

UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn hails Alexis Tsipras of Syriza

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Last week, Greek Prime Minister and Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) leader Alexis Tsipras visited the UK. He met Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May and was received warmly by an audience in the Guildhall in the City of London consisting of what the Greek Embassy in London described as “key representatives of the financial sector”. Tsipras called on his audience to invest in the Greek economy to reap vast financial rewards.

His most enthusiastic welcome, however, was afforded by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who tweeted of their June 26 meeting, “It was good to meet Greece’s Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras today to talk about Brexit, the fight against austerity, and the crucial importance of international solidarity in our time. Governments can and must work together to support refugees fleeing war and devastation.”

Just who does Corbyn think he is fooling? What “fight against austerity” and support for refugees is he talking about?

If he were honest, Corbyn would have said that he discussed Syriza’s fight to *impose* austerity.

It was only weeks after coming to power in January 2015 that Tsipras junked Syriza’s promises to oppose austerity and agreed with the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund to enforce slash-and-burn policies that have pauperised millions of workers and youth.

After signing an agreement to extend EU austerity in February 2015, Syriza trampled the landslide “no” vote against the measures in the July referendum and rammed even worse attacks through parliament.

After three and a half years of Syriza’s rule, salaries have fallen by an average of 15 percent. Out of 4.1 million households, nearly 800,000 live in poverty. More than one in three Greeks (34.8 percent) are

threatened by poverty or social exclusion. Nearly four fifths (78 percent) are not able to shoulder unexpected expenses of €475. One in five are unemployed, with employment still over 40 percent for young people. Historically, many families in Greece rely on pensions that have been slashed 14 times in eight years, with an average decrease of 50 percent. Syriza has imposed its own pension cuts that will continue over the next years.

Syriza enforced these measures through the police baton and tear gas, and has carried out anti-strike legislation by overturning a law first enacted in 1982, in the aftermath of the fall of the fascist junta in 1974.

Only the week before his talks with Corbyn, Tsipras adopted another comprehensive austerity package to meet the demands of the EU and global financial institutions.

These include a €700 million tax cuts package for businesses, while the tax rate on profits will be reduced from 29 percent to 26 percent. The reduction in the highest income tax bracket for individual taxpayers will result in a €877 million tax break for 2020, and €997 million in tax breaks for 2021 and 2022.

An official report of the meeting between the two leaders noted that Corbyn thanked Tsipras “in particular on Greece’s contribution to the refugee issue. The Labour Party leader compared it to other European countries which have not contributed to the issue but have, as he said, “reinforced xenophobia and racism instead.”

This too is a pack of lies. Syriza and its right-wing coalition partner, the Independent Greeks, have extended the inhumane immigration policy of previous governments. The repression meted out against refugees and asylum seekers is as savage as that of any right-wing and far-right government in Europe. In agreement with the EU and Turkey in 2016, Syriza

pioneered the “hotspot” immigration detention camps that are now to be the model for similar concentration camps to detain immigrants in Germany and across Europe.

By May 2017, Syriza had overseen camps detaining 62,000 refugees. The Moria camp on Lesbos alone detains 7,500 immigrants who are caged in by fences covered in barbed wire. Looking over the camp in watchtowers are armed guards.

Corbyn apparently considers this a positive contribution to “the refugee issue”! He would, as the Labour leader has made clear, accept the end to free movement in Europe. The party’s manifesto at the last general election confirmed this will cease after Britain exits the EU, with Corbyn stating that a Labour government will impose “managed migration.” This can only be enforced through stringent border controls of the kind now being brought forward by the EU.

The Labour leader was promoting Syriza long before it came into office. In 2012, in a two-day trip to Athens, he met and spoke alongside Tsipras and tweeted, “A Syriza victory will open the way for an alternative to Bankers Europe. Impressed by their support when I was there. Hoping!”

The entire pseudo-left internationally joined Corbyn in promoting Syriza-type movements as the way forward for workers internationally.

Syriza reciprocated, publishing a statement in 2015 reading, “The election of Corbyn to the Labour leadership ... is a significant boost to the pan-European front against austerity and sends a message of hope to European peoples.”

Tsipras was invited for the first time in March 2016 to attend a conference of the Party of European Socialists, comprising leaders of the social democratic parties in Europe. This was in recognition for his services rendered to the EU in imposing austerity by politicians who have all carried out similar policies in government on their own countries.

Last October, the ANA/N news agency reported on a conversation between Corbyn and Tsipras at another conference of the Party of European Socialists in Brussels: “Nice to see you. We’re very proud of what you have accomplished,” Tsipras told Corbyn. “We are following your example. I believe we will succeed soon,” Corbyn responded. Tsipras tweeted a photo of them together and the wording, “With Jeremy Corbyn,

friend and ally in the battle for progressive and radical changes in favour of the people of Europe.”

In his July 2015 leadership election campaign, Corbyn cited the example of PASOK, Greece’s social democratic party that had been wiped out as an electoral force, after having imposed the first raft of austerity measures in government from 2009 to 2012: “I have been in Greece, I have been in Spain. ... It’s very interesting that social democratic parties that accept the austerity agenda and end up implementing it end up losing a lot of members and a lot of support. I think we have a chance to do something different here.”

Today, Tsipras heads a right-wing monstrosity of a government that is despised by millions of workers and youth in Greece. Yet nothing has changed regarding Corbyn’s attitude to this scoundrel.

What Syriza has done in the service of capital only prefigures what a Corbyn government would do in office. In fact, given the existential crisis facing British imperialism over Brexit, the only difference for Labour in following Syriza’s “example” is that it would be even more vicious and violent against the working class.

The International Committee of the Fourth international, the world Trotskyist movement, was alone in seeking to alert workers and youth as to the pro-capitalist programme of Syriza while explaining the necessity of building a genuinely socialist alternative.

Following his election as Labour leader, as the pseudo-left groups hailed Corbyn as the latest “saviour of the left” after Syriza’s exposure, the Socialist Equality Party warned that he heads a right-wing, pro-capitalist party, insisting that “Should Corbyn come to power, he will play exactly the same role as Tsipras in Greece.”

Corbyn’s meeting with Tsipras to rubber-stamp Syriza’s brutal attacks on the working class and refugees vindicates our assessment.



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