

Snap elections in New Year following fall of Greek government

By Robert Stevens
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General elections are to be held in Greece on January 25 after the parliament on Monday failed to elect Stavros Dimas, the candidate of the New Democracy (ND)-PASOK governing coalition, as president. The collapse of the coalition government testifies to a profound crisis of rule in Greece and heightens social and political instability throughout Europe.

Constitutionally, Dimas needed to obtain the votes of at least 180 of the Greek parliament's 300 deputies to avert the collapse of the government and the triggering of general elections. In Monday's final round of voting, after two previous rounds had failed to elect Dimas, the government was able to secure only 168 votes. This was the same figure it obtained in the last round, when it secured the votes of only a handful of non-aligned Independent deputies.

All the main opposition parties—SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left, 71 deputies), the fascist Golden Dawn (16), the right-wing Independent Greeks (12), the Communist Party of Greece (KKE, 12) and the Democratic Left (DIMAR, 9)—voted against the government.

Six years of brutal austerity cuts imposed by successive ND and PASOK governments working with the European Union (EU), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) “troika” have devastated the Greek working class. ND and PASOK, the Greek bourgeoisie's traditional parties of rule, are now widely hated.

The alignment of the opposition parties of all colorations against Dimas reflected the fact that broad sections of the Greek bourgeoisie had lost confidence in the government of Prime Minister and ND leader Antonis Samaras. They feared that it could not push through further, even deeper attacks on workers' living standards without provoking an eruption of social

opposition from the working class.

They are seeking a new political mechanism to push through further attacks on the working class, salvage Greece's relationship with the EU and the banks, and prevent a mobilization of Greek and European workers against the EU's deeply unpopular austerity agenda.

Events in Athens have further exposed the EU as a dictatorial entity, intent on looting the Greek people to bail out the banks and super-rich. Samaras himself had likened the prospect of new elections to terrorism, while stating candidly that “markets do not want elections.”

The presidential election occurred amid extraordinary interventions by leading EU figures. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker all but declared his support for Samaras' presidential candidate, warning of the perils of the “wrong election result.” European Economic Affairs Commissioner Pierre Moscovici similarly stressed that what counted was the completion of the austerity programme and that Brussels preferred to deal with those committed to “preserving the integrity of the euro zone and to reforms.”

On Saturday, ahead of the final vote, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble was even more categorical, declaring: “The tough reforms are bearing fruit and there is no alternative to them. The upcoming elections will not change Greek debt. Every new government needs to fulfil the contractual agreements of its predecessors.” He added, “If Greece chooses another direction, it will result in a difficult situation.”

In response to the government's fall, finance capital is again threatening to strangle the Greek economy. IMF spokesman Gerry Rice announced that the IMF would suspend loans to Athens. “Discussions with the Greek authorities on the completion of the sixth review

of the program... will resume once a new government is in place, in consultation with the European Commission and the European Central Bank,” he said.

Samaras’ decision to call the presidential vote early came after his government failed to reach agreement with the “troika” for a further tranche of loans required to keep Greece from defaulting on its €319 billion debt. Instead, the troika authorised a two-month extension, until February, of its current loan agreement. In the words of the *Financial Times*, this was to ensure “further tough measures including tax rises and pension cuts.”

Samaras calculated that this timetable would leave his government—which had only a wafer-thin parliamentary majority—holding the presidential vote at the same time it was tasked with pushing through greater cuts in the face of overwhelming popular opposition. By holding the presidential ballot early, he hoped to scrape together enough of a parliamentary majority to avoid any recourse to the polls. This strategy has now failed.

Significantly, as part of this anti-democratic manoeuvring, the Greek state released seven Golden Dawn deputies from prison, where they were being held pending trial on charges of membership in a criminal association. Despite rumours of a possible deal in which the government would secure Dimas’ election with Golden Dawn votes, this failed to materialise.

Sections of the ruling class were concerned that the government’s reliance on neo-Nazi thugs to survive would further discredit the entire political set-up. In the event, Golden Dawn voted against the government.

Opinion polls currently show the pseudo-left party SYRIZA leading ND and poised to be the outright winner of the snap general election. Its margin of victory is not expected to be large, however, meaning it would likely have to govern as part of a coalition.

SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras responded to the presidential vote by suggesting that a SYRIZA victory and a change of course for Greece were imminent, saying: “In a few days, austerity bailouts will be a thing of the past... Lawmakers proved democracy cannot be blackmailed.”

This is a cynical fraud. Whatever government emerges from the January elections, it will be implacably hostile to the working class.

The sharpest warnings must be made about reactionary pseudo-left organizations of the affluent middle class such as SYRIZA. It proposes to renegotiate EU bailouts with the troika, which only means repackaging the cuts under another name. Its sister parties—Rifondazione in Italy, the Left Bloc in Portugal, the Unity Lists in Denmark—have repeatedly joined government coalitions that imposed austerity measures against the working class and waged imperialist wars overseas.

Sections of the bourgeoisie calculate that a SYRIZA-led government could provide the best available instrument to deal with an escalating crisis—above all, to dissipate working class opposition to EU austerity. SYRIZA, which adamantly supports the EU, has spent the last two years ingratiating itself with the banks and the military-intelligence apparatus of the major imperialist powers. SYRIZA leaders, including Tsipras, have made numerous trips to Washington, Berlin, Paris and London.

The critical question now facing the working class in Greece and throughout Europe is how to intervene independently into this political crisis against the EU and all sections of the ruling elite, including parties such as SYRIZA. There is massive hostility in the working class across Europe to EU austerity, and class tensions have taken on explosive dimensions. The challenge facing the working class is to grasp politically the dangers posed by SYRIZA and the other factions of the political establishment.

In Greece, where as recently as 1974 a military junta was in power, backed by the CIA, the ruling class is prepared to use all means to smash working class opposition. Just prior to the presidential vote, Panayiotis Baltakos, Samaras’ former cabinet secretary, announced his intention to form a new far-right party, *Rizes* (Roots). He said it would be based on “our traditions, the Orthodox Church, the Security Services and the Armed Forces.”

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