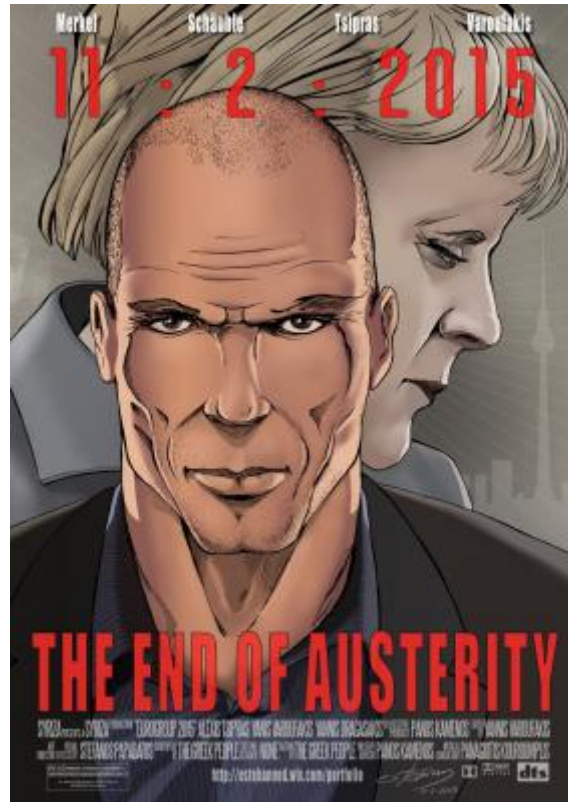


A Report on the Crises in Greece

July 26, 2015

While in Athens, I have gotten into the habit of ending the day by enjoying an iced coffee with cream in an outdoor cafe in a park about one mile from my hotel. It is there that I have been writing these dispatches. As I remarked in my first report, the park the cafe is in is filled with children, teenagers, young couples, the middle-aged, and old people until quite late. The cafe does not start to empty until after midnight.



Yesterday I slept through breakfast at the hotel and, needing coffee, walked to the cafe in the late morning. While I sat under a canopy shielded from the broiling Mediterranean sun, poor people made their rounds. They came to each table asking for a handout or trying to sell whatever trinkets they had managed to acquire: an old man was selling cheap watches, a boy of around ten hawked packages of syrupy liquid that could be frozen to make ice pops, and so on. A young woman with a depressed and semi-vacant expression moved around the tables asking for money so she could get something to eat. I gave her my last two-euro coin, and she proceeded to the next table. When she asked the middle-aged Greek couple seated there for a contribution, the female partner reached into a small paper bag and withdrew a breakfast roll that she handed to the beggar. The young woman took the roll and proceeded to the next table. There is a visual joke from a Marx Brothers' movie where a bum asks Harpo for a dime so he can get a cup of coffee. Harpo reaches under his dilapidated trench coat and, grinning his maniacal grin, brings out a steaming cup of coffee resting on a saucer of China. The bum reacts with a look of shock and disappointment. What he wanted, of course, was the dime, not the coffee. There was no such look on the young woman's face when the older woman handed her the breakfast roll.

Early in the morning of July 16, the Parliament of Greece passed the first round of laws necessary to continue discussions with the Troika on new loans enabling the country to continue making payments on its debt. There was a twenty-four hour strike of the public employees' union, a mass

demonstration outside Parliament, and a battle between anarchists and police in which they exchanged Molotov cocktails, tear gas, and stun grenades. All of the Left Platform MPs (around forty) within Syriza voted against their own government, but the legislation still carried overwhelmingly. Tsipris engineered the capitulation, but retained his political honesty. He said that he did not believe in the deal imposed by the Troika and in fact thought it was irrational but that, given the banking crisis, the Greek government had no choice but to accept it. He had to depend upon the discredited opposition parties to pass the laws. Tsipris carried the vote by a razor thin margin of members of his own party, just two more than necessary to prevent the opposition from calling for new elections in accordance with Greek electoral practice. All of the Syriza ministers who voted against the legislation have now resigned from their ministerial posts, but have kept their seats in Parliament. There are rumors that Costas Lapavitsas, economics professor at the University of London and a leading member of Syriza's Left Platform, may walk out of Syriza and form a new party to its Left. The rumors may be false since Lapavitsas recently said he would stay in Syriza and fight to return the party to its radically anti-austerity origins. According to him, the Left Front was the only group within the Party that kept faith with the democratic will of the people expressed in their resounding No! to the Troika in the July 5 referendum.

I had dinner with three friends yesterday evening and then went with them to do some sight-seeing at the Acropolis. Afterward we took a cab to the anarchist neighborhood, Exarchia, for drinks. The cab driver was a highly intelligent and friendly man in his late 50s. He told us that he normally voted for the right-wing parties but that, in the last election, he voted for the Left. He also voted No! in the referendum. But like the rest of Greece, he was betrayed by Tsipris, and he vowed never to vote for Syriza again. He quoted Gianni Agnelli, the politically lucid Italian president of Fiat during the tumultuous 1970s, who said that is sometimes necessary to vote for the Left to implement measures that are painful for workers and the lower middle class. According to the driver, that is precisely the role Syriza has played. We asked for his opinion of the Greek neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn. He said that the Greek people are not Nazis, but that some vote for Golden Dawn to protest the negative effects of immigration, especially rising urban crime rates. He told us with a note of both realism and regret that Golden Dawn is now the third largest party in Greece.

The most worrisome consequence of the betrayal of the referendum by the majority of Syriza in Parliament is that it will give new impetus to the rise of the neo-Nazi Right. Golden Dawn has been quiet recently as a result of the indictment of some of its leaders for responsibility in the murder of immigrants. But Hitler was once jailed for his participation in the Beer Hall Putsch. In times of severe crisis - the Great Depression of the 1930s, the current Depression in Greece - the road to fascist power is opened when the Parliamentary Left takes on the role of managing a crisis on behalf of the capitalist class that cannot be successfully managed. It amazes me that so many Left professors, inside and outside Syriza, have failed to see that.

The agreement between the Troika and the Greek government will someday be remembered as a colossal economic and political farce, but a farce that will end in tragedy unless the Left plays the cards it has left very carefully. No one - the Troika and the government least of all - believes that the deal can be implemented, let alone succeed. The parliaments of Northern Europe will never make the promised 80 billion euros available to Greece over the opposition of their own voters. On its part, Greece will not be able to find 50 billion euros of public assets to privatize, as the agreement requires. It is also unlikely that the government will be able to implement a host of other reforms under the agreement because of its lack of control over the state apparatus. Corruption and clientelism are so rampant in Greece that many candidates run for political office solely to get jobs for their relatives.

Greece might as well have been defeated in a war, because it has now surrendered its national sovereignty. It has been forced to rescind all of the legislation the government had passed in its five

months in office. In addition, under the agreement, the Troika has the right to veto any new law that it judges will adversely effect the ability of Greece to pay off its debt. The agreement also demands that the government set aside past judicial decisions that conflict with the interests of the Troika. To add insult to injury, the Troika will now set up its physical headquarters in a building in Sytagma Square. Tsipris is right that the Troika's demands are irrational economically. They will deepen the depression in Greece, depriving the state of the revenues necessary to pay back the loans. But the Troika is not stupid - it knows very well that this is the case. It is operating in accordance with a different, specifically political rationale. Quite simply, it wants to crush Greece as an object lesson to Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland, all of which face debt crises. Golden Dawn will take note.

There are three categories of crime under which the Nazi prisoners were tried in Nuremberg: crimes against peace, crimes of war, and crimes against humanity. By refusing to live up to its constitutional responsibility to provide liquidity to the Greek banking system, the European Central Bank launched an economic war against the Greek nation. It is guilty of crimes against peace. By targeting the civilian population, the ECB and the other two members of the Troika are guilty of war crimes. Even before the ECB brought down the Greek banking system, the Greek department of health released data showing that one-third of all Greeks are under-nourished. Some hospitals have already closed and more will certainly follow. People will die of malnutrition and lack of medical care. The Troika is guilty of crimes against humanity. We need a new version of the Nuremberg trials. At the very least, Merkel, Shaeuble, Draghi, Holland, and the rest ought to be brought before the International Court of Justice in the Hague. If the Court is unable to achieve justice in the case of the People of Greece vs. the Troika, then the idea of Europe as anything other than a pack of ravenous wolves and a flock of helpless sheep is indeed doomed.

In a war of the wolves and the sheep, the most aggressive wolves win. Golden Dawn and its counterparts in the rest of Europe are waiting to enter the fray.

Gary Zabel is a professor of philosophy at UMass Boston. He has been visiting Greece for the conference, Democracy Rising, and has been writing a series of reports about his trip for Open Media Boston. This report concludes the series. To see the other reports see openmediaboston.org