

Rumbles of military coup as Greek workers demand end to EU austerity

Alex Lantier
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Hours before anti-austerity demonstrators flooded the streets of central Athens on Friday, a number of retired Greek military officers publicly called for a “yes” vote in Sunday's referendum on the European Union's demands, defying Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's call for a “no” vote.

The contrast between masses of workers denouncing EU austerity and the pronouncements of prominent military figures could not have been starker. Retired General Fragkoulis Fragkos, a former defense minister and one-time head of the Greek army general staff, called for a “loud yes on Sunday.” In 2011, Fragkos was cashiered by then-Prime Minister George Papandreou amid rumors of a coup.

Clearly referring to Tsipras, Fragkos said that “the moral values and principles that have always defined us Greeks are not under negotiation with any clueless and historically ignorant [politician] who is advancing his own party interest.”

A group of 65 retired high-ranking officers issued a statement citing their “oath to the Fatherland and the Flag” and warning, “By choosing isolation, we place the Fatherland and its future in danger.”

The statement continued: “The strength of our country is the most important thing we have, and this is being put in jeopardy. Our exit from Europe will make our country weaker. We will lose allies that have stood by our side. We will lose the strength we gain from associations and groupings to which we belong historically and culturally.”

These declarations constitute an enormous act of political intimidation. Just over 40 years since the CIA-backed colonels' junta collapsed, well-connected officers are casting aside any pretense of neutrality and announcing their support for the positions of the EU and Washington in opposition to large sections of the

population and the current government.

To grasp the significance of the Greek officers' statements, one must recall the 1967 coup, which, in the midst of a political crisis, brought to power the brutal junta that ruled until 1974. Its goal was to suppress working-class protest and preempt any attempt to shift Greece's foreign policy toward neutrality between NATO and the Soviet Union. The coup was led by Colonel George Papadopoulos, a top CIA liaison officer, who oversaw the roundup of at least 10,000 political opponents, many of whom were tortured or killed.

This week, senior German officials said that they intended to secure a “yes” vote in the Greek referendum so as to bring down the government led by Tsipras's Syriza party. Earlier, German Chancellor Angela Merkel sent a warning shot Tsipras's way by inviting bloodstained Egyptian dictator General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to Berlin as Cairo held joint military exercises with the Greek armed forces. Berlin subsequently arrested *Al Jazeera* journalist Ahmed Mansour on trumped-up charges issued by Sisi's regime.

The statements coming from the Greek military vindicate the warning made by the *World Socialist Web Site* after Mansour's arrest. The WSWS wrote: “It is a calculated signal sent by Berlin that it is ready to publicly collaborate with repressive measures by military dictatorships... One of the intended recipients of this message is doubtless the Greek premier, Alexis Tsipras.”

The EU is emerging ever more openly as a ruthless dictatorship of finance capital. There can be no doubt that the Greek officers intervened in the referendum with the support of Berlin and Brussels. They see the events in Greece as part of a war on the entire European

working class, to be waged by means of state violence and repression if necessary. They are out to demonstrate in Greece that they will brook no challenge anywhere to the dictates of the banks and finance houses.

The policy of Berlin and the EU confirms the assessment of Lenin. “Finance capital strives for domination, not freedom,” he observed, adding, “Political reaction all along the line is a characteristic feature of imperialism.”

Imperialism seeks support within the reactionary classes of the targeted countries. So it is with the bourgeoisie and its allies in the upper echelons of the middle class in Greece. The events of the past few days—masses of workers and youth calling for a struggle against austerity and the EU on the one side, wealthy businessmen and professionals, joined by the military, backing the EU onslaught on the other—have laid bare the stark and irrevocable class divide in Greece.

These events expose the bankruptcy of the Tsipras government. Its entire policy has been based on the self-deluded notion that it is possible to reach a compromise with the EU, and that some respite from vicious cuts in jobs, wages, pensions and social services can be secured without a struggle against the social base of support for such policies within Greece itself.

Not only has Syriza refused to take any measures to challenge the economic interests of Greek capital, it has not taken a single step to protect the people against the conspiracies of the state. On the contrary, it has placed far-right forces such as the Independent Greeks (Anel) in key positions of power.

Defense Minister Panos Kammenos, an Anel leader, all but admitted yesterday that the government is preparing to use the army to crack down on domestic dissent and impose the army’s preferred foreign policy. “The country’s armed forces guarantee stability internally, the defense of national sovereignty, and the country’s territorial integrity and stability in relation to the country’s alliances,” he said during a joint visit with Tsipras to army units.

The Tsipras government doubtless conceived of its referendum as a means of providing political cover for its own retreat and accommodation to both the EU and the Greek bourgeoisie. A “yes” vote would be used to justify total capitulation, while a “no” vote, as Tsipras

declared this week, would serve as a pretext to return to the negotiating table in yet another fruitless attempt to obtain a deal for slightly modified austerity measures.

As yesterday’s mass protests showed, however, the referendum call has produced an enormous radicalization of public opinion. Masses of workers who have come onto the street to call for a “no” vote see such a vote as the beginning of a struggle to end austerity policies and break the stranglehold of the EU.

The working class cannot be bound by the policies of Syriza, whose aim is to secure at most token modifications of the austerity program, the better to uphold the EU bankers’ dictatorship and Greek capitalism. It fears nothing so much as a mass movement of the working class, against which it is prepared to unleash the police and military.

What is required is a broad appeal for the active support of the European and international working class in opposition to the EU, combined with the most determined measures within Greece itself to break the power of the local allies of international finance capital.

It is necessary to carry out revolutionary measures in defense of the Greek masses: the nationalization of the banking system and major industries under the control of the working class, the repudiation of the national debt, the dismantling of the military, the arrest of officers involved in military conspiracies against the people, and the establishment of a workers’ government.



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