

Who will rule Greece? A first analysis of the results of the elections

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Alexis Tsipras and SYRIZA won a decisive victory in the September 20 election, but they will be under immediate pressure to implement the harsh austerity agreement with the European authorities accepted in July. In an article published in French at the A l'encontre website [1], where he is editor, Charles-André Udry, a member of the Movement for Socialism in Switzerland, analyzes the outcome of the election and looks at the shape of struggles to come.

Contents

- [Tsipras: The Delegate](#)
 - [Beyond the Overall Results](#)
 - [Reminders of the Memorandum's](#)
 - [The First Stage for Popular](#)
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ALEXIS TSIPRAS, at the head of the newly minted, pro-Memorandum SYRIZA, won snap elections on September 20. However, Jon Henley, writing in the Guardian on September 18, noted the presence of a certain Maarten Verway, a tenant—or maybe we should say roommate—in Maximos Mansion, the prime minister's residence.

So who is this Maarten Verway? A Dutch functionary of the Ministry of Finance, previously assigned to operate in Cyprus, Verway has been appointed head of the European task force that will take up residence in Athens. In this role, he will preside over the Memorandum signed by Tsipras on July 13, which was adopted by a large majority of the previous parliament, including a majority of SYRIZA's MPs, alongside those of the Independent Greeks, New Democracy, PASOK and Potami.

Tsipras will now be forced to come to an agreement with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF before finalizing and adopting a set of laws governing the new austerity program. Maarten Verway will serve as proconsul for the creditors and their institutions.

Thus, Romaric Godin, in the French daily *La Tribune*, rightly labeled the coalition of SYRIZA and the Independent Greeks [2]:

"a majority for the implementation of the Memorandum signed by Tsipras. After all, this agreement precisely defines the tasks of the next government, leaving it with almost no capacity for maneuver. In October, according to item 2.1 of the Memorandum, Alexis Tsipras will present a supplementary budget for 2015, a draft 2016 budget and a so-called "fiscal path" through 2019, which must be supported by a package of parametric measures along with extensive and credible structural reforms." The text of the agreement dictates a large part of these measures, including a second

pension reform and the elimination of several subsidies.”

In other words, the democratic rights of Greek citizens have been reduced to the status of those in a neocolonial country.

Tsipras: The Delegate

All commentators have pointed to the high level of abstentions (43.43 percent of those eligible did not vote), the highest rate since the end of the dictatorship in 1974. SYRIZA won 35.46 percent of the votes (which translates into 145 seats in parliament, because of the 50-seat bonus given to the first-place party); conservative New Democracy won 28.1 percent (75 seats); Golden Dawn (the neo-Nazis) won 6.99 percent (18 seats); social-democratic PASOK-Dimar won 6.28 percent (17 seats); the KKE (Communist Party) won 5.55 percent (15 seats); centrist To Potami won 4.09 percent (11 seats); the right-wing Independent Greeks won 3.69 percent (10 seats); and the Union of Centrists won 3.43 percent (9 seats).

Popular Unity—the party founded by, among others, SYRIZA’s former Left Current and Red Network, with the support of candidates such as Zoe Konstantopoulou, the former speaker of parliament—failed to reach the 3 percent threshold required, taking only 2.86 percent of the vote, leaving it without any seats in parliament.

The unexpected entry into parliament by the Union of Centrists, led by perennial politician-turned-boorish talk show host Vassilis Leventis, which obtained just 1.79 percent of the vote in January, is one indication of the media-driven nature of politics: Leventis included six close family members in his electoral list as well as other candidates without any political experience. (*El Pais*, September 21, 2015)

A sociological analysis of the election results, a land into which some political scientists venture, is beyond the scope of this article. One explanation, however, has been advanced by activists in Popular Unity: the 180-degree turn carried out by the SYRIZA leadership after the July 5 referendum—although Tsipras began leaning in this direction after February 20 when he signed the first interim agreement with the Troika—sparked a marked disorientation among the ranks of the working class and those who had identified with the prospects, as appeared to be possible in January 2015, of breaking with austerity policies.

Yet Popular Unity underestimated, partly owing to the shock of the huge “no” vote on July 5, the persistent feeling within the working classes that enormous obstacles stand in the way of obstructing the national and international austerity machine’s mechanisms.

