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Greece and the Future of Syriza: Lessons of a Tragic Defeat

By Jeff Mackler
August 10, 2015

The classic definition of Greek tragedy from the times of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides 2500 years ago applies with a vengeance today. The Greek working masses have suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of Europe’s imperial economic and political powers—tragically, with the full complicity of the reformist, that is, pro-capitalist, Syriza party (Coalition of the Radical Left).

Tragedy in the theater is defined as an unfolding drama in which the main player is brought to ruin or suffers extreme sorrow *especially as a consequence of an innate flaw or inability to cope with unfavorable circumstances.*

Today, without doubt, the “unfavorable circumstances,” an understatement if there ever was one, lies with the Syriza government’s “negotiating partners”—the brutal, bullying, and crisis-ridden European capitalist elite embodied in the “Troika” (the European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund). This is the same Troika that has reduced Europe’s weaker and debt-ridden capitalist states—Spain, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, and Greece, among others—to subordinate status, rendering them increasingly incapable of effectively competing on the globalized world markets that are dominated by the most technologically, financially, and militarily advanced imperialist powers.

All the hype about European unity, the sanctity of the euro, “following the rules” of the European Central Bank, and fiscal responsibility pales before the fact that European capitalist

unity inevitably takes a back seat to the incessant and inherent drive to maximize the profits of big capital, represented in the most powerful European states. Were it otherwise, were the smaller and weaker nations treated as equal and harmonious partners in a humanistic endeavor in which the interests of peoples were prioritized above all others, the present European and world crisis would instantly disappear.

Pipe dreams aside, no self-respecting capitalist sees it this way. The cardinal rule of the corporate game is to destroy your opponent to maximize your own profits. Drive the lesser competitors out of the marketplace! Monopoly! “Dog eat dog!”

At best the European “dis-union” was conceived as a necessary or potential bloc to counter the weight of U.S. imperialist economic hegemony, to at least partially combine the economic and natural resources of Europe to withstand the U.S. onslaught from without. But this never happened. It was doomed to failure at the outset as the conflicts between the ruling-class elites of all European states inevitably drove them to prioritize their own interests.

The grand scheme of European unity stands in ruins as all agree that the weaker, less competitive states have been driven to near bankruptcy and massive indebtedness at the expense of the stronger. The capitalist playing field will never be made level.

EU tops threaten Greece with shut down

Greece today, as with all capitalist states, is ruled by an elite ruling class that long ago established the fundamental rules that govern social relations. Its highly profitable shipbuilding industry and related merchant-marine manufacturing stands second or third in the world. Yet these industries are virtually untaxed by the state. The same situation exists with virtually all major Greek private capitalist corporations and financial institutions.

In significant aspects, Greece is an underdeveloped nation; it stands among the poorest of the European capitalist states. Its technological infrastructure, agriculture, and therefore its industrial capacity are inferior to that of most European countries. It is thus subjected to unequal terms of trade, including prices for agricultural and other commodities it produces. Its capacity to obtain credit to renovate or modernize its largely obsolete manufacturing infrastructure is extremely limited.

Like most poor nations, Greece’s imposed underdevelopment renders it nearly incapable of competing with the more advanced capitalist nations. As with most of the rest of the world, it is subordinate to the dictates of the great world powers. A world capitalism in crisis requires victims, not equals—and certainly not vibrant competitors who threaten to or are capable of undermining imperialist hegemony.

The smashing of the Syriza “experiment” was a conscious decision—a message to all oppressed people of Europe and beyond that “leftist” rhetoric and the election of “leftist” governments of the reformist variety cannot and will not alter the relationship of forces in favor of the oppressed masses.

Greece, as with all nations on earth, including the United States, where capitalist rule requires ceaseless attacks on every aspect of working-class life, has no solutions within the unequal parameters of the capitalist order.

With Greece tottering ever closer to the economic brink, and following Syriza's January 2015 election victory, the Troika's top European players, Germany and France, engaged Syriza's leading "Marxist" economist professors and political leaders in six months of futile "negotiations." Europe's smug elite team, headed by Germany's Wolfgang Schauble and backed to the hilt by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, offered not a single revision of their third and most devastating "bailout" package—a series of proposals that would further reduce Greece to an occupied or vassal state of European capital.

Syriza's chief negotiator and finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, stated following the early July breakdown of negotiations, and without exaggeration, that during his six-month stint in Brussels and in talks across Europe, *not a single counterproposal to his numerous revisions was ever made by the Troika!* "Take it or leave it" was the top European banksters' first, last, and only offer—and if you leave it, we will immediately stop all credit flows to Greek banks and effectively shut them down, leaving essentially bankrupt Greece with no means to conduct the business of running the state!

Indeed, that is precisely what the Troika did almost immediately—17 hours after the resounding 61.3 percent "no" vote in the July 5 snap referendum called by Greek Prime Minister and Syriza leader, Alex Tsipras.

At the time, Greek banks were on the verge of collapse. There was not enough cash in their ATMs to sustain the meager withdrawals by pensioners and the unemployed. Factories were quickly exhausting their last stocks of raw materials, and preparing to cut work shifts. There was a risk that the country would run out of food stocks by the end of the month.

A portrait of Syriza

Here we are compelled to frankly evaluate the other side of the Greek equation, the tragic side—the fundamentally flawed political perspectives of Syriza. *We begin and end with the proposition that the capitalist system in its fundamentals cannot be reformed, a proposition that is rejected by the reformist Syriza-led government.*

The almost unprecedented and ever intensifying catastrophic conditions of life that confront the world's working classes today—massive and Great Depression era austerity, poverty, starvation, endless wars, impending life-threatening global warming, racism, sexism, homophobia, slave labor and sex trafficking, scapegoating Islamophobia, and racist attacks on immigrants—are inherent in the operations of the capitalist system of plunder and profit.

These are not accidental policy decisions made by right-wing governments ("left-wing" reformist governments do the same), but rather brutally imposed and "necessary" measures to guarantee the exploitation, oppression, and subordination of the world's people to the dictates of the crisis-ridden capitalist world order.

While revolutionaries fight for any improvement or positive reform in the quality of life of working people, we have absolutely no illusion that temporary gains achieved in the course of struggle—and these are increasingly few and far between—can be maintained for long if the capitalist system as a whole remains intact. Advocacy and the struggle for socialist revolution—the abolition of capitalism based on the organization and engagement of the vast working class majority—is the prerequisite requirement to ending the horrors of capitalist minority rule and ushering in a new world order, in which the fulfillment of human needs, full equality and the elevation of all to the highest and richest standards of education, health, and culture are realistic and attainable goals and objectives.

The greatest contradiction of our times is that between our present technological capacity to achieve all of the above and the rule of the tiny but powerful minority elite that stands in our way. With this in mind, we offer the following evaluation of the decisive events that have transpired in Greece since the January election that allowed Syriza to form a government:

Syriza is a reformist party, not a revolutionary party. It is largely an electoral coalition of various radical and reformist socialist groups, many with lofty aims but lacking the perspective of organizing the Greek working class for a challenge to capitalist rule and a struggle for state power. Most of the components of Syriza are made up of former members and/or leaders from the Eurocommunist tradition, a reformist current that “broke” with many of the “official” policies of the long Stalinized and counter-revolutionary Communist Party of the Soviet Union but *never* with its overall anti-socialist and reformist politics.

Both Eurocommunists and the more orthodox variety of Stalinists inside the USSR routinely supported participation in electoral coalitions around the world with openly capitalist parties and, when these coalitions were “successful,” participated in coalition capitalist governments—taking ministerial posts and otherwise aiding in the administration of the capitalist states.

All rejected the independent organization of the working class in a struggle for socialism. All, without exception, in both the advanced and underdeveloped countries, subordinated the organization of the working class for socialism to coalitions and agreements with local and international capitalist powers at the expense of the interests of the working class.

