



Syriza pays the price of betrayal

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The Coalition of the Radical Left, Syriza, has been thrown out of office after just over four years in government. In last week's general election, it gained just 31.6 percent against the 39.7 percent for the right wing conservative party, New Democracy, ND, led by Kyriakos Mitsotakis. The constitution accords 50 extra seats to the leading party, so ND will have 158 MPs, an absolute majority, in the 300-seat Parliament. Syriza will only have 86.

The result is hardly the "landslide" the bourgeois media claimed. Given Syriza's lamentable record, imposing austerity instead of halting it as it had promised, its result might have been far worse. That it was not indicates less any continued faith in Syriza and more the destruction of any hope for change that Syriza's years in office brought about; plus the absence of any viable alternative to it at the ballot box. The record high level of abstention, at 44 percent the highest since the restoration of democracy in 1974, confirms this.

What is significant is that forces to the left of Syriza, "reformist" or "revolutionary", did not gain from Syriza's betrayal. With 5.38 percent, the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece, KKE, was slightly down on 2015 and has 15 MPs. The anti-capitalist Antarsya, to which the Socialist Workers Movement, EEK, Greek section of the IST, belongs, got a derisory 23,191 votes 0.41 percent, barely half its 2015 result. Popular Unity, which split from SYRIZA in 2015, even less. The strangely named European Realistic Disobedience Front of the former Finance Minister, Yannis Varoufakis, gained 9 seats with just over 3.44 percent of the vote.

Nevertheless, Syriza's leader brazenly excused his party's action in government saying;

"Today, with our heads held high, we accept the people's verdict. To bring Greece to where it is today we had to take difficult decisions at a heavy political cost." If any leader should hold their head very low, it is Alexis Tsipras. Before the January 2015 election, he claimed he would rule for the workers, the young unemployed, the poor farmers, the pensioners; in government, he ruled for the bankers, the business executives and the élite of the European Union. Now he has the gall to present this as a sacrifice of his party's interests for the good of the nation.

Of course, far greater shame should fall on the leaders of the European Union and the bankers of Frankfurt, Paris and the City of London. Having bailed themselves out in 2009 and 2010 to the tune of trillions, they then forced the workers of Europe to pay off the resulting "sovereign debt", and Greece was first in the firing line.

Shame should also fall on the sizeable left parties of Europe, such as Germany's Die Linke or Spain's Podemos, not to speak of the continent's major social democratic and labour parties, which hardly said a word, let alone lift a finger to help.

Today, those who uncritically supported Syriza up to the summer of 2015, and attacked anyone who dared to warn or criticise its strategy, excuse it by saying nothing else was possible faced with the overwhelming power of the EU and Germany in particular. But the clash with the EU was inevitable and it is simply not true that there was no alternative for the Greek, or the European, Left.

How Syriza sold out

Four years ago, Alexis Tsipras was the poster boy of the European reformist and far Left, after his triumph on January 25, 2015 when Syriza won 38 percent of the poll or 2.25 million votes. That victory was the culmination of half a

decade of resistance against the austerity packages imposed by Greece's creditors via two previous governments, starting with PASOK in 2010 and continuing under New Democracy in 2013.

Between 2011 and 2015, there were 20 one-day, and four 48-hour, general strikes. There were mass sieges of Parliament, often with running battles with police when it was debating the austerity packages. In 2011, there were months of square occupations, most famously of Syntagma Square in Athens, but also in many other cities and towns. Local assemblies met to take up the tasks abandoned by the state as social services, pensions, jobs and wage levels were slashed.

The austerity packages devastated the Greek economy throwing 27 per cent out of their jobs and forcing the sale of public services and other state assets such as ports and electricity generation. Large numbers were evicted from their homes, unable to pay mortgages or rents. For the young, the situation was even more devastating. Unemployment reached 42.5 per cent for the 15-24 age group. As a result, huge numbers had to leave in search of jobs in Northern Europe.

From 2013 onwards, when New Democracy returned to power at the head of a "technocratic government", it became clear that square occupations, one-day general strikes and riots would not move the leaders of the Eurozone. Strike levels fell as people began to look for a political solution; a party that could get into government and halt the austerity. Hence the sudden and impressive rise of Syriza.

Formed in 2004, it was a coalition of left reformists from the Eurocommunist tradition (Synaspismos), and far leftists including from the loosely defined Trotskyist tradition (DEA). Syriza, under its young, middle class, leader, Alexis Tsipras, promised that it would reject the EU "memorandums" and the remorseless destruction of jobs and social services they were causing.

Millions of Greeks began to hope that, if protests by unions and social movements could force the government into a general election, and if Syriza could win it, then maybe the savage austerity could finally be stopped. This was the real coalition of social forces that led to Syriza's remarkable victory on 25 January 2015.

Within a month of this victory, however, the IMF, the EU and the Eurozone, with Germany in the lead, made it brutally clear, in the oft-quoted words of the German finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble: "Elections change nothing. There are rules." The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, said much the same; "There can be no democratic choice against the European treaties."

Though the new Greek finance minister, Yannis Varoufakis, did stop the privatisation of two ports, increased the minimum wage and re-employed some public sector workers, his 13.5 billion euro stimulus programme was in clear breach of the existing bailout agreement. The response of the Troika was to propose another, even harsher, memorandum and threaten that, if it were rejected, the taps of international credit to Greece would be turned off completely; the entire Greek banking system and the government's finances would collapse.

This is how international capital responds to a radical government if it tries to meet its obligations to its electorate.

Yet the publicity seeking Varoufakis and Tsipras wasted six months in futile visits to the Eurozone authorities and EU capitals, making pathetic appeals to France's Socialist President, François Hollande, to soften the hard hearts of "the Germans". At best, they got coffee and sympathy. Meanwhile, Syriza as a party made no serious attempt to organise and mobilise Greek workers. It was too frightened even to consider the idea of encouraging workers to seize control of the banks, the factories, the shipping lines or, as the government, to sequester the funds of the big corporations.

Above all, they should have appealed to the workers of Europe to join them in continent wide strike action to halt austerity in every EU country. For all Varoufakis' trips around European capitals, no serious attempt was made to appeal to Europe's workers to come to the aid of their Greek sisters and brothers.

For all the talk of a Plan B by the left in Syriza, there was nothing remotely anything like that. Of course, there was the

Stalinist-inspired idea, long the fetish of the KKE, of leaving the Eurozone and reissuing the drachma, but did these people seriously think the EU would let them leave behind their debts and obligations? Did they not realise that the value of the drachma would drop like a stone from the moment it was re-issued? Had they not thought through what that would mean for Greek workers' wages? Did they think Greece could run an autarkic economy, a capitalism in one country?

Meanwhile, Syriza's leaders daydreamed that the EU would finally relent out of fear that if Greece defaulted on loan repayments, or was expelled from the Eurozone, the whole Union might disintegrate. It seems they thought, 'they wouldn't dare' and that, at least, Brussels would make a face-saving offer. In other words, their entire strategy was nothing more than a poker player's bluff.

Of course, the bluff was called. Tsipras accepted the new memorandum but called a referendum to see if this might wring a last minute concession, or maybe the people would give him a mandate to capitulate. When 61 per cent said Oxi!-No! to the austerity package, he realised the game was up and betrayed this second mandate to fight.

In little more than a week, the government passed an even more severe package than the one originally demanded by the Troika, costing the Greek people as much as €200 billion. It included the sale to foreign investors of profitable public assets; ports, airports, seashores, railways, power stations, water and gas companies, cultural and archaeological sites, theatres and goldmines.

Meanwhile, the 'bankrupt' government found close to \$2.5 billion to buy Lockheed F-16 warplanes from the United States. It also bought McDonnell-Douglas F-4 Phantoms and Dassault Mirage 2000s, from France. At the same time, it abandoned the Greek Left's previous support for the Palestinians and sought warm relations with the Netanyahu government in Israel. Abandoning the Greek people's initial warm welcome for the flood of Syrian refugees, Greece went along with closing the borders and opening camps which effectively detained the refugees.

The electorate, Syriza's membership, indeed the whole of the left, were stunned. But parliament voted it through with the aid of the right. When a section of its MPs left the party, Tsipras called a snap election in September and 'won' four years of acting as the Troika's proconsul in Greece.

Many will ask why the forces on the Greek left did not grow in response to such a historic betrayal. Of course, for many of those who had illusions in the betrayers, such a defeat would bring a long-lasting demoralisation and they would not be expected to rally around a new party immediately. But it should be possible for an alternative party, that had warned of betrayal and fought for an alternative strategy, to at least rally the more advanced militant sectors.

Judged by the cruel test of voting figures this has not happened. The KKE, supposedly one of the most left wing CPs, has failed to make any headway. It prides itself on its unchanging stance of hostility towards Syriza but, in practice, this only resulted in a self-imposed isolation from those Syriza mobilised. From 2013 to 2015 it could and should have offered a united front with Tsipras when he was moving leftwards and defying the Troika.

After the January 2015 elections, which gave the two parties a potential parliamentary majority, it could, and should, have offered its support to Syriza in government as long as it stuck to its promise of fighting austerity. Meanwhile, it should have joined with Syriza members and supporters to create a network of local councils of action, including all the workers' parties and the different trade union federations, including PAME, the All-Workers Militant Front, linked to the KKE. Its objective, while Tsipras toured Europe, would have been to organise workers and youth, employed and unemployed, to resist any further attempts by the Troika to force the government to stick to the austerity programme.

