

Pseudo-left parties in Greek election offer no alternative

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On Sunday, Greece holds its first national election since the beginning of the offensive by the Greek elite and the European Union on the social rights of the working class. The election is overshadowed by poverty and a growing desperation fuelled by the broad sentiment that no party expresses the genuine social interests of the population.

“Violence is when one works for 40 years for a few crumbs, and nevertheless has to ask for the right to retire. [...] Violence is the employer's right to dismiss you whenever he wants”. wrote 44 year old teacher Metikis Savas in a suicide note before hanging himself in his parents' house.

The growing number of suicides in Greece is just the most blatant expression of a widespread feeling of despair that is expressed in a rejection of the government responsible for organizing the social counterrevolution of recent years. According to recent polls, the current ruling parties, New Democracy (ND) and PASOK, have lost almost half their support compared to the election of 2009. The lack of perspective, however, is mainly due to the bankruptcy of the so-called left parties. Neither the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), nor the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE), nor the Front of the Anti-Capitalist Left (Antarsya) offers any serious alternative.

Despite the growing social anger, SYRIZA regards its main task as contributing to the formation of a stable government capable of enforcing the austerity measures demanded by the EU. To this end, SYRIZA raises all kinds of social demands and encourages the illusion that they can be implemented within the EU.

“We accuse the ND and PASOK of failing to use the weapons of negotiation to secure an equal participation of Greece in the Euro Zone”. SYRIZA candidate Dimitris Papadimoulis declared last Sunday in an interview. In the event of entering government, SYRIZA would undertake tougher negotiations with the EU countries. Its proclaimed aim is to remain in the EU while opposing the austerity measures.

On this basis, SYRIZA has put forward an entire slate of

social demands in its electoral program, the Uniting Social Front. A ten point program will allegedly lead Greece out of the crisis. Annual incomes of €500,000 or more are to be taxed at 75 percent, and social cuts reversed.

In regard to the Greek debt, the organisation writes: “There is only one solution: the selective cancellation of most of the debt, be it with financial institutions or states. Then the suspension of repayment terms for the remaining debt for the purpose of economic recovery, the servicing of debt on more favourable terms, and measures for development and employment”.

The platform fails to specify what percentage of the debt is to be cancelled, when it should be paid and what is meant by “favourable conditions”. A “selective cancellation” and even a suspension of interest payments, i.e., an extension of repayment terms, has already taken place and is entirely in the interests of creditors.

On closer inspection, all of the social demands raised by SYRIZA turn out to be mere phrases, given the organisation's fundamental recognition of the debt and its defence of EU membership. On both counts, SYRIZA merely promises to strike a slightly better deal in negotiations than the current government.

SYRIZA's determination to form a stable government that can pursue the social counterrevolution is also illustrated by the fact that it is willing to form coalitions with almost all other political forces. In addition to appeals to the KKE, SYRIZA also calls for collaboration with layers of PASOK and the Democratic Left (DIMAR), which for its part is also eager to collaborate with PASOK.

Recently, SYRIZA chairman Alexis Tsipras even announced that he would rely on the votes of the Independent Greeks to achieve a majority in parliament. The Independent Greeks is led by Panos Kammenos, who was expelled from the conservative ND in February. Kammenos founded the new party in March and criticizes the EU diktat from the right. The ranks of the party are filled with many former ND members who call for a more nationalist policy to defend Greek interests.

According to Kammenos, his party is “neither left nor right, nor centre. It is independent and, above all, nationalist”. The party's web site emphasizes the need for a strong state.

The Stalinist Greek Communist Party, the KKE, pursues a different tactic. It has so far rejected all overtures in the campaign from other political forces and excluded participation in a coalition government. The KKE not only demands the repudiation of all government debt and withdrawal from the EU, but also the nationalization of major banks and corporations.

Unlike many other post-Stalinist organisations, the KKE remains unflinchingly attached to Stalin and his political legacy. In an election broadcast, KKE General Secretary Aleka Papariga described the North Korean dictatorship as a socialist country. After the collapse of Stalinism, the leaders of the KKE came to the conclusion that there remained the necessity for a powerful bureaucratic apparatus to keep workers under control.

To this end, the party relies heavily on its Stalinist history. In the 1946-49 civil war, the KKE faithfully carried out the dictates of Stalin, who demanded that a revolution in Greece be prevented by all means. At the end of the Nazi occupation in December 1944, British and Greek troops were instrumental in bloodily suppressing workers organized in the anti-fascist resistance organization, the EAM. The KKE used its influence at the time to hold back the masses, and in early 1945 signed the Treaty of Varkiza, which stipulated the disarming of workers and prepared the way for the subsequent right-wing counterrevolution.

This policy was justified with the argument that a revolution was not possible, and that it was therefore necessary to collaborate with bourgeois forces. The KKE behaves in a similar manner today. It puts forward radical demands in its election campaign in order to divert the anger of workers into completely harmless channels that do not jeopardize the social order.

In strikes and protests, the KKE assumes the function of organization and discipline. All those who reject the country's two main trade union bodies, the GSEE and ADEDY, are to be prevented from organizing independently, but instead are to remain under the control of the KKE. This became clear in December 2008 following violent protests in the centre of Athens after a policeman murdered a 16-year-old girl. The KKE condemned the protesters and called for order. The KKE is also working through its own trade union, PAME, to isolate the ongoing strike at the steel works in Halivourgia Aspropyrgos, where workers have occupied the plant for several months. By refusing to organise strikes in other factories or industries, the party has effectively prevented the

spread of resistance.

PAME has never sought to challenge or even question the straitjacket imposed on the working class by the country's two major union federations. Itself part of the largest trade union federation, the GSEE, PAME has participated in a series of symbolic protests, but has repeatedly refused to call upon workers to undertake serious independent action. Characteristic in this respect is a call by PAME and KKE for a symbolic 24-hour strike on the day of the election— when the election has been decided.

Papariga justified the party's bankrupt line in an election broadcast by declaring that a revolutionary offensive of workers was impossible. “We do not find ourselves in a revolutionary situation”, she said, under conditions where millions of workers in Greece are fighting for survival and seeking a perspective in order to combat poverty and repel the attacks of the ruling elite.

The KKE's explicit repudiation of a mobilisation of the working class and its thoroughly nationalist perspective completely strips away the progressive content of its demand for an exit from the euro and the repudiation of Greek debts. Under capitalist conditions such a policy would lead to a return to the drachma, hyperinflation and mass poverty. The KKE offers its services as a force for order in precisely such a situation.

But 2012 is not 1945. Neither Syriza nor the KKE has an influence comparable to that of the Stalinists at the end of the war. The May Day demonstrations organised by these parties were poorly attended, and Papariga was booed and jeered when she campaigned at the Acropolis seeking to win the support of workers. The workers made clear they regarded her and the KKE as part of the political establishment which is intent on intensifying the social attacks.



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