

# The political issues in the Greek elections

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Sunday's general election in Greece is uniformly portrayed as a defining moment in which the Greek people will have the chance to determine not only the future of their own country, but the course of Europe. But as far as Europe's ruling elite is concerned, Greece's fate has already been determined.

Whoever wins the election, the working class will be forced to repay the €200 billion-plus bailout through the austerity measures attached to the Memorandum signed with the troika—the European Union (EU), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This will inevitably be followed by calls for additional sacrifice, whether or not Greece is allowed to remain in the euro zone.

German chancellor Angela Merkel chose the eve of the Greek election to bluntly declare that “Germany's resources are not unlimited” and rule out all proposals that Frankfurt foot the bill for euro bonds and ECB debt guarantees. Her statements were directed against France, Britain and the US. But whatever their disagreements, on Greece they are unanimous.

There are numerous reports of detailed plans drawn up by the EU and central banks around the world in anticipation of a Greek exit from the euro. The €100 billion bailout for Spain only last weekend was widely understood as an attempt to create a firewall to prevent financial contagion spreading from a meltdown of the Greek economy.

British chancellor George Osborne said this week that a Greek exit could be the price necessary to persuade Germany to “save” the euro. Reinforcement for Osborne's claim can be found in the ongoing run on Greece's banks, which has led to a decline in deposits of up to 50 percent, with €500 million being withdrawn every day. Ex-Lehman Brothers banker Michael Tory was even more explicit than Osborne, declaring that a Greek exit from the euro could be just the “Lehman moment” Europe required to shock it into action.

The Lehman reference makes clear that this is a demand by international finance that yet more money be handed over to the banks, to be paid for through even deeper and more savage cuts.

The offer of some temporary concessions is not excluded as part of the effort at crisis management. But Greece's downward spiral will continue.

Every day, the crisis throughout Europe escalates, and every measure taken to deal with it proves ineffective. Already, the focus of the speculators has moved on from Greece. The impact of Spain's rescue was short-lived. Its borrowing rate has now soared above the unsustainable 7 percent benchmark. Italy is now widely spoken of as the next candidate for action by the troika.

The trail of devastation resulting from the predatory demands of the banks and speculators is nowhere more apparent than in Greece. After five years of austerity, its gross domestic product is estimated to have collapsed by 27 percent—unprecedented in peacetime.

A quarter of workers and half of all young people are officially unemployed. Millions more are on short-time contracts, earning as little as €300 a month. Wages have been cut by up to 50 percent, while social services are in a state of collapse. Starvation, homelessness and suicides are the subject of innumerable heart-rending news stories.

In the face of this terrible fate, no party in Greece genuinely speaks for the interests of working people.

New Democracy and PASOK are the direct accomplices in the ruination of their own people. Their election campaign translates the demands of the troika into the injunction: Do as you are told, or face social Armageddon!

Those seeking an alternative in SYRIZA (the Coalition of the Radical Left) will find none. The coalition and its leader, Alexis Tsipras, rail against the injustices suffered under the Memorandum. However, SYRIZA's stated intention is to do whatever is

necessary to maintain Greece's position in the EU and the euro zone. To this end, SYRIZA, proposes only a more protracted repayment of Greece's debt, coupled with efforts to increase revenues through more effective taxation. It hopes to persuade Europe's leading powers that this is a more attractive option than forcing Greece's immediate collapse.

Along this road there is no way out.

What unites all the parties is their insistence that workers and youth place their hopes on reaching a compromise with one or another section of the bourgeoisie. They are assisted in this by the trade unions, which have closed down any and all struggle against the austerity dictated by the troika.

Everything now depends on the independent intervention of the working class into political life.

Workers and youth in Greece are facing the full impact of a global failure of capitalism. Whatever the specific features of Greece's crisis and that of the European Union and the euro, what is fundamental is that the continued existence of the profit system is incompatible with the essential needs of the broad mass of humanity. This is as true in the United States, Russia, Japan, India and China as it is in Europe.

Greece is the victim of a social counterrevolution that is being implemented by the ruling elite and which they intend to roll out across Europe. Cuts totaling hundreds upon hundreds of billions of euros have already been made across the continent. In Greece, the ruling class is testing out just how far it can go.

Along this course, a decisive conflict between the ruling elite and the working class is inevitable. There is open discussion of social unrest in Greece escalating to the point where the military is called in. Plans for a Greek exit from the euro include closing the country's borders, and military manoeuvres have already been staged in preparation for civil unrest.

Germany's *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* summed up the mood in ruling circles when it posed the need for Europe to dispatch troops to Greece should it become a "failing state". If "Athens should no longer be able to pay its officials or pay only in drachmas," the situation would become "chaotic," with Greece "rocked by rebellions", it wrote last month.

Noting the recent extension of the deployment of EU troops at the Greek/Turkish border, it concluded, "Hopefully, an international protection force, such as is

stationed in the teetering countries to the north, will not become an option."

The Greek working class cannot base its political actions on either the false hopes promoted by SYRIZA or the fears whipped up by New Democracy and PASOK. They must look reality squarely in the face.

The same holds true for all of Europe's workers, who must be as resolute in defending their Greek brothers and sisters as the ruling elite is in its determination to impoverish them.

Solidarity with Greece's workers must be the focus of a political movement of the entire European working class against the predatory governments in Berlin, Paris, London, etc. The bosses' European Union must be overthrown and replaced by workers' governments organised within a United Socialist States of Europe.

To this end, independent organs of struggle must be forged in every workplace and neighbourhood. What is required above all is a genuinely socialist leadership developed through the construction of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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