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Greece

SYRIZA, socialists and the struggles ahead

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Greece's left-wing government is on a collision course with the rulers of Europe over the commitment of the Coalition of the Radical Left, or SYRIZA, to reverse drastic austerity measures imposed under the Memorandums negotiated with the European Union (EU).

SYRIZA won a tremendous victory in the January 25 elections because it promised an alternative to the catastrophic economic and social crisis that Greece has endured for more than five years. But with the government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras only two weeks old, the political and financial elite of Europe, from Germany's Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble to Mario Draghi, head of the European Central Bank (ECB), have rejected all proposals to negotiate Greece's huge foreign debt or relax the austerity conditions imposed as a condition for the bailout of the country's economic system. With a showdown approaching, all eyes are on the struggle in Greece and the hope it holds for the future.

Antonis Davanellos and Sotiris Martalis are members of the Greek socialist organization Internationalist Workers Left (DEA), a co-founder of SYRIZA a decade ago and now a leading force in the Left Platform inside SYRIZA. Both are members of SYRIZA's Central Committee. On February 7, Antonis and Sotiris spoke to an audience of socialists in the U.S. via videoconference about SYRIZA's election victory, the first days of the new government and the struggles that lie ahead. After an opening presentation, the two responded to numerous questions from the audience. Here, we publish their comments, edited and supplemented for publication at SocialistWorker.org.

Antonis Davanellos: Opening Presentation

The first thing to understand is the importance of January 25 as a victory for the left, as well as for SYRIZA. This has happened in a country where, in the past century, there were two dictatorships and a civil war, in which the left suffered terrible defeats. This is the first major political victory for the radical left in the whole period since the 1940s.

This victory is based on the mass resistance of the working class in Greece over the past five or six years. So you can understand that throughout the population, throughout the country, there is a feeling of joy and celebration.

This feeling of celebration has been reinforced by what the ministers of the new government have said in just the first weeks after the election. The government will officially be in power on Monday, February 9, but before that, when the new ministers were taking over their ministries, they were already saying and doing important things.

For example, one was sworn in and immediately announced that the ongoing privatization of the port of Piraeus, the largest seaport in Greece, will end. Another said that as of that day, the privatization of the Public Electricity Co. (DEI) would be reversed. There were announcements that the layoffs in the public sector would end, and 3,500 workers could return to work.

Also during this time, Tsipras made an agreement with the Independent Greeks [known by the initials ANEL, a right-wing party that is also against the Memorandums] to be a part of the government, going against the position of SYRIZA that it would form a government of the left.

It seems that some people outside Greece think that SYRIZA has made a deal with a party that is similar to Golden Dawn. This is not the case. The Independent Greeks are a party that comes from the right. They have also taken a clear position against the Memorandums, which has forced them to change their conservative positions on specific

questions. For example, ANEL supports privatization in its basic program. Yet over the past five years, it has been against any concrete proposal for privatization because they were carried out under the Memorandums.

After the agreement with ANEL was announced, our organization produced a statement opposing this alliance with the Independent Greeks. We said that this went against the declarations from the conferences of SYRIZA that rejected alliances with center-left parties—surely this meant the center-right as well. We said that the alliance with ANEL would be a transmission belt for conservative pressures on the government.

But to be honest, in the days ahead, I think your attention should not be on the Independent Greeks as much as other factors that are much more crucial in determining what the government will or will not do. The threat posed by the Independent Greeks will be an easy problem for us to solve compared to the bigger problems—dealing with the international lenders, with the existing ruling class in Greece, and with the existing state.

After the formation of the government, the negotiations with Greece's creditors began, and what we have seen is the European Union and European Commission, the European Central Bank, along with the German government, taking a very hard position. They are trying to humiliate the newly elected government in Greece, with a clear aim of isolating and eventually overthrowing that government.

Facing them is the new Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, who is not a member of SYRIZA. He is an ex-social democrat who was selected by the SYRIZA leadership to be a minister. He is trying to maneuver against the pressure exerted by the EU by changing the basic positions of SYRIZA around the question of debt, in the hopes of making a compromise with Wolfgang Schäuble [the finance minister of Germany].

We don't know what the outcome of this maneuvering will be. This is a new and unpredictable situation. But we do know the importance of the changes in Greece—they are immense, inside the country, and outside it.

Within Greece, there is a sense that we must support the government, but also that the government must not compromise with the creditors. Two nights ago, on February 5, after a last-minute appeal and very little organization, more than 10,000 people were in Syntagma Square to show their support for the government, but at the same time to demand that the government not retreat.

This will be a very complicated situation. Even if the leadership of SYRIZA wants to make a compromise, it isn't at all certain it can do so. There is a lot of evidence that the working class movement in Greece is willing to fight, and now that there is hope as a result of the SYRIZA victory, I think it can fight even better.

But we must also remember the importance of the change internationally. A few days ago, I was in Germany, speaking to a public meeting about the government of the left in Greece, and as people there said, this is the first time in 20 years that there has been a public discussion in Germany about another possible road than neoliberalism. That is very important. You can see the alternative in Spain—the second example of left-wing success in elections after SYRIZA is Podemos. This is a real political threat to the ruling classes of Europe and the EU leadership.

I don't know exactly what will happen—nobody knows. We may win, and we may be defeated. We don't know the end of the story. The only thing that I can tell you is that we will fight to win. Nobody should forget that SYRIZA is a particular kind of political party—it is a network of activists and militants with a strong left that isn't defeated.

Antonis Davanellos: First Round of Answers

We were asked about the reaction of the mass movements to the new government. It is too early to say. The government has not even, at this point, officially presented its program, so we are really at the beginning.

There was a demonstration several days ago in Syntagma Square in support of the government and against Schäuble's threats. Plus, there are discussions and meetings in unions and at many workplaces, talking about the demands that can be presented to the government, and how to push it for solutions. But that is the point we are at right now.

It is still early. For example, the workers at ERT [the public radio and TV station closed down by the government in 2013, which led to an occupation of the main production facility] are saying that for now, they will wait for the government to present its solution for reopening the station. We are in discussions with those workers about the need to mobilize to make this happen quicker. But this shows the feeling is that up until now, the government is doing well.

As for the Left Platform and the left inside SYRIZA, all the radical currents inside SYRIZA, with the exception of DEA, are participating in the government.

For example, the Left Current, which together with us forms the Left Platform, has four important ministers in the new government. The radical wing among supporters of the current that Tsipras is part of "the Left Unity current" has five ministers. DEA has elected two members of parliament "one is a member of DEA and one is a supporter from Kalamata. Both are women, and one is the youngest member of parliament in Greece.

As for the attitude of the ruling class in Greece toward SYRIZA and the conflict there, for the moment, this is secondary, because the principal question is the negotiations with Europe over the debt.

The Greek ruling class isn't supporting the government, but is asking it to compromise with the EU. For its part, the leadership of SYRIZA is trying to convince the ruling class, through the media and so on, that Tsipras will find a solution without a major crisis. But all of this is speculative, because it is based on the estimation that Schäuble will accept a compromise and also that the social base of SYRIZA and its membership will accept a compromise.

In reality, that isn't a certainty at all "on either side. I think that Schäuble cannot accept even Yanis Varoufakis' more moderate proposal, which is in conflict with the positions SYRIZA has committed to in its declarations. And at the same time, you can already hear voices inside SYRIZA protesting against the concessions of Varoufakis' plan.

I think this is just the first chapter of the book. The second chapter will be about taxing the corporations and the rich; stopping the privatizations and reclaiming the major companies and enterprises that have been privatized; and above all, the question of controlling the banks.

There was a question about Golden Dawn, Islamophobia and the line of SYRIZA toward immigrants in Greece. The showing of Golden Dawn was the only dark spot in the elections that we were unhappy about. Their result was a little bit weaker than the last elections, but they still won over 6 percent of the vote.

The main thing to say is that Golden Dawn has been forced to change how it operates in order to keep its influence. Up to six months ago, it was organized around armed violence in the streets "attacks by Nazi thugs against immigrants, gays, unionists and left-wing activists.

