



Syriza: is Plan B an alternative?

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The Eurogroup were outraged at the very idea of a referendum, withdrew their offer and declared the result invalid in advance. Yet, immediately after issuing the referendum The complete collapse of the Syriza leadership when faced with the threat of the withdrawal of all funding to Greek banks and expulsion from the Eurozone vindicated Left criticism of its strategy of seeking an 'honourable compromise' with the the Troika, but would 'Plan B', the negotiated Grexit proposed by Syriza's Left Platform, have fared any better? Martin Suchanek surveys Syriza's record and the Left's alternative strategy.

The Oxi referendum vote on July 5 was a powerful expression of the rejection by the Greek working class, youth and the popular classes of the harsh new Memorandum presented by the Eurogroup to Syriza's prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, at the end of June. They gave him an even stronger mandate than the January 25 election that brought him to power; 61 per cent voted to reject austerity.

The Eurogroup were outraged at the very idea of a referendum, withdrew their offer and declared the result invalid in advance. Yet, immediately after issuing the referendum call,call, Tsipras began to retreat, claiming a NO vote was intended to improve the government's bargaining position rather than endorse a definitive rejection of any austerity package. This, however, was not an aberration; the coalition government of Syriza and the right wing Independent Greeks (Anel) had always talked of an 'honourable' compromise with the creditors.

As early as 20 February, less than a month after victory in the elections, Tsipras and the Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis, agreed a deal allowing for a four-month credit extension with the Eurogroup, that is the Finance Ministers of the Eurozone. The Eurogroup made it abundantly clear that even this was only provisional. This agreement already abandoned much of the Thessaloniki Programme on which Syriza was elected. Moreover, that programme itself was a major retreat from the one Syriza adopted after its first major successes in the two 2012 elections, which renounced the debt and called for ending austerity altogether.

Nevertheless, it did demand writing off the greater part of the public debt and a moratorium on debt servicing, with any repayments to begin only as the economy returned to growth, not from the primary budget surpluses the Troika demanded. It also promised to restore public sector workers' salaries and state pensions, to increase consumption and stimulate demand. In short, it was a typical Keynesian counter crisis programme. The central strategy of the Tsipras leadership was the claim that negotiation with 'The Institutions', the cosmetic name for the old Troika, could reach a compromise that would allow Greece to recover from the slump into which austerity had hurled it.

The Eurogroup, with Germany's Wolfgang Schäuble playing the leading role, never intended to concede any 'honourable compromise'. They wanted total surrender. They wanted to send a clear message to all the peoples of the continent: if you elect parties that promise to reject austerity and the dictates of the European financial authorities and the IMF, you will be faced with political and economic blackmail. You must expect no mercy from the ruling elite either in the EU or internationally.

Since his resignation Yanis Varoufakis has revealed a number of interesting insights into the hopelessness of the negotiation strategy. He recently recalled:

‘The very powerful troika of creditors were not interested in coming to a sensible, honorable, mutually beneficial agreement. They were far more interested in humiliating this government and overthrowing it, or at least making sure that it overthrows itself in terms of its policies?’

The pressure from the imperialists was certainly a key factor in making Tsipras' position more and more untenable, leading him to call for the referendum on July 5. But there was another reason as well; the pressure from his own social base and, in particular, from within Syriza itself.

Syriza in office

Over recent months, we have not seen mass mobilisations on the streets in Greece. After the election victory and street celebrations, in comparison to the previous year, there were fewer struggles in the workplaces, the universities or on the streets. This is not surprising. After years of mass struggles, a series of one-day general strikes and a prolonged pre-revolutionary situation, the workers recognised that the imperialists, and the bourgeois governments of Nea Demokratia and PASOK, could not be stopped by economic and social struggle alone. What was needed was a general political onslaught. Since the general strikes had been confined to one-day actions, that route, posing the question of power through an indefinite general strike, also seemed to be blocked.

