

Obama, Greek premier stress close military and intelligence ties

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Last Thursday the Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras met US President Barack Obama in Washington. Samaras came offering the president his services and asked for investment aid. In reply Obama pressed for more cuts in social spending in Greece and praised the collaboration between the military and intelligence services of both countries.

At a joint press conference at the White House both leaders emphasized the close partnership of Greece and the United States. Obama used the opportunity to defend the brutal social cuts and structural reforms already undertaken, which have plunged Greek workers into bitter poverty, and urged more of the same.

Obama repeatedly stressed the need for cuts: “It’s important that we have a plan for fiscal consolidation to manage the debt, but it’s also important that growth and jobs are our focus.”

Phrases such as “growth” and “job creation” are in fact euphemisms for deregulation, cuts in pay and the deterioration of working conditions. Using the same argument, Obama imposed massive wage cuts in US industry. At GM and Chrysler, wages for new hires have been reduced by up to 50 percent.

At the press conference, Obama stressed the “strong bilateral military and intelligence cooperation between our two countries.” Greece has already helped prevent terrorist attacks “and can play an important stabilizing role and partnership role as we address the issues in the Middle East and North Africa,” he said.

Samaras assured his host that he would further reduce his country’s budget and press ahead with “structural reforms.” The stance of the two leaders is a clear warning to European and American workers. Both governments are prepared to relentlessly enforce the interests of the financial elite against their own workers and against rival nations.

In Greece, the attacks on social gains dictated by the IMF and the EU and faithfully carried out by the Greek government have already led to an unprecedented social disaster. The latest figures show that unemployment has risen once again to a new record of 27.6 percent. Among young people the figure has reached an astronomical 64.9 percent. Aid organizations report that in the poorest regions of the country, 90 percent of the population relies on food donations.

Now the Greek government is preparing at the behest of the EU to switch an additional 25,000 public service workers into a so-called transfer agency—the prelude to their losing their jobs altogether. These measures are part of a plan to wipe out 150,000 public service jobs by 2015.

In addition to budgetary consolidation the devastation of public service jobs serves to increase the downward pressure on wages, which have already been reduced in recent years by up to 60 percent. On Wednesday, Samaras met with senior representatives of 20 of the largest US investment firms in a New York luxury hotel. Among those taking part were Andrew Liveris, the head of Dow Chemical, and the hedge fund manager John Paulson. Behind closed doors, Samaras offered new investment opportunities at the expense of the already impoverished Greek working class.

At home, the austerity measures and mass layoffs are meeting with increasing resistance by workers, with protests and strikes in almost all spheres of public service in recent weeks. Last week labor agency employees went on strike, and an indefinite strike by aviation workers was only averted at the last minute by the union leadership.

Under these conditions, the Greek government is relying increasingly on dictatorial measures to enforce

cuts against the population. Already this year Samaras has placed striking workers under martial law on three separate occasions, has repeatedly used police against strikers and has banned demonstrations.

On Thursday of last week the government went another step further towards establishing an authoritarian state. It passed a law that allows mass layoffs in the public sector to be henceforth decreed by ministerial decision—thereby bypassing parliament. The government is now able to impose social cuts without a parliamentary debate or vote.

Against this background Obama's praise for US "intelligence cooperation" with Greek military is a clear warning. As is the case in Egypt, the US is prepared to rely directly upon military repression to deal with increasing social opposition in Greece.

There is a history of strong ties between the United States and the Greek military. In March 1947, US President Harry S. Truman used the doctrine bearing his name to intervene on behalf of Greek troops in the Greek civil war to prevent a takeover by the Stalinist-led Democratic Army of Greece (DSE).

Following persistent mass demonstrations and protests by Greek workers in 1967, NATO and the United States supported the military coup and the subsequent Colonels' dictatorship, which brutally repressed workers' opposition and imprisoned political opponents in concentration camps until 1974. Since then, the Greek army has remained a bastion of reaction and maintained its close ties to the United States.

Greece continues to remain of great strategic importance to the United States. The Greek Arexos Airport near Patras and especially the air base at Souda on the island of Crete played a key role for the US in the war against Libya. The bases were the point of departure for Belgian, Norwegian, French and Qatari fighters. Along with Cyprus, the Souda airbase would be an important hub for a western led war against Syria.

At his meeting with Obama, Samaras pledged his subservience to the United States, promising to cooperate with the US in addressing "internal turbulence in various countries, and even, unfortunately, the problem of terrorism."

Prior to the meeting, Samaras assured the *Washington Post* that Greece could play a geopolitical role as a "bastion of stability" in the Mediterranean. In return, Samaras hopes for US and NATO backing in

Greece's confrontation with Turkey, as well as with respect to Greek claims to oil and gas reserves in the Aegean Sea.



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