

In bid to ram through austerity package, Tsipras calls snap elections in Greece

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Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras used a nationally televised address yesterday evening to announce his resignation and the calling of snap elections. While Tsipras defended his government's imposition of a European Union (EU) package of deep austerity measures, government sources said the elections would most likely be set for September 20, before these measures begin to go into effect in October.

"I will go to the president of the republic shortly to submit my resignation, as well as the resignation of my government," Tsipras said before going to meet with President Prokopis Pavlopoulos.

In his subsequent meeting with Pavlopoulos, Tsipras said that he did not have enough support for his policy agenda: "The present parliament cannot offer a government of majority or a national unity government."

The Greek constitution now grants the leaders of the country's three largest parties—Syriza, the right-wing New Democracy (ND), and the pro-EU The River party—up to three days each to try to form a government. If they fail, a caretaker prime minister, Supreme Court head Vassiliki Thanou-Christofilou, will be appointed to serve until the elections.

The election is a cynical attempt to boost Syriza's vote and stabilize the state apparatus in anticipation of a confrontation with the working class. Tsipras aims to retain office but obtain a new parliament and government, providing a more reliable base of support for imposing his austerity policies.

Tsipras agreed to the July 13 EU austerity package in flagrant violation of the wishes of the Greek electorate. It elected the Syriza party in January based on the party's promises to end the EU austerity Memorandum, and voted by an overwhelming 61 percent to reject EU

austerity in a referendum called as Tsipras negotiated austerity with the EU.

Yesterday, Tsipras defended this reactionary and anti-democratic record, appealing to voters for support on the fraudulent basis that Syriza had negotiated harder than previous governments. "I'm very proud of my government. We've negotiated hard, for a long time," he said.

"I want to be completely honest, we did not achieve the agreement we expected before the January elections," he said, asserting that Greece was now obliged to honor the agreement. "I feel a moral and political obligation to submit to your judgment.... Your vote will decide if the deal we reached can get us out of the crisis."

Tsipras's posturing as a great democrat, anxious to obtain the mandate of the people for his policies, is a disgusting fraud. The bitter truth is that there is no party that voters can vote for in parliament in order to reject the deal he has imposed upon the Greek people in defiance of their votes. Other parties that could conceivably form or join a government coalition—ND, The River, the PASOK social democrats—are all champions of EU austerity.

A confrontation between the ruling class and the working class is brewing, and opposition will mount as Tsipras' austerity measures, including deep pension cuts, hit the Greek people in October.

In calling elections now, Tsipras apparently aims to capitalize on polls showing that, six months after taking office, and before its austerity measures go into effect, Syriza is still less discredited than the rest of Greece's political establishment. July polls showed Syriza getting up to 40 percent of the vote, versus 20 percent for ND, the likely second-place finisher. Syriza could aim to increase its vote or to bring right-wing parties

such as ND into a new government coalition.

Central to Tsipras' calculations is finally dealing with the dissident faction in his party, as has long been demanded by the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the media. Tsipras was facing a vote of no confidence due to the erosion of his government's majority. In the recent vote by the Greek parliament passing the austerity programme, 43 Syriza deputies did not support Tsipras. Most of these were members of the party's Left Platform. As a result, the number of MPs in the governing coalition who backed the bailout fell to 118, with 120 required to survive a parliamentary no confidence vote.

Hitherto, in every truly critical vote where its opposition might have scuppered EU austerity, the Left Platform proved itself a reliable ally of Tsipras. On July 30, it led the drive to avoid a vote on EU austerity in Syriza's Central Committee, which technically would have had the authority to compel Syriza legislators to vote against the measures agreed upon by Tsipras.

But this position has become politically untenable. Faced with expulsions organised by Tsipras, on Friday morning 25 Left Platform parliamentary deputies formally quit Syriza and formed a new political party that will stand in the upcoming election. As its name, Popular Unity, indicates its purpose will be mobilise various pseudo-left outfits to channel growing opposition to austerity into a dead-end combining anti-memorandum and EU demagoguery with measures such as capital controls and the possible reintroduction of a national currency that in no way challenges the rule of capital.

Numerous sources in the bourgeois press argued that it was best for Tsipras to hold new elections rapidly, before he faces an explosion of popular opposition to austerity.

The *Guardian's* Helena Smith wrote, "By triggering an election so soon, many believe he will be able to outmanoeuvre his internal foes in Syriza before an impoverished population feel the impact of further tax increases and other bailout measures. By the time international inspectors return to Athens to conduct their first bailout review in October, it might be too late to capitalize on his popularity at all."

The conservative Greek daily *Kathimerini* wrote, "Although Syriza's ratings have escaped relatively unscathed, Tsipras' teflon suit could start to wear

uncomfortably thin as voters begin to feel the pinch of mounting austerity measures."

Such comments underscore the dishonest and reactionary character of Syriza, which has from the beginning of its term in office served as a tool of finance capital against the workers. It seeks to shore up its support inside the state by posing as a defender of the Greek people, as it plots to weld together a powerful majority in the Greek parliament to trample the repeatedly expressed opposition to austerity in the Greek electorate.

Some figures in financial circles expressed concerns last night that the formation of a caretaker government and lasting political uncertainty might block the cuts agreed upon by Syriza and the EU. Thus the *Financial Times* of London wrote, "The election campaign is expected to delay the implementation of fiscal and structural reforms agreed with creditors since the interim government will lack a mandate to take political decisions."

A raft of leading officials rapidly came to the defense of Tsipras' decision to call new elections, however, hailing it as key to enforcing the EU austerity agenda in Greece. Martin Selmayr, the chief of staff of European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, praised the snap election call: "Swift elections in Greece can be a way to broaden support for ESM [the European Stability Mechanism bailout] stability support program just signed PM Tsipras on behalf of Greece."

After speaking to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is visiting Brazil, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff said Merkel had told her, "Tsipras stepping down is part of the solution, not part of the crisis."

Pierre Moscovici, a former minister of France's ruling Socialist Party (PS) who is now European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, hailed the move in a message posted to Twitter: "I'm taking note of Tsipras' decision. Greece signed up to the new program. Broad support and determined delivery is key for its success."



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