



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 PrAncipe and Dan Russell titled [Asking the Right Questions](#). PrAncipe 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 discussing "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 revolutionaries "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 arise—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 list—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 way—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, Lapavitsas 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 Lapavitsas' 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](#), Lapavitsas 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 Blandis, 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 Lapavitsas' 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](#)

Footnotes

[1] The article was published in Greek at the Red Network website and was translated into English from a French translation at *A l'encontre* and a Spanish translation at *Viento Sur* by Todd Chretien.

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.

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THIS WILLINGNESS to pit one people against other people is as old as the hills, and its function is to obscure the real causes of the current struggle. At this moment, this is being played out in a real political effort, which aims to rip out at the roots the anti-austerity protests which have broken out all

over. Essentially, for those EU leaders, this had more to do with imposing a demonstrative political defeat than with any attempt to carry out remote-control calculations.

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

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

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

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

countries, are struggling, day after day, to expel austerity from our daily lives.

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* [1]: 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 [2] 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 [3] 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 [4], "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 [5] 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* [6] - 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" [7] 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 [<http://cadtm.org/Nos-meilleurs-allies-les-300-000> class="spip_out" rel="external">Quelle réponse de Syriza aux millions de citoyens solidaires de par l'Europe ?

'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 i.e. 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 Isihos, 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 on 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". [1].

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". [2].

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" [3]. 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” [4].

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 [5], 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 [6]: 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 [7]. 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" [8]. 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." [9].

27 July

[Alencontre](#)

Footnotes

[1] Stathis Kouvelakis, "Il faut s'opposer à ceux qui mènent la Grèce et la gauche grecque à la capitulation", July 24, 2015

[2] Jacques Sapir, "La Grèce, la gauche", *El Correo*, July 25, 2015

[3] Michel Husson, "Grèce: l'économie politique du crime", *A l'encontre*, June 29, 2015

[4] Michel Husson, "Euro: en sortir ou pas?" *A l'encontre*, July 18, 2011

[5] John Milios, "Ils pensaient pouvoir gouverner de la même façon qu'avant la crise", *A l'encontre*, July 22, 2015

[6] Michel Husson, "Grèce: une économie dépendante et rentière", *A l'encontre*, March 12, 2015 ; George Economakis, Maria Markaki, Alexios Anastasiadis, "Structural Analysis of the Greek Economy", *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 47(3), 2015

[7] Uwe Böwer, Vasiliki Michou, Christoph Ungerer "The Puzzle of the Missing Greek Exports", *European Economy*, 2014

[8] Jacques Sapir, "Les conditions d'un "Grexit"", July 11, 2015

[9] John Milios, op cit.

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 didn't want to make any shifts that could damage the process of financialisation that they had insisted was the only way forward. Greece, the weakest link in the EU chain, went first, followed by Spain, Portugal, Ireland. Italy was on the brink. The Troika dictated the policies to be followed in all these countries.

Conditions in Greece have been horrific: a quarter of a million Greeks applied for humanitarian relief to buy food and help with rent and electricity; the percentage of children living in poverty leaped from 23 per cent in 2008 to 40.5 per cent in 2014 and

is now approaching 50 per cent. In March 2015 youth unemployment stood at 49.7 per cent, 300,000 people had no access to electricity and the Prolepsis Institute of Preventive Medicine found that 54 per cent of Greeks were undernourished. Pensions dropped by 27 per cent between 2011 and 2014.

Syriza insisted that this constituted collective punishment, and that a new "deal" was needed, one that aimed to bring some improvement to the conditions of everyday life.

The EU has now succeeded in crushing the political alternative that Syriza represented.

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 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. [1] 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 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:

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

– SYRIZA provided a political alternative with its demand for a government of the left.

– 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 â€” and within the debates that should accompany them â€” 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 â€” whether to keep the euro or go back to the drachma â€” 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 â€” 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 â€” 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 â€” 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 â€” 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 â€” 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. [2]

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:

• Write-off of the greater part of the public debt's nominal value;

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

• A moratorium in debt servicing to save funds for growth;

• A "European New Deal" of public investment financed by the European Investment Bank.

• Quantitative easing by the European Central Bank with direct purchases of sovereign bonds.

• 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:

• Immediately increasing public investment by at least €4 billion;

• Gradually restoring salaries and pensions, to increase consumption and demand;

• Investing in knowledge, research and new technology;

• 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 "correctly gauged to respond to the concerns and interests of the widest numbers of austerity victims, and to offer them immediate relief" 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 — 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 safe havens; it is estimated that Swiss banks currently hold Greek private deposits of —80 billion — the amount of the total debt at stake in the new Memorandum! [3]

And both Syriza and the social movements were in suspended animation from February to June while awaiting the outcome of the negotiations. [