

Workers in Germany and Europe must defend the Greek working class

Ulrich Rippert
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The European working class and especially German workers must come to the aid of the Greek population. The so-called "troika" of the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB), and the financial aristocracy that stands behind them, cannot be allowed to destroy living conditions and democracy in Greece.

The defence of Greek workers is not only critical to upholding the principle of international working class solidarity, it is essential to the defence of the basic interests of all workers in Europe and worldwide.

Since the Wall Street crash of September 2008, the international financial aristocracy has seen to it that one government after another transferred hundreds of billions in taxpayers' money to the major banks. Now it is seeking to make an example of Greece and set a precedent for slashing wages and pensions, destroying social infrastructure, installing governments and imposing conditions of savage exploitation across Europe and around the world.

If the European working class does not halt this social counterrevolution, it will pay a heavy price. It is therefore important to speak frankly.

The cause of the crisis lies not in Greece, but in the European and international financial centres. Those responsible for the economic misery are not the workers of Greece or any other country, but the profiteers who have enriched themselves through risky and criminal forms of speculation.

The Greek crisis is not rooted in national factors. It arises from the class division of society on a global scale.

Greek society is deeply divided. The ruling elite in Athens and Thessaloniki is part of the European and international financial oligarchy and enforces the interests of this oligarchy in collaboration with the European Union institutions in Brussels. While ordinary people face one austerity measure after the other, the wealthy jet set lives in the lap of luxury, having reportedly stashed away €560 billion in foreign bank accounts. This sum is almost twice as much as the entire Greek national debt.

An example of the cronyism linking Greece's billionaires—the proverbial "fat on the Aegean"—and the EU institutions is the Latsis family. Based on huge profits from the shipping business, they established the Greek Eurobank twenty years ago. Five years ago they received €10.3 million in state aid, approved by the European Commission, to extend their banking business. EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso is a close friend of the Latsis family. Company head Spiros Latsis' fortune is put at €6.7 billion.

The struggle against the Merkel government and German imperialism

The German working class, in particular, must actively oppose social devastation and dictatorship in Greece. It has the primary responsibility to spearhead the struggle against the government of Angela Merkel and German imperialism.

The brutal austerity programme for Greece demanded by the chancellor and her finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, is meant to set the tone in the European Union. They respond to every new austerity package passed by the Greek government with new and even more punitive conditions for the release of €130 billion in bailout loans agreed last year. The brazen arrogance of the German government, its undisguised contempt for the democratic rights of the Greek people and naked defence of the profits of the banks and privileges of the rich, is remarkable, even by the reactionary standards of contemporary capitalism.

Last weekend, the Greek parliament approved a new round of vicious cuts in jobs, wages and pensions, and the ruling parties expelled 44 deputies who voted against the measures. Schäuble's response was to demand that the heads of the major parties submit written statements committing themselves unequivocally to enforcing the austerity measures, regardless the outcome of elections slated for April.

Greek Finance Minister Evangelos Venizelos of the social democratic PASOK party immediately assured Germany that this requirement would be met. Nevertheless, Jean-Claude Juncker, the head of the Eurogroup, after consultations with Schäuble, called off the meeting of euro zone finance ministers scheduled for Wednesday at which the decision was to have been made to approve the release of bailout funds for Greece.

On Wednesday, Schäuble presented a new demand: either the opposition parties in Greece also put in writing their support for the austerity measures or the planned elections be delayed until next year.

Earlier, Chancellor Merkel had rejected criticism of the so-called Fiscal Pact, which obliges the EU states to introduce a debt ceiling along German lines. The significance of the debt ceiling consists precisely in the fact, she declared, that parliaments cannot yield to pressure from the street.

Without doubt, this is the language of dictatorship.

In the past, Merkel stressed that she came into politics as a result of the "great democratic movement of German reunification" twenty years ago. Now she has dropped the mask and revealed that the words about freedom and democracy hid one thing above all—the unconditional defence of capitalism and the right to accumulate private wealth at the expense of the general public.

The ruthless behaviour of the German government toward Greece is related to the growth of social opposition within Germany and a mounting political crisis. The economic, foreign and justice ministers of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)-led coalition government belong to the Free Democratic Party (FDP), whose popular support has fallen to just 3 percent according to the latest opinion polls.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) unreservedly supports the policies of Merkel and Schäuble towards Greece. The social democratic front-man in Europe and president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, has said he expects all the Greek parties to ensure the speedy implementation of the measures demanded by the troika. The Greens similarly insist there must be no concessions to soften the austerity measures.

The Left Party differs only in that it plays its well-known double game. Where the government does not require its support to ensure a safe majority, it votes "no" and plays the opposition card. At the same time, it supports the SPD and works closely with the trade unions, which have not organised a single, even symbolic, action in opposition to the social devastation in Greece.

The German workers must reject the barrage of propaganda slandering the Greek people and seeking to pit them against their Greek brothers and sisters. They must come to the defence of the Greek working class. But this

means mobilizing independently against the Merkel government and the German ruling class.

This requires that workers break out of the straitjacket of the SPD and the trade union bureaucracy. The defence of the Greek working class requires that workers in Germany powerfully repulse all the attacks on wages, jobs and working conditions and force the Merkel government to resign.

Workers need a new political program that is aimed not at appealing to the capitalists but at overthrowing their system. Without breaking the power of the international banks and speculators, not a single social problem can be resolved.

Only on the basis of an international socialist programme is it possible to stop the social devastation in Greece and other countries and establish conditions under which the needs of the population, not the profit interests of the rich, are placed at the centre of social development.

Against the EU: For the United Socialist States of Europe

The fight against the European Union must not be left to right-wing nationalists.

The arrogant and dictatorial actions of the Berlin government are reminiscent of the darkest days in European history. If Merkel's confidante and Christian Democratic parliamentary faction chair Volker Kauder can boast that German is now being spoken in Europe again, it is no wonder that anti-German sentiment is growing in Greece.

It is necessary to implacably oppose the growth of nationalism on all sides, but this requires a conscious struggle to unite the working class throughout Europe in a common struggle against European and world capital.

A progressive solution to the European crisis can be achieved only by uniting the working class in a common struggle for the overthrow of the EU and the establishment of workers' governments.

This requires the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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