

European trade unions back EU austerity demands

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The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has called a so-called “European Day of Action for Employment and Social Justice” on February 29. This toothless protest is the trade union bureaucracy’s response to the growing radicalization of European workers and mounting popular hostility to the austerity measures being imposed at the behest of the European Union.

The one-day action is not aimed at promoting solidarity with Greek workers or developing a united struggle by European workers against the imposition of austerity measures. Rather, it is an attempt to subordinate the working class to the EU and the national governments of Europe and promote a spirit of resignation in the face of the brutal cuts being carried out.

The ETUC’s call to action speaks explicitly of a “restoration of the budgetary balance over the long term,” thus accepting the framework of the banks and the ruling classes for sweeping cuts in jobs, wages, pensions and social benefits. The German Trade Union Federation (DGB) is even more explicit in its own statement, declaring the cuts to be necessary. “Savings and investment at the same time—this is the right formula,” it states.

This formula could be supported by German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and the representatives of all the other parties in the Bundestag (German parliament). It makes clear that the talk from the Day of Action organizers of sending “a strong message to Europe’s decision-makers” means sending a message to the European and International bourgeoisie that they will collaborate in imposing the cuts dictated by the banks.

Accordingly, the ETUC and DGB are seeking to limit the Day of Action to a symbolic action rather than a

mass social protest. The DGB is doing nothing to mobilize its members in any major industrial city and has instead called a rally for 8:30 in the morning in the remote and relatively sparsely populated city of Magdeburg.

Such actions cannot hide the fact that in every European country the unions are helping to impose the dictates of the banks and the EU over the opposition of the people. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Greece, where brutal cuts in jobs, wages and social services serve as the template for similar attacks across Europe and internationally.

Two years of escalating austerity measures have reduced large sections of the Greek population to destitution. Homelessness and suicides have shot up in tandem with mass layoffs, wage and pension cuts of 30 percent, 50 percent and more, and devastating cuts in the health care system. Overall unemployment stands at 20 percent and youth unemployment at 50 percent.

These attacks have been carried out despite repeated attempts by Greek workers and youth to demonstrate their opposition. The major factor in undermining their resistance has been the treachery of the Greek trade union federations—the public-sector Civil Servants’ Confederation (ADEDY), the private-sector General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) and the Communist-Party aligned All Workers Militant Front (PAME).

All three support the social democratic PASOK party, which dutifully carried out the demands of the financial markets and the “troika”—European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund—until it was replaced last November by a coalition government consisting of itself, the conservative New Democracy and the neo-fascist LAOS party (which has since withdrawn from the government). At no time

have the unions demanded the resignation of the government.

The unions have repeatedly called one-day protest strikes to dissipate the anger of the working class while they negotiated behind the scenes with the government and employers on the terms of the austerity measures to be imposed. Whenever workers in different industries—such as the oil workers and truck drivers—sought to go beyond limited protests and carry out work stoppages that threatened to inflict serious economic damage and destabilize the government, the unions intervened to break their strikes, in some cases openly supporting state repression.

Since February 12, when hundreds of thousands participated in protests against the latest austerity demands, the GSEE and ADEDY have sought to keep protests to a minimum. The growing disgust of workers with these organizations was expressed last week when a jointly called trade union protest in Athens' Syntagma Square attracted only a few thousand people.

The reactionary role of the unions in Greece and throughout Europe is not simply a matter of bad leaders, but rather the result of the unions' nationalist and pro-capitalist program and their alignment with the state. In response to the growth of class antagonisms, these counterrevolutionary organizations move ever closer to the state.

As a GSEE spokesperson told the *World Socialist Web Site* this week, the unions are not opposed to the government, but only to certain of its actions. "We have to find another plan to get out of the crisis, with the help of all positive forces in Greece of all political parties," he said.

In other words, the unions stand fully with the state and the banks in seeking to contain the capitalist crisis at the expense of the working class. They support bourgeois government that are implementing a social counterrevolution—even those that include neo-fascist forces such as LAOS.

The unions make no secret of their defence of the European Union and its institutions. Several days ago, the GSEE issued a statement citing the EU to insist that certain rights are associated with obligations. The above-cited GSEE spokesperson stressed to the WSWs that the unions defend Greek membership in the EU in spite of all the cuts.

This position was echoed by ADEDY representative

Basil Xenakis. He told the WSWs that his union was not calling for an indefinite strike against the attacks on workers because the government had already decided everything. "We cannot act, we have to react," he said.

He essentially acknowledged that the workers felt differently. "Everyone in Greece knows" that the workers are prepared to fight, he said.

Although PAME, the union federation of the Greek Communist Party (KKE), employs radical rhetoric against the EU, it has not called any serious strike action independently of ADEDY and GSEE. During mass protests last October, it deployed its own stewards to protect the parliament building against the demonstrators.

The KKE's anti-EU rhetoric has not prevented it becoming a member of the European United Left in the European Parliament, which speaks explicitly of reforming the EU and not replacing it. The KKE employs criticism of the EU primarily to channel workers' resistance along nationalist lines. General Secretary Aleka Pappariga declares that a social revolution is not on the agenda while the KKE tells Greek workers the country could be self-sufficient under capitalism because of its energy reserves.

The fight to abolish the bankers' European Union and defend the rights of workers requires a break with the trade unions and the building of new organizations of working class struggle guided by a socialist and internationalist perspective. The slogan for this fight is the United Socialist States of Europe.



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