

SYRIZA grooms itself for government power in Greece

Christoph Dreier
27 September 2014

Against the backdrop of a growing crisis of the Greek government, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) is preparing to take over government in order to enforce the European Union's austerity measures against the Greek population.

The current government coalition of the conservative New Democracy (ND) and Social Democratic PASOK has faced growing problems in imposing the privatization, layoffs and cutbacks demanded by the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Strikes and protests are commonplace and have repeatedly delayed the implementation of the planned measures.

After a number of key votes in parliament and internal disputes, the ruling coalition has just 152 deputies, down from the 179 it had following the last federal election in June 2012. This is the slimmest possible margin for a parliament consisting of 300 seats, and it is insufficient to guarantee the government's choice in the upcoming presidential election. If the government is unable to gather the support of the necessary 180 votes for its candidate in the next six months, then a new parliamentary election is inevitable.

According to polls, the likely victor in such an election is SYRIZA. In the European elections in May, the party won a four percentage lead over the ND. During the European election campaign, SYRIZA criticized the government's austerity measures and called for the withdrawal of cuts.

A government takeover by SYRIZA has long been discussed in European ruling circles as a means of maintaining the austerity course and suppressing resistance by workers. SYRIZA Chairman Alexis Tsipras has used the two years since the last federal election to meet with various European economic and government officials to assure them he will do everything in his power to keep Greece in the EU and the euro zone.

Earlier this month Tsipras was invited to the Ambrosetti

Forum in Cernobbio, Italy—an annual meeting for high-level representatives from politics and business to come together and discuss developments and strategies. Last week Pope Francis also met with Tsipras, with both men later expressing their mutual “great similarities” on a number of issues.

British business newspaper, the *Financial Times*, wrote that Tsipras's success in the European elections “have prompted Mr. Tsipras to drop his disruptive image and recast himself as Greece's prime minister in waiting.”

In fact, the SYRIZA chairman has undertaken intensive efforts to convince the Greek bourgeoisie and international finance capital that he can function much more effectively as a stabilizing factor capable of breaking the resistance of the workers than the current government.

In early September, Tsipras called for immediate elections in a speech he gave at the International Fair in Thessaloniki. He also announced that SYRIZA would open its election list to the candidates of other parties, a move regarded as an invitation to representatives of the severely depleted ranks of the ruling PASOK party and its former coalition partner, the Democratic Left (Dimar).

Tsipras combined his offer to other parties with the presentation of a new government program. Prior to the last federal election, SYRIZA had demanded the immediate termination of the country's memorandum agreement with the IMF and EU and announced the party's intention to reverse all of the austerity measures introduced in past years. These demands have now been unceremoniously junked.

It was not a question of what the party liked but what was feasible, Tsipras declared at the beginning of his speech in Thessaloniki. It was simply impossible to reverse the massive wage and pension cuts carried out at the behest of Brussels in recent years, he continued.

Instead the SYRIZA chairman announced some

minimal social improvements, particularly for the poorest layers of the population. In addition, small and medium-sized enterprises should be granted government loans. In total, Tsipras anticipates a total expenditure of nine billion euros for the measures—a fraction of the tens of billions slashed from the economy and incomes in recent years.

Even before SYRIZA has assumed governing power, the party has approved the bulk of the credit arrangements with the IMF and EU, declaring them to be in essence irreversible. This is also clear from Tsipras' plans to finance his campaign promises. Previous calls for tax increases for the rich or charges on the banks have also disappeared from his party's program.

Instead Tsipras proposes raising three billion euros by curbing tax evasion, another three billion by setting up repayment plans for tax debts and the last three billion in the form of a withdrawal from the Hellenic Financial Stability Fund (HFSF), which holds eleven billion euros for the capitalization of Greek banks. In addition, Tsipras reckons on a loan of five billion euros from the EU to finance a two-year jobs-creation program.

None of the measures proposed by SYRIZA would even begin to offset the social devastation caused by over half a decade of austerity measures. The official unemployment rate is 27 percent in Greece, with almost a third of the population living below the European poverty line.

The aim of the party is not to combat poverty. Instead, the main purpose of its policy platform is to assure the European elites that SYRIZA will limit its demands to a few cosmetic changes while accepting the general framework of the EU and IMF's budgetary demands.

Tsipras made this quite clear in both Thessaloniki and Cernobbio. As he has done on previous occasions, the SYRIZA leader explicitly defended the EU and its institutions. In an interview with the *Financial Times* he said he wanted to “negotiate at European level in an alliance of the peripheral countries” to make possible a New Deal in Europe.

Tsipras also defended the EU's finance policy which dictates terms to individual countries on budget cuts to be made. He explicitly rejected a termination of the brutal austerity diktat from Brussels. Instead, he wants to renegotiate the terms for Greek sovereign debt at a conference of the country's creditors aimed at ensuring that loan repayment is linked to economic growth in Greece. In this way, he hopes to avoid default and guarantee repayment of at least part of the country's debts.

This clear commitment to the EU and the austerity

measures it demands renders all other points of the party's program irrelevant. At every opportunity, EU representatives have made clear they will not accept a deviation from their budgetary targets. Emissaries of the troika (the IMF, European Commission, and European Central Bank) are currently in Athens to ensure that the Greek government complies with their wishes in order to secure the payment of the next tranche of credits of over 1.8 billion euros.

According to reports, the troika is demanding the implementation of 250 additional savings, liberalization and privatization measures to commence in October. Should the government not comply, any new credit would be stopped, threatening the country with bankruptcy.

The development of SYRIZA into a bulwark of Greek capitalism and the EU's austerity regime is of international significance. The party was founded in 2004 as a coalition of various Stalinist, Maoist and pseudo-left groups that defended the EU from the outset. It represents the social interests of a relatively affluent section of the middle class.

Prior to the euro crisis and the subsequent barbaric social attacks, the party never exceeded single-digit results in national elections. As a result of the austerity policies, Greece has been rocked by a series of violent social protests, and SYRIZA has been systematically built up as the country's new official opposition. The aim is to defend the EU and its institutions against growing popular opposition.

Now the party is directly preparing for the next round of social attacks and for taking power as a defender of the capitalist state. This is not just a declaration of bankruptcy for SYRIZA, but also for the countless pseudo-left organizations around the world that held up SYRIZA as a political model.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact