

Collapsing Syriza set to be replaced as main Greek opposition party

John Vassilopoulos
18 November 2024

An avalanche of resignations has hit Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), following the November 8 resignation of former leader Stefanos Kasselakis, who declared he is setting up his own party in Greece.

Five Syriza members of parliament immediately left to join Kasselakis' new party. Then last week Syriza's central committee shrunk by a third after 107 Kasselakis loyalists resigned from the 300 strong body.

More MPs are expected to resign in the weeks ahead, stripping the party of its status as Greece's official opposition, to be replaced by the social democratic Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). At the time of writing Syriza has 31 deputies—the same number as the once collapsed social democratic PASOK.

Syriza's popular support has also collapsed. In many polls it is now in fifth or sixth place, or even lower. One survey conducted by Real Polls last week has Syriza polling in eighth place, at 3.6 percent. There is a 3 percent threshold required to enter parliament. In second place at 16.7 percent is PASOK, which has benefited from Syriza's collapse and the fall in support for the ruling conservative New Democracy (ND), which is polling at 29.7 percent.

Syriza was first swept into power in 2015, with Alexis Tsipras promising to end the brutal austerity that had been imposed on the Greek working class at the behest of the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

This mandate was jilted, culminating in the betrayal of the July 2015 referendum in which workers overwhelmingly rejected a third austerity package. One month later, Syriza and its junior coalition partner, the far-right Independent Greeks, agreed to an even more brutal austerity package with the EU/IMF. The next four years saw Syriza impose austerity more savage than that enforced by the previous social democratic and ND-led administrations.

Syriza haemorrhaged support among workers and youth, strengthening ND which defeated Syriza in the 2019 general election, before routing Tsipras' party in the June 2023 election. In the latest election Syriza won 47 seats—just over half its total in the previous parliament.

Following the resignation of Tsipras last year, Stefanos

Kasselakis was elected as leader in September, winning nearly 57 percent of the membership's vote. Before his election Kasselakis was unknown in Greece with no links to Syriza. He had lived in the United States since the age of 14 where, besides running shipping businesses and working for Goldman Sachs, he volunteered for Joe Biden's 2008 presidential primary campaign and worked at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) thinktank.

His pitch to the affluent upper middle-class layers that make up Syriza's membership was that Syriza should build a "big-tent" party similar to the Democratic Party in the US. In an op-ed in the conservative *Kathimerini* last July he wrote, "If the intention is to govern again, SYRIZA should just copy the US formula as soon as possible. Unequivocally embrace the political center as well; make clear that prudent fiscal management is non-negotiable; and showcase the management talent of its prospective cabinet." His election was welcomed by ND, with spokesperson Pavlos Marinakis hailing "a serious and credible opposition, with Syriza taking a more realistic path."

Commenting on Kasselakis' election the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote that "with the popular support garnered eight years ago now evaporated, the party's political essence is coming to the surface. From a party serving bankers, Syriza has turned into a party directly led by a banker."

The WSWS placed Kasselakis' election within the wider geopolitical context, noting that with two wars raging in Ukraine and the Middle East, Kasselakis was parachuted into Greek politics with the active intervention of Washington to ensure that Athens' pro-NATO alignment is maintained.

The first fruits of Kasselakis' leadership was Syriza's statement in response to the Palestinian uprising launched from Gaza on October 7, which it condemned while "expressing solidarity to the people of Israel." A few days later Kasselakis made a speech to the Federation of Industries (SEV) employers' body where he declared that Syriza "was passing in the next stage of its historic road, that of a modern Left that doesn't demonise the word 'capital' but sees it as a tool of prosperity to reduce huge inequalities through strong growth."

His leadership began to unravel in October 2023, just one month after he was elected, in the fallout from an investigative

report published in Greek daily *I Efimerida Ton Syntakton* laying bare his vicious anti-working class politics. The newspaper collated information in articles Kasselakis wrote for the right-wing Greek-American newspaper the *National Herald* between 2007 and 2015.

