

Greek pseudo-left leader Tsipras auditions for State Department, IMF

By Bill Van Auken
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With Greece in deepening crisis, Alexis Tsipras, leader of the SYRIZA (Radical Left Coalition) opposition party, came to the US this week to hold closed-door meetings with State Department and IMF officials and make a series of public appearances.

While the Greek government of Prime Minister Antonis Samaras was employing police-state methods to break a strike by subway workers, Tsipras used his trip to tell US and IMF officials that they have nothing to fear should he come to power.

The latest polls show SYRIZA and the leading party in the existing conservative-social democratic coalition government, New Democracy, in a virtual dead heat. With 27 percent of the vote in the last election, SYRIZA constitutes the main opposition party, and with popular anger growing over unending austerity measures and mass unemployment, there is a real possibility that it could place first in coming elections.

Tsipras used his American tour to reassure the US ruling establishment that if that happens it can count on him and SYRIZA to serve as pillars of capitalist stability, working to suppress the revolutionary strivings of the Greek working class.

“I hope I’ve convinced you that I’m not as dangerous as some people think I am,” Tsipras declared ingratiatingly to an audience in Washington assembled by the Brookings Institution think tank.

On Wednesday, Tsipras held talks at the State Department with US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Eric Rubin, who is responsible for issues related to Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and the Caucasus, as well as Christopher Smart, the Treasury Department’s deputy assistant secretary for Europe and Eurasia.

And on Thursday, the SYRIZA leader paid a visit to the International Monetary Fund headquarters, meeting there with its number two man, David Lipton, the

agency’s first deputy managing director.

Following Tsipras’ meeting at the IMF, the agency released a terse statement acknowledging that Lipton and the SYRIZA leader “had a constructive and sincere discussion on the economic challenges that Greece is facing.”

The State Department has yet to issue any statement on its meeting with Tsipras.

For its part, SYRIZA claimed that, while there were “agreements and disagreements,” the meeting at the State Department revealed a “common assessment” that continuing austerity was not the answer to the Greek economic crisis. The party said that Tsipras assured US officials that he believed Greece had “an important role” to play in assuring international stability and would pursue a foreign policy based on “persistence and consistency.” In other remarks, Tsipras upheld Greece’s commitment to NATO.

Tsipras addressed several audiences while in the US. His most significant speech, delivered Tuesday in Washington at the Brookings Institution, was clearly directed to the American ruling establishment. (The full transcript can be found [here](#)).

“Is there really a reason for somebody to be afraid of the left in Greece today?” Tsipras asked the audience midway through his remarks on Tuesday. “I heard the person who spoke before me saying that I represent the radical left [the English translation of his party’s name] ... But how are we really radical? Those who engage in scare-mongering will tell you that our party will come to power, rip up our agreements with the European Union and the IMF, take our country out of the euro zone, break off all of Greece’s ties with the cultured—with the civilized West, and then turn Greece into a new North Korea.”

He assured his listeners that SYRIZA’s “goal is to

save the country and keep the country in the euro zone.”

His principal proposal, which he referred to repeatedly in his remarks, was a so-called “haircut” for Greece’s public creditors, principally the European Central Bank (ECB) and euro zone countries, similar to the debt forgiveness imposed upon banks and private lenders in October 2011, which cut in half the amount promised in interest on Greek debt.

Tsipras’ remarks made it clear that SYRIZA has no intention of repudiating Greek debt or ripping up the memorandum of understanding on austerity measures between Athens and the so-called troika (the European Commission, the IMF and the European Central Bank), but rather merely wants to renegotiate the terms.

Tsipras was asked by one member of the audience why the Greek people should expect anything different from SYRIZA than from Prime Minister Samaras “who was initially opposed to the memorandum and now supports it.”

“We have become used to the fact of seeing politicians that say one thing ... before they get elected and another thing once they come to power,” he replied. “As you see, we only say things that we believe and that we are going to try to implement. We’re not saying anything that’s crazy.”

In point of fact, SYRIZA won 27 percent of the vote last year based on its promise to reverse all previous cuts made by the Greek government and tear up the memorandum. As Tsipras’ comments in Washington made clear, it has no intention of doing anything of the kind. The anti-cuts rhetoric is meant merely to divert the anger of the Greek workers into harmless channels.

Within the Washington establishment, there were expressions of approval for Tsipras’ performance in the US, which was greeted as a further turn to the right by SYRIZA.

"This trip shows the ongoing evolution of his political profile towards more of a social democrat," Domenico Lombardi, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute and former representative for Italy to the IMF's executive board told the *Wall Street Journal*. Lombardi, the *Journal* reported, said that Tsipras's American tour “highlights SYRIZA's shift to a more balanced, politically mature position that could garner further backing in Greece and is more palatable overseas.”

An article posted on the Brookings Institution web site similarly declared: “In a country where leftists have historically been incendiary, prone to violence, and aggressively anti-American, Mr. Tsipras came across as genial, courteous, pragmatic and eager to hear American views ... He spoke warmly about President Obama’s inaugural calls for social justice.”

Indeed, in his speech Tuesday, he praised the policies of the Obama administration and the US Federal Reserve Board, while giving a rosy assessment of social conditions within the US.

“One of the things that I notice these past two days that I’ve been in the United States ... is that America is a country that does not find itself in a state of depression as Greece is,” he said. “I have not seen any closed shops. I haven’t seen any sad faces. I haven’t seen any signs of hopelessness everywhere. America avoided misery after 2008.”

In his presentation at Columbia University in New York City on Thursday night, Tsipras presented only a slightly more “left” face, attempting to enlist the support of his audience by stressing the growth of fascist forces in Greece organized in the ultra-right Golden Dawn (Chryssi Avghi) party.

He called upon his audience to join with SYRIZA in seeking “to erect a firewall of democracy over fascism and neo-Nazism.”

The political reality is that the double talk of pseudo-left elements like SYRIZA, which denounce austerity in words while supporting capitalist stability and the European Union in practice, has fueled the growth of Golden Dawn, allowing the fascists to pose as the militant opponents of the EU, the bankers and the political establishment of which SYRIZA is a part.

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