

Split over Greek regional election highlights SYRIZA's rightward march

John Vassilopoulos, Alex Lantier
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Conflicts are erupting within the Greek petty-bourgeois “left” coalition SYRIZA over the selection of high-ranking PASOK official Alexis Mitropoulos as its candidate in November’s regional elections in Attica. The Attica region includes Greece’s capital, Athens, and over half the country’s population. Former SYRIZA leader Alekos Alavanos on September 9 announced his intention to run a competing campaign.

SYRIZA is openly embracing PASOK even as the PASOK government of Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou is responding to the Greek debt crisis with draconian attacks on the working class. In exchange for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Union (EU) bailout, Papandreou has slashed wages and social spending, producing an average cut of 30 percent in workers’ living standards. The fact that SYRIZA chooses such a time to deepen its ties to PASOK exposes its right-wing character.

Alexis Tsipras, the leader of SYRIZA and of Synaspismos, the largest group within SYRIZA, attacked Alavanos’ decision as an “unprecedented attempt from a left official to impose his candidacy by blackmail.” Tsipras suggested that he would not make any concessions to internal opposition to Mitropoulos’ candidacy to preserve party unity. “Everyone can act according his will and take responsibility for his actions,” he said.

Alexis Mitropoulos is a prominent labour law professor and a founding member of PASOK. Under the 1980s government of the current prime minister’s father, Andreas Papandreou, he had the task of drawing up the legal framework for the government’s labour and social policy.

In March of 2008, he was elected to the party’s National Council. He declared at the beginning of this month that would not participate in the council’s activities in protest over the government’s “neo-liberal policies.” However, he remained on the PASOK council even after Synaspismos officially endorsed his candidacy.

Mitropoulos announced on September 13 that he would stand with several other PASOK members on an “Independent Movement for Attica” ticket. The

circumstances of Mitropoulos’ candidacy suggest that he may have the tacit support of PASOK’s leadership. PASOK made no official statement on Mitropoulos until two days after his announcement, when his party membership was suspended. This is despite the fact that he has been openly courted by SYRIZA for more than a month. His treatment—the fact that he was not expelled—amounts to a slap on the wrist.

Before nominating Mitropoulos, Synaspismos made clear it wanted to run a high-ranking PASOK member as its Attica candidate. Prior to approaching Mitropoulos, Tsipras approached Sofia Sakorafa, a former javelin champion and PASOK MP, and the ADEDY public sector union President Spyros Papaspyrou, who is also a member of PASOK. Both of them turned down the offer.

Synaspismos’ attempt to find a candidate took on a ludicrous character at the beginning of the month, when Tsipras asked the 88-year-old resistance fighter Manolis Glezos to stand. Glezos refused and instead endorsed former SYRIZA leader Alavanos, who was already hinting at his intention to stand.

Alavanos represents no alternative to the right-wing politics of Tsipras and the current SYRIZA leadership. He is standing on a “Front for Solidarity and Overthrow” ticket, a group he set up earlier in the year as a new pole of attraction for petty-bourgeois ex-radical groups.

Alavanos comes from a longstanding political dynasty based on the island of Tenos. Both his father and grandfather sat in parliament. When he was the leader of SYRIZA and president of Synaspismos, he adopted policies similar to those of Tsipras, offering to work with PASOK in 2008. Four SYRIZA factions, including the Maoist Communist Organization of Greece, support his candidacy.

Alavanos is trying to present PASOK as a party that has temporarily abandoned its left-wing character. In a recent TV interview, he said, “[W]e have a government that came out with one programme and is implementing something entirely different.” Alavanos bemoaned the “collapse of popular power.”

At a time when workers are concluding that Papandreou's election promises to boost social spending were lies, and that the entire political establishment is stacked against them, Alavanos' claims represent an attempt to restore reformist illusions.

Most press commentators are speaking of a de facto split in SYRIZA. A *Kathimerini* editorial stated, "It is clear for the Left that after the announcements by Mitropoulos and Alavanos, the breakup of SYRIZA is now a fact and the two election platforms are a precursor to the formation of new political groupings."

Such a split would have no principled basis. Alavanos is not concerned with rallying opposition to PASOK, but rather with seeking to maintain some credibility for the so-called "left." He has no fundamental political differences with Mitropoulos or Tsipras.

Both candidates—Mitropoulos and Alavanos—are promoting nationalism. In a speech last week, Alavanos accused the government of "handing over power to foreigners, the IMF and the EU." In an interview with Synaspismos' newspaper, *Avghi*, Mitropoulos pledged to "bolster the pride and dignity of our people by utilising our geo-strategic position and national resources."

The class character of SYRIZA's policies is so clear that it is seen as a credible ally by Greece's main right-wing party, New Democracy (ND). *Eleftherotypia* wrote last month that ND leader Antonis Samaras hopes "to unite against PASOK the [Stalinist] Greek Communist Party, a section of SYRIZA and parts of [the neo-fascist party] LAOS."

The toothless one-day union protests which SYRIZA has endorsed do not frighten ND. According to *Eleftherotypia*, ND leader Samaras plans his "charm offensive" precisely for when SYRIZA and the Communist Party will be carrying out their "revolutionary gymnastics."

SYRIZA's desperate attempts to associate itself with PASOK illustrate its further shift to the right since the right-wing Renewal Wing (RW) split from its ranks in July. RW has since formed the Democratic Left (DL) party under Fotis Kouvelis' leadership.

At the time of its split, Kouvelis declared: "We want a left that does not feel it is legitimate to defend all workers' established rights, nor to pander to unions and associations for petty political gains." He was responding to the establishment of the European Financial Stabilization Fund in May, which indicated that Papandreou's austerity policies would be underwritten by the IMF and EU. On this basis, he wanted to establish closer links with PASOK to help carry out the cuts.

Kouvelis and his newly-formed Democratic Left party have since struck a deal with PASOK for the local elections with candidates in Athens, Volos and Thessalonica standing

on a joint ballot. Papandreou has described the partnership with the DL as "strategic."

Asked about the possibility of government posts going to DL members, Papandreou said that the partnership will be an ongoing one. Noting the importance of the "left alibi" Kouvelis has offered to Papandreou, an article in online newspaper *Zoomnews.gr* wondered when "the wedding will be announced now that the engagement party's over."

Tsipras is now repeating the basic arguments that underlay RW's move to an openly pro-austerity, pro-PASOK position. In a radio interview on September 14, Tsipras spoke of "a new situation in the country, which is defined by the IMF's presence, and which has led to a realignment of the country's political life, including on the Left."

These positions belie all claims by petty-bourgeois ex-radicals that with the departure of Kouvelis, SYRIZA could now move to the left. Within SYRIZA, such positions were advanced by Xekinima, the Greek section of the Committee for a Workers' International (See, "Greece: What is behind the right wing-split from SYRIZA?").

A similar position was put forward by SEK, sister party of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and member of the Greek "anti-capitalist" coalition ANTARSYA. Calling RW's departure "positive," SEK's journal *Socialism From Below* wrote: "if not the whole of SYRIZA, then at least its left current could turn leftwards."

In fact, the logic of SYRIZA's positions—and the identity of its Attica candidate—suggest that it will follow RW into a more explicit alliance with PASOK against the working class.



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