The workers, therefore, turned to Syriza, as the only weapon with which to defeat Samaras, Venizelos and austerity in the elections. It was the only party on the left offering a governmental alternative and addressing the question of power in the here and now. So, they brought ‘their’ party into office. The massive attacks and slanders from the European Union, echoed and orchestrated by the old political elite and the most reactionary and conservative sections of Greek society, made workers wary that they needed to defend their party against internal and external reaction.

On the other hand, the leadership of Syriza around Tsipras also made it very clear from the beginning that they did not want to break with the imperialist powers behind the EU and the Euro, or to break with the IMF and certainly not with Greek capitalism and its state institutions. This was shown by the rush to form a coalition with the right wing, arch-reactionary and racist party ANEL; the Syriza leaders preferred a coalition with this open bourgeois party to the ‘risk’ of forming a minority government, which would have needed to base itself on working class and popular support rather than parliamentary combinations.

Moreover, the Party leadership agreed to elect Prokopis Pavlopoulos, a member of Nea Demokratia and former Minister of the Interior, as the new President. The government also left key officials in the national bank and state institutions in post. The military and police apparatus was not touched and the right winger, Panagiotis Kamenos, leader of the Independent Greeks (ANEL), became Minister of Defence. All this showed how far the leadership of Syriza was prepared to go in order to appease sections of Greek capital. It went on to demonstrate its willingness to concede to the demands of the Institutions in February 2015 and crossed ‘red line’ after ‘red line’ in the negotiations with the EU, ECB and IMF in June.

The Left gets stronger

The continued concessions made by the Syriza leaders began to undermine their social support. This did not mean that the people turned away from the party, en masse, and even less did they turn to other political parties like the KKE or Antarsya. No, the pressure from the social base of Syriza was expressed primarily within Syriza itself by the growing tensions inside the party, increased political debate in the party branches and by the growing influence of the Left Platform.

Tsipras, the leadership around him and the party apparatus he inherited from Synaspismos, were aware throughout that entering government would put the party under enormous strain. That is why they had already ensured a high degree of independence for the chairman of the party from the Central Committee of the party.

The Syriza congress in July 2013 changed the party's constitution. Until then, the chairman of the party had been elected, accountable and recallable by the 200-strong central committee. Tsipras and his allies proposed that congress itself should elect the leader, arguing that this would be much more democratic than referring such decisions to a 'small committee'. In fact, electing a party leader by a vote of the whole congress, though it seems more democratic is actually less so since it makes them less answerable to the party bodies elected to develop and execute policy and to hold leaders to account. The leader can claim their mandate has a greater authority because it is from the whole of congress, even though their actions may since have alienated those who voted for them.

This populist demagoguery worked, not least because the party apparatus had arranged for more than 3,000 delegates to attend, many of whom were recent recruits without much prior knowledge of the issues confronting the congress. As a result, it had the character of a rally rather than a policy conference. All this was designed not only to make Tsipras into a media personality, but also a leader who could present himself as standing above the party factions and even its leadership bodies.

It was at the congress, that Tsipras started a political onslaught on the left wing of the organisation. The dispute was not only around constitutional questions. In the course of 2013, the Syriza leadership also changed some of its main slogans; 'No sacrifice for the Euro!' meaning no concessions to the Troika, was now rarely heard, and 'For a government of the left' was replaced by the call for an 'anti-austerity government', which opened the way to a coalition with a right wing party or a split from PASOK.

It was also at the congress that Tsipras built and organised his majority wing, which includes quite heterogeneous forces. The majority came from Synaspismos and its apparatus, but it also included representatives from the social movements, amongst them the European Social Forum in Greece and even the Maoist 'KOE' (Communist Organisation of Greece).

The main force to challenge Tsipras was the Left Platform colourfully referred to by Britain's Economist as 'the wild ones'. Like the party leadership, most of the leaders of the Left Platform originated from Synaspismos but they came from its left wing and trade union fractions. Its most prominent leader is Panagiotis Lafazanis. It also includes the Red Network, a minority of 'Trotskyists', most notably DEA, the International Workers Left. They have fraternal links to the International Socialist Organisation in the USA. The majority of the Left Platform were left reformists, not Marxist revolutionaries, but they saw themselves as defending more 'traditional' working class politics and recognised the need to pose the property question as central for left wing politics in Greece and elsewhere.

