

The Greek crisis and the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe

Alex Lantier
24 April 2010

The April 22 public sector strike in Greece has underscored the critical political issues facing workers in the struggle against Prime Minister George Papandreou's austerity policy. The social democratic PASOK government is imposing huge cuts in jobs, wages, social programs and pensions to make the working class pay for the soaring state debt owed to the international bankers.

Tens of thousands of workers marched on April 22 with chants of "No more illusions, war against the rich." Civil servants, health workers, dockers and seamen struck, reflecting mounting popular anger. Recent polls have found that 86 percent of the population considers Papandreou's cuts "unfair."

Despite the strike and in defiance of public opinion, the Greek bourgeoisie is pushing for more cuts. Yesterday, Papandreou officially requested that the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) activate plans to bail out Greece. The EU would loan €30 billion and the IMF €12 billion in exchange for Athens agreeing to new cuts. The *Financial Times* noted that Papandreou was working to "prepare public opinion for new harsh measures."

Behind Papandreou stand the financial markets—i.e., Greece's creditors among the major European and international banks—which tolerate no expression of opposition to their plans to economically plunder Greece. They sold off Greek government bonds during the strike, driving up the interest rate Athens pays for new borrowing to near nine percent. It is widely assumed that Greece will go bankrupt if it continues borrowing at such rates.

The assault by international capital on Greece is a trial run for attacks on working people across Europe and worldwide. As Portugal's borrowing costs rise

towards five percent, the press increasingly speaks of that country as the banks' next target—and after Portugal, the UK or Spain.

The outcome of the Greek strikes highlights the political impasse workers face, as the unions and their pseudo-left allies work to suppress and betray the popular resistance to the capitalist offensive.

The unions are shielding Papandreou. Their aim is to wear down the workers by calling strikes piecemeal, while Papandreou intensifies his cuts.

The GSEE private-sector union refused to participate in the April 22 strike, saying it was putting off strikes until an unspecified date next month. The ADEDY public-sector union decided not to organize strikes in critical sectors, including public transport and the airlines.

The Stalinist Communist Party and Syriza, the Greek pseudo-left party led by Alexis Tsipras, are shamelessly promoting anti-Americanism in order to divert popular anger away from PASOK and Greek capitalism and block the development of a European-wide and international struggle against the attack on workers' jobs and living standards.

Tsipras has called for a referendum for or against the EU-IMF bailout plan. Since Syriza insists that workers subordinate themselves to the trade union bureaucracies, and it proposes no policy for the working class to fight the PASOK government and unite with workers throughout Europe and internationally, its call for a referendum leaves the workers the choice of refusing the bailout and accepting state bankruptcy or accepting the dictates of the IMF and Brussels. It is a cynical and backhanded means of pressuring the workers to accept austerity measures. It reflects the fake left's de facto support for the bailout and the brutal austerity policies attached to it.

At the same time, Syriza seeks to focus opposition to the austerity measures on the Washington-based IMF's participation in the proposed bailout, not on any principled class basis, but in order to foment Greek nationalism and crude anti-Americanism. As though the European Union and the Greek banks and government were any less hostile to Greek workers than the American bankers!

In this vein, Dimitris Papadimoulis, a Syriza lawmaker, said the IMF "hangs like a cloud of volcanic ash over the Greeks," while Tsipras warned against Papandreou's "advisors hailing from across the Atlantic."

Such nationalist demagoguery goes hand in hand with the attempt to portray Papandreou and PASOK as victims of foreign forces, rather than the representatives of the Greek workers' most immediate enemy—the Greek ruling class. Those who promote this political line seek to disarm the working class with illusions that popular pressure can shift Papandreou to abandon his austerity program. This is the road to defeat!

There is a real danger that such a disorientation of the working class will open the door for a return to the military rule Greece suffered under the 1968-1975 junta. There can be no doubt that within the Greek political establishment military plans are being laid for such a move should the trade unions fail to quash the resistance of the working class to the cuts.

There is no reform solution to the crisis in Greece or, for that matter, the rest of Europe, the United States and beyond. The logic of the global capitalist crisis is posing the issue of revolution or counter-revolution, socialism or barbarism.

The critical question facing Greek workers, who have been thrust into the front lines of the international struggle, is to liberate their fight from the treacherous grip of the trade union bureaucracies and the unions' pseudo-left backers and mobilize their independent strength on the basis of a revolutionary and international strategy.

Instead of austerity and mass unemployment, the workers must demand the nationalization of the banks and their transformation into public utilities under democratic popular control, so that the social wealth can be marshaled to provide jobs and decent living standards. This must be combined with the nationalization of basic industry.

Papandreou and PASOK would sooner hand over power to the military than enact such a program. The political task facing Greek workers is not to pressure the PASOK government, but to bring it down and replace it with a workers' government.

Nor can the crisis be solved simply within the national borders of Greece. Across Europe and in every country, workers are facing the same attacks from the same enemy—the international bourgeoisie. In particular, the crisis has exposed the impossibility of uniting Europe on a progressive, democratic and egalitarian basis within the framework of capitalism. In opposition to the European Union of the bankers and corporate bosses, the workers in Greece and across Europe must unite in the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe.

Alex Lantier



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact