

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2389>



Greece

Greece: New government and the accelerated march to capitalist barbarism

- IV Online magazine - 2011 - IV442 - November 2011 -

Publication date: Monday 21 November 2011

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

The farce, and the arguments of the "political elite" of Greece along with the "power play" â€” mainly of the two large system-supporting parties PASOK ("Socialist Movement") and the right-wing "New Democracy" (ND) â€” to support a government coalition with the participation of the far-right LAOS, finally led to the formation of an "interim government" in November. Elections are scheduled for February. The reformist parties KPG (KKE) and SYN/SYRIZA demand immediate elections.

After days of sordid wrangling, intrigues, and backroom conversations, an agreement was reached on November 1 to appoint L. Papadimos, a top banker who enjoys the absolute confidence of the ruling classes of Europe and of the IMF, as the new head of government. The fight over the new government and its prime minister began when the down-and-out PASOK parliamentary group (down from 160 to currently 152 votes) confirmed its "confidence" in the Papandreou government on Nov 4. But then Papandreou announced a coalition government. The whole procedure was unconstitutional (but who cares under today's conditions?), since Papandreou had not even submitted his resignation.

"Democracy" in retreat

With the installation of the new government it becomes clear that even the last remnants of the so-called democracy ("rule by the people"), in the modest and familiar framework of bourgeois parliamentary rule, are about to be eliminatedâ€”effectively and ruthlessly. This tendency toward authoritarianism reaches a level no one would ever have predicted. Papandreou's announcement of a referendum on the agreements reached on October 27, as a result of a negotiation process for the payment of the 6th installment of the infamous loans by the troika was quickly called off after the intervention by Merkel, Sarkozy and Co. ND, which has always distanced itself from the memorandum policies, was compelled by the troika to form a coalition government with PASOK under a new prime minister.

Thus the Hellenic Republic becomes, even officially, a government committed exclusively to the profits of national and international bankers. Essentially, no one wanted to accept responsibility for the steamroller measures to be taken by the new government in accordance with ultimatums from Brussels and Berlin. The whole affair is particularly embarrassing for ND, which, as opinion polls show, is at least 7 percentage points ahead of PASOK, expected to get 22%. But it will soon lose this favored position as a result of its government participation.

After a long time and without having been asked, the Greek population is once again confronted with ministers representing the far right-wing (three deputies) plus one overtly fascist minister (by the name of M. Voridis), members of the racist LAOS party. The failed PASOK luminaries, among them the particularly hated Minister of Economy V. Venizelos, keep all important ministerial posts. The ministerial team is expanded to include some already discarded former PASOK and ND-ministers. So it is clear that only a very ordinary cabinet shuffle has been successfully carried out and nothing really new can be expected.

For the first time the three pro-system parties, PASOK, ND and LAOS, are collectively responsible for the memorandum policies, considered by the great majority of the population to be failed and fraudulent. This does not bode well for the future of the Greek bourgeois political system, especially not for its democratic facade. It is also a bad sign that this government is committed to keeping Greece in the euro zone since it is very likely that the euro can no longer be saved. This government will wear out very soon and there is much reason to fear that the elections will be "postponed" to an undefined point in the future.

The catastrophe of the memorandum policies

The PASOK government plundered the country in less than two years, by means of an unprecedented devastating raid, driving it to the brink of ruin with the co-leadership of the Troika—i.e. the ruling classes of Europe and the United States, and their governments. This monstrous fraud, a theft in the tens of billions at the expense of working people, the socially disadvantaged, but also the previous "middle class," served nobody but the creditors, i.e. the national and international financial oligarchy that shamelessly continues to enrich itself.

At the same time, the rulers and the mainstream media deliberately spread the illusion that the failing global financial system, and thus the global capitalist system, can be saved by this sort of maneuvering. It can already be foreseen that other countries, such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Great Britain and even France, will follow the Greek "model" step by step. But nobody can tell how the Euro will be saved in this situation and how the rest of the EU countries can avoid the general impoverishment process. The next European recession has already begun.

In Greece, the economic decline has reached 15% in the last two years. The loss of wages, salaries and pensions is up to 40% or more. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost, unemployment gallops, workers rights such as collective bargaining have recently been abolished in favor of unrestricted employer arbitrariness. State property, in principle national property, will be privatized and completely liquidated under intolerable conditions. The public health system is dismantled and 50% of the country's hospitals will close. Austerity is imposed on the public school system. Universities are to be sold to big capital.

The material deprivation is accompanied by a mass mental depression. The suicide rate is reaching record highs. Thousands of people try to get psychiatric treatment without being able to pay for it. One can say about Greece that capitalist society, "successfully" deregulated in recent decades, has once again turned deadly. The young generation has no prospects and the "lucky" ones who get a job are to be offered paltry salaries between 400 to 700 Euros.

Capitalist plunder and social resistance

Since September it is clear to everyone that the memorandum policies, allegedly aimed at the rescue of the euro and the banking system but also at protecting Greece "from bankruptcy" and insolvency etc., is a bottomless pit. It means nothing but endless bloodletting of workers and serves as a kind of grave-robbery of the Greek economy which has been expertly run into the ground. Only the parasites of the ruling system, 10% at most who are beneficiaries of the rapid intensification of exploitation and redistribution from bottom to top, along the rich who hold â,- 560 billion deposited in foreign accounts, are exempt from the effects of the crisis, manage largely to increase their incomes.

However, the overall situation of Greek capitalism remains hopeless. The austerity policy has proven to be a cycle of evil, as the recession causes falling tax revenues and thus higher national debts. This in turn requires new "measures" at the expense of the Greek population supposedly "living beyond their means," exacerbating the recession and so on—creating a perfect infinite feedback loop, a spiral into the abyss.

In September new taxes, especially on property (flats and houses), were announced making the situation even more unbearable. For an approximately 100-square-meter apartment around 700 â,- must be paid in order to satisfy the appetites of the creditor-lenders (i.e. the international banks etc.). This poll tax will be assessed along with the electricity bill and in the case of non-payment the current of the household will be switched off! And in February, the next installment of the same tax will become due.

Given the fact that a significant percentage of the population has already reached a point below break due to the

various austerity measures, unemployment, debts etc., many people will simply not be able to pay. Greek society as a whole is reaching a breaking point.

In this new situation, the majority of the population has lost the last illusion that despite the memorandum policies there might still be some individual solution or possibility to survive. This is the real reason for the extraordinary success of the general strike of October 19/20 when 500,000 protesters took to the streets in Athens alone, though this success was significantly diminished by counter-productive tactics of Greek Communist Party (KKE) and their union formation PAME on the one hand, along with the Molotov cocktail-throwers of the "black block" on the other. Approval of the new package of measures in parliament could not be prevented.

A few days later, the national holiday (Oct 28) of the "No" (OHI) was marked by mass protests. Nationwide riots dominated the day. This was the last confirmation that the memorandum policies and those in government who carry them out, the Troika—but also those other parliamentary groups who support them indirectly, especially from the ranks of New Democracy (ND) and the far-right LAOS—have lost all credibility, or are nearing that point.

In other words, the vast majority of the population has come to the conclusion that no compromise with the governments and the rulers is possible anymore, that what matters is to prevent the implementation of all measures prescribed from above. This may be possible by legal protests, occupations and demonstrations, or by "illegal" resistance, such as the non-payment of the poll tax on real estate—i.e. through civil disobedience.

A number of mayors and city councils in various parts of the city of Athens, along with the rest of the country, have already decided to support people in this affair and to enable them to resist the payment and avoid power cut-offs. The developments of last month have shown that the gap which is always present between the rulers, but also the entire political system, on the one side, and the great mass of the governed population on the other, has become an unbridgeable abyss.

The conditions of the Troika

There is no doubt that the governments in Athens, Berlin, Paris and Washington were not without fear or the first signs of panic when they registered this significant hardening of their front. But they also responded immediately. The Troika drastically increased its pressure on all parties that support the system to implement the new measures immediately and to put an end to social resistance by all possible means. The Troika does not hesitate anymore to set blatant ultimatums and to put Greece under a de facto receivership. It also does not take into consideration that the "political elite" in Athens is stripped naked and humiliated. What counts, of course, are very real interests, the "rescue of the euro" etc.

With all this maneuvering, extortion, and other miscellaneous actions, the question of how the basic living standards of the Greek population can be protected no longer enters into their thinking. According to a report of "Capital.gr" the Troika's conditions for the transfer of the 6th installment of its loan to the new Greek government are the following:

- a) the legal institutionalization of the poll tax on real estate as a permanent measure. With this measure, the Troika and the government intend to gather 1.67 billion Euros this year, but ever higher sums in the following years;
- b) the lay-off of tens of thousands of public employees, starting with 30,000 immediately as an emergency step;
- c) a package of measures to close, "merge," and dismantle companies that were previously under public ownership,

by way of a bill passed in the summer;

d) the transfer of all companies privatized this year or to be privatized next year into a "fund for the evaluation of private property." This includes the shares of nationwide port facilities, water works, the profit-oriented gaming company OPAP, nationwide airport facilities, the gas center of the district Kavala, the tolls of the national motorways and government buildings. Similarly, "consultants" or overseers of privatization in some of these companies are to be appointed;

e) a new "list of drugs," which means that patients themselves will have to pay in the future for a number of expensive drugs;

f) the reduction of the number of persons who have previously qualified for a disability pension;

g) the measures adopted so far and information regarding their implementation to be added to the state budget for 2012.

