

What way forward for workers in Greece?

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This week's strikes and mass protests have provided a powerful demonstration of the potential power of the Greek working class. Workers shut down virtually the entire country for 48 hours, with almost all state enterprises and many private companies on strike. Hundreds of thousands poured into the streets to express their determination to resist the austerity measures of the government of Antonis Samaras and the European Union, which are driving the country into ruin and raising unemployment to record levels.

The scale of these protests shows that the working class is a social force capable of defeating both the social attacks dictated by the government and the EU and the fascist gangs that have terrorized immigrants in recent weeks. This applies not only to Greece but also to Spain and Portugal, where mass protests have taken place in recent weeks, and to all other European countries.

There is a deep chasm, however, between the interests and desires of Greek workers and the policies of the trade unions and their political allies, which have sought to curb the movement of the working class, limiting the mass strikes to short-term protest actions and ensuring as much as possible that they do not impinge upon the fundamental interests of Greek and foreign capital.

The political allies of the unions, such as the Coalition of the Alternative Left (SYRIZA) and other pseudo-left forces, are strictly opposed to any genuine struggle to defeat the draconian austerity measures being imposed upon the working class. They are against bringing down the Samaras government and reject any break with the European Union, without which no real fight to defend workers' interests is possible.

They place themselves in front of the protests to prevent them endangering the government or the country's membership in the EU. Both the union

leaders and head of SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras, have repeatedly emphasized that they will maintain Greece's EU membership no matter what the consequences and will guarantee the repayment of Greek government debt to the international banks.

Notwithstanding historical differences between Europe in the 1930s and the situation in Greece and more broadly in Europe as a whole today, the lessons of that period and in particular, the betrayal of the mass struggles of the working class by means of the Stalinist Popular Front are of vital importance. The subordination of the workers' movement to the parties and institutions of the "democratic" state and the class interests that they serve prevented the working class from advancing its own, socialist, solution to the crisis created by capitalism. In the absence of decisive leadership from the working class, the ruined middle class was increasingly susceptible to appeals by extreme right-wing forces and the path was opened for the fascists to grow, aided and abetted by the bourgeoisie and the state apparatus.

Today, while able to carry out vicious assaults on the streets of Greece, with the support of the police, the fascist gangs of *Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn) are numerically small compared to the masses mobilized by the working class.

However, the historical crisis of world capitalism and the austerity measures imposed by the EU are rapidly accelerating the decline of Greek society. Broad sections of the working class and middle class are being plunged into poverty. Class conflict is intensifying. Should the working class fail to show a way out of the crisis, there is a danger that desperate layers of the middle class will orient to the right. The growing poll numbers for Golden Dawn, which already has 18 seats in parliament, show that this danger is not merely hypothetical.

The savage attacks that have been carried out against

the Greek working class, together with the threat of fascism and dictatorship, are the outcome of policies worked out not merely in Athens, but more fundamentally by the entire European bourgeoisie organized in the European Union.

Greek workers are being victimized to pay for the crisis of European capitalism as a whole. The defense of their social and political rights is a European-wide question. It requires the mobilization not only of the Greek working class, but of workers in Germany, France, Britain and the entire continent in a united struggle against capitalism.

The key to the situation in Greece and throughout Europe is the development of an independent revolutionary movement of the working class. This requires a political break with the unions and their pseudo-left political allies, who will do everything in their power to suppress such a movement and tie workers to the ruling class and its institutions.

Greek workers must organize themselves independently of the unions and their political allies. They should build action committees to defend jobs and social rights, organize protection against fascist attacks and unite all sections of the working class. They should fight for a workers' government, which expropriates the major corporations and banks and reorganizes the economy to serve the social needs of the population at large rather than the drive for profit by the international and domestic financial aristocracy.

In order to implement such a program, a new revolutionary party must be established, a Greek section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. The International Committee embodies the historical continuity of the Marxist, Trotskyist movement. It fights for an international socialist program and for the overthrow of the European Union and the construction of the United Socialist States of Europe.

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