealed itself to be an instrument for the implementation and enforcement of austerity policies.

Living Up to the Slogans

It makes little sense to retrospectively search for the obstacles to a different conclusion of the Greek tragedy exclusively or even primarily in Greece itself. The reasons for Syriza's (tentative) failure lie primarily in the absence of relevant left movements in

the rest of Europe, as well as in the historic weakness of the Left in Germany. We believe that new and stronger efforts are necessary if we are to achieve a true social realignment in Germany with [Die Linke](#).

We remain a party that receives 10 percent in elections and are only able to mobilize twenty thousand protesters to the [Blockupy](#) demonstrations. Our roots in the trade unions are still paltry, although we are at least mobilizing together against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) in the fall.

This common action is important, but it is still far too little if we really want to live up to our slogan of "carrying the resistance into the heart of the European crisis regime." To do so, we are going to have to go back to the drawing board and do our homework, in order to build an "oxi" to neoliberalism and austerity that truly earns its name.

One lesson of this defeat is to rethink the premises of our own politics and to dare to entertain the possibility of a break. A break with an EU that strengthens rather than overcomes nationalism, the sealing-off of European borders, and imperialist conflict. A break with a purely parliamentary politics that reduces parties to something one votes for once every few years and reduces parliaments to bodies for implementing the wishes of corporate lobbyists.

The best and most important kind of solidarity we can offer the people in Greece is to start putting real pressure on the German government here at home.

Turning "No" Into a Political Front

13 August 2015, by [Stathis Kouvelakis](#)

As a member of Syriza's central committee for the last three years, I too bear part of that collective

responsibility. Of course, we are not all the same in Syriza. As a member of the [Left Platform](#), over the past five

years I was among those making consistent interventions around questions such as the euro, seeing the

disaster that would ensure if another course was not taken.

But it would be facile to assert that what has happened does not concern me. The majority line in Syriza led to a debacle, but those of us in the minority for our part were not able to forestall it, however much events vindicated [our perspective](#).

Notwithstanding all this, I am not participating in this discussion with any inclination for self-flagellation, not only because that would not be helpful, but because such a stance offers an easy way out, a way of escape from the political substance of the problem.

Those of us who have accepted such responsibilities, each in our own way, should now try to contribute to a collective investigation into what we can do together from this point onward, and not simply lay down our arms.

Here are my thoughts along these lines, organized in three points. The first is about what exactly was defeated in this defeat. The second, as paradoxical as it may seem, is about what was not defeated – what remains and has a potential for use in the future. And the third, of course, is what is to be done now.

What Was Defeated?

It is never self-evident in a defeat, and particularly in a great defeat of historic dimensions, to determine exactly what was defeated. The most characteristic example is that of the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. Even today there is still no agreement as to what was defeated with the collapse of those regimes.

Most still think that what was defeated together with the USSR was communism, socialism, revolution, the possibility of social liberation. Those of us who disagree with that are a minority, but that does not necessarily mean that we are wrong. But it certainly means that we have not yet emerged from that defeat.

The jury is still out, then, on what was

defeated, and I am under no illusion that what I am going to say now can count on any kind of wider acceptance. It's quite the opposite actually. It seems logical, however, to start from what in my view is the least controversial point. What has been crushingly defeated was a political strategy, the strategy that the majority in Syriza, and therefore Syriza as such, has espoused for the last five years, and which could be called "left-Europeanism."

It was the conception that the memoranda and austerity could be overturned within the specific framework of the eurozone, and, more broadly, of the European Union (EU). That we have no need of an alternative plan because in the final analysis a positive solution will be found within the euro and that displaying credentials as "good European citizens" and professions of faith in the euro could be used as bargaining chips.

I think that it has been exhaustively demonstrated over the last months that nothing of this kind is possible. It has been exhaustively demonstrated exactly because it was attempted by a political subject who believed to the end in this possibility, who bent over backwards to work within that particular framework and doggedly refused to examine any other.

For this reason, talk of "betrayal" and of "the traitor Tsipras," although rooted in an understandable emotion – it is obvious that someone might feel betrayed when in a week's time a 62 percent "no" becomes a "yes" – does not help us understand what has happened.

Alexis Tsipras, the Greek prime minister, did not carry out a secret plan "to sell out." He found himself confronted by the total bankruptcy of a specific strategy, and when a political strategy fails this means that there remains only the choice between bad and worse options. Or rather, there remains only the worst option – and that is exactly what happened in this case.

So the left-Europeanism approach, the axis around which debate was centered, both in Syriza and in the European left generally, and in which both the conflicts of the time and the

limits of Syriza itself were reflected, suffered an ignominious defeat. Within those general parameters there are, however, a number of other factors that warrant attention.

The first is that the left-Europeanism strategy naturally meant largely sidestepping the dynamic of popular mobilization. The choice of focusing on negotiations with the troika with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable solution quickly led to the first great failure, namely the [February 20 agreement](#) signed between the Greek government and the Eurogroup.

This agreement didn't just tie the hands of the Syriza government, opening the way for the capitulation that followed. Its first and most immediate consequence was to paralyze the mobilization and destroy the optimism and militancy that prevailed in the first weeks after the January 25 [electoral victory](#).

Of course, this downgrading of popular mobilization is not something that started on January 25 or February 20, as a consequence of a particular governmental tactic. It is something that was preexistent in Syriza's strategy. It is something that accompanied the retreat of the great mass mobilizations of the first two years of the "shock therapy" period (2010-12), a retreat with its own causes, subjective and, more significantly, objective.

Nevertheless, adaptation to these conditions, to the retreat of the mass movement, was a matter of political choice for the Syriza leadership. From a certain moment onwards its own shift to ever more "moderate" positions, the passage from "no sacrifice to the euro" and "the euro is not a fetish" – slogans that were heard even as late as the run-up to the 2012 elections – to "we are not going to leave the euro; they will accept what we say and that will be as clear as daylight" intensified and reproduced the retreat.

The second point of strategy that was defeated was the logic of appeasement that prevailed on the "internal front" once Syriza assumed governmental responsibilities. There are a few aspects to this logic.

The first is that a specific choice was made in favor of an alliance with the traditional political personnel. This is evidenced by the selection of New Democracy's Prokopis Pavlopoulos to be president of the republic – not to mention other equally weighty preferences, such as the choice of Lambis Tagmatarchis, a journalist entirely integrated in the dominant media system, for director of the reconstituted public broadcasting company, a position in no way related to the constraints of the negotiations and the conflict with the creditors.

The second aspect of appeasement, even more profound, is the logic of conflict avoidance and continuity in the mechanism of the deep state and the bourgeois state apparatus. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this aspect: the appointment of Panos Kammenos, the leader of the ANEL party, to take charge of defense and foreign policy, irrespective of the counterweight provided by the presence of Costas Isychos, a Left Platform vice minister, in the defense ministry (but with a limited brief).

The role of the minister of defense became evident: for example, in the continuation of military collaboration between Greece and Israel – though it would be wrong to imagine that Kammenos alone bears all the responsibility for this. The other example, of course, is that which is symbolized by the placement of Yannis Panousis, a typical "law-and-order" politician from a Pasok background, as the minister of public order, and now, indeed, with extended powers. This is a case of a clear choice in favor of continuity at the level of the repressive mechanisms of the state, with obvious repercussions for the overall political and class balance of forces.

