

The European Union and Greece

Peter Schwarz
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One has to go back to such military-fascist dictatorships as the Pinochet regime in Chile to find a parallel to the attacks being imposed by the European Union on the working people of Greece. With sadistic zeal, the commissioners in Brussels, at the behest of Berlin, Paris and London, make each new financial package dependent on fresh demands for destroying the livelihoods of Greek workers and making their lives hell.

Events in Greece show the true character of the European Union. It is not a means of achieving genuine European unity, but rather an instrument to subjugate all of Europe under the dictatorship of finance capital.

The EU institutions make a mockery of democratic principles. Non-elected commissioners accountable to no one determine the fate of whole countries. Decisions of the European Council are regularly sealed on the basis of trade-offs between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the leaders of the EU's two most powerful member-states. The European Parliament, which decides nothing, serves as a pseudo-democratic fig leaf.

Since its establishment two decades ago, the EU has systematically wound back the clock of social progress in Europe. Instead of bringing the continent together, the euro has further increased the influence of the economically powerful countries, above all Germany, over the weaker nations.

In Eastern Europe, the EU has overseen the destruction of education and health and social welfare systems. It has fostered the growth of a corrupt elite that enriched itself through the privatisation of state assets and EU subsidies. For the vast majority of the population, entry into the EU has turned out to be a nightmare.

It was long claimed that the social decline of Eastern Europe was merely a transitional stage. These countries were said to have inherited ailing economies from the

former Stalinist regimes, but were being prepared for a flourishing future.

The fate of Greece reveals that social decline in Eastern Europe is not the exception, but the rule for all of Europe.

The purpose of the so-called "aid packages" for which the Greek population must sacrifice is not to help the people, but to enrich the banks, hedge funds and speculators. For many experts and officials, the bankruptcy of Greece is a foregone conclusion. According to *Spiegel Online*, they admit off the record: "Of course, the 130 billion [euros] will not solve the problem. It is only a question of buying time. Time until the financial markets have stabilized to the extent that they can handle the bankruptcy of Greece without a chain reaction."

Of the €130 billion agreed by European finance ministers on Monday, €30 billion will flow directly to the accounts of creditor banks, which are guaranteed repayment (with interest) of a portion of their loans to Greece already written off. The remaining money goes into an escrow account to ensure that it is used to pay off debts and not to finance essential government functions.

Anger over the dictates of the EU is mounting not only in Greece, but also in Portugal, Spain and Ireland, which have also been targeted by the financial markets. In the past few days, hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets.

It is increasingly evident that the working class cannot defend a single social or democratic right without breaking from the European Union.

Some nationalist political forces both within and outside of Greece are calling for withdrawal from the EU. They do so on a pro-capitalist basis that leads both to the further impoverishment of the working class and the further fracturing of Europe. The working class must not allow popular opposition to the EU to fall

under the leadership of such forces.

Above all, these forces—whether on the right or the nominal “left”—use nationalism to line the working class up behind the ruling class of each country and block the emergence of an independent movement of the working class and the unification of working class struggles across Europe.

An autarchic Greek capitalism is not viable. The country would remain at the mercy of the international financial markets, much like Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo and the other small states which emerged from the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Some spokesmen of international capital advocate such a development. The head of the German Ifo institute, Hans-Werner Sinn, argues that Greece’s exit from the euro group and the devaluation of its currency would reduce the living standards of Greek workers by a further 30 percent while avoiding further direct wage cuts, which, he warns, would drive the country “to the brink of civil war.”

This underscores the necessity for Greek workers to fight for withdrawal from the EU on the basis of a revolutionary socialist and internationalist program. The rejection of EU diktats by Greek workers would provide a powerful impetus to the workers in Germany, France, Italy, Britain, Spain, Portugal and internationally—the real allies of the Greek working class. It would draw European workers together in a common struggle against austerity, unemployment and attacks on democratic rights.

The ruling elites of Europe and Greece are preparing for the national bankruptcy of Greece and the social conflicts that will inevitably ensue. On the one hand, they are considering bringing pseudo-left organizations such as the Democratic Left, Syriza and the Stalinist KKE into government. The task of such a “left” government would be to contain and dissipate any offensive launched by the working class and keep the state apparatus intact until the ruling class is prepared for a counteroffensive.

At the same time, preparations are being made to impose dictatorial forms of rule, like that imposed by the Greek military between 1967 and 1974. The Greek

generals work inside NATO in close cooperation with American, British and German officers. The world’s biggest military alliance has long supported military dictatorships within its ranks. Fascist Portugal was a founding member of NATO in 1949, and the US-led alliance worked closely with Franco in Spain. Greece and Turkey, where the generals staged a coup on three occasions, joined in 1952.

Mass poverty and dictatorship can be prevented only by the Greek working class opposing not only the EU but also the Greek bourgeoisie and its state. Greek workers must fight for the establishment of a workers’ government. Such a government would expropriate the large fortunes, banks and corporations and reorganise the economy on a socialist basis for the benefit of society as a whole, rather than the profit interests of the financial aristocracy.

Workers must break with the unions and all political parties that seek to bind them to the EU and the Greek capitalists. They should establish action committees in workplaces and residential areas to take over the organization of daily life, prepare the fight against the austerity measures and organize defensive action against attacks by fascists and the military.

Such action committees must coordinate their fight at a national level and establish contact with workers in Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and other European countries in order to topple the EU and replace it with the United Socialist States of Europe.

The most urgent question is that of revolutionary leadership. A new leadership must be built based on the fight for the international unity and political independence of the working class and the struggle for socialism. Workers in Greece and throughout Europe should make the decision to build that leadership by building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in every country.

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