

SPEECH

Greece: Our new tasks in the struggle against austerity - “We are facing the collapse of a particular strategy”

Friday 31 July 2015, by [NTAVANELLOS \(DAVANELLOS\) Antonis](#) (Date first published: 27 July 2015).

Speech at Syriza’s Left Platform rally in Athens, July 27, 2015.

SYRIZA’s Central Committee is scheduled to meet on Thursday for the first time since the July 5 referendum in which the Greek people answered “no” to drastic new austerity measures demanded by the European blackmailers—and the subsequent surrender by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to that same blackmail.

Tsipras won approval from parliament for the third and most onerous Memorandum—the term used for the package of cuts, raised taxes and accelerated privatization demanded by European governments and international financial institutions in return for a bailout of the Greek financial system. But more than one-quarter of SYRIZA’s members in parliament voted “no” or abstained to register their opposition—and a majority of the Central Committee members of the radical party signed a statement opposing the new Memorandum.

SYRIZA’s Left Platform has been organizing to demand a reversal of the government’s course and a return to the party’s commitment to abolish the Memorandums. At a rally in Athens, some 2,500 people packed an indoor arena to hear leaders of the Left Platform speak out about the ongoing struggle. Among the speakers was Antonis Davanellos, a leader of the socialist group International Workers Left, one of the organizations that co-founded SYRIZA—and now a member of SYRIZA’s Central Committee and smaller Political Secretariat. Here, we publish his speech, translated by Antonis Sotiris.

Socialist Worker

COMRADES, THANKS to Iskra for the invitation to speak. I hope, along with all the supporters of the Left Platform, along with the broader forces of the radical left within SYRIZA, and also outside of it, that we find the strength to face a challenge of historic dimensions.

We face an agreement that every activist in the workers’ movement, every activist in the broader social resistance, every activist of the political left cannot fail to understand as a new Memorandum.

In fact, it is an even harsher Memorandum. It is equipped with a turbocharged TAIPED [a regressive tax on real estate that SYRIZA promised to abolish], with a turbocharged mechanism for oversight

by the creditors, a turbocharged provision for automatic spending cuts in social programs to offset any financial shortfalls. This Memorandum continues the regressive tax increases on working people, the brutal austerity measures, the ruthless heartlessness towards the vulnerable and the poor. This Memorandum, like the previous ones, can only be imposed against the democratic will, putting the wishes of the local ruling class and its European allies ahead of the working class majority and the popular masses.

But there is a big difference. This time, the Memorandum and the harsh austerity policies come as a proposal from the government led by SYRIZA—from the political leadership that we, along with a very wide section of the working class and popular forces, actively supported during the struggle against the right, against the social liberals and the social democrats, against the “grand coalition” of Samaras’ New Democracy and Venizelos’ PASOK.

Certainly the Left Platform, like other comrades inside SYRIZA, criticized the leadership’s compromises and moderation, and developed alternative proposals, both in the period before the elections on January 25 and during the first half-year in office of the SYRIZA government. Our opposition to the February 20 agreement with the creditors is a clear example.

Our past record of rejecting such compromises places additional tasks and obligations for us now. Any debate on the future of SYRIZA, any debate on the future of the wider radical left in Greece, any effort to prevent a disaster like the one suffered in Italy [when the left-wing Communist Refoundation Party participated in a pro-neoliberal government led by the center left] requires as a condition that we be in the front of the fight to defeat the agreement and the struggle to overthrow the third Memorandum.

I have no doubt that this new Memorandum will face the resistance of workers, pensioners and the poor. In this resistance, our position should be what it has always been: Standing next to the people, trying to win their struggles and establish themselves as a political force that is able to overturn the austerity agenda, and to pave the way for a future socialist liberation. This has been the project of the radical left so far, and it will always be this.

COMRADES, THERE is another difficult question we face: How did we get here? Its answer will be a matter of the political debate, mainly within SYRIZA in the weeks to come, but generally on the radical left.

But it is already clear that we are facing a decisive defeat—I would even say the collapse—of a particular strategy: the point of view that we could keep our promise to reverse austerity through negotiations with the European leaders, seeking consensus with them and avoiding a conflict with the limits of the euro currency system. The outcome of this strategy has proven to be identical with the hard neoliberal austerity policies that currently dominate across Europe.

Along with this central conclusion, we must also think about the failure of a particular form of electoral strategy—one that was expressed with the openings and alliances proposed when SYRIZA was drawing up its lists of candidates or when the government was being formed. We have to recognize the dominance of a particular vision of governing, in which the government of the left was not a means to continue the struggle for the left, for our founding purpose, but as an end in itself—even when this quickly led SYRIZA into a conflict with the interests and needs of the working people.

Throughout the course of this government, the people have so far been particularly generous towards us. This is because the elections of January 25 signaled a political reversal with the potential to take on historic dimensions. And because in the referendum, the big and proud “no” of the people

was a class vote, standing side by side with SYRIZA at the low point of the lenders' extortion, and showing an alternative direction, based on a break with the blackmailers, and the potential support of popular forces that would rally behind that direction.

That alternative course can certainly not be served by the government's response—the incomprehensible joint meeting of SYRIZA, New Democracy, PASOK, Potami and other parties on the day after the referendum, and the joint communiqué of political leaders, an alliance that has since been confirmed by those parties providing the critical votes to the government in parliament.

The alternative direction toward a break that was showed by the referendum should and can serve the forces that will insist on a “no” to the end!

COMRADES, IN the course of the struggle until today, we have achieved a lot in SYRIZA. We learned to work together, even if we come from different ideological and political origins. This established a power in unity that exceeds what divides us and created the basis to attempt to achieve victories.

We have built the foundations for a radical program of short- and medium-term demands—most obviously cancellation of debt, nationalization of the banks, and heavy taxation of capital and the wealth of the rich. It is now clear that this program can only be pursued when combined with a willingness and readiness for conflicts, both with the local ruling class and the EU, the eurozone and the euro project.

This program provided and still provides the basis for the slogan of achieving a government of the left—one that is accountable to the workers and that determines its policies based on the needs of the people, not by detaching itself and operating autonomously from them.

Inside SYRIZA was a section of its leaders and members that found the strength to say “no” to the third Memorandum. It was in the grassroots organizations of the party, in its leading bodies and among SYRIZA's representatives in parliament.

This “no” sends a message with an important political significance. It is a basis to rebuild the forces of the radical left inside SYRIZA, but also in the wider, non-sectarian left. Our “no” places new tasks before us—tasks related to SYRIZA itself, but also more generally to the prospect of a new start, which obviously stands urgently before us now.

Antonis Davanellos

P.S.

* <http://socialistworker.org/2015/07/30/our-new-tasks-in-the-struggle-in-greece>