The third aspect: the appeasement of the center of economic power, the oligarchy, and what is called in Greek "diaploki," the intricate nexus between business interests, politicians, and the state. And here we must be absolutely specific. It would of course be a mistake to attach all blame to individual persons. But we should be quite clear about the fact that there have been enclaves providing bridges with sectors of the

oligarchy inside Syriza, even before it came to power.

There is nothing coincidental about the exceptionally opaque role of the vice prime minister, Giannis Dragasakis, as the person par excellence devoted to keeping the status quo untouched in the entire banking and financial sector, standing as a barricade against any attempted change in a system that today forms the nerve center, the literal heart, of capitalist power in its relation to the state.

The final element in the failure of Syriza's strategy was its conception of the party and the evolution of the party form itself – which is entirely consistent with everything that has been said above. Even before assuming office Syriza had tended to become less and less democratic as a party, not in the superficial sense of the term – being permitted to express one's opinion – but in the sense that its members had less and less influence on the shaping of policy and on where decisions were being taken within the party.

What we saw being constructed after June 2012 – step by step but systematically – was a party form increasingly leader-centered, centralized, and detached from the actions and the will of the membership. The process went entirely out of control when Syriza went into government. From that time on, the high circles of the government and the key centers of political decision-making acquired absolute autonomy from the party.

One need merely mention that the central committee has only been convened three times since Syriza came to power. This consummated the downgrading of the party as a space for political debate and elaboration, and the stratification of its internal structure.

What Was Not Defeated?

For the thoughts that follow I have drawn inspiration from a text by the East German Communist writer [Christa Wolf](#), written before the fall of

the German Democratic Republic but published afterwards, under the title *Was bleibt* (What remains, what is left to us).

It is a very significant work that in my view is attempting to say the following: the strictest self-criticism should not end up demolishing what was an important collective endeavor. But that is not all: the quest for the fragments of truth that were inherent, amid contradictions, in that unfinished endeavor acquires particular significance in conditions of defeat, for it highlights the way that, even if they were not realized, there are always other potentials within a historical bet.

History is never written in advance: its trajectory always goes through points of bifurcation in which one direction finally prevails over an alternative one.

So, what has not been defeated in Syriza? In other words what is there that has been positive in this experience for the Left and the workers movement?

As a first approximation I would make the following four points, which could also prove useful for the future reconstruction of the radical left and the reformulation of a present-day anticapitalist strategy.

For starters, the argument that a unitary government of radical left forces is a necessary and tested instrument for approaching the question of power has been validated. Of course, "approaching the question of power" doesn't mean resolving it. It is obviously one thing to be the government and quite another to have power. The question is whether we are able to use the first to achieve the second, and if so how.

Whether, that is to say, the achievement of governmental office through a combination of electoral successes and mass struggles can be utilized as a point of departure for a "war of position" strategy, i.e. for the development of popular mobilizations to open up a space for overturning the overall balance of class forces.

This approach has been tested so far only in Latin America. We now have a case in one of the main centers of the world capitalist system, Europe, which

at least indicates that it is possible for a minority force of the radical left to build an electorally successful alternative in a situation of deep social and political upheaval and get into government.

The limit of this comparison lies of course in the fact that, as a relatively autonomous imperialist center, Europe is dominated by a very particular political construction, the EU, which increasingly acts as the collective hegemon of European capitalisms, posing thus all sorts of constraints and obstacles that are only partly similar to the domination exercised by the United States in their "backyard."

Second element: the transitional program. The idea of the transitional program is that we do not content ourselves with abstract, propagandistic anticapitalist discourse that is applicable in every situation and simply reiterates the strategic objective of socialism and revolutionary overthrow.

The tried and tested dividing lines, those that enable the offensive against the class enemy to be activated effectively and the overall balance of forces to be overturned, must be defined anew for every specific occasion.

Here too the anti-memorandum goal was, in my opinion, very properly the central axis of this transitional program "on the condition, of course, which was not observed, that a consistent anti-memorandum line would lead inevitably to an [across-the-board clash](#) with the eurozone and with the EU itself.

Whatever its limitations, particularly in relation to the calculation of its net budgetary impact, the so-called "[Thessaloniki Program](#)," on the basis of which Syriza won the popular mandate last January, was an incomplete but basically sound approximation to such a program. There is nothing coincidental about the way that it came so soon into conflict with the line being followed by the government, to the point where it rapidly became taboo to mention it within the ranks of the government, and to some extent also within the party.

The transitional program is also organically linked "this is something we learn from the inheritance of the third and fourth congresses of the Communist International and the subsequent elaboration by Gramsci and [Togliatti](#)" to the goal of the united front, the rallying of all the forces of the block of the subordinated classes at a higher political and strategic level. It was this unifying approach implicit in the idea of a "government of the anti-austerity left" that fired the imagination of broad masses in spring 2012, enabling Syriza's rise.

The reason for this was that the goal of a "government of the anti-austerity left" was not just a "Syriza government," and still less was it the Syriza-ANEL government that finally emerged. It was a way of reconstructing the popular movement itself, along with its social references and political forms of expressions.

But as we know, the goal came up against two obstacles, resulting in an extremely problematic and inherently contradictory implementation of it after January 25. One factor was its rejection from the remainder of forces on the radical left ([KKE](#) and [Antarsya](#)), which proved unable to respond to the key issue of that moment. Another was an impasse marking the limits of Syriza strategy, particularly after the turn to "moderation" and subsequent cave-in after June 2012.

The above leads me to the fourth and final remark on "what remains" from this experience "the relationship between the social and the political. What we have seen over these past five memorandum years is that the conflicts unfolding in the course of the class confrontation are brought together and called on to resolution at the political level. From a certain point onwards, success or victory, even partial victory, is played out at the political level and becomes a condition for popular mobilization to develop to a higher level.

This was precisely the gamble that was launched in 2012 and after, with all its contradictions and limitations. That is to say the combination of a left government and of a rich record of popular struggles, which of course can never be taken for granted and must

continually be reasserted, so as to open up a perspective of radical social change.

One should insist on that last point. What has been played out in Greece has been no run-of-the-mill alternation in power of parties with a history of system management. It has not been something like the election of [François Hollande](#) in 2012, or like the "center-left experiment" of [Romano Prodi](#) in Italy in the 2000 years. It is not even like the case of [François Mitterrand](#) in 1981, who came to power with a quite radical program by the standards of the time.

The bet played out in Greece has been different, carrying a powerful anti-systemic potential, and it exactly for that reason triggered a crisis not only in Greece but internationally. It was a showdown on a large scale in which our side proved itself entirely incapable not only of winning but even of organizing elementary self-defense, so that we were led to the capitulation we have seen.

What Now Should We Do?

At this moment, as I said earlier, Greek society at large is still in a state of post-traumatic shock. Our camp has been stunned by the reversal of the dynamic sparked by the thunderous "no" of the referendum, all within the space of a few days. When we move outside of the activist circles and the more politicized layers of society, we see that contradictory feelings are prevalent. There is a mixture of disillusion, anger, and profound unease about what is to come, but also a margin of tolerance of the choice that has been made by the government and by Tsipras himself.

The nodal point for recovering from this climate and for a restart is the following one: the 62 percent for "no" is at the moment deprived of any structured expression. Its political consolidation and articulation is the number one immediate task for all of us. This political consolidation cannot be viewed as the linear extension of any existing formations "neither Syriza nor [Antarsya](#) nor other

formations or sections of those groups.

We should now speak in terms of a new political project. A new political project that will be class-based, democratic, and [anti-Europeanist](#), and in a first phase will take the form of a front, open to experimentation and to new organizational practices. A front that will bring together moves from above and initiatives from below “similar to those that sprang up during the struggle around the referendum with the creation of the “committees for the No,” but also afterwards.

At this moment it is difficult, if not impossible, to say more about the concrete form that this political project might assume. It is obviously contingent to a decisive extent on the internal struggle we are currently waging inside Syriza, alongside the comrades of the Left Platform and others. We all realize that for this project to be able to go forward much else is needed.

Under no circumstances should the left wing of Syriza, and more specifically the Left Platform, which is its best organized component, be encouraged to claim some exclusive status. It nevertheless has a central role to play, as is now being widely recognized by friend and foe alike. And this in a sense, perhaps, is among the most significant gains of the past weeks.

As regards its goals, as they were recently summarized in a fine article by [Eleni Portaliou](#), my comrade of many years, the undertaking is centered on the following basic axes:

- The liberation of the country, and the Greek people, from the shackles of the eurozone, with immediate elaboration of a plan for exit from the memoranda and euro and across-the-board confrontation with the EU that, in my own view, should go as far as withdrawal.
- The reconstruction of this

ruined country “of its economy, of its state, and of its social fabric” headed by the working classes and the popular bloc, who are called on to lead this process.

- This project is profoundly class-based. It will be grounded in the leading sectors of the working class who voted “no” and rejected austerity by more than 70 percent in the referendum of July 5, and its backbone will be constituted by forces coming from the best traditions of the workers and of the revolutionary movement in their multiple expressions.

At the same time it is also national. And here of course more explanation is needed. As I understand it, the term “national” has two aspects to it. The first is the “national-popular” in the Gramscian sense “that the laboring masses must emerge as the leading force in society, that they must become “the nation” in order to reorient that “nation” in a different direction.

As Marx and Engels phrase it in the Communist Manifesto, “since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.” “National” here doesn’t mean, therefore, some “popular frontist” conception of trans-class unity with some spectral “national bourgeoisie,” or with some of its sectors. It refers to the hegemonic dimension of any class-centered project aimed at winning political supremacy.

Also, far from leading to any retreat to national narrowness, or to nationalism, this “nationalization” of the new hegemonic bloc, as I will explain in a moment, also means

embodying a profound new internationalism.

The project is also national in the sense that at this moment there is a problem of national sovereignty in Greece “that is to say, of the existence of popular sovereignty and of democracy itself. The new agreement that has been signed by the Greek government doesn’t simply perpetuate troika rule, it deepens it. We are now in a situation where the Greek state and any elected Greek government essentially do not have in their hands a single lever to exercise any policy at all.

This is perhaps the deeper objective of the memorandum, above and beyond the imposition of yet another package of barbarous austerity measures.

The secretariat for inland revenue, detached from the rest of the cabinet and placed under the control of the troika, has acquired total autonomy from the government. A financial council is being established that will be able to automatically institute horizontal cuts if there is divergence from any fiscal objective set in the memorandum. The infamous [â,-50 billion fund](#) is also being created under the direct control of the troika, and all Greek public property earmarked for privatization is being brought under its jurisdiction.

Even EL.STAT, Greece’s statistical service, is being transformed into an ostensibly independent authority that will be controlled directly by the troika and will serve as a mechanism for policing and checking, on a daily basis, on the Greek state’s implementation of memorandum goals.

Greece is thus being converted “I go so far as to draw this analogy” into a kind of Kosovo writ large, a country bound hand and foot in neocolonial chains and consigned to the status of an insignificant and ruined Balkan semi-protectorate. In such a conjuncture, reference to nationhood indicates that there is a problem of regaining national sovereignty as a prerequisite for exercising not even anticapitalist but democratic and progressive policies of the most elementary kind.

This project, finally, and this is in no way incompatible with what has just been stated, is profoundly internationalist. This is not only because defense of the vital class interests of the working people and the popular strata of a country is by its nature internationalist, given that exploited people of different countries have common interests. It is internationalist in a much more concrete sense, because a breach in the weak link in the eurozone and the EU opens the way for other ruptures in Europe and administers a powerful blow to the reactionary and anti-popular EU edifice.

Not only does our internationalism have nothing to do with the euro and the EU, but there will arise on its foundations an ever greater resistance to, and rejection of, these formations by the peoples of Europe.

The fight of the Greek and of the other European people against the iron cage of the EU will reveal the class and

imperialist character of this edifice and will thus allow the struggles inside the historical center of world capitalism to connect with the broader movements against imperialist and capitalist domination at a global scale, and more particularly with the movements of the Global South, which begins just at the other side of the Mediterranean.

Let us not forget here that in the landmark year of 2011, the first wave of popular rebellion after the onset of the 2008 crisis led to the nearly simultaneous outburst of the Arab Spring and of the Greek and Spanish movements of the occupation of city squares.

What we can now draw as a conclusion from the political experience that followed is that the perspective of a genuine "other Europe," which cannot be but socialist in orientation, requires the dissolution of today's eurozone and of the EU, starting with breaks in the weakest links. In addition, this dissolution is a

prerequisite for a proper break on the part of Europe "both with its colonial past and with its neocolonial and imperialist present.

As a conclusion, I would say that we have been taught a harsh lesson, and at a very heavy price. As is usually true in this type of situation, the first to be called on to pay the price will be workers, and in this case Greece as a country and as a society. But for us, for the forces of the radical and of the anticapitalist left, it was a necessary lesson. It can lead to our destruction, but also to a new beginning. Or as our great poet Kostis Palamas put it, to a "new birth" "if we can reflect on it and at the same time act.

Adapted from a speech at the public meeting organized by the webzine Kommon, in Athens, July 23. Many thanks to Panagiotis Frantzis for his help in transcribing the speech and to Wayne Hall for the translation.

Jacobin

An Alternative for SYRIZA

20 June 2015, by **Achilleas and Eleni**

by Achilleas and Eleni

The First Days of SYRIZA in Government

Since the beginning of the crisis in 2009, the Greek economy has undergone a brutal collapse, as attested by a cumulative GDP decline of 28% over a period of five years, and a public debt rise from 113% to 175% of the GDP. As a result of this collapse, unemployment increased to 26% (with one in two young people without a job) and a number of phenomena relatively unknown to our generation and foreign to the close-knit Greek society appeared in the cities, including infant mortality and suicide increase, soup kitchens, homelessness, and a large percentage of the population seeking primary health services through NGOs. The labor market was completely deregulated by abolishing

collective bargaining, instituting lockouts, and practically denying the right to strike with 95% of strikes declared illegal by the courts. Finally, the government operated in a mode where passing fast-track laws and issuing executive decrees was the norm, thus ridiculing the so-called parliamentary democratic process.

In this context, SYRIZA ran with a modest (even by US standards) program which first and foremost promised a write-off or restructuring of a large portion of the public debt in conjunction with balanced budgets. The program was based on four pillars:

measures for confronting the humanitarian crisis, such as food/energy stamps for the poorest;

measures for restarting the economy

and promoting tax justice, such as a €12K minimum taxable income, and a minimum monthly wage of €750 for the private sector;

measures that introduced reregulation of the labor market, as well as a public employment program with the aim of creating 300,000 new jobs;

measures that aim at enhancing transparency and democratic participation, such as citizen's legislative initiatives, curtailment of parliamentary immunity, and reregulating the mass media landscape that has been the territory of the Greek oligarchy.

