

Macron goes to Greece: “Radical left” Tsipras welcomes ex-banker turned French president

By Alex Lantier
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Emmanuel Macron traveled last week to Greece to hail the austerity measures imposed by the Syriza (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) government, and to discuss the future of the European Union.

The visit to Greece clearly shows what Macron has in store for the French working class. After the German general election on September 24, Berlin and Paris intend to use the EU to impose the liquidation of the social rights acquired by the working class in France and in Europe during the 20th century. In their assault on the working class, the financial aristocracy intends to use the petty-bourgeois “radical left” as a key political tool.

The cordial meeting between the ex-banker Macron and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras also unmask the nominal opposition of the French pseudo-left to Macron. Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), which claim to oppose Macron, hailed the coming to power of Tsipras. If they took power under Macron, as Mélenchon has proposed to do, their class line would not be significantly different from that of Tsipras.

At his first meeting with Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos, Macron applauded the EU austerity diktat in Greece: “I wish here to salute the reforms that your governments have conducted, and I will have the opportunity very shortly to have an exchange with Prime Minister Tsipras on this topic. But these reforms must go hand-in-hand with a collective engagement that must continue to allow the rewriting of your country’s debt.”

Macron hailed the “courage” that Syriza and the Greek ruling class showed in imposing austerity on the Greek people: “The resistance you showed, the courage you had to carry out several reforms, the will not to forget your principles, this will that you, your

government and your prime minister always showed to keep Greece in Europe while around you many extremists were pressing you to leave it, it obliges us to have even more ambition for this Europe that we continue to hold dear.”

In fact, the only “courage” possessed by Tsipras and Syriza was to repudiate pledges to oppose austerity measures, and to slavishly carry out the demands of the banks, hoping the army and the riot police would protect them from the anger of the masses.

The cumulative impact of cuts to pensions and minimum wage by a series of Greek governments since 2008 has been a 40 percent average fall in pensions and wages. Bankruptcies and layoffs by small businesses and a wave of mass sackings in the public-sector workforce have led to 25 percent unemployment rate (60 percent among youth).

Athens and the EU used the social catastrophe they were creating—Greek GDP fell by a quarter, as in the worst-hit countries of the 1930s Depression—to tear up workers’ basic social rights. Among the attacks was a cut of the minimum pension to a miserly €382 per month and the elimination of public health care for the unemployed.

Syriza was elected in January 2015 based on false promises to end EU austerity that it swiftly repudiated. It even organized a referendum on austerity in July 25, hoping to obtain a “yes” vote that would allow it to resign, blaming the population for supporting the EU. Faced with a crushing 62 percent “no” vote, largely from workers, Syriza trampled public opinion and imposed the single largest package of austerity measures since the beginning of the crisis.

Like Mélenchon and the NPA in France today, Tsipras refused to call on European workers to defend workers in his country against austerity. As the WSWS

had warned, Syriza's rejection of the sole viable strategy for opposition to the EU stemmed from its essential approval, shared by its allies across the EU, of the EU's reactionary social program.

Macron traveled to Greece not only to legitimize attacks on the working class, but also to advance the strategic and commercial interests of French and European imperialism. His visit was closely tied to the rising danger of global war. As divisions mount between Washington and Berlin following Trump's election, and war risks erupting between the United States, China, and Russia over Korea, Greece is becoming a battleground in a struggle for influence between the major powers.

"In order not to be ruled by bigger powers such as the Chinese and the Americans, I believe in a European sovereignty that allows us to defend ourselves and exist," Macron said in a subsequent speech on the Pnyx hill near the Parthenon in Athens.

As with his domestic policy, Macron's foreign policy is filthy reaction all down the line. He promised to push for the EU to help Tsipras keep refugees from fleeing NATO's Middle East wars to Greece: "We need, for this reason, to advance a permanent planned cooperation that allows us to protect ourselves from major migrations that your country was confronted with in recent years."

The EU's main refugee policy has been to deny their right to asylum and limit rescue operations in the Mediterranean, leading to thousands of drowning deaths, while stepping up naval patrols in the region.

Moreover, Macron briefly alluded to conflicts inside the EU provoked by the Greek crisis, saying, "Our euro zone must give up a sort of internal civil war over minor differences." He then proposed financial policies long opposed by Berlin. He not only proposed to restructure Greece's debts, but also to keep the IMF from playing a role in formulating the austerity policies imposed on Greece.

What is at stake are not differences over austerity, as the EU's policies are as brutal as those of the IMF, but explosive inter-imperialist rivalries. As Washington and the EU are ever more openly in conflict, Macron intends to limit the influence of the IMF, which is headquartered in Washington, while demanding financial concessions from Berlin on Greece in exchange for French support against the United States.

On his trip, Macron brought in his retinue a large delegation of CEOs and top management of French big business. Among the companies represented was port operator Terminal-Link, which is participating in negotiations on privatizing the port of Thessaloniki. There are growing rivalries with China, whose shipping company COSCO has acquired a majority stake in the Piraeus port in Athens and wants to make it a major node in the Chinese regime's "One Belt, One Road" infrastructure network connecting China to Europe.

The *New York Times* cited Greek commentator Coostas Iordanidis as saying that Athens hopes that Macron will reaffirm his support for Greece's position in the EU and pressure French investors to "counterbalance" German and Chinese investment in Greece.

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