

# Greek “left” pushes to join the government

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“The Greek government is losing its political base, the main parties are losing their members, the fabric of society is in disarray”, according to Lothar Bisky, chair of the left faction of the European Parliament, who warns of “social upheaval” in Greece. Basing themselves on this assumption, the Greek followers of this tendency have offered to take over the reins of government and restore order in the country.

The ruthless austerity measures of the Papademos government, dictated by the European Union and supported by the social democratic PASOK party, the conservative New Demokratika (ND) and the fascist party LAOS, have led to an explosive social situation.

Economic output has declined by 15 percent over the past four years. The official unemployment rate is 20.9 percent and there have been pay cuts of up to 50 percent—in short, the systematic destruction of all the social gains achieved by workers—leading to widespread protests and mass defection from those who previously supported the government and the EU.

On February 12, hundreds of thousands of workers protested against further cuts. While parliament was voting to further slash social provisions, the police covered the entire city centre in tear gas. The anger of the protesters then erupted in attacks on dozens of buildings, banks and shops. North of Thessaloniki, health workers have been occupying the hospital for two weeks, running it under their own control.

Under these conditions, the ruling parties, which between them polled 83.6 percent at the last election, now only have 43 percent support in recent opinion polls. The social democratic PASOK party that ruled Greece alone for the last two years has slumped from 44 to 11 percent.

Those currently benefiting are primarily parties that present themselves as left-wing alternatives. In the same poll, they received a combined 47 percent support. These groups include the “Democratic Left” (DIMAR) with 16 percent, the Communist Party (KKE) with 14 per cent, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) with 13.5 percent and the Greens with 3.5 percent. Only KKE and SYRIZA

are represented in the current parliament, with 12.1 percent.

The increase in support for these parties is due to their left-wing rhetoric. In the context of the Coalition of National Unity under Papademos, SYRIZA and the KKE are the only parties in the Greek parliament speaking out against the cuts. The KKE utilizes particularly radical phraseology, talking about a “fight against the plutocracy” and calling for “people’s power, which would write off the debt”.

However, such phrases only serve to conceal an extremely national, backward-looking policy. KKE Secretary General Aleka Papariga says it must be assumed that a socialist revolution is not on the agenda. At a meeting of the Communist Party of Turkey, she emphasized that a united, socialist Europe may well be a future goal, but this cannot “develop automatically and synchronously throughout Europe, but is the result of a series of coordinated activities at national level”.

The party uses this argument to justify its demand for an immediate withdrawal from the EU, a return to the national currency, the drachma, and a cancellation of all debts. The energy reserves of the country, argues the KKE, would suffice to supply the Greek population and to guarantee prosperity for all. This policy of national self-sufficiency is being presented as a step towards socialism.

The KKE, previously isolated on the “left”, is now gaining support in the ranks of SYRIZA. While party leader Alexis Tsipras still opposes leaving the EU, he also advocates greater self-sufficiency for Greece. In an interview he said: “We need a national strategy for the development of agriculture so that the country can feed itself in the future”. In addition, Greek industry and research must be advanced and “the geostrategic position of Greece “utilized”.

In recent months, representatives of SYRIZA have continually reaffirmed their offer to form a coalition government with the KKE. “We want a coalition of all parties that will reject the [EU] memorandum from a left perspective”, Tsipras said in October.

An important role in preparing such a coalition is played by the various petty-bourgeois groups in Greece, which although numerically less significant are distinguished by their particularly left-wing rhetoric, thereby seeking to provide a cover against potential protests by the working class.

For example, the Pabloite group OKDE-Spartakos supports the nationalist perspective of the KKE, arguing that the class struggle is nationally based: “Since the main weapon of the capitalists in the struggle against the working class is the nation state, and the class struggle develops unevenly and mainly at the national level, an anti-capitalist programme must develop demands that trigger such a solution at the national level”.

Other groups, such as Xekinima (Committee for a Workers' International, CWI) or SEK (International Socialist Tendency, IST), who with OKDE are part of the “Cooperation of the Anti-Capitalist Left for the Overthrow” (Antarsya), have been calling for quite some time for an alliance of left-wing forces, in particular a joint electoral list of the KKE and SYRIZA. The SEK has also repeatedly supported a return to the drachma.

Such a move to a national currency would in no way be a step forward, but would have the same devastating consequences for workers as the current EU diktats. Instead of workers' achievements being destroyed by cuts in social programmes, wages and pensions, this would be achieved by an inevitable hyperinflation.

Above all, such a nationally oriented policy isolates Greek workers from their class brothers and sisters in other European countries, who can expect the same attacks on their social rights by the financial aristocracy. For the ruling elite, this division of the working class along the national borders is the necessary precondition for expanding its attacks across Europe.

Moreover, the tendency within the European elite advocating the withdrawal of Greece from the euro zone is growing. After Wolfgang Reitzle, CEO of the engineering company Linde, Bosch's CEO Franz Fehrenbach is the second major German company executive this year to endorse this course. According to Fehrenbach, Greece has become an “unsustainable burden” for the EU and must be expelled from the common currency, by force if necessary. German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble is also openly contemplating a state bankruptcy for Greece.

Both bankruptcy and a return to the drachma would be unthinkable without substantial social chaos. The KKE and parts of SYRIZA are preparing to enforce such a

policy against the Greek population. The justified rejection of the EU among Greek workers is being exploited by these tendencies in order to support an extreme nationalist and reactionary wing of the bourgeoisie.

The second grouping inside the self-proclaimed left in Greece is by no means more progressive. The Democratic Left and other parts of SYRIZA also fundamentally reject an international perspective for the working class. They are merely oriented towards a different wing of the Greek and European bourgeoisie. They defend the EU institutions and offer to enforce the EU diktats more effectively against the population. Like PASOK, they want to use their good relations with the unions to this end.

For example, Tsipras spoke on behalf of his party's majority in favour of participating “in the public dialogue on the future of Europe”. DIMAR is even more open, talking not only about remaining within the EU and euro zone, but also of “measures that strengthen the competitiveness of Greek enterprises”, and demanding a “modern, leaner and more efficient government”. These positions are also found within the conservative ND and PASOK, and are merely euphemisms for the austerity being demanded by the EU.

The differences between the two wings of the official left in Greece are relative. Both camps support sections of the ruling elite and are therefore flexible in what they advocate. Both before and after any elections in April, all kinds of coalitions and governments are possible, which might then rely on one or another of these “left” parties and groups. Although the KKE is currently against coalitions, a 180-degree turn would not be the first in the party's history; in 1989, the Stalinists even formed a coalition with the conservative ND.

Unquestionably, however, in the socially explosive situation gripping Greece today, a government of the “left” would only seek to break the workers' resistance and prepare authoritarian forms of rule. Workers can only defend themselves by adopting their own independent and international perspective against the national and bourgeois positions of the fake “lefts”.



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