

European Left selects Tsipras as lead candidate in European elections

By Christoph Dreier
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The fourth congress of the European Left (EL) took place in Madrid last weekend. The alliance of parties discussed a joint programme for the European elections in May next year and elected Alexis Tsipras, chairman of the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), as its leading candidate.

The 25 parties which make up the EL have a long tradition of defending the bourgeois order. Almost all have Stalinist roots. In Eastern Europe, they emerged from the former state parties, which suppressed the working class for decades and subsequently reintroduced capitalism. In the West, they have betrayed every revolutionary initiative of the working class since World War II. Many were or still are participating in governments which are responsible for social attacks and war. Along with the bourgeois order and the state, they have also defended the European Union (EU) and its institutions.

With Tsipras, the European Left has selected someone who is particularly friendly towards the EU, and intends to become head of the Greek government next year. Should this happen, he has announced that Greece will remain in the EU and accept its state debt in principle. He does not intend to reject the conditions of the EU bailout that have led to an unprecedented social catastrophe in Greece, but merely to renegotiate them.

Tsipras made clear his determination to adhere to the EU's austerity dictates in an interview with the Euractiv website shortly after his nomination. In it, he offered European Social Democratic parties the possibility of cooperation. These parties would have to decide if they wished to continue in coalitions with the conservatives, he said, or if they would "change political direction and work for an alliance with the radical left."

The Social Democrats have played a leading role in the implementation of the EU's austerity measures. In Greece, the social democratic PASOK has imposed the austerity dictates on the population with extreme brutality. In Germany, the social democrats (SPD) have signed a coalition agreement with Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) which baldly states, "The policy of budgetary consolidation must be maintained."

By offering to cooperate with these parties, Tsipras is making it unmistakably clear where he stands: in the camp of the EU, banks, and corporations, which are forcing workers across Europe into poverty.

The congress sought to cover up these policies somewhat. The vast majority of the debates and resolutions discussed proposed reforms which the delegates knew could not be realised within the framework of the EU, and which they will quickly abandon as soon as they go into government in any country.

In his speech to the congress, Tsipras listed various suggestions for reform which would allegedly make the EU more "humane." These included the introduction of a separation between commercial and investment banking, the provision of direct loans to the member states from the European Central Bank, as well as the elimination of tax havens. Tsipras intends to organise a debt write-down for the countries of southern Europe at a "European debt conference," and ensure that the rest of the loans would be repaid.

The platform adopted by the delegates contained similar points which were even more vague. Demands included a "citizens' audit" of debt and the annulment of "illegitimate debt," as well as its "restructuring."

Elements of democratic "control over finance," it declared, had to be "re-established."

These demands implicitly recognise the EU and its bailout regime. The European Left are not concerned with breaking the austerity dictates from Brussels, but rather with presenting the EU's institutions as being capable of reform and potentially becoming less hostile to the social rights of the working class.

In reality, millions of workers across the continent have experienced the true character of the EU. The EU has organised social attacks on an historic scale in Ireland, Greece and other countries in southern and eastern Europe. In Greece, wages have been cut by 40 percent and thousands of jobs destroyed. Throughout Europe, the EU is the main instrument to enforce deregulation, privatisation, and low wages.

The EU has also intensified the national conflicts within Europe, not reduced them, and encouraged the growth of fascist forces. The European powers have participated in every military operation by NATO in the past 20 years. From the beginning, the EU and its predecessor organisations were tools of the continent's most powerful capitalist interests.

In the face of this record and of growing popular anger over the EU's social cuts, it is increasingly difficult for the EL to cover for the EU.

In order to contain this social opposition, the conference sought to criticise the EU more strongly than previously. Along with the platform, the delegates adopted a "political document," that is not binding on the individual member parties, however.

In it they declare, for example, that "the economic-institutional architecture of the EU was created exclusively to protect the interests of big capital." Therefore, a "new founding of Europe" was necessary, and a "new definition of its aims, policies and structures." Finally, they even stated, "capitalism cannot be humanised."

But no conclusions were drawn from this, however. The "political document" did not call for the dissolution of the EU, but only further debt conferences and a somewhat different policy from the ECB.

In relation to foreign policy, the trigger for a future war was provided. The document said, "The EU could be a strong ally of all peoples struggling for self-determination." The divided Cyprus was then cited as an example, which the European Left wants to unify under the Greek bourgeoisie. The EU should put pressure on Turkey, which had illegally occupied the

north since 1974, it stated in the political document.

Furthermore, the EU could secure peace internationally "by ensuring compliance with international law." Every imperialist war over recent years, from Afghanistan to Iraq, Libya and Syria have been justified with such arguments.

Regardless of its name, the European Left is a collection of right-wing parties with a long history of suppressing the independent strivings of the working class.

Members from eastern Europe—the Czech Party of Democratic Socialism (SDS), the Romanian Socialist Alliance Party (PAS) or the Moldovan Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM)—all have their origins in the Stalinist state parties. Today they have no qualms about allying with the most right-wing elements.

When a WSWS correspondent asked the chairman of the PAS about their joint demonstrations with fascists, he answered, "I'm glad that they think like us."

In western Europe, the French Communist Party (PCF) has a decades-long history of supporting for the bourgeois state. They betrayed the general strike of 1936, joined the De Gaulle government in 1945 and disarmed the resistance, organised the sell-out of the general strike in 1968 and ultimately served as loyal partners in government under Mitterrand and Jospin.

The Greek SYRIZA emerged from the Eurocommunist wing of Stalinism. In 1992, they supported the Maastricht treaty and have been fervent promoters of the EU ever since. The Danish Red-Green Alliance supports the Thorning-Schmidt government, which locked out 70,000 teachers in April this year.

All of these tendencies are united in the German Left Party. In the state governments in which it took part, the Left Party stood out for its extreme ruthlessness towards the social rights of the working class.

Last weekend's congress was an attempt to conceal such reactionary politics with left phrases, and to provide the EU with renewed legitimacy.

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