

Report #3 from Athens

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Text

IDEAS

OP-ED

by Gary Zabel (Advocate)

I’ve had to swallow a bitter pill today. If the news reports are correct, Tsipris has sold out. With one or two “face-saving” modifications, he’s accepted Germany’s terms for a bailout. They include a 50 billion euro fund of privatized Greek assets beyond the control of the Greek government as security for the new loan. Tsipris won two concessions on this: the fund will be located in Greece and not abroad (big deal), and 12 billion euros will be devoted to investment in Greece – in privately owned companies of course. He has also accepted tougher measures on pensions and “labor law reform,” i.e. weakening the unions and making it easier to fire Greek workers. Parliament must pass legislation enabling this travesty by Wednesday. Evidently Tsipris is set to purge his government of members of Syriza’s Left Program, including the current ministers of energy and labor. In short, under his leadership, Syriza is slated to become yet another nominally “socialist” party pledged to enforcing economic neoliberalism. It appears that Tsipris worked closely with members of the French “socialist” government in the recent pseudo-negotiations. That makes a lot of sense. The Socialist Party of France has been an enforcer of neoliberalism since Mitterrand made his Reaganite-Thatcherite about-face in the early 1980s.

The only hope remaining is that the Greek parliament will refuse to abdicate sovereignty by enacting the legislation. That would bring down the current government by forcing new elections. Syriza MPs may be loath to take their chances at the polls. It seems more likely that the party will split, with members of the Left Program voting against the government. If they abstain this time, as they did on Tsipris’ most recent proposal for a settlement (now history), then they will be finished too. Syriza might survive as a Greek version of the Socialist Party of France, but their project for a party to the left of “socialist” neoliberalism will be, as they say, swept into the dustbin of history.

Where to go from here? I see three possibilities from the perspective of former fans of Syriza (like me). One is for Syriza’s Left Program to secede from the party and align with the Communist Party and the much smaller, but more attractive, Antarsya... I’m not fooling myself that such a formation could win a national election today, but it might be able to constitute a significant opposition in parliament. The second possibility is to pursue an extra-parliamentary strategy of mass demonstrations and strikes. (In any event, I think they are sure to come.) The third possibility is to focus on building a new world within the shell of the old. Greek anarchists and autonomists have been busy developing alternative forms of community and social-service delivery in neighborhoods, towns, and villages throughout Greece. The projects make food, medicine, theater, music, and so on available free of cost; in addition, some abandoned enterprises have been taken over by workers and run as cooperatives. I am an eclectic. I’m in favor of all three of these strategic possibilities. But if I were advising friends in America and European countries outside Greece about what they can do to help, I would suggest that they raise money and send it to one of the grassroots projects. I’ll get back to you with details in a future report.

Longtime Open Media Boston contributor Gary Zabel is a professor of philosophy at UMass Boston - and most recently, the director of the division of political economy of the new online international graduate college The Global Center for Advanced Studies. He is visiting Greece for the college’s founding conference, Democracy Rising, and will be sending a series of reports about his trip in his role as Our Man in Athens.

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8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

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