

Greece's Popular Unity: An attempt to create Syriza 2.0

By Robert Stevens
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Even before Syriza took office, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned workers in Greece and internationally of the role it would play in betraying the working class, as a party representing the interests of the Greek ruling elite and the most affluent layers of the petty-bourgeoisie. Its wholesale capitulation to the European Union and the other institutions of global capitalism has fully confirmed this assessment.

Now, just weeks after participating in a government that exacted a terrible price from the Greek working class, Syriza's Left Platform has founded a new party.

The task of Popular Unity (*Laikí Enótita*) is to continue pursuing the bankrupt, pro-capitalist perspective of Syriza, which it supported until last week. It is led by a faction that had dozens of members on Syriza's Central Committee and held four of the 11 positions on its Political Secretariat, and whose main leaders occupied ministerial positions in Syriza's governing coalition with the right-wing Independent Greeks (Anel).

Popular Unity's president is Panagiotis Lafazanis, formerly the Minister of Energy in Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's cabinet. Other Left Platform figures include Costas Isychos (former Deputy Minister of National Defence) and Dimitris Stratoulis (Deputy Minister of Social Security).

Lafazanis was originally a member of the Central Committee and Political Secretariat of the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece. He joined with the Euro-Communists in Synaspismos, a party that embraced capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union and the devastating "shock therapy" unleashed against the working class in Russia and throughout Eastern Europe. It has been the principal faction within Syriza ever since.

Lafazanis and the Left Platform provided Tsipras

with a "left" cover as he and Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis negotiated with Greece's creditors, having already agreed in February to implement the bulk of the austerity measures signed up to by the previous New Democracy/Pasok coalition.

In March, Lafazanis told a journalist who asked why Syriza had not abolished the austerity programme as it had promised: "Our commitment for full abolition of the Memoranda and their implementation laws is still wholly valid." He added that it would "be fully honored in the next few months."

Following the landslide vote against austerity in the July 5 referendum, Syriza rapidly agreed to the most devastating cuts programme yet demanded by the troika. The Left Platform formally voted to reject measures that went far beyond those accepted by New Democracy, but only did so while pledging loyalty to Tsipras. They did all they could to ensure his government's survival—including deciding which of their members would vote against the agreement and which would abstain.

Despite their craven behaviour, this month Tsipras moved against the Left Platform. He resigned, paving the way for snap general elections before which Left Platform supporters would be purged from the party. Only then did the Left Platform jump, before they were pushed.

The main goal of Popular Unity is to prevent the working class from drawing the necessary lessons from the role of Syriza and their own involvement in its betrayal. To this end, on August 20 they declared that, with his announcement of elections, Tsipras "appeared with another face, completely and radically opposed to the hitherto commitments and struggles of SYRIZA"--as if there was no previous indication that he would violate his promises!

Leading Left Platform member Stathis Kouvelakis previously insisted that it was not appropriate to call Tsipras' actions a betrayal. Rather, it was the failure of a perspective of "left-Europeanism"—which he described as a belief that by being a good European it would be possible to secure concessions that benefited Greece.

The Left Platform advocates a more strident nationalist agenda—stating that Tsipras should have negotiated for concessions based on a threat to implement a "Plan B", including possibly withdrawing from the euro, imposing capital controls, and reintroducing the drachma.

This is not an anti-austerity agenda. Greece quitting the Eurozone on a capitalist basis would mean austerity being imposed on the say-so of the Greek bourgeoisie rather than the EU.

Rather, the Left Platform appeals to a substantial section of the Greek bourgeoisie, who believe that Tsipras agreed to onerous terms that impinged on their interests—including measures to cut tax subsidies to the shipping companies and tourism sector. Popular Unity advocates a national, autarkic solution based "on a new path of national independence, sovereignty, reconstruction and a new progressive course."

Lafazanis et al. rely on the pseudo-left groups to perform the same role as political apologists for Popular Unity that they previously provided for Syriza. Prior to their split with Syriza, the Left Platform had already enlisted the services of representatives of 13 pseudo-left groups. These include Antonis Davanellos of the Internationalist Workers' Left faction (DEA) of the Left Platform and Andreas Pagiatsos of the Xekinima tendency.

The DEA is affiliated to the US International Socialist Organization, while Xekinima is affiliated with the Committee for a Workers International. They have also secured the backing of some factions within the pseudo-left coalition, Antarsya. The Pabloite journal International Viewpoint has posted every statement issued by Popular Unity and by Kouvelakis.

Within hours of announcing Popular Unity's formation, Lafazanis announced that he had an electoral agreement with Alekos Alavanos' Plan B party. Alavanos was the leader of Syriza until 2007. However, Popular Unity has stressed that its aim of creating a broad "anti-austerity" front is not confined

to the "left."

In an August 21 article, "Popular Unity' is born," Kouvelakis states that the movement is a "recomposition within the Greek radical Left...But the goal of the front is even broader than this, it is to provide an expression to social forces that *do not necessarily recognize themselves as part of the Left but want to fight austerity...*" [emphasis added]

This is not new territory for the Left Platform. Among those deputies who defected from Syriza is Rachel Makri, once a leading member of Anel, who signed up to be a Syriza candidate just before the election in January.

The Left Platform was the most enthusiastic voice endorsing Syriza's decision to form a coalition with Anel. Isychos of the Left Platform served as deputy to Anel leader Panos Kammenos in his role as Defence Minister.

The working class in Greece should reject the claim of Popular Unity, Syriza Mark 2, to offer an alternative to the betrayals of its parent body.

What is required is the building of a new revolutionary socialist leadership, a Greek section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—a task that begins with the assimilation of the powerful record of political opposition to Syriza contained in the pages of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

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