John Pilger’s harsh but accurate Syriza description is noteworthy (“The Problem of Greece Is Not Only a Tragedy. It Is a Lie,” *Global Research*, July 13, 2015): “The day after the January 2015 election a truly democratic and, yes, radical government would have stopped every euro leaving the country, repudiated the ‘illegal and odious’ debt – as Argentina did successfully—and expedited a plan to leave the crippling Eurozone. But there was no plan. There was only a willingness to be ‘at the table’ seeking ‘better terms.’”

Pilger continues: “The true nature of Syriza has been seldom examined and explained. To the foreign media it is no more than ‘leftist’ or ‘far left’ or ‘hardline’—the usual misleading spray. Some of Syriza’s international supporters have reached, at times, levels of cheerleading reminiscent of the rise of Barack Obama. Few have asked: Who are these ‘radicals’? What do they believe in?”

“The leaders of Syriza are revolutionaries of a kind—but their revolution is the perverse, familiar appropriation of social democratic and parliamentary movements by liberals groomed to comply with neo-liberal drivel and a social engineering whose authentic face is that of Wolfgang Schauble, Germany’s finance minister, an imperial thug. Like the Labour Party in Britain and its equivalents among those former social democratic parties still describing themselves as ‘liberal’ or even ‘left,’ Syriza is the product of an affluent, highly privileged, educated middle class, ‘schooled in postmodernism,’ as Alex Lantier wrote.”

For revolutionary socialists, participation in capitalist elections is a sometimes useful educational *tactic*, but it is always subordinate to the ongoing organization of workers to challenge capitalism itself. For reformists, like the various social democratic parties and former Stalinist/Communist parties around the world, and Syriza in Greece, elections are a *strategic* orientation aimed at winning government posts to administer the capitalist state.

Today, in an era of capitalist crisis, such administration necessitates imposing the massive austerity measures that capitalism requires for its continued functioning. Thus, every social democratic and/or social reformist government on earth today has become the willing and often preferred tool of capital, including the “left” capitalist governments of Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Nicaragua.

Syriza, elected on a pledge to refrain from all future austerity measures and to seek reversal of those implemented by the previous government, won the January 2015 Greek election with 36 percent of the vote and 149 of the 300 seats in the Greek parliament—one vote short of a formal majority to form a government on its own. To achieve this constitutionally required majority, it formed a coalition government with ANEL (Independent Greeks) an openly right-wing nationalist, anti-immigrant capitalist party. This, in and of itself, amounted to an ironclad pledge that Greek capitalism’s essential prerogatives would not be challenged! As part of the deal, the Syriza leadership granted ANEL ministerial posts to help administer the new government, including the post of head of the Greek armed forces.

Syriza’s new parliamentary majority voted to designate former Minister of the Interior and Public Order Prokopis Pavlouopoulos as president of Greece. Pavlouopoulos is a current Central Committee member of New Democracy, Greece’s main capitalist party and the party in power prior to the January 2015 elections. Pavlouopoulos’s election to the Greek presidency, a largely ceremonial post, was nonetheless a conscious statement to Greek’s creditors that Syriza’s objective was a negotiated debt settlement as opposed to a challenge to Greek’s creditors and capitalist institutions at home and in Europe.

Prime Minister Tsipras said that Pavouopoulos has “a proven democratic sensitivity, a high feeling of national conscience, and ... enjoys broad approval in society and parliament.” These are kind words indeed for a leader of Greek capitalism and a proponent of austerity and privatizations. Syriza further sought to insure its credibility as a reliable capitalist government administrator by including in various government positions members of the discredited and former governing capitalist PASOK party.