When Tsipras betrayed, such a powerful and organised rank and file movement would have been able to continue the struggle. The KKE was, and remains, militant in words but utterly passive when it comes to advancing a strategy and tactics for creating a workers' government.

None of the alternatives to Syriza in 2015 had, nor do they have today, a clear strategy for intervention in the class struggle, a strategy that can expose and replace the reformists, winning over those who have illusions in their existing

leaders through common action for concrete goals. Outside of anti-fascist mobilisations against Golden Dawn, the left cannot mobilise significant forces but, important and praiseworthy as these are, they do not point a way forward for Greek workers from one day protests and piecemeal actions to a powerful united front of resistance and, ultimately, to the struggle for power.

The lessons are clear enough and vitally important to leftists in Britain, Spain or the USA, where similar hopes have been raised in relation to Jeremy Corbyn, Pablo Iglesias or Pedro Sánchez, Bernie Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Any reformist 'socialist' or left populist party that hopes to make radical change, to end privatisation and austerity, to fight neoliberalism, but which restricts itself to electoral or parliamentary means, is leading its followers to certain defeat.

Unless the working class is mobilised, not as a stage army but as the conscious, autonomous agency for taking power, not just talking of 'change' or 'transformative politics' but of revolution, collapse and betrayal are inevitable.

Within movements like Syriza, we cannot simply denounce the reformist leaders but stand aside from their enthusiastic followers, like the KKE has always done. Genuine revolutionaries should participate in these movements, indeed vote for the parties to put them to the test of office, fight for their rank and file to exercise democratic control over their leaders and, at the same time, build independent class organisations rooted in the unions, the local communities, the youth, the immigrants.

In short, we need to create organisations that can not only resist betrayals and sell outs but create a leadership that can press on to take real power. Last, but not least, the lesson to be drawn from the events of 2010-15 is that what was crucially needed, but not forthcoming, was powerful, organised solidarity from workers in countries like those in Northern Europe; Germany, France, Britain and those who are victims of their rulers. In 2015, we needed solidarity action, not just words.

What the League said about Syriza

In an article published immediately after the election of Syriza, Workers Power, paper of the British section of the League for the Fifth International, warned:

'The worst outcome will be if the Syriza leaders are able to use the immense hope and prestige the party built up between 2010 and 2015 to re-submit Greece to the continuation of austerity. If a Tsipras government becomes the guarantor of a rotten deal with the Germany-led Eurocrats, it will hamper and hobble working class resistance, demoralise a whole sector of the left, and prepare the rise of right-wing forces.'

We stressed from the beginning that the fate of the Greek struggle would rest in large measure on the international solidarity it could call forth from workers across Europe:

'Last, but not least, an appeal should be made now, to the entire workers' movement right across Europe, to take action to force an end to the economic blackmail and threats of a financial blockade of Greece made by politicians, bankers and bureaucrats of the whole European Union.

'For all these reasons, we need to launch a massive movement of solidarity with the Greek resistance right across the continent, linking it to resistance at home against our own ruling classes. Our ultimate aim must be to replace the Europe of the billionaires with a Socialist United States of Europe.'

On June 11, 2015, Workers Power said:

'Alexis Tsipras and the leadership of Syriza have betrayed the mandate given to them twice by the Greek people. Scarcely a week after 61 per cent of voters said Oxi!-No! they have presented a nearly identical proposal to the parliament in Athens, which has voted by 250 votes to 32 to endorse it.

The choice the Syriza leadership faced was clear; attack the working class in return for a new 'Memorandum' and an extension of Greece's debt-slavery or seize the wealth and property of the rich and appeal to the workers of Europe to help break the dictatorship of the banks and institutions that impose austerity across the continent.

"In the rest of Europe, the workers' movement must not stop campaigning against their own governments and must demand an end to austerity in Greece. Their solidarity must be, not with Syriza and its leadership, but with Greek workers and youth fighting the new austerity programme.

"The last few months saw the growth of a revolutionary situation in Greece, in which the popular masses in general, and the working class vanguard in particular, entered into open confrontation and class war with the ruling class. At the critical moment, the reformist leadership of Syriza buckled and chose to collaborate with our class enemies to attack the workers, youth and unemployed.

"The months since the election show that the model of a 'broad party', with a reformist leadership tolerating a revolutionary minority, is not a model for anything except preparing yet another social-democratic betrayal.

"It is time for revolutionaries within Syriza to expose and break with the reformist leaders, appeal for the foundation of a consistent revolutionary socialist party of the working class, and say that the choice is not between the drachma and the euro under capitalism, but between capitalism and a social revolution that puts power into the hands of the working class."

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