

Disaffection with Syriza mounts in Greece ahead of election

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The crisis within the Greece's ruling Syriza party is mounting ahead of this month's general election. The election, to be held on September 20, was triggered by the resignation of Syriza Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras on August 20. He stood down after Syriza, along with the other pro-austerities parties, pushed through a bill outlining the most devastating attacks yet against the working class.

In July, Syriza signed the third austerity memorandum, after months of negotiations with the European Union (EU), European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund. This came just days after the population voted in a landslide to reject the framework of that agreement.

Since then, with the vast portion of austerity still to be imposed, Syriza's poll ratings have collapsed. Polls this week found that Syriza and the conservative New Democracy (ND) were now virtually neck and neck.

On Thursday, a poll for the first time showed ND had a slight lead over Syriza at 25.3 percent to 25 percent.

Prior to Tsipras agreeing to impose more EU austerity, thus repudiating pledges to repeal all EU austerity measures that he made prior to the January's election that brought him to power, Syriza had a commanding lead in the polls. As late as the middle of June, support for Syriza stood at almost 50 percent—more than double the support recorded for ND.

Opinion polls are subject to many vagaries, of course, and surveys published so far show no party would get enough votes for an outright parliamentary majority.

What is clear, however, is that disaffection with Syriza is escalating. Regardless of the result of the election, further political instability and social unrest is certain.

The right-wing *Kathemerini* cited the comments of a “senior EU diplomat” who said a further election

beyond September would be “absolutely disastrous”. He added, “The government budget is already out of control. The EU made a decision to keep Greece in the euro zone in July but its future remains precarious. Its economy is slowly dying. Political stability, at the very least, is vital.”

Discontent with Syriza is rising within layers of Greek society who previously supported and had illusions in it. *Guardian* journalist Helena Smith spoke to two students in Athens. One was 20 years old and in her final year. She told Smith, “We really thought that as our youngest prime minister, Alexis Tsipras would have done something positive for our country. He did not.”

Her friend, 21, also in her final year said, “Overnight, it seemed, Greece was grappling with bankruptcy and then there was Tsipras offering real hope. I voted for him. I was happy to”. She added, “He made so many promises. He should have said less. He did everything he pledged he wouldn't do. Of course I'm disappointed.”

Reuters reported the comments of a 72-year-old pensioner who said, “He [Tsipras] promised us that he wouldn't touch pensions and that he would tear up the bailout agreements. He didn't tear up anything and now he's put us in a worse position, and the Greek people are going to suffer.”

As Tsipras announced the election, the Left Platform, an amalgam of various pseudo-left forces working inside the Syriza government until last month, exited the party that had kept in power up until that point.

Anticipating an enormous popular backlash against Syriza's perfidy, they set up Popular Unity. Its main function is to prevent any lessons from being drawn by working people on the role of Syriza as a prop of bourgeois rule and to prevent a politically independent

movement of the working class from developing against Syriza's various factions.

The Left Platform, which represents a substantial section of Syriza, played a central role in its betrayal. Stathis Kouvelakis, a leading figure within Popular Unity, stated this week on Facebook that most of the Central Committee members elected at Syriza's Congress in 2013 have now resigned. He added, "The vast majority of them has left the party altogether ... and the biggest chunk has joined or supports Popular Unity."

This week, a number of other former high-ranking figures in Syriza came out in support of Popular Unity, including Zoe Konstantopoulou, the former Speaker of the Greek parliament, and Nadia Valavani, former deputy finance minister. Valavani, as with many of Syriza's leading cadre, was once a member of the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE).

Konstantopoulou said she will stand as Independent in the election and, if elected, will back Popular Unity in parliament. Polls suggest that Popular Unity will win support above the three percent threshold allowing parliamentary representation, with one survey showing support for them as high as 8 percent.

Also among those defecting from Syriza this week was Tsipras' own speechwriter, Theodoros Kollias, who had previously also been an aide.

Syriza's crisis worsened Tuesday when its youth wing effectively split and announced it would not support its parent organisation in the election.

In the weeks leading to the election, Syriza and Greece's other bourgeois parties are seeking to cement alliances. In some cases, these are desperate attempts to avert the eradication of whatever remaining support they can muster.

Up to nine parties could be represented in parliament following the election. Several polls show that the fascist Golden Dawn, who have long postured as an anti-austerity party, have been able to take advantage of Syriza's betrayal, placing third with around six percent of the vote. They are followed by the KKE on around 5 percent. The pro-austerity social democratic PASOK and River (Potami) parties both poll at around 4 percent.

Most polls show that the xenophobic, right-wing Independent Greeks (Anel), Syriza's former coalition

allies, may not win enough votes to enter parliament. Syriza and Anel have stated that they would work with each other again in a future coalition.

While Tsipras cynically declared that Syriza would refuse to govern with ND and Pasok, which he called "old establishment parties," other Syriza officials have not ruled out such a coalition.

In an interview last Sunday with *Proto Thema*, New Democracy leader Evangelos Meimarakis refused to rule out a future coalition with Syriza as a part of a "national unity" government. While stating that "Our ambition is to be the first party," he added, "from the moment we come first, there can be a broader cooperation of political forces of the European front for a four-year government based on a national plan for economic and social restoration."

Other pro-austerity parties, including Pasok and the Democratic Left (a right-wing splinter from Syriza), who recently announced a joint electoral alliance, could also join such a formation. After its 2010 split with Syriza, the Democratic Left participated, just two years later, in a ND-PASOK government that imposed vicious EU austerity measures.

These elections are an attempt by the ruling class to impose a parliamentary dictatorship dedicated to pursuing austerity on the masses. *Kathemerini* editorialised Wednesday, "[W]hichever government emerges, in whatever form, will have a duty to implement the third bailout deal that was ratified in Parliament by the majority of SYRIZA, New Democracy, To Potami and PASOK."



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