

SEP holds meeting in Berlin

Greece and the euro crisis

A correspondent
20 July 2011

“The threat of national bankruptcy in Greece is not a national phenomenon but rather an integral element of the global crisis of capitalism. The international financial oligarchy is determined to resolve the crisis at the expense of the living standards of working people. The frontal attack on the Greek working class is only the prelude to a worldwide social counter-revolution.”

At the meeting “Greece and the euro crisis,” held in Berlin on Saturday, Ulrich Rippert, chairman of the German Socialist Equality Party (PSG), described the consequences of the Greek “rescue” package for those affected: lower wages, lower pensions, mass layoffs, higher health care costs and higher taxes. “Everything won by the working class in struggle during the past hundred years is now being challenged due to the historical crisis of capitalism.”

The extent of the cuts agreed in Greece is huge. Rippert calculated that the total amount to be saved by 2015, €28 billion in the small country of Greece, was equivalent to a total of €300 billion in Germany, and about one trillion US dollars.

In addition, 150,000 public service jobs are to be wiped out, with those retaining their jobs subject to a 30 percent pay cut. Privatizations of state-owned industries and services amounting to upwards of €50 billion are to be carried out, while VAT for catering establishments will increase by 10 percent. This last measure will force many Greek families who live from tourism out of business.

The background to these savage cuts is the world economic crisis, which has reached a new stage. The collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 triggered a chain reaction. Many major international banks were “saved” with public money, tearing gaping holes in state budgets. These deficits are now being filled by massive reductions

in social spending all over the world.

This process has encountered fierce resistance. In response, the ruling class has commenced with the dismantling of democratic rights. It will not stop there. Should it become necessary, they will resort to dictatorship as they did in the past. The relative peace in Europe at the moment should not obscure the fact that enormous, explosive developments are on the agenda. The ruling class and their paid ideologues are making their own preparations for such a situation.

Rippert cited Berlin professor Herfried Münkler who has close links to the SPD and the Greens. Münkler is campaigning for more power for the “elite” in order to combat the opposition of the working class, which has participated in a series of strikes and protests in Greece.

These actions, however, have been systematically undermined by the unions which, for example, refused to provide any assistance to striking Greek truck drivers. The trade union bureaucracy, which is closely linked to the ruling PASOK party, have deliberately permitted the strikes to run aground, organising no less than 15 one-day strikes, while refusing to organise an indefinite general strike, which would have threatened the government.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Stalinism, the international trade unions have ceased to conduct any struggles for substantive improvements within the framework of capitalism and transformed themselves into disciplinary organs against workers, Rippert declared. Their main goal was to prevent the development of an independent working class movement and hold back the struggle for socialism.

The same policy was pursued in Greece by Syriza, an alliance of pseudo-leftist parties, which maintains close

relations with the German Left Party. A genuine solution to the crisis of capitalism requires the rejection of all debt repayments, the expropriation of the major banks and corporations and the taking of power by the working class internationally. Syriza strictly rejects such a policy and instead encourages illusions that the crisis could be solved through reforms such as a new Marshall Plan or limited debt relief for Greece.

Rippert pointed out that due to the rapid development of the crisis the struggle for a socialist program has met with a positive response on the part of the working population. This was confirmed in the initial stages of the PSG election campaign in Berlin. In the course of collecting the 2,200 signatures necessary for registration for the election, campaign workers had carried out around 10,000 discussions. The overwhelming reaction was great indignation and a sharp rejection of the established parties. Demands such as the expropriation of the banks and the prosecution of those responsible for the financial crisis and their political accomplices were warmly received.

It was now important to transform this anger and frustration into political consciousness—and in particular reveal the role played by the Left Party. In its ten years of rule in the Berlin Senate in a coalition with the Social Democratic Party the Left Party has demonstrated its politics in practice. The party is currently undertaking a further turn to the right in order to demonstrate its loyalty to the capitalist state and ability to govern at a federal level.

In its election campaign the PSG will also undertake the exposure of the role of petty-bourgeois radicals, including those anarchist elements which claim it is possible to influence the ruling class with provocations and spectacular posturing. The end result of such policies is evident in the biography of Joschka Fischer, who was able to make the transition from stone-throwing street fighter to Green Party foreign minister.

The ensuing lively discussion centred on the concrete events during the protests in Athens with questions asked about the role of the Indignants movement.

Peter Schwarz, who had reported on-the-spot for the *World Socialist Web Site*, noted that the representatives of this movement in Syntagma Square had sought to impose a ban on political parties and political newspapers. On

closer inspection, however, it became clear that the organisers of the “outraged” were longtime members of various “left” parties, who hid their political identities. Others in attendance in Athens confirmed this impression.

Schwarz sharply criticised this approach. These people had a hidden political agenda and were committing a political fraud. They suppressed the open discussion of political perspectives and strategies, and limited any debate to organisational issues and utopian prescriptions for resolving the crisis within the existing system. In this way they helped the Papandreou government to maintain power and implement its austerity package.

One meeting participant felt that this attitude was too negative and asked if one should not give people the time first to wake up once and join the political debate. She said that a forum such as the outraged movement should be regarded as a first step in this direction.

Schwarz said that the clarification of political issues requires an open exchange of political positions. Those who deny their true political intentions encourage political confusion and assist the other side.

Finally, Ulrich Rippert drew attention to the urgency of the situation. The current situation is dramatic and one should not underestimate the dangers for the working class. The primary objective of the PSG is to build an internationalist party, which offers the working class a revolutionary socialist perspective. In so doing it seeks to constantly unmask those who pose as “leftist” but who in fact profess orthodox bourgeois politics—whether as trade unionists, the Left Party or radical street fighters.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact