

Syriza's rout in the Greek general election

Robert Stevens
23 May 2023

The first round of Greece's general election Sunday was won comfortably by the ruling conservative New Democracy (ND) party, with almost 41 percent of the vote. It was a rout for the largest opposition party, Syriza (the "Coalition of the Radical Left"), which secured just 20 percent, a fall of over 11 percentage points since 2019.

ND's victory came despite widespread opposition in the working class to its austerity agenda, its homicidal pandemic policies, leading to six million infections and over 36,000 deaths, and its placement of Greece at the centre of NATO's de facto war against Russia.

The result was not even impacted by the weeks of mass protests and strikes following the horrific death of 57 mainly young people in February's train crash in the Tempi valley, caused by decades of cuts and the slashing of staff.

Workers are in acute social distress, having been bled dry by 15 years of austerity. Under these conditions, the victory of ND can only be explained by the absence of any genuine left alternative. The great majority of the working class concluded that none of the official parties of the nominal left—Syriza, PASOK and the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE)—were significantly different from ND. Voting is compulsory in national elections in Greece, but some 40 percent of the electorate abstained from voting at all.

Syriza's period in office, from 2015 to 2019, and the years since its initial defeat by ND, have demonstrated that it is a party of European Union-dictated austerity that has acted as one of Europe's main jailers of refugees and has played a decisive role in facilitating NATO's war against Russia.

The record of Syriza is a strategic experience for the international working class, demonstrating the bankruptcy of claims made by pseudo-left tendencies around the world that meaningful change can be made by voting their pro-capitalist parties into government. It is essential for workers to consciously reject this political trap amid mounting strikes and protests internationally that raise the necessity of a socialist struggle against capitalism.

Syriza came to power in a landslide election victory in January 2015, after it pledged to end the savage austerity of previous PASOK and ND governments. Instead, it enforced at least seven comprehensive austerity packages demanded by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, known as the "troika." This

included 15 cuts in pensions, reductions in wages, tax hikes, redundancies and budget cuts across the public welfare, education and health sectors.

Syriza entered government in coalition with the Independent Greeks—a right-wing xenophobic party with ties to the far-right—as its junior partner. The pro-capitalist policies enforced by Syriza, in partnership with the trade union bureaucracy, resulted in levels of social immiseration without precedent, including 30 percent unemployment, from which many Greek workers have never recovered. This left Syriza incapable of benefiting from popular opposition to ND among workers and youth. Its leader, Alexis Tsipras, made great play of the Tempi train crash, but no one forgot Syriza's role in creating the conditions for the disaster by privatising the rail network in 2017 as part of over €6 billion in privatizations.

Syriza has, in fact, shifted further to the right since 2019, renaming itself the Syriza-Progressive Alliance in a bid to win support among PASOK supporters. Tsipras declared in the main election debate that he was "fully aware of the country's fiscal capabilities."

Syriza voted alongside ND and PASOK last September to accept the NATO applications of Sweden and Finland. In office, moreover, Syriza was a trusted NATO partner, providing the alliance with critical military bases, including the Souda Bay naval base, which is now integral to the war against Russia.

Responsibility for all of Syriza's political betrayals is shared by the myriad pseudo-left groups that proclaimed it the model for building similar "broad left" electoral formations in Europe and internationally. In every instance, these parties—including Podemos in Spain, the Left Bloc in Portugal, the movements around former UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Gabriel Boric in Chile—carried out the same political betrayals, for which the working class has paid not only in savage austerity, but in an eruption of militarism and war.

With Syriza widely discredited, sections of the pseudo-left tried to perform the same deception by advocating support for the political vehicle of Tsipras's former finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis: MeRA25 (European Realistic Disobedience Front). Days before Sunday's vote, *Jacobin* magazine, allied to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), ran an interview with Mariana Tsihli, a candidate for the MeRA25-Alliance for Rupture coalition with another Syriza splinter, Popular Unity.

Tsichli claimed to be “seeking to overcome” Syriza’s “baleful legacy” by “rebuilding a united radical-left space, able to learn from past failures and respond to the challenges of the present.”

Far from representing any such alternative, Varoufakis was the joint architect of Syriza’s betrayals, stating on taking power in 2015 that he only wanted to impose a slightly modified version of austerity based on “standard Thatcherite or Reaganesque economic policies” and negotiating with the troika on that basis throughout.

With workers viewing him as equally toxic as Tsipras, MeRA25-Alliance for Rupture received less than the 3 percent vote required to enter parliament, losing the nine seats it had gained in 2019. Giving vent to his own right-wing agenda, Varoufakis blamed his defeat on the fact that “people don’t want the truth, really,” and attacked ND from the right for “four years of spend, spend, spend with the support of the European Central Bank.”

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement, was the only party that offered workers timely warnings of the class character and political role of Syriza.

On January 27, 2015, as Tsipras took power, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote:

Syriza’s election victory does not express a political development, a step forward, progress or anything of the kind by or for the working class.

In its origin, social composition and politics, Syriza is a bourgeois party—one of many, including the Democrats under US President Barack Obama—that come to power making promises of ‘hope’ and ‘change’ and then impose policies of austerity and war. It will inevitably betray, sooner rather than later, the aspirations for an end to social hardship and suffering that it has cynically exploited... Syriza has come to power based upon a programme that articulates the interests of a powerful section of the Greek bourgeoisie and more privileged sections of the upper-middle class. It makes its appeal to yet more powerful forces: the imperialists of Europe and the United States.

The ICFI’s November 13, 2015 statement, “The Political Lessons of Syriza’s Betrayal in Greece”, was written in the aftermath of Syriza’s trampling on the mass “No” vote rejecting the troika’s dictates in the party’s own referendum, and its ramming of a massive new austerity bailout through parliament. The statement explained:

It must be bluntly said that the experience of the Syriza government has been a major defeat for the

working class... The central task is the political rearming of the working class and the building of a new revolutionary leadership, based on a remorseless critique of the parties, personalities, and political conceptions that were responsible for the defeat. This has been the significance of the work carried out by the International Committee of the Fourth International in relation to the Greek events.

In Greece, in Europe and throughout the world, the working class can defend itself only through the building of new working-class parties, which are entirely independent of all sections of the capitalist class, based on an internationalist revolutionary program, directed toward the establishment of workers’ power, the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a world socialist society.

In its assessment of Syriza’s four years in power and its electoral defeat in 2019, the WSWS insisted that workers make a reckoning with pseudo-left politics in its entirety.

This experience has unforgettably demonstrated the impossibility of fighting a bankrupt capitalist order by voting for ‘left populist’ parties to implement reforms under capitalism. The betrayal carried out by Syriza, rooted in its class basis in the affluent petty bourgeoisie, will be repeated if similar parties come to power elsewhere.

The way forward is a turn to the perspective of classical Marxism, that is, Trotskyism: the revolutionary mobilization of the full industrial and economic power of the international working class to take control of economic life and state power.

The most farsighted workers and youth must now turn to the building of a Greek section of the ICFI, as part of a new revolutionary turn by the European and international working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact