

EUROPEAN NEOLIBERALS CRUSHED THE LEFTIST PARTY IN GREECE

Two of the most depressing interviews I have ever seen are the Jacobin interview with Stathis Kouvelakis and the New Statesman interview with Yanis Varoufakis in the wake of the Greek referendum and the capitulation of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of the Syriza party. Kouvelakis is a member of the Left Platform in Syriza, Tsipras' governing party. Until shortly after the referendum, Varoufakis was the finance minister, charged with leading the negotiations with the Troika. I thought Tsipras was trying to fulfill his promises during the elections that he would be able to get an acceptable deal from the Troika and remove the burden of austerity from the Greek economy, while rationalizing Greece's weak governmental institutions. Varoufakis confirms this. But then came capitulation.

Varoufakis says that he prepared for the negotiations like an academic. He worked out his theoretical position and the data that supports his view that Greece would never be able to recover from under the strain of the austerity and other demands of the Troika. He claims that the Troika knows that is true, though they won't admit it, and at least initially there was personal sympathy with the problems of Greece and the positions he was taking. This is his major point:

HL: You've said creditors objected to you because "I try and talk economics in the Eurogroup, which nobody does." What happened when you did?

YV: It's not that it didn't go down well – it's that there was point blank refusal to engage in economic arguments. Point blank. ... You put forward an

argument that you've really worked on – to make sure it's logically coherent – and you're just faced with blank stares. It is as if you haven't spoken. What you say is independent of what they say. You might as well have sung the Swedish national anthem – you'd have got the same reply. And that's startling, for somebody who's used to academic debate. ... The other side always engages. Well there was no engagement at all. It was not even annoyance, it was as if one had not spoken.

He says that Wolfgang Schauble, the German Finance Minister, took the position that the previous government had agreed to the austerity program, and the Greeks were stuck with it. When Varoufakis asked if debtor countries should just dispense with elections, Schauble was silent, which Varoufakis interprets to mean it would be great if that could be done. Then came the referendum, a smashing win for rejecting the austerity demands of the Troika. Varoufakis says he had a plan ready to get ready to exit the Euro, but Tsipras rejected it, and moved to capitulation.

So from this we can conclude that what we thought about Europe is true: it is a purely neoliberal state, one in which creditors cannot suffer losses. Either the debtor pays or the taxpayers pay, but the creditors do not lose money. And, of course, by taxpayers, I mean the working class and any remaining middle class. The elites use their control over governments to make sure they don't pay.

The interview with Kouvelakis makes it clear that this was purposeful. He tells us how it looked from the standpoint of the Left Platform, the leftist element of Syriza. He thinks that in June it became clear that the Troika was not negotiating in good faith, and were out to humiliate the people of Greece. Tsipras used the referendum to get himself out of the negotiating trap. He expected the referendum to win, not, as

it did, to lose. The decisive factor was the decision by the ECB to force closure of Greek banks, which panicked people.

Kouvelakis says that the rightist wing of Syriza argued that the referendum would be perceived as a serious provocation by the Troika, and they were right. Syriza lost all its leverage, and was forced into humiliating surrender. Even so, Kouvelakis doesn't have harsh words for Tsipras.

What I think actually happened was that Tsipras honestly believed that he could get a positive outcome by putting forward an approach centered on negotiations and displaying good will, and this also why he constantly said he had no alternative plan.

In this Kouvelakis agrees with Varoufakis. He also agrees that their approach was logical and lucid, to use his words. The weakness was their belief in Left Europeanism. Tsipras and Varoufakis both thought that this was a negotiation between partners in the European project.

But what actually happened was akin to a fight between two people, where one person risks the pain and damage of losing a toe and the other their two legs.

So it is true that there was a lack of elementary realism and that this was directly connected with the major problem that the Left has to face today – namely, our own impotence.

Kouvelakis tells us that this was a class vote. The working class supported the no vote, and the wealthy supported the yes side. The age group 18-24 voted no overwhelmingly. These groups see the EU as hostile, and they are anti-European. They were betrayed by the people they elected.

Kouvelakis says that the yes supporters, the old

guard in Greek politics, collapsed in the wake of the loss. But then Tsipras revived them with his call for a council of political leaders. These people decided to treat the referendum as a vote to continue negotiations, even for capitulation. Kouvelakis feels betrayed by this reversal. After a discussion of internal Greek procedures, Kouvelakis says that the Left Platform will leave Syriza, and that the rightist wing and the rest of the group will more or less unite with those rejected parties to form a party of national unity.

That's so depressing it's hard to write. One of the EU demands was replacement of the elected government of Greece. It is a direct rejection of democracy. The EU refuses to work with anyone outside the neoliberal consensus, meaning leftist parties. Syriza was never a revolutionary leftist party, more of a highly reform oriented leftist group, and that's how Kouvelakis sees the Left Platform. So, by removing the Left Platform, Syriza is now nothing more than the Third Way Democrats: economic destruction of human beings with a nice smile. Large groups of Greeks were willing to do battle with the neoliberals, but they were betrayed, and their misery will go on indefinitely. The destruction of human lives is just the way things are in neoliberal lands. Greece's young people and its working class are losers, the markets have spoken, and they will be sacrificed. It's enough to gag a maggot.