

Athens workers and youth discuss Greek election result

Robert Stevens
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The *World Socialist Web Site* discussed with workers and youth in Athens the result of Sunday's general election as negotiations continued to form a government following the narrow victory of the conservative New Democracy.

Finishing in first place with 29.66 percent (less than 3 percent ahead of the second place SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), ND was able to secure an extra 50 seats under Greece's electoral system. ND won a total of 1.8 million votes, up from 1.2 million in May's inconclusive general election, while SYRIZA's vote rose to 1.7 million from 1.1 million.

Whilst the exact make-up of the new government is yet to be finalised, what is assured is an enormous sharpening of class antagonisms in Greece. As the main party in any coalition, ND will move to ensure a continuation of mass austerity against the population, intensifying the already record unemployment levels and deepening the pauperisation of Greek workers and youth. The new opposition party, SYRIZA has already stated its aim is to function as a "responsible" opposition and that an ND led government is the "will of the people."

In reality, ND has no popular mandate in which to carry out its onslaught on behalf of the Troika—the European Union (EU), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Central Bank (ECB).

In their rush to proclaim the result as a popular mandate from the Greek population to remain in the euro zone, barely any mention has been made of the fact that the election saw a record low turnout. Just 62.4 percent of registered voters turned out, down from 65.1 percent at the May 6 election.

The 37.53 percent of people who didn't vote is significantly higher than the vote obtained by any single party. The prime reason for this abstention is the

lack of faith in any of the parties, especially the ND and the social democratic PASOK, who are rightly viewed as the architects of the social misery now being imposed.

In a number of prefectures the turnouts were well below national average, with Florina at 61 percent, Kefalonia 56.78 percent, Lakonia 55.89 percent, Evrytania 53.65 percent and Lesvos 54.43 percent. The low turnout was also reflected in the turnout in the Athens "B" area, with its 1.4 million registered voters living in mainly working class districts. Although at 70 percent it was higher than the national average, this was down from 73.4 percent in the May election.

One factor in the low turnout is directly linked to the mass poverty that has engulfed Greece. During the last week WSWs reporters have been told by many people that they would not be voting as they could not afford the travel costs from Athens to return to their ancestral home towns and villages where they are registered to vote, as is required by law.

Overall, seven parties will receive seats in parliament. Besides ND and SYRIZA, PASOK won just 12.28 percent gaining 33 seats, the right-wing nationalist Independent Greeks 7.51 percent (20 seats), the fascist Golden Dawn 6.92 percent (18 seats), the Democratic Left (DIMAR) 6.26 percent (17 seats), and the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE) 4.5 percent (12 seats).

PASOK, which in the October 2009 general election won 43.9 percent of the vote, was wiped out nationally, falling even below its dismal total last month. It is the party most associated with the austerity measures, which it began imposing two and a half years ago.

The party no longer has a majority in any constituency in Greece, losing even its former stronghold, the island of Crete, which has a population

of 600,000. PASOK's vote in Crete collapsed with SYRIZA winning first place and PASOK finishing third, behind ND.

The central feature of the election campaign echoed the threats of the EU, that credit to Greece would be terminated if the result threatened the austerity measures already agreed in the last 110 billion euro loan to Greece.

Workers and youth in the western Athens suburb of Peristeri described to the WWS this climate of fear and blackmail that overshadowed the election campaign.

Ioanna is unemployed and was outside the unemployment office. She said, "I didn't vote because there was no real choice in this election." Speaking about ND's victory she said, "If the people wouldn't have elected this government they would have thrown Greece out of the euro zone."

Katerina, a 27 year old Spanish teacher said, "The media played a crucial role [in the result] by creating this fear."

SYRIZA won the most votes among working class voters nationally, on the basis of their criticism of the austerity agendas of ND and PASOK.

In many districts of Athens such as Chaidari, Aigaleo and Peristeri as well as the port area of Peireos B, SYRIZA recorded pluralities often above 35 percent. In contrast ND won in areas with a more affluent middle class electoral make-up. In Kifissia, northern Athens, where many of Greece's traditional political families reside, ND won with a plurality of 44.5 percent.

According to exit polls, comparing the results to the previous month's election, SYRIZA won support from 14 percent of former PASOK voters and 24 percent of former Democratic Left voters. ND won an estimated 22 percent of voters from the Independent Greeks, 17 percent from Golden Dawn and 9 percent from Democratic Left and other parties.

The KKE's vote fell significantly, nearly halving from 8.48 percent in the May election to 4.5 percent. Exit polls recorded that 24 to 26 percent of those previously voting KKE, switched to SYRIZA. In May, the Communist Party won a majority on the island of Samos but lost it to SYRIZA in Sunday's vote.

Many workers told the WWS that there was no political party standing in the election that represented

their class interests. Ioanna said, "There is no party that could bring us out of the crisis." She added that SYRIZA wouldn't be an alternative, "because it wants to renegotiate the debt with the EU countries—which the EU won't accept."

Panagiotis, a worker employed in the private sector, said he voted ND over the last few years, but didn't go to the polls this time. He said, "ND and PASOK brought us into this situation, but SYRIZA is no alternative." He said "SYRIZA's policy could lead to an exit from the euro zone," which he wanted to avoid.

A number of working class and other voters told us that they voted for SYRIZA, without being convinced of their programme.

Georgos sells bread from a makeshift handcart in front of the Peristeri unemployment office. He told the WWS, "The people who come here don't even have the money to buy bread anymore."

"Most of the people don't believe that the elections will change anything," he added. "They voted for SYRIZA as a kind of protest against the two-party system and the memorandum [the austerity plan dictated by the EU]. But people didn't believe that they would change a lot. Tsipras and Antonis Samaras said the same things with different words."

Panagiotis predicted that further attacks on the living standards of the population would result in an escalation of social anger and protest. "I am surprised that there has not been much social unrest so far. With the next memorandum there will be social unrest because people will be just not able to live."

Georgos agreed, saying, "If there won't be any help for the people and the cuts continue, there will be social unrest."

A young unemployed man also told us impassionedly, "If the cuts will continue—and they will drink our blood—the people won't fear anything anymore."



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