Amongst the most influential theoreticians of the Left Platform are Costas Lapavistas, a professor of economics at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and Stathis Kouvelakis, a lecturer in political theory and philosophy at King's College, London. Lapavistas was elected as a Syriza MP in February and Kouvelakis is a member of Syriza's Central Committee. These academic Marxist theoreticians are the proponents of the idea of exit, not only from the Eurozone, but from the EU itself.

At the congress, the Left Platform rallied a substantial minority; between a quarter and a third on all disputed political questions and won 60 seats on the Central Committee. However, a weakness was revealed that persists to this day; it accepted the role of permanent opposition, rather than fighting to replace the conciliatory leadership around Tsipras. It wanted to resist some of Tsipras' policies certainly, but it did not overtly challenge his leadership.

When the new government was formed, therefore, the Left Platform did not immediately wage a struggle against the coalition with ANEL. Indeed, most of its MPs and leadership members had no real objection to forming it, accepting the rationale that there was no alternative. For them, at the end of the day, it was not a decisive question. Equally, they voted for Pavlopoulos as President.

Politically influential supporters and members of the Left Platform, such as Costas Lapavistas, did not see coalition with ANEL as inherently a 'bad thing', because it 'solidified support for Syriza amongst the poorer sectors of society' (Lapavistas, Greece: Phase Two) Only deputies like Gianna Gaitani, an MP from Thessaloniki, and a member of DEA,

publicly refused to vote for a member of ND.

February Agreement

Nonetheless, the agreement with the Eurogroup and the capitulation of the Greek government did produce a deep rift. Originally, the government had planned to bring the agreement before Parliament for its blessing, they quickly dropped all talk of that. In fact, the Syriza leadership only convened meetings of its parliamentary fraction and the Central Committee of the party after the agreement had been concluded.

At the end of February, there was a stormy session of the 149 strong parliamentary fraction. The meeting lasted some 12 hours and on an 'indicative' vote there were 10 votes against and 13 abstentions but the majority voted for the agreement. Among the critics were members of the Cabinet such as the Left Platform's Panagiotis Lafazanis, Minister of Productive Reconstruction, Environment and Energy from January to July 2015.

On the last weekend in March, there was a meeting of the Central Committee of Syriza. At this, the leadership around Tsipras was only just able to carry its position. Representatives of the 'Left Platform' brought their own resolution. That read, in part:

'... we express our rejection of the agreement and of the list of reforms which has been agreed with the Euro group. Both of these represent unacceptable compromises for our country and they move away from the key points of the programmatic obligations of Syriza or are even directly counterposed to them.

'Despite the agreement with the Euro group, Syriza should in the immediate future seize the initiative for the continuous and prioritised implementation of its obligations under the government programme.

'In order to pursue this path we must base ourselves on the struggles of the workers and the masses and contribute to the revival and continual expansion of the support of the masses in order to be able to resist any future blackmail and to offer the perspective of an alternative plan for the complete implementation of our radical goals.'

In addition, the draft resolution demanded that, in future, decisions of Syriza must first be discussed within the party and be accepted by party bodies.

Although this proposal was defeated, it gained 68 votes on the Central Committee (41 per cent) with 92 votes against (55 per cent) and six abstentions (4 per cent). As well as the representatives of the 'Left Platform', the supporters of the Maoists, previously organised in the Communist Organisation of Greece (KOE) who are close to the Marxist Leninist party in Germany, and supporters of the former leader of the political economic department of Syriza, John Milios, voted for the resolution. For a long time, these two currents had both supported the leadership of Tsipras against the Left.

A new General Secretary of the party was also elected at that meeting; Tassos Koronakis, who gained 102 of 199 votes. The candidate of the Left Platform, Alekos Kalyvis, gained 64 votes. In the election to the 11 person "Political Secretariat", the majority fraction around Tsipras gained six seats, the Left Platform four and the Maoists one. All this shows that in Syriza the forces of the opposition were growing stronger and the repeated concessions to imperialism were leading to a strengthening of the left-wing.

The dispute sharpened further in May and June when the CC of Syriza discussed the line for the negotiations with the Troika. By its meeting of May 23-24, the leadership around Tsipras could still get a majority with 95 votes for his proposal and goal of an 'acceptable compromise' but the Left Platform presented an alternative document which received 75 votes.

Proposal of the Left Platform

The Left Platform resolution proposed the following points:

The following measures must immediately be implemented:

The immediate nationalisation of the banks with all necessary accompanying measures to ensure their function along transparent, productive, developmental and social criteria.

The establishment of democratic legality and transparency upon the dominant media, along with the substantial control of their lending obligations.

The immediate termination of every measure protecting the country's scandal-immersed oligarchy.

The suspension of privilege, privileging adjustments and immunity for big economic interests.

The substantial taxation of wealth and large properties, as well as the taxation of top earners and of high corporate profitability.

The immediate and full reintroduction, as well as safeguarding and practical implementation of labour legislation and rights to trade union organisation.

The government has to counter decisively the propaganda of the ruling circles that terrorises the people with the scenario of full disaster that the suspension of debt servicing and of an eventual exit from the Eurozone will allegedly bring upon the country.

The greatest disaster facing the country is the imposition of a new Memorandum in one form or another and the extension of the implementation of past Memoranda.

This development must be avoided by any means and sacrifice necessary.

Any alternative solution for a progressive policy against the Memoranda, includes first and foremost the suspension of servicing the debt. Notwithstanding all the difficulties entailed, it is much more preferable to any other option for it offers the country hope and prospects.

If the 'institutions' continue with their policy of blackmail in the following days, the government has a duty to clearly state from this moment on that it will not 'strip' the Greek people by robbing them of their savings, that it will not proceed to the next IMF payment, and that it intends to put forward alternative solutions for the country's course, on the economic, social, political and strategic levels that will safeguard the implementation of its programme. (Kouvelakis, A note on Syriza's Central Committee and the text presented by the Left Platform, <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4052> [1])

This gives an idea of the political programme of the Left Platform. Clearly, it represents a left challenge to Tsipras and the government and includes important immediate measures that revolutionaries should support and mobilise for. It also openly recognises the failure of past governments and Syriza's strategy. An 'honourable agreement' with the Troika could, at best, only mean a modified austerity programme and Tsipras' hope, to get better conditions after the referendum, was a pure utopia. Indeed, it could only have encouraged their opponents to take an even harder line.

However, whilst the proposed measures go far beyond those of the dominant faction of Syriza, they are also limited to a programme of immediate measures that remain within the framework of capitalism and do not include a single transitional demand, that is, measures that decisively challenge international and Greek capital's control over the economy and point towards a socialist transformation of society. Despite its limitations, however, such a programme would certainly be met with fierce opposition and a terrific struggle from the capitalist class on all fronts; sabotage, non-payment of taxes and refusal to implement labour legislation, for example.

This would inevitably pose the question; how to break this resistance? Who was to enforce demands such as the immediate termination of every measure protecting the country's scandal-immersed oligarchy; the suspension of privilege, privileging adjustments and immunity for big economic interests, the substantial taxation of wealth and large

properties, as well as the taxation of top earners and of high corporate profitability??

Should the corrupt, long established state machine be entrusted to fulfil this task? Could anybody seriously believe that those officials, who are tied with a thousand threads to the privileged classes, would do this?

To pose such questions is to answer them. Only workers in the private sector, in the banks, in public institutions, not the bosses and their managers, could be relied upon to do this. The only realistic answer would be the opening of the books and accounts to working class control; it would mean that in all companies, the workers and the trade unions should take stock of the declared and hidden resources. In short, workers' control would be a key measure to ensure the realisation of such a programme.

Likewise, the Left's programme does not go beyond the nationalisation of the banks. But what about the imperialists (and Greek capitalists) who have robbed the country? Should they keep their booty? Or is it not imperative to expropriate them, if one wants to stop them continuing to transfer wealth out of the country, threatening redundancies, non-payment of wages or investment boycotts? Is it not necessary to nationalise them under workers' control and reorganise their work according to an emergency plan to satisfy the basic needs of the masses?

All these measures would point to the need for a government that not only goes beyond the policy of Tsipras, but which also tackles the root cause of the current crisis; capitalism.

Even less does the Left Platform take on the question of the state apparatus. It does not even raise the question of how to respond to the threats from the President and the Greek generals not to ?allow? a break with NATO?

Such threats can only be countered if they are first of all openly addressed and not passed by without comment. Secondly, they would need measures from the government to replace, to break up, the old, bureaucratic apparatus and replace it with organs of working class self-organisation, with committees of action and control, which could develop into workers' councils.

One would obviously need to purge the armed forces and the police of all officers who threaten the government. Even more importantly, one needs to replace the police with an armed militia and to break up the command chain of the reactionary officers in the Greek army and the involvement of NATO and its military advisors, by the building of soldiers' committees and councils. However, the Greek left as a whole has no policy towards the armed forces, apart from shallow phrases like ?democratic control?.

Finally, the Left Platform's programme, whilst it seeks partners in struggle in Europe, is essentially a programme for national change within Greece. It ultimately sees the solution of the problem in the establishment of Greek independence, which it believes would allow the space to rebuild the Greek economy and improve the living conditions of the population rapidly within the framework of a reformed Greek capitalism.

Such a programme, whether the Left Platform likes it or not, will ultimately face the same difficulties as the programme of Tsipras. To aim to reform Greece on the basis of a market economy, whether in or outside the Eurozone, whether with the Drachma, the Euro, a ?mix? or whatever, is essentially a utopia. To overthrow capitalism is certainly a huge task, but to suggest that Greece could be ?transformed? and ?revived? by limited measures of state reform, is completely utopian.

The left in Syriza and many of the far left outside it, make many valid points against the treacherous strategy of Tsipras. They rightly mock the idea that one could play the EU, the ECB, the IMF, the German and southern European governments off against each other to win a programme of mild social reforms, as completely utopian. However, the very same reformist or centrist left is far from being as realistic when it comes to its own alternative.

As we have shown above, the programme of the Left Platform of Syriza remains entirely within a reformist framework. Whilst they correctly point out that any hope for ?honourable deals? is utopian and only weakens the Greek working class movement, and ultimately plays into the preparation of an offensive from the right, the Left Platform and many

others on the Greek left (such as Antarsya and a split from Syriza, Mars) see an exit from the Eurozone (if not from the EU) as a strategic objective, as a step forward.

Of course, revolutionaries should oppose sacrificing the interest of the working class and popular masses for the sake of the euro, but they should not give in to the pressures from Schäuble and the ECB, EU, IMF voluntarily. Indeed, they should call on the European working class to mobilise against the driving out of Greece from the Eurozone by cutting financial transactions or imposing a banking crisis. However, within the Left Platform, the call for a Grexit has become increasingly popular.

Was Grexit the solution?

This is also the line of economists like Costas Lapavitsas. For years, he has argued that Greece should leave the Eurozone and introduce its own currency. This strategy, to leave the EU, has become known as "Plan B". His argument is that Greece should leave the euro (but not necessarily the EU) preferably in the context of a 'controlled' exit, negotiated with the other euro countries.

I want to come clean, and this a good venue to do it, and say the following: the obvious solution for Greece right now, when I look at it as a political economist, the optimal solution, would be a negotiated exit. Not necessarily a contested exit, but a negotiated exit. I think Greece would have a reasonable chance if it went into the negotiations and was prepared to fight for and accept negotiated exit. It could be for a limited period of time, if the Greek people accepted this more easily than fine.

