

Greek SYRIZA leader meets with German finance minister

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On Monday, Alexis Tsipras, leader of the Greek SYRIZA movement (Coalition of the Radical Left), met with German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) to discuss the credit agreements struck between the European Union and Greece.

Tsipras had previously requested the nearly one-hour audience. He was already in Germany for fraternal discussions with the German Left Party and, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the conversation with Schäuble came about via mediation by Left Party leaders.

The German finance minister bears personal responsibility for the brutal social attacks imposed on Greece at the behest of the EU. In all relevant negotiations, Schäuble has refused to budge an inch on the terms of the austerity measures. The plight of Greek children who die due to a lack of drugs, the 57 percent of young people officially registered as unemployed, and the elderly forced out of their homes due to their falling pensions are all a direct result of Schäuble's EU policy.

With his visit to Schäuble, Tsipras was signaling that he can be relied on to maintain the same policy. With 27 percent of the vote, SYRIZA is the main opposition party in Greece and, according to some polls, could emerge with the biggest vote in new elections.

Immediately before the meeting, Tsipras declared: "The Germans can see that SYRIZA could be the next government and they want to prepare the ground by having direct contact with us. We want the same." SYRIZA "wants to have normal relations with the governments that play an important role in Greek and European affairs."

In an interview with Deutsche Welle radio, Tsipras reiterated his earlier promise that his party would not

unilaterally terminate the Greek debt, but merely negotiate new credit agreements and carry out "reforms". Tsipras regarded recent statements by IMF chief economist Olivier Blanchard, who admitted that the Greek austerity measures were based on incorrect calculations and now needed to be adjusted, as confirmation of his own stance.

After his meeting with Schäuble, Tsipras said: "I told him that the austerity programs have failed." Now they must deal with poverty, unemployment and the strengthening of fascist parties, he said. Tsipras is evidently now preparing to cooperate with Schäuble on all of these issues. His differences with Schäuble were "political, not personal", he said.

Speaking on behalf of Schäuble, a spokeswoman for the German Finance Ministry stressed there was "no alternative to the economic adjustment program". Otherwise Greece could not remain a part of the euro zone. "Schäuble called upon Mr. Tsipras to endorse this path," the spokeswoman said.

In June last year, the federal government had refused to respond to appeals from Tsipras and refused to meet with him. The fact that a meeting with Tsipras has now taken place is a clear signal that the European and Greek elite are increasingly looking to SYRIZA to stabilize the Greek state and suppress workers' resistance against further cuts.

The meeting took place against the backdrop of a deep crisis of the political system in Greece. Five brutal austerity packages dictated by the EU have brought the current parliamentary system to the brink of collapse. The social democratic PASOK and the conservative New Democracy (ND), which alternately ruled the country since the fall of the military junta in 1974, have lost most of their support in the population.

Following PASOK's leading role in implementing

social cuts, the party's support plunged from 44 percent to 12 percent in the election held in June 2012. According to recent polls, support for the ruling ND has now shrunk to less than 20 percent.

The angry response of workers takes the form of strikes and protests carried out on a daily basis, which the union bureaucracy is increasingly unable to control. In the past few weeks public transport workers, employees at the state lottery company and railway workers have stopped work and held protests. On Saturday, the government agreed a new tax that reduces the maximum tax rate by 3 percent to 42 percent and raises taxes for families with children.

The three-party ruling coalition of ND, PASOK and DIMAR (Democratic Left) maintains power only due to the undemocratic electoral system in Greece, and has lost 15 of its former 179-seat majority since last June. It has currently just 14 seats more than the mandatory parliamentary majority of 150.

Most of the 15 MPs were expelled because they refused to vote in favor of the fifth austerity program last December. Just a few days ago DIMAR expelled another two deputies who supported an investigation of the government practice of promoting tax loopholes for its crony supporters.

When the PASOK government showed similar signs of decay a year ago the EU decided to replace Prime Minister George Papandreou with the technocrat Loukas Papadimos in collaboration with the conservative ND and the semi-fascist LAOS. At the same time the state apparatus was strengthened and the police have increasingly been used against striking workers and to witchhunt immigrants.

Now SYRIZA is preparing to play a similar role. In December of last year the organization refused to stop the fifth austerity package by forcing new elections and thus secured the survival of the government. Now the party is being groomed for direct involvement in government.

At a party congress held on November 30 last year Tsipras had already declared that SYRIZA would form a "government of popular unity, of responsibility and social salvation". "We will take responsibility for governing the country, even if this is under the worst conditions of economic disaster and social liquidation", he said. "And we will be successful."

Greek workers must regard these words as a warning.



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