

Greece's SYRIZA steps up its overtures to big business

By Robert Stevens
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SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) is openly turning to the right as it prepares to take over the reins of power in Greece, following the next general election.

In May's European elections, SYRIZA emerged as the strongest party, winning 26.6 percent of the vote. While not winning the concurrent local elections outright, it won in the Attica region where over a third of the Greek population lives. In the capital, Athens, it finished a close second.

SYRIZA has previously pledged that if it took power, it would pay off the vast majority of Greece's €300 billion debt via a "renegotiation" with the European Union (EU), European Central Bank-led "troika". This admission exposed its threadbare pose as the only political force that could reverse the austerity that has devastated Greece.

Since the European elections, the party has made a number of significant overtures to big business, which is demanding the removal of any remaining obstacles to the unfettered exploitation of the working class.

At the end of May, SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras, as the leader of the parliamentary opposition, addressed the annual conference of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV). He has addressed the event before, but this time also had dinner with the assembled capitalists and bankers.

Commenting on the SYRIZA leader being welcomed and indulged by SEV, *Eleftherotypia* wrote, Alexis Tsipras is fashioning the image of a "business-friendly statesman."

Tsipras called on the SEV to "cooperate with sincerity and develop a functional institutional relationship" with SYRIZA. SEV and SYRIZA should create "a new social deal for a new Greece," he said. Central to SYRIZA's proposed renegotiation with the

troika would be the "external, non-loan financing of businesses," he said.

A SYRIZA government, said Tsipras, would not renationalise all the state assets that have been privatised by the New Democracy/PASOK coalition over the last five years.

Tsipras is always careful to make sure he throws in a few populist statements, so he told the Greek capitalists he favoured opposing government policies to lift restrictions on mass lay-offs and wanted to prevent a further reduction of the minimum wage.

He claimed this could be done within the framework of support for the EU, telling the SEV that SYRIZA supports a new labour relations system that would be compatible with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The truth is that this legislation has proved to be compatible with the impoverishment of millions of workers over the last six years, with 25 million people now officially unemployed across the continent.

SYRIZA has developed a series of pro-business policies in recent months, including reducing the cost of energy for industries, as well as supporting entrepreneurs. Tsipras stressed that he was in favour of energy tax breaks for business.

It is within this context of implementing, "a more favourable pricing policy toward businesses that truly produce" that SYRIZA opposes the proposed part-privatisation of the Greek Public Power Corporation.

Demonstrating how keen SYRIZA are to remove all burdens from big business, party spokesman Panos Skourletis elaborated: "Labour costs have fallen greatly, and energy is the main cost that makes Greek production expensive. It is a joke to speak of an outward-looking economy, and businesses with a focus on exports that can compete in the EU framework, with

such high energy costs.”

In a country which has seen the greatest fall in wages and living standards ever seen in a European country during peacetime, these comments define SYRIZA as a party which defends the interests of capitalism.

The MacroPolis web site recently examined data revealing that long-term unemployment is “the most devastating factor in Greece’s labour market.” It noted, “In the first quarter of this year, just under 1 million Greeks (958,700) were out of employment for more than a year. This represents over 71 percent of all those without work.”

“Greeks available for employment but not looking for a job has almost doubled from less than 40,000 in 2008 to just under 100,000 in the first quarter of this year,” it added.

Tsipras’ message was well received, with outgoing SEV president Dimitris Daskalopoulos declaring: “The Left and the modern business class must come to an agreement for the recovery of domestic production.”

SYRIZA’s new bedfellows are calling for yet further austerity for the masses. Tsipras’ call for a partnership with business comes just a few months after SEV called for an ending to all regulations they deem to have “suffocated” private firms for decades.

In February SEV published a report stating that over a 30 year period 171,500 laws, decrees or ordinance have been legislated in Greece preventing the untrammelled operation of capital. The SEV classified each regulation on a 1-5 scale, on the basis of their interpretation of how much it was an obstacle to businesses.

The report recommended the outsourcing of further state functions to the private sector and the recruitment of managers with a private sector background into the public sector. Incoming SEV Chairman Theodore Fessas—after warning that “Unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, and the loss of hope are all threatening the very foundations of our society”—then stated: “We cannot put off completing the reforms. We should not waver in this.”

SYRIZA is working overtime in pursuit of alliances with various organizations from across the political spectrum. As well welcoming representatives from the remnants of the collapsed right-wing social democratic PASOK party into its ranks, SYRIZA has issued entreaties to work with the recently formed populist

Potami (the , and Rivers) representative founding congress last weekend.

SYRIZA has also developed a working relationship with the right-wing Independent Greeks. SYRIZA secretary Dimitris Vitsas said of these moves, “We have clarified that, even if SYRIZA achieves a clear parliamentary majority, we will seek broader social and political alliances.”

Following his meeting with the SEV, Tsipras, along with SYRIZA’s head of economic policy Yiannis Dragasakis, visited European Central Bank President Mario Draghi on June 10 in Frankfurt.

To Vima wrote that cordial talks between Tsipras and Draghi were “indicative of how the powerful financial centres of Europe are starting to treat Mr. Tsipras differently. SYRIZA president is not treated anymore as a systemic and sworn enemy, but as a radical politician working within a European framework.”

SYRIZA has been incessantly hailed by pseudo-left groups in Europe and globally. Lionising Tsipras, they called for the formation of similar organisations everywhere. Even now as SYRIZA rushes to cast off what remains of its previous radical garb, the pseudo-left still peddle this lie.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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