Germany: PSG holds meetings in defence of Greek workers

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The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG, Socialist Equality Party) recently held a series of meetings under the slogan "Defend Greek workers" in Bochum, Frankfurt and Berlin.

After more than three years of austerity measures and five cuts packages imposed by the troika of the European Union (EU), the European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), the picture of Greece is one of social devastation. The Greek economy is in a shambles, and hunger and homelessness are increasing.

Unemployment in Greece is rising at a rapid pace. More than half (58 percent) of all young people are without work. Public service jobs are being destroyed in their thousands; social and state facilities closed or sold off. Hospitals lack medicines, equipment and personnel, and diseases thought long eradicated are spreading again.

The German government is the driving force behind the austerity measures. But while Greek workers take to the streets in their hundreds of thousands, the German unions, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Left Party and pseudo-left groups play a sordid role. They have not lifted a finger to defend Greek workers; they support the EU's coercive measures and work to completely isolate Greek workers from their class brothers and sisters in Germany and Europe.

For this reason, the PSG campaign is also directed against the unions and so-called "left" parties. In calling the meetings, the PSG stated: "Social devastation can only be stopped in a struggle against these organizations and for the unification of Europe on a socialist basis."

In preparation for the meetings, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit distributed thousands of leaflets at factory gates, universities, apprentice colleges and employment offices. Many Greek workers live with their families in the Ruhr Area, in Frankfurt and other German cities. In Frankfurt Griesheim parents and school students at the Hellenic School took bundles of leaflets to distribute at restaurants and grocery stores.

The meetings in Frankfurt and Berlin were addressed by Peter Schwarz, a member of the PSG National Committee. "What is happening in Greece", said Schwarz, "is a crime of historic proportions, for which the European Union and the German government bear responsibility."

He pointed out that a social experiment was being conducted in Greece today that was without parallel in the West since the Second World War. A similar situation could only be found under bloody military dictatorships such as that of Pinochet in Chile or following the collapse of the Soviet Union, where criminal oligarchs plundered and destroyed entire national economies. For the first time, an entire country that has belonged to the European Union for 30 years is being systematically ruined and its working class turned into pariahs.

While Greece was being "squeezed like a lemon," Schwarz continued, the debt has continued to rise. "The object of the so-called rescue packages was not to 'help' Greece, but to ensure that the banks and investor's get their money back", he said.

"The Greek population has not received a cent from the billions that have been pumped into the so-called 'bailouts'", Schwarz said. "They are solely to provide security for and to enrich the creditors, while the population must pay the price for them in the form of welfare cuts, wage reductions, massive layoffs in the public sector, the closure of schools and hospitals and the looting of state-owned companies."

The object of the troika's austerity program was not to "save" Greece, he said, but to set back the living standards and the rights of its people by decades. Greece was neither unique nor a special case, but provided an example and model for all of Europe, warned Schwarz.

Capitalism was in a deep crisis worldwide. The world economy had not recovered from the 2008 financial crisis. The collapse of US bank Lehman Brothers had initiated a period of violent economic distress, comparable to the period between 1914 and 1945, which was marked by depression, mass unemployment, the impoverishment of broad sections of the population, violent class struggle and two world wars.

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The defence of Greek workers was therefore a political task. It required the mobilization of the European and international working class on the basis of a socialist program. Without breaking the power of the financial aristocracy, it was absolutely impossible to overcome the crisis. Only when the banks, hedge funds and big corporations were expropriated and placed under democratic control, could unemployment and poverty be overcome and economic life be organized according to the needs of society as a whole, instead of the profit interests of capital.

The austerity measures had elicited massive resistance, Schwarz continued. In Greece, Spain and Portugal there have been repeated mass demonstrations and strikes. These were part of an international trend that could also be seen in Egypt and South Africa.

But workers were confronted with a variety of organizations that weakened their struggles and led them up a blind alley.

Firstly, was the role played by the unions. In Greece, they work closely with the government to enforce the cuts. Their protests were used to blow off steam and to prevent the development of a movement that could be dangerous to the ruling class.

In Germany, the unions had not lifted a finger to defend Greek workers. On November 14, the German Union Federation (DGB) participated in a protest called by the European Trade Union Confederation that saw just 200 officials assemble at the Brandenburg Gate. “Their support for the troika’s austerity diktats could not be more graphic”, said Schwarz.

A second obstacle was the Left Party, its Greek sister party SYRIZA and the numerous pseudo-left groups that are active in and around them.

The Left Party defended the EU and its policies and had failed to organize a meeting dealing with the events in Greece. Instead, they presented SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) as a political model to be emulated. In Greece, SYRIZA was preparing to take over the government itself and implement the austerity measures more effectively in a somewhat modified form. SYRIZA fully supported Greece remaining in the EU and the retention of the euro. However, one could not defend the EU and simultaneously fight its austerity measures.

The complete absence of a workers’ party offering a progressive solution to the crisis has been exploited by the right wing and fascists in Greece, Schwarz continued. Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn), an openly fascist party that wants to deport all immigrants, had doubled its poll rating. This party, which combines populist attacks on the EU with law-and-order slogans, was supported by many Greek police officers.

The main prerequisite for defending the social and democratic rights of Greek and European workers was to break with the unions, the Left Party and its pseudo-left satellites, Schwarz concluded.

History has shown that only an independent movement of the working class can stop barbarism, fascist terror and war. For this to happen, workers must unite internationally and take responsibility for the fate of Greek workers.

Europe can only be united from below, on the basis of a socialist program, through the formation of workers’ governments and the United Socialist States of Europe. To this end, European workers need a new party that unites them across all national borders. The construction of such a party is the goal of the International Committee of the Fourth International and its German section, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit.

After Schwarz concluded his remarks, a Greek member of the audience in Frankfurt addressed the meeting and said, “The reality in Greece is exactly as has been described here, and a lot worse. We Greeks are supposed to be just lazy bones, who party all the time and spend Germany’s money.”

A woman who had found out about the PSG meeting outside the Frankfurt job centre described the situation in Greece: Old people were unable to obtain their medicine and people did not even have shoes to change into. Young people had nothing to do other than to sit around, as there was no work. “This capitalism is too powerful. Each of us feels so small”, she said. “There is a purpose to this hardship. Greece has become a guinea pig for the EU.”

A teacher at the Hellenic School in Frankfurt reported: “Our school is directly threatened by the austerity measures of the Greek government. We teachers have lost a large part of our salaries, and we have to fear that our jobs will disappear first as part of the cuts in public services.

“Some teachers have already drawn the necessary consequences and left the service. Now the remaining teachers have to take much larger classes. After the last summer vacation, classes in several subjects, for example in English and computer science, were cancelled for several weeks and will not begin again until after Christmas. No one knows how long we can keep it up yet, and what will happen to our school in the end.”

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