

Greece: French Left Front backs SYRIZA's appeal to the banks

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Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the Left Front (FG) candidate in last month's French presidential elections hosted a meeting in Paris on Monday with Alexis Tsipras, the leader of Greece's Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA).

Mélenchon's task was to serve as a political go-between for Tsipras and newly-elected French President François Hollande, of the Socialist Party (PS). In the run-off for the French presidential elections, Mélenchon, a former PS minister, endorsed Hollande—who had campaigned on calls for budget cuts, combined with a “growth component” of targeted financial subsidies for key banks and industries.

As is becoming clear from press coverage of Tsipras' European tour, however, SYRIZA bases itself on a similar perspective to that of Hollande. SYRIZA came in second in the May 6 Greek general election, which failed to produce a government, and is currently leading polls in the June 17 elections. It sent Tsipras to meet Mélenchon and German Left Party officials in Berlin, to offer assurances that its criticisms of the current austerity measures in Greece poses no threat to European capitalism. (See: “The pseudo-left unmasked in Greece”)

The PS refused to meet Tsipras in person, apparently because he is not yet a head of state. Instead, the task of speaking directly to Tsipras was given over to Mélenchon and the Left Front, which organized a speech by Tsipras attended by a few hundred Left Front members, in front of the National Assembly building—in one of the wealthiest districts of Paris.

In Berlin, Tsipras praised Hollande's defeat of former President Nicolas Sarkozy, who worked closely with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on designing austerity policies in Europe.

Tsipras said, “Of course we have high hopes and expectations regarding this break of the German-French

axis that followed the defeat of Nicolas Sarkozy in the French election.

Issues the left had formulated a long time ago are now being discussed at the level of the G8, such as euro bonds and direct loans from the European Central Bank.”

Tsipras is seeking help from Paris in trying to modify the bailouts forced on Greece by the European Union (EU). However, it is rapidly become clear that such a policy involves at most, cosmetic changes to austerity measures that have devastated the Greek working class.

Tsipras told Reuters: “We want the governments of ... France and Germany to see what we stand for: what is being transmitted in Europe about us is not what we represent and want.” He called for “long-term reforms” to make the bailouts forced on Greece by the European Union (EU) viable, so Greece would “be able to pay back the money they gave us.” He also cited as his model the Obama administration's social cuts in the US, saying: “We have to press Merkel to follow the example of America.”

Other SYRIZA officials speaking to the French media made similar comments. SYRIZA deputy Sofia Sokarafa told *Médiapart*: “We want reforms, we want the country to be competitive, the state more functional, for there to be a meritocracy.”

Left unsaid, however, is the fact that plans to boost Greek competitiveness based on repaying the banks and copying the Obama administration's restructuring of the US auto industry would entail deep cuts in workers' living standards.

Mélenchon nonetheless enthusiastically endorsed Tsipras' visit. Speaking of Tsipras, Mélenchon said: “We are not identical but we are comparable.”

Mélenchon also used Tsipras' visit as the opportunity for some bogus “left” posturing. He criticized the PS for refusing to meet with Tsipras while he was in Paris, for organizing the “ostracism” of Tsipras. He absurdly

demanded that the PS—a leading party of French big business—should meet with Tsipras in the name of “international solidarity ... at least left solidarity should prevail.”

In fact, Mélenchon’s policies are in line with sections of finance capital, including in Paris and on Wall Street, that prefer a policy of “quantitative easing”—where the European Central Bank would print euros to bail out the banks during any financial crisis. This policy was endorsed by Hollande shortly after his election, as his administration signaled its plans for budget cuts after the June legislative elections. (See also: “Incoming French president signals budget cuts, handouts to banks”)

In an interview with *Libération*, Mélenchon said he would offer this advice to Tsipras: “I know how I would go about it ... We must achieve the capitulation of the European Central Bank. That it lends directly to the Greek state. If I were Alexis, this is the way I would force them to do it.”

These policies—identified in Europe by the “left,” as Tsipras noted—have nothing to do with solidarity with the Greek workers, however. An inflationary policy of printing money at will to pay off the banks is simply a recipe for cutting workers’ purchasing power, while increasing social inequality by handing over gigantic sums to the private banks responsible for the economic crisis. Indeed, the more inflationary policy pursued by the Obama administration has produced a social disaster for the working class in the US.

Mélenchon, despite his support for the NATO bombing of Libya and military threats to Syria, likes to express a nationalistic independence of France from America, but his Greek protégé somewhat undermines this pose. The New York Times quotes Tsipras: “The message we’re giving to the G-8 is that we have to press Mrs. Merkel to follow the example of America, where the debt crisis wasn’t tackled with austerity measures but with an expansionist approach.”



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