

SYRIZA leader offers his services to the European political elite

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On Wednesday, July 6, the chairman of the Greek party SYRIZA (the Coalition of the Radical Left), Alexis Tsipras, made an urgent appeal to the European political and financial elite to restructure their loans to Greece. If they did not, Tsipras warned, they risked the development of potentially uncontrollable forms of social unrest.

Tsipras's comments make absolutely clear the bourgeois character of SYRIZA, which opposes a socialist perspective and is desperately striving to hold back any independent movement of the Greek and European working class that could challenge the political status quo.

Tsipras made his remarks at a meeting in Berlin organised by the German Left Party, with whom SYRIZA enjoys close links. Both organisations were instrumental in establishing the European Left faction in the European parliament in 2003. The European Left consists of a number of Stalinist organisations, many working closely together with pseudo-“left” groups in national coalitions, like SYRIZA in Greece or the Left Bloc in Portugal.

The long-standing chairman of the European Left was prominent Left Party member Lothar Bisky, who recently stepped down, turning his post over to the French Communist Party's national secretary, Pierre Laurent. In addition to being a deputy in the Greek parliament, Tsipras is also chairman of Synapsismos (the largest party in SYRIZA) and a vice chairman of the European Left faction.

In Berlin Tsipras spoke at the headquarters of the Left Party to an audience composed prominently of elderly Stalinist cadre. He was introduced to the audience by veteran Stalinist and Left Party member Diether Dehm, who is currently the treasurer of the European Left.

Inside Greece, Tsipras and SYRIZA have longstanding relations with the Greek ruling party, PASOK, in particular via Tsipras's links to the trade union bureaucracy.

Last autumn Tsipras asked the ADEDY public sector union president and PASOK member, Spyros Papaspyrou, to

stand as a SYRIZA-backed candidate in local elections in the Athens suburb of Attica. Papaspyrou turned down the offer. Tsipras then approached Alexis Mitropoulos, a founding member of PASOK and legal professor, whose activities on behalf of PASOK go back to the 1980's when he worked closely with Andreas Papandreou, the father of the current Greek prime minister.

Tsipras did not dwell on the multiple links between his own organisation and PASOK. In the course of his 40-minute presentation in Berlin he did not mention the Greek government or PASOK. Instead he restricted his comments largely to a series of statistics describing how international financial institutions had sought to exploit the crisis in Greece.

After his speech, Tsipras quickly gave up his microphone and quit the stage, taking no questions or discussion.

While refusing to address the role of PASOK, Tsipras made clear in Berlin that SYRIZA's perspective is entirely based on appealing to the banks and financial elite for a restructuring of their loans to Greece. The alternative, Tsipras warned, would be even more violent social upheaval.

Addressing the massive public anger at the austerity measures introduced by the PASOK government in 2009, 2010, and again just a month ago, Tsipras declared, “I cannot be certain that the Greek people will continue to bear this burden. Greece resembles a powder keg, and the danger is that Greece could break apart before a solution is found to its problems”.

In order to defuse the situation, Tsipras called upon European nations and the financial elite to draw up a plan to rescue Greece based on the post war Marshall Plan. Tsipras reminded the audience that in 1953 the American government had been prepared to write off German debts to the US, and called for similar measures for Greece today.

In Berlin, Tsipras called for the repudiation of any new loans from the so-called troika (IMF-EU-ECB) while making it quite clear that his organisation did not expect European and international banks to write off all their Greek

debt. Tsipras specifically called upon the European Central Bank to write off 60 percent of its holdings of Greek government bonds. In so doing he indicated that SYRIZA would be prepared to support demands for austerity made by the ECB if the latter was prepared to annul at least part of its Greek investment portfolio.

In addition to the call for a restructuring of Greek debt, Tsipras also proposed the introduction of Euro bonds—debt jointly issued by all the countries of the Eurozone—to finance investment in Greece and Europe, plus increased public control over the banks.

In total Tsipras's proposals amounted to nothing more than recycling policy options being discussed at the highest levels of the political and financial elite.

The most prominent organ of international finance capital, the *Financial Times*, has long argued for a restructuring of Greek debt, to prevent a default like that of the Lehman Brothers bank that precipitated the 2008 financial crisis. Some restructuring of Greek debt is the policy of the German government and remains part of the political program of PASOK, which is actually carrying out the cuts in Greece. It is also a central demand of the right-wing Greek opposition party, New Democracy.

As for the proposal for Euro bonds, this is the official policy of the European parliament. Towards the end of June, EU Economics Commissioner Olli Rehn, who has argued repeatedly for savage spending cuts in Greece, announced that the European Parliament in Brussels would soon put forward its own plans for the introduction of a Euro bond.

Rehn has made clear that the main advantage for the European elite of a Euro bond is that it would facilitate the implementation of similar types of austerity measures across the widely divergent economies in Europe. At the same type it would be a powerful mechanism for strengthening the competitiveness of the Euro and European financial interests against the dollar and US domination of financial markets.

The last proposal made by Tsipras—for increased public control over the banks—is also a subject of broad debate in the political and financial elite, in particular in the form of demands for increased state regulation and oversight of financial operations.

In total, the proposals of Tsipras in Berlin would not affect the domination of the banks and the financial elite over economic and political life. Tsipras's agenda is identical to that of the trade union bureaucracy and broad layers inside the ruling PASOK government. Substantial sections of Tsipras's economic program could also be endorsed by New Democracy.

In fact there are precedents for collaboration between the two organisations. In the crisis period of 1989-90, a coalition government of New Democracy and Synapsismos played a

key role in demobilising workers—paving the way for the implementation of social cuts during the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Tsipras is clearly offering his services and links to the trade union bureaucracy to serve in a future Greek government, either in coalition with PASOK or New Democracy. Such a coalition would leave all of the mechanisms and institutions of modern finance capital in place while, at the same time, strive to more effectively implement austerity measures in the face of widespread popular opposition.

Tsipras's agenda of demands directed to the European political elite are not exclusive to SYRIZA. His proposals are shared by all of the parties inside the European Left—in particular the German Left Party, which has played a leading role in drawing up the program of the European umbrella organisation.

In this respect the Left Party has drawn upon its long history of implementing austerity measures while securing the interests of the banks. The Left Party (formerly the Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS) began its coalition with the Social Democratic Party in the Berlin Senate 10 years ago in the wake of the collapse of the major bank *Berliner Bankgesellschaft*.

Since then, it has played a crucial role in implementing the austerity measures and savage cutbacks to social spending, to repay billions to BBG share-holders. This has produced an enormous growth of poverty and social decline in the German capital city.

In one respect, the Left Party is one step ahead of its Greek counterpart. At the meeting in Berlin, a one-page statement from the Left Party was on display. Prepared by the party's financial expert, it proposed founding a European Rating agency. As numerous European heads of state, including the German chancellor, have criticised the monopoly of rating held by American credit rating agencies, the Left Party has promptly echoed their political masters, advancing demands for a European agency to rival the existing US agencies.



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