

As ruling party loses support, Greek ‘left’ cosies up to PASOK

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Following a relentless series of attacks on their living standards and social gains, millions of Greeks are angrily turning their backs on the established political parties. According to recent polls, support for the social democratic PASOK party has slipped from 44 percent in 2009 to between 8 and 15 percent. Under these conditions, a number of pseudo-left parties are working to stabilize the situation and prepare the ground for a new government capable of enforcing additional social cuts.

The driving force behind a government of “leftist” parties is the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA). It has repeatedly called upon the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Democratic Left (DIMAR) to cooperate in such a project, but so far both organisations have turned down the offer.

Last week the chairman of SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras, repeated his call for cross-party collaboration at a press conference held in the Red Cross hospital in Athens. Massive cuts have been imposed at the hospital during the past two years and, as a result, nurses often earn just €500 (\$US 659) per month. The hospital also faces partial privatisation, which has led to a series of protests by staff.

At his press conference, attended by a small group of employees, Tsipras spoke out against the planned privatisation and called for more funding for the hospital. He sought to convince the workers present that a “left” government would be able to de-escalate social tensions and reverse some of the cuts.

Tsipras’s speech encouraged the illusion that “decent wages, pensions, schools and hospitals” could be achieved despite the draconian European Union (EU) measures and that it was possible to force the financial aristocracy to make concessions through negotiations. Wide layers of the Greek working population have drawn very different conclusions from the experiences of the recent months. Tsipras sought to cloak his

appeal with radical rhetoric stressing the “contradiction between capital and labour”, which was intensifying, he suggested, in the current crisis.

In his speech, the SYRIZA leader made no call for the expropriation of the banks, nor did he argue for a workers’ government, thereby revealing his hostility to a socialist perspective directed against capitalism.

While the situation in Greece shows the impossibility of defending workers’ rights without breaking the power of the financial elite, Tsipras is preparing a “left” government that accepts the diktats of the European Union and organises future cuts in such a manner that they can be successfully imposed on the population. This emerged clearly as Tsipras continued his appearance at the hospital.

When WSWs supporters pointed out that his demand for a reversal of social cuts was incompatible with his support for the European Union, which had prescribed savage cuts for Greece two years ago, Tsipras responded by stressing that SYRIZA did not support withdrawal from the EU. He made it clear that he was prepared to sit down and “renegotiate” with the same EU officials who have bled Greece white in recent years.

“If we manage to form a ruling coalition,” Tsipras stated, “and power in the country is transferred to those who defend the interests of workers and the people, then we will of course seek to denounce the austerity measures and existing policies. We will carry out vigorous negotiations on both a European and international level, and use all possible means to achieve a favorable result at a European level”.

Given that the EU has from the start played the central role in attacking the social rights of workers in Greece, the word “renegotiate” represents tacit acceptance of the austerity measures. The talk about the contradiction between “capital and labour” is merely smoke and mirrors, insofar as Tsipras is ready to recognise one of the most important capitalist institutions as negotiating partner.

Tsipras’ position with regard to the EU is even clearer when

one examines his proposed alliance partners. In his comments, Tsipras admitted that so far the leader of the Democratic Left (DIMAR), Fotis Kouvelis, had refused to cooperate, but Tsipras was sure he would eventually accept the necessity to collaborate with SYRIZA.

“We believe that our proposal,” the SYRIZA chief indicated, “will find a response not only on the part of the left, but from all people who realise that we are in a situation where our house is under siege, we are being robbed by a thief and where we must work together to throw the thief out—even when we occasionally have minor differences of opinion”.

The forces with whom Tsipras has only “minor” differences of opinion are aggressive defenders of the EU and the banks.

DIMAR spokesman Andreas Papadopoulos told the WWS that remaining in the EU was an overriding strategic goal for his party. If the EU institutions once again sought to dictate cuts, a government involving his party would undertake negotiations to introduce “other measures which are socially compatible”. Even if this strategy failed, withdrawal from the EU was out of the question. “We would never leave the EU”, Papadopoulos stressed.

DIMAR’s Kouvelis, a former cabinet minister, is quite clear this means enforcing the next round of cuts against increasing popular resistance. To this end he calls for authoritarian measures, such as the creation of the new ministry with special powers. “We want a budget minister to whom all other ministers are subordinate”, he told the German daily *Die Welt*. Such a super-minister should be directly elected by parliament rather than selected by the head of government. “This would mean he could not be replaced in a ministerial reshuffle, which is common in Greek politics”, Kouvelis explained.

Such a “budget minister” to whom all other ministers are subordinate would mean nothing less than transforming the financial dictatorship of the EU into a political dictatorship of the Greek government.

DIMAR was founded in June 2010 by members of SYRIZA who wanted to vote in favour of PASOK’s cuts program and sought a coalition with the social democrats. Kouvelis said at the time: “We want a left that neither feels obliged to defend all of workers’ hard-fought rights, nor panders to the unions for petty political purposes”.

For SYRIZA to form a coalition with DIMAR is equivalent to joining in a coalition with PASOK, the ruling party, and not simply because an increasing number of former PASOK politicians, like rats leaving a sinking ship, have recently joined DIMAR. For its part, DIMAR actively pursues cooperation with PASOK. “We are interested in joining the government”, DIMAR spokesman Papadopoulos declared: “Even though we

have differences, we are ready for a coalition with PASOK”.

SYRIZA has already contemplated a coalition with PASOK on a number of occasions. In 2009, Tsipras told representatives of the Italian Communist Refoundation Party (Rifondazione Comunista) that he was ready to form a coalition with PASOK when the latter “agrees that it necessary to change Greek society in a leftist direction”. This is a meaningless standard, which slippery politicians would have no difficulty in promising to live up to.

PASOK assumed government in 2009, replacing the conservative New Democracy (ND) following early elections. In its election campaign, PASOK called for more government spending on social programs. As the government party for the past two years, PASOK has organised a social counterrevolution. PASOK is discredited within wide layers of the population, but DIMAR and SYRIZA are attempting to breathe new life into the corpse of Greek social democracy.

In this respect, SYRIZA can rely on the support of a host of ex-left groups, which adopt a somewhat more radical posture, but are agreed on their basic orientation. Such an organisation is the Greek section of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), Xekinima-Socialist Internationalist Organisation, which also calls for a coalition of “left” parties capable of forming a government at the next election. Similar demands are raised by the SEK (International Socialist Tendency, IS) and OKDE (Organization of Communist Internationalists of Greece, United Secretariat).

In fact, such a government would pursue the logic of the previous PASOK regime and enforce the dictates of the EU against the Greek workers. In order to oppose social counterrevolution, workers must organize independently of all of these groups and directly oppose the EU and all its institutions. Their ally in this struggle is the working class throughout Europe.



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