

# Meeting with Alexis Tsipras - leader of Syriza

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The Greece Solidarity Campaign's recent delegation to Athens met with ALEXIS TSIPRAS MP, Leader of SYRIZA and President of Synaspismos. The delegation meeting him included national representatives from UNITE, CWU, FBU and TSSA, together with Paul Mackney, Chair of the Greece Solidarity Campaign.

## **The impact of austerity**

Alexis Tsipras described as 'catastrophic' the impact of austerity on Greek society, describing public hospitals on the brink of collapse with a shortage of medical supplies, and there were no new books at the start of the school year, so parents were forced to photocopy old ones. He said 'it's only a matter of time before the next social explosion'.

Mr Tsipras told the delegation that if austerity is the 'prescription' to cure the economic crisis, it is 'the medicine of disaster' and that the policies being imposed by the IMF/EU and World Bank are destroying social cohesion, destroying the political system and destroying the economy.

He described how the imposition of these policies, being implemented by a Government with no electoral mandate was a 'violation of the democratic establishment' and a 'loss of national sovereignty'.

## **Background to austerity in Greece**

The representatives from Synaspismos described some of the build up to the crisis. They outlined how national income through tax had diminished year on year, even in the 'development years' when there was economic growth.

They told the delegation that 110 billion euros were lost through avoidance and evasion of tax on profits by richest in Greece, with tax evasion by the rich on a grand scale in the last 10 years. Instead of collecting money owed by the wealthy a direct tax (VAT) of 23% has been levied, affecting the poorest most. An example of this was given : Greece has the biggest merchant fleet in the world, but the fleet owners pay less in tax than the entire immigrant population in Greece.

They described how for two and a half years the banks, bailed out in 2008, have not paid back the money that they owe the Greek people. Tsipras described the ESKRO off-shore account created outside of Greece by the Greek government, which will pay banks and other international creditors first, and whatever is left will go to meet the social needs of Greece. 40 billion Euros of capital has left Greece in the last year.

## **Not a Greek crisis**

Representatives talked about their efforts to counter the incorrect arguments that single out Greece as the cause of the crisis - the 'black sheep.' They described their view of the causes of the crisis are because of the neo-liberal economic policies followed across Europe and beyond, making it a 'European crisis, a capitalist crisis, not a Greek crisis....not a war between people and nations but between classes.

The problem is 'not the cook making a bad meal but the recipe'. (Alexis Tsipras)

They described the austerity policies as 'shock neo-liberal measures' that were a socio-political experiment - using Greece to see how much a society can take, how far resources can be privatised and a new supply of cheap labour be created, to export to neighbouring countries.

### **What needs to happen ?**

Alexis Tsipras talked about the need for the left to create a climate of social justice and campaign for alternative policies

He said that the Government had no mandate to sign the two memoranda, and questioned their legality. He said the first job of a new Government with a popular mandate should be to renegotiate the memos, on the agreed principal that Greek society cannot take the policies of the two memos. Furthermore they felt that the key question was not in or out of the eurozone, but rather exploiting being in it to support renegotiation.

They outlined how regardless of any renegotiations their view is that there needs to be a reorganisation of social and economic structures. Key features of this include socialisation (nationalisation) of the banking system and redistribution of wealth through a radical change in the taxation system - taxing big capital not poverty.

Mr Tsipras told the delegation that political figures on the left and ex-PASOK needed to create an electoral alliance. He said that this hasn't been possible so far, because of different traditions and party interests. However he said that SYRIZA was an initiative trying to create this alliance, to include ex-PASOK members. He said that such an alliance could allow the left to come second in the forthcoming elections.

### **What can a solidarity movement in the UK do ?**

The delegation was told how important the initiative of setting up a solidarity campaign in the UK is in supporting those opposing austerity in Greece.

The Synaspismos representatives stressed the need for solidarity action that challenges the notion that this is a problem with Greece and the slurs about Greek people. They described how the situation was impacting on Greek people in two ways - making them feel isolated and under attack, but at the same time, some believing the politicians and the media that say the Greek people are to blame. The delegation was told how important solidarity support from the UK could be in overcoming both of these things.

'It is very important to the Greek people that there is such an initiative as this in Britain. It is important to the Greek people to understand that they are not alone and there other people with them against the attack taking place'. (Alexis Tsipras)

The delegation was told about the importance of the international links made in the squares movement - with Occupy Wall St and the Arab social occupation movements - and the need to link up with movements such as these, and build on the connections already made.

Representatives stressed the importance in Greece of the trade unions being in the forefront of opposition to austerity, and that this meant it was vital for international solidarity to include union to union links and - ultimately - coordinated international action. An example of such action had recently taken place, with a day of action in Greece on 29th February supported by solidarity action organised by the trade unions in Portugal and Spain.

'This is a European crisis and we must respond on a European basis. This needs to include Europe outside of the EU, a new internationalism.' (Alexis Tsipras)

## **Coalition of Resistance**

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