

Vote of no confidence in Greek government fails

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13 November 2013

A vote of no confidence in the Greek government initiated by the largest opposition party, SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), failed by a wide margin on Sunday. The result of the vote has strengthened the government, which faces a growing wave of social struggles.

SYRIZA called for the no confidence vote on Friday, in the wake of a police assault on protesting workers at the former public broadcaster ERT (Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation). After a debate, the parliament voted on the motion Sunday night.

The coalition of the conservative New Democracy (ND) and the social democratic Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) received the backing of 153 of the 294 deputies who were present. Seventeen deputies abstained, including 14 from the Democratic Left (DIMAR), a split-off from SYRIZA. DIMAR was part of the government until June of this year.

One hundred and twenty four deputies voted in favour of the no confidence motion. Along with SYRIZA, the right-wing populist Independent Greeks (ANEL), the Communist Party (KKE), and the fascist Golden Dawn voted against the government. PASOK deputy Theodora Tzakri also voted for the motion and was immediately expelled from her parliamentary fraction.

“The government has emerged stronger from the vote,” said Prime Minister Antonis Samaras (ND) after the ballot, which was broadcast live on Greek television. No further no confidence motion can be proposed for six months.

The result did not come as a surprise. The government has a clear majority, with 155 seats in parliament, and DIMAR had announced that it would abstain in the event of a no confidence vote. In order to obtain the 151 votes required for new elections,

SYRIZA needed the support of 20 deputies from the governing parties.

SYRIZA introduced the motion fully expecting it to fail. It was a parliamentary manoeuvre intended to provide political cover for its collaboration in the ongoing austerity offensive against the working class. The aim as well was to contain and dissipate growing popular anger over the attacks on social conditions and democratic rights, further inflamed by the police attack on the ERT workers.

There are no fundamental political differences between SYRIZA and the government. Representatives of SYRIZA have repeatedly pointed out that they do not oppose the austerity agenda of the European Union (EU), but merely want to renegotiate its terms. Last week, SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras confirmed this at a forum at the University of Texas, where he reiterated that a SYRIZA government would under no circumstances leave the European Union.

During the debate on the vote of no confidence, Tsipras presented himself as a voice of moderation and defender of the established order, indicating that his party did not in principle oppose austerity policies. He combined limited criticisms of the government with reassurances to the EU and asserted that SYRIZA was ready to negotiate with the country’s creditors. By means of the no confidence vote, his party wanted to avert economic catastrophe and the decline of democracy, Tsipras said.

He complained that the government had failed to negotiate better terms for the bailout of the Greek economy with the “troika” (the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund). It had submissively adopted deeper austerity measures rather than suggesting alternatives to the nation’s creditors or pointing to the humanitarian crisis.

The government, Tsipras asserted, had to implement new measures to stimulate growth.

In the name of a policy of “growth” and job-creation, the troika is demanding that the government reduce corporate contributions to social insurance, i.e., deepen the attack on social welfare programs and pensions.

Tsipras is increasingly combining his pro-EU politics with appeals to Greek nationalism. In the parliamentary debate, he denounced Samaras for being under foreign control. This follows his speech at SYRIZA’s party congress in July, where he called on “patriots” of all parties to become members of SYRIZA.

Earlier this year, SYRIZA formed a united front with the nationalist ANEL to call for an EU bailout to rescue Cypriot banks.

The aim of such rhetoric is to mobilize layers of the petty-bourgeoisie in support of the EU’s social cuts and against the social interests of the working class. Only a few thousand people came to a rally called by SYRIZA on Sunday evening on Athens’ Syntagma square. The majority of these were trade union bureaucrats and representatives of the privileged middle class.

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The manoeuvres of SYRIZA are a response to intensifying social conflicts in Greece. Workers in all areas of the public sector are fighting against mass layoffs. Hundreds of thousands of workers took part in a general strike last Wednesday. Since then, the government has taken increasingly brutal action against working class opposition.

The eviction of workers from the headquarters of the former public broadcaster, which was the occasion for the vote of no confidence, marks a further escalation of violence against strikes and protests.

One day later, a court declared a strike of university staff illegal. The university employees have been fighting for over two months against government plans for sweeping job cuts.

Despite the court ruling, the workers decided on Monday to continue their strike. Under similar court orders, the government has in recent months placed striking subway workers and seamen under martial law and forced them back to work.

The actions taken against the ERT workers and the university staff were discussed in detail with representatives of the troika. They have been in Athens

since last week to advise the government on how the agreed layoffs and spending cuts can be imposed against the opposition of the working class. Otherwise, the troika has threatened not to release the next €1 billion tranche of bailout cash.

In addition, new social attacks for 2014 have been discussed. Finance Minister Giannis Stournaras announced that he had already identified €2.2 billion in further cuts, but he did not give any details.

Under these conditions, SYRIZA is doing all in its power to defend the government and the troika against the resistance of the workers. It is promoting the illusion that the social attacks are the result merely of a poor negotiating strategy, rather than the consensus policy of the European and international bourgeoisie.



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