In the year or so *prior* to the Jan. 15 election, the Greek masses engaged in an unprecedented number of strikes, including 33 one-day or two-day general strikes against the New Democracy and PASOK governments' implementation of sweeping austerity measures. *Following Syriza's Jan. 15 election victory, however, the number of such strikes against capitalist austerity dropped to zero!*

Syriza prioritized six months of negotiations with European capital over the mobilization of the Greek masses to challenge capitalism at home, a mistake of epic proportions. Syriza pledged to pay the debts incurred by the previous government and to carry out the austerity measures imposed by them while simultaneously seeking modest debt relief with possible measures such as lower interest rates, extended payment deadlines, or a partial debt "haircut." That is, it asked for a measure of forgiveness of some of the debt on the basis that it was in fact nearly impossible to collect and that it was incurred by a corrupt government that had been repudiated.

But Syriza, while agreeing at the bargaining table to not reverse the previous government's two previous negotiated austerity packages, sought funds to "reorganize" Greek capitalism to make it more competitive on world markets through investments in more efficient technology and privatization of government-owned "inefficient" industries and other measures in the framework of maintaining Greek capitalism.

In short, Syriza's entire negotiating strategy was to pay the \$300 billion debt, continue the present austerity, and perhaps moderate the terms of payment in return for an additional \$96 billion in new loans to avert an impending bankruptcy. About \$50 billion of this new loan is set aside to pay off creditors immediately—in one door and out another!

Varoufakis' blunt admissions

Yanis Varoufakis' negotiating counterparts, as he forthrightly stated in several widely published interviews following his July departure/removal as Greece's chief negotiator, did not believe for a second that Greece's third bailout in the past five years would be anything other than an across the board heinous assault on the Greek people. His removal signaled nothing less than a Syriza/Tsipras decision to make this absolutely clear to the Troika.

There was an element of reality in the Troika's position. Europe's top negotiators knew full well that, Syriza's posturing sound and fury rhetoric aside, Tsipras had sent its negotiating team, hat in hand, with only a hope and prayer that the conditions of a third bailout might be slightly less onerous. Indeed, Varoufakis himself later admitted that he was personally granted permission to establish a secret six-person team to prepare a "Plan B" when it became clear that the Troika's insistence that Greece pay its \$300 billion debt in full, with interest, and via the imposition of even more draconian austerity measures than the two previous bailouts was the only option.

Here is Varoufakis's blunt assessment of this matter based on an interview with Martin Hart-Landsberg, Professor of Economics at Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Ore.:

"HL: You must have been thinking about a Grexit (Greek exit from the Eurozone) from day one....

YV: Yes, absolutely.”

“**HL:** ... have preparations been made?

YV: The answer is yes and no. We had a small group, a ‘war cabinet’ within the ministry, of about five people that were doing this: so we worked out in theory, on paper, everything that had to be done [to prepare in the event of a Grexit]. But it’s one thing to do that at the level of 4-5 people, it’s quite another to prepare the country for it. To prepare the country an executive decision had to be taken, and that decision was never taken.”

“**HL:** And in the past week, was that a decision you felt you were leaning towards [preparing for Grexit]?

YV: My view was, we should be very careful *not* to activate it. I didn’t want this to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. *I didn’t want this to be like Nietzsche’s famous dictum that if you stare into the abyss long enough, the abyss will stare back at you.* But I also believed that at the moment the Eurogroup shut our banks down, we should energize this process.

“**HL:** Right. So there were two options as far as I can see—an immediate Grexit, or printing IOUs and taking back control of the Bank of Greece [potentially but not necessarily precipitating a Grexit]?

YV: Sure, sure. I never believed we should go straight to a new currency. My view was—and I put this to the government—that if they dared shut our banks down, which I considered to be an aggressive move of incredible potency, we should respond aggressively *but without crossing the point of no return.*

We should issue our own IOUs, or *even at least announce that we’re going to issue our own euro-denominated liquidity*; we should haircut the Greek 2012 bonds that the ECB held, *or announce we were going to do it*; and we should take control of the Bank of Greece. This was the triptych, the three things, which I thought we should respond with if the ECB shut down our banks. ...

