

Syriza poised to hand over power to New Democracy in Greece's July 7 elections

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After coming to power in 2015 promising to end European Union (EU) austerity and then betraying those promises, imposing the largest raft of EU social cuts in Greece's history, the Syriza ("Coalition of the Radical Left") government faces shipwreck in Sunday's elections. All polls show right-wing New Democracy (ND) candidate Kyriakos Mitsotakis defeating Syriza Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and forming a government.

ND defeated Syriza 33 percent to 24 percent in the May EU elections and trounced it in the ensuing local elections. ND carried 12 of Greece's 13 regions, including the regions of both Athens and Thessaloniki, Greece's two largest cities. Polls have shown ND defeating Syriza by a similar margin in the July 7 legislative elections, which Tsipras called four months ahead of schedule, just after his party's defeat in the EU elections.

By calling early elections, Tsipras is seeking to hand over power to fascistic, right-wing forces amid growing opposition in the working class to the reactionary policies of his petty-bourgeois party.

Syriza's EU election rout, Tsipras told President Prokopis Pavlopoulos while asking him to dissolve parliament, had "created a situation of a protracted pre-election period of about four months. I have the responsibility to consider that this may pose a threat for the national economy. ... Given that we have entered into a virtuous circle, it must not in any way be affected, because that would mean that the sacrifices of the Greek people would be jeopardised. Having a full sense of this responsibility, I ask you to dissolve parliament and call for national elections to renew the mandate."

Tsipras' claim that the purpose of new elections is to obtain a new democratic "mandate" for state policy is as fraudulent as his pledge four years ago to end EU austerity. In fact, as his remarks make clear, he called early elections to prevent a protracted election campaign

during which mass social opposition could "jeopardise" the austerity policy pursued by the entire EU and Greek political establishment against the wishes of the working population.

Syriza's EU election defeat came amid a wave of strikes in Greece and across Europe that show its capitulation to EU austerity lacks any legitimacy. Greek youth protests and strikes by seamen, ferry workers, train employees, mass transit workers, museum and hospital workers unfolded alongside an upsurge of protest against social inequality internationally. This includes the first national teachers strike in Poland since the Stalinist regime's restoration of capitalism in 1989, the "yellow vest" protests in France, and strikes against EU-dictated wage freezes in Germany, Portugal, Belgium and beyond.

Amid this growing opposition, Tsipras is rushing to hand power to Mitsotakis, who is pledging to continue EU austerity and step up police operations against the Greek population.

Campaigning in northern Greece in June, Mitsotakis told Reuters he would reassure the financial markets by quickly getting elected and then imposing the banks' diktat without fearing political fallout from new election campaigns. "The first thing that is necessary for economic growth to be boosted is a stable government, a strong majority in the next parliament," he said. "If we are able to reach that goal, and I'm very optimistic, I think that we'll send a very clear signal that we have four years ahead of us, without any additional elections to deliver on our plans."

The other component of his plan to keep on imposing EU austerity, Mitsotakis has said, is a draconian escalation of state repression. He said, "We will strengthen the police, which has to do its job well. We have to protect policemen, while there has to be more police activity in the centre of Athens. For the next government security is a political priority ... Police

commanders of precincts that go into hostile areas will be rewarded.”

Thanos Plevris, a parliamentarian formerly of the far-right Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) who has joined ND, helped show what Mitsotakis and Tsipras have in mind. The son of an official in the bloodstained Greek “junta of the colonels” of 1967-1974, Plevris shot a video in the dead of night on Athens’ Exarcheia Square, the heart of the neighbourhood that rose up in 1974, launching the overthrow of the CIA-backed military regime. In it, Plevris echoed Mitsotakis’ threats: “On July 8, we will hand over the square to residents. Lawlessness and no-go zones will end.”

For four years, Syriza has imposed EU austerity in defiance of the Greek people’s wishes, including the landslide “no” vote in Syriza’s own July 2015 referendum on austerity. At that time, as accounts from Syriza sympathizers made clear, Tsipras wanted a pretext to step down and hand power to the conservatives. Stunned by the “no” vote, however, Tsipras stayed on and imposed tens of billions of euros in new social cuts, in addition to sending weapons to the Saudi war in Yemen and building concentration camps for Middle East refugees on the Greek islands and mainland.

Syriza, a coalition of petty bourgeois Stalinist and Pabloite tendencies inspired by the postmodernist populist writings of Chantal Mouffe and praised by middle-class pseudo-left groups internationally, has been exposed as a ruthless tool of the Greek capitalist class and the EU. Particularly amid an upsurge of class struggle, this will have consequences far beyond the short-term calculations being made by the Greek and European establishment.

The parliamentary regime established after the Greek junta’s collapse in 1974 has been exposed as a threadbare façade for the diktat of the banks. As protests and strikes spread across Europe, broad sections of the ruling class are calling to ditch what remains of their democratic pretensions and move back nakedly to the dictatorial forms of rule that prevailed across much of southern Europe or East Asia in the early 1970s.

In an editorial titled “A new path for a new era,” the right-wing daily *Kathimerini* wrote: “Where do we look? Ironically, there are lessons in the behaviour of autocrats ... Working in Asia when the four tiger economies of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore were beginning to roar, I witnessed strong economic growth by top-down visionary leaders that were in pseudo-democracies.”

Other, apparently more thoughtful, sections of the ruling

class propose to continue to use Tsipras and Syriza to control workers opposition, and thus help continue imposing austerity measures that funnelled trillions of euros into the pockets of the super rich since the 2008 crash.

The *Financial Times* (FT) of London, the voice of European finance capital, carried an article titled “Looming elections in Greece pose big risks for investors.” Warning that an ND victory “could reignite volatility,” it pointed to Syriza’s services to the banks: “Mr Tsipras has managed to pass tough measures with practically no social unrest for the past few years. This would not have been the case under any right-of-centre government. Hence, investors should be cognisant that an ND government led by Mr Mitsotakis could reignite near-term volatility and social unrest.”

The upside the FT saw to the situation, however, was that Syriza’s decision to hold new elections “would place Mr Tsipras in the role where he excels the most—as leader of the opposition.”

That is, the FT is speaking for sections of the ruling class who hope workers struggles will remain under the grip of the nationalist trade unions and their reactionary political allies like Syriza. This would ensure that struggles against the EU and the banks would be isolated, defeated, and used to consolidate police states that are rapidly emerging across Europe. Indeed, it appears likely that this calculation underlies Tsipras’s call for new elections that seem certain to return him to opposition.

The way forward, as the International Committee of the Fourth International has insisted, is a total political break with Syriza and similar pseudo-left parties internationally, and the building of independent committees of action to wage the class struggle. Only an appeal to the mounting opposition to austerity and capitalism in the European and world working class, based on a revolutionary struggle for socialism and workers power, offers an alternative to the reactionary policies of Syriza and the Greek ruling class.



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