

Troika gives green light for Greek election

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On Wednesday, Prime Minister Lucas Papademos named May 6 as the date for Greece's long-awaited general election. As was the case with the appointment of the non-elected banker as the head of government, the date for the Greek election was also decided by the representatives of international high finance.

Papademos, a former head of the Greek central bank and vice-president of the European Central Bank, was selected by European leaders and the International Monetary Fund last November to replace the incumbent prime minister George Papandreou, of the social-democratic party PASOK, who had called for a popular referendum on the austerity measures demanded by the troika.

The EU leaders regarded the notion that broad masses of the Greek population could have any say in the fate of the country as intolerable. They installed Papademos as prime minister with a mandate to rapidly impose drastic austerity measures in the face of mounting popular opposition.

To this end, Papademos formed a three-party government with support from PASOK, the conservative New Democracy, which had been in opposition, and the fascist Laos party. He set up a new cabinet, adding four members of Laos and leading members of the conservative New Democracy party, while retaining PASOK members in key government positions, including interior minister.

Having implemented the agenda of the banks, Papademos has now been given a green light by the troika for new elections.

This was made clear in a recent article in the *Kathimerini* paper noting that Papademos had decided on a date for the election three weeks ago, but chose to hold back any announcement until a further tranche of social security cuts passed through parliament.

The article reveals that a central factor in finalising the date were a series of European summits to be held next month which will discuss further austerity measures to be imposed by a new Greek government.

Kathimerini reports: "According to sources, the premier also had his eye on the June visit of officials from the European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, collectively known as the troika. Greece will have to agree on more than 11 billion euros of savings for 2013 and 2014 then. It is possible that the new government will have to adopt extra measures for this year as well."

Upon announcing the new elections—18 months before parliament's current term expires—Papademos declared he would not be dissolving his government. The Greek cabinet would continue to meet on a regular basis up to the election in order to decide upon further austerity measures if and when required.

The cuts so far imposed have had devastating consequences for broad layers of the Greek population. Mass unemployment is now a permanent fixture of life in Greece. The official jobless rate is over 21 percent and for the first time in post-World War II history more than 50 percent of youth are without a job. More than 500,000 people have no income whatsoever and the situation is so desperate that an equal number, half a million mainly young people, have left the country to seek their fortune abroad.

The mounting social crisis in the country was most graphically illustrated by the suicide one week ago of 77-year-old Dimitris Christoulas. Prior to killing himself with a handgun in front of the Greek parliament, Christoulas drafted a note in which that he stated that he preferred to end his life with dignity rather than end up "scavenging through garbage looking for food."

Four years of recession and austerity at the hands of a parliament revealed to be nothing more than a blunt instrument of international finance had led to a meltdown in support for the country's ruling parties.

According to the latest Public Issue poll, support for the ruling New Democracy led by former Foreign Minister Antonis Samaras has dropped to 19 percent. In February, ND's support was running close to 30 percent, and even that was below the figure for the ND the last election,

when it polled 33.5 percent while losing badly to PASOK.

The party associated first and foremost with the social catastrophe of the past four years, PASOK, now headed by Papadreu's finance minister Evangelos Venizelos, trails in second place with 14.5 percent, only one-third of its 44 percent polling in the 2009 election. This means that just five weeks before the election the two parties which have dominated Greek politics for half a century can only muster 33.5 percent of the vote between them.

The latest totals for three opposition organisations associated with the traditional left in Greek politics indicate that they now have more support than the ND and PASOK combined. The Public Issue poll shows the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) winning 13 percent (2009 election – 4.6 percent), the Democratic Left, a recent breakaway from SYRIZA to the right, 12 percent, and the Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE) 11 percent (2009 election – 7.5 percent).

Despite their occasional criticisms of the government, all of these organisations maintain close links with layers inside the PASOK and trade union bureaucracy who are intent of ensuring their own place at the table when it comes to implementing austerity policies.

SYRIZA and the Democratic Left both favour continued membership in the EU for Greece. A main plank of the program of the Democratic Left, founded just a year ago by Fotis Kouvelis, stresses the importance of EU and eurozone membership for Greece, and, in a recent exchange with WWSW reporters, SYRIZA leader Alex Tsipras vehemently opposed withdrawal from the EU. Instead both parties propose a revision of the existing fiscal treaties.

In a radio interview yesterday, Kouvelis said his party was not prepared to join a coalition with the ND and PASOK but left open the possibility of a coalition with PASOK and other “left” parties.

Both SYRIZA and the Democratic Left are fishing in the stagnant waters of Greek social democracy. Tsipras recently announced a number of new recruits to his proposed “coalition of power with the left at its centre”, including two former PASOK MPs and PASOK veteran Alexis Mitropoulos.

For his part, Kouvelis has been able to angle on board five PASOK MPs who had been expelled by the party for voting against the last bailout package.

The arch-Stalinist KKE rejects Greek membership of the EU on the basis of a nationalist, capitalist program based on a return to the drachma. On this basis the KKE is being courted by another phony left organisation,

ANTARSYA (the Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left), which recently addressed an appeal to the Stalinists to participate in “joint action of the Left.” Tsipras has also made appeals for a common front with the KKE and the Democratic Left, which have been turned down up to now by both organisations.

The slump in support for ND and PASOK means that if they are unable to form a coalition with one or more of the pseudo-left parties they will be increasingly dependent on the ultra-right in forming a new government. Following its short-lived period in government, the Popular Orthodox Rally (Laos) saw its support drop from its 2009 level of 5.6 percent to just 3 percent in the latest polls (3 percent is the threshold for entry into the Greek parliament).

A more likely candidate as coalition partner is the ultra-right nationalist Independent Greeks organisation recently founded by a former member of ND. Independent Greeks has been able to draw support from both the ND and Laos camps and is currently polling at 11 percent. One other neo-fascist organisation, Golden Dawn, is polling at 5 percent. The fascist parties have been able to gain support from the racist campaign conducted by the government of Lucas Papademos, which has sent out special police units in the past few weeks to round up immigrant workers and their families.

The current political situation is fraught with danger for the Greek working class. The key role is being played by the Greek pseudo-left organisations that are striving to bind the working class to the European Union, and the established trade union and social democratic bureaucracies.

To the extent that they are able to paralyse the working class and suppress a genuine socialist alternative, it is these parties which permit the traditional right and ultra-right to reorganise and establish a new regime with the type of dictatorial power required to enforce the austerity policies demanded by the international banks.



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