

# SYRIZA supports Greek government as it negotiates new austerity measures

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31 October 2012

Four months after entering office, Greece's conservative-social democratic government is in deep crisis. Faced with daily strikes and protests against brutal austerity measures as well as falling poll ratings, tensions between the government coalition partners are growing.

On Tuesday, conservative premier Antonis Samaras (ND) announced that his government had finished talks with Greece's international lenders. It will submit the fifth austerity package to the parliament next week. The package contains €13.5 billion of cuts as well as reforms of the labor laws. A failure of the law, Samaras claimed, would plunge Greece into "chaos."

A struggle has broken out within the government over how best to implement the cuts. The conservative *Nea Dimokratia* (ND) is insisting that the requirements of the troika—the EU, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund—are implemented to the letter. For their part, the Democratic Left (DIMAR) and the social-democratic PASOK have proposed some cosmetic changes and the greater involvement of the unions, threatening otherwise that they will not vote for parts of the package.

In this situation, the largest opposition party, the Coalition of the Alternative Left (SYRIZA), has lined up behind the government, all but openly offering its support to ensure that the government can hold together and pass the cuts. Last Friday, in an interview with the Reuters news agency, SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras said his party was not interested in bringing down the government. "Our top priority is to overturn this policy", he said, "It is not a time for tricks, it is not a time to provoke the fall of the government."

Tsipras was referring to the possibility that his party could stop the austerity package by provoking the dissolution of parliament. Greek election law states that

fresh elections must be held if 60 of the 300 parliamentary deputies resign. Since 1974, only the social democratic PASOK and the conservative New Democracy (ND) have had enough seats to bring about such a situation. Now SYRIZA, with its 71 deputies, is also in a position to do this. All the other opposition parties combined do not have enough seats.

According to the latest opinion polls, the government parties would suffer heavy losses in new elections as a result of the new austerity measures, while SYRIZA would gain a majority. However, Tsipras is now excluding such a possibility.

Instead, in the interview he encourages the illusion that members of the government coalition of ND, PASOK and the Democratic Left (DIMAR) will vote against the new austerity package and could therefore stop it.

Tsipras adopts a cowardly and submissive attitude towards the government because fundamentally he agrees with its program. The SYRIZA leader stressed again to Reuters that, like Prime Minister Antonis Samaras (ND), he wanted to ensure that Greece remained in the EU. He told Reuters that he wanted to renegotiate the credit agreements—of which the latest austerity measures are a part—with the representatives of the EU, so that Greece would be in a better position to repay its debts.

Tsipras repeated his demand that Greek banks be nationalised. Given the bankruptcy of these financial institutions, this means nothing more than socialising their losses. Of the current tranche of financial aid, some 85 percent will go directly to the banks. To that end, the population is to be forced to submit to one package of social cuts after another.

In light of these statements, SYRIZA's cynical verbal opposition to austerity policies is no more than an

attempt to divert workers' anger and resistance into harmless channels, namely in support of the EU and the government. Tsipras' main task is to encourage illusions that the social attacks can be halted or reduced within the EU, and even under the present government.

This strategy grows in importance as social contradictions intensify. The ruling elite in Athens faces growing difficulties imposing the cuts being dictated by the EU. The austerity measures introduced so far have already led to a deep recession, unemployment of over 24 percent, and a massive drop in wages. Since the beginning of the crisis, 70,000 businesses have had to close.

The government is now planning further cuts in wages and pensions of up to 30 percent, cutting unemployment benefits in certain areas and imposing mass sackings. At the universities, 13,000 to 15,000 non-tenured lecturers' posts are to be cut, and the already desperately underfunded hospitals must cut a further 10 percent of their workforce.

Anger at this policy of social devastation is enormous. In the past month, there have been three mass demonstrations with up to 100,000 participants. Every day, new strikes break out and the government can no longer count on workers in the ministries and departments to carry out its decisions.

Under these conditions, an open struggle has already broken out within the government over how best to implement the cuts. While the ND is insisting that the requirements of the Troika (the EU, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund) are implemented to the letter, DIMAR is proposing some cosmetic changes and the greater involvement of the unions, threatening otherwise not to vote for parts of the package.

The central function of SYRIZA in this situation is to politically paralyse workers and prevent massive protests being directed against the government and the EU institutions, and becoming the starting point for a European-wide offensive by the working class. For this reason, Tsipras criticises the cuts, but seeks to prevent every serious initiative to mobilise workers politically.

If SYRIZA is able to maintain its paralysing influence on workers, and thereby block the only progressive way out of the crisis, the danger from the extreme right grows.

The fascist party *Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn) has

already been able to attract desperate and backward elements of the petty bourgeoisie and mobilise them against immigrants, workers and political opponents. The fact that they are supported in their racist campaigns by considerable sections of the police underscores the reactionary character of the current government, to which SYRIZA is effectively extending its support.



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