After the death of Pavlos Fyssas [a left-wing hip-hop artist murdered by a Golden Dawn member in September 2013]

and the mass mobilizations that forced New Democracy and the state to take legal action against Golden Dawn, this orientation collapsed. Now the Nazis are considering whether they should turn toward an electoral strategy and perhaps try to cooperate with Antonis Samaras [the former prime minister and leader of the main center-right party New Democracy].

This is because a huge crisis has opened up inside New Democracy, following the election defeat. There is a confrontation between Samaras' hard-line right strategy and policies and the traditional center-right positions of people around Kostas Karamanlis. Many of Karamanlis' followers are accusing Samaras that of having transformed New Democracy into a far-right groupuscule.

On the question of Islamophobia, SYRIZA is a party that has grown up fighting against racism. So for the vast majority of our members and followers, Islamophobia is something they protest. Local branches of SYRIZA are organizing in support of immigrants and fighting against Islamophobia—but this is mainly at the grassroots.

The new government has appointed Tasia Christodouloupoulou, a radical, anti-racist activist, as the minister responsible for questions of immigration. All the other parties, starting with ANEL and continuing through New Democracy and PASOK, are objecting and asking how a radical activist can be a minister and carry out the laws on immigration.

In a month's time, there will be a demonstration demanding legalization for immigrants, giving full civil rights to the children of immigrants, accepting refugees who are fleeing war, and eliminating the camps where immigrants are detained. So you can see that this is an ongoing battle, but we are in a much better position now than we were.

On the relationship of SYRIZA and the other parties in Greece, the first point is that this wasn't just an election victory for SYRIZA, but a major political victory.

Look at the overall picture. SYRIZA won 36.3 percent of the vote. Then you have New Democracy, the former ruling party, at 27.8 percent, and all the other parties—including PASOK, previously the main party of the center left—are around 6 percent or less. This shows the dominance of SYRIZA in the new parliament, which gives the government many options to strengthen its position—but only if they use them.

For example, one of the first acts of the new parliament was to elect a speaker, and the candidate put forward by SYRIZA, Zoe Konstantopoulou, got 235 votes out of 300. That means that many more members of parliament than just SYRIZA—the MPs of the Communist Party, the center-left parties—voted for SYRIZA's candidate.

As for two other parties of the left, the Communist Party and ANTARSYA, the Communist Party has maintained its hostility toward cooperating with SYRIZA, which people call sectarian. In my mind, their attitude is not merely sectarian, but completely abstentionist and passive. They continue to attack SYRIZA first and New Democracy second. The party maintained that it would not support SYRIZA in a vote of tolerance in parliament [which would have allowed SYRIZA to lead a government on its own],

I will say that I think Tsipras gave a big present to the leadership of the Communist Party by immediately making an agreement to form a government with the support of the Independent Greeks. If he had insisted on going to parliament to present the program of a SYRIZA government and then asked for a vote of tolerance—the course we supported—I think the Communist Party would have been in a very difficult position in maintaining its sectarian position, without losing further support.

ANTARSYA [a coalition of anti-capitalist organizations that got less than 1 percent of the vote and does not have representation in parliament] is in trouble. Its electoral showing was a little better than in the parliamentary elections in June 2012, but still less than what it got in May 2012. For now, the coalition has many differences within it. One part is rightly supporting the SYRIZA government, while another is continuing its rejection.

That is where things stand with SYRIZA and the other parties of the left. Given that, I think the question of the balance of forces inside SYRIZA is the more important question.

On the left inside SYRIZA is the Left Platform, which is made up of DEA and the Left Current. At the conference, the Left Platform had 30 percent of the vote of SYRIZA members, and it is accepted by everyone that after the conference, the Left Platform became stronger.

The new development was a split among the supporters of Tsipras in his Left Unity current. This split to the left was presented publicly through an open letter signed by 53 cadres of SYRIZA—so we refer to them as "the 53." The important thing is that if you add the support for the Left Platform to the support for the 53, together, they are a strong part of the Central Committee of SYRIZA.

