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Greece

# The rightward drift of SYRIZA

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## **Description:**

On January 15, 2018 the draft "omnibus bill", whereby the Tsipras government ensures the "good" progress of the third assessment of the situation of the Greek economy by the creditors, was submitted to the Greek Parliament, and subsequently adopted by the SYRIZA-ANEL [Independent Greeks] majority in parliament. So, this government is moving towards the end of the program of the 3rd memorandum (signed on 14 August 2015), announced for August 2018.

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By that date, the government will have to avoid two reefs. On the one hand, the "stress tests" on Greek banks (National Bank of Greece, Piraeus Bank, Alpha Bank and Eurobank), where it hopes the creditors and the European Union Commission will accept the application of less stringent criteria in order to avoid a new recapitalization of banks that would explode the optimistic vision of the Greek economy currently being disseminated. On the other hand, the communications strategy of Tsipras who, despite all the problems, is already preparing for the next elections. The 4th evaluation (spring 2018), which will lead to further austerity measures, is still in prospect.

Provided that the government manages to overcome these risks, it could hope to obtain a promise of measures "easing" the Greek debt, mainly a larger spread over time of the essential repayments. In all cases, the creditors for the moment say that the debate on the debt will be officially opened after August 2018.

It should be noted that the formal end of the 3rd memorandum does not mean the end of the brutal memoranda policies. As was explicitly agreed during the Tsipras signature of the 3rd memorandum, all laws, rules and regulations, associated with the memorandum, all the neoliberal counter-reforms of the last eight years, will remain in force, as will the "surveillance" of the economy until 2060 (that is, until at least 75% of the debt is reimbursed).

## The "omnibus bill"

The arrangements put in place during the third evaluation included several brutal measures. The most controversial article in this law is the one that allows banks and administrations to proceed electronically with the auctioning of the homes of families who are unable to pay their debts. The government has already tried to conduct large numbers of auctions.

But it has encountered significant resistance, with mobilizations (within which Popular Unity - LAE - has played a leading role) which have prevented the courts holding hearings and making auction decisions. The government has attempted repression, and failed miserably, leading to ever more numerous protesters in front of and inside the courts. Also, the appearance of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) in these actions, after much delay, has helped to cement the belief that we can defeat the government on this question, crucial for the banks and creditors. The government is trying to avoid this clash by organizing auctions in hundreds of notary offices across the country. But the auction programme involves such a large number of cases that there is realistic hope that the resistance movement will move to the neighbourhoods to fight the battle to halt evictions

An emblematic reactionary turn was also seen in the radical change in the law which governs the right to strike. This law was won through intense labour struggles during the period after the fall of the dictatorship [1974]. Today, a government which is left in name only has decided that for a strike to be declared, 50% +1 workers in a company or branch must be present and approve the decision to go on strike. Such a regulation was for decades the wish of the

most extreme capitalist leaders, a wish that seemed until now unachievable.

Undoubtedly, the "omnibus bill" contains many other critical measures, such as major cuts in family allowances and pensions, as well as further facilitating privatization within "strategic sectors" such as electricity or water.

## Strike

This government policy has been systematically supported by the trade union bureaucracies in the public and private sectors that, under the leadership of a coalition of cadres from PASOK, New Democracy and SYRIZA, have done everything to prevent serious mobilizations. Thus, the big confederations have refrained from strike action leaving workers who intended to engage in such struggles without protection and support.

All the weight has fallen on the shoulders of the rank and file unions where the left is a motor force. But, even at this level, the attitude of the KKE, proposing a one day strike at the time of the "suitcase law" vote, without prior mobilizations, reduced the importance of this strike, transforming it into symbolic action "for honour". Taking account of all this, we believe that participation in the strike was larger than expected, but largely insufficient in terms of what would have been needed to stop the government offensive.

The strike enjoyed particular support in public transport (almost 100%) and in the navigation sector. Nevertheless, this transport strike was an obstacle to getting to the places where the demonstrations were called. Thus, gatherings were attended mainly by determined left political activists.

Once again, the post-2015 experience has been confirmed in Greece: people are indignant and angry, but for now this does not translate into direct mass action, because of the lasting disappointment caused by the defeat of 2015, and the lack of a convincing political alternative to end brutal austerity.

## The drift to the right

Tsipras, capitalizing on the popular and working-class disappointment, is rapidly shifting his social base and turning towards the dominant classes. SYRIZA has already organized around it an alliance with the circle of capitalists it called before 2015 "the dark side of entrepreneurship". Capitalists who have built fortunes in various trades, gambling, money laundering, a strong presence in football and who, always, depend on good relations with respective governments.

SYRIZA is extending its relations with the most traditional "families" of the bourgeoisie, thus taking advantage of its relations with the banks and a specific instrumentalization of privatization. That is to say, it takes care, while attracting foreign investment, to secure a place and a role for indigenous capitalists as "local partners" of international funds and transnational corporations, claiming to withstand, in the face of the superior forces of the "international markets", a "de Hellenization of companies".

But mainly, the SYRIZA leadership stresses stability, arguing that the SYRIZA-ANEL government has applied the memorandum provisions while significantly reducing the reactions of the working masses, by establishing a climate of peace in the country for the first time in years.

The ambition to serve the interests of the dominant class as a whole is extended, and not by chance, to support for the most inflexible inclinations of Greek nationalism in the region. The government, headed by defence minister Panos Kammenos (Anel) and Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias (SYRIZA), has had no problem in continuing the policies of the right in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean: open support for the United States, the intensification of NATO's presence in the Aegean Sea, strengthening of the "axis" with Israel and with the Sissi dictatorship, with the aim of isolating Erdogan's Turkey, seen as unstable and ambivalent. The aim of this is that Greece would gain a share in the oil and gas in the eastern and south-eastern Mediterranean, and would see a strengthening of their centre of gravity in terms of developments and prospects in Cyprus.

