

German finance minister threatens Greek voters

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The German government has intensified its threats against Greek voters on the eve of parliamentary elections this weekend.

“There is no easy way”, Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union) told the press earlier this week. Social cuts and public sector layoffs dictated by the EU and Berlin—euphemistically labeled “adaptation measures”—are essential and non-negotiable, Schäuble declared, however the electorate votes.

He was even more explicit in a television interview on Saturday evening. Greece must comply with the terms of the EU “irrespective of who the Greeks vote for”, he said.

Earlier this year, Schäuble sharply criticized the decision of the Greek government to hold new elections and spoke of “elections at the wrong time”. Only after the cuts had been imposed could one talk about elections.

When new elections were then scheduled, Schäuble demanded that all parties underwrite a declaration that they would adhere in full to the prescribed program of cuts after the election. He made the payment of the next tranche of the euro rescue fund dependent on this condition, and blackmailed the parties with the threat of national bankruptcy.

Now, Schäuble says, the Greek people can vote how they like, but the electoral result and the composition of a new government will have no effect on policy in Athens. There are only two possibilities: either Greece stays in the EU and in the euro zone, accepting that all important decisions will be taken in Brussels and Berlin, or Greece leaves the euro, resulting in national bankruptcy with equally disastrous economic and social consequences.

This is the language of dictatorship. In both cases, it

is not the voters who decide, but the markets—that is, the banks and large corporations and the financial aristocracy behind them.

Schäuble is a lawyer and held the post of interior minister from 1989 to 1998 and from 2005 to 2009, with responsibility for assuring adherence to the German Constitution, which declares that all government authority emanates from the people. In Greece, this basic democratic principle is now being repudiated under German pressure.

As interior minister in 1990, Schäuble played a leading role in winding up the former East Germany. At that time he never tired of complaining that there had been no free elections in the GDR, and that the “people could vote for who they wanted without any real political change taking place”. How does this differ from Greece today?

The only difference is that workers in the GDR had social rights which Greek workers either never had or have lost due to Schäuble’s own initiatives.

Schäuble’s threat that the Greek people can choose only between a rock and a hard place—poverty dictated by Brussels and Berlin or state bankruptcy—shows how aggressively German imperialism is using the economic crisis to enforce its hegemony in Europe.

A few weeks ago the chairman of the conservative parliamentary group, Volker Kauder, declared that Europe would “once again speak German”. By “again”, he apparently meant the years before 1945, when German soldiers destroyed half of Europe.

Conditions in Greece now make it clear how this history is relevant today. The massive cuts in social services and attacks on democratic rights, and the enormous redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top, have produced a social retrogression unprecedented in Greece since the Nazi occupation.

Schäuble can adopt such an arrogant stance only because all the parliamentary parties support the government of Angela Merkel on all crucial questions. Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Frank-Walter Steinmeier told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* he was skeptical that Greece would remain in the euro zone. Greek “radical” parties had waged a campaign against Europe and had thereby won considerable support, he complained.

The demand of the SPD—that the government’s fiscal pact be supplemented by a “Growth Pact”—has nothing to do with employment programs or other measures to alleviate unemployment and poverty. Rather, it is another mechanism to funnel money to the banks and eliminate so-called “barriers to employment.”

This means dismantling job protections and other workers’ rights so as to create the greatest possible flexibility and deregulation of the labor market and massively expand the low-wage sector.

The trade unions support Schäuble’s policy. They have not lifted a finger to defend Greek workers, but have instead moved closer to the German state and government.

The working class in Europe, and particularly in Germany, must take Schäuble’s attack on Greece seriously and oppose it. The defense of Greek workers is not only a fundamental principle of solidarity, it is also vital for the defense of the rights and achievements of all workers, most especially those of the German working class.

The policy of Merkel and Schäuble recalls the savage social cuts and the emergency decrees introduced by the Brüning government during the economic crisis of the 1930s. The impoverishment of broad sections of the population and the destruction of democratic rights by the right-winger Brüning, who was supported by the SPD, paved the way for Adolf Hitler’s rise to power.

That is why it is so important to go on the offensive against the attacks launched by Schäuble and defend all social and democratic rights. Such a struggle would send a powerful signal to workers in Athens and Thessaloniki. It would make clear the working class response to Schäuble’s blackmail and ultimatums: the joint struggle of workers throughout Europe to overthrow capitalist governments and the establishment of workers’ governments, together with the overthrow of the institutions of the EU and the establishment of

the United Socialist States of Europe.



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