

SYRIZA leader Tsipras lays out right-wing policies for Greek crisis

Alex Lantier
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On May 31, Alexis Tsipras, leader of Greece's Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), gave a long interview to *Time* magazine detailing his party's program in Greece's June 17 elections.

SYRIZA leads the opinion polls, with roughly 30 percent of the vote, thanks to its criticisms of unpopular austerity measures dictated to Greece by the European Union (EU) since 2009. These measures have collapsed the Greek economy while laying siege to the living standards of Greek workers. Wages have been slashed by 30 percent or more and unemployment has shot up to 22 percent (over 50 percent for youth).

As popular outrage mounts, many people are turning to a vote for SYRIZA to express their hostility to the European Union and the cuts that have been carried out by Greece's two main big business parties, the social democratic PASOK and the conservative New Democracy (ND).

SYRIZA is not a radical organization, however, but a party of the affluent middle classes—union bureaucrats, academics, professionals, parliamentary functionaries—who seek to defend their privileges by preserving the social order. Tsipras wants to renegotiate the terms of the EU bailouts not to reverse the attacks on working people, but to enable Greece to continue repaying the banks (see, "Greek SYRIZA leader Tsipras pledges to repay banks in European tour"). His interview in *Time* is a signal to the American ruling class that he is a safe pair of hands.

Asked if he was willing to make "necessary structural reforms," Tsipras replied: "We must make structural reforms which will make the public sector more reliable, create an effective and fair taxation system, and fight the black economy, which has been like a kind of gangrene on the Greek economy."

Tsipras let it be known that he planned to fund Greece's payments to the banks with tax increases and cuts to jobs and wages. He attacked government employees, criticizing Greece's "inefficient public sector, structured in an irrational way." He claimed that PASOK and ND gave workers public sector jobs simply as a "clientelistic" move

to get votes. He warned, however, that layoffs would be counterproductive unless done in a "targeted" way.

Even as thousands of Greeks are losing their homes in the midst of rising tax rates and plunging wages, Tsipras said SYRIZA would push efforts to collect taxes "to the limit." He said taxes would apply not "only on those who have low incomes, but those who have high incomes and come from the upper class." He explained that for ordinary Greeks to accept to "contribute," they had to believe that cuts would apply not "only to those who have low incomes but to those who have high incomes."

These denunciations of tax evasion and public sector inefficiency epitomize the cynical ambiguity of Europe's petty-bourgeois "left." Its criticisms of state policy are crafted so as to obscure their own anti-working class standpoint.

Tsipras' plans for a state crackdown on tax evasion would not significantly curb the routine tax evasion by the wealthy that occurs in all capitalist countries. The purpose would be to reconcile workers to submitting to the banks' looting of Greece. As for the Greek public sector's allegedly irrational structure, Tsipras does not say how he would change it. But one must conclude that he would deal with sections of the work force he considers inefficient through layoffs and speedup.

Tsipras burnished his bank-friendly credentials with *Time* by again praising US President Barack Obama's policies. As he already made clear during his European tour, he thinks that in its response to the crisis, Europe should "follow the example of America."

This is a devastating exposure of the class character of Tsipras' politics, since Obama gave multi-trillion-dollar handouts of public funds to the banks, while opposing any government job-creation programs, refusing to provide serious relief for the unemployed and those losing their homes to foreclosure, and imposing a 50 percent wage cut on newly hired workers in the auto industry bailout.

In the *Time* interview, however, Tsipras went even further, declaring: "In the USA, whenever the state was called to

recapitalize private banks to consolidate them, it received stock according to the money it spent. There was no banker that said, ‘My bank has gone bankrupt but I want to remain in my seat even if it’s being bailed out with public money.’”

One cannot help wondering whether Tsipras is totally uninformed about American politics or is simply lying. In either case, his statement is flagrantly false. Far from taking the banks to task and holding them accountable, the Obama administration has allowed them to keep their trillions in public funds and subsidies while maintaining their executives and paying them record bonuses to boot.

SYRIZA’s request to renegotiate Greece’s EU bailout to include larger bank bailouts has met with sharp opposition from sections of the European bourgeoisie, particularly German Chancellor Angela Merkel. She is threatening to cut off credit to Greece, which would bankrupt the country and force it to reintroduce its own national currency.

It is expected that the banks would speculate against a new Greek currency, rapidly leading to its collapse on international markets and plunging the Greek population into destitution virtually overnight through hyperinflation. The Greek state reportedly plans to mobilize the army in such an event so as to block bank runs and forcibly suppress protests (see, “Greek ruling elite prepares for showdown with working class”).

Tsipras stressed that leaving the euro was “not an option” for SYRIZA, prompting *Time* to ask: “And if the Europeans say, sorry, Mr. Tsipras, we don’t like your plan?”

According to Tsipras, SYRIZA is in fact planning for the possibility of Greece being expelled from the euro. He replied, “Indeed, we would be in a really difficult position if this was Europe’s reaction. We have an alternate plan, focused on supporting the most vulnerable and sensitive social groups, that we will implement in that difficult situation.”

This ambiguous response, which appears to imply that SYRIZA would respond to a collapse in Greek state finances by slashing social spending so as to focus on the poorest layers of the population, did not satisfy *Time*. The magazine pressed him again about his plans for a “worst-case scenario.”

Tsipras responded, “We have a plan. There’s a team of economists who lay out the plans, update and communicate them... I would not like to talk about it.”

He explained: “I don’t find it useful to speak in detail about this plan, given that a public display of it would suggest that we’re leaning towards it. On the contrary, we want to avoid it. We are fully aware of the consequences. We are fully aware of the consequences that it will have on the country and Europe in general.”

Such a comment highlights the gulf separating the cynical petty-bourgeois politics of SYRIZA from a proletarian orientation, which seeks to warn the working class of the dangers it faces and mobilize it in struggle against them. The banks and the major powers are making contingency plans for unprecedented acts of imperialist brigandage—holding the workers of entire countries hostage and preparing to attack them through the financial markets. The situation speaks to the utter bankruptcy of capitalism.

Yet Tsipras makes no objection to capitalism—indeed, the word does not appear in his *Time* interview—because he and his party are not of the “radical left,” but are instead integral parts of the political establishment. Even in the best circumstances, the policies SYRIZA plans to enact are thoroughly conventional, right-wing measures that will intensify the suffering of millions of workers.

Well aware that Greece and Europe stand on the edge of the precipice, SYRIZA is also discussing secret plans for disaster scenarios that it will not reveal to the public. Nor does the SYRIZA leadership speak only with anonymous “economists.” Two days before *Time* published its interview, Tsipras met for an extensive, three-hour discussion at the Greek Defense Ministry with the army high command. (see, “SYRIZA leader Tsipras backs the Greek military”).

SYRIZA represents no alternative for the working class. It serves only to divert rising working class opposition to the political establishment behind a vote for a party of the capitalist state, blocking the development of a revolutionary struggle of the working class against capitalism and for socialism.

Such a movement can develop only through a struggle to shatter the political authority and false “left” pretenses of groups such as SYRIZA, which stand on the opposite side of the barricades from the working class.



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