

What way forward in Greece?

Chris Marsden
19 June 2012

New Democracy (ND) leader Antonis Samaras is expected to form a coalition government in Greece tasked with implementing the brutal austerity measures agreed with the troika—the European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank.

The ND victory is above all an indictment of SYRIZA, which emerged as the main opposition party, and its claim that austerity can be opposed without a struggle to overthrow the EU and the Greek bourgeoisie.

Greece's general election starkly confirmed the absence of any recourse through the existing political setup to combat the dictates of the troika and the banks.

ND's victory was the end result of a campaign based on naked blackmail. One European leader after another threatened that a vote against ND—the main party endorsing the austerity memorandum signed with the troika—would lead to an immediate freeze on money used to bail out Greek banks, a forced Greek withdrawal from the euro zone, and a catastrophic economic collapse.

Even so, parties formally opposed to the memorandum secured a majority, with SYRIZA's vote reaching 27 percent. A record 37.5 percent abstained. This reflects broad-based disgust with the entire political establishment, as well as the inability of many voters to pay for traveling from the cities to their home villages and back in order to vote.

Though only 40 percent of those who did vote backed the parties overtly supporting the memorandum, ND and the social democratic PASOK, these two despised parties are reportedly in talks to form a government. They would have a parliamentary majority thanks to the 50-seat bonus ND receives as the winning party under Greece's anti-democratic electoral laws. Such a government will have no popular mandate for its

policies and will only pave the way for a confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the working class.

Samaras knows his position is precarious, hence his attempt to create “a salvation government” including “as many parties as possible”—the Democratic Left, a splinter from SYRIZA, and another small party—combined with talk of renegotiating aspects of the agreement.

European leaders dismissed any possibility of a significant shift on their demands, reiterating their pre-election threats. At the G20 in Mexico, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated baldly, “The important thing is that the new government sticks with the commitments that have been made. There can be no loosening on the reform steps.”

That the majority of the electorate still refused to endorse the memorandum or took no part in a ballot portrayed as determining the future of Greece and the entire EU is proof of the deep hostility aroused by the savage cuts imposed since 2009. However, SYRIZA only channeled this opposition into a political dead end.

SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras spent the campaign reassuring the ruling elite that he was committed to the EU and repaying Greece's debts through stepped-up tax collection, desiring only small concessions and a more extended repayment period. To workers, he insisted that opposition to the EU and to capitalism was unrealizable, unrealistic and a road to national suicide.

This reflects the class interests and the political illusions of the affluent middle class layers for which SYRIZA speaks. Though they are angry at the unfolding political disaster in Greece, SYRIZA's leaders are organically hostile to a socialist strategy to fight it: the broad mobilization of the entire European working class in struggle against the EU and capitalism.

SYRIZA now plans to act as a loyal opposition. Yesterday, Tsipras absurdly claimed that an ND

government was in accordance with the “mandate of the people.” Opposition “should be critical and responsible, and I have informed Mr. Samaras that we intend to be that,” he said.

The paralysing impact of SYRIZA’s line and the support it received from pseudo-left groups internationally allows the ruling elite freedom of action, even as mass opposition to austerity evidenced in Greece spreads throughout Europe. Parties associated with austerity measures, whatever their formal coloration, are routinely punished at the polls: Spain’s PSOE, the Socialist Party in Portugal, Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and Sarkozy’s UMP in France are among the victims. Each government that replaces them pushes for more austerity and runs into a political backlash and stiff resistance from the working class, however.

For this reason, there is no confidence in ruling circles that what they do in Greece—including more savage cuts and possibly forcing Greece out of the euro zone—will prevent a political and economic catastrophe.

Markets fell sharply despite ND’s victory in Greece. Spain and Italy’s bonds continue to be targeted by speculators, and bank shares also fell in Germany and France. Institute of International Finance chief Charles Dallara warned the G20 leaders: “The risk of a global recession again, for the second time in four years, is very real.”

Under such conditions, the “Plan B” SYRIZA and its counterparts urge the ruling class to adopt will not be a turn away from austerity, but more deep-going attacks on the working class. These will be imposed by whatever means necessary—including a resort to police-military repression.

Workers and youth throughout Europe must draw the central lesson of Greece and make a decisive change in political course. The bitter experience of Greece confirms that the task at hand is not to reform the EU or pressurise its constituent governments for concessions, under the leadership of pseudo-left parties like SYRIZA.

New parties of the working class must be built to mobilise an industrial and political offensive against big business, its parties and governments and their collective enforcers in the EU and IMF. The goal must be workers’ governments organised within a United Socialist States of Europe. Nothing less than the

construction of such a genuinely socialist and internationalist leadership—sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International—will do.

Chris Marsden



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact