

Greece: SYRIZA support sought to enforce austerity measures

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New elections appear increasingly likely in Greece. The conservative New Democracy (ND) and the Democratic Left (DIMAR) demanded participation of the Coalition of Radical Left (SYRIZA) as a necessary condition for them to form a coalition with the social-democratic PASOK party. SYRIZA turned down the demand and made clear it was unwilling for now to enter into such an alliance.

SYRIZA has already signaled its willingness to participate in a government that implements EU diktats. During the election campaign, it declared that Greece should not leave the euro zone under any circumstances, but rather should seek to renegotiate the budget cuts and debt repayment. Given the uncompromising attitude of the EU, which takes its orders from the major banks, this amounts to an offer to participate in the enforcement of the cuts.

But SYRIZA is unwilling to assume responsibility for austerity policies immediately, preferring to engage in maneuvers that will force a second election which is likely to strengthen its position in the Greek parliament.

In the course of last week, the ND, which polled the most votes in the election, and the second-place and third-place SYRIZA and PASOK all failed to form a viable governing majority. Over the weekend, Greek President Karolos Papoulias had talks with the leaders of PASOK, ND and SYRIZA and then held individual discussions with representatives of the other parties.

After the meetings, SYRIZA Chairman Alexis Tsipras once again declared that under the given conditions he was not prepared to form a coalition with the two former ruling parties, PASOK and ND, which have implemented the austerity programme of the European Union (EU) in Greece.

Tsipras said that a coalition with the two parties would mean disregarding the will of the electorate who

voted overwhelmingly in favor of parties that opposed the government's course.

Taken together, ND, PASOK and DIMAR had a sizeable majority of 168 seats out of 300, Tsipras pointed out, adding: "Their demands for SYRIZA to take part are unprecedented and illogical." He also called on Papoulias to make the discussions on a new government public.

The chairman of DIMAR, Fotis Kouvelis, then said that his party was still not prepared to support a coalition if it did not involve SYRIZA. "A government without SYRIZA would not have the necessary popular and parliamentary backing," he said.

The conservative leader, Antonis Samaras, had made similar comments last week. Following negotiations, he complained of the refusal of Tsipras to join in any government. "I honestly do not know where they are going with this," he said.

The president has called for a meeting on Monday evening involving the leaders of the four main parties to make a final attempt to forge a coalition, but Tsipras has declared he will participate in such discussions only if the right-wing populist Independent Greeks and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) also attend.

The ruling elite in Greece and the EU are apparently convinced that they can best regain control over growing popular opposition to the cuts with the help of SYRIZA. In the election, SYRIZA emerged as the second strongest political force on the basis of its declared opposition to the austerity measures.

The election result reflected the extent of rejection of the EU diktats by broad layers of the population. Only one-fifth of the electorate voted for the two governing parties that have dominated the country's politics since the end of military dictatorship in 1974 and formed a coalition government in recent months.

The fact that these two discredited parties are still almost able to form a majority is related to the undemocratic electoral system in Greece, which guarantees the party with a plurality, no matter how small, an additional 50 seats. New Democracy gained 18.8 percent of the vote compared to 16.8 percent for SYRIZA, but holds 108 seats in parliament compared to 52 for the supposedly “left” party.

Meanwhile, EU officials have made clear that they will make no concessions regarding the deficit-reduction targets that have already led to mass unemployment and poverty. There is even a growing chorus calling for the exclusion of Greece from the euro zone—a step that would lead to hyperinflation and even worse mass misery.

In this critical situation, the main priority for the Greek and European elites is to find a mechanism to keep popular resistance under control. A government involving SYRIZA is reckoned to have more chance of enforcing the pending cuts, perhaps with a few cosmetic changes, than a government relying solely on PASOK, ND and DIMAR.

SYRIZA has no principled objection to participating in such a regime. Last week, it was SYRIZA that commenced talks with ND and PASOK on a government coalition when Samaras passed on the negotiating mandate after just a few hours. Tsipras said that he was even prepared to work together with the Independent Greeks, a right-wing split-off from New Democracy, in order to forge a possible government.

It was only after the publication of new opinion polls indicating that SYRIZA could emerge the winner in new elections that the party shifted its stance. Tsipras subsequently declared that he would not cooperate with the two governing parties and would instead seek to form a coalition of forces opposed to the cuts.

At the same time, he moderated his anti-austerity rhetoric, omitting in a statement his previous calls for a moratorium on debt repayments and stressing the need to renegotiate the terms of EU demands.

The primary objective of a coalition including SYRIZA would be the preservation of the EU, the euro currency and European capitalism. It would negotiate with the EU to achieve at best a few minor changes and then—camouflaged with leftist rhetoric and using its connections with the trade unions—enforce new cuts against the resistance of the workers.



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