

Widespread solidarity in Berlin with Greek workers

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As teams from the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party) have campaigned over the last few days in Berlin for the public meeting “Solidarity with Greek workers!”, to be held next Tuesday, they have encountered contempt by workers in Germany for the brutal course of action being carried out by the government and EU against the Greek working class.

At the Daimler factory in Marienfelde, a team met Naci Karakas, who is outraged by the actions of the German government. “What the EU is carrying out in Greece is the politics of the banks. One can only call it a swindle. The way the credit system was inflated in the stock market created a giant bubble. The hole in Greece cannot be filled, even if every single inhabitant of Greece is forced to pay. The workers should not have to pay off the entire debt.”

Naci has worked at Daimler for 35 years. He pointed out that the same class politics in the interests of shareholders are practiced in Germany as in Greece. Showing us a daily news update on his smartphone, Naci said, “Daimler was able to increase profits by 54 percent to 3.8 billion euro. And still they have more and more temporary workers slaving away here for bad pay to drive down wages and to pit workers against each other. It’s really time that workers opened their eyes!”

Another worker said: “The Greeks have been completely ripped off. They gave a clear ‘no’ vote and the EU did the exact opposite with it.” A worker from Eastern Europe added: “It’s awful what they’re doing to those people. I can imagine how things are there now; they did the exact same thing to us after the reunification of Germany.”

During the mid-day shift change, the team also met Norbert, who has worked his whole life in the auto

industry. He refused to believe that Greek pensioners were at fault for the debt burden in Greece, as the media claims. “The rich, for example the ship owners, can completely duck their taxes and make their money in another country. That shouldn’t be allowed. If the rich would pay their taxes, then there wouldn’t be any problem. I ask myself why the Greek pensioners should actually get less than everyone else.”

Norbert is 71 years old. He works at Daimler through a temp agency because he wants to “be out among the people again.” “I can’t just sit at home,” he says. What concerns him, however, is the increase in temporary work in traditional manufacturing. “A temp agency worker only earns €8.50 per hour for the same work done by full time workers for €22 or €23,” he said.

Among those the team spoke with there were also reactions which demonstrate that the extremely one-sided reporting in the German media, which openly vilifies the Greek population, has had a certain effect, even if it does not run very deep. While taking leaflets in an effort to understand the situation in Greece, some spoke of “the Greeks” who had “lived beyond their means.”

At the public housing complex near Hallesches Tor in Berlin-Kreuzberg the mood was different. The crisis in Greece is an ever-present theme here and is widely discussed. Workers, pensioners, youth, students and the unemployed let it be known that they categorically reject the austerity demands of the EU and especially the actions of the German government.

Blanca, about 40 years old, was appalled by the developments in Greece. “It is absolutely absurd what’s going on there. I have a friend in Athens who has to line up every day in front of the bank to withdraw 60 euros. A real catastrophe. The suicide rate in Greece is also climbing now,” she said.

“But it’s not just that way in Greece,” added Blanca, “it’s also in Germany and Berlin: What’s taking place in Greece, the way they bleed the people and push them to their limits, we’ll have that here soon. Just look around at Berlin. The whole city is being sold off. The ‘locals’ who have lived here for years don’t have rights anymore if they don’t have money. The rich show up, buy an apartment with a nice location and then evict the people who live there.”

She herself knows a family with two children who have just experienced this. “What is happening quite openly in Athens is what takes place all over Europe. Only here it hasn’t been placed under the spotlight,” said Blanca. “It is a class question, of course. It’s about the poor and the rich. There are really dark times ahead.”

Like Blanca, many workers see events in Greece as the prelude to social attacks on the entire continent. The partly chauvinistic propaganda of the media is being met with widespread rejection. “What bothers me especially: Only one opinion is allowed with regard to Greece. Anyone who has a different opinion will be dismissed as a crackpot,” said a student.

A couple on bicycles stopped by on their way home and each took a flyer. They listened to the discussion for a moment and said: “What the Germans are organizing in Athens in the name of the EU reminds us of the trust set up here after reunification. At that time they also forced the privatization of all public facilities and sold everything to the highest bidder. The result was that everything became focused on profit. The people fall completely by the wayside.”

Workers repeatedly declared their opposition to the policies of the German government and compared them to actions taken during the darkest chapters of German history. “Why must they interfere everywhere?” asked Dragan, a Berliner from Yugoslavia. “They already occupied Serbia once.”

“Schäuble has revealed his colonial attitude,” declared an older gentleman categorically. “One cannot call it anything else. Seventy years ago, the Germans were an occupying power in Athens. This is the new version, which isn’t exactly the same. It’s being carried out with financial blackmail and forced impoverishment.”

The man, who introduced himself as Micha, explained: “It is an attempt by people like Schäuble and

his clique to exercise influence throughout Europe in order to feather their own nests. Whether someone else is bled dry or not, it’s all the same to them.” That affects not only Greece, but also neighboring countries in Europe and North Africa. It’s similar, of course, to Germany’s behavior under fascism.”

Micha was at first impressed by Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. “One had the impression that with his referendum he wanted to unite society and call all citizens to action. Then he apparently recoiled. He made a big mistake there.”

At this point, Ralf, who was coming from work, stepped in to say: “I think it’s a real setback. The referendum mobilized people against the austerity demands. But Syriza didn’t support it consequently.” Tsipras would finally have to speak openly about his plans. “One simply can’t do that: first signal left and then turn right.”

Ralf sharply criticized Germany’s policy in Greece: “One cannot restore any economy with austerity policies, because one must first invest so that the money comes rolling in again. On the contrary, one would have to give more money to the population. Whoever has money, can spend it. One has to strengthen domestic consumption.”

As to why Syriza had just failed in Greece with this program, Ralf could not answer. Syriza’s betrayal, which defied the clear ‘No’ vote, has left much confusion in its wake.

In its call for a public meeting, the PSG explains that “Syriza is not a left, and certainly not a socialist, party, but rather a pseudo-left organization representing wealthy, selfish middle class layers primarily concerned with their own well-being. They have nothing but contempt for the working class, which they fear.” Their betrayal underscores the necessity of an international perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe. That requires the building of revolutionary parties.



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