

The euro crisis and the role of SYRIZA

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8 June 2012

The crisis of the European Union (EU) and its common currency has brought to the fore the necessity of an independent movement of the working class against the EU and the capitalist system which it upholds. The experiences in Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland of the past two years, where workers have repeatedly carried out mass protests and strikes against austerity measures, show the falsity of claims that mass pressure from below can shift the policies of the EU and the ruling elites of Europe.

The austerity policies spearheaded by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former French President Nicolas Sarkozy have impoverished broad layers of the population in Greece and other highly indebted countries of southern Europe, while only intensifying the debt and banking crisis. Greece, mired in recession for the fifth consecutive year, has seen its debt rise from \$250 billion in 2008 to more than \$350 billion today.

Proposals by US President Barack Obama and newly elected French President François Hollande to modify European austerity policies by increasing the size of bank bailouts offer nothing to the working class. The schemes being floated in increasingly desperate negotiations between the major European powers all include demands for further budget cuts and new attacks on workers' social rights.

The crisis has exposed the bankruptcy of the financial elites that govern Europe and the failure of the capitalist system. The only social force that can provide a progressive answer to the euro crisis is the working class. Its industrial and social strength must be mobilized in an international struggle against the European Union and its constituent bourgeois governments, based on a fight for the establishment of workers' power, the overthrow of capitalism, and the development of socialism throughout Europe and internationally.

The petty-bourgeois "left" forces that seek to subordinate workers to one or other camp of the ruling class constitute a critical obstacle to the development of a mass independent movement of the working class. Currently, the chief representative of these forces in Europe is Greece's Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) and its leader, Alexis Tsipras.

According to opinion polls, SYRIZA could emerge as the strongest party in the June 17 elections and Tsipras could become prime minister, as voters seek an alternative to the previous governing parties that have imposed the austerity measures dictated by the EU. SYRIZA is rising in the polls due to its talk of rejecting Greece's credit arrangements with the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund and freezing the austerity measures.

SYRIZA is not a revolutionary party. It is a petty-bourgeois party whose policies are hostile to the independent political mobilization of the working class.

It seeks to contain the anger over social attacks while keeping workers' struggles under the domination of the trade union bureaucracy, which worked closely with Greece's previous governments as they carried out devastating attacks on the workers. It functions as a tool to subordinate the working class to the Greek ruling class, the European institutions and capitalism.

When he speaks to the international press, as opposed to the Greek electorate, Tsipras makes clear that his party, once in power, would do what is necessary to satisfy the financial markets. SYRIZA hopes to carry out a program combining bailouts to key banks and corporations with austerity measures against the working class.

Tsipras has repeatedly said that SYRIZA seeks above all to remain in the EU. It will not only agree to structural "reforms"—which have already slashed wages and wiped out tens of thousands of jobs—but also honor the country's debts, which the EU has used as a lever

for the last two years to impose the austerity measures.

In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Tsipras called Hollande a “source of hope” and supported the French president’s proposals for more money-printing by the European Central Bank and the introduction of euro bonds. He has repeatedly praised the policies of Obama, calling on European leaders to adopt policies along the lines of the Depression-era New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt.

Such fatuous comparisons serve only to foster illusions about the possibility of resolving the Greek crisis by tinkering with EU policy. Obama has carried out brutal attacks on jobs and wages in the US and rejected any reform policies to alleviate the suffering resulting from mass unemployment and budget cuts. The vast decay of American capitalism is reflected in the absence of any social reform faction within the US political establishment. Greek capitalism lacks the resources to carry out the reform policies of an earlier era.

Amid an escalating capitalist crisis, bitter class struggles are on the agenda—in which petty-bourgeois parties like SYRIZA will face the working class not as an ally, but as a bitter enemy.

Tsipras himself has admitted that SYRIZA is in secret talks with top officials to prepare emergency measures in the event that the EU expels Greece from the euro zone, though he refuses to say what they are. Last week he met with the Greek army command and called for the strengthening of the armed forces.

The principal danger is that parties such as SYRIZA and the social layers they represent in the affluent middle class and the state and trade union bureaucracies will disorganize and block working class struggles against the rising dangers of economic collapse and dictatorship.

This underscores the need for a systematic political struggle against these pseudo-left tendencies. The workers cannot take a step forward without a political struggle against them, based on an independent socialist program.

The working class faces the task of building a new revolutionary party in Greece and throughout Europe, uniting the working class in a fight against the EU institutions and for the United Socialist States of Europe. This party is the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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