

SYRIZA leader Tsipras backs the Greek military

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On Tuesday the leading candidate of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), Alexis Tsipras, held talks with the Greek Defence Ministry and army high command. In doing so, he made clear he is prepared to work closely with the army, should SYRIZA win the election planned for June 17.

After the three-hour meeting, Tsipras stressed the meeting's significance and its symbolic character. "Defending the country's territorial integrity and national independence is a non-negotiable priority for SYRIZA," he declared, stressing that the economic crisis did not mean the country could be negligent or ignore dangers that require constant alertness.

He continued, "in spite of exorbitant sums spent, there had been a failure to create the necessary infrastructure in terms of the maintenance and spare parts needed by defence systems. The situation must be reversed without, however, undermining national defence." Tsipras also proposed nationalising the armaments industry to increase the armed forces' fighting capacities.

Tsipras referred to the possibility of reducing the military budget but only, he stressed, to combat corruption, not from the standpoint of weakening the army. He said he opposed any reduction in soldiers' pay, which would serve to undermine the morale of the troops.

Tsipras made these statements as open discussions are being held on the possibility of employing the military to suppress the popular opposition within the Greek working class to austerity.

Since the imposition of the EU austerity measures in 2009, there have been a series of reports about army manoeuvres aimed at preparing troops for a confrontation with the population. According to a report in the right-wing daily *Kathimerini* last week, an

exit by Greece from the euro zone would take place amid a mobilization of the army to suppress bank runs and popular protests. (See also: "Greek ruling elite prepares for showdown with working class")

The Defence Minister appointed by the current transitional government is the head of the armed forces, Frangos Frangoulis, and the new minister for the Protection of the Population is the former head of police and intelligence service officer, Eleftherios Economou.

Tsipras has said nothing regarding these threats. Instead, he lined up behind the army high command, going so far as to guarantee an increase in its combat readiness. This stance is the logical consequence of the political orientation of SYRIZA.

Since the May 6 elections, the party has repeatedly demonstrated its adherence to the state and indicated its readiness to support reforms and austerity measures. In the May 6 election, SYRIZA won 17 percent of the vote, quadrupling its score thanks to its criticisms of EU-dictated austerity measures which have plunged millions of Greeks into poverty.

SYRIZA is now poised to emerge as the strongest force in the new June 17 elections and form the government. It has reacted by increasingly junking its election promises and demonstrating to European powers that it is best placed to implement austerity.

In trips to Paris and Berlin over a week ago, Tsipras repeated that SYRIZA was intent on securing new negotiations on the country's debts rather than repudiating the debts or the conditions laid down by the EU:

In an interview in the current edition of the news weekly *Der Spiegel*, Tsipras makes this point absolutely clear. At the start of the interview he emphasises that a SYRIZA government would do all

that it can “to ensure that Greece can keep the euro.” This is despite the fact that the EU has always demanded that recognition of all debts and strict adherence to its austerity measures are the conditions for staying in the euro.

Tsipras makes clear that he will respect the debts by complaining that a continuation of the austerity measures in their current form would make Greece unable to “repay its creditors.” It is in the interest of the creditors to ensure that Greece was not forced into complete bankruptcy.

Like both the social democratic PASOK and the conservative New Democracy (ND) parties, Tsipras offers “structural reforms” in exchange for lengthening debt repayment times.

“We (Greeks) bear great responsibility for our situation,” Tsipras declared. Asked if he rejected the sacking of tens of thousands of workers in order to achieve the “urgently necessary” reforms in public administration, he replied: “We are not opposed to reforms, we say merely the same as many economists, German newspapers or even former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt. And what has just been confirmed in the latest OECD report: the austerity policy which we have implemented for the past two years, the policy to rely solely on dramatic savings, has failed.”

His perspective of horse-trading with the European powers to convince them to ease the pressure somewhat and accept a slower pace of structural reforms will inevitably bring a government headed by Tsipras into confrontation with the working class. Workers voted for SYRIZA precisely due to their opposition to austerity policies.

It is this eventuality which lies behind Tsipras’ current turn to the military. Should the need arise he would not hesitate to use the army against protest demonstrations or strikes.

Even though he has gone to great lengths to prove his reliability, powerful sections of the European and international bourgeoisie view a SYRIZA government installed on the basis of popular anti-austerity sentiment as too unpredictable. Under these conditions, the army could, as in 1967, organise a putsch to oust or block the installation of a SYRIZA-led government.

With his visit to the military on Tuesday, Tsipras showed that he fears a mobilisation of the working class against social austerity far more than the risk of a

military putsch.



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