

# Greece: Fake left lines up behind union sabotage of anti-austerity struggle

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The mass movement of Greek workers against the €16 billion government-imposed austerity package is being run into the ground by the trade unions. The two major union federations, the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) and the public sector confederation (ADEDY), are stifling opposition to the social-democratic PASOK government in order to pave the way for their inevitable declaration of support for cuts—provided only that they are administered “fairly.”

On Tuesday, what should have been a day of industrial action by all public sector workers was instead the occasion for a number of isolated strikes and protests. ADEDY has only called an unspecified “protest rally” for the evening of March 23 and has said that a date for industrial action to be held “either before or after Easter” will not be fixed until later this month.

As the protests have mounted and the austerity measures begin to be imposed, the GSEE has advanced a nationalist consumer protest campaign as opposed to industrial action. The GSEE, which is presently holding its congress, is focusing its energies on a “buy Greek” campaign.

Tuesday and Wednesday were the occasion for a 48-hour action by power workers employed by the state-owned DEH. However, the GENOP trade union limited this to taking some units offline for a short time at seven plants, with union president Nikos Photopoulos stressing that “we don’t want a single light bulb to go out.” Speaking to a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter, an official of GENOP said that after meeting with the energy minister they will decide whether to continue the strike or to end it.

Everything is being done to lull Greek workers into a false sense of complacency. On Monday, the credit ratings agency Standard & Poor’s (S&P) slightly upgraded Greece’s status to BBB-plus, while Tuesday saw the European Union foreign ministers pledge support

to PASOK’s austerity measures and issue a declaration that they have devised an emergency aid package in case Greece requests financial assistance.

In reality, there is nothing comforting or positive in either announcement. In the first place, both are meant as an endorsement of Prime Minister George Papandreou’s attacks on jobs, wages and social services. Moreover, both are highly conditional. S&P still warns that the Greek economy faces “much weaker medium-term growth than official forecasts,” a sign that the financial powers are still not satisfied with the scale of attacks made on working people.

Commenting on S&P’s verdict, Gary Jenkins, credit analyst at Evolution Securities, described it to the *Guardian* as “probably the most negative positive comment that I have ever read.” Jenkins added, “It reads like they [S&P] do not want to be part of potentially creating any problem, but they want to say enough negative comments so that if it does all go horribly wrong in the future, they can point to said commentary and say ‘we did warn you!’ ”

European finance ministers in fact failed to agree on any concrete measures to aid Greece and have stressed instead that the government has not asked for any money. Spanish Economy Minister Elena Salgado told the press, “Greece for the moment does not need any help. They haven’t asked for any financial help, so what we did yesterday is simply to discuss on the technical issues, to have some instrument ready if it is needed.”

The *Irish Times* headlined its report, “Brussels offers Greece the rack as alternative to its bed of nails.”

Under these circumstances, the austerity measures being carried out by Papandreou can only be the first wave of an ongoing programme of cuts. This year, he plans to reduce the budget deficit from 12.7 percent of gross domestic product to 8.7 percent. The government must impose tens of billions in further cuts in the next two years in order to

reduce the deficit to 3 percent by 2012.

There will be no let-up in the demands for more pain now being made to the working class. Harvard University professor Martin Feldstein, a former advisor to US President Ronald Reagan, said on Saturday that failure to implement the measures could result in Greece having to exit the euro zone. Feldstein said, “The idea that Greece can go from a 12 percent deficit now to a 3 percent deficit two years from now seems fantasy. The alternatives are to default in some way or to leave, or both.”

Commenting in the *Financial Times* on the precarious state of the Greek economy, Richard Batty, investment director of strategy at Standard Life Investments, asked, “Are the Greeks able to achieve the fiscal adjustments necessary? That is still very unclear, particularly as the economy is likely to see a much bigger contraction than is forecast and the country has to pay elevated interest rates in the market.”

A decisive political role in facilitating PASOK’s attacks is being played by the pseudo-left groups—SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), Antarsya (Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow) and the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE)—which have acted throughout as loyal cheerleaders for the trade union bureaucracy, hailing its one-day strikes as proof that the unions defend the interests of the workers.

SYRIZA’s leader, Alexis Tsipras, spoke in the European Parliament this month, warning that “the last two Greek governments’ neoliberal policies...can lead us to a social catastrophe!”

He advised that a more long-term model for the imposition of cuts was required, stating, “It is nonsense to reduce the deficit in such a short time. We have to give a Left alternative with medium-term changes that are not based in reducing the salaries by 20 percent, with indirect taxes rises, and the reduction of the social system provoking terrible consequences to the social peace of Greece.”

On Monday, SYRIZA appealed for unity among “all the forces of the Left, radical environmentalism and PASOK supporters that disagree with the policies of the party and the government”—a measure designed to legitimise its refusal to mount any struggle against PASOK in the name of a supposed “unity of the Left.”

The various ex-left groups organised within Antarsya act as a second line of defence for the government, by posing as a left alternative to SYRIZA while insisting that the most important task is to build the type of “left” alliances being advocated. This places them in a direct

line of continuity with PASOK.

Just as fundamentally, both groups are firmly tied to the trade union apparatus and are busy providing excuses for its efforts to call off opposition to the government.

A rally Tuesday night in Athens was supposedly ADEDY’s major activity of the day. But the gathering was attended almost exclusively by the members and periphery of SYRIZA, Antarsya and the KKE’s youth movement.

A member of the Socialist Workers Party of Greece (SEK), which is affiliated to Antarsya, told a WSWS reporter that the demonstration was being held to demand that the trade unions call further strikes. But when pressed as to why none had been called, he stressed that ADEDY was not taking action this week because it had held a strike last week. Regarding the GSEE, he added that it had not called any action since March 11 because “they are in a congress this week.”

In an interview with the *Socialist Worker*, the newspaper of the British Socialist Workers Party, Panos Garganas, the editor of *Workers’ Solidarity*, its Greek newspaper, stated blandly that the Greek trade union federation “has its conference next week so there may not be more action from it soon.”

He made out that what was happening was a “waiting game.” The government, he claimed, was “waiting to hear whether the European Union is going to loan money to Greece” and workers are “waiting for the trade union leaders to make up their mind.”

The trade union leaders have made up their minds a long time ago. By encouraging such a passive acceptance of their right to lead, the entire fake-left is disarming the working class and paving the way to defeat.



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