

How the Greek Communist Party covers for Papandreou's cuts

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WSWS reporters attended a rally held on the May 15 by the Greek Communist Party (KKE). The rally was called in response to the social cuts implemented by Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreou, amid the Greek debt crisis and the IMF-EU bailout.

The KKE and PAME, the KKE-affiliated sections of Greece's GSEE private-sector union, are integral parts of a political establishment that is determined to slash the living standards of the working class. Their specialty is justifying their right-wing policies with Greek nationalism, while posing as opponents of the government through an unreconstructed Stalinist defense of the policies of the Soviet bureaucracy, before it liquidated the USSR. The rally came shortly before the KKE held its May 17 talks with the main conservative party New Democracy (ND) on how to respond to the debt crisis.

Before the rally WSWS reporters spoke with Chrysoula Lamboudi, head of the Immigrants' and Women's Secretariats at the national office of PAME. She described the impact of the cuts as "tearing up the gains of the working class." However, she largely absolved PASOK of blame—claiming that Papandreou had little choice, as the "measures are determined outside Greece."

Asked if PAME intended to seek international support, Lamboudi said she "wanted the trade union movement in other countries to develop along similar lines" to Greek unions. She said the "class movement in other countries is very weak," however. Having held up Greek unions as models for workers around the world, Lamboudi drew a devastating portrait of how they work with the state to loot the working class.

WSWS reporters noted that in France, papers speak of "co-government" between President Nicolas Sarkozy and

CGT trade union leader Bernard Thibault, and asked if there were any parallels in Greece. She answered, "Yes, there's a common front between the GSEE and the government. [GSEE chairman Yiannis] Panagopoulos criticizes them on television, but steps back from laying blame on the government. Layoffs, wage cuts—they say yes, that's necessary; instead of fighting the rise in prices, they draw up lists of discount stores people can shop in."

Asked why the GSEE takes such positions, she said: "The majority of GSEE is in PASOK." She said that Panagopoulos is a PASOK member and earns €200,000 a year by participating in various state committees.

Speaking of the meetings with the government, Lamboudi said: "Everyone is notified of government plans; the content of the talks with the government is not to discuss what will happen, but how best to apply the measures" that the state has already decided on. The measures include implementing "more flexible work practices and working hours," she explained.

PAME holds a number of positions on leading GSEE bodies as well. Describing its differences with the rest of the GSEE, she said that other "unions participate in all talks with the government. ... [They] discuss flexible working practices, they agree to them, saying it's better for workers." PAME leaves during such discussions, she explained, holding "separate meetings" instead. This does not preclude working with the rest of GSEE, she noted: "When we try to organize events, we hope everyone comes, for convenience."

The portrait of PAME's role painted by Lamboudi is one of providing a shield of pseudo-left rhetoric around the GSEE's collaboration with the government. She said, "Other organizations have more limited demands—whereas we call for job security and work for all, the GSEE says it wants more opportunities for job placement," for laid-off workers. She added that PAME unsuccessfully proposed to the rest of the GSEE that the

May 20 one-day national strike last two days.

Lamboudi knew this rhetoric did not address the threats posed to workers by the debt crisis, but said there was no political alternative. When WSWS reporters noted that brief, sporadic strikes had not halted Papandreou's cuts, she said, "I recognize that—it's difficult."

She insisted a political solution had to wait for the indefinite future: there had to be "people's power," but it is "very early to talk about this." Lamboudi said working people are politically "numb" due to PASOK and GSEE propaganda, a characterization that contrasted sharply with the overwhelming opposition to PASOK that WSWS reporters found among workers.

Despite all the purported tensions between the KKE and its PAME unions and the GSEE, the speakers' platform at the May 15 KKE rally itself was directly in front of the GSEE national headquarters building—which had a gigantic KKE banner hanging from its top floor.

The main speaker was Aleka Papariga, KKE General Secretary since 1991 and a writer on questions of "women's emancipation," according to the KKE web site. Like Lamboudi, but with the more menacing demeanor of an angry school headmistress, Papariga encased the KKE's right-wing policies in a cocoon of pseudo-left rhetoric.

She began with nationalistic appeal against the social cuts. She called for an "internationalistic patriotic struggle" against "the merchants and the banks" and the "yoke" of the IMF-European Union (EU) austerity plan. Presenting Papandreou's cuts as a product of foreign influence, she criticized Greek businessmen for "colluding with the EU attacks."

She then attacked the main conservative party, New Democracy (ND), for ultimately having "the same" position as PASOK on the austerity plan. She said such parties "sometimes use the carrot and the stick with the KKE."

In fact, if the ruling parties are definitely using the stick against the workers, the KKE is currently getting mainly carrots. While denouncing ND before her audience, Papariga was preparing for well-publicized meetings with ND leader Antonis Samaras that took place on May 17.

Especially given the rapid collapse of Papandreou's popularity, it recalls one of the KKE's more notorious betrayals: its entry into a coalition government—with the Communist Party of Greece (Interior), the precursor of the main faction of SYRIZA—led by ND Prime Minister

Tzannis Tzannetakis in 1989.

In the 1989 coalition, which was aimed ostensibly at investigating the previous PASOK government's corruption, the KKE received the justice and interior ministries. Once in office, the KKE destroyed large parts of the secret police archives, impeding investigation and historical study of the crimes of the 1967-1974 Greek military junta, and reassuring the ruling class of the KKE's reliability. This helped speed the KKE's full integration into Greece's political establishment.

Without so much as a word about the 1989 government, Papariga continued with abstract rhetoric: "Between capitalism and popular government, no compromise is possible," she said, calling for "a socio-political coalition from below."

Despite, or perhaps because of, the KKE's unswerving defense of Stalin and Brezhnev, Papariga felt the need to briefly address the question of "20th century socialism," as she called it—that is, the Soviet bureaucracy. She unblushingly repeated the Marxist movement's traditional demands to ensure that officials in a socialist state remain answerable to the population: instant recall of state officials and their payment at skilled workers' wages. Stalin and Brezhnev were hardly subject to these demands. And those who challenged the bureaucracy along similar lines were massacred in Stalin's Great Purges.

Papariga closed with calls for "sacrifice"—which, coming from her, are not inspiring but ominous.

Looking around during the final minutes of Papariga's speech, one saw people shifting their weight, quietly talking to one another, or playing with their hair. The purpose of Papariga's empty rhetoric is not to explain events, to inspire willingness to struggle, or to inspire anything at all—it is to bore and confuse masses of people facing economic strangulation by the banks.



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