Negotiated exit 'negotiated' in the sense that the other side of the bargain would be a deep debt write-off that would be the price that monetary union would have to accept 'a 50 per cent debt write-off. And, crucially, the exit would be protected in the sense that the European Central Bank [ECB] would see to it that the devaluation of the new currency would not be more than 20 per cent and that the banks would survive.

Both of these two terms 'protecting the exchange rate and protecting the banks' cost next to nothing. It's not as if the monetary union is asked to commit any money or to bear a significant cost for that. It would make a tremendous difference to Greece, with effectively no cost for the monetary union. The only cost to the monetary union would be the debt write-off.

In that context, I can see reasons why the monetary union would accept that, as it would put an end to the Greek problem. To me, that's an optimal solution right now because I can see the difficulties of the contested exit. However, if it comes to it, even a contested exit is better than continuing with the current program.' (Greece: Phase Two, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/03/lapavitsas-varoufakis-grexit-syriza/> [2])

While Lapavitsas correctly criticises the utopianism of the Syriza leadership, which expects to negotiate a 'social' solution for the masses in Greece within a framework set by the EU and German imperialism, he himself speculates that the EU, including Germany, would agree to a 'controlled' exit and thereby forego part of the debt. If history has already proved that Tsipras' hopes of playing one imperialist off against another were completely illusory, it would be no less unkind to Lapavitsas' own hopes:

'If it's not in the confines of the monetary union, it will find restructuring much easier. Much, much easier! The IMF, for instance, knows that the debt has to be restructured. The real force stopping restructuring in Greece is the European Union and the monetary union. So debt restructuring ought to become easier and more doable if Greece also, of course, exited. That's the first thing. The debt can wait. Greece will default, the debt will sit, it can wait.'

It is true that the IMF is critical of the Euro group and, in particular, Germany, for refusing to address the question of the unsustainability of Greek debt, that is, the inevitability of a major write down. But, for all that, Christine Lagarde did nothing to get the Greek government off the hook and even joined in the haughty baiting of the Greeks. The IMF insisted that debt restructuring, will only be made 'easy' if Greece agrees to one of its infamous 'structural adjustment programmes', in other words, if it slashes pensions and other remaining 'privileges' of the poor.

Even more incredible in the light of the final showdown in Brussels in early July, is that Lapavitsas' plan for a negotiated Grexit relies on Germany and Wolfgang Schäuble's five year 'temporary' exit proposal.

Schäuble is on record, or at least Greek ministers are on record, stating that Schäuble offered an aided exit to the Greeks already back in 2011. I can see, from the perspective of the German power structure, why they might be tempted by this idea, and I can see it as an objective worth fighting for by a Greek left government, for obvious reasons?.

In fact, this was not an offer but a threat, indeed, it was the very threat which constituted the 'waterboarding' (in the words of EU officials) that forced Tsipras into total surrender. He realised that Grexit would not come with generous debt forgiveness, a rescue for the Greek banks and a slow transition to a new drachma but with a brutal pulling of all the plugs.

After five months of capital flight, only the most dictatorial measures over capital, together with aid from the European Labour movement, could have stemmed collapse and no one in the Left Platform even contemplated this. Yet Lapavitsas continues to assert that Plan B was a viable option, not as a declaration of war on the Europe of Capital but as a negotiating ploy with it.

He comes to such a self-contradictory position because, like the majority of the Left Platform, his starting point is that the socialist revolution and the formation of a workers' government, that is a fundamental challenge to capitalist property relations, is simply not possible in Greece today, the time is not yet ripe for that. Therefore, he argues in favour of Keynesianism as an interim solution.

In this, he expresses a fundamental dilemma for the left reformists in Syriza. They believe that the time has not yet come to pose the perspective of workers' power and socialist transformation. All that remains for them is an 'independent', state-regulated capitalism, pursuing an alternative development strategy for Greece. This includes directed investment, re-industrialisation, and the advantages a devalued Greek currency would give the country's exports on the world market. That is why the question of the euro always comes up in the debates within the Greek Left because it symbolises the question of an independent national development.

