

German parliament supports attacks on Greek workers

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18 July 2015

“Politically, we are interested only in the safeguarding of peace in this area; economically, in the establishment of an order that will provide for the production of goods for the general benefit and again revive the exchange of products... Towards the vanquished and unhappy Greek nation we feel sincere sympathy. It was the victim of its deluded leading caste.”

These words come not from German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble or Chancellor Angela Merkel, who yesterday in parliament defended the new austerity measures to be imposed on Greece, but from Adolf Hitler. He made this statement in parliament on May 4, 1941 after the German Wehrmacht had conquered Greece. But the parallels to today are striking.

In parliament Friday, Merkel, Schäuble, Social Democratic Party leader Sigmar Gabriel and many other members of the governing parties declared their sympathy for the Greek people and presented the brutal measures they had imposed on Greece at this week’s euro zone summit as selfless acts of “support.” Merkel spoke of the “enormous solidarity of Europe.” Gabriel proclaimed, “We are partners of the Greeks and not opponents.”

But, they insisted, such things as elections and referendums cannot change the rules of the euro zone—rules written and enforced by Germany to serve the interests of the German and European financial elite. Acting outside of the euro rules would be “the end of the legal community in Europe,” declared Merkel.

In fact, the new austerity package means the ruin of Greece, the utter impoverishment of its population, and the plundering of its resources by the most powerful European financial interests. The new “emergency

loans” of which Merkel, Schäuble and Gabriel boasted are being extended to finance this thievery, while giving the Greek upper classes a cut of the booty and driving the country deeper into financial dependence.

Five years of austerity under the troika—the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission—have driven Greece into the deepest economic depression experienced by a developed country since the 1950s. The economy has shrunk continually since the end of 2008, contracting by a total of 25 percent. Incomes have fallen by 40 percent. Over a third of the population is officially poor, a quarter is unemployed, and half of youth are without jobs. Millions no longer have access to health care.

Under these circumstances, the increase in the VAT sales tax, the reduction in pensions, the sale of state property and the other measures to which the Syriza government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has committed mean that the weakened Greek economy will fall into the abyss. What Hitler achieved by military force and terror, the current German government wants to achieve by means of financial strangulation.

Four hundred and thirty nine of the nearly 600 parliamentary deputies present in the Bundestag, the vast majority, voted for these measures. The vote confirms the warnings of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) that the German ruling elite is returning to its worst historical traditions.

The revival of aggressive great power politics was prepared through a systematic campaign: Federal President Joachim Gauck and leading government officials announced the end of military restraint; political scientist Herfried Münkler declared that Germany should become Europe’s “disciplinarian,”

and historian Jörg Baberowski played down the crimes of the Nazis.

Half of the 119 “no” votes came from the right wing of the Christian Democrats, who want to drive Greece into bankruptcy, and the other half from the Left Party. The majority of Green Party deputies abstained.

Neither the Greens nor the Left Party reject the course of the government on principle. Both defend the European Union and the capitalist system on which it is based. But they fear that the German government has overplayed its hand. They are concerned that, by acting so blatantly as Europe’s disciplinarian, Germany has alienated other European powers, particularly France and Italy. Even worse, it has set a course that risks igniting revolutionary upheavals.

The designated parliamentary leader of the Left Party, Dietmar Barsch, pleaded with Merkel and Schäuble: “You are squandering the legacy of Helmut Kohl and Helmut Schmidt. Stop this disastrous path, so that Europe may really hold together.”

He cited the 86-year-old sociologist Jürgen Habermas, who, in Thursday’s *Guardian* newspaper, accused the German government, including the Social Democrats, of “gambling away all the political capital in one night that a better Germany had accumulated in half a century.”

EU Council President Donald Tusk, a firm supporter of the assault on Greece, who as head of the Polish government had himself implemented brutal social cuts, directly warned of revolution. “For me,” he told the *Financial Times*, “the atmosphere is a little similar to the time after 1968 in Europe. I can feel, maybe not a revolutionary mood, but something like widespread impatience. When impatience becomes not an individual but a social experience of feeling, this is the introduction for revolutions.”

The Left Party considers preventing revolution its most important task. That is why parliamentary faction leader Gregor Gysi said he would be voting “no” in the Bundestag, even though he would have voted “yes” in Athens. In this way he solidarised himself with Tsipras, who has broken all his election promises, ignored the referendum he himself called, and pledged to enforce the austerity measures against popular opposition.

In recognition of Tsipras’ miserable betrayal of the Greek working class, the arch-conservative *Die Welt* concluded, “For Europe, there is no better partner than

Tsipras.”

The draconian social attacks on the Greek population are a prelude to further attacks on the entire European working class. Along with the growing tensions between the European powers, they recall the first half of the last century, when similar developments resulted in war and fascism. They urgently pose the need for the independent intervention of the working class.

Especially in Germany, workers have to oppose the government, which is reviving the noxious legacy of German imperialism by seeking once again to destroy the social fabric of entire countries. German workers must come to the defence of the Greek working class.

The wretched capitulation of Tsipras and Syriza underscores the fact that so-called “left” parties and organisations that support capitalism are incapable of defending past social or democratic gains. The events in Greece confirm the Marxist insight that it is impossible to fight imperialist oppression without fighting for the overthrow of imperialism’s fifth column at home—one’s own bourgeoisie.

The most urgent task is to build new workers’ parties, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, throughout Europe, to fight for the unity of the working class on the basis of a revolutionary socialist programme.



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