

# The Greek Elections and the Emergence of Popular Unity

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When Syriza's Alexis Tsipras resigned as Prime Minister, on August 20, he triggered a new general election, which will take place on 20 September. This enabled him as Leader to choose the entire electoral list of his party. He made it clear that he would not include the 32 Syriza MPs who had voted against the Third Memorandum and the terms of the €86 billion bailout from the IMF in Parliament on August 14.

The snap election also aborted the calling of a Party conference before the election, thereby ensuring there would be no democratic decision by the membership. This virtually obliged the left wing of Syriza to break away from the party. On August 21, the party's Left Platform launched an electoral challenge to Tsipras at the upcoming polls. To do this they formed Popular Unity

Like Syriza before it, this has a substantial majority of left-reformist socialists, plus far-left organisations and individual activists from social movements. It also has individual political celebrities like Zoe Konstantanopolou, the outgoing Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament who has a very erratic political record. As yet, it is less than a political party but more than an electoral front and, if anything, it is more politically heterogeneous than Syriza.

Conflicting views over the fundamental strategy on which to build a party; either accepting elections as the road to 'power' or focusing on the class struggle to bring down the austerity regime and replace it with a workers' government, will sooner or later be put to the test of building mass resistance to the new austerity government. Whether that government is headed by Syriza (whose position is sliding in the polls since August ) or New Democracy, we will soon see. ND has replaced the unpopular Antonis Samaras with a new leader, Vangelis Meimarakis, and is now neck and neck with Tsipras and Syriza at around 26 percent of the vote. Popular Unity is trailing far behind with 3.9 per cent, lower than the Communist Party (KKE), which has reconsolidated its traditional 5 per cent. The fascist Golden Dawn has likewise partly recovered from its mauling by the Greek state.

The bulk of Popular Unity's membership come from the two components of the Left Platform in Syriza; the Left Current, headed by Panagiotis Lafazanis, and the smaller Red Network around DEA/Workers' Internationalist Left. In addition, there is the Movement for the Radical Left, a network of antiracist, pro-migrant, and LGBT activists. The Communist Tendency (International Marxist Tendency) has also said that it will "actively participate in the establishment of the new political entity along with the comrades of the Left Platform". However, PU has also been joined by two groups from Antarsya (Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow) which stood aside from Syriza during the years of its rise and political crystallisation; these are ARAN (Left Recomposition) and ARAS (Left Anticapitalist Group) both of which have Althusserian-Stalinist origins.

Incredibly, the new party has adopted a name, Popular Unity, which will be forever linked to Salvador Allende's Chilean Road to Socialism in the years 1970-73. Central to that strategy was the formation of an alliance with the Christian Democracy, a powerful bourgeois party which quickly became an obstacle to reforms and then went on to pave the way for the coup and dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. For the lessons of this terrible disaster for the working class, which opened the way to the imposition of the first 'neo-liberal' economic programme and was rooted in Stalinism's strategy of the Popular Front see <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/lessons-chile-popular-unity-19...> [1].

Greece, of course, has its own experience of a 'left' populist government, overthrown by the King and then the army (the regime of the colonels). It seems that social democrats and Stalinists, as in Einstein's famous description of insanity, insist on doing the same thing, over and over again, each time expecting a different result.

At the moment, it is unlikely that any serious capitalist parties or figures will step forward to play the role of the 'patriotic' or 'progressive' bourgeois that this scenario requires. Nonetheless, by restricting the programme of a new party to measures that might be acceptable to such forces, such a strategy would, as in Chile, fatally exclude the anticapitalist measures and the workers' government that should be fought for by working class parties and trade unions.

Popular Unity defines itself as 'a social and political front to overturn the memoranda, predatory austerity, the negation of democracy, and the transformation of Greece into a European colony by means of indebtedness'. It has published a programme that includes many demands that are necessary and supportable but which, as a whole, do not form the basis for a government that can solve the economic crisis or force the surrender of the capitalist class either at home (the oligarchs) or abroad (European bankers and bureaucrats).

#### Popular Unity's Emergency Programme

PU proclaims it is fighting to build a 'great popular patriotic front' based on a number of key policies:

- 'Abolition of the memoranda and freeing Greece from the deadly overlordship of the imperialist centres

- 'Suspension of Greece's debt repayments and loan agreements

- 'Repayment of the Greek loan the Nazis exacted during their occupation of the country

- 'An immediate end to austerity and redistribution of social wealth to working people at the expense of the oligarchs

- 'Restoration of medical and pharmaceutical cover and power, water, heating etc. for all

- 'Support for wages and pensions, and social expenditures for free public education, popular health care, and culture

- 'State support for wages, pensions, and social expenditures, for free public education, popular health care, and culture. Gradual wage increases in step with economic growth

- 'Abolition of the Uniform Property Tax, a tax system introduced hitting only very large-scale fixed property

- 'Abolition of punitive taxation against farmers and the self-employed. Establishment of a permanent, socially just, and redistributive taxation system

- 'Nationalisation of the banks under a regime of social control, with guarantees for the savings of ordinary people. The new nationalised banking system, will underwrite the cancellation of household debt and liquidity for small and medium businesses.

