

Greek elections: Workers have no voice

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The Greek elections on 6 May will be contested by the greatest number of parties in any vote since the end of the military dictatorship in 1974. Last week, the Supreme Court ruled that 32 of 36 registered organizations are permitted to participate. But despite the many parties on the ballot, workers have no voice in this election.

Last week, EU Commission President Barroso announced the program which the EU intends to impose on the next Greek government. This “European Initiative for Growth and Employment” requires not only additional budget cuts, but also extensive privatization, affecting such sectors as the electric power company, and the liberalization of markets. Moreover, Barroso announced government-imposed wage cuts in the private sector of at least 15 percent by 2014.

The previous attacks on the working class, which have led to a slashing of real wages by up to 65 percent, an official youth unemployment rate of over 50 percent, and long queues at soup kitchens, were directly ordered and organised by the troika of the EU, the IMF and the European Central Bank.

When the social democratic PASOK government under George Papandreou had increasing difficulty enforcing these attacks, it was unceremoniously replaced by the “technocratic” government of former ECB Vice President Loukas Papadimos. Even the present election date was set on the direct instructions of the troika.

Under these conditions, workers' social rights can only be defended in a fight against the EU institutions and the ruling elite in Greece. But not a single party standing in the elections is advocating such an independent perspective for the working class. They all speak for one or another section of the Greek bourgeoisie and, at most, merely argue about how best the attacks on the working class can be carried through.

In addition to PASOK and the conservative New Democracy, which together form the current government, the elections are being contested by the *Coalition of the Radical Left* (SYRIZA). It is doing so under the banner of the “United Social Front”, in alliance with former PASOK deputies who have long supported the austerity measures and only spoke out very lately against them—when their own votes no longer mattered.

In its election manifesto, the alliance opposes further cuts in social spending and promises it would reverse the cuts made so far. However, at the same time, it defends Greece's membership in the EU and the euro zone, and thus the dictates of these institutions. The Greek debt burden should not be written off, but only renegotiated, they say. Under these conditions, any promise to reverse the social attacks is just hot air.

It is becoming clear that SYRIZA wants to play the role that was played by PASOK in the last elections. At the time, PASOK campaigned on the demand for an increase in social spending; then after the election it used its close connections with the unions to enforce the historically unprecedented social cutbacks that Greece has experienced over the last three years.

This is indicated not only by the alliance with the PASOK deputies, but also the numerous offers to the Democratic Left (DIMAR) to form a coalition of all the “left”. DIMAR split away from SYRIZA two years ago and has since tried to create a coalition with PASOK. The goal of the party is to defend Greece's membership in the euro zone by all means—in other words, to continue the social counter-revolution.

The chairman of SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras, said recently that his party would also form a coalition with sections of the right-wing nationalist “Independent Greeks”, in order to secure a governing majority.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) is playing a special role. In the campaign, the KKE has repeatedly

said that it would not participate in any coalition government. It campaigns with very radical demands, such as withdrawal from the EU, the repudiation of government debt and even the nationalization of the banks and large corporations.

In reality, these claims serve only to appeal to the anger of the workers in order to steer them into safe channels. According to KKE Secretary General Aleka Papariga, a social revolution in Greece is not on the agenda. Under these circumstances, the correct call for withdrawal from the EU is transformed into a nationalist and reactionary perspective for the reintroduction of the drachma on a capitalist basis.

While the KKE attacks the two major union federations for their collaboration with the government, they seek to prevent workers breaking out of the syndicalist straitjacket.

This found expression in recent years when the unions organised a series of ineffectual 24-hour general strikes. The KKE did not take up the demand of many workers for an extension of the strike, but called for separate and also temporary strikes. Their stewards helped to corral the demonstrators through the streets of Athens. At the central Syntagma Square, the stewards then formed a barrier around the parliament to protect the institution against the angry workers.

Besides DIMAR, KKE and SYRIZA, other smaller groups are on the ballot, which for decades have orbited around these parties and the unions. The largest is Antarsya, in which can be found Pabloites, state capitalists, Maoists and split-offs from the KKE. With their radical rhetoric of “revolution” and a “break with capitalism”, they are a left fig leaf for a possible SYRIZA government. In their election manifesto, one of their main aims is the call for “joint action” by SYRIZA and the KKE.

Given the utter bankruptcy of the pseudo-left organizations and trade unions, and the lack of a serious progressive alternative, the far right parties are acting ever more openly. In addition to the Independent Greeks and the far-right LAOS party, the openly fascist “Golden Dawn” is also forecast to enter parliament.

The current ruling parties, PASOK and New Democracy (ND), which have fallen in the polls from 77.4 to less than 40 percent, have already said they would consider inviting these ultra-right parties to join the government. LAOS was even a member of the

current government coalition for a time. PASOK and ND are using similar right-wing demagoguery and witch-hunting illegal immigrants. There is no question that they are willing to brutally impose the additional cuts demanded by the EU against the working class.

To counter such dictatorial actions and defend their social rights, Greek workers must reject the “left” parties and trade unions. They need a revolutionary, internationalist party which opposes the ruling elite in Greece and the EU institutions and unites all the workers of Europe with the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe.

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