I was warning the Cabinet this was going to happen [the ECB shut our banks] for a month, in order to drag us into a humiliating agreement. When it happened—and many of my colleagues couldn’t believe it happened—my recommendation for responding ‘energetically,’ let’s say, *was voted down.*”

“**HL:** And how close was it to happening?

YV: Well let me say that out of six people we were in a minority of two. ... Once it didn’t happen I got my orders to close down the banks consensually with the ECB and the Bank of Greece, which I was against, but I did because I’m a team player, I believe in collective responsibility.

“And then the referendum happened, and the referendum gave us an amazing boost, one that would have justified this type of energetic response [i.e., Varoufakis’s plan] against the ECB, but then that very night the government decided that the will of the people, this resounding ‘no,’ should not be what energized the energetic approach [his plan].

“Instead it should lead to major concessions to the other side: the meeting of the [European] council of political leaders, with our Prime Minister accepting the premise that *whatever happens, whatever the other side does, we will never respond in any way that challenges them. And essentially that means folding. ... You cease to negotiate.*” [Emphasis added in italics — J.M.]

“The referendum of 5 July,” said Varoufakis, “has also been rapidly forgotten—preemptively dismissed by the Eurozone, and many people saw it as a farce—a sideshow that offered a false choice and created false hope, and was only going to ruin Tsipras when he later [almost immediately] signed the deal he was campaigning against. As Schäuble supposedly said, ‘elections cannot be allowed to change anything.’”

Wolfgang Schauble made a critical point here, one that goes to the heart of the Greek crisis. From his vantage point as the Eurozone’s top-gun negotiator, armed with the full powers of European finance capital, the January 2015 election that brought Syriza/ANEL to government and the July 5 referendum that rejected his take it or leave it final and crippling bailout proposal meant absolutely nothing. Schauble and all the other Eurozone nations had full confidence that Greek’s coalition capitalist government had no alternative but to accept another austerity package—elections, referendum results, and political bluster notwithstanding.

The terms of the deal

The first two Greek bailouts negotiated by the previous rightwing PASOK/New Democracy government brought Greece to its knees, reducing the standard of living by some 25 percent, raising unemployment levels to Great Depression levels exceeding 26 percent—60 percent for Greek youth—privatizing major Greek industries, and slashing pensions and social services. The third and most recent bailout, this time negotiated by Tsipras on behalf of his “left” coalition capitalist Syriza government and approved by the Greek parliament in mid-July, *is far worse!*

The New York Times pointed out in a July 14 article: “In signing on to the deal, however reluctantly, Mr. Tsipras suddenly found himself the champion of policies he was elected to oppose and the best hope for de-escalating a crisis he had helped to create. Should he succeed on carrying out the policies set out in the agreement, he would oversee just the kind of market-based changes that creditors have been demanding and successive Greek governments have been failing to deliver for years.”

The July 13 British *Guardian’s* summary of the new agreement is devastating. Here’s my own shortened version: Tsipras, some 17 hours after the July 5 “no” vote, rushed to Brussels for an all-night session with the 18 representatives of the Eurozone nations and approved a seven-page agreement that included the establishment of a \$55 billion Greek fund that is to be used to privatize Greek assets—that is, to sell them to corporate interests at bargain basement prices.

Greek planes, airports, ports, vital infrastructure and communication industries and banks are slated for the chopping block.

The new measures include a 50 percent increase in the cost of pensioner health care (almost 40 percent of pensioners live in poverty) and an extension of the age of pensioner eligibility to 67. New and increased sales and value added taxes up to 23 percent as well as restrictions on collective bargaining rights, automatic or triggered social spending cuts when Greece's future budgets fail to reach new required surplus criteria, continued IMF monitoring—if not control—of Greek finances, and a host of other measures aimed at humiliating Greeks in favor of capitalist profits were all approved at Syriza's insistence.

The seven-page agreement mandated that 13 billion euros be cut from the public purse—4 billion euros more than the “austerity” figure rejected overwhelmingly on July 5 by the majority of the Greek population a week earlier. And if one believed that the agreement could not be even more deadly, it affirmed that “the Euro Summit stresses that nominal haircuts on the debt cannot be undertaken.” On this last point alone Varoufakis had previously noted, “If the specifics of debt relief are not written clearly into the overall package, it is not worth anything.”

Indeed, not only was debt relief/forgiveness in any amount *not* included, it was explicitly excluded. This rejection even irked the U.S.-dominated IMF, whose top echelons knew full well, and stated so in intentionally leaked internal communications, that without a significant debt forgiveness as well as a prolonged, perhaps 30-year, extension of the maturity dates along with interest rate reductions, Greece would be absolutely incapable of anything resembling a recovery. Greece would once again rapidly fall into bankruptcy—as it now will—but not before the new austerity measures take their pound of flesh and line the pockets of the creditor rich while further undermining the standard of living of the Greek people.

Schauble understood this well. He crudely and publically suggested an alternative—that Greece withdraw from the Eurozone for at least five years and seek relief from other non-troika financial institutions. Pouring into Greece the amount of debt relief that the IMF recommended as the minimum to avoid yet another and close to immediate bankruptcy and bailout—30 percent of Greece's GDP—would, in his view, be the equivalent of throwing good money after bad.

For Schauble, and for essentially the entire Eurozone group, a “voluntary” Greek exit—in reality throwing Greece out of the Eurozone for non-payment of its debts—would be their first preference. In the end it was only political considerations that altered their approach. These centered on their fear that throwing Greece out of the Eurozone might well trigger a political firestorm among the masses of the other European debtor nations that would threaten the present capitalist order. While forcing Greece out was put on hold, no one denies today that the third “bailout” will fail to resolve anything other than to postpone the day of reckoning to perhaps a year or so down the line.

Why did Tsipras ignore the referendum results?

Tsipras began his government's abject capitulation just hours *after* the massive “no” vote was announced. As a gesture of “good faith” and to assure Greece's creditors that his government had

ceased its high talk about challenging austerity he presented and won the approval of several initial and devastating measures insisted on by the troika.

A week or so *before* the referendum, when negotiations had effectively ended, Tsipras had defiantly reported: “They asked the Greek government to accept a proposal that accumulates a new unsustainable burden on the Greek people and undermines the recovery of the Greek economy and society, a proposal that not only perpetuates the state of uncertainty but accentuates social inequalities even more.” Yet Tsipras now demanded its acceptance.

To date there has been but one plausible explanation put forward for this near instant Syriza reversal—Tsipras fully expected the referendum to produce a “yes” vote! Varoufakis’ lengthy interview strongly implies that this was the case. Tsipras, he implies, planned to use a “yes” vote to immediately go to the parliament to ask for approval of the “people’s will,” and thus provide justification for acceptance of the ruthless measures required by the Troika. Nevertheless, a stunned Tsipras went to the same parliament, throwing the “no” vote into the dustbin and demanding acceptance.

On July 6, again, one day after the massive “no” vote, he secured a near unanimous vote of approval from Syriza’s parliamentary delegation, including its Left Platform. This vote, with only two Left Platform ministers in opposition—a pre-planned token opposition vote of the two—was secured based on the fear that if the Syriza/ANEL government failed to secure a majority of its own members of parliament, Greek law might require the holding of elections for a new government.

In addition to the almost unanimous Syriza/ANEL vote—minus the Nazis Golden Dawn “no” votes and those of the opportunistic and sectarian Greek Communist Party (KKE), which in years past did its own stint in Greek coalition capitalist governments—the traditional Greek capitalist parties, New Democracy and PASOK, voted their approval. Varoufakis did not attend the meeting but sent a note indicating his vote in support of Tsipras’s proposal!

Varoufakis later commented on the agreement that he had approved, asserting that “it is the Versailles Treaty for the present age.”

This analogy is a far cry from the truth, however. The 1919 Versailles Treaty, which concluded World War I, was imposed on defeated imperialist Germany by its French, U.S., and British imperialist conquerors. Following a devastating world war that took the lives of millions, the victors imposed massive reparations on Germany as well as taking possession of German-populated territories. The Versailles Treaty is said to have laid the basis for the resurgence of German nationalism and the rise of the Hitler regime.

In contrast, the Syriza-inflicted imposition of massive austerity on the Greek people flowed from the fundamentally flawed policies of a reformist, pro-capitalist Greek government. The government sent its tiny band of intellectuals to do battle with European capitalism while leaving the Greek masses standing on the sidelines and—to state the truth boldly—with never the slightest intention of engaging them in struggle. This is a strategy doomed to failure and, again, tragedy.

A week or so later, when the full Eurozone/Tsipras seven-page agreement came before the Greek parliament, some 32 MPs of the Left Platform and other leftist tendencies voted “no.” But the agreement was overwhelming approved by the parliament, with some 80 percent of the Syriza representatives voting in favor and joined by the traditional Greek capitalist parties. As we have noted, the terms of Tsipras’s negotiated agreement are harsher by a full order of magnitude than those rejected by Greek voters the previous week!

The lessons of the Greek experience in the “rule” of mis-named “broad parties of the anti-capitalist left,” with Syriza being today’s touted model by those who reject the formation of revolutionary socialist parties of the Leninist type, is glaring and tragic. The spectacle of “leftists” in “power,” including “Marxist” professors, ex-Stalinists, social democrats, and even some who describe themselves as Trotskyists taking responsibility for and imposing massive austerity measures on the working class must be a warning to serious revolutionaries.

Syriza’s Left Platform’s alternative Grexit proposal was summarized on the *Greek Reporter’s* on-line news site as follows: “An exit from the Eurozone would generate further benefits, namely, the restoration of financial liquidity, a sustainable growth program based on private investment, the rebuilding of the internal economy to reduce dependence on imports, an increase in exports, independence from the European Central Bank, its policies and restrictions and finally the utilization of unused resources to create rapid growth so as to protect against the first difficult months following the Grexit.”

We must note, however, that this “technical” proposal never once deviated from solutions based on Greece’s remaining in the world capitalist orbit via the promotion of a more profitable and efficient capitalist economy in Greece.

Syriza, and all its component currents, essentially subordinated organizing the Greek masses to defend and advance their interests to technical solutions and/or futile negotiations with Greek’s capitalist predators and their international troika superiors. This undeniably *demobilized* the working class! It fostered illusions that socialists could administer capitalist states without challenging capitalist power and capitalist rule itself.

Capitalist rule is based on the forced imposition of the will and interests of society’s tiny property owning elite on the vast majority. It is based on the deployment of the combined institutions of the capitalist state to enforce this minority rule, from capitalism’s legislative bodies, courts, police and army to all other government dominated institutions. All exist solely to defend the interests of the capitalist state power, its wealth and unimpeded right to exploit and oppress its working class victims.

A revolutionary course of action

Some Greek revolutionaries did seek to alter the present relationship of forces between labor and capital. Revolutionary parties, small as they were—including the Greek Fourth International section, OKDE-Spartakos (Organization of Communist Internationalists of Greece)—looked to the organizations of the working masses and oppressed to exercise their power in the streets.

They encouraged and helped to lead united-front mass actions that challenged capitalist austerity in all its manifestations.

They acted to defend the rights of immigrants against the fascist Golden Dawn attacks. They aimed at the organization of working-class communities and neighborhood groups to fight for their own interests. In the electoral arena and in united-front mobilizations, they participated in the relatively small but important ANTARSYA (Anti-capitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow) to pose a mass-struggle alternative to Syriza's reformism.

They worked to foster the education and active engagement of the Greek masses and warned that there are no reformist—that is, capitalist—solutions to the massive austerity imposed on by Greek and international capital. Immediately following Syriza's vote to approve the third "bailout," they helped to build a general strike and mass rally of 15,000 in Athens' Syntagma Square, which was brutally attacked by the government's police, including the frame-up arrest of OKDE-Spartakos members and other revolutionary activists who challenged the Syriza sellout.

For revolutionary socialists, politics is the art of organizing, uniting, and mobilizing the working class for the seizure of power when the conditions have been properly prepared.

Revolutionaries operate on the irrefutable premise that no ruling class in history has ever voluntarily ceded power to the vast majority of the working masses, who produce all the world's wealth. When faced with a serious challenge to their rule, the capitalist elite resort to every means necessary to sustain it. Their tactics range from electoral guile (for example, running radical-sounding politicians for office), restrictive election laws, and stealing elections via their control of the ballot box to outright repression including mass arrests, imprisonment, and murder. And finally, when all else fails to stem an impending mass uprising that directly threatens their rule, they can resort to outright dictatorships of the fascist type, with rule by force and violent repression.

Revolutionaries certainly do not advocate isolated groups running wild in the streets demanding "socialism now!" Nor do we believe that socialism can triumph in a single country without its being accompanied by a social transformation worldwide—especially including the most advanced industrialized countries.

But on the other hand, revolutionaries do not advocate passivity until the "world revolution" comes. In 1917, V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky won their Bolshevik Party to the task of organizing Russian workers, peasants, and oppressed nationalities in order to *prepare* for the seizure of power to end capitalist rule. They saw backward Russia, in the context of a worldwide rise in revolutionary struggles and the devastation brought on by World War I as a critical moment where their revolution—their example—might inspire workers everywhere to follow suit.

Indeed, they prioritized and helped foster the formation of disciplined revolutionary socialist parties of the Leninist type everywhere in the world. They saw their revolution as only the first blow against the capitalist world order. And they also understood that the alternative to the organization of the working class for the seizure of power was the continued rule of capital,

including Russia's continued participation in a monstrous war, the starvation of the Russian masses, and the continued oppression of Russia's colonially oppressed nationalities.

In Greece today, the central question before serious revolutionaries is *not* the immediate seizure of power but the prerequisite steps that are indispensable for achieving it. This begins, in Greece and in all nations, with the construction of a consciously constructed revolutionary socialist party of the Leninist type—a deeply-rooted mass revolutionary party that aims to unite all of society's millions and billions of oppressed and exploited people, the vast majority, into an unbeatable force—the *only* force capable of defeating the repressive capitalist state power in all its manifestations.

That this process takes time is indisputable. Patience, fortitude, conviction, and confidence in the working class are the indispensable qualities of serious revolutionaries. There is no other way. Socialist revolution requires the organization of the working masses to rule in their own name, in their own interests, and through their own institutions.

Had Syriza spent its first six months governing Greece looking to the working-class masses as its source of strength and power, the result might well have been inspirational to the workers of the rest of the oppressed European states and beyond.

But instead of mobilizing its millions to challenge capitalist rule, to take over the major industries, to tax and/or expropriate the rich, to national the banks and major corporations, all under the control of the working masses, Syriza and its sycophants (blind and obedient followers) envisioned social change as a product of clever negotiations with the capitalist elite, employing leading intellectuals to press for modest reforms within the framework of capitalism. Greece's working-class masses were shunted to the sidelines by the Syriza/ANEL government.

Many of the "left" argued that this was the only possible choice, that the time was not ripe for revolution, or that the Greek workers were not ready to fight back. Some added that Tsipras and Syriza negotiators were exhausted from their yeoman efforts and should be praised for their work. They fought the good fight against unbeatable odds!

But nothing could be further from the truth. Reforming capitalism as opposed to the perspective of abolishing it, formation of multi-class electoral alliances to administer the capitalist state, and a rejection of revolutionary party building in favor of vaguely defined "broad" reformist parties constitute Syriza's "tragic flaws." This dead-end strategy has once again ended in defeat.

Those who absorb these fundamental lessons of independent working-class politics will be best prepared to help lead the coming struggles for a socialist future.