

German government threatens to force Greece out of euro zone

Johannes Stern
6 January 2015

The German government is threatening to expel Greece from the euro zone if it does not stick to the austerity dictates of the “troika” (the European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank). This was reported in the latest edition of the news magazine *Der Spiegel*.

According to the magazine, Chancellor Angela Merkel and Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) are preparing to give Greece the cold shoulder should the pseudo-left SYRIZA party win parliamentary elections on 25 January and party leader Alexis Tsipras, as the new prime minister, pull back from the current austerity program. A Greek exit from the euro (a so-called Grexit), *Der Spiegel* wrote, would be “the almost unavoidable result.”

The threat from Merkel and Schäuble underscores the antidemocratic character of the EU and the German bourgeoisie. The Greek people not only have no right to determine policy in their own country, they are to be punished if they vote for a party critical of austerity policies dictated by German imperialism.

Berlin’s aggressiveness is an expression not only of the EU’s antisocial policies directed against the working class, but also of the deepening crisis in Europe. Six years after the outbreak of the financial crisis and after years of deep social cuts in southern Europe, the political, economic and social tensions within and between European countries have reached the breaking point. *Der Spiegel*, one of the German bourgeoisie’s main press organs, commented that Greece had become “a stage for a conflict that has a much greater significance than the country itself.” The magazine continued: “It concerns the mounting north-south conflict within the euro zone over the German-dominated austerity course that had to be followed by

the crisis states. And it also concerns what is to count for more in the end: the democratic will of the Greeks to abandon the cuts and savings, or the law of the financial markets that they will not provide any more loans.”

From the standpoint of finance capital, the decision has already been made. Greece has to continue to bow to the austerity dictates of Germany and the EU, which have thrown a large section of the Greek population into bitter poverty and gone a long way towards destroying a functioning society.

“There will be no Greece law,” said Bavarian Finance Minister Markus Söder (Christian Social Union—CSU), according to Monday’s *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. “It is clear for me that there will be no debt relief or reduction just because a new government comes to power.”

In *Welt am Sonntag*, Social Democratic Party (SPD) parliamentary fraction leader Thomas Oppermann warned, “We will insist that the structural reforms in Greece be implemented.”

Social Democratic leader and vice chancellor Sigmar Gabriel followed suit, demanding in the *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* that Athens implement plans for cuts and economic “reforms.” It was expected that “regardless who forms [the next Greek government], agreements reached with the EU will be upheld.” The German government would “not be blackmailed,” he added.

German threats are aimed not so much at preventing SYRIZA from forming a government, as at disciplining the party. The German government intends to compel SYRIZA and Tsipras to accept the debt Memorandum just as unconditionally as had the social democratic PASOK party under then-Prime Minister George Papandreou and the conservative New Democrats under

the current prime minister, Antonis Samaras.

Last week, German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) chief Marcel Fratzscher demanded that Germany and the EU keep up the pressure on the next Greek government, calling previous Greek governments' reform attempts "pathetic." Many measures remained to be carried out, he wrote, adding that "competition in the economy" was still lacking.

Fratzscher wrote that, unlike PASOK and New Democracy, the deeply discredited traditional parties of the Greek political establishment, SYRIZA might offer a way forward for finance capital to push through deeper attacks. The needed reforms required "nothing short of a political earthquake," he said, "so that the country's political elite are removed to give an opportunity to a new generation of politicians to start anew." Although a crisis provoked by a SYRIZA government could be "economically damaging in the short term, it could also bring about a renewal."

In other words, pseudo-left parties like SYRIZA, which capture votes with left-sounding phrases but are essentially right-wing bourgeois parties, should be accepted into government under pressure from finance capital to initiate a new round of social attacks, not only in Greece, but throughout Europe.

In a comment on Monday, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* stated that the future of the euro would not be decided in Greece, but in Italy and France. There, the urgent question was: "When and how will these large countries adopt a course to restructure state finances, strengthen business and improve competitiveness?"

Also yesterday, the *Financial Times* hailed pseudo-left parties like SYRIZA and Podemos in Spain as possible saviours of the euro zone. By ruling out a Greek exit from the euro zone and a unilateral cancellation of Greece's debt Memorandum with the EU, Tsipras had shown that he had the "right instincts," if not always the right politics, the newspaper wrote.

The growing possibility of a Grexit, and the increasing reliance of the EU on the political "instincts" of layers of the privileged middle class represented by parties like SYRIZA and Podemos, mark the beginning of a new stage in the euro crisis. A Greek exit from the currency union would not only be the prelude to a breakdown of the currency union, but would also intensify the national conflicts within Europe. At the same time, a SYRIZA government

would continue the programme of austerity policies while demoralising the working class, preparing the way for the forces of the extreme right.

Commenting on the collapse of the Greek government, the WSWS explained that the greatest challenge facing the European working class was to "comprehend the magnitude of the political tasks it faces." The WSWS continued: "While there is explosive social discontent, the pressing need is to build a new political leadership based on a revolutionary program."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact