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Greek Prime Minister Tsipras claims social cuts over as Syriza prepares more austerity

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras spoke yesterday to hail Greece's exit from its European Union bailout scheme, imposed after the 2008 Wall Street crash, as a new dawn created by his Syriza ("Coalition of the Radical Left") government. The speech was a pack of lies from start to finish. Above all, Tsipras tried to cover up the key role Syriza played in continuing EU austerity after its election in 2015, and its pledge now to impose EU austerity for decades to come.

Tsipras pompously chose Ithaca—the home of Ulysses, the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*—to claim that Greece's devastating, decade-long austerity *Odyssey* was drawing to a close. "Greece has experienced its modern *Odyssey* since 2010," he said. "Within five years, unprecedented things happened for a country in peacetime. We lost 25 percent of our national wealth. Three out of 10 people were unemployed. Six out of 10 young people, too. Austerity measures of 65 billion euros were implemented. Violence and repression became part of everyday life."

He claimed, however, that a "new day" had dawned: "The people, three-and-a-half years ago, made a historic decision: getting the country's steering wheel from those who led it onto the rocks and giving it to new captains. We assumed this heavy responsibility. ... The people who fought to get to the destination were no longer on the sidelines. They were no longer locked in the hold, with no voice, no hope. They were behind the wheel, with us. And in hard times, they held it firmly."

There is only one element of resemblance in the idiotic comparison Tsipras drew between himself and Homer's mythic hero. Ulysses designed the Trojan Horse to allow the Greek army to enter into Troy by deceit and plunder the city, while Tsipras gained access to the prime minister's mansion via lies and treachery and used his office to plunder Greece in the interest of the banks.

After voters elected Tsipras in January 2015 based on his promise to cancel the EU austerity memorandum, he promptly disenfranchised them. He signed a pledge to maintain the memorandum only weeks after taking office, and then trampled upon a massive "no" vote in a referendum on austerity he himself called in July 2015. Syriza had expected to obtain a "yes" vote and an excuse to step down and hand over power to a right-wing government that would cave in to the EU's blackmail to impose more austerity or be expelled from the eurozone.

Instead, it was left to Tsipras to flout the landslide 61 percent vote for "no" and impose tens of billions of euros in new social cuts in exchange for preserving the access of the Greek banks and propertied classes to the EU and the strong euro currency.

Syriza's hostility to the workers is ever more naked and brazen. The EU "multi-bill" it rubberstamped in parliament in January not only included billions in pension cuts and fire-sale privatizations of state assets. It also limited the right to strike—a right inscribed in Greece's 1975 constitution as a guard against the type of untrammled dictatorship of big business that Greece knew under the Nazi occupation, as well as under the 1967-1974 CIA-backed junta of the colonels.

Syriza also ships weapons to Saudi Arabia for its bloody, US-backed war against Yemen and runs brutal EU detention camps for refugees fleeing from Syria and Iraq across the Aegean Sea to Greece.

Even as Tsipras spoke, public anger was mounting over the authorities' failure to prepare any plan for the devastating fire season in Greece. After EU austerity plans imposed budget cuts of over 30 percent on Greek firefighters, at least 92 people died on July 23 in forest fires in Mati. Tsipras' defense minister, Panos Kammenos of the far-right Independent Greeks party, was booed when he arrived in Mati and blamed the deaths on unlicensed construction by Mati's inhabitants.

Now, however, Tsipras claimed that the end of the EU debt bailout, which will see Greece resume borrowing directly from private debt markets, meant the beginning of a new golden age. He said, "The memoranda of austerity, recession and social depopulation have

finally come to an end. Our country is regaining its right to define its own fortune and its future, like a normal European country, without any external compulsion.”

This is yet more lying. Workers and youth in Greece will only escape debt slavery by mobilizing in struggle against Syriza, and appealing to workers across Europe, who themselves are increasingly taking strike action against austerity, to support their Greek class brothers and sisters.

The Syriza government’s record is a devastating exposure not only of Tsipras, but of an entire layer of pseudo-left parties of the affluent middle class—such as the International Socialist Organization in the United States, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, the Left Party in Germany and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France—that hailed Syriza’s election and promoted it as a model. Syriza is now pledging that Greece will continue paying back hundreds of billions of euros to the banks.

Despite a slight uptick in economic growth, social conditions in Greece are disastrous. A study by the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants (GSEVEE) recently found:

- over 70 percent of Greek youth want to seek a job abroad;
- 51 percent of households depend on pensions;
- with unemployment at 20 percent, 75 percent of the jobless are in long-term unemployment;
- 34.2 percent of Greek households live on less than €10,000 per year;
- 62.4 percent of Greek households reported a fall in income in 2017.

The €288 billion disbursed over nearly a decade of EU bailouts did not go to help Greece or invest in its economy. Instead, it went to paying off the banks and running up Greece’s debt. On August 17, Greece’s General Accounting Office revealed that the country’s national debt has again risen by €1.6 billion in the second quarter of 2018, reaching €345.3 billion. This is an unsustainable 181 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Yet, the EU and the banks adamantly oppose debt relief.

Syriza and the EU instead cobbled together a bailout exit plan that commits Greece to generations of austerity. They require Greece to devote at least 3.5 percent of economic output to debt servicing until 2022, and 2.2 percent until 2060—diverting billions of euros from rebuilding Greece’s shattered economy into the pockets of the European financial aristocracy.

Describing the plan in the *Washington Post*, US economist Matt O’Brien wrote, “That’s right: four more decades of austerity. It’s no wonder, then, that Greece’s economy might

not get back to where it was in 2008 until 2030.” Calling Greece “one of the biggest economic failures you’ll ever see short of a war or revolution,” O’Brien added, “This is what Europe calls a success: an economy that has shrunk so much it looks war-torn.”

The EU and powerful sections of the Greek bourgeoisie aggressively support this plan, however. Yesterday, Bank of Greece Governor Yannis Stournaras told Xinhua: “Investors are watching us, as they are checking if we honor our commitments in full and if we implement all the measures agreed with our creditors.” He added that the Greek population would have to “keep up with the fiscal effort for many more years.”