

Greek SYRIZA leader Tsipras pledges to repay banks in European tour

Alex Lantier
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Alexis Tsipras, the leader of Greece's Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), visited Paris yesterday to meet with Left Front officials before traveling on to Berlin today. In Berlin, Tsipras is slated to meet leaders of Germany's Left Party, Gregor Gysi and Klaus Ernst.

In Paris, Tsipras met with Pierre Laurent, the head of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), and the Left Front's candidate in this spring's presidential elections, Jean-Luc Mélenchon. In addition to a press conference with Laurent and Mélenchon, he gave a speech to roughly 300 Left Front members gathered in front of the National Assembly building.

SYRIZA is leading in polls in Greece for elections next month, due to its criticisms of austerity measures imposed by the European Union (EU) on Greece since 2009. A poll published Sunday in *Kathemerini* showed that SYRIZA is set to win a plurality and possibly form a government after the June 17 elections. The elections were called after Greece's parties failed to form a government coalition based on the May 6 election. With 28 percent of the anticipated vote, SYRIZA leads Greece's main right-wing party, New Democracy, which has 24 percent, as well as the social-democratic PASOK party.

The purpose of Tsipras' tour is to reassure the banks and the major imperialist powers that, despite his criticisms of the bailouts, he will be a safe pair of hands should SYRIZA win the elections and form a government. In a long interview Sunday with Reuters—excerpted in the *Guardian* and in France's business daily *Les Echos*—Tsipras stressed that he supports the EU and intends both to repay the banks and to continue “reforms” begun by PASOK.

Tsipras told Reuters that he was traveling abroad because “we want the governments of these important European Union countries, 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 added, “We are not at all an anti-European force.”

Noting that European taxpayers' funds had been “wasted” in two previous multi-billion-euro bank bailouts of Greece, Tsipras explained that he sought to create better conditions for repaying the banks.

He said, “We want to make use of Europe's solidarity and funding to create the basis for our long-term reforms. But we need to know that in two-three years we'll have escaped this downward vortex, we will have growth, and we'll be able to pay back the money they gave us. There is no way we could pay them off if we continued” with the bailouts on the current terms.

Tsipras discussed the Obama administration's economic policies with Reuters, praising them for making “recession less severe than in Europe.” He noted that Obama and newly-elected French President François Hollande apparently saw “see eye-to-eye” on Greece at their meeting at this weekend's G8 summit at Camp David.

Tsipras here returned to a position he has repeatedly advanced: that Europe has to adopt the policies the Obama administration adopted in response to the economic crisis. In a May 18 *New York Times* interview, he explained that his message for the G8 is that “we have to press [German Chancellor Angela] Merkel to follow the example of America, where the debt crisis wasn't tackled with austerity measures but with an expansionist approach.”

The *New York Times* commented, “Mr. Tsipras' arguments are not so different from those of some of the leaders gathered at the Group of 8 summit at Camp David.”

Tsipras clearly considers both Obama and the new

French government as allies. Speaking to Reuters, he said, “At the Hollande-Obama meeting, the main issue was what happens with Greece. Until yesterday [i.e., when the G8 issued its communiqué], what would happen to Greece was a given: the people and workers would be crushed, labor rights would be demolished. ... For the first time after a very long time, we have the conditions and the terms so that this negotiation is in the interest of the people and against banks and capital.”

Tsipras’ final rhetorical flourish only underscores the basic dishonesty of SYRIZA’s politics. While appealing to voters with claims that it opposes austerity and defends “the people,” in interviews aimed at imperialist governments and SYRIZA’s fellow parliamentarians in Europe it sings a different tune. There, SYRIZA explains that it aims only to renegotiate the terms of the oppression of the working class in Greece, to fully “pay off” global finance capital while avoiding an explosion of working class discontent.

SYRIZA is, for its part, quite conscious that its interests are bound up with those of capitalist governments internationally, and it fears rising social opposition in the working class. As Tsipras told the *New York Times*, a decision by the EU to expel Greece from the euro zone in retaliation for a SYRIZA victory would be “cutting the branch that we are all sitting on.”

Nothing more clearly exposes the anti-working class character of SYRIZA’s program than Tsipras’ support for Obama’s policies. While the banks got hundreds of billions of public funds from Washington and some \$7.7 trillion printed by the Federal Reserve, Obama is waging a bitter assault on the workers. Millions of workers have lost their jobs, social conditions are disintegrating, education costs are rising sharply, and workers have faced deep wage cuts—highlighted by the 50 percent wage cuts for new-hires in the auto industry.

This vindicates the *World Socialist Web Site*’s consistent opposition to SYRIZA and its co-thinkers internationally, including the French Left Front and Germany’s Left Party.

In its perspective “Greece and the global crisis of capitalism,” the WSWs described SYRIZA as “a party that speaks for a section of the Greek bourgeoisie that wants more extended debt repayment to avoid economic collapse and cosmetic alterations in the

deficit-reduction terms to placate popular opposition.” The perspective continued: “SYRIZA categorically defends the European Union and the euro, while presenting itself as an opponent of austerity, but this circle cannot be squared. Austerity and ever-deeper attacks on the working class are an integral requirement of the bankers’ EU and the capitalist order it defends.”

SYRIZA does not represent a socialist opposition to capitalism, but a layer of affluent parliamentarians and careerists who are preparing for the possibility that they might take power. This is well understood by the European media, which, it must be said, has considerable experience with this social type.

Praising Tsipras’ assistants for their “Louis Vuitton bags and fashionable sunglasses,” the *Guardian* ended its account of Tsipras’ Reuters interview by happily concluding that Tsipras “appears to be preparing for power and moderating his tone.” In terms of describing the personal habits of the European petty-bourgeois “left,” there is little to add to this assessment.



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