Greek crowds celebrate the Syriza victory.

The first couple of weeks in February were full of symbolic and substantial moves by the new elected

government. The ousting of the "troika" (consisting of the EU, ECB, and IMF) technocrats from Greece, and the numerous visits of the finance minister and the prime minister to European capitals to meet with their peers, publicize the new program, and gain political support, created an atmosphere of hope. A number of Greeks felt that they regained the dignity they had lost in the previous four or so years of continuous economic and political violence by the domestic and foreign elites.

People who didn't even vote for SYRIZA went to the streets in our generation's first ever rally in support of the government. Even the relatively conservative establishment in the US expressed support to the anti-austerity policies that SYRIZA promoted, as evidenced by the numerous articles by New York Times and Wall Street Journal pundits.

Yet, as time went by, it became more and more evident that the pre-election agenda could not materialize. Negotiations upon negotiations lead to the February 20th bridging agreement by which the government essentially agreed to pause the execution of its program in order to gain time and the needed liquidity. Under the immense pressure of the troika, the government was forced to (1) agree on budget surpluses (although lower than the previously agreed upon); (2) continue the privatization of the largest port (Pireaus), along with more than 16 tourist destination airports; (3) delay the minimum wage increase, as well as the repealing of a highly regressive real-estate tax; and even (4) scale down the humanitarian relief program. It goes without saying that the important issue of the debt write-off/restructuring has been taken out of the agenda for now and has been postponed for a new round of negotiations to happen in June. At the time of writing, another negotiation is taking place, with the "troika" seizing an opportunity to completely ridicule the left government by asking them to kneel and accept all of its terms or else. SYRIZA is facing a bitter existential dilemma and is reaching a dead end, as evidenced by the prime minister Alexis Tsipras' recent talk about a referendum if the negotiations fail to produce a mutually agreeable

result (without though specifying what this referendum will ask).

Needless to say, besides the economic sphere, this government is expected to address a number of important issues, such as foreign policy matters and international relations (with Cyprus, Turkey, Israel, Russia, China, FYROM), the reformation of the penitentiary system, church and state relations, civil rights, corruption, and media oligarchs. With a few substantial exceptions, the SYRIZA-ANEL government has not taken action yet on most of these issues, which is to some extent understandable under the current situation.

Observing this brutal assault of the transnational elite on the democratically elected government and the people of Greece, one need not be a radical to empathize with the Greek people, side with the SYRIZA-ANEL government, and hope that they will not cave to the ever-expanding demands of our European "partners". On the other hand, it is our responsibility as radicals to assess with a clear head the tactical, and more importantly, the strategic mistakes of SYRIZA. It is of great importance to understand if the current predicament is not attributed to lack of experience and/or the other side's irrational behavior, but is a direct consequence of SYRIZA's overall political analysis. This painful exercise is essential for the citizens in countries of the European south, that are not (yet) in the position of Greece, and also for the citizens on the other side of the Atlantic, even in the comparatively prosperous USA, since by looking at Greece one may get a glimpse of their own future.

The Political Analysis of the European Left

It is now pretty much accepted by friends and foes of SYRIZA that the belief in the ability of the government to implement anti-austerity policies within the EU (let alone within the Eurozone (EZ)) is a pipe dream. This belief can only lead to continuous

retreats with the only visible end an economy with labor force conditions akin to that of China. But why was SYRIZA unable to diagnose this accurately and timely? In our opinion, the reasons lie in the political analysis of SYRIZA leadership, which is shared by much of the European left. According to this analysis, neoliberalism is an ideology, one of the many possible manifestations of capitalism and it can thus be reversed within the EU if appropriate political parties come to power. The recent crisis, it is said, is the result of such neoliberal policies that were enacted by right-wing governments (with Thatcher and Reagan always listed as the villains) and greedy capitalists all over the world in the end of the 70s, thus ending the post-war social-democratic consensus.

This analysis disregards a number of systemic components of capitalism, such as (a) that capital is always greedy—by necessity; (b) these policies have been consistently implemented by both center-right and center-left (social-democratic/liberal) governments over the last 30 years and cannot be attributed just to economically conservative politicians; (c) neoliberalism is a structural phenomenon that occurred in the 70s when the internationalized economy, dominated by the emergence of the transnational corporations and faced with declining profits and stagnation, became incompatible with the social-democratic consensus. The emerging globalized economy necessitated a different, more extroverted/competitive economic model in place of the model of production/consumption for the domestic market (this of course does not mean that such a change was unavoidable due to some kind of material law of History, but was a result of the objective and subjective conditions of that time). Consequently in today's internationalized economy there cannot be any kind of capitalism other than a neoliberal one, and thus, any return to Keynesian/New Deal politics is impossible, since such policies require a strong nation state and relatively closed economies. To put it differently, capitalism will commit suicide if it accepts such policies.

It should not be surprising that once this idea of "neoliberalism as an option" is accepted, one can hope that EU (the main globalizing institution in Europe) can be transformed into a fairer, more equal, and more prosperous economic and political area, accountable to its citizens. Following this point of view the way forward is to push for technical solutions within the EZ, such as the issuing of Eurobonds by the ECB, or even the exit of the EZ in order for a country to gain monetary sovereignty. However, although the ability of a country to define its monetary policy is a necessary condition for sovereignty, it is by no means sufficient, since the freedom of movement of capital, goods, services, and labor is a founding principle of the EU (not just the EZ).

Finally, another corollary of this analysis is that ostensibly the EU is the only acceptable arena for social struggle. In fact, any popular movement that defines itself as national is seen with suspicion by the left. This internationalist thesis deemphasizes the national liberation aspect of this struggle and leaves this space to be filled by ultra-right-wing political rhetoric. This way the left pushes away a large majority of newly pauperized low- and middle-class victims of the crisis, whose interests naturally align with the working class. These people, not being class aware, are guiding their anger and frustration towards the wrong targets, depriving at the same time the Left of a vibrant social ally.

In our opinion the above-mentioned political analysis dictates the strategy of SYRIZA and has imprisoned the government in this dead end negotiation with its admittedly cynical "partners." Therefore, the question emerges almost inevitably: what is a more realistic analysis that the Left should adopt so as to identify the problem, address—even partially—its causes, and empower people to create a way out of the crisis?

An Alternative

Analysis and a Sketch of a Transition Program

The roots of the crisis lie in the very structure of the capitalist system. This is a structural, systemic problem. Capitalism promotes uneven development of world economies, according to the role assigned to each country based on its position in the world economic net. One need not be a proponent of dependency theory to agree with this observation. Today we experience globalized capitalism, and more specifically its fierce evolution to neoliberalism. Once a small economy like Greece is fully integrated in this globalized system, it has no other choice but to try to be competitive by adopting some of the most inhumane and socially destructive remedies: massive privatizations, fiscal austerity, deregulation, flexible labor markets, low wages, implementation of an extroverted production/consumption model, leading to the disruption of social cohesion and solidarity of any kind.

Countries integrated in the globalized economy clearly have almost zero degrees of freedom. The more attached they are to globalizing institutions, the more distant the potential of escaping the grasp of neoliberalism becomes. In Europe, the dominant institution of global capitalism is no other than the EU. Therefore, it becomes crystal clear that, as explained above, in order to regain sovereignty, a country has to exit not only the EZ, if a member, but the EU itself. This exit, although not sufficient, is necessary for a country to pursue a different fate.

The above analysis prescribes a possible viable solution to the Greek crisis: exit the EZ/EU, issue a national currency, and immediately impose unilateral debt write-off. Liberated from the noose of the EU treaties and regulations, Greek people will have the freedom to follow a sovereign monetary and fiscal policy and form trade and international alliances to the best of their interests. Pressured by

the people, the government will be able to increase and reprioritize public spending so as to effectively and rapidly fight unemployment, to control capital movement and achieve redistribution of wealth through taxation, to enhance and reconstruct domestic production, to strengthen democracy, transparency, and social control of all aspects of public life.

It should be clear that such a solution does not even remotely constitute an end of the social struggle towards a fair and equitable democratic society (such a teleology is in any case foreign to democracy). However, given the realities of the devastated Greek economy and society, this solution may provide a fruitful beginning. It is, for sure, a steep path to follow. Nevertheless, it is more immediate than a generalized social revolution (which part of the radical left sees as a prerequisite for change), which would require vastly different objective and subjective conditions. At the same time, it is not a reformist approach, as it identifies the core of the problem, which is the globalized neoliberal capitalist system, and aims for direct, substantial changes outside this system. This transition strategy will initiate and cultivate a public discussion, engage and educate the people, and encourage them to think outside the asphyxiating systemic box, while at the same time improving their material conditions (at least in the long run). This is not a suggestion for an instructional or patronizing left; it is a suggestion for a left that demolishes all taboos and inflexibilities, inspiring and unifying people in this crucial crossroad.

Building a massive and unified popular front is admittedly not easy. Extra-parliamentary radical left groups in Greece have a hard time agreeing on how to form such a social front so as to gather as much support as possible around them and fight to win this battle. Apart from the economic and political elite, which obviously is not the target group of this collective attempt, there is no consensus as to who should be included in this front. Is this going to be an anti-capitalist front, one of the radical left, or one of national liberation? Should it expand beyond the traditional limits of the left? What should it fight for and what

should it focus on? These questions are not easy to answer, but they reveal several of today's challenges that radical leftists in Europe and elsewhere have to face and answer.

The obstacles that SYRIZA is facing and the contradictions of its analysis should not discourage working class people from fighting their way to

transform society. It is however of crucial importance, now more than ever, to identify which is the battlefield, who are the allies, and who is the enemy. Dead ends should make us reflect and seek ways out. The bulldozer of neoliberal capitalism can be eliminated and give way to an inclusively democratic, just, and equitable society.

Solidarity to Greek people who fight for hope!

Solidarity to all people who fight for freedom and social justice against all authority!

June 12, 2015

[Against the Current](#)

The Battle in Syriza

16 June 2015, by **Alexis Tsipras**, **Stathis Kouvelakis**

Alexis Tsipras: "No to a Two-Speed Eurozone"

On January 25 the Greek people took a courageous decision. They dared to challenge the memorandum's one-way street of rigorous austerity, and demanded a new agreement. That is, a new agreement allowing Greece to get back on course to growth "within the eurozone, and with a viable economic program" while avoiding the errors of the past.

The Greek people have paid a heavy price for these past mistakes. In five years, unemployment climbed to 28% (and to 60% among young people), while the mean income fell by 40%, as Greece became the European Union state with the highest index of social inequality, according to the Eurostat figures.

Worse still, even despite the great damage that has been caused to Greece's social fabric, this program has not succeeded in restoring its economy to competitiveness, while the public debt has swollen from 124 to 180% of GDP. Despite the great sacrifices of the Greek people, the country's economy is still mired in the continual uncertainty engendered by the unrealizable goals of the doctrine of balanced budgets. This has trapped it in a vicious circle of austerity and recession.

The Greek government's main goal over the last four months has been to put an end to this vicious circle and this uncertainty. Now more than ever, what is needed is a mutually beneficial agreement to set realistic objectives for the budget surplus, at the same time as we reintroduce a program of development and investment: a definitive solution to the Greek situation. Moreover, such an accord would mark the end of the European economic crisis that broke out seven years ago, putting an end to the eurozone's cycle of uncertainty.

Today Europe has the capacity to make the decisions that will produce a strong recovery in the Greek and European economy, putting an end to any prospect of a "Grexit." Such a prospect is a barrier to the long-term stabilization of the European economy, and is liable to undermine citizens' and investors' confidence in our joint currency at any moment.

Yet some people say that Greece is doing nothing to help make progress in this direction, because it arrives at the negotiations with an intransigent attitude, and without offering any proposals. But is that really the case?

Given that the moment we are living through is of critical or even historic importance for both Greece's and Europe's future, I would like to set the record straight, giving both European and world public opinion a responsible picture of the real intentions and positions of the Greek government.

After the Eurogroup's February 20 decision, our government submitted a number of proposed reforms, seeking an agreement that would combine respect for both the verdict of the Greek people and the rules that govern the functioning of the eurozone. In particular, we agreed to smaller primary surpluses [the budget surplus before interest payments] for 2015 and 2016 and higher ones for the subsequent years, with the expectation that they will rise in correspondence with the rate that the Greek economy grows.

Another important proposal was our commitment to raise public revenue by shifting the burden from low- and middle-income citizens to those who have higher incomes and, up till now, have failed to pay their share in dealing with the crisis, protected as they have been both by my own country's political elite and by the troika, which closed its eyes to this.

Moreover, from its first day in office the new government has demonstrated its intentions and its determination by introducing a legislative measure to confront fraudulent triangular transactions, intensifying customs and fiscal controls in order to suppress smuggling and tax evasion. Simultaneously, for the first time in many years the Greek state has charged the media owners for their debts.

The changed climate in the country is

obvious. It is also proven by the fact that the courts have accelerated the processing of cases, so judgments on matters concerning tax evasion come through in a shorter time frame. The oligarchs who were accustomed to being protected by the political system have good reason to lose sleep over this.

During the discussions with the institutions we not only set out our general line of march, but also made specific proposals. We have thus bridged a large part of the distance that separated us a few months ago. More specifically, the Greek side has agreed to embark on a series of institutional reforms, such as the strengthening of the independence of the Greek Statistics Agency (Elstat); interventions designed to speed up the administration of justice; as well as interventions in the markets in order to eliminate privileges and distortion.

Moreover, though we are diametrically opposed to the model of privatizations that the institutions advocate – which does not offer any prospect of development, and does not effect any sort of transfer of resources to the real economy, but only goes toward paying off debt, which is by no means viable – we have agreed to pursue the privatizations program with a few small modifications, thus demonstrating our intention of drawing toward a rapprochement.

We also arrived at an agreement on mounting a major reform of VAT, simplifying the system and strengthening its redistributive element, with the aim of raising both the collection rate and the overall revenue.

We made concrete proposals for further measures to increase tax receipts (an exceptional charge on very high profits, a tax on online gambling, intensified controls on the big fraudulent depositors, measures to recover overdue payments to the state, a special tax on luxury goods, a tendering process for radio and TV licenses) – the kind of measures the troika seem to have forgotten about, as if by accident, for the last five years and more.

These measures are aimed at increasing the state's revenues at the

same time as avoiding adding to the recession, since they do not weaken effective demand and do not impose any further burden on those on low and middle incomes.

We reached an agreement on implementing a major reform of the social security system, with the merger of the social insurance funds and the suppression of measures allowing the unjustified granting of early retirement, and thus increasing the real retirement age.

We have to take account of the fact that the social insurance schemes' losses, which raised question marks over their medium-term viability, are principally because of political choices. The responsibility for this lies with both the previous Greek governments and, above all, the troika (the €25 billion reduction of their reserve funds thanks to "private sector involvement" in 2012, and above all the very high unemployment rate, which owes almost exclusively to the extreme austerity program applied in Greece since 2010).

Finally, despite our commitment to immediately reestablish European labor norms – these having been completely pulled apart over the last five years, under the pretext of competitiveness – we agreed to implement a reform of the labor market, after consulting and securing the agreement of the International Labour Office.

Taking all the above into account, we might rightly ask why the representatives of the institutions persist in saying that Greece has not presented any positive proposals. Why continue to refuse to provide liquidity to the Greek economy, when Greece has demonstrated that it does want to respect its external obligations, paying more than €17 billion in principal and interest since August 2014 (around 10% of its GDP) without outside funding?

Finally, what is the agenda of the people who make leaks to the press saying that we are far from reaching an agreement, when such an accord would allow an end to the political and economic uncertainty that is today felt at both a European and world level,

and which the Greek question has only aggravated?

The unofficial answer that you get from some people is that we are not close to an agreement because the Greek side has dug into its positions of reestablishing collective bargaining and refusing to cut pensions further.

I ought to provide some explanation on these points: as for the first of them, Greece's position is that its labor legislation ought to correspond to European norms, and it cannot flagrantly violate European legislation. We are asking for nothing more than what is already the norm in the eurozone countries. We made a statement to this end together with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

As for the second point, concerning pensions, the Greek position has a logical position based on sound reasoning. The cumulative reduction of pensions in Greece in the memorandum period ranges between 20 and 48%: today 44.5% of retired people receive a pension below the relative poverty line, and according to Eurostat 23.1% of them live in risk of poverty and social exclusion. This situation, which is a result of the memorandum policy, is intolerable in Greece just as it would be for any civilized country.

So we have to tell it like it is: if we have not yet reached an agreement with our partners, it is not because of our intransigence or because our positions are incomprehensible. Rather, the cause is certain institutional representatives' obsessive insistence on unreasonable solutions, demonstrating their indifference toward the democratic outcome of the recent Greek parliamentary elections as well as toward the positions of the European and international institutions, who have stated that they are ready to show some flexibility out of respect for the verdict at the ballot box.

Why this obsession? An easy explanation would be to say that it expresses certain institutional representatives' interest in covering up the failure of their own program, securing a sort of confirmation of it.

Indeed, we should not forget that a few years ago the IMF publicly recognized that it had failed to foresee the devastating effects that the multiple budget cuts imposed on Greece would produce.

I do not think that this is a sufficient explanation. I don't believe that Europe's fate can hang on the obsessions of a few individual actors.

I have reached the conclusion that the Greek question does not concern Greece alone, but is at the center of a conflict between two opposed strategies for the future of European integration.

The first seeks the deepening of European integration, in a context of equality and solidarity among its peoples and citizens. Those who support this strategy start out from the fact that it is unacceptable to force the new Greek government to apply the same policies as the previous administrations did – which, moreover, totally failed.

Otherwise we would have to do without elections in any country subject to an austerity program, and accept the European and international institutions imposing prime ministers and governments and depriving the citizens of their right to vote until the program is complete. This would amount to the abolition of democracy in Europe and the beginning of an intolerable split in the EU. Ultimately, all this would result in the birth of a technocratic monster and Europe abandoning the values on which it was founded.

The second strategy would lead to a rupture and the division of the eurozone, and thus of the EU. The first step in this direction would be the formation of a two-speed eurozone, with the central core imposing the harsh rule of austerity and structural adjustment. This central core would also impose a super minister of finance for the eurozone, who would enjoy immense power, with the right to reject national budgets – of sovereign states – who failed to conform to the doctrines of extreme neoliberalism.

There would be a simple solution for

all the countries who refused to give into this power, namely severe punishment: the compulsory imposition of austerity, and, added to that, restrictions on the movement of capital, disciplinary sanctions, fines and even the creation of a currency parallel to the euro.

That is how the new European power is trying to establish itself, and Greece is its first victim. It is already being presented as the bad example that the other disobedient states and peoples of Europe must not follow.

But the fundamental problem is that this second strategy carries great risks, and those who are promoting it seem not to realize this. This second strategy risks becoming the beginning of the end for the eurozone currency union, transforming it into a simple exchange rate zone. But, moreover, it opens up a process of political and economic uncertainty that could also upset the balance across the whole Western world, from top to bottom.

Today, Europe is at the crossroads. After the Greek government's major concessions, the decision no longer rests in the hands of the institutions – which, with the exception of the European Commission, are unelected and unaccountable to the people – but in the hands of Europe's leaders.

Which strategy will win out? The Europe of solidarity, equality, and democracy, or the Europe of rupture and ultimately division?

If some think, or want us to believe, that this question concerns Greece alone, they are very much mistaken. I can only refer them to Ernest Hemingway's great work, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Stathis Kouvelakis: Syriza Inside the "Iron Cage"?

This column by Alexis Tsipras is important in a number of regards. It shows a qualitative change in the Greek situation, for many different reasons.

Before anything else, for the first time Tsipras provides us (Greek readers included) with a list of the concessions that the Greek government accepted during the negotiations with the institutions, as the troika has now been renamed.

And the list is an impressive one: agreement on budget surpluses; the effective abandonment of the demand of canceling the debt (not even mentioned in this text); a rise in the VAT; postponing the rise in the minimum wage and the restoration of collective bargaining to a vague future and on condition of an International Labour Organization approval; implementing cost-saving pension reforms; and rubber-stamping existing taxes on property, which Syriza had staunchly committed itself to abolishing.

And to that we should add another essential point: as the Greek version of Tsipras's text makes clear, the "strengthening of the independence of public bodies" concerns not only the statistics agency ELSTAT but, most importantly, the state secretariat for public revenue.

Thus the very heart of the state's economic apparatus is freed from the control of elected governments: in reality, it will work under the direct supervision of EU institutions. Keeping Katerina Savaidou in this strategic position, who was appointed in the last weeks of the previous government, was already an indication that the government had consented to keep this strategic body out of its field of control.

Let's be clear. Firstly, these concessions, which Alexis Tsipras has recognized here for the first time, have never been publicly discussed at any level, neither in the party nor in parliament, nor even within the government, in the sense of a collective debate communicated to the citizenry. They are simply announced, after having been concocted during the entirely opaque negotiations with the EU.

Secondly, in this text Alexis Tsipras fails to pick up on a theme that he had referred to on many other occasions, including in his widely commented on

Der Spiegel interview, namely the fact that since February the ECB has been using liquidity as a means of blackmailing Greece.

He only mentions the halt to the loan payments, which has forced the Greek government to reimburse its lenders by drawing on its own resources alone – a process that has led to the current situation, where the coffers are running dry. As such, he denies himself the central argument that could have allowed him to show what the EU is really up to – but which would, at the same time, have forced him to admit the weakening of his position and the harmful character of the February 20 agreement that he continues to defend.