- 'Restoration of free collective bargaining and agreements and a clampdown on unfair treatment by employers, stricter limitations on, and fines for, dismissals, activation and strengthening of labour inspectorate

- 'An end to predatory privatisations of enterprises, networks, and infrastructure (power supply, natural gas, harbours, airports, real estate in the public sector, etc.).

? Reorganisation of the demolished national health system and of public hospitals, with institution of a first-rate, high-quality, health system, accessible to all, in urban centres and in the regions

Popular Unity's economic policy clearly envisages a controlled and redirected capitalist economy.

? It talks of shifting from consumption of imported commodities to industrial and agricultural production of high quality goods and strengthening the state-run and private sector along with the social economy (cooperatives, self-managed enterprises that have been abandoned by their owners, solidarity networks, etc.)

? Exit from ?the monetary prison of the Eurozone? and a break with the neoliberal policies of the EU. The re-introduction of a national currency.

? Opposition to the new ?Cold War? and the division of Europe with the erection of new walls against Russia

The programme is based on the neo- Keynesian prediction that such measures will; ?Foster job creation through a programme of necessary public productive investments, developmental initiatives from the big publicly owned enterprises, support for the social sector of the economy, and restoration of credit for small and medium businesses. Abolition of the unjust taxation and other burdens, imposed on lower-income households simply to service the unbearable debt, will boost demand and stimulate development.?

This reformist economic program is developed in more depth by Stathis Kouvelakis on the website of LAE ( <http://laiki-enotita.gr/component/k2/item/202-the-euro-means-permanent-a...> [2]) where it is clear that LAE really thinks that by leaving the euro, import-substitution and currency devaluation they could revive Greek capitalism.

The absurdity of this perspective is demonstrated in this article by the fact that Kouvelakis presents Argentina as a positive example of driving a better deal with the financial markets/institutions by ?regaining monetary sovereignty?. In fact, after a brief bubble of growth, Argentina has shown very clearly that, given the crisis-mode of the global economy and the aggressiveness of the financial markets, let alone, the financial institutions, an ?independent? monetary policy in a capitalist, highly indebted semi-colony is a pure fiction. Indeed, the monetary and general economic crisis in Argentina, which is caught in the trap of severe stagflation, makes even the economic situation in Greece look comparatively relaxed.

Last, but not least, the programme advances the goal of ?a government supported by the power of the organised people and their own specific institutions, in the workers' movement, the youth movement, local and environmental movements, movements of solidarity, forms of popular self-organisation?.

This is indeed very close to the language of Allende's Popular Unity. It, too, insisted on popular mobilisation and mass support under the deceptive slogan ?a people united will never be defeated?. In fact, a disarmed people, facing a fully armed and controlled state machine, will always be defeated since the capitalist tiger does not allow itself to be skinned alive whilst it has its teeth and claws. Only a workers' government, installed by the forces of an embryonic workers' state (workers' councils and militia) will be able to do this. The negative proof of this has just been provided by Syriza's capitulation.

In Greece, the road to a coup, constitutional or military, would be paved by the inevitable failure of Keynesian measures hemmed in by pressure of world markets, not least the run on the restored drachma, and the Greek and foreign capitalists. The only effective response to this would be dictatorial measures against capital and the disbanding of the forces of the state and their replacement by the armed workers

and other popular classes. But, if that is what is going to be needed, then that needs to be said now. It is blatantly deceitful to cover this up and just wait for the development of the situation in which they are needed. By then, as in Chile, it will be too late.

Revolutionary party?

The increasing contradiction between an objective situation, which calls ever more urgently for revolutionary solutions, and the current political stance of the Greek left becomes ever more obvious. The left-reformist strategy of Syriza and the ultra-left sectarianism of the KKE, are two sides of the same coin; a complete rejection of the potential for revolution in the present period of crisis.

The KKE's refusal even to march together with other working class forces is not revolutionary intransigence but passive abstention from the effective common action needed to fight the austerity government. Popular Unity, though it does not obstruct unity in the same way, does not appear to be ready to mount any fundamental challenge to the essential weakness of the former Syriza strategy.

The far left forces, if they are to be at all effective, must openly challenge the reformist, neo-Keynesian, programme of Lafazanis. Many of these smaller socialist groups and currents, like the CWI section, Xekinima, were part of the OXI campaign and are now part of PU. They must avoid the strategic mistakes that the Left Platform made in Syriza; they must challenge the programme of the leadership.

There can only be a socialist alternative to austerity and the Memorandum as part of a socialist programmatic alternative for the Greek working class. Otherwise, the same reformist illusions that came from Syriza will now be spread by PU. It is the duty of all socialist or revolutionary organisations to stand for a socialist and anticapitalist perspective and programme inside and outside the PU. The arguments for being in Popular Unity are, however, nowhere near as compelling as they were for being in Syriza from 2012-2015.

