

Austerity demands provoke Greek government crisis

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Representatives from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Commission and European Central Bank (ECB) began talks with the New Democracy-led Greek coalition government Sunday.

Continuing throughout the week, the discussions are centred on Greece's progress in implementing the austerity measures that are the precondition for the country receiving any further loans under the "Memorandum" agreed with the troika.

The primary demand of the troika is that there must be no retreat on plans to slash the number of civil service employees. As part of Greece's commitment to reduce the number of public sector employees by 150,000 by the end of 2014, it must shed 25,000 jobs this year and half of those by June.

To impose further deep job cuts is political dynamite for the ruling New Democracy, PASOK and Democratic Left (DIMAR) parties. Unemployment is already expected to reach 30 percent this year, with 60 percent of these under 25 jobless. Nearly 4.5 million people from a population of around 11 million are either unemployed or described as "economically inactive".

This has necessitated a show of feigned opposition from the social democratic PASOK and DIMAR, who have raised concerns about the implications of deepening austerity for the social and political stability of Greece. In no small measure such concern is motivated by fears for their own survival.

As a result of the PASOK government of former prime minister George Papandreou imposing the first raft of austerity, following its landslide election in 2009 and its joining with New Democracy, the party has almost been wiped out as a political force. In last June's general election, PASOK lost more than two thirds of its votes, collapsing from 43 percent

(3,012,373 votes) to 12 percent (755,868 votes). Recent opinion polls put the party's support at just 5.3 percent.

At PASOK's annual conference last week in Piraeus, fewer than 4,000 delegates were in attendance. Neither of the party's recent prime ministers (Papandreou and Costas Simitis) were present. Current party leader Evangelos Venizelos utilised the occasion to call for a centre-left coalition to be formed for the next elections and for DIMAR to take part. DIMAR has refused the offer, but its own support has fallen in the opinion polls to 4.3 percent, just enough needed to secure seats in parliament according to electoral law.

Under the conditions of the breakup of Greece's established bourgeois parties, those seeking a left alternative are being presented with the pseudo-left SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left). Heavily promoted as the anti-austerity party, SYRIZA was able to win 27 percent of the vote at last year's election and is now the main opposition party in parliament.

The reality is that SYRIZA's principal proposal is a "haircut" for Greece's public creditors, principally the ECB and euro zone countries. SYRIZA has stated repeatedly that Greece's debts to the banks will be fully paid back and that it merely wishes to renegotiate the terms of payment.

To this end, party leader Alexis Tsipras has taken to openly promoting an alliance with PASOK and DIMAR, to form a future "government of the left". Without specifying names, Tsipras has also stated that other political forces could be involved. Last month, he told the Greek daily *Kathimerini*, "We aim to create a broad front that will counter the policies of the memorandum in a credible manner. Of course, this front would include all parties of the left but it could also engage voters from the two parties that used to dominate Greek politics"—a clear reference to New

Democracy as well as PASOK, though he subsequently denied this in the same interview.

SYRIZA's claims that there is room for manoeuvre with the troika based on a softening of the austerity agenda are spurious. Nowhere has there been retreat by the troika in its demands for mass austerity. Even where extensions of the time permitted for implementing its terms have been accepted, it has been on the basis that the policies are still carried out to the letter.

SYRIZA's role as a faithful defender of the European Union and a political prop of the Greek capitalist state means that everything it does strengthens the fascist Golden Dawn movement, which is promoted as the genuine radical force in Greek society and appears so when compared with the respectable bourgeois party that is SYRIZA.

In his *Kathimerini* interview, Tsipras acknowledged that SYRIZA had stagnated in opinion polls since its breakthrough and declared, "We need to become more militant, more credible and more effective."

In a BBC interview with *Newsnight*'s Paul Mason, Tsipras accused New Democracy leader Samaras of unleashing a campaign of right-wing destabilisation based on a "strategy of tension", using the police, Golden Dawn and others, including agent provocateurs. He stated, "Today the manuals of Europe's extreme right have become the gospels of the present Greek government."

But when asked by Mason if he was a "man of the parliamentary opposition" or "the man who is going to lead the strikers out here into a mass uprising against this government", Tsipras exposed the rotten character of his left pretensions.

"We can be at the same time the parliamentary opposition and tomorrow the government. At the same time we can be down in the streets, fighting and mobilising the masses", he replied. "So, we do have this advantage. We can participate in a protest, motivating people to defend their rights, while at the same time, we can be in Washington discussing with the IMF, the State Department or in Germany, conversing with [German finance minister Wolfgang] Schauble, in order to voice the fair demands of the Greek people."

In reality, you cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, as the English proverb states. Tsipras is

essentially making a pitch to the ruling elite, professing that he is with them in both spirit and intent even when forced to appear on the occasional protest and demonstration.



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