

Greece: SYRIZA presents its economic programme

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Yesterday afternoon Alexis Tsipras presented the economic programme of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) for the upcoming June 17 elections.

Tsipras promised, in the event of an election victory, to terminate the loan agreements with the European Central Bank, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund and reverse the social cuts imposed on Greece in recent years. “The first act of a government of the left, as soon as the new parliament is sworn in, will be a cancellation of the bailout and its implementation laws,” he said in Athens.

“There is no more or less bad memorandum,” he said, referring to the bailout agreement. “You either implement the memorandum, or you cancel it We want to cancel it.”

“Let people know that there is still democracy in Greece,” he added.

The national plan, which Tsipras then presented, calls for the withdrawal of the major social attacks of recent years, such as cuts to the minimum wage or higher taxes for the masses. It also calls for the privatization of state enterprises to be halted and some privatizations reversed. Cuts to pensions and wages are simply to be frozen. Moreover, banks that take state aid should be nationalized.

Such demands are aimed at deep social anger among Greek workers, who in recent years have suffered wage cuts of up to 60 percent and have lost their jobs by the thousands.

Tsipras claimed SYRIZA would adopt a wealth tax and introduce a register of fortunes in which every Greek must record their property. At the same time, SYRIZA seeks to encourage foreign investment—by investors who would certainly object to any effort to investigate and tax the rich.

In the elections on May 6, an overwhelming majority of the electorate voted for parties that had criticized the EU’s austerity measures. SYRIZA quadrupled its share of the vote, to 17 percent. In the election on June 17 there is a possibility that it will emerge as the strongest party and may form the government.

Tsipras is making promises that his party will be unable to keep, should it come to power, because its orientation is to the ruling parties, not to the working class.

On Friday, Tsipras said nothing about how he would enforce his promises as prime minister against the dictates of the EU and European governments. His strategy is based on threatening the EU with a possible Greek state bankruptcy to obtain concessions. And yet, he constantly stresses that SYRIZA accepts the EU and will do everything to stay in the euro zone.

At the launch of the party programme, Tsipras underlined that his party would not terminate debt arrangements unilaterally, but would only suspend the interest payments and negotiate a debt cut. This should ensure that the debt could be repaid later.

EU representatives have made it abundantly clear that they will not accept any renegotiation of credit agreements and would push Greece into bankruptcy in the event of non-compliance.

German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, French President François Hollande, and IMF head Christine Lagarde, have all emphasized that they categorically oppose new negotiations on the memorandum.

Instead, arrangements are being made to exclude Greece from the euro zone. Finally, the Euro- group instructed its members to consider all the scenarios that might follow a withdrawal of Greece, and prepare for them. The large European banks are also taking precautions.

In the past two years, the European elite has proven that it is prepared to implement the most brutal attacks on the working class to bail out the banks and supply them with fresh capital. Under these conditions, the demands raised by SYRIZA can only be implemented by mobilizing the European working class against the EU institutions on the basis of a socialist perspective. But SYRIZA rejects such a perspective.

Should Tsipras end up in government, he would forget his programme as soon as he sits down with representatives of the European Union at the negotiating table. In 1981, French President François Mitterrand needed eighteen months before he dropped his campaign promises under the onslaught of the financial markets on the French currency, and did a complete U-turn. Tsipras would only take one and a half weeks.

Immediately after Tsipras' speech, SYRIZA's economic policy spokesperson, George Stathakis, said that the party would accept all foreign debts: "We are willing to make any agreement, any compromise, as long as it is viable."

On his visits to Paris and Berlin, Tsipras told a number of European and American newspapers that he did not seek any confrontation with the EU. He said that under his government, Greece would recognize its debts and merely seek to renegotiate its credit agreements.

He also offered to continue "long-term reforms," which have led to mass layoffs and pay cuts in Greece. As models for his policies, he cited US President Barack Obama, former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, and Hollande.

European leaders, including Hollande, show little inclination so far to respond to Tsipras' offers of a compromise. They are demanding his unconditional surrender and threatening to plunge the country into financial ruin. For this eventuality, the use of the army to suppress social unrest is already under discussion. Tsipras' efforts to foster illusions in the EU only serve to disarm the working class against these dangers.



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