

COMMENT

After the referendum - The people of Greece must be heard: No more!

Friday 10 July 2015, by [NTAVANELLOS \(DAVANELLOS\) Antonis](#) (Date first published: 10 July 2015).

The struggle for the future of Greece will come to a head in the next few days as the Greek government's negotiations with European leaders arrive at a turning point.

In a referendum on July 5, Greek voters firmly rejected further harsh austerity measures demanded by the European authorities in return for financial support. But on Thursday, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' cabinet reportedly agreed to a proposal to the European authorities that accepts almost all the measures previously demanded by the so-called "institutions," in return for another bailout and the promise of modest debt relief. The proposal has reportedly been presented to parliament for a vote on Friday, July 10. For their part, the leaders of EU governments are preparing to meet over the weekend to plan for how to push Greece out of the common euro currency shared by 19 countries if there is no agreement.

The Greek government is led by the radical left party SYRIZA, which won office with its victory in elections on January 25. But in the months that followed, Tsipras and other officials made wholesale concessions on SYRIZA's promises to reverse austerity and act immediately to aid working people and the poor, who are suffering through a catastrophic depression that began with the 2007-08 economic crisis and was made much worse with the austerity measures—contained in the so-called Memorandums—that accompanied two bailouts of the Greek financial system agreed to by previous governments.

Tsipras is very popular after having refused the EU's demand to capitulate on every point, instead calling the referendum on austerity. But the left wing of SYRIZA, organized around the Left Platform, has played a crucial role in pressuring Tsipras not to surrender, and in putting forward a program for a different direction for Greece—to use every available resource and all necessary means to reverse austerity.

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THE UNEXPECTED SIZE of the "no" vote cast by working people and the poor, in the cities and in

the countryside, has given an important boost to the government and the leadership of SYRIZA.

The “no” vote was overwhelming in spite of the extremely difficult circumstances faced by the majority of the people: closed banks, threats by employers, scaremongering about shortages of medicines, fuel and food, and so on. Under these conditions, the determination of the people to vote “no” and the sweeping dimension of the result in an obvious mandate for the government to reject austerity and for a general break, if this becomes necessary. Yet the first statement from the leaders of the government was that the verdict of the Greek people does not constitute a mandate for a break. This is giving aid and comfort to the illusions of the losers, and disregarding the hopes and expectations of the winners.

The votes of the masses of working people have given the government and SYRIZA a clean slate to work from. They have provided a new opportunity—maybe even a bigger opportunity than the January 25 election—to do what must be done. The measures promised by SYRIZA during the election campaign, which could have changed the political landscape in January if they were carried out immediately and unilaterally—for example, the immediate restoration of collective labor agreements, the increase of the minimum wage to the pre-Memorandum level, the re-establishment of a pension bonus at Christmastime—are once again on the agenda.

But now, after five months of inaction on these measures and with almost all of the resources of the state exhausted in the meanwhile, the scale of the measures needed must take on a more generalized character. For example, the removal of Yannis Stournaras as governor of the Bank of Greece and the immediate nationalization of the core banks of the Greek financial system are now necessary conditions to maintain the basic functions of the economy. These are necessary to prevent the sabotage of the financial system, to ensure that working people’s savings are protected, and to stop the flow of capital out of Greece if the government is going to be prepared to confront the chaos and crisis to come.

Such measures are diametrically opposed to the so-called “realism” of those who want an agreement with the lenders, no matter what the cost. This is why the government’s attempt to bring about a reconciliation between the winners and losers in the referendum—by holding a meeting of the leaders of Greece’s biggest parties—is a wrong step. It has revived the media’s speculation about a government of “national unity,” not only as a bargaining chip to use in the difficult negotiations with the lenders, but as a possible scenario for what’s ahead. The statement issued by the heads of SYRIZA, New Democracy, PASOK, Potami and the others is not only false and arbitrary—it is directly in contradiction to the polarization expressed in the referendum. The range of unity claimed for the party leaders’ July 7 statement doesn’t exist and cannot exist politically.

IT IS perfectly understandable that the government feels obliged to take part in new negotiations with the lenders. But the course of those negotiations until now has shown clear limits of what type of agreement a government of the left can accept. With their “no” vote, the people of Greece have repeated their demand for austerity to be reversed. This demand is not the same as an austerity program where the burden is shared more fairly or one designed with the least possible negative effects on the economy. The voice of the working class in the July 5 vote calls on SYRIZA to return to its radical left program.

In the negotiations—if they can honestly be called “negotiations”—two new issues have arisen. One is the question of debt relief. But the proposals of the lenders on this question remain extremely vague and put off the specifics of what will be done until after an agreement, including commitments to new austerity measures, is signed. The lenders’ promise to hold future “substantive” discussions about the problem of the viability of Greece’s international debt is not an acceptable commitment that would justify the Greek government signing an agreement that will include additional austerity

measures, not to mention maintaining what has already been carried out under the previous Memorandums.

The second issue in negotiations is a proposal for a development program for Greece. The package put forward by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker promises about 35 billion euros in investments over the next five years. But these investments would be made under certain conditions—specifically, acceptance of the neoliberal counter-reforms attached to the bailout. They would be directed at specific economic areas—and even specific capitalists!—which means the program wouldn't permit funds to be used in areas that are a priority for the Greek people, like saving public hospitals and schools. The government's acceptance, in the statement of the seven party leaders on July 7, that the agreement with the lenders must "encourage entrepreneurship" is yet another worrying sign.

THE GOVERNMENT is entitled to try, once more, to see if negotiations can bring about a just and viable agreement—an "honorable compromise," as they call it. But the government must avoid being trapped—as it was with the February 20 agreement with the Eurogroup—in an arrangement where it is blackmailed throughout the months to come into accepting a third Memorandum.

The result of the referendum has given the government an opportunity to challenge the blackmail. The resistance to austerity does not exist only in Greece. The victory of the "no" vote produced remarkable shows of international solidarity—and it also showed the risk of the Greek radical "contagion" spreading to other countries is not over. Portugal and Spain are the obvious next victims of the financial markets, but if the problem isn't stopped and moves on to Italy and France—as most analysts suggest is more likely than not—the EU will be facing an even deeper crisis.

We must find the strength to continue the momentum from the referendum result, facing negotiations with firmness and without conceding the fundamental identity of SYRIZA as an anti-austerity party. We need to prepare—responsibly, but also resolutely—for alternative policies if and when the lenders insist on imposing a humiliating agreement of Memorandum austerity, which will be a step toward trying to overthrow the SYRIZA government.

In these circumstances, the role of SYRIZA as a party will be crucial. Right now, the media gossipmongers of various types are trying to downplay the importance of this factor, by speculating about how the party base and structure has been left behind by a government leadership that knows better.

It is frustrating to read and hear analysts and business leaders who used high-pressure tactics against SYRIZA and Alexis Tsipras in an attempt to get Tsipras to cancel the referendum or to change to a "yes" supporter—and who today call the "no" vote victory a personal triumph for Tsipras, but not his party. The opposite is the case, as Petros Papakonstantinou wrote of the referendum result: "The people overpowered the faint-hearted, the saboteurs and the bureaucrats—who were not missing and are not missing among the circles of left leaders—preventing a disastrous capitulation and a paralyzing fragmentation."

That statement is accurate in all its parts. The link between the power of the people expressed in the "no" vote and the radical left strategy and tactics needed to confront the new conditions after the referendum cannot be anything other than the party of SYRIZA. The members, cadres and grassroots structures of SYRIZA, together with the people and other organizations of the left, mainly ANTARSYA, organized the battle for the "no." Today, they must find the strength and the strategy to take further steps forward.

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P.S.

* Socialist Worker (USA), July 10, 2015:

<http://socialistworker.org/2015/07/10/the-people-of-greece-must-be-heard>