This explains why Tsipras and the party leadership didn't call meetings of the Central Committee and acted by themselves in the lead-up to the election. They were able to get away with this, but the pressure inside the party about these questions of democracy is strong and building.

The leadership is apparently planning a reorganization of the party, which would mean a new conference held very soon, and the election of a new Central Committee. With this, Tsipras may hope he can change the balance of forces inside SYRIZA away from the left and back in his favor. Will it work? We will see. It will not be easy. But to be absolutely honest, this new situation after the elections is confusing and chaotic, and nobody knows exactly what will come next.

I said earlier that the rest of the left inside SYRIZA, other than DEA, has agreed to participate in the government. We have decided not to participate—not just governmental offices, but also in the machinery of the state. We will try to remain a force inside the social movements and in the Left Platform inside SYRIZA.

I will say a few things about DEA at this point. We are still a small organization, though we are double our size from when we began. The most important thing to say is that we are a very healthy organization, with connections in many unions, social movements and the local organizations of SYRIZA. We have done this openly as members of DEA, representing our organization.

We have strengthened DEA—for example, with a serious campaign around our newspaper. We are producing a much bigger newspaper, and for the first time, we are selling our paper not only through members, but at newsstands, which is an important step forward for us.

There are some inside SYRIZA who think that the left is isolated right now. We don't feel this way. We know that our position within SYRIZA is a minority, but we have a very big audience that is in contact with us, and that respects the political positions we are taking.

I also want to comment on the situation outside of Greece in Europe. The politics of austerity and neoliberalism still dominate, and the gains for the right wing in countries like France and Italy are one part of the picture. But we shouldn't lose sight of the signs of change. SYRIZA's election victory in Greece is one example. The strong support

for Podemos in Spain is another. Sinn Fein has made gains in Ireland, and there is good news from Portugal for the first time in some years. And in Germany, there are signs that the situation is shifting.

Still, having said this, it is absolutely clear that a majority of the governments and all the governing institutions of Europe will attack the agenda that SYRIZA is putting forward. Against this, all the radicals inside SYRIZA have a common slogan: Not one step back. We insist on our program and will work to achieve it "to use a reference from the movement in the United States" by any means necessary.

And "by any means necessary," that includes understanding that the confrontation with the European Union might mean an exit from the euro and a return to a national currency. We do not support this as a first choice, or worse, as a method to save Greek capitalism from the crisis. This is not a Plan B for an economic revival in Greece, as some economists have put forward. Rather, it is a political position stating that we are determined to overthrow austerity, and we will finish the job by any means necessary.

Sotiris Martalis: First Round of Answers

I want to comment on the question about the relationship between SYRIZA, the trade unions and the Communist Party.

SYRIZA's forces in the unions have increased over the last period, but until now, the majority in most unions are social democrats. On most questions, they win, with the support of more conservative forces. But in the past year, there have been a number of splits, with the forces of SYRIZA in a stronger position "which has led some social democrats to approach us with support or offers of alliances. We believe that this will continue and that SYRIZA will continue to become a stronger force in the trade unions.

Members of the Communist Party have had a sectarian policy inside the unions as well as in politics. For a long time, the Communist Party and ANTARSYA had similar demands to SYRIZA of stopping the layoffs and rehiring public-sector workers, opening up public services and enterprises that were closed and stopping the wage cuts. Now they talk about demanding that the government immediately increase salaries by 35 percent or more, to the level they were at in 2009. So you can see that this is not a policy of pushing SYRIZA from the left, but of dividing the struggle.

I agree with Antonis that DEA is not isolated within SYRIZA "we know a large part of the left inside the Party sees DEA as an important part of the Left Platform and will continue to find ways to work with us. I also want to say that in December, DEA had a unity conference with a smaller organization, Kokkino, which has joined forces with DEA so we are now stronger and better able to build inside SYRIZA.

