

French president applauds Syriza's austerity measures before Greek parliament

Alex Lantier

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On Friday, French President François Hollande wrapped up a two-day visit to Athens to applaud the reelection of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Syriza (the “Coalition of the Radical Left”), who campaigned on a pro-austerity platform in last month’s elections. Hollande was accompanied by several French CEOs hoping to buy Greek state assets on the cheap under the terms of the European Union (EU) austerity bailout Syriza negotiated in July.

The praise lavished on Syriza by Hollande, whose government is unpopular among workers in France for its own reactionary austerity policies, is yet another benchmark in Syriza’s emergence as a tool of Greek and international finance capital.

Still at record lows in polls at home, Hollande sought to extract maximum political advantage from the visit. He met Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos, who thanked him “infinitely” for his help in the bailout talks, where the Socialist Party (PS) president opposed proposals to expel Greece from the euro zone. While this did bring Hollande into conflict with a section of EU officials around German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, his role was entirely reactionary: the French Finance Ministry prepared the first draft of a set of devastating austerity policies that were imposed on Greece in July.

Behind empty clichés about France as a force for “resistance” in Europe, Hollande was cynically applauding Tsipras for his attacks on the working class and for allowing the ruling elite to continue imposing austerity not only in Greece, but in France and across the EU.

Speaking to the Greek parliament, Hollande declared: “Coming here to Athens for a president of the French Republic, to the country where human rights were born, where the French Revolution brought hope well beyond

what were then its borders, also means saluting the lesson in democracy you have given us in recent months. That lesson is one of a country attached to its dignity.”

“Democracy,” Hollande added, “is giving the people the right to choose in all clearness of mind, with responsibility and will power.”

Who does Hollande think he is kidding? What Syriza gave the world is an example not of democracy, but how to deceive and trample the will of the people. Elected in January on a platform of ending EU austerity, it instead negotiated further austerity deals. In the face of an overwhelming “no” vote in a referendum on austerity it organized in July in a failed attempt to get a popular mandate for austerity, it proceeded to trample that vote as well, imposing a further EU bailout overseen by Berlin and Paris.

Hollande’s effort to compare such political crimes to the French Revolution or to the birth of democratic conceptions in ancient Greece is a foul travesty.

“I know that such reforms are difficult; we are all carrying them out, including in France, in the interest of preserving the future,” Hollande said. “These reforms are necessary, not only in order to re-stabilize our budgets, but to guarantee the future of the youth, of industry, of competitiveness, of public services.”

The truth, as workers across Europe sense, is entirely different. Cuts to social spending, jobs, and investment have condemned millions of youth to unemployment, deindustrialized vast regions and devastated public services in Greece, in France and across Europe.

As the disastrous implications of such policies become ever more evident, Hollande and Syriza have been working together closely to prevent the eruption of mass opposition in the European working class.

No ruling elite in Europe is more concerned about

this than that of France. At the end of last year, shortly before the Greek electorate went to the polls to elect Syriza and say ‘no’ to austerity, a poll came out in France showing that Hollande’s economic policy had only 3 percent approval. The French ruling elite was terrified of a sudden mass eruption of social struggles in the working class. After this year’s violent workers protests at Air France, former President Nicolas Sarkozy warned of a “disintegration” of the state and alluded to the French general strike of May 1968.

Syriza categorically rejected any appeal to the working class across Europe to mount protests against austerity in solidarity with Greece, or to bring down antidemocratic governments like that of Hollande. Syriza was hostile to mobilizing the only social force—that is, the international working class—with an interest in halting the EU’s austerity drive.

Instead, it went straight into talks with the EU, signaling to the banks and major European governments that it would take whatever deal they gave Syriza in order to avoid being thrown out of the euro currency zone. This paved the way for Syriza to surrender to the EU and continue imposing the EU austerity diktat desired by the ruling class in Greece and internationally. In so doing, it was blocking a struggle against austerity not only in Greece, but in France and internationally.

The entire experience points to the reactionary role of pseudo-left parties of the affluent middle class such as Syriza or the various political satellites of the PS in France to which Syriza is affiliated, such as the Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

When Syriza came to power in January, Hollande’s government knew that Syriza would not embark on a revolutionary policy. However, it was concerned that French workers not see the election of Tsipras as a turning point and the beginning of a broader, international fightback against austerity in coordination with other parties in France or elsewhere in Europe.

As Tsipras arrived in Paris for a state visit on February 4, Hollande administration officials let it be known that Tsipras was not authorized to meet publicly with officials of any other party besides Hollande’s Socialist Party.

“One doesn’t enter into dialog with opposition parties,” a PS official told *Le Monde*. “If you meet someone, you legitimize them. If we had met with

Tsipras two years ago, the Greek government at the time would have been very angry. And if Tsipras did that to us now, we would be very angry.”

Unsurprisingly, both Tsipras and Mélenchon tucked their tails between their legs and obeyed the PS’s orders not to hold a public meeting.



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