

# Greece and Detroit—a new stage in the social counterrevolution

**Stefan Steinberg****27 July 2013**

This week saw a fresh round of mass sackings of public sector workers in Greece. On Monday, 2,000 teachers were suspended from their jobs and 2,500 health workers received notice of their transfer into a “labour mobility” austerity scheme, a short gangplank to unemployment. The target is to push 27,000 into the labour mobility scheme by the end of this year. Most of these workers will join the 15,000 public sector employees already made unemployed or redundant in the first six months of this year.

The overall target for the ongoing jobs cull set by the European Union, International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank is 150,000 by 2015.

The elimination of guaranteed job security for public sector workers in Europe is part of an international offensive of finance capital against the working class. It comes just as in the United States the city of Detroit has been placed in bankruptcy by financial manager Kevyn Orr, who is moving to slash retiree pensions and sell off the city’s assets. Around the world, the financial elite view every social right won by the working class in bitter struggles as an intolerable obstacle to their profits and wealth.

Athens agreed last week to demands by the international banks and the Troika to sack 27,500 public employees, when unemployment in Greece already exceeds 30 percent. They will lose health care and pension entitlements. Fully 40 percent of the Greek population is already ineligible for health care, following seven austerity budgets in the past four years. The EU demanded that disabled workers be included in the labour mobility scheme target.

Public Administration Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis—who previously worked for the McKinsey consultancy agency, a firm notorious for its asset stripping activities—is in charge of the sackings.

In the cases of both Greece and Detroit, workers are

bombarded with propaganda that the country and city are bankrupt and the state can no longer afford to pay a living wage and social benefits. This is a pernicious lie!

When it came to bailing out the banks in 2008, Washington and the European capitals could drum up trillions overnight to cover the speculative losses of Wall Street and of the major European banks. Now, stock markets on Wall Street and in Western Europe are soaring, and major banks on both sides of the Atlantic are posting near-record profits.

The only way forward for the working class is a renewal of the militant class struggles through which the social rights now under attack were originally won. In the US, entitlement to a living wage, social and health benefits was wrested from the employers in the course of bitter class struggles starting in the 1930s, which were often led by socialist-minded workers.

The social achievements won by European workers after World War II were reluctantly conceded by a ruling class deeply discredited by its support for fascism, and fearing that—due to the prestige of the October Revolution in the working class—rising class struggles could coalesce into revolution.

In Greece, it was determined resistance by the working class that led to the downfall of the military junta in 1974 and forced the subsequent PASOK government to make major concessions, in particular a significant expansion of public sector employment.

If it has been possible for the financial elite and its political lackeys in Washington, Brussels, and Athens to attack these gains, it is due to the reactionary role of the pseudo-left parties and the old labour bureaucracies they support. They responded to the upsurge of working class struggles after 1968 and the development of globalization by aligning themselves with the employers and the banks.

After the collapse of the USSR and of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, they rejected whatever

tenuous connections they still retained to socialistic sentiments.

For decades now, the United Auto Workers union has repeated its mantra that concessions to the bosses and trust in the Democratic Party would save Detroit workers from the worst. In Greece, the trade unions have promoted illusions that toothless protest strikes, including numerous one-day national strikes, would encourage the Greek government to see sense and back down on austerity.

The working class in the US and Europe must draw their own conclusions and orient their struggles on the basis of an independent, revolutionary perspective.

They can place no confidence in the unions, bourgeois “left” parties such as the Democratic Party in the US, or the social democrats of Europe, or pseudo-left outfits such as Greece’s SYRIZA party. SYRIZA argues that, in collaboration with the European Union and the banks, it is possible to reorganize austerity in a less punitive manner.

The stage is set for new and explosive class conflicts. Well aware that such frontal attacks on basic social rights are incompatible with democratic rights, the ruling elites are moving towards authoritarian methods of rule. This has been most recently confirmed by documents released by Edward Snowden, revealing that European states have developed their own methods of surveillance comparable to those of the American NSA.

The socialist traditions of the past must be revived to prepare workers’ resistance today. There is only one political tendency on the planet which represents this continuity of the struggle for socialist internationalism: the Socialist Equality Parties around the world, and their political voice, the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Today the SEP in the US is fighting to mobilize workers of Detroit and throughout the country. In Germany, the SEP has placed a pan-European campaign to defend jobs at the heart of its campaign for the September federal elections. We urge workers and youth to study our web site and contribute to the building of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class.



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