Moreover, as I have emphasized in other articles, the level of social mobilization hit its peak at the end of 2012. The movements’ decline resulted in a certain reflex toward the idea of forming a government, symbolized by the charismatic personality of Tsipras, which could block the socially deadly effects of the first two memoranda (2010 and 2012). The social crisis added to this, creating a sense of fatigue stemming from the daily stress of masses of people having to constantly rearrange their personal and family lives in almost every dimension in order to simply survive. [3].)

Likewise, the exodus of some 400,000 to 500,000 Greeks in the past few years, often young skilled workers, represents a loss of vigorous forces in the Greek social fabric. All these factors point to the difficulty of predicting just how the militant mood which took root during the 15-day interlude prior to the July 5 referendum—when 61.3 percent voted “no”—would express itself. These are, at least, some of the elements explaining the high rate of abstention.

The Tsipras leadership quickly seized on the inertia inherent in the working classes delegating their struggle to SYRIZA, while capitalizing on their continued rejection of the “parties of the old system.” Therefore, the central theme of the campaign conducted by SYRIZA’s apparatus, ensconced as it was in government, emerged: Faced with the creditors’ diktats, we are the only ones who can mitigate their social effects, and we are the only ones who can negotiate to restructure the debt.

This message won out, as was confirmed by the results. The militant disaffection that did clearly strike at SYRIZA did not affect the election results as certain analysts had supposed would be the case. If what we might call a Memorandum mutation occurred, with its disintegrating effects on the formerly militant SYRIZA coalition, then it was fed by SYRIZA’s newly constructed politico-clientalist and institutional apparatus.

In the socio-political climate prevailing in Greece, one would have to be an academic to think that whole social sectors would be voting solely on the basis of a clear-headed expectation of the complex effects dictated by the new Memorandum and its myriad associated measures.

This is especially so once we recognize that control over the electoral timetable was in the hands of the SYRIZA government apparatus. Popular Unity had to be organized in great haste, while its capacity to put forward its ideas in close relation to an active social base was limited. For instance, attempts to organize “Committees for the no” after the referendum were not consistently effective. Overall, the gravitational pull of Popular Unity’s message, with few exceptions, was not sufficiently tangible.

Beyond the Overall Results

A schematic review of the results in a couple electoral districts may be useful.

In the two districts of Athens (A and B), the respective results for September 20 can be compared as follows:

- SYRIZA: 31.55 percent and 35.21 percent (in January 2015, 33.61 percent and 37.09 percent)
- Popular Unity: 3.58 percent and 3.77 percent
- KKE: 5.83 percent and 6.80 percent (in January, 6.04 percent and 6.93 percent)
- Golden Dawn: 6.91 percent and 5.64 percent (in January, 7.05 percent and 5.73 percent)

And in the two districts of Piré (A and B):

- SYRIZA: 33.62 percent and 42.05 percent (in January 2015, 34.40 percent and 42.06 percent)
- Popular Unity: 2.95 percent and 3.77 percent
- KKE: 5.14 percent and 7.94 percent (in January 2015, 5.27 percent and 8.18 percent)
- Golden Dawn: 7.83 percent and 8.40 percent (in January 2015, 7.44 percent and 7.80 percent)

At first glance, although a specific study of votes transferred from one party to another is not available, what is obvious is that the distribution of votes for the parties listed above was not greatly disrupted by the presence of Popular Unity in these four significant districts. Of course, in the Athens A district, heavy media coverage of certain Popular Unity candidates—such as Zoe Konstantopoulou—does probably explain SYRIZA’s relative decline.

As for the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn, it has become the third largest bloc in parliament, despite the fact that it has been on trial since April 2015 for “engagement in criminal activity.” Pointing to the importance of Golden Dawn’s election results, the party’s leader, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, told the

BBC that “the whole system was against us.”

The neo-Nazis’ main campaign slogans centered on two themes: First, “No to the Memorandum,” and second, “No to illegal immigration, we will not allow them to make us a minority in our own country.” Golden Dawn’s vote increased nationally from 6.28 percent (17 seats) in January to 6.99 percent (18 seats) in September. And its progress is visible in the border districts of the north such as Evros (growing from 7.5 percent in January to 8.71 percent in September), or on islands like Lesbos (4.66 percent to 7.78 percent).

Reminders of the Memorandum’s Orders

After the announcement by Tsipras of the formation of a coalition government with the Independent Greeks—a repeat of the previous formula—Martin Schulz, president of the European Parliament, did not hesitate to attack Tsipras, saying, “I called him [Tsipras] a second time to ask him why he was continuing a coalition with this strange, far-right party.” The presence of proconsul Maarten Verwey is not enough. Schulz, like other Eurocrats, wants a coalition government with PASOK and To Potami in order to ensure greater government stability.

The creditors’ institutional and political representatives know the policy and legal agenda tied to the memorandum. Each decision will be “supervised” and the issue of “debt restructuring” will be used as a permanent mechanism to bring the government to heel whenever necessary.

Thus, one can guess, in summary form, how this agenda will be rolled out. To begin, the supplementary budget for 2015 will be revised and the outlines of budgets through 2019 will be drawn up. Then, in late October or early November, European inspectors, present at its birth, will bless the newborn budget. Next, the chains will be tightened with pension reforms due in January 2016 and a drastic reduction in funding for public hospitals to the tune of 22 percent, according to the Association of Doctors. The list will go on.

For creditors and the Greek ruling class, the main priority in the fall will be to recapitalize the Greek banks in order to avoid a “bail-in.” This would imply that, if the recapitalization is not completed by December 2015, any deposits backed by the institutions (those totaling 100,000 Euros or less) would no longer be guaranteed.

It goes without saying that all accounts containing more than 100,000 Euros have long since vanished during the years 2010 to 2015. Amounts totaling 100,000 Euros and up are critical on account of their importance for trade conducted by small and medium-sized firms. The coalition government, represented by Tsipras, will be the captain of a ship that it cannot steer. And, following any socio-political turmoil, calls to expand the coalition—even to form of a government of “national unity,” including PASOK, To Potami and others, cannot not be excluded.

The First Stage for Popular Unity

It is possible to add up all the votes won by parties to the left of SYRIZA: KKE, Popular Unity and ANTARSYA. But for now, the only conclusion that can be drawn from such an arithmetic operation is that there is a significant layer of militants in Greece, and they are embedded in deep social networks. This layer will be put to the test in the coming months. In the run-up to the September 20 elections, it proved impossible to politically translate the “no” vote of July 5 into a material force. Certainly, there were objective reasons for this.

Yet Popular Unity must draw up a collective balance sheet of its actions thus far. The angle adopted by several of its spokespeople with respect to the euro-drachma debate seems to have benefited the SYRIZA leadership's line of attack.

The most immediate and concrete issue facing Greek workers, pensioners, students and the poor was the impact of the austerity policy. Therefore, presenting an exit from the eurozone as a necessary precondition for winning vital demands related to social needs was the most politically credible strategy. But making a "Grexit" the focus of the election campaign meant placing what could only be the ultimate conclusion of a class-wide battle—that is, the fight against the whole political, economic and institutional system of the euro—at the starting point of Popular Unity's program.

Along these lines, we can question the efficacy of engaging in this sort of programmatic pedagogy in relation to the accumulation of social forces. Furthermore, once the debt had been generally characterized as illegitimate, odious and unsustainable, connections needed to be clearly spelled out between the refusal to repay (even a fraction of) the debt and how this could be linked to the fulfillment of immediate, quantifiable social needs (health, education, etc.) This dual articulation was necessary in order to create a palpable identification between the rejection of the debt on the one hand and the winning of basic necessities on the other.

In the weeks to come, Popular Unity will undoubtedly define its policies as a political front. And its organizers will have to evaluate their capacity to engage with social resistance fueled by the brutal blows of the third Memorandum's enforcement. In this sense, the dimension of the fight initiated in Greece represents a challenge for the forces of the European radical left on a continental scale, if not beyond.

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P.S.

* "Who will rule Greece?". Translation from the French by Todd Chretien for <http://socialistworker.org/>

Footnotes

[1] Available on ESSF.

[2] See on ESSF (article 35912), [Grèce : des marges de manoeuvre très limitées pour Alexis Tsipras - La logique du mémorandum va s'appliquer inexorablement.](#)

[3] Also see the A l'encontre introduction to the Popular Unity program, published on September 16, 2015, available on ESSF (article 35879), [Grèce : des élections pour « élargir le soutien » au troisième mémorandum.](#)