

The German media's chauvinist campaign against Greece

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The chauvinist campaign directed against Greece by sections of the international media, and particularly the German media, has assumed an increasingly strident tone since Greek workers took to the streets in large numbers to oppose the austerity program dictated by the European Union and the banks.

The tenor of such comments is always the same: blame for the Greek financial crisis lies first and foremost with the Greek population, who are lazy and egoistical. For years they have been living beyond their means, supporting the bad habits of the state and seeking to retire from gainful employment at the first opportunity.

Leading this demagogic campaign is, as is so often the case with such journalistic filth, the German *Bild* newspaper, a product of the Springer publishing firm. When Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou arrived in Berlin last Friday, the *Bild* editorial board produced a vicious and arrogant open letter. Under the headline "Dear Prime Minister," the newspaper wrote, "When you read these words you will have stepped foot in a country that is very different from your own. You are in Germany."

The editorial declared that, unlike in Greece, in Germany most people do not laze around and they work to the age of 67. Among other slanders was the charge that people in Greece must pay a thousand euro in bribes to get a hospital bed, and the Greek state provides pensions for "the daughters of generals unable to find a husband."

Germany also has a high level of debt, but is able to pay it off, the *Bild* wrote, "because we get up early in the morning and work the whole day."

One is tempted to write a reply to the well-paid editors at the *Bild*, who earn many multiples of what the average Greek or German worker makes. The list of

so-called "German virtues" of which the hacks at *Bild* are so proud can be easily extended.

Due to the anti-welfare Hartz laws, the average wage in Germany has declined dramatically. People are now forced to work for wages well under 5 euro per hour.

At the same time, a two-tier structure is being introduced into the health system that will effectively exclude the low-paid from decent care.

When it comes to pensions, Germany may not pay for generals' daughters, but the German state did go to great lengths and great expense to ensure the livelihoods of war criminals and Nazi henchmen. The widow of Roland Freisler, the chairman of the National Socialist Court of Justice, who died in a bomb attack in the final days of the Second World War, was provided a generous pension by the state until her death in 1997. Many more examples could be given.

The media campaign against Greece is aimed at dividing the peoples of Europe and playing them off against one another in order to prevent a joint struggle by the European working class against the dictates of the European Union, the EU member governments and the banks. This is the development that is so feared by the European and international financial elite and their pens-for-hire in the press.

It is necessary to spell out a few basic truths.

The cause of the crisis is not to be found primarily in Greece—although the Greek ruling class fully shares responsibility—but rather in the centers of European and international finance capital. Those responsible for the economic miasma are not Greek workers or the workers in any other land, but instead a wealthy elite of profiteers who have made fortunes through risky and often criminal forms of speculation.

When the crisis erupted one-and-a-half years ago and the system of international finance confronted collapse,

the bankers demanded that governments intervene and take on their losses. Across the globe, they dictated the terms of bank rescue plans that put hundreds of billions of euro at the disposal of the banks to cover their bad debts and allow them to continue their speculative practices. Additional billions were handed over to major industrial firms.

From the start it was clear that the bank and industry rescue programs would lead to a drastic increase in public debt. It was also clear that this debt could be paid off only by imposing draconian austerity programs aimed at squeezing the necessary resources from the working population. Germany went so far as to introduce a so-called “debt brake,” establishing a constitutional limit to the amount of debt the state could build up.

The crisis is rooted not in national traits, but in the class divisions that dominate Europe and the world. The ruling elite in Greece is part of the European and international corporate-financial elite. It is deeply involved in international speculation and backs the Papandreou government, providing full support for its attacks on the working class.

One example is the Latsis family. Based on huge profits from its shipping company, the family established the Greek Eurobank 25 years ago, and five years ago received 10.3 million euro from the Greek state for its banking activities, in a deal approved by the EU Commission. The current president of the EU, José Manuel Barroso, is a close friend of the Latsis clan. The estimated fortune of company boss Spiros Latsis amounts to 6.7 billion euro.

The media has frequently referred to the low level of productivity in the Greek economy. What remains unsaid, however, is that it is European banks and corporations that have set the tone in the Greek economy since the introduction of the euro in 2001. The price of foodstuffs in Greece is determined by German and French food concerns, and is significantly higher than the average price in Europe, although salaries in Greece are well below the European norm.

Denunciations in German ruling circles and the media of Greek corruption are utterly hypocritical. The German company Siemens has no less than seven factories in Greece. In the course of a recent investigation it emerged that in 1999 the company gave Papandreou’s party, PASOK, one million German

marks for the social democratic party’s European election campaign. In so doing, Siemens lined up fully behind PASOK’s industrial policy of deregulation and privatization.

Workers in Germany, France, Great Britain and other European countries must recognize the EU-dictated program for what it is: The start of an unprecedented attack on the living standards and the social gains of all workers.

It is necessary to decisively reject the chauvinist campaign directed at the Greek population. There is no national solution to the crisis confronting the peoples of Greece, Spain, Portugal and all over the world. The European working class must build a new leadership and new mass organizations that fight for an international socialist program.

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