

Polls show fall in support for Syriza ahead of Greek general election

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On Friday, Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos confirmed that September 20 will be the date of a general election triggered by the resignation of Syriza Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras on August 20.

A caretaker government, headed by Vassiliki Thanou, has been formed after the conservative New Democracy (ND) and the new Syriza break-away Popular Unity failed to form a government last week in a constitutionally-required process.

The election date was announced on the same day that a welter of polls showed a fall in support for Syriza after it pushed through Greece's third austerity memorandum, repudiating the sentiment that originally brought it to power at the beginning of the year.

Syriza was elected with 36 percent of the vote in January, winning 149 seats in the 300-seat parliament. Falling just short of an overall majority, it entered in a coalition with the right-wing xenophobic Independent Greeks (Anel) and quickly proceeded to implement European Union diktats.

After calling a referendum on July 5, in which 61 percent of the population voted against austerity, Tsipras moved quickly to repudiate the result. Tsipras called the referendum fully expecting to lose it. In its wake, he has moved quickly to impose even more onerous conditions than those inflicted by the ND-led coalition.

The new elections called by Tsipras are another political fraud aimed at suppressing the determined and repeatedly-voiced anti-austerity sentiment of the Greek working class and youth.

There are ongoing discussions over the formation of some sort of "national unity" government, which would be tasked with enforcing the unpopular measures that the Greek parliament has already agreed to. Tsipras himself has said that he would only stay on as prime

minister if Syriza was in coalition with Anel.

Polls currently show that Syriza could again receive the largest vote, but in a much tighter race than in January. According to a ProRata poll, published in *Efimerida Ton Syntakton*, just 23 percent would vote for Syriza, with ND polling at 19.5 percent.

ProRata's survey shows a significant fall in support for Syriza in the weeks since it signed the third memorandum. In early July, at the time of the referendum, Syriza was still polling at 26 percent compared with 15 percent for ND. The latest poll found that one third of those who voted for Syriza in January 2015 were now unsure if they would do so in the next election. Another 25.5 percent of voters, the largest bloc of those polled, were undecided.

A poll by the University of Macedonia showed Syriza with just a three percentage point lead, with 25 percent support, down from 34.5 percent in June.

Tsipras' own personal rating has fallen drastically. As late as March, 70 percent of voters said they had a "positive or very positive view" of him. The University of Macedonia's poll showed his approval rating has fallen by more than half in the last month, from 61 percent to 29 percent.

The University of Macedonia's survey projects that nine parties will enter parliament by gaining more votes than the 3 percent threshold required. Among these would be the Popular Unity Party, with 5 percent. Popular Unity was founded earlier this month by members of the party's former "Left Platform" tendency who claimed to oppose the austerity agenda of the party they had propped up for months.

The university poll and two others found that the Independent Greeks would not pass the threshold, scoring just 2 percent, less than half the 4.7 percent vote it won in January.

Syriza and the political establishment as a whole are well aware that the austerity measures they have agreed to will engender massive opposition from an already largely pauperised working class and other poverty-stricken layers of society. The formation of Popular Unity is part of efforts to contain and channel this opposition.

While most of the new austerity measures will not go into effect until after the elections, last week the first pension cuts began to be imposed. *Gr Reporter* noted that, “The amounts of the main and supplementary pensions to be transferred to [pensioners’] bank accounts will be 3-4% and 6% lower respectively”, with the changes hitting, “hundreds of thousands of Greeks who receive pensions from the main insurance fund IKA in Greece and the pension fund of public sector employees.”

It added, “Similar will be the reductions of pensions that the pension funds will pay to workers in private practice and farmers on 1 September.”

Added to previous cuts, pensioners who had been receiving €1,000 in 2010 will now receive a pension of just €892, a cut of more than 10 percent. Individuals who had been receiving a supplementary pension of €200 will now receive only €148, a cut of more than 25 percent.

The personnel that have been appointed to lead the caretaker government already bear the stamp of the type of pro-austerity regime that the EU, IMF and European Central Bank are demanding.

Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the head of the Eurogroup (finance minister of the eurozone nations), stated baldly that the remit of both the caretaker government and the government formed after the elections must be to impose the already agreed austerity package. He said, “I hope [the caretaker government] will—and they should—continue with preparations, so that a new government can implement the next steps immediately so we don’t lose any time.”

Speaking of Interim Finance Minister George Chouliarakis, Dijsselbloem said, he “knows what he’s doing because he was top man in the ministry for the past year-and-a-half”. Chouliarakis taught economics at the University of Essex, where a number of the leading academic figures around Syriza were based. He now holds a leading position at the University of Manchester.

Beginning in April, Chouliarakis played a central role in the negotiations leading to the third memorandum agreement.



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