

# Lies and Deceptions on the Left: The Politics of Self Destruction

Greece, France, Brazil

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*Over the past year, what appeared as hopeful signs, that **Left governments** were emerging as powerful alternatives to right-wing pro-US regimes, is turning into a historic rout, which will relegate them to the dustbin of history for many years to come.*

*The rise and rapid decay of left-wing governments in France, Greece and Brazil is not the result of a military coup, nor is it due to the machinations of the CIA. The debacle of left governments is a result of deliberate political decisions, which break decisively with the progressive programs, promises and commitments that political leaders had made to the great mass of working and middle class voters who elected them.*

*Increasingly, the electorate views the leftist rulers as traitors, who betrayed their supporters at the beck and call of their most egregious class enemies: the bankers, the capitalists and the neo-liberal ideologues.*

## **Left Governments Commit Suicide**

The self-destruction of the Left is an unanticipated victory for the most retrograde neo-liberal political forces. These forces have sought to destroy the welfare system, impose their rule via non-elected officials, widen and deepen inequalities, undermine labor rights and privatize and denationalize the most lucrative sectors of the economy.

Three cases of Left regime betrayal serve to highlight this process: The French Socialist regime of President Francois Hollande governing in the second leading power in Europe (2012-2015); Syriza, the left regime in Greece elected on January 25, 2015, portrayed as a sterling proponent of an alternative policy to 'fiscal austerity'; and The Workers Party of Brazil, governing in the biggest Latin American country (2003-2015) and a leading member of the BRICS.

## **French 'Socialism': The Great Leap Backward**

In his Presidential campaign, Francois Hollande promised to raise taxes on the rich up to 75%; lower the retirement age from 62 to 60 years; launch a massive public investment program to reduce unemployment; vastly increase public spending on education (hiring 60,000 new teachers), health and social housing; and withdraw French troops from Afghanistan as a first step toward reducing Paris' role as an imperialist collaborator.

From 2012, when he was elected, to the present (March 2015), Francois Hollande has betrayed each and every political commitment: Public investments did not materialize and unemployment increased to over 3 million. His newly appointed Economic Minister

Emmanuel Macron, a former partner of Rothschild Bank, sharply reduced business taxes by 50 billion euros. His newly appointed Prime Minister Manuel Valls, a neo-liberal zealot, implemented major cuts in social programs, weakened government regulation of business and banking and eroded job security. Hollande appointed Laurence Boone from Bank of America as his top economic adviser.

The French 'Socialist President' sent troops to Mali, bombers to Libya, military advisers to the Ukraine junta and aided the so-called Syrian 'rebels' (mostly Jihadist mercenaries). He signed off on billion-euro military sales to the Saudi Arabian monarcho-dictatorship and reneged on a contracted sale of warships to Russia.

Hollande joined with Germany in demanding that the Greek government comply with full and prompt debt payments to private bankers and maintain its brutal 'austerity program'.

As a result of defrauding French voters, betraying labor and embracing bankers, big business and militarists, less than 19% of the electorate has a positive view of the 'socialist' government, placing it in third place among the major parties.. Hollande's pro-Israel policies and his hardline on US- Iranian peace negotiations, Minister Valls's Islamophobic raids in French Muslim suburbs and the support of military interventions against Islamic movements, have increasingly polarized French society and heightened ethno-religious violence in the country.

### **Greece: Syriza's Instant Transformation**

From the moment in which Syriza won the Greek elections on January 25, 2015, to the middle of March, Alexis Tsipras, the Prime Minister and Yanis Varoufakis, his appointed Finance Minister, reneged in rapid order on every major and minor electoral program. They embraced the most retrograde measures, procedures and relations with the '*Troika*', (the IMF, and European Commission at the European Central Bank), which Syriza had denounced in its Thessaloniki program a short time earlier.

Tsipras and Varoufakis repudiated the promise to reject the dictates of the '*Troika*'. In other words, they have accepted colonial rule and continued vassalage.

Typical of their demagoguery and deceit, they sought to cover up their submission to the universally hated '*Troika*' by dubbing it '*the Institution*' - fooling nobody but themselves- and becoming the butt of cynical cackles from their EU overseers.

During the campaign, Syriza had promised to write off all or most of the Greek debt. In government, Tsipras and Varoufakis immediately assured the *Troika* that they recognized and promised to meet all of their debt obligations.

Syriza had promised to prioritize humanitarian spending over austerity - raising the minimum wage, rehiring public employees in health and education and raising pension payments. After two weeks of servile groveling, the 're-formed' Tsipras and Varoufakis prioritized austerity - making debt payments and 'postponing' even the most meagre anti-poverty spending. When the *Troika* lent the Syriza regime \$2 billion to feed hungry Greeks, Tsipras lauded his overseers and promised to submit a multi-billion euro list of regressive '*reforms*'.

Syriza had promised to re-examine the previous rightwing regime's dubious privatization of lucrative public enterprises and to stop on-going and future privatizations. In government,

Tsipras and Varoufakis quickly disavowed that promise. They approved past, present and future privatizations. In fact, they made overtures to procure new privatization 'partners', offering lucrative tax concessions in selling-out more public firms.

Syriza promised to tackle the depression level unemployment (26% national, 55% youth) via public spending and reduced debt payments. Tsipras and Varoufakis dutifully met debt payments and did not allocate any funds to create jobs!

Not only did Syriza continue the policies of its rightwing predecessors, but also it did so in a ludicrous style and substance: adopting ridiculous public postures and demagogic inconsequential gestures:

One day Tsipras would lay a wreath at the gravesite of 200 Greek partisans murdered by the Nazis during WW II. The next day he would grovel before the German bankers and concede to their demands for budget austerity, withholding public funds from 2 million unemployed Greeks.

One afternoon, Finance Minister Varoufakis would pose for a photo spread for Paris Match depicting him, cocktail in hand, on his penthouse terrace overlooking the Acropolis; and several hours later he would claim to speak for the impoverished masses!

Betrayal, deceit and demagoguery all during the first two months in office, Syriza has established a record in its conversion from a leftist anti-austerity party to a conformist, servile vassal of the European Union.

Tsipras' call for Germany to pay reparations for damages to Greece during WW II –a long overdue and righteous demand– is another phony demagogic ploy designed to distract the impoverished Greeks from Tsipras and Varoufakis sellout to German contemporary austerity demands. A cynical European Union official tells the Financial Times(12/3/15, p. 6), "*He's (Tsipras) giving them (Syriza militants) a bone to lick on*".

No one expects German leaders to alter their hardline because of past injustices, least of all because they come from interlocutors on bended knees. . No one in the EU takes Tsipras demand at face value. They see it as more empty 'radical' rhetoric for domestic consumption.

Talking up 70-year German reparations avoids taking practical action today repudiating or reducing payments on illegitimate debt to German banks and repudiating Merkel's dictates. The transparent betrayal of their most basic commitments to the impoverished Greek people has already divided Syriza. Over 40% of the central committee, including the President of the Parliament, repudiated the Tsipras –Varoufakis agreements with the Troika.

The vast majority of Greeks, who voted for Syriza, expected some immediate relief and reforms. They are increasingly disenchanted. They did not expect Tsipras to appoint Yanis Varoufakis, a former economic adviser to the corrupt neo-liberal PASOK leader George Papandreou, as Finance Minister. Nor did many voters abandon PASOK, en masse, over the past five years, only to find the same kleptocrats and unscrupulous opportunists occupying top positions in Syriza, thanks to Alexis Tsipras index finger.

Nor could the electorate expect any fight, resistance and willingness to break with the *Troika* from Tsipras' appointments of ex-pat Anglo-Greek professors. These armchair

leftists ('Marxist seminarians') neither engaged in mass struggles nor suffered the consequences of the prolonged depression.

Syriza is a party led by affluent upwardly mobile professionals, academics and intellectuals. They rule over (but in the name of) the impoverished working and salaried lower middle class, but in the interests of the Greek, and especially, German bankers.

They prioritize membership in the EU over an independent national economic policy. They abide by NATO, by backing the Kiev junta in the Ukraine, EU sanctions on Russia, NATO intervention in Syria/Iraq and maintain a loud silence on US military threats to Venezuela!

### **Brazil: Budget Cuts, Corruption and the Revolt of the Masses**

Brazil's self-styled Workers Party government in power an unlucky 13 years, has been one of the most corruption-ridden regimes in Latin America. Backed by one of the major labor confederations, and several landless rural workers' organizations, and sharing power with center-left and center-right parties, it was able to attract tens of billions of dollars of foreign extractive, finance and agro-business capital. Thanks to a decade-long commodity boom in agro-mineral commodities, easy credit and low interest rates, it raised income, consumption and the minimum wage while multiplying profits for the economic elite.

Subsequent to the financial crises of 2009, and the decline of commodity prices, the economy stagnated, just as the new President Dilma Rousseff was elected. The Rousseff government, like her predecessor, Lula Da Silva, favored agro-business over the rural landless workers' demands for land reform. Her regime promoted the timber barons and soya growers encroaching on the Indian communities and the Amazon rain forest.

Elected to a second term, Rousseff faced a major political and economic crises: a deepening economic recession, a fiscal deficit, and the arrest and prosecution of scores of corrupt Workers' Party and allied congressional deputies and Petrobras oil executives.

Workers' Party leaders and the Party's campaign treasury received millions of dollars in kickbacks from construction companies securing contracts with the giant semi-public petroleum company. President Rousseff promised "*to continue to support popular social programs*", and "*to root out corruption*", during her election campaign. However, immediately after her election she embraced orthodox neo-liberal policies and appointed a cabinet of hard-right neo-liberals including Bradesco banker Joaquin Levy as Finance Minister. Levy proposed to reduce unemployment payments, pensions and public salaries. He argued for greater de-regulation of banks. He proposed to weaken job protection laws to attract capital. He sought to achieve a budget surplus and attract foreign investment at the expense of labor.

Rousseff, consistent with her embrace of neo-liberal orthodoxy, appointed Katia Abreu, a rightwing senator, a life-long leader of agro-business interests and sworn enemy of land reform, as the new Agricultural Minister. Crowned "*Miss Deforestation*" by Greenpeace, Senator Abreu was vehemently opposed by the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) and the labor confederation to no avail. With Rousseff's total backing Abreu set out on a course of ending even the minimal land redistribution carried out in Rousseff's first term in office (establishing land settlements benefiting less than 10% of the landless squatters). Abreu endorsed regulations facilitating the expansion of genetically modified crops, and promises to forcefully evict Amazonian Indians occupying productive land in favor of large-

scale agro-business corporations. Moreover, she promises to vigorously defend landlords from land occupations by landless rural workers.

Rousseff's incapacity and/or unwillingness to fire and prosecute the Workers Party Treasurer, involved in a decade long billion-dollar kickback and bribery scandal, deepened and widened mass opposition.

On March 15, 2015 over a million Brazilians filled the streets across the country, led by rightist parties, but drawing support from the popular classes demanding immediate anti-corruption trials and stern sentences, and the revocation of Levy's cuts in social expenditures.

The counter demonstration in support of Rousseff by the CUT labor confederation and the MST drew one-tenth that number - about 100,000 participants.

Rousseff responded by calling for 'dialogue' and claimed to be 'open to proposals' on the issue of corruption but explicitly rejected any changes in her regressive fiscal policies, neo-liberal cabinet appointments and her embrace of their agro-mineral agenda.

In less than two months, the Workers Party and its President has indelibly stained its leaders, policies and backers with the brush of corruption and socially regressive policies.

Popular support has plummeted. The right wing is growing. Even the authoritarian, pro-military coup activists were present in the mass demonstrations, carrying signs calling for 'impeachment' and a return of military rule.

As in most of Latin America, the authoritarian right in Brazil is a growing force, positioning itself to take power as the center-left adopts a neo-liberal agenda throughout the region. Parties dubbed 'center-left', like the Broad Front in Uruguay, the pro-government Party for Victory in Argentina, are deepening their ties with agro-mineral corporate capitalism.

Uninformed claims by leftist US writers like Noam Chomsky that, "*Latin America is the vanguard against neo-liberalism*" is at best a decade late, and certainly misleading. They are deceived by populist policy pronouncements and refuse to acknowledge the decay of the center-left regimes and thus fail to recognize how their neoliberal political actions are fostering mass popular discontent. Regimes, which adopt regressive socio-economic policies, do not constitute a *vanguard* for social emancipation...

## **Conclusion**

What accounts for these abrupt reversals and swiftly broken promises by recently elected supposedly 'left parties' in Europe and Latin America?

One has come to expect this kind of behavior in North America from the Obama Democrats or the New Democratic Party in Canada . . . But we were led to believe that in France, with its red republican traditions, a Socialist regime backed ('*critically*') by anti-capitalists leftists; would at least implement progressive social reforms. We were told by an army of progressive bloggers that Syriza, with its charismatic leader, and radical rhetoric, would at least fulfil its most elementary promises by lifting the yoke of *Troika* domination and begin to end destitution and provide electricity to 300,000 candle-lit households. '*Progressives*' had repeatedly told us that the Workers Party lifted 30 million out of poverty. They claimed that a former '*honest auto worker*' (Lula Da Silva) would never allow the Workers Party to revert

back to neo-liberal budget cuts and embrace its supposed '*class enemies*'. US leftist professors refused to give credence to the crass billion-dollar robbery of the Brazilian National Treasury under two Workers' Party Presidents.

Several explanations for these political betrayals come to mind. First, despite their popular or '*workerist*' claims, these parties were run by middle class lawyers, professionals and trade union bureaucrats, who were organically disconnected from their mass base. During election campaigns, seeking votes, they briefly embraced workers and the poor, and then spent the rest of their time in pricey restaurants working out "deals" with bankers, business bribe granters and overseas investors to finance their next election, their children's private school and their mistresses luxury apartments...

For a time, when the economy was booming, big corporate profits, payoffs and bribes went hand in hand with wage increases and poverty programs. But when the crisis broke, the 'popular' leaders doffed their Party hats and pronounced '*fiscal austerity was inevitable*' while going with their begging cups before their international financial overlords.

In all these countries faced with difficult times, the middle class leaders of the Left feared the problem (capitalist crisis) and feared the real solution (radical transformation). Instead they turned to the '*only solution*': they approached capitalist leaders and sought to convince business associations and, above all their financial overlords, that they were '*serious and responsible politicians*', willing to forsake social agendas and embrace fiscal discipline. For domestic consumption, they cursed and threatened the elites, providing a little theater to entertain their plebian followers, before they capitulated!

None of the academics-turned-left-leaders have any deep and abiding links to the mass struggles. Their '*activism*' involves reading papers at '*social forums*', and giving papers at conferences on '*emancipation and equality*'. Political sellouts and fiscal austerity will not jeopardize their economic positions. If their Left parties are ousted by angry constituents and radical social movements, the left leaders pack their bags and return to comfortable tenured jobs or rejoin their law office. They do not have to worry about mass firings or reduced subsistence pensions. At their leisure they will find time to sit back and write another paper on the how the '*crisis of capitalism*' undermined their well-intentioned social agenda or how they experienced the '*crisis of the Left*'.

Because of their disconnect from the suffering of the impoverished, unemployed voters, the middle class leftists in office are blind to the need to make a break with the system. In reality, they share the worldview of their supposedly conservative adversaries: they too believe that '*it's capitalism or chaos*'. This borrowed cliché is passed off as a deep insight into the dilemmas of democratic socialists. The middle class leftist officials and advisers always use the alibi of '*institutional constraints*'. They '*theorize*' their political impotence - they never recognize the power of organized class movements.

Their political cowardice is structural and leads to easy moral betrayals: they plead, '*Crisis is not a time to tinker with the system*'.

For the middle class, '*time*' becomes a political excuse. Middle class leaders of popular movements, without audacity or programs of struggle, always talk of change.... in the future...

Instead of mass struggle, they run to and fro, between the centers of financial power and

their Central Committees, confusing 'dialogues' that end in submission, with consequential resistance.

In the end the people will re-pay them turning their backs and rejecting their pleas to re-elect them 'for another chance'.

There will not be another chance. This 'Left' will be discredited in the eyes of those whose trust they betrayed.

The tragedy is that the entire left will be tarnished. Who can believe the fine words of 'liberation', 'the will to hope' and the 'return of sovereignty' after experiencing years of the opposite?

Left politics will be lost for an entire generation, at least in Brazil, France and Greece.

The Right will ridicule the open zipper of Hollande; the false humility of Rouseff; the hollow gestures of Tsipras and the clowning of Varoufakis.

The people will curse their memory and their betrayal of a noble cause.

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