Expressing support for the sort of austerity policies that after 2010 would be implemented by successive PASOK, ND and Syriza governments, he wrote, “Greece for some years needs the application of Reagan’s supply side economics”.

In February 2012, at the height of the austerity attacks implemented by the coalition government of ND, PASOK and the far-right LAOS headed by unelected banker Loukas Papadimos, Kasselakis wrote approvingly of the lowering of the minimum wage. This was a “positive measure” that “makes the country more competitive while at the same time keeps small businesses afloat.” Kasselakis complained that the government was not going far enough. Referring to the sacking of 15,000 civil servants in 2012 he wrote that this “seems like a very small number... In my opinion, they should have already sacked many more people and invested the money in cutting taxes.”

The revelations prompted the “Umbrella” faction of the party to release a statement voicing “concern” over “the collective sense that we are participating in a party which is tending towards bearing no relation to the Left in any political sense. Everything that we knew about the character and social priorities of Syriza are changing violently and unilaterally.”

The Umbrella forces were concerned that Syriza’ shift to the right left them too compromised under conditions of a growing wave of militancy among workers and youth. Umbrella was led by scoundrels including Nikos Filis, Panos Skourletis and Thodoris Dritsas, who all held senior ministerial positions and imposed brutal austerity in Syriza’s government at various points between 2015 to 2019. By the end of November last year, 11 of Syriza’s MPs—including former finance minister and Umbrella leader Euclid Tsakalotos—had left to establish a new party, the “New Left”.

In this year’s European Elections in June, Syriza won just 14.7 percent of the vote—down 6 percent from last year’s general election— failing to benefit from the unpopularity of ND which got 28.6 percent compared with the 42 percent that gave it a second term in power.

This led to a motion of no confidence called against Kasselakis by 100 central committee members which stated that “if we don’t address directly and decisively the causes of [the party’s crisis], it will continue to descend into introversion and disappoint all left-wing and progressive citizens.” The motion passed and last month Kasselakis was barred by the central committee from seeking re-election in the leadership contest due November 24, amid ongoing revelations around his declared wealth and assets including his participation in offshore companies which is prohibited for leaders of political parties in Greece. Leadership candidate Pavlos Polakis stated

that Kasselakis “took us for a ride,” adding “someone who has companies based in the Marshall Islands can’t be leader of Syriza.” This is so much hot air from someone who was a Kasselakis supporter.

Syriza’s demise is an indictment of pseudo-left forces around the world who cheered its rise to power, claiming it the way forward for the working class.

In 2012, Jeremy Corbyn, after returning from a trip to Greece, and three years before he became leader of Britain’s Labour Party, tweeted, “A Syriza victory will open the way for an alternative to Bankers Europe. Impressed by their support when I was there. Hoping!”.

In January 2015, just months before Corbyn took office, he and 25 MPs mainly from his Socialist Campaign Group, plus George Galloway, then the leader of the Respect Party, signed a parliamentary motion as Syriza took power, “That this House welcomes the support for the Syriza party in Greece, which is committed to ending years of austerity and suffering on the Greek people” and “states its confidence in a government that will face down such pressures [from the EU and IMF] and defend the democratic choice of the people of Greece; and applauds Syriza’s immediate priorities to end the austerity programme...”

As Labour leader Corbyn repeatedly submitted to the attacks by the Blairite wing of the party on issues where he had mass support, such as opposition to NATO and nuclear weapons. Aping Syriza, he instructed Labour run local councils to impose austerity cuts demanded by the Conservative government. This ended in his rout in the 2019 general election and eventual replacement as party leader by current Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer.

Syriza’s fate is mirrored in the collapse of all those pseudo-left forces internationally, who boasted they were working to the “Syriza model”, as they betrayed the struggles of workers and youth in defence of living standards and democratic rights. In December last year Podemos, Syriza’s counterpart in Spain, left the coalition government it had formed with the social democratic PSOE in 2020 after its vote collapsed in the summer elections due to its austerity policies.

The International Committee of the Fourth International’s writings on Syriza and other pseudo-left tendencies comprise the necessary theoretical arming of workers to take forward the fight for socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact