

Panel Discussion on Syriza Victory

February 8, 2015

The Campaign for Peace and Democracy sponsored a panel discussion Friday evening on "After the Greek Elections: The Future of Austerity in Greece, Europe, and Beyond." A standing-room-only audience heard speakers address the success of the Syriza coalition party in the recent Greek elections and how it is dealing with the austerity crisis.

Part 1 (part 2 is below)

Here were my opening remarks:

Hello. I'm Tom Harrison, co-director of the CPD, which is the sponsor of this forum along with the NYU Radical Film and Lecture Series. The Co-Sponsors are AKNY-Greece Solidarity Movement/*Aristeri Kinisi Neas Yorkis*, SYRIZA-NY, ANTARSYA-US, *Jacobin*, *New Politics*, *Against the Current*, *Logos*, the International Socialist Organization (ISO)-NY, Socialist Alternative, and Democratic Socialists of America-New York City

So, welcome to "After the Greek Elections: The Future of Austerity in Greece, Europe and Beyond." Thanks for braving the chill and for putting up with the several changes of venue.

Before we get underway, however, a word from one of our sponsors. The Campaign for Peace and Democracy has been around since 1982. Our deep involvement in solidarity work with Greece flows not only from our opposition to the power of financial and corporate elites and their political lackeys - but also our commitment to promoting *international* solidarity among progressive movements in different parts of the world. That's the kind of thing the Campaign has been doing for more than 30 years, whether it's bringing Eastern European dissidents together with Western peace and justice activists, as we did in the 1980s, or trying to foster support for and knowledge of the anti-austerity struggle in Greece, as we are doing today. The Greek struggles are the vanguard of a *global* resistance, a resistance of which we too are a part.

This meeting is dedicated to discussing the hard questions that confront Syriza and Greece. Tonight, therefore, you will hear much criticism of Syriza, at least of its leaders, as well as much praise. But I think there is general agreement that the coming to power of a party of the radical left represents an enormous step forward - towards a better world as well as a better Greece.

We must applaud the Greek peoples' courage in defying the threats and pressure applied by EU leaders and financial circles to influence the election. But we must remember that Syriza's electoral triumph was prepared by six years of grassroots resistance, including dozens of general strikes, the movement of the squares, mobilizations against the neofascist Golden Dawn, and the valiant struggles of teachers, cleaners, transport workers, media workers, and many others. During those six years, Greeks have fought back with great determination, offering an inspiring example to all those, throughout the world, who are being strangled by the neoliberal agenda - the agenda of crippling unions, especially unions of public employees, reducing workers' living standards, cutting public services, drastic upward redistribution of wealth, and securing the overwhelming domination of corporate and financial elites. This brutal agenda is grinding down the vast majority of the population and fuelling the rise of the far right.

We hope the election of the Syriza government will have a domino effect across Europe; it has

already begun with Spain, where the fast-growing Podemos movement stands to make major gains in elections later this year. On election night, Greek crowds chanted: “First we take Athens, then Madrid, then Berlin!”

And we hope that its effects will be felt in the United States, where the rich and powerful have had their way for much too long. The experience of the Greek people shows that a massive people's coalition can be built, a powerful movement of the left allied with an independent political party, that can shake the financial citadels and eventually take power.

Meanwhile, we know that the elites of the EU are determined to crush the Syriza government and nip its radical project in the bud. They desperately want to prevent the “infection” of radical democracy from spreading. So it is our job precisely to do all we can to spread it. That – spreading and intensifying the resistance — is the best hope for the success of Syriza and the future of the Greek people.

Greeks are courageously standing up to power. They need our support, and this meeting is an early contribution to the forging of that solidarity in the U.S. Big solidarity meetings have already taken place in London, Paris and other European cities. But they also need us to follow their example. As Syriza’s slogan puts it: “Hope is coming. Greece is going forward. Europe is changing.” We stand with the Greek people. Their battle is also ours.

The speakers:

Natassa Romanou is a Research Professor at Columbia University in Climate Studies, a member of SYRIZA and the ecosocialist group System Change Not Climate Change. She is a founding member, SYRIZA-NY and AKNY. Natassa was in Greece for the elections.

Alan Akrivos is a founding member SYRIZA-NY, a member of Socialist Alternative/(CWI), and among the founders of AKNY. He has been active in the struggle to stop the neo-fascist Golden Dawn in NYC, and speaks frequently across the U.S. on issues of international politics, labor, and socialism.

Iannis Delatolas is an art photographer, a founding member of AKNY, and a supporter of Antarsya-MARS and of the International Socialist Tendency. He has been involved in the antifascist solidarity movement with Greece and in struggles for LGBTQ rights, abortion rights, anti-war, and other social justice causes.

Nantina Vgontzas is a Greek-American PhD student in sociology at NYU focusing on political economy and social movements. She is a member of the UAW Graduate Student Organizing Committee and involved in the nationwide Academic Workers for a Democratic Union reform movement. She grew up in the US but has lived in Greece at different points in her life, most recently during the year after the 2012 elections. This summer she will be in Athens to study developments in the labor movement amid the transformation of the party system.

Aaron Amaral is a member of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and a founding member of AKNY. The ISO sister organization in Greece, Internationalist Workers Left (DEA) participated in the formation of the SYRIZA coalition and is part of the Left Platform within SYRIZA.

The chair is Joanne Landy, the other Co-Director of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy.

Part 2 (part 1 is above)

[Note: because of technical difficulties, we are using videos from two different videographers, Joe Friendly and Stopmotionsolo. The opening remarks of the last speaker on the first video are repeated at the beginning of the second video.]