Greek parliament approves new attacks on workers

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A fresh round of savage attacks on the working class was voted through late on Sunday by the Greek government.

MPs of the New Democracy/PASOK coalition passed a multi-bill austerity programme, following seven months of talks with the European Union (EU)-led troika.

The troika—the EU, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank—demanded the passage of the bill as a precondition for Greece to receive further loans of around €9 billion, the final disbursement from the €172 billion second loan agreement agreed on previously. Greece must repay a debt maturity of €9.3 billion in May . SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), the main opposition party, attempted to delay debate on the bill by putting a motion of no confidence in Finance Minister Yanni Stournaras. The motion was not accepted by parliament as valid.

The agreement imposes a raft of further devastating attacks, including job losses and further spending cuts.

Leading up to the vote, the contents of the bill were concealed from the public. It was only due to the leaking of some of the agreement by the *Efimerida ton Syntakton* newspaper on March 24 that the scale of the social reversal agreed on was even made public.

It has a timetable, mapped out by the troika, for the government's imposition of its anti-social onslaught in 2014. It includes a series of commitments overturning every last social right won by the working class over generations. New laws are to be enacted within months with the aim of consolidating Greece as a permanent reservoir of cheap, flexible labour for exploitation by transnational corporations.

Some 4,000 additional employees are to be transferred into the hated "labour mobility scheme". This is in order to reach the 25,000 public sector employee layoff goal by the end of the year. Once in the scheme, workers receive only about two thirds of their salary and are dismissed within 12 months if no other public sector jobs are found for them.

The existing scheme is to be completed and another permanent one legislated, meaning that a public sector worker in Greece will no longer have any secure employment.

Following a provisional agreement earlier this month, a statement from the troika said the government was committed to "market reforms identified by the recent OECD study." It would take "concrete measures to liberalise the transport and rental markets and open up closed professions; and to reducing social security contribution rates and nuisance taxes."

From this month, there will be a complete liberalisation of the operations of Temporary Employment Companies. A requirement is abolished that hiring out workers to a third party is only allowed to cover urgent, temporal or seasonal needs.

It is agreed that from January 2017, the length of service-related increments for long-term unemployed will be eliminated. According to Greek labour law, there were statutory increments for every three years of service. Previously, these increments were taken into account in starting salaries for the long-term unemployed.

From 2017, anyone who has been unemployed longer than 12 months will be hired irrespective of age and experience on a minimum wage of just €586 a month.

To enforce mass austerity, the government has routinely used dictatorial measures to smash strikes and force strikers back to work. The agreement states that the ability of employers to decide organisational and operational matters should no longer be obstructed through the exercise of the right to strike. *Efimerida ton*

Syntakton stated: "The troika also wants to limit the right to call strikes. The use of lockouts has also been introduced into the discussions. The preliminary reviews must be exchanged by June in order for discussions to take place in August and for the legislative changes to be implemented in September."

The troika agreement states that a review must be undertaken of "the existing framework of strikes and unions', employees' and employers' rights, including the use of defensive lockouts, in the light of best practises by **June 2014** ." It adds:

"After consultation with social partners, prepares in discussion with the EC/ECB/IMF, the necessary legislative changes to bring the Greek framework in line with best practise and in respect of the international conventions, by August 2014. It then instructs, "iii. adopts those changes by **September 2014** " (all bold in the original).

Finally, it states that all new legislation will be codified into a single Labour Code by December 2014.

New laws are being brought in allowing firms to sack workers with ease. The agreement stipulates, "The employer and the employee representatives will have 30 days for consultation on a dismissal plan."

Following confirmation "that such information has been provided (lack of response is considered as consent), the employer can proceed with laying off up to 10 percent of the labour force per month, without the cap of 30 employees, for a period of 3 months from the day of notification. *Beyond this 3-month horizon, the employer can proceed with full dismissals immediately without further restrictions* " (emphasis added).

New legislation to this effect will be in place by October.

Also by October, further reductions in the value of pensions will take place, as all pensions will be equated to the lowest current provision. The minimum pension will be linked to the nationally determined minimum wage. A new basic welfare pension of just €360 will be introduced.

All these attacks are specifically designed to accelerate the process of reducing overall labour and social costs. The agreement states, "The Government will foster the effective implementation of the recent labour reforms and build upon them to boost employment and support restoring cost-competitiveness, notably that has already delivered a reduction in nominal unit labour costs in the economy by 15 percent."

As a result of the huge cuts already in place, the government reported a budget surplus for last year of €2.9 billion. In what was presented as a pre-election "giveaway," a paltry €500 million of this will go to "lower-income groups" as a one-off payment. This is a pittance when compared to the huge reduction in income suffered by millions of people over the last five years. Just €20 million will be allocated to provide for those made homeless (€500 for each of the 40,000 people nationally).

Some €1 billion of the surplus will go to cover overdue public-sector debts to private-sector firms and individuals in 2014, while another €1 billion will go towards paying off Greece's debts of more than €300 billion owed to the international banks.

The new austerity pact in Greece comes on the heels of one dictated to Ukraine, which is set to become the new benchmark for assaults on the social conditions of workers throughout Europe.

The measures just approved by the flunkeys of the international financial aristocracy in Athens will have incalculable and terrible social consequences.

It demonstrates that the agenda of the ruling elite everywhere is to enforce permanent attacks on the working class.