

DIMAR party leaves Greek government amid protests over TV shutdown

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The chairman of Greece's Democratic Left (DIMAR) party, Fotis Kouvelis, announced on Friday that his party will leave the Greek government coalition. The decision, which leaves the government with a slim majority of only three deputies, is a response to growing opposition in the working class to austerity measures and, in particular, to attempts to shut down Greek public broadcaster ERT.

Prime Minister Antonis Samaras of the conservative New Democracy (ND) party expressed his regrets, but stressed that he would continue the coalition with the social-democratic PASOK party. A reshuffle of cabinet seats will give PASOK more ministerial positions.

According to Kouvelis, the reason for his step was the "unacceptable" decision by Samaras to close Greek public broadcaster ERT. "This issue is fundamentally an issue of democracy," Kouvelis said.

Samaras and his ND closed ERT last week by ministerial decree, sacking its 2,600 employees with immediate effect. This decision triggered mass popular protests and was criticized by both DIMAR and PASOK. On Monday, a court ruled that ERT must reopen and cannot be closed without the approval of the parliament.

On Thursday, Samaras and PASOK chairman Evangelos Venizelos agreed on the compromise to rehire 2,000 of the sacked workers on temporary contracts until the end of the summer. At that time, a new public broadcasting service should be set up; it may re-hire some of the concerned workers. Kouvelis rejected this compromise, insisting that the "necessary reconstruction" of ERT should be organized during ongoing operations.

By leaving the Samaras government, DIMAR is engaging in a cynical political maneuver—the party's basic mode of existence. Since it joined ND and

PASOK in government in 2012, it has supported the most brutal social attacks on the workers while simultaneously trying to posture as a "left" critic of such policies. In one instance last October, DIMAR refused to vote for the fifth austerity package, but proceeded to support the state budget that made the social cuts dictated by that austerity package.

Kouvelis made clear today that his party will continue supporting the government in implementing EU austerity policies. "The Democratic Left insists on its reform policy and will continue to seek and demand solutions within the European reality," he said.

He added that DIMAR would only oppose "arbitrary acts, despotism and policies that promote party choice."

These remarks show that the decision of Kouvelis and DIMAR to leave the government did not reflect opposition to the Samaras governments' policies. Rather, in order to continue posturing as critics of Samaras, it had to distance itself somewhat from the reactionary policies that it has been supporting from inside the coalition government.

Underlying this calculation is the escalation of the class struggle in Greece in recent months, which made it increasingly difficult for DIMAR to provide a "left" cover for Samaras from within the government.

As workers have launched more and more strikes, with such industrial action threatening to escalate into a challenge to Samaras' policies, Samaras has responded with open strike-breaking. In January, they mobilized police against striking subway workers and imposed a state of emergency to force them back to work. The same thing happened to the seamen in February. In May, teachers, who even had not yet decided to strike, were drafted and thereby forced back to work under state of emergency legislation, as were Athens subway workers in January.

Underlying these confrontations are the demands of the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which are formulating the Greek government's austerity policies. In recent days, they have increased the pressure on Greece. An inspection delegation of EU and IMF officials is still in Greece and will prepare a report on the progress of the austerity measures for the end of July, to decide whether to pay the next tranche of aid loans to the Greek government.

European officials have already indicated that the Greek government has enforced only half of some 300 measures that are supposed to be implemented by the end of June. Greece has to "really concentrate all energy on the implementation of the program," European Monetary and Economic Affairs Commissioner Olli Rehn said.

These prospects and the massive suppression of any resistance to this policy led to the massive eruption of solidarity actions with the ERT workers. When Samaras sent the police to cut off the energy supply to ERT broadcasting antennas on Tuesday of last week, it was broadly seen not only as an attack on jobs and culture, but also on democratic rights and as a sign of the ruthlessness of the Greek government.

Within hours, thousands of demonstrators gathered in front of the main ERT building in Athens, which was—and still is—occupied by the workers. One day later, the crowd swelled to tens of thousands. Dozens of organizations and individuals rebroadcast the protest program that is being broadcast by ERT workers. There are still daily demonstrations taking place to reopen ERT, and the workers refused to sign the temporary contracts, which the government offered.

DIMAR's role in government also exposes the political character of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), from which DIMAR split in June of 2010. SYRIZA is today the largest opposition party in Greece, with 71 deputies, compared to DIMAR's 14 lawmakers. SYRIZA played a crucial role in implementing the austerity measures which is similar to DIMAR: while verbally criticizing these policies, SYRIZA supports them and the Samaras government in all critical situations.

Until 1992, Kouvelis was the General Secretary of Synaspismos, the largest party within SYRIZA. The differences that emerged in 2010 had only a tactical character. While DIMAR was more oriented to direct

involvement in government, the forces that remained in SYRIZA believed that at that time, they could better stabilize bourgeois rule if they remained in opposition.

Even though DIMAR announced that it would support most of the government measures, the ND-PASOK coalition is highly unstable. Over the last year nine deputies have already left the ND or PASOK fractions in parliament. The government could rapidly lose its three-seat majority, especially under conditions of rising class struggles and tensions within the ruling elite.



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