

European Union gives no quarter in war against Greek workers

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On Monday, the finance ministers of the Eurogroup, meeting in Brussels, made it clear they would not budge from the brutal austerity policies that have plunged Greece into a social catastrophe.

Taking their lead from Germany, the finance ministers unanimously rejected proposals from the Syriza-led Greek government for largely symbolic modifications of the debt repayment plan imposed by the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The leader of the Eurogroup finance ministers, Jeroen Dijsselbloem of the Netherlands, handed Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis a draft statement at the beginning of the meeting that amounted to an ultimatum: Sign or face a cutoff of loans and state bankruptcy!

The statement declared that Greece would dutifully implement the current debt repayment program, including its provisions for new and even deeper cuts in jobs, pensions and social services and a fire sale of public assets to the banks and hedge funds.

German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble expressed the arrogance of the European and international ruling elites and their contempt for the suffering of the Greek masses, calling the Greek government's pleas for a measure of relief "irresponsible" and a "waste of time," and accusing Syriza leader and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of "insulting those who have helped Greece in the past few years."

The "help" provided by the German and European ruling classes since the Wall Street crash of 2008 has consisted of reducing millions of Greek workers to unemployment and poverty, gutting the country's health care system, and producing a plague of homelessness and hunger in order to make the working class pay for the multi-trillion-euro bailout of the

banks. Such "help" has been extended to other highly indebted countries such as Spain, Portugal and Ireland, with catastrophic social consequences.

The austerity offensive against these countries has been used to set a precedent for sweeping attacks on working class living standards and social services in Britain, Italy, France, Germany and throughout Europe.

The European Union governments evidently decided to use Monday's meeting to make an example of Greece. Their contemptuous treatment of Syriza was meant to be an object lesson lest others think they can resist the power of capital.

They had taken the measure of Syriza, viewing it not as the representative of insurgent masses, but rather as a supplicant speaking in behalf of failing Greek capitalists. This assessment was borne out by Syriza's entirely predictable response to Monday's provocations.

Varoufakis balked at signing the draft statement, complaining that he had agreed to sign a somewhat different text that signaled acceptance of the existing debt repayment scheme, but with certain unspecified differences in wording.

He protested against the refusal of the finance ministers to give the Syriza-led government some wiggle room as it went about reneging on its campaign promises and implementing the austerity program. Nevertheless, he declared after the abortive meeting, "I have no doubt there is going to be an agreement in the end."

On the eve of the meeting, he had told the *Guardian* newspaper, "We are a party of the left, but what we are putting on the table is essentially the agenda of a reformist bankruptcy lawyer from the City of London." He went so far as to call Schäuble the "only European politician of intellectual substance" and laud German

Chancellor Angela Merkel as the “most astute politician in Europe.”

It evidently took little more than 24 hours for Syriza to complete its capitulation. The *Wall Street Journal* reported Tuesday afternoon that Greek officials would seek an extension of the current debt repayment program on Wednesday.

Syriza’s entire approach has been based on the notion that it could somehow schmooze the European ruling classes into slightly modifying their policy. Tsipras hoped to find support among sections of the European bourgeoisie that have expressed certain differences with Germany. He also banked on leveraging economic policy differences between the United States and Germany.

The charm offensive Tsipras and Varoufakis undertook in various European capitals following Syriza’s election victory last month was pitched entirely to the economic and political elites. There was no appeal to the working class.

The leaders of Syriza have never questioned the legitimacy of the capitalist system. On the contrary, they have repeatedly declared their support for the banking system and their determination to fully repay Greece’s debts to the financial elite. The centerpiece of their program is support for the European Union, the political and organizational framework for the bankers’ offensive against the European working class.

Like all petty-bourgeois parties, Syriza’s politics are embedded in the notion that great historical and political questions can be dealt with through evasions, maneuvers and clever tactics. In Syriza’s case, this has included forming a coalition with a right-wing chauvinist party, the Independent Greeks.

It has taken less than four weeks of a Syriza-led government to thoroughly expose the bankruptcy of a middle class reformist outlook in a period of revolution or counterrevolution.

The offensive of the ruling class can be defeated only by revolutionary means: the independent political mobilization of the working class across Europe and internationally against capitalism. Syriza and the various pseudo-left parties that support it are obstacles to this struggle. The building of a new, revolutionary leadership of the working class must be carried out in a struggle against them.



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