

SYRIZA leader Tsipras addresses the British pseudo-left

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Alexis Tsipras, the leader of Greece's SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), spoke in London at several events last week.

Tsipras addressed a meeting organised by the Hellenic Observatory at the London School of Economics, as well as a public meeting organised by the London branch of SYRIZA. He also held discussions with Members of Parliament from the opposition Labour Party, and conducted interviews with the *Guardian* newspaper and *New Statesman* magazine.

Tsipras spoke at Friends Meeting House in London before an audience that included representatives of all the principal pseudo-left parties in the UK. Tony Benn, the octogenarian former Labour MP, cabinet minister and president of the Greece Solidarity Campaign, was due to host the event, but was unable to due to his hospitalisation. Others present included Alan Woods of the International Marxist Tendency and John Rees of the Socialist Workers Party splinter, Counterfire. Given a special welcome from the platform was Alicia Castro, Argentina's ambassador in London.

The middle class left were gathered to hear from Tsipras, an individual heading a party, SYRIZA, they all portray as the most exciting development on the "left" in Europe in many years, a party that can be entrusted to lead the fight against the austerity measures being imposed in Greece. This task is not made any easier by Tsipras, who spends the majority of his time touring Europe's capitals to pledge his loyalty to the European Union (EU), while making appeals for modified repayment terms on the bailout of Greece's banks.

During his January visit to the United States, he met with State Department and International Monetary Fund (IMF) officials, and spoke at the Brookings

Institution, the liberal think tank, primarily to assure all and sundry they had nothing to fear from a possible SYRIZA government.

In London too, Tsipras offered his "left" apologists only cold comfort. He largely eschewed radical rhetoric and instead presented SYRIZA as the sole force able to resolve the crisis in Greece on the basis that it represented "Europe's democratic traditions". Tsipras waxed lyrical in praise of both a mythical "European" ideal and the all-too real EU, under conditions in which the EU is the primary force, alongside the IMF, in imposing the most horrifying attacks on the Greek population and throughout the continent.

"SYRIZA has a political and moral responsibility to put an end to this social disaster", he asserted. The Greek coalition government had, "launched a violent shift to the far right, endangering the European liberal and humanist tradition and democracy itself ... We in SYRIZA believe that radical democratic changes are the only way out of the crisis for the people of Europe".

To reassure the international ruling elite that it can be trusted with the reins of power in Greece, SYRIZA has abandoned its previous commitment to overturn the IMF-EU austerity programme agreed with successive Greek governments since 2010.

SYRIZA, Tsipras said, would "put a stop to the austerity policies while, at the same time, renegotiating the loan agreement with our creditors".

While denouncing right-wing New Democracy prime minister Antonis Samaras and "his political allies, PASOK and the Democratic Left" for their "crucial role in instigating, planning, and implementing the austerity programmes", Tsipras levelled his main criticism at this "internal Troika" for having "refused our demand to renegotiate the Loan agreement".

Tsipras' argument rests on the claim that the

international financial aristocracy is ready to forego billions of euros Greece owes to the banks. He called for “an economically viable strategy” that “must follow the model of the 1953 London Debt Agreement, which gave the post-war German economy a kick start and helped it create the ‘economic miracle’ of the post-war era”. This is a reactionary fantasy.

“We see no reason why in 2013 such a settlement is not also the appropriate way forward for the whole of the South, and for Greece”, he declared.

Tsipras knows full well that the EU and the IMF have insisted again and again that there is no alternative to austerity. Even when these institutions have extended the period for Greece to pay back its loans, it has been on the basis that the terms of austerity are fully adhered to.

While informing his audience that SYRIZA supported, “a plan for human emancipation”, whatever that might mean, Tsipras was quick to stress, “But we are no utopians. We know that in order to change the situation we need to be both idealists and visionaries, but at the same time also brutal pragmatists”.

SYRIZA needed “to restore confidence in the ability of democracy to provide solutions for the whole population”, he continued. This would require the mobilisation of “all the social forces who have an interest in fighting corruption, cronyism, clientelism, and public sector inefficiency”.

This is a list of euphemisms favoured by the ruling elite to justify austerity, which invariably translates into attacks on workers. The mobilisation of “all social forces” means an attempt to maintain the subordination of the working class to the bourgeoisie via the upper middle class layers that have flocked to SYRIZA’s banner.

Concluding his remarks, Tsipras called on the assistance “of the European Left and of trade unions”. This appeal to the unions and the Labour Party sums up the pro-capitalist politics of SYRIZA.

Only through the active collaboration of the unions have Greece’s crisis-ridden governments been able to impose, without hindrance, five successive austerity programmes since 2010.

Tsipras was careful to stress that SYRIZA, if elected, would undertake no fundamental steps to reverse the intolerable social conditions that have been imposed in Greece. “Undoubtedly the next day will be a difficult

day for us and the Greek people”, he said. “And that is because of course we don’t have a magic wand to solve all these problems”.

In his interview with the *New Statesman*, Tsipras felt free to elaborate on SYRIZA’s right-wing orientation in more detail and without diplomatic restraint. “Our aim is for an international summit on the re-negotiation and the cancellation of the debt of peripheral European countries”, he explained. “For this, we are open to co-operation with forces outside the European left as well”.

Describing his various discussions with representatives of the ruling elite, he commented, “Through these contacts we’ve had the chance to create such alliances, for today and for tomorrow”.

He was asked by the *New Statesman*, “Is the rumour true, then, that the US is positive towards the possibility of SYRIZA coming to power?”

He replied, “The point is that the US are following a policy line radically different from that which Angela Merkel follows and enforces throughout Europe. The US have printed money, they intend to tax the rich in order to avoid the fiscal cliff”.

President Barack Obama is doing no such thing. Following its multi-trillion dollar bailout of the banks after the 2008 financial meltdown, the Obama administration has led an offensive against the working class, including the restructuring of the auto industry in which thousands of workers have lost their jobs and wages have been slashed.

He described the Labour Party, one of the British ruling elite’s two major parties, the party of Tony Blair and the Iraq War, as “one of the few parties so close to power in Europe with whom we share a lot of positions and with whom we can be in constant communication”.



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