Recently Greek diplomacy has turned to the western Balkans, with the aim of resolving the dispute with the Republic of Macedonia about its "name", on the terms dictated by the Greek state. With the full support of the United States, the EU and NATO, the Greek "negotiators" require a new name for the neighbouring country, a "composite name" (apparently "Nova Makedonja") which would replace that of "Republic of Macedonia" for all uses (inside the country and internationally, in official language as in everyday life), which would be written in the Cyrillic alphabet and used internationally without being translated or conjugated.

The change of the name of the neighbouring state should be compulsorily referred to in the characterisation of its language and that of citizenship. This absurd violation of the right of democratic self-determination is solely intended to guarantee the exclusive Greek use of the term Macedonia. The "arrangement" has as its real objective the immediate integration of the Republic of Macedonia into NATO (presumably at the next summit in July 2018) and the start of the process of its integration into the EU.

The real negotiation was between the great Western powers and the Greek state, on the guarantees which would be sufficient for the lifting of the veto on Macedonia's joining NATO issued by the Karamanlis government during the Bucharest Summit in 2008. That is why today NATO and the EU are putting relentless pressure on Zoran Zaev's government (using even the influence of the Albanian parties with little concern for "Macedonian" self-determination), so that it accepts the conditions laid down by Greece, indicating to the Skopje government that "there is no alternative".

By following this policy, and by the assertion that the extension of NATO in the Balkans will strengthen peace (!) and democracy (!! ) in the region, the Tsipras government is striving to include in its balance sheet a "national success", by the resolution, on the basis of the line of the United States, of a problem that has stagnated for decades. [1]

These tactical moves put pressure on the leadership of New Democracy, incarnated by Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Being aware of the benefits expected by Greek capitalism, Mitsotakis is maintaining a "responsible attitude". But the right wing of the party and the nationalist far right beyond New Democracy are reacting at the ideological level, organizing nationalist gatherings in January in Thessaloniki, with 100,000 protesters according to the police, in collaboration with the Orthodox Church. But even they take care not to raise their tone too much: so as not to scuttle government policy by provocations on the one hand, and on the other so as not to reduce the prospects for a New Democracy election victory. [2]

This is a real incursion of Tsipras into the political project of the right. Through this, SYRIZA tries to compensate for the loss of its influence among the popular and working-class layers, or to reduce it. However, there is every reason to believe that this tactic has had no spectacular results, or not yet anyway. As one radical critical analyst has put it, Tsipras is on the way to a political and electoral battle where he will learn that the weak resistance of the popular classes is one thing, but their assent, even if only electoral, is something else.

What is still needed in Greek politics, from the point of view of the interests of the workers, it is the creation of a massive pole of the radical left, which would serve as a point of reference for important sectors that supported

SYRIZA but are today disappointed by its politics and by its accelerated movement to the right.

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[1] According to Jaklina Naumovski in *Le Courier des Balkans*, "on Wednesday, January 24, at the margins of the Davos summit, seven years after the last meeting at this level, the leaders of the Macedonian and Greek governments, Zoran Zaev and Alexis Tsipras, met to continue the dialogue around the conflict over the name of Macedonia, thus showing a new sign of relaxation in relations between the two countries. This meeting took place just three days after the massive demonstration in Thessaloniki, and a few days before the visit to the two capitals of the United Nations mediator, Matthew Nimetz, who will share his new proposals to solve the main diplomatic dispute between the two countries ... Alexis Tsipras confirmed his intention to support his northern neighbour in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration. So, among the steps in this direction he announced the opening of the Markova noga border post at Prespa. He also stated his commitment to "support the proceedings suspended by his government, specifically its neighbour's candidacy for the Adriatic-Ionian Sea initiative (ESS) and to ensure that the second phase of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU is ratified by the Greek Parliament". They have concluded that meetings would continue in the coming weeks, particularly at Foreign Ministries. A meeting unanimously welcomed by the representatives of the EU".

[2] The Thessaloniki demonstration is certainly significant. It received, according to information from the press, support from someone who wants to buy this city's port and who has links with Putin: Ivan Savidis, more Russian than Greek. He is also the owner of the PAOK Thessaloniki football team, one of the three most important clubs in Greece, and cultivates relations with the Orthodox Church. In addition, he has made numerous purchases of real estate and hotels, as well as firms in the tobacco and sugar sectors. All of this does not prevent - rather the contrary, one could say - him having a relationship with Tsipras. The political project could be to form a hard right in the north - which does not involve the criminalized Golden Dawn - which stands in the way of a victorious breakthrough for New Democracy in the next elections. Tsipras is "capable of anything"! One of the prominent personalities at this event was the retired soldier and ardent nationalist, Frangos Frangoulis (or Fragos Fragoulis according to the transliteration). He has occupied important positions in the military and the intelligence services and was Minister of Defence, briefly, in the transitional government of P. Pikramenos (May-June 2012). Put in historical perspective, this event is however, far from the size of 1992. Another demonstration was held on February 4, 2018 in Athens, and in this case New Democracy wanted to demonstrate its ability to oppose Tsipras, while hinting that it does not want to stand in the way of NATO enlargement. Golden Dawn was present, at the margins. The Orthodox Church participated in the operation. To heighten the political confusion Mikis Theodorakis was one of the main speakers, although Manolis Glezos refused.