Thirdly, it is clear that however the question is posed, the framework that Tsipras is proposing here is one of softened austerity, and in no sense a rupture with austerity. The whole edifice of the memoranda is renewed, but just trimmed at the edges. Conversely, not much is left of the Thessaloniki Program, which was, lest we forget, presented as an “emergency program” that would be applied immediately and independently of the outcome of the negotiations.

Even worse, the four red lines that Alexis Tsipras had himself set down on April 16 in a portentous declaration to Reuters (on pensions, VAT, privatization and collective bargaining) have all to some extent been crossed.

So some might ask where the blockage is, and why Alexis Tsipras is seeking to dramatize things, as the final sentence of the article (“for whom the bell tolls”) and certain passages would seem to indicate. The very simple reason for that is that the troika isn’t happy to continue with the existing austerity and memorandum framework.

The troika’s demand is to aggravate it, by imposing immediately further cuts in pensions and increased deregulation of the labor market, with the goal of humiliating Syriza. And Tsipras knocks the ball back into their court, saying, “You’re looking for rupture, not me. I, you see, am ready to manage austerity and defer sine die the program I was elected on, but you demand more than that, demanding that I go beyond even what you asked of Samaras.”

And then he brandishes the specter of the “division of Europe” and calls for its “values” to be respected, as if the burial of Syriza’s promises not even five months after it was elected was an acceptable sacrifice in order to preserve this European “unity”; as if accepting the “deal” he proposes could represent a step towards the “Europe of solidarity, equality and democracy” that he evokes (this is just empty phrase-mongering – rarely has it sounded so sinister).

Without playing at being a prophet and predict where all this is going to lead us, let’s simply note the current state of things:

The Greek government has entered into a veritable spiral of retreats, where one concession leads to another, and there is no reason to think it is going to stop.

All this was entirely predictable, because the majority of Syriza’s leadership didn’t prepare and adopt a line of confrontation as was proposed since the start of the crisis in the numerous interventions of the Left Platform and, more broadly, of the Syriza left.

Clearly, after all this, to persist in speaking of a rupture with austerity and neoliberal policies within the current European framework is either irresponsibility or a deliberate attempt to fool people.

There is an alternative.

Another way is still possible, that could spare the most promising

experience of the Left for decades the disaster which is now looming. Its main elements have been pointed in the last document of the Left Platform, which got 44% of the vote at the last session of Syriza’s central committee.

The government should proceed to a counterattack with an alternative plan that is based on Syriza’s pre-electoral pledges and the government’s programmatic announcements, a plan structured along the following set of measures to be implemented immediately:

The nationalization of the banks with all necessary accompanying measures to insure their function along transparent, productive, developmental and social criteria.

The immediate termination of every grid protecting the country’s scandal-immersed oligarchy.

The substantial taxation of wealth and large properties, as well as the taxation of top earners and of high corporate profitability.

The immediate and full reintroduction, as well as safeguarding and practical implementation of labor legislation and rights to trade union organization. The government has to counter decisively the propaganda of the ruling circles that terrorizes the people with the scenario of full disaster that the suspension of debt servicing and of an eventual exit from the eurozone will allegedly bring upon the country.

The priority of the next few days should be to default on the debt and not proceed to the next IMF payment on June 5.

The greatest disaster facing Greece would be the imposition of a new memorandum that would signify the end of any hope for an alternative to the neoliberal shock therapy. This development must be avoided, as Malcolm X used to say, by any means and sacrifice necessary.

[Jacobin](#)

The Syriza strategy has come to an end

4 May 2015, by **Costas Lapavitsas**

What's your opinion on the negotiations so far? How is the government doing?

The Syriza strategy has been - and it remains - that a change in the political alignment of forces in Greece, in Europe, or generally, would act as a catalyst in the Eurozone. This strategy has now come to an end. The real question is how long it will be before people understand it.

I was always extremely skeptical of it. I always argued that it isn't just about political alignment, there are institutional mechanisms and the logic of the monetary union. And those who believe that a simple change of politics is enough to transform this, were mistaken and I think this has been confirmed.

What we've seen is that the institutional framework of the Eurozone and the ideological machinery attached to it are not susceptible to arguments that come from electoral realignments. So the agreement of the 20th of February at the Eurogroup reflects that.

Do your party members notice that this strategy has come to an end?

Syriza is a big organization which has grown very rapidly. It reflects society. It isn't some kind of traditional party of the left, and therefore there is a variety of opinions and of political conscience.

I think that the leadership of the party knows that it has a very tough choice ahead of it: Do we persevere with the programme that we proclaimed to the Greek people? Or do we submit to what the institutions, the Brussels Group, the troika, whatever you want to call it, want us to do? These two things are incompatible.

So there is no middle way?

There is no middle way. The Eurozone

will not allow it. Do I think the leadership was surprised? Yes, I suspect they were to a certain extent. Because my reading of the situation is that the leadership genuinely believed that you could change the political alignments, you could change electoral arithmetic, and on this basis change Europe, change European policies.

So what should the Greek government do in your opinion?

Greece needs to consider the true alternative path which is to leave this failed monetary union. It is clearly the only way that was there from the beginning - which is basically exit. If you are going to apply such a programme, as Syriza has proclaimed, which is not radical - Syriza's programme is just moderate Keynesianism -, you need to think seriously of how you are going to get out of the confines of the Eurozone.

Do you think Syriza has the mandate for it?

A straight answer is no. Syriza has a mandate to fulfil its programme. Indirectly, not directly, it has a mandate to keep the country in the Eurozone. But this question was never openly posed to the Greek people.

Is the solution a referendum?

The first thing to do is not so much discuss the idea of a referendum but actually that of the alternative strategy. There has to be a genuine public debate at last. That's not easy because for five years this country has been subjected to the most incredible misinformation and scaremongering campaigns. So the atmosphere has been very badly poisoned. It is not impossible to have this debate now but it is much more difficult than a few years back.

In my judgement, the best strategy

right now is what I call a consensual and orderly exit. Not a contested exit.

Can you elaborate on that?

I think Greece should set a target for itself to negotiate an exit basically without rupture, without falling out, without fighting, without unilateral actions. This would mean: Exit takes place and Greece seeks deep debt restructuring.

Why would the EU-partners accept? This exit has two elements that the EZ doesn't want: the exit itself and the debt restructuring.

I am not entirely certain the EZ doesn't want exit. I suspect that it does. And in my judgement if a country asked for a negotiated way out, it might as well receive it. Germany, Schauble, back in 2011 was in favor of a negotiated exit.

The price for the EZ should be debt restructuring. But they are two more very important elements: the protection of the exchange rate and protection of the banks. These are essentially costless for the ECB because Greece is a small country.

What would Europe win out of it?

Peace and quiet. (Pause...) For a period.

Why only for a period?

Because the monetary union in my judgement is a major historical failure. It's Europe's biggest failure in decades. And it will not last. But obviously it might last long enough for Greece to be dead. Of course the EZ proponents believe it is going to last forever. It is a historical delusion. Monetary unions don't last this long. Let them believe it. Fine.

Would the EU as a political construction survive if countries exit the monetary union?

In 15 years the monetary union has undone all the goodwill generated in Europe by the EU. The state of relations in the European countries today is probably worse than it's been for decades. The state of affairs between Germany and Greece is appalling, absolutely atrocious. And this because of the euro.

This is proof that this money doesn't generate solidarity, this money creates divisions. And this is again the biggest evidence of its failure. Now stubbornness, unwillingness to recognize the failure of it in the last five years is making things worse. What the EU has done in the last 5 years is to tie itself even more closely around the common currency instead of deeply restructuring it. It has actually made it harder. So yes if now the common currency fails, which I think it will, then the EU will be in question, that's the price to pay for the historical mistake of the common currency.

So for Greece, does leaving the EZ also mean leaving the EU?

The most important is to differentiate between the EU and the EZ. In this country, and in most of Europe, a sustained confusion has been going on for years. That the membership of one equals the membership of the other. It's of course absurd because there are members of the EU which are not members of the European monetary union. If Greece leaves the euro, it doesn't have to leave the EU at the same time. If the Greek people want to leave the EU, let them leave the EU. But that's a separate question. This conflation has been deadly and it's been used ideologically...

There were binding mechanisms even before the monetary union...

The previous regimes were not successful but, compared to the disaster the common currency has been, the previous regimes were beacons of success. The bottom line: Europe needs a monetary system that allows for monetary flexibility. It is complete nonsense to impose a system of monetary inflexibility and at the same time to create flexibility through labour markets and the private sector. But the most profound reason for the

failure of the euro is of course German policy.

Why that?

Germany is the country that is the most delinquent in Europe. Not Greece, not Spain, not Italy. And certainly not France. France is playing far more by the book than Germany. Germany has been not keeping the rules and I can make it very simple for you: Germany often accuses Greece - Schauble for instance does - that Greece has been living beyond its means. It's true. But Germany has also been systematically living below its means, and this is how exports are generated, not because of technology, productivity and all that. That's why it is so successful.

But when you are in a monetary union it cannot be a bad thing to live above your means and a good thing to live below. The real rule must be to live by your means. So Germany has not kept the rules and the price is paid by the German people. I understand full well how the German people live. I know very well that wages have not risen for years, that one third of the labor force lives under precarious conditions. Precarious employment, wages below productivity...,

So what you are saying is that the euro has not been good for the German people either...

This also explains why the German people are annoyed and angry when it comes to sending money abroad, paying for others. Of course, I would be angry too in that position: you live in a very tight way, you count your beans and then somebody comes and tells you, you have to pay.

On the other hand, German exporting business, the German banks, this is a different story. They've done very well. But that's for the German people to sort out.

Do you think the Germans are kept in fear with a purpose? If you are a German you are always told "things will get worse". Germany - we are told- is not performing as it could, Europe is not performing as it could, there is China, there is India, the globalization...

Globalization is one of those words that means all and nothing. There has been a consistent policy on the part of the German establishment to scare the German public and the German workers, to keep them in fear of tomorrow and of unemployment in particular, there is no doubt. The original idea back in 1998-1999 when unemployment was high is that we accept low wages to restore employment within the confines of a monetary union. Now the argument seems to be 'we accept low wages to compete with the Chinese'. There is no end to this. The truth is low wages are not good for Germany. Germany needs a policy of boosting domestic demand. This is neo-mercantilism, the belief that growth comes from abroad only, that the only wealth is exports.

Are you making the same point about Greece? Is domestic demand the key to return to growth? How should Greece get back on its feet?

There are three stages. First, as I said, is the negotiated, consensual, orderly exit.

Second stage is recovery and that would depend very much on recovery of domestic demand which is very heavily repressed in this country. There are vast resources lying unused. Small and medium enterprises would be reactivated, that's what would really restart the Greek economy. Not exports - this worship of exports is nonsense.

But obviously that is not really a path for sustainable growth. What Greece would need after that would be an industrial policy to restructure its productive base, to integrate itself in the world economy on a different basis. That would take a few years.

But Greece would be still part of a common market, as a member of the EU. So it is not so easy to go back to domestic demand and to the SMEs, because it would have to kick out the big companies that could still sell cheaper.

I believe that Greece could out-compete imports very easily. Unfortunately, wages have been destroyed during the last 5 years due to bailout policies. A devaluation of

15-20% (but no more since as I said the ECB would defend the exchange rate) would give a tremendous competitive advantage. Wages would then gradually rise again.

What are the chances for that to happen? For Greece to choose that path?

At 2010 I said there are 3 possible solutions. Austerity, the 'good euro' and exit. I said that the most likely solution would be austerity and this would be a disaster. As for the good euro strategy (i.e., that you achieve Keynesian policy within the confines of the euro – the strategy of Syriza), I said that the chances of this occurring were close to zero. The strategy of exit is the only logical one. The real issue is will it be contested or orderly? I don't know. But exit there will be at some point.

How can it be orderly when now even implying that the negotiations are not going well brings panics and fear of a bank run?

The first thing to happen is for the EU and Greece to understand that they are flogging a dead horse. After 5 years of torture, it is time to finish. This strategy has come to an end. Some sense please. So when I say a strategic aim this is what I mean. People have to come to terms with it. And those who refuse to see, it is

because of ideological reasons, because this ideology is poisoning the debate.

What is this ideology?

It is not neoliberalism, it is Europeanism. The idea of Europe as this transcendental entity which is good for all of us and we all belong to it. This great fiction that has emerged in the dominant countries and has come to penetrate the weaker countries.

I am socialist, old style, with the old meaning of the word, the idea of the United States of Europe and of European solidarity is a socialist idea and I share it. Obviously it has also been a Nazi idea, used by Hitler. No one has the monopoly of the idea of a unified Europe.

I don't believe in a single European people, there is no European demos, and there shouldn't be. Europe is about plurality, many different languages, cultures. Since when was it desirable for all of us to be just European, to be one thing?

These are illusions and ideologies. I don't see a political convergence, I see the rise of fascism, the rise of the extreme right, I see extreme tension. Front National in France is at 30% of the vote, and the way things are going, I would not be surprised if the next president of France were a fascist.

If the euro was such a bad idea, why is there this "stubbornness" - as you called it - across Europe to support it? What are the interests behind the idea?

Money is the embodiment of non-economic relations as well. It embodies social relations, it has identity attached to it. This often means national identity. The Americans are the dollar, the British are the pound, the Germans used to be the Deutsche Mark. The euro particularly in the countries of the periphery has come to mean being European. You see it also in the Baltic countries. So there is an element of identity and an element of international policy.

But why the core countries of the EU are so much attached to the idea of the common currency?

I think the core doesn't know how to get out. A bad mistake was made 15 years ago, and the risks of getting out are perceived as very high. At the same time, some special interests, the exporting sector, the banking sector, are strongly defending it because it has served their strategy.

30 April 2015

[Verso](#)

A shorter version of this interview was published in German in the Berlin daily Der Tagesspiegel.

The government, the party and the people

29 April 2015, by Antonis Davanellos

In their agreement with Eurozone finance ministers in February, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis made major concessions on SYRIZA's pre-election commitments not to extend the

Troika's bailout program and to reverse austerity. But that wasn't enough – the Eurozone is demanding the full implementation of previous and new measures before it releases

further funds, including money owed to the Greek government. Plus, the media are reporting that Eurozone ministers are pressuring Tsipras to get rid of left-wing forces within the party and the government. [