It is superfluous to comment on these requirements since they speak for themselves. It should be noted, however, that they mean a death sentence to thousands or tens of thousands of people in the coming months and years.

All this confirms that the main aim of the memorandum policies was not primarily "the reduction of debt" and so on. The main concern of the ruling classes, as several interviews by P. Thompson (IMF), C.-J. Juncker (ECOFIN) and others already showed in the past, is the implementation of the "reforms" in Greece. This means that the living standards of workers and the vast majority of the population have to be reduced by some 50 or 60%, on average, if not more. In fact, the downward spiral has no limits.

It seems that this policy is a strategic decision of the European and perhaps also of the North American capitalist classes. The basic idea obviously is to establish conditions under which "productive investments" are again efficient and profitable. This can be accomplished only by a decisive defeat of the working class and its complete subjugation. Only in this way can a realistic prospect be found for the global capitalist system to find an exit from the terrible crisis in which it is mired.

On the situation of the Greek Left

The new forms of mass struggle of the workers and oppressed, with square occupations in the summer, then other occupations, strikes, and forms of self-organization from September, directly influence all the forces of the left. The Greek Communist Party (KKE) leadership, which realized that it was increasingly being overtaken by the mass mobilization, tried to gain more strength by various reinforced sectarian actions of their union formation PAME (occupations of ministries, town halls and schools, campaign for non-payment of poll tax). This is a slight shift in the "party line," resulting in an attempt to provide leadership for the mass movement.

The appearance and the general political propaganda of the KKE are oriented to a more radical rhetoric "against capitalism," but still never exceed bureaucratic routine. A deeper understanding of the economic and social reality does not exist. Even if it is true that the statements of the party generally correspond to an anti-capitalist and mechanistic Marxist framework, its sectarian tactics are tragically dangerous as Oct 20 abundantly demonstrated. They do not correspond to the need of the working class for a united front, which is today more necessary and more urgent than ever before.

Greece: New government and the accelerated march to capitalist barbarism

The left-reformist alliance SYRIZA, which is dominated by the SYN, a reformist party with roots in euro-communism, tries to represent a credible alternative on the parliamentary left. The rapid fall of PASOK in the polls raises the hope that this alliance may enjoy a new boom. The proposal of SYRIZA chairman Tsipras to aim for the installation of a government of the united left to promote the vital need of workers actually contradicts the immediate self-organization of the mass movement and the strengthening of unified militant mobilizations.

It cannot be excluded that this orientation might weaken the emerging dynamics of the resistance movement against the memorandum policies, creating new parliamentary illusions. Adamant in their "pro-European" orientation, the party leadership desperately tries to cling to the straw of euro-bonds and the democratization of EU institutions. But all these nice things are solemnly rejected by the German government parties, also by the "opposition parties" of the social-democrats (SPD) and the Greens, and, of course, by their clients in banking and industry, as well as by the EU bureaucracy and the ECB. The radical youth of the party and the radical elements of SYRIZA, which have moved to the left due to the massive resistance movement, clash increasingly with the boundaries set by the SYN leadership.

ANTARSYA undoubtedly gathers the most militant and politicized rank and file activists in the unions, youth, and students. It successfully held its first national congress in late October. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the formation of the alliance has up to now developed at a snail's pace, mainly due to protracted factional struggles between its component organizations.

The "Political Theses" are certainly an excellent programmatic document. But it became clear in the discussion before and during the congress that a not insignificant minority of ANTARSYA tends to aim at a "unity of the Left" in the sense of a future government project. This would be a strategic concept based on a "popular front" policy in the framework of the existing system, specifically of the bourgeois state.

The debate about the withdrawal from the euro zone and the EU as part of a strategy of transitional demands, as well as the deletion of the so-called "non-acceptable part of the debt," needs to be carried through on a much broader basis. But most important is that in the very near future ANTARSYA must begin functioning with its local units and national leadership as a factor in the political life of the country. This process of building the alliance appears today to be absolutely necessary as a political response of the Greek working class to the capitalist crisis.

Athens, 11 November 2011