

Syriza shifts further to right in Greece, as conservative New Democracy set to win general election

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23 June 2023

The second round of Greece's general election takes place Sunday with the conservative New Democracy (ND) expected to win.

The first round was held in May and despite ND winning with a landslide 20 percent margin over the opposition Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' party fell just short of an overall majority in the 300 seat parliament.

In the second round, ND is expected to win by a similar margin and even increase its lead. The average of the latest polls has ND on 42 percent and Syriza on 20 percent. Finishing in first place in the upcoming round, which is based on a semi-proportional representation with a sliding scale seat bonus, would see ND allocated up to 50 extra seats.

It is projected that ND could take 155 to 166 seats in the next parliament, allowing Mitsotakis to form a government without the need for coalition partners. Were this round not to confirm a majority of seats for ND, Mitsotakis said he would not seek to form a coalition, but instead green light a third round of voting to be held in August.

The government was forced to delay May's election by a month due to the widespread outrage felt by millions of workers and youth at the preventable deaths of 57 people in the Tempi valley train crash. Syriza attempted to make political capital out of the event, but failed abysmally as the population knew that this rotten party was just as implicated in the running down of safety standards on the rail network as ND.

Indeed, it was Syriza that sold off the state rail system in 2017, keeping staff numbers as low as possible in the years prior in order to make the deal as lucrative as possible for the profiteers who bought it at a

knockdown price.

The social crisis in the country is so acute, and the government so brutal, that another mass death event—over 600 refugees on an overcrowded boat on June 14, off Greece's south-western coast—has overshadowed this election round.

Under conditions in which a growing body of evidence points to the culpability of the Hellenic Coast Guard in this crime—with some survivors claiming the vessel was sunk by the coastguard to deter other refugees—the government has released virtually no information, with none of the 80 bodies recovered from the sea identified, let alone the names of 104 survivors.

The survivors were first locked in a fenced compound with highly restricted mobility and access to communications. Spanish daily *El Pais* noted this week that the coast guard commander “did not clarify why the survivors were subjected to limitations more typical of a prison regime than an aid post for shipwreck victims.” They are now being held in a detention camp near Athens under similarly repressive conditions.

The deaths of hundreds of refugees—the latest of thousands who have died in the Mediterranean Sea in the last decade—prompted mass protests, with tens of thousands demonstrating in Athens and 20 cities around the country. Among the banners denouncing the Hellenic Coast Guard, the EU and its Frontex border protection force were ones reading “murderers”.

Syriza again sought to politically gain, with leader Alexis Tsipras visiting Kalamata and speaking to survivors. He shed more crocodile tears as Syriza raised the deaths in parliament.

As with the train crash deaths, no-one bought this fraud either, given the role of Syriza as the chief jailer

of Fortress Europe when in power from 2015-19 and its barely concealed anti-immigration stance.

Doubling down on its anti-immigration agenda, the ND government is only continuing the dirty work carried out by Syriza. Mitsotakis has made central to his campaign a pledge to lengthen a five-metre high steel fence to cover almost the entire length of Greece's 192-km border with Turkey, promising to contract another 100-km by 2026. The prime minister said he hoped this would be mainly funded by the EU but stated at a campaign rally, "The fence in Evros will be finished with or without European money."

Syriza and ND share the same closed-borders policy. In response to Mitsotakis asking of Syriza, "Will they tear down the wall that we have already built and return to a policy of open borders? Or will they preserve it and help secure Greece's borders?", Syriza's European Parliament Vice President Dimitris Papadimoulis replied, "We are not going to tear down anything... And of course, we support EU funding for border security needs, like funds for night vision cameras and coast guard vessels."

Prior to gaining power in a landslide in 2015, Syriza routinely appealed to mass anti-austerity sentiment. After ditching its promises and imposing even more savage attacks on the working class than the governments it replaced, the party will no longer permit even any public discussion of its pre-power period.

In the weeks running up to the latest round, Greek conservative daily *Kathimerini* reported, "All the cadres who have been associated with SYRIZA's tumultuous period between 2012 and 2015 are in a peculiar state of supervision by the party president [Tsipras] and his press office. They will not be able to appear in the media without prior permission from the party." This was required, said the newspaper "in an effort to reassure the centrist audience that voted en masse for New Democracy leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis in May."

An earlier attempt to appeal this constituency, especially voters of the right-wing, pro-austerity social democratic PASOK—and bolster chances of a future coalition government with them—saw Syriza change its name in 2019 to Coalition of the Radical Left-Progressive Alliance.

Tsipras responded to his party's defeat in May's election with another step to the right, hiring the anti-

communist political scientist and professor Nikos Marantzidis as Syriza's head of communications for the June poll. Marantzidis was previously a supporter of the pro-capitalist, EU-supporting To Potami (The River) party and has been a leading figure in a right-wing historians tendency in Greece.

A slew of enemies confronts the working class in the upcoming elections. There is no political alternative representing the interests of workers, setting up the widely hated ND for another four years in office. Thanks to Syriza's betrayals and sharp lurch to the right over the last decade, ND was able to win the support of every demographic in the May election.

Voting is compulsory in Greece, yet the last two general elections (2019 and May this year) have seen around 40 percent of the electorate abstain in disgust. But no matter the scale of opposition against the crimes of the political elite—as evidenced by the movements which erupted in revulsion at the murderous policies responsible for the Tempis deaths and mass drownings of refugees—these will inevitably dissipate in the absence of a socialist perspective and organisation.

All experience of the last decades, including the strategic lessons of the pseudo-left in power, points to the urgency of Greek workers and youth building their own revolutionary party: a Greek section of the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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