

Greek Finance Minister Varoufakis prostrates himself on German talk show

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The appearance of the Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis on the Günther Jauch talk show was a pathetic spectacle that symbolized the political bankruptcy of Syriza. While the German bourgeoisie wants to use Greece to set an example for their own dominance in Europe and ruthless attacks on the working class, Syriza hopes to gain a bit of leeway through servility and boot licking.

Alongside Varoufakis, Jauch had also invited *taz* correspondent Ulrike Herrmann, the Bavarian state minister of economic affairs, right-winger Markus Söder, and *Bild* columnist Ernst Elitz to his Sunday evening show.

The invitation of a representative of the *Bild* newspaper alone speaks volumes about the orientation of the broadcast. The tabloid is conducting a vile, chauvinist campaign against the Greek people and has been criticized by the German Journalists Association (DJV) due to its political bias.

Elitz was one of the originators of this campaign. Just days before the talk show, he called for the Greek representatives to be “kicked out on their ear” from the negotiation of the loan agreements. “Out with you and your Grixi-Graxi!”, he wrote in a column. This hack was then invited onto the most important talk show of Germany’s state-funded public service broadcaster, where he set the tone for the proceedings.

Both the host, Jauch, as well as Söder made claims about “the Germans”, who were said to be no longer willing to pay for “the Greeks”; Germans were indeed “ready to help”, but were “not naïve”, etc. Again and again, Jauch tried to insinuate that Varoufakis had insulted the German government.

Varoufakis responded to the naked chauvinism of the broadcaster by submissively seeking to curry favour with the German government, promising to implement

harsh austerity measures and flattering his German counterpart Wolfgang Schäuble. He called the programme a “fruitful dialogue”.

Again and again, he gave assurances that his government would do its best to see that “all creditors get their money back.”

“Our intention is to do everything possible to repay every single euro,” he said. He also pledged unconditional defence of the European Union: “We have a moral obligation that the euro zone project remains alive.” After all, he stressed that he had written back in 2013 in the *Handelsblatt* that Europe needed “Germany as hegemon.”

Varoufakis criticized previous Greek governments because they implemented the promised austerity measures too slowly: “In order to obtain more and more loans from their European partners, they have repeatedly promised reforms they never intended to implement.”

The new Syriza government would not do anything that would lead to a primary deficit, Varoufakis said. While the old government wanted to cut 50,000 jobs, his government had reduced that number “because we want the finances to be healthy”. Initially, only 2,000 illegally dismissed state workers had been reinstated.

When Günther Jauch insinuated his guest had insulted Schäuble, Varoufakis sang a veritable hymn of praise to the German finance minister—one of the main architects of the austerity diktat in Greece, and therefore one of the most hated politicians in Germany and Europe.

Varoufakis stressed, however, that he had never offended Schäuble. “For God’s sake,” he said. “The opposite is the case. Tell me a single instance when I have made anything but compliments about Herr Schäuble. I tell everyone to their face: it was a privilege

for me to be able to get to know Herr Schäuble, to meet him, an intellectually open European. [...] I have published books, written articles, lectured throughout Europe, in which I have repeatedly warned against Greek propaganda against Germany.”

Markus Söder answered this flattery with the demand that Greece comply with the German diktats without hesitation. “I think it’s great when you now say you want to follow Wolfgang Schäuble,” he said. “You should do this not only today, but perhaps in general.”

Varoufakis let this insult go completely without comment.

Even when the discussion turned to the enforced loan German occupiers had imposed on the Bank of Greece in 1942, Varoufakis backed down. Syriza had announced it would demand repayment of the loan, which today amounts to €8 billion to €11 billion, from the German government. The German government has so far refused to accept responsibility for the loan.

“I would very much like it if this issue could now be taken off the table and we could settle it once and for all,” said Varoufakis. It was not a financial but a moral issue, he continued, proposing the debt be repaid by payment of a single euro.

Varoufakis’ boundless sycophancy reflects the bankrupt perspective of Greece’s ruling Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza). The party of newly-elected Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, who won the elections in January, had hoped to achieve a certain room for maneuver for its affluent middle-class clientele by tactical ploys and exploiting divisions within Europe.

Like no other, Varoufakis embodies the class attitudes of the new government. On Friday, the magazine *Paris Match* published several photos of the finance minister and his wife in their penthouse in one of the most expensive parts of Athens, just below the Acropolis. Varoufakis had had it decorated in a *Dolce Vita* style.

Syriza has never questioned the European Union, Greece’s debt burden, or the capitalist state, all of which it supports. The last thing the party wants is a mobilization of the working class which could endanger capitalism and the EU. That applies both to Greece and Europe.

At no time has Syriza turned to the workers of Germany and other European countries and called on them to take up a struggle against their own

governments.

Instead, the Syriza government has alternated between loud-mouthed promises and utter prostration to the ruling elites. The class logic of its politics leads to ever new forms of subservience to the Brussels bureaucracy and the German government. The harsher Merkel and Schäuble behave, the more they were flattered by Tsipras and his ministers. Long ago, the Greek government agreed to prepare new cuts with the institutions in Brussels. Syriza has become the main tool to implement the austerity measures against the population.

For Schäuble, however, even such belly crawling is not enough. He responded to Varoufakis’ fawning with new attacks on the Greek cabinet. “They have destroyed all trust. That is a serious setback,” Schäuble said on Monday at a discussion meeting of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Berlin. He accused the Greek government of breaking agreements and of presenting concepts that “do not work.”

Schäuble received support from social democratic German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who called on Tsipras to work on proposals to meet the European commitments.



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