As far as the attitude of workers and popular forces toward the new government, there were many symbolic steps that won a lot of support for SYRIZA. For example, on the day after the election, Tsipras made a point of going to national resistance monument in Kaisariani, where the Nazis executed 200 people, most of them Communists, on May Day in 1944, during the occupation of Greece in the Second World War. Tsipras laid a wreath in memory of the victims.

Also on that first day, workers took down the barriers surrounding parliament, which were put up to stop demonstrators. At the same time, the new ministers were announcing that SYRIZA would honor its promises to implement measures like restoring the minimum wage to 751 euros a month from 530 euros, to re-establish collective labor agreements, to go back to not taxing people's first 12,000 euros of income and so on.

All this gave a lot of momentum to the government, and a lot of hope to people that it will stand up for its commitments. Now, we have to see how the government deals with the international lenders so that it will have money to honor these promises.

Antonis Davanellos: Second Round of Answers

I want to first talk about the working class movement before the elections. It's obvious that Greece had a huge resistance movement until 2012. From 2010 to 2012, there were several dozen general strikes and many other major workplace battles, which were the backbone of mass demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of people.

This experience was important for the working class in many ways, but most of all, it taught workers that to win even their minimum demands against austerity, they had to defeat the government and reject the Troika. Greek workers tried to do this through their own struggles and demonstrations, but at that point, they encountered the naked force of the state. We have faced not just the police, but military special forces, with all their weapons.

It was a very difficult experience, and by 2012, workers had turned their hopes toward elections to defeat the Memorandum governments. The conclusion can be summed up as this: We prefer the way of struggle, with the working class in the middle of the political scene, but we can't choose the conditions we face.

It is important to say that this wasn't a turn to the right since 2012—that is absolutely clear. This is why SYRIZA won—because the mass of the working class is attempting to make changes in their conditions by supporting a left alternative in elections.

At the same time, of course, there were workers and social struggles that did continue. I think that is an important fact for everybody to remember, because it means the conditions exist for a huge movement to reappear very quickly. That sends a message to the ruling class, but also to the new government.

I'll also say something about the Movement of the Squares, the rise of the popular assemblies and so on. Looking back, it has not had as much of an impact as many people outside Greece may think. For a period, the occupations of public spaces were very important, but the movement didn't leave much behind.

I think that here in Greece—though this is not the case in many countries—the central social force of the resistance movement has been the organized working class. By organized, I mean organized in workplaces for the possibility of strikes and struggles. In Greece, we didn't have the same kind of sentiment that people have called "anti-party" or "anti-political." It is important to recognize that the majority of workers felt that to change their lives, they needed to support a left-wing party in the elections.

In the concrete circumstances of today, various forces on the left, including DEA as well as the Left Current within SYRIZA, support the idea of reconstructing the popular committees—that is, uniting local organizations of resistance. We are at the beginning stages of this—something we are discussing and planning for, but have not yet done.

In Spain, the development of the resistance was different. There, the occupation movement of the "indignados" was a much stronger ingredient in the resistance. I think this is the basis of the creation of Podemos. Within Podemos, we have a relationship with Izquierda Anticapitalista. We think this is the most serious effort to organize within Podemos against the influence of these anti-politics or anti-left ideas that could seriously damage this movement that has created so many hopes.

For Greece, the Podemos movement is very important. Maybe the most important event for us after the election was the massive demonstration in Madrid organized by Podemos with hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating in solidarity with Greece, showing the unity of the resistance across Europe.

Someone asked about the social democratic parties in Greece and why they have not responded to the crisis by moving to the left. I think the explanation lies in what the social democratic parties have done over the past 20 or 30 years. They have moved so far to the right, and this involved creating relationships with the ruling classes that they can't break now. I think it is impossible for the Social Democratic Party in Germany to return to what the SPD was in the 1970s.

Given this, I think the only way forward is what we have done in Greece. For the left to grow, it must sweep aside the social democratic parties. In Greece, PASOK, which was once one of the strongest social democratic parties in Europe, basically doesn't exist anymore. It won less than 5 percent of the vote, and it can no longer mobilize people to demonstrations.

As for the question about the importance of raising the minimum wage to the pre-Memorandum level, this is critical. It is not really about the conditions of the workers who are paid at the minimum wage. More importantly, this measure, along with the restoration of collective labor agreements, sends a political message to the majority of the working class that we starting to make gains, and there is more to come in the future. Our newspaper's front-page headline right now is: "We will take everything back."

The minimum wage influences income at all levels. If the minimum salary is growing, it will push up all salaries above it. So this is very important, and I'm sure we will see that the ruling class will pressure Tsipras to delay and retreat on this.

What obstacles does SYRIZA present for mobilizations of the working class? I think the answer to this question is: It doesn't. We must change our way of thinking, at least with the conditions that exist in Greece. We cannot explain everything wrong by saying the problems are caused by the leadership. There is something else very important, which is the balance of forces inside society.

That does not mean that the leadership of SYRIZA has no responsibility for what happens. It has serious responsibilities that we demand it live up to. But in reality, there is no magic button that Tsipras can push and the working class will mobilize inside Greece.

It is very important that our political current has a transitional strategy and tactics. We are starting from the real conditions of the working class movement and trying to put forward concrete steps to make gains and increase the confidence of workers. I want to take this opportunity to again thank Haymarket Books for its help in publishing a book in Greek on the Fourth Congress of the Communist International [Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922]. We thought that with our relationship to SYRIZA, we were opening up a new path for socialists, but with these documents, we realized that the path was begun some years ago. To introduce these ideas in a book for the Greek left was a big help for us.

That leads me to talking about the lessons from the experience of SYRIZA for other countries. Here, I must be very honest. It is not possible to translate these lessons directly for anyone on the left internationally. SYRIZA is the concrete result of the concrete conditions of the concrete class struggle in Greece.

Nobody can explain the political development of SYRIZA without the massive mobilization of working class three years ago. This was the basis of SYRIZA's rise and its victory in the elections, but that was not the only factor. Ten

years ago in Greece, there were huge mobilizations against capitalist globalization, the creation of the Greek Social Forum and a movement against war. These are also part of the roots of SYRIZA.

After this experience, we tried to continue what we started in the Greek Social Forum with a political formation. Ten years after the founding of SYRIZA, we are happy to say that we have done very well—but that is a period of 10 years of fighting, of specific developments of the Greek left and so on. So we cannot give lessons to anyone.

But having said that, as I said before, it is very important for any political current to hold some basic strategic ideas, and here, I think the concept of transitional demands and strategies is very important. That's why we make reference to Lenin and Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. There are times when we are in a small minority, and there are times when we feel like we are swimming with the stream with these ideas.

I will talk more about the question of exiting the euro. As I said before, our approach to this question is in the context of what will bring us closer to socialism. So our approach is absolutely not the same as the economists who think that exiting the euro will ease Greece's crisis within the bounds of capitalism.

That's why we don't feel that we are saying the same thing as Costas Lapavistas [the left-wing economist and now a member of parliament representing SYRIZA]. Costas is a radical. His proposals for exiting the euro are coming from the left, but we can't agree with the idea that changing the currency will pull Greek society out of the crisis. If the balance of forces between workers and the ruling class remains the same, the shift to a national currency could be a disaster for workers by making them bear the brunt of a huge devaluation.

Shifting to a national currency based on a permanent devaluation in order for the Greek economy to become more competitive with other countries is not exactly a march toward social liberation. It can be a march toward worse misery and poverty.

On the other hand, however, we prefer Lapavistas' economic ideas to those of Yanis Varoufakis. The ideas of Varoufakis are simply social democratic. He believes he has clever mechanisms for negotiations on the debt, where Greece will pay all of the debt, but in a way where nobody loses—not Greek workers, not the creditors, not anybody. He is proposing that Greece be able to issue new bonds, where the payments are tied to growth in the Greek economy, to the Euribor measure of interest rates offered by banks, and to other things.

