

“Syriza disregarded the wishes of the Greek population”

Workers speak out against austerity in Greece

Robert Stevens, Christoph Dreier
1 July 2015

In the south-eastern Athens district of Pagrati, throughout the day people queued at ATM's discussing the referendum called for Sunday on the austerity dictates of the European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The area is socially mixed with a high percentage of working class residents. People were withdrawing cash, at a maximum limit of 60 euros per day, following the imposition of capital controls by the Syriza government Sunday. WSWs reporters spoke to some of the district's residents outside a supermarket.

Chris works as a freelancer in cleaning services. He voted for Syriza in the January elections. He said that he didn't agree completely with their ideology, but that he wanted to vote against the austerity policies of previous right-wing governments. Over the last month, he said it became clear to him that Syriza is collaborating with other European governments. “They are not fighting each other,” he said.

He sees Syriza as part of the pro-austerity-camp. “Not only Germany, France and Italy, but also Syriza disregarded the wishes of the Greek population,” he argues. “Syriza says: say no to their austerity, but say yes to our austerity. So the Greeks must say no and no, because the programmes are almost the same.”

That is why Chris said he will vote “No” in the referendum. On Monday he marched in the No demonstration in Athens against the EU/IMF proposed austerity measures. He said, “When you say No at the weekend” it means, “yes to Europe, to a democratic Europe.”

Chris thought there will be a majority for a No-vote. “If there was a referendum now, there would be a 65 percent No-vote. I can't believe the opinion polls,” he says. But he also anticipates a huge campaign by the pro-austerity camp, which could change the mood.

Chris saw a direct connection between the cuts in Greece and the attacks on workers in other European countries. “The German government can't step back from the austerity demands towards Greece, because they say to their workers that they can't give them more money as there are problems in the European Union and in Greece.”

Asked about the impact of the austerity measures on his family, he said, “My father had a decrease of his pensions of 30 percent. They told us the lie; that we have to decrease the wages in order to get investment.”

Yiota is a teacher in a public school. She told the WSWs that she had voted for Syriza in January's general election. She continued, “I am voting No in the referendum. I think we have to be calm and wait. I don't know if Greece will stay in the euro zone. If we leave the EU, we have to think about many things.”

She thinks that there is no real choice for the population. “An exit will have a big impact in our lives, but even if we stay in the EU this will also be big. If we stay, there will also be a lowering of wages and the quality of life is going to go down.”

Yiota was not sure how to assess Syriza's negotiating strategy. “There are a lot of reports telling lies. I think that Syriza did the right thing. I want to think they have,” she says.

Giorgos, who is unemployed, is certain that a majority will vote No in the referendum. “I will vote No as well, but it's too late now. This should have been done by Greece in March, 2010. That's when this should have been put to [German Chancellor Angela] Merkel. Now we can't do that anymore. If we stay in the euro zone or leave the euro zone, the disaster will be similar. Maybe it will be worse with the drachma.”

For Giorgos the lenders are not partners, but are loan sharks. “The first thing they did in 2010 was to

introduce the English law for these debts. This means that the lender can come here and confiscate anything he likes.”

The representatives of the lenders never worked in their lives, Giorgos observed. “These are people who no matter what idea you say to them, they are going to show you the contract all the time. That is what their master is telling them to say to you. This is the plan, take it or leave it. And the plan is the impoverishment of the western world. In Greece the level of suicide was one place above the bottom in the 1980s. Now we are number two on the list. We have gone up 27 places.”

Giorgos is 54 years old and said he sees no chance at all to get regular work again. As with many workers, he is supported by his mother and her pension. “Only 10 percent of the unemployed get any money and it’s only €335 a month for those that do,” Giorgos said. “I had no money for about two years. Then I had a job last year for four months but I lost that job. I have had no money since last November,” he added.

Speaking of the international implications of the Greek crisis, Giorgos said, “I want people to understand. This crisis is going to expand. It is going to come to countries that now prosper like Austria, Holland, Germany itself.”

Giorgos voted for Syriza in January for the first time but is now critical of the government. “I think Syriza took too long to realise that these people will not change. The previous government were for the establishment, the ship-owners in Greece are filthy rich. They already have their money all over the world.”

“Giovanni Agnelli, [the ex-president of Fiat], once said the left are important as they can pass measures other can’t. The government have said they will accept anything, anything, as long as the debt will be settled,” he said.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact