

Syriza Voted Back into Office amid Mass Abstention in Greek Election

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With over 93 percent of the vote counted early Monday, Greece's Syriza had returned to power in Sunday's snap election called last month by the party's leader, former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.

Tsipras returns to office based on a political program that is, at least on the surface, diametrically opposed to the platform upon which Syriza first swept into office in January of this year. Then, the party won the election based on promises to overturn the austerity measures imposed by the European Union and international finance capital as the condition for two previous bailout agreements. Now, Tsipras returns to office to implement the even more onerous austerity measures dictated in the "memorandum of understanding" he accepted as the condition for a third bailout deal.

The election was the third time Greeks have been called to the polls this year. Last January, they elected Tsipras and Syriza based on the widespread belief that they would battle against austerity. Last July, they went to the polls a second time, voting overwhelmingly against austerity in a referendum called by the Syriza government, only to have Tsipras turn around within barely a week and accept the austerity terms dictated by the so-called "troika"—the European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank.

The repudiation of the popular will expressed in the referendum was only a further step in Syriza's renunciation of its anti-austerity electoral platform, which began almost the moment it won the election last January. Within less than a month after taking office, it had signed an agreement with the EU pledging not only not to roll back any of the previously imposed austerity measures, but to craft new ones based on the hated memorandum of understanding it previously vowed to defeat.

This betrayal constitutes a strategic experience of the working class in Greece and internationally, revealing the viciously anti-working class nature of the pseudo left in power. Behind its populist rhetoric, Syriza, a bourgeois party staffed by and representing the interests of privileged layers of the upper middle class, quickly proved itself an enemy of the workers.

In Sunday's election, a clear plurality, 45.2 percent of the Greek electorate voted with their feet, staying away from the polls in record numbers. This figure, a 9 percent increase in abstentions over last January, is all the more significant in a country where voting is compulsory.

The record low turnout Sunday was a clear expression of the mounting alienation of the masses of working people from the entire political setup in Greece, from the old, discredited

and diminished parties that dominated Greece over the previous four decades—New Democracy (ND) and PASOK—to the new and supposedly “left” Syriza.

What emerges most clearly from Sunday’s vote is that none of the political parties can present themselves as a credible opponent of austerity. Not one of them can give political expression to the popular will of Greek working people, clearly expressed in the July referendum, to conduct a fight against the capitalist system that is responsible for the mass unemployment and mass impoverishment that have been imposed over the past five years.

Millions of Greeks knew that the election would decide nothing. All of the fundamental decisions about their future conditions had already been taken behind their backs in the deal struck in July between Syriza and Greece’s international creditors. Syriza, which won 35 percent of the vote, and its principal challenger, the right-wing ND, which won 28 percent, were equally committed to implementing the drastic austerity measures dictated by this deal.

ND’s electoral campaign consisted largely of denouncing Syriza for its “false promises” and for being “amateurish” in implementing economic policies. The prospect of a more “professional” assault on their already decimated living standards proved to be far from a pole of attraction for Greek voters.

With a projected 145 seats in the Greek parliament, Syriza fell short of a majority in its own right. It is reprising the coalition it formed after last January’s election with the Independent Greeks, a right-wing party that employs anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic demagoguery. In his last government, Tsipras handed this reactionary political tendency effective control over the country’s security forces.

Tsipras appeared onstage at Syriza election headquarters Sunday night clasping hands with Independent Greeks leader Panos Kammenos before a cheering crowd of Syriza supporters. With the right-wing party’s expected 10 parliamentary seats, the alliance will hold a narrow majority.

The reelection of Tsipras and Syriza as the custodians of the austerity program dictated by the troika was hailed by European capitalist leaders as a step forward for “stability” and “continuity.” French President Francois Hollande praised the election result, saying it was “an important outcome for Greece, which will now live through a stabilization period with a solid majority.”

Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the Dutch finance minister and Eurogroup president, congratulated Tsipras and said he was “ready to work closely with the Greek authorities and to continue accompanying Greece in its ambitious reform efforts.”

Similarly, the president of the European parliament, Germany’s Martin Schulz, stated, “Now a solid government ready to deliver is needed quickly.” And the EU’s economic chief Pierre Moscovici expressed confidence that Tsipras would deliver on deepening austerity. “From Monday, we are ready to collaborate to implement the program to reform the Greek economy,” he said.

The British daily *Telegraph* summed up the sentiments of international finance capital with an article entitled, “Jittery creditors breathe short-lived sigh of relief after Tsipras triumphs again.” The article stated in part: “Greece’s international lenders welcomed the resounding

re-election for former prime minister Alexis Tsipras on Sunday night amid fears that the Leftist premier would fail to stick by his promises to stay in the euro... The continued presence of the popular prime minister will cheer investors who had been braced for a period of prolonged political uncertainty and fractious coalition talks after polls predicted a dead heat.”

In response, Syriza’s spokeswoman Olga Gerovassili vowed to meet all of their expectations: “This will be a four-year term government with a strong parliamentary majority, which will implement the program it promised. It will continue the tough negotiations with the lenders, realizing that this is the beginning of a battle.”

This “battle” will be against the working class, and it will inevitably entail the increasing utilization of state repression to enforce policies that are bitterly opposed by masses of Greek workers.

An undeniable element in the timing of the snap election was Tsipras’ desire to get it over with before a range of new austerity measures are to be put into effect. Between now and next month, when Greece faces a review by its creditors, the government is tasked with a further gutting of the Greek pension and social security systems, a series of tax hikes, a new round of privatizations and the drafting of a 2016 budget that will entail further sweeping cutbacks.

Significantly, the party with the third largest share of the ballots cast Sunday was the fascist Golden Dawn, which postures as an opponent of austerity and has sought to capitalize on popular anger over Syriza’s capitulation to EU austerity demands. With a number of its leaders in jail for murderous acts of violence, the party gained around 7.2 percent of the vote, a moderate increase that will give it 19 parliamentary seats, two more than after January’s election.

Failing to top the 3 percent threshold needed to win a single seat in parliament was Popular Unity, the newly formed party made up of former members of Syriza’s Left Platform faction, an amalgam of various nationalist and pseudo-left elements, which split from the party last month.

Led by Panagiotis Lafazanis, who served in the Syriza government as the minister responsible for industrial, environmental and energy policy, Popular Unity failed dismally—and justifiably—in its campaign to portray itself as the champion of Syriza’s original anti-austerity agenda.

Lafazanis and his cohorts were themselves totally complicit in forcing through the austerity package accepted by Tsipras, refusing to call it to a vote on the party’s central committee and breaking with Syriza only when it became clear that Tsipras would bar them from running for re-election on the party’s line.

Similarly, the Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE) failed to register any gains based on its reactionary nationalist opposition to Syriza’s policies, seeing its actual percentage of the vote fall slightly compared to last January.

In a statement tweeted Sunday after his victory became clear, Tsipras said, “A road of hard work and struggle has opened up ahead of us.” Indeed, the policies to which he is committed will inevitably open up a period of intensified class struggle in Greece in which

the decisive question will be the independent political mobilization of the working class against the Syriza government.

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