In that period, Syriza grew to be a mass force in the working class, one to which workers and youth turned to oust the Memorandum governments. It was crucial to have been alongside them in this process, sharing their struggles but not their illusions. Alongside participation and support for Syriza against PASOK and New Democracy should have gone remorseless criticism of its whole programme and not just of its support for the EU and the euro.

Now, Popular Unity is reduced to the size and electoral impact of Syriza before it began its ascent. Nothing guarantees that it will repeat this rise. In the elections between 2012 and January 2015, we argued that the right tactic for revolutionaries was to give critical support to Syriza whilst warning of the crisis that would arise when it reached the inevitable impasse with the European bankers and governments.

This exclusive concentration on Syriza does not apply to its lineal successor, Popular Unity. Indeed, if it were to realise its wish for a block with bourgeois forces it would not be possible for revolutionaries to give it such support. Today, however, critical support should go to PU and/or Antarsya, depending on the situations in the different districts. The purpose is to maximise the vote for a united fightback against the austerity government.

All this points to the key issue, the crucial problem facing the Greek working class, the absence of anything approaching a genuinely revolutionary party. Here, we have to address the remaining parts of Antarsya as well as the far left in PU. Antarsya was certainly one of the most active and militant components of the protest movement against the Memorandum and organised an important part of the most militant class fighters in Greece. This was proven once again by the persecution it endured during the protests against Tsipras' capitulation. But, although it is based on certain anti-capitalist principles, it has proved unable to

develop the necessary programmatic and tactical coherence between its component organisations. It is, therefore, no wonder that, in the current total reshaping of the Greek left, it has split.

Even Antarsya's smallish Trotskyist components, OKDE-Spartakos (one of the sections of the Fourth International) and the SEK (section of the IST) adopted a policy limited to polemical exposure of Syriza's reformism, during its electoral rise to office and during its months in power. They did not seek to mobilise the expectations and hopes placed in Syriza by huge numbers of workers and youth to win them to calling for a workers' government, that is, to surround the reformist leaders with such militant and well-organised support that this could have forced them to go much further than they wanted or, if they refused, could have opened the way for a new leadership.

Such an approach could have opened up the prospect of a genuine workers' government. This tactic, developed by the Leninist Comintern and adopted by Trotsky in the Transitional Programme, could have proved immensely valuable in winning for revolutionaries the confidence of large parts of Syriza's base and exposed Tsipras and Co a hundred times more effectively than mere paper denunciations. The critical moment in such a tactic would have been the OXI Referendum campaign and Tsipras' betrayal only three days later.

Today, the decisive need is to form a working class united front of all those parties, groups and trade unions, especially their workplace units, to fight the new government and the Third Memorandum. The militancy of the first three years of the crisis needs to be regenerated as the impact of the new austerity begins to become clear and the undeniable confusion and demoralisation caused by Syriza's betrayal begin to lift. A decisive factor in this process will be the subjective one; whether there is an agency for winning vanguard fighters to a strategy that avoids the twin evils of adaptation to reformism and passive propagandistic leftism.

The revolutionary left groups need to seek unity with one another on the basis of an analysis of the past period and the collapse of Syriza, a balance sheet of their own strengths and weaknesses and the adoption of a programmatic foundation.

Action Programme?

That foundation must be an action programme whose starting point is resistance to the Memorandum and the (likely) left-right coalition government that will try to impose it. This element needs to include the call for united front organisations of struggle that link all the trade unions at a local and workplace level with community and student organisations and the workers' parties. It needs to focus not only on the burning needs facing ordinary people but go on to raise solutions to them which do not respect the property rights of the oligarchs or the foreign investors, indeed, which exert workers' control over them and meet the needs at their expense.

Last, but not least, such a programme must set as its goal a government committed to taking anti-capitalist measures from day one. These would include throwing out the EU commissioners, nationalising all the private banks, imposing a state monopoly of foreign trade, nationalising under workers' control the enterprises of the Greek oligarchs and appealing to workers across Europe to take action to stop the EU leaders blockading Greece, throwing it out of the euro or conspiring to bring down the workers' government. Obviously, it would also have to prepare an emergency currency if the present rules and treaties governing the euro and the dictatorship of the ECB still exist.

\* For Workers', not Popular, Unity in alliance with the small farmers and family businesses; end the futile and reactionary search for a bloc with the 'patriotic' bourgeoisie.?

- \* For direct action up to and including an indefinite general strike to break the Memorandum and kick out the Memorandum government.
  - \* For a Workers' Government taking anticapitalist measures?
  - \* For a united revolutionary socialist party on a transitional programme?
  - \* For Europe-wide solidarity with the Greek workers and youth to break the plundering and blockading of Greece by rulers of the European Union.
  - \* Open the gates of Europe and all its states, without exception, to the refugees from the wars in the Middle East and Africa.
  - ?\* For a Socialist United States of Europe.
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**Source URL:** <https://fifthinternational.org/content/greek-elections-and-emergence-popular-unity>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/lessons-chile-popular-unity-1970-1973>

[2] <http://laiki-enotita.gr/component/k2/item/202-the-euro-means-permanent-austerity-and-negation-of-democracy>