

# Backing Syriza, UK's Left Unity reveals anti-working class, anti-socialist perspective

By Robert Stevens  
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Syriza took office in Greece in January by exploiting a wave of anti-austerity sentiment. The so-called Coalition of the Radical Left had built up support by promising to reverse drastic attacks on the living standards imposed by the European banks and the Greek ruling class since 2010.

Syriza was hailed by myriad pseudo-left forces internationally as the role model to be emulated everywhere—among them, Britain's Left Unity.

Left Unity was founded following an appeal by film-maker Ken Loach, out of the detritus from various pseudo-left groups. Before Syriza came to office, Left Unity founding member Andrew Burgin declared that if Alexis Tsipras' party came to power it would be a "workers government".

Syriza's victory can be "the spark that sets the field of socialism alight. This is our time," Burgin declared. "Our recent party conference took the decision to become a sister party of Syriza through seeking affiliation to the European Left Party. We will rally to support a government that promises to break with austerity."

The *World Socialist Web Site* was alone in explaining that Syriza did not represent "a political development, a step forward, progress or anything of the kind by or for the working class." It is a bourgeois party expressing the interests of a section of the Greek ruling elite and more privileged sections of the middle class. Syriza will "inevitably betray, sooner rather than later, the aspirations for an end to social hardship and suffering that it has cynically exploited", the WSWS warned.

This prognosis was confirmed extremely rapidly, as Syriza entered into a coalition with the right-wing xenophobic Independent Greeks. Within a month they signed a deal with the troika, agreeing to extend the austerity programme of the previous conservative New

Democracy-PASOK coalition.

None of this has stopped Left Unity from continuing to hail the party as the way forward. Its election manifesto, written after Syriza's February agreement to continue austerity, declares, "*We will not vote for cuts or compromise our principles by participating in coalitions with capitalist parties.* Elsewhere in Europe left parties *such as Syriza in Greece are winning mass support for resistance to austerity*" [emphasis added].

Who do they think they are kidding? In fact, Left Unity aims to play the same role in Britain as Syriza is playing in Greece—a political prop for the ruling class and the capitalist system.

Last week Left Unity launched their manifesto for the UK general election at a meeting in Manchester under the title "Left Unity—Beating austerity in Europe: for an end to the politics of fear."

The meeting included a report from a member of Syriza's London group, Marina Prentoulis. She is a Senior Lecturer at the University of East Anglia in the School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies and also spoke at a meeting of Left Unity's National Conference in November 2014.

Prentoulis claimed that Syriza's election victory was the "first break that we have after a very long time, against neo-liberalism" and that the party was "doing very well" in the ongoing negotiations with the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Advising Left Unity on how to proceed, she said the party would not be successful "if we insist on the old leftist rhetoric which does not take into account the particular conditions that we have today."

Expressing her contempt for any socialist solution to the crisis based on the mobilisation of the working class across Europe and internationally, she declared,

“This is why I talk sometimes about a new left. A new left in the sense that, working within these conditions, let’s leave aside the dogma ... that we approach everybody and say, ‘Oh, you know what Marx said in page 105 of *Das Capital*’. It’s not going to work like that.”

In the discussion, a member of the Socialist Equality Party said that far from everything “going well,” Syriza had exposed its true colours within three weeks of taking office. The experience of the working class with Syriza has been a disaster. The working class should reject Syriza, not seek to emulate them, he said.

Prentoulis replied with a tirade, saying, “You’re talking about the working class. Which working class? Apart from the fact that what we mean by this working class which has been questioned since the 1970s, I don’t know where this working class is.”

“The people that passed me in the street [on protests in Greece were] my mum, my grandmother and people,” she said, “who were middle class or lower middle class and they started suddenly being squeezed and they didn’t expect that this would happen...”

“And then this movement, they were not working class in the street all the same. It was lower class people, working employees, but also they are middle class and other people in there as well. So it was something much broader.”

She continued, “So this insistence with the working class, which I bet if I ask anyone of you to show me where they are, we wouldn’t know where it is.”

Insinuating that the working class were turning to right wing and fascistic forces, Prentoulis said, “I’m also afraid that they will be voting something that I don’t even want to think about.”

The primacy of the working class, she said, “is a fantasy of the left”.

In a meeting in London following Syriza’s victory, Prentoulis claimed that its coalition with the Independent Greeks was necessitated by the refusal of the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE) to enter into a coalition government.

Returning to this theme, she said in Manchester, “If the working class of Greece is with the Communist Party of Greece, which again I would question, it’s five percent and they are now doing nothing. They stay in their corner with their purity. They don’t want to be in a leftist government, and they don’t want to have

anything to do with the situation. So let them stay in their corner, as the KKE did, and f\*\*k off at the end of the day.”

Prentoulis was applauded by Left Unity supporters for this statement.

Noting that Syriza won 37 percent of the vote in the election, Prentoulis continued, “We were two votes below having a majority. The intention of the vote right now [for Syriza is] 42 percent. 42 percent! Oh, but we gave up the working classes! Well maybe the working classes, and again I don’t know where they are in this, they don’t see it like that and they voted for Syriza.”

Stating that she was now “having this discussion” about the role of the working class “all the time.” She added, “You have to understand at some point where this insistence is taking us. I believe it is taking us in the path of separating, of fighting with each other and doing nothing at all.”

Summing up the outlook of the entire pseudo-left, who see Syriza as a meal ticket and the means to further entrench themselves in bourgeois society, Prentoulis concluded, “This is not where I want to be. I want to be into politics. I want to be the party who is in the government, and maybe not in the best possible way, but at least it’s trying to do something with the situation that we have in front of us.”

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