

German Socialist Equality Party defends Greek workers

Our correspondents
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On Monday the German Socialist Equality Party (PSG) and the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) held a meeting at the Technical University in Berlin demanding solidarity with the Greek working class. Further meetings will be held throughout Germany.

Several dozen workers and students gathered in a university lecture room to discuss not only the need for broad solidarity, but also the roots of the current crisis and the spread of social attacks across Europe.

Christoph Dreier, a member of the executive of the PSG and a correspondent for *the World Socialist Web Site* who has written on the crisis in Greece, gave the opening report. Dreier drew historical parallels between the attacks taking place on Greek workers today and those carried out in the 1970s by the Chilean dictator Pinochet, and the authoritarian regime of German Chancellor Heinrich Brüning in the early 1930s.

Tax increases, the introduction of taxation on low-income earners, a reduction of wages, minimum wage and pensions, mass layoffs in the public and private sector, have all led to real wage losses of up to two thirds. “Unemployment stands at over 20 percent, amongst youth at 50 percent,” Dreier said.

Nevertheless, the EU and IMF are continuing their offensive against Greek workers. “By 2015, an additional 150,000 public service jobs are to be wiped out,” Dreier explained. “Ever newer rounds of austerity are driving Greece deeper into recession and the population into poverty and despair.”

For the first time since the Second World War hunger

and homelessness are commonplace. Due to the cuts there is insufficient money for textbooks for school children and the savings made in the health system means that children can no longer be vaccinated.

Despite the devastating effects of the austerity measures the Greek super-rich remain untouched, Dreier said. On the contrary, the recent reduction in corporate tax means investors can rely on higher returns than before the crisis. The super-rich repay this generosity in their own way: they are shifting enormous sums of wealth abroad. Greek millionaires are estimated to have transferred a sum of between 450-600 billion euros across the border in the past year.

Dreier noted that if this tiny group of people had been subjected to a wealth tax of just fifty percent, sufficient sums would have been released to settle the debt of Greece as it stood in 2009. This ruling elite, however, has no interest in compromise. It is intent on imposing its program with a vengeance, if necessary through the abolition of democratic rights and the establishment of a dictatorship—as took place in Chile in 1973.

Dreier recalled the brutal police interventions against demonstrators in Athens’ Syntagma Square, and reminded the audience that the current government of Lucas Papademos had not been elected by the people. Papademos is a former vice president of the European Central Bank who was selected by the EU and IMF to replace his predecessor George Papandreou, who for his own electoral purposes had suggested a referendum on the austerity proposals of the EU.

The dictatorship of the EU, ECB, and IMF has had disastrous consequences for Greece. Drier explained,

“The interests of those in power are no longer compatible with the interests of the people.... There is no doubt that Greece is heading toward a revolutionary situation.”

The offensive being carried out today in Greece is only the prelude to much more extensive cuts. Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Italy are already being subjected to similarly drastic measures, and such attacks are also on the agenda for workers in France and Germany.

In Germany the bourgeoisie is seeking to expand the Agenda 2010 program introduced by the Greens and SPD in order to dramatically expand the use of cheap and temporary employment.

Resistance to this policy is developing across Europe, but “due to the unions that the opposition by workers has so far failed to achieve anything,” Dreier said.

In Greece, for example, no less than two-dozen one-day general strikes have taken place. These have achieved nothing other than the demoralisation of those who took part in them. “The unions used these purely symbolic strikes in order to allow workers to let off steam, but they have never seriously challenged the social attacks,” Dreier said. As soon as workers took effective strike action, the unions moved in to close them down as quickly as possible.

The unions in turn rely on the support of pseudo-leftist groupings, which encourage illusions in capitalism and the European Union in order to prevent workers from adopting a clear and independent perspective.

“If workers want to be successful, they must break with these organisations and organise themselves politically in independent action committees. Their goal should be to replace the rule of the political elite by the democratic control of workers. If workers fail to develop such a revolutionary perspective then disaster is inevitable,” Dreier declared, adding that the lesson to be drawn from the experience in Chile in 1973 was that “the ruling elite prefers to introduce dictatorship rather than give up a single one of its privileges.”

In the discussion that followed a series of questions

came up, including the role of the trade unions. One member of the audience declared that one should not dismiss the trade unions too quickly. Despite justified criticism these were still workers’ organizations. Other speakers at the meeting responded by pointing out that the social composition of an organisation says little about its political character. The majority of the main auto insurance company in Germany were workers—this did not mean, however, that the ADAC was a workers’ organisation.

Since the end of the German system of social compromise, the unions have adopted a clear political function: to isolate, weaken, and actively oppose workers’ resistance. The most recent example was the shameful behaviour of the Verdi public service union during the recent strike at Frankfurt airport. Instead of supporting striking workers Verdi lined up with management and functioned as a scab organization.

With the unions everywhere the story is the same. A new report on the financing of the French trade unions—which count just 8 percent of French workers as members—found that 90 percent of its revenue, or 4 billion euros, comes from the state and big business. Membership contributions make up just 3 percent or 4 percent of union income.



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