I think that Varoufakis' hope to avoid a confrontation with the ruling class and save the Greek economy through his new financial ideas is simply a social democratic fantasy that will lead to a big setback. And I'm not sure at all that Schäuble will accept what Varoufakis is proposing. In just a few days, the finance ministers from the Eurozone will meet to discuss the plan and make a decision. So a moment of truth is coming for the new government.

As I said before, we don't start from the question of whether Greece should keep the euro or leave. We start from the idea that we must organize our class to confront and reverse austerity, and in this way, we can open the way for exiting the era of neoliberalism and moving toward socialism.

I will finish with the question of SYRIZA's agreement with ANEL and the discussion inside the Left Platform. We don't agree with making an alliance with ANEL. It isn't mainly because ANEL is tied up with the Greek Orthodox Church or that it is a hard-line Greek nationalist party. All this is true, but the main problem is that the presence of ANEL inside a government of the left will be the transmission belt for the ruling class to put more pressure on the government.

That's why we opposed the agreement with ANEL from the beginning, and why you can be sure that we will be the

first to push for kicking the ANEL founder, Panos Kammenos, out of the government when this becomes possible. Frankly, I think that will be easy when the time comes.

But there is a different danger that people need to be aware of. Martin Schulz, the president of the European Parliament and leader of the European alliance of center-left parties, visited Athens and said it was a shame for SYRIZA to make an alliance with the Independent Greeks. But his alternative was that SYRIZA should create an alliance with PASOK.

That is pure hypocrisy. For the past three years, the European social democrats were supporting a government in which PASOK participated under the rule of New Democracy and a hard right prime minister who has connections with Golden Dawn. And now they talk about fighting the right?

I think that Tsipras made the agreement with the Independent Greeks because he wanted to form a government the next day after the elections. If he was obliged to move in the way we proposed—to wait for two weeks until the new session of parliament opened and seek a vote of tolerance for SYRIZA to govern alone—that would have meant the prime minister from New Democracy, Antonis Samaras, would have remained in place for two weeks, and been in a position to organize some very damaging things, like a bank run or closing some large enterprises in order to create a climate of panic. And that might have created the conditions for parliament not to accept the result of the elections.

So I think that Tsipras moved so quickly because he was afraid that two weeks is a long and dangerous time in conditions like these. That's why the discussion about ANEL is calmer inside Greece. Everybody knows that this is problem, but it is a problem we can confront. There are more dangerous threats for the left than ANEL's presence in the government.

So the discussions within the Left Platform are very difficult. In crucial political moments, the political background and education of every part of SYRIZA will come to the surface. So, for example, because of our political tradition, it was easier for DEA to recognize the problems with Varoufakis' ideas—and not as easy for the comrades of the Left Current, who come from a Stalinist background, where the popular front is a prominent legacy.

So there is confusion among the left in SYRIZA, but with the concrete experiences we are going through now, we can confront this confusion. For example, before the parliament opened, we worked together with other currents in SYRIZA to stop any tendency in the party from undermining the importance of the commitment on the minimum wage and other proposals SYRIZA has made.

So that is the situation. It is very difficult and complicated, and the only thing we can say is that we will fight as hard as we can within this situation for the goals and strategies of the left.

Sotiris Martalis: Second Round of Answers

I have one point to add to the question about whether the ruling class could try to build another social democratic party to counteract the popularity of SYRIZA. In reality, they have tried this, with the creation of a new party named Potami, which means "river." Potami is a creation with a lot of support from the mass media, and it doesn't have a clear line.

The real problem for the ruling class is not which social democratic party to create or rebuild, but the political defeat of the center-left, which has given SYRIZA political hegemony. On the center-left, there are three parties, one of which didn't reach the 3 percent necessary to get into parliament—so those parties are very weak.

SYRIZA, socialists and the struggles ahead

One question SYRIZA must face now is what happens when former leaders of these social democratic parties try to come to SYRIZA. SYRIZA has problems just based on its size. Its membership is around 35,000 people, and it won 2,250,000 votes—that's a very big gap. So that's another problem that reality has presented to SYRIZA, and that it must solve.

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Transcription by Karen Domínguez Burke

[Socialist Worker](#)