Lapavitsas claims this is not a programme for autarky, that Greece would have to maintain access to international markets, especially in the EU, and would have to seek international technology transfer for its development projects. In his article Eurozone Crisis: Beggar Thyself and Thy Neighbour (2010) (<http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/23045/1/fullreport.pdf> [3]) he even remarks 'there are no guarantees that such flows would be forthcoming, particularly as the established order in Europe would be hostile to radical change.' Five years on, the European Institutions have given a practical display of what they will do to small countries inside the Eurozone, let alone a country outside it. He might not want autarky, but autarky is what Greece would get.

This entire strategy is fundamentally utopian, that is, unrealisable in terms of the peaceful transition to Keynesian development that Syriza's 'Marxist' economists imagine. Were it ever to be attempted, it would have massively reactionary consequences for the Greek working class. Out of control inflation of the new currency would mean collapsing real wages long before the prices of Greek imports or extra tourism could prop up the economy. As a result, there would soon be further huge job losses because of weakening economic ties with the rest of the EU, and a contraction in vital imports from Europe as a result of having no hard currency with which to buy them.

It would be reactionary, too, for the working class of Europe. It would be held up as living 'proof' that 'there is no alternative' to austerity that is not much worse. In addition, economic collapse in Greece would likely lead to a takeover by the right, even to a military coup or the rise of fascism as a real challenger for power. The Plan B strategy utterly fails to prepare the working class to deal with this, except in the supportive role for the social movements.

Like all utopias, this perspective and strategy leaves out, or reduces to a walk on role, the proletariat and its class struggle, which is what should be central for genuine Marxists.

Overcoming the crisis and the devastating destruction of the Greek economy demands the exercise of workers' power

in society and in the economy, culminating in a workers' government imposing emergency measures of workers' control and setting as its goal socialist transformation within the perspective of a United Socialist States of Europe. In short, Greece's situation is objectively revolutionary; it calls out for revolution as the only solution. What is missing is the instrument necessary to bring this about, a revolutionary party.

Conclusion

Since Syriza's July collapse some on the European left have described the events in Brussels as a 'Greek Tragedy' with the implication that it represented an inexorable fate. Others claim that Plan B, Grexit, should have been tried. As we have seen this was a non-starter, not least because Syriza would in all probability never have been elected on its basis. However, both strategies, because they were fundamentally reformist, ruled out and obstructed another one; that of direct action by the Greek working class to take control of the Greek economy, to repudiate the debt and concentrate on winning the solidarity actions of workers across Europe.

What is a tragedy is that the Greek working class did not have an alternative leadership, in Syriza or outside it, that was armed with a real Plan B, fighting for it openly and boldly amongst the workers and youth. Providing such an alternative leadership was sizeable and well enough rooted amongst the militants of the parties and the trade unions, it would have been possible that they would turn to it in the critical moment of Tsipras' betrayal. If all those activists in the various revolutionary groups inside and outside Syriza had constituted such a force, then this would have been a real possibility.

This Plan B would have to be a programme of action to save the country from disaster, centred on creating a workers' government. Its programme would focus on measures such as workers' control of the banks, industry, transport, cancellation of the debt, monopoly of foreign trade, nationalisation of the big industrial and commercial companies and a workers' militia, measures that would need to be implemented, not by bourgeois civil servants, but by ordinary workers themselves.

The Left Platform's Plan B was, as we have seen, very far from being such a programme. A negotiated Grexit was as unworkable as persuading the masters of the Eurozone to relent and forgive Greece its debts. Moreover, the reformist Left knew it and did little or nothing to disturb Tsipras' time-wasting negotiations or to agitate for the working class to take control of things by blocking the sabotage of the Greek ruling class, which was evacuating its money from the country throughout this period.

When the Greek parliament first voted for the acceptance of a harsher austerity deal on 11 July 2015, only two of the Left Platform MPs dared to vote no and another eight abstained. Their excuse was that they feared bringing down the government. Only on 26 July, when the new Memorandum was put to parliament and it was clear that the right wing parties would vote for it and would not try to bring down Tsipras, did 39 of the Left Platform's MPs dare to vote against.

This showed that, like typical reformists, they were still focussed on parliamentary manoeuvres, not acting as tribunes of the people summoning the masses to resistance. They still regarded a Syriza government, even when imposing the Eurogroup's terms, as some sort of protection for Greek workers. In short, though revolutionaries in Syriza should support the Left Platform's call for a meeting of the Central Committee and, indeed, a conference to call Tsipras and Co to account before the party membership, their number one duty is to mobilise resistance to the government and its actions, in the factories, the streets, the communities.

The failure or inability of the Left in Syriza and outside it to build democratic councils of action (the name does not matter) meant that between the election and the referendum there was no counter-power to the Syriza-Anel coalition. The government remained, fundamentally, a bourgeois government and not the workers' government that was needed. It was under all the pressures of the Eurogroup and the Greek capitalists, not under the control of the working class. The lack of such councils during the week of the betrayal, and even more so now, when resistance to the Tsipras government's measures is critical, was, and remains, the main obstacle to a fightback.

The imperative need to explain this in agitation and propaganda, and do everything within its power to win workers and youth to carrying it out, was why a party committed first and foremost to waging the class struggle, not just to winning elections, or even carrying out social work, was needed. Simply waiting for Syriza to fail, either as a permanent opposition within the party or outside it in Antarsya, was not a policy worthy of being called Bolshevik or Leninist.

Work within Syriza, amongst its members and even more its mass support, was, in our opinion, correct from at least 2012 onwards. However, this did not mean suggesting for a moment that Syriza was ever an adequate instrument either in its structure or its programmes. It meant opposing Tsipras' direct election as leader, opposing the coalition with Anel and opposing the February surrender as well as the July betrayal.

It meant developing an action programme that included the measures vital to meet the poverty and deprivation facing huge numbers and that did not fear to challenge the laws of capitalism and private ownership of the large scale means of production.

Vital arguments over such strategic and tactical questions are raging in Greece and the whole of the left internationally must follow and participate in them. Those who say it is not our right, or our duty, to make our views known, are taking an axe to the root of internationalism. Internationalism cannot mean simply proclaiming uncritical solidarity with any existing leadership. In any case, our solidarity must now go solely and exclusively to those who are fighting against the imposition of the Eurogroup's savage measures and not to those who are imposing them.

Of course, from a distance, we have to be aware that our grasp of concrete circumstances may be deficient in certain respects and that means engaging in a serious study and discussion with revolutionary forces in Greece and their account of events, including what they have done at critical moments. In a forthcoming article, we will look at the arguments and actions of those who consider themselves revolutionaries in Greece, both those inside and outside Syriza.

During the June-July crisis, increasing numbers turned against the Tsipras leadership and this has continued in its aftermath. We believe this shows that revolutionaries should have intervened, and should continue to intervene, as some are, as an organised revolutionary fraction within it. The objective should not be the illusory one of winning over the reformist leadership and the party apparatus, but to organise and strengthen the rank and file to fight for democratic control over the party and to replace the leadership.

The goal should be to lay the foundations of a revolutionary party, together with revolutionaries in Antarsya and others who are not passive sectarians, as soon as possible. If this is the outcome, then the betrayal of reformism and the revelation of the organic incapacity of the Left Platform to provide a fighting alternative to it, can be a cause not of demoralisation and disintegration but of political renewal. This can aid a renewal of the resistance and the creation of a mass movement that is not only anti-austerity but also anticapitalist and revolutionary.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/syriza-plan-b-alternative>

Links:

[1] <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4052>

[2] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/03/lapavitsas-varoufakis-grexit-syriza/>

[3] <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/23045/1/fullreport.pdf>