France’s Left Party applauds Syriza’s imposition of EU austerity

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The Left Party (Parti de Gauche, PG) of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France is hailing the capitulation of Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to the euro zone summit’s demands for deep austerity last weekend. Passing over the content of Tsipras’ policies in silence, Mélenchon hails Syriza as an exemplar of resistance to the dictates of the European Union (EU).

On Monday, after Tsipras agreed to the sweeping measures dictated by Berlin, Mélenchon issued a communiqué entitled “A gun pointed at its head.” The press release says, “The government of Alexis Tsipras has resisted like none other in Europe. It is therefore accepting an armistice in the war waged against it. We condemn this war, those waging it, and their objectives. We condemn the sacrifices being demanded of the Greeks and the violence imposed upon them.”

Mélenchon’s claim that Tsipras opposes austerity is a political lie. While claiming to disapprove of EU austerity measures, Tsipras is nonetheless imposing them on a hostile Greek population. The measures include slashing pensions and wages, so-called labour “reforms,” raising VAT (sales taxes) and transferring state property to a private fund, effectively transforming Greece into a deeply exploited, semi-colonial dependency of the EU.

Tsipras’ policy is a naked betrayal of the working class, repudiating its election pledges to end EU austerity, as well as the results of the July 5 referendum on EU austerity that Syriza itself called, and which resulted in a landslide 61 percent “no” vote.

Mélenchon pledged to support and assist the Greek leader: “We support Alexis Tsipras and his struggle to permit the resistance of the Greek people. We know that the best weapon of Greece would be the victory of Podemos in Spain and of ourselves in France. We are working at it!”

In fact, Mélenchon’s defense of Syriza and its austerity policies exposes the reactionary character of all the pseudo-left organisations, including the PG, which function as instruments of the EU to attack the working class. By supporting Syriza’s policies, Mélenchon is signaling that he would carry out similar policies in France, if his party were to come to power.

On July 6, a PG editorial headlined “Widening the Greek victory” declared, “By massively voting no to European austerity, the Greek people has widened enormously the space of disobedience created in Europe by Alexis Tsipras…This broadening of the popular will and this acceleration of history show the revolutionary character of the process taking place in Athens.”

The PG hailed Tsipras’s call for the referendum as “a lesson of democracy for all Europe.” It applauded Tsipras, claiming that he “is respecting his pledges to respect popular sovereignty…. Unlike the previous right-wing government, he is showing that it is not written in the stars that one must submit without resistance to the austerity diktat imposed by the Troika.”

The warning made by the WSWS prior to the July 5 vote was fully borne out by events: “The referendum has been set up to create the conditions for a vote for austerity, giving a pseudo-democratic veneer to the escalating assault on the Greek working class. While there is widespread hatred of the years of brutal austerity, both Syriza and the EU have done everything they can to confuse and demobilize popular opposition.”

Various Syriza officials have since confirmed to the press that they assumed they would obtain a “yes” vote in the referendum, allowing them to hand over the power to a new government to implement the EU attacks. Stunned by the landslide “no” vote, however,

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Syriza responded to the overwhelming popular repudiation of the austerity by moving further to the right.

On the night of July 5, Tsipras declared, “This is not a mandate for rupture with Europe, but a mandate that bolsters our negotiating strength to achieve a viable deal.” Four days after the referendum, Tsipras trampled on the results of the referendum, surrendered to the EU and proposed a €13 billion [US$14.1 billion] raft of austerity measures in return for EU bailout funds.

As the talks between euro zone member states began, the PG supported Tsipras’ package of cuts and launched a propaganda campaign intended to create confusion and defuse popular opposition to austerity.

PG political coordinator Eric Coquerel saluted Tsipras’ betrayal, trying to give the latter political cover by criticizing the German government’s refusal to endorse Tsipras’ package without demanding further cuts. Coquerel wrote, “Now it’s enough! Greece’s future and that of the other European peoples cannot depend on the goodwill of the German right.”

Endorsing Syriza’s deep austerity, Coquerel wrote, “Now more than ever we are affirming our solidarity with Greece. The Tsipras government’s plan and the restructuring of Greece’s debt must be approved in their current form.”

The PG’s verbal denunciations of Berlin were empty demagogy rooted in the party’s reactionary anti-German chauvinism. When Tsipras then capitulated to the German government’s demands for even more austerity last weekend, imposing a series of measures transforming Greece into a financial colony of the EU, Mélenchon reacted, as noted above, by hailing him as an icon of “resistance.”

Syriza’s emergence as a tool of EU austerity, supported by the PG, is a fundamental political experience of the working class in Europe and internationally. It highlights the gulf separating the pseudo-left parliamentarians of Syriza and the PG from a Marxist opposition to the EU based on the interests of the working class.

A former member of the Organisation communiste internationaliste (OCI) who joined the Socialist Party (Parti socialiste, PS) in the 1970s, Mélenchon helped organize attacks on the working class carried out by PS President François Mitterrand in the 1980s and 1990s. He was a minister in the Plural Left government of PS Prime Minister Lionel Jospin between 1997 and 2002. After founding the PG in 2009, he called for a vote for President François Hollande—now widely hated for his policies of austerity and war—in the second round of the 2012 presidential election.

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