

German auto workers condemn austerity deal imposed on Greece

Our correspondents
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The brutal austerity measures imposed on Greece last weekend by German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and Chancellor Angela Merkel have provoked heated discussions in German factories. Many workers are shocked and disgusted.

The WSWS recently spoke to workers at GM-Opel's Rüsselsheim plant number 2.

In Rüsselsheim, the statement "Defend the Greek workers!" was distributed prior to the early shift. It declares, "For millions of Greeks, the implementation of these measures means poverty, unemployment, disease and even death.... It is the task of the working class in Germany and throughout Europe to oppose these measures, which threaten to plunge the working class into desperate poverty, and the continent, once again, into war and dictatorship."

Many workers leaving their shift at lunchtime had read the leaflet and expressed their agreement with it. "What a vile, deceitful bunch. They're finishing us all off," said one. Others reported that their colleagues had discussed the leaflet in the plant. "I'm in full agreement with it," stated one shift worker. "That is precisely my opinion, but not all colleagues agree."

Several workers expressed their confusion over the developments. One said, "I find all of this terrible. The banks can obviously do whatever they like." Asked about the role of Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and his Syriza Party, he continued, "They did organise the referendum. But why didn't they then stick to the clear 'no?'"

An older worker said, "Although over 60 percent of Greeks voted no, this oppressive deal has been imposed on them." He said of Syriza, "They are just like all other politicians and are seeing to it that they can fill their pockets." A colleague added, "The worst thing is that the rich always come out on top and the workers

have to pay for everything. Here it is actually no different."

Asked about the role of the trade unions, IG Metall and the Left Party, a worker responded with contempt, "They have collaborated in everything here, all of the intensification of conditions on the assembly line."

The statement distributed by the WSWS declared, "The Left Party works closely with the trade unions, which have sought to aid the German government by shutting down and selling out strikes by train drivers, postal and daycare workers, hospital employees and other professionals."

"That's no lie," another worker commented on this passage.

Dmitri, an employee at Opel for over 30 years, told the WSWS that he has followed the situation in Greece with great concern. "What they are imposing there, for example the pension cuts and the sell-off of ports, they are terrible attacks," he said. "Two-thirds of the port of Piraeus is to be sold off, and now absolutely everything is going to be flogged off. The entire Greek people have come under extreme pressure."

Germany was actually profiting from the crisis, Dmitri said. Therefore he couldn't understand "why they can't help one another: Why can't the richer countries in Europe help the weaker ones? Other countries have to be assisted, not just Greece." He said he feared that many German workers were supporting the Merkel government on Greece because they believed the media propaganda "that the Greeks were still doing too well. But most of them have already reached the poverty line."

Responding to the question of what he thought about the Syriza government, he said, "What is it with this government? It is under so much pressure, it doesn't have a choice any more. Sometimes I ask myself if a

Grexit would not have been more beneficial? But it would be bad. The population voted no to EU cuts, but almost all want to be in Europe. Schäuble's stance is hypocritical. There is no Greek exit for a short period of time. If Greece leaves, it will stay out for a long time."

The crisis was "caused by the banks and stock markets, but the workers have to pay for it," Dmitri stated. On the PSG's perspective of uniting the European working class in the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe Dmitri said, "I think that is entirely fine, it is also my opinion. It is high time that things were made fairer."

Oskar, an elderly care worker from Flörsheim, happened to pass by the factory gate to pick up his friend, a shift worker at Opel. He declared his solidarity with the campaign to defend the Greek workers.

"I think this is very important," said Oskar. "How can I struggle against capitalism as an individual? Is there a possibility? As a human to fight against this terror? Capitalism is literally destroying people."

Relations in Germany are not that different, he continued. "I have had experiences in several European countries. I was in Romania, Switzerland, the Netherlands and now here. The austerity measures are an international phenomenon. As a care provider for the elderly, you are often paid poorly and pushed around from place to place. The conditions are catastrophic. In one facility, two workers have to look after 30 elderly people. I stopped working there because I didn't get any wages for three months. I got just €600 for 242 overtime hours and the holiday time I had built up."

"For me, the question is 'what is to be done?'" Oskar concluded. "One can't get anywhere as an individual. An organisation is needed to prepare for an international uprising."

The dictates of the German government are also attracting the attention of workers in the Ruhr region. Peter Modler, a shop steward at the ThyssenKrupp plant in Duisburg, contacted the WSWS.

He said that he had expected that the European Union, above all the German government, would impose harsh cuts. "But I am repeatedly astonished at the increasing brutality of capitalism. I did not seriously believe that a Grexit would happen, I thought it much more likely that people such as Schäuble used its possibility to build up pressure to force Syriza to

capitulate, which is what they ultimately managed to do. But what has now been imposed has a new quality."

Modler continued, "The German, and as a consequence, European workers must fear the worst since Schäuble and Merkel are playing the leading roles in the social massacre. What is happening in Greece today can be seen as a cynical testing ground on how to deal with the entire EU population."

He related his view of the role of Syriza, "I can understand the Greek voters, how they clutch at every straw. Perhaps I would also have voted for them if I was a Greek worker. But as long as a party claiming to represent the working class does not really base itself on it and have an internationalist and socialist programme, it is not only condemned to failure, but also responsible for confusion and betrayal. This is what the history of 1933 in Germany teaches us."

Modler concluded by drawing attention to the complicity of the German trade unions and saying that it was "remarkable that no trade union in Germany or Europe came to the aid of the Greek workers. I have heard absolutely nothing on the subject of Greece from IG Metall. Not a word on what their position is on developments in Greece. But that is itself a position. Whoever says nothing about this in truth agrees with it. Sometimes silence says a great deal."



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