

“We need a revolution”

Workers in Berlin speak out on the crisis in Greece

Our reporters
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Over recent weeks, supporters of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party) conducted an intensive campaign for the meeting “Solidarity with the Greek workers,” which took place Tuesday evening in Berlin. In hundreds of discussions and interviews, they found widespread solidarity with the Greek working class and the growing opposition to the German government.

“It always hits the wrong ones, regardless in which country, always the poorest population,” said a dental assistant from Tempelhof. “The banks should be dealt with first, but nothing is happening there. The banks actually govern, and the politicians do what the banks and business prescribe.”

Harry expressed concern above all with the dictatorial measures with which the austerity diktat was enforced in Greece. In this month’s referendum, the population overwhelmingly opposed the dictated cuts, but nothing had changed. “Democracy only exists if you vote for the establishment,” he said.

The solidarity among visitors to a job centre in the Berlin district of Wedding was considerable. They have been as negatively affected by the decline of capitalism as Greek workers, youth and pensioners.

A security worker at the job centre was convinced that the lack of an alternative confronting the Greek working class would soon lead to a social explosion. He said that social relations were not fundamentally different from those in Greece. Poverty among pensioners is on the increase while those “topping up” their income with welfare faced harassment from the job centre, and unemployment is on the rise. “At least 20 percent of the population is living below the minimum,” he stated. “I will say it in very simple

terms—we need a revolution,” the security worker said with conviction.

Devrim, who works as a part-time self-employed cook and also is one of those who “top up,” attacked the German government for its brutal actions in Greece. “They exploit everything and everyone and then say, we are just helping.” He noted that the German state still owed the Greek population hundreds of millions from the Nazi era. The German firm Fraport intended to use the current crisis to purchase the most profitable airports in Greece at fire-sale prices, said Devrim angrily.

Mohammed, a 23-year-old apprentice, was familiar with conditions in Greece as well as in Germany. He fled to Greece from Afghanistan in 2010 and moved on to Germany in 2012. He was visiting Greece in the week prior to the referendum.

“Prior to the crisis, incomes were good. Now, wages are lower and there is very little work. In some areas, there are virtually no job opportunities.” He and his friends had previously earned around €50 per day, but today wages were below €30. Workers at the market, for example, had to make do with €100 for an entire month. “And on top of that is the rise of homelessness, which did not exist previously.”

Mohammed did not understand Germany’s firm stance. “And if everything becomes more expensive due to the new measures, whether it is through privatisation or an increase in sales tax, how will the people be able to pay for it at all? Even now, hardly anyone in Greece has any money.” He shook his head, “We are all people; we have to help each other.”

Later, a couple with their two sons came out of the building: Giorgios, 33, and Eva, 32. Eva works in

catering and Giorgios on a building site. They had moved from the former Soviet Union to Greece and became Greek citizens, and came to Germany four years ago looking for work. They discussed the situation in Greece with a WSWs reporter in Russian.

“We speak with relatives in Greece. It is bad there: taxes have been increased, wages reduced, and pensions cut,” Giorgios stated. He was unsure of where it would end. “People are starting to starve and become angry. Because if you are hungry, but have no work, you go out on the street and protest and strike.”

“One must take from the rich,” Eva stated. She spoke about pensioners who arrived in the country after 1991 that are no longer paid any pension. Giorgios’ grandmother has not received a pension in two years. The government has found people from whom they can squeeze the debt repayments, “from the elderly who can no longer work,” Eva added bitterly. “The government has completely sold Greece out.”

The couple noted, however, that the Syriza government had not touched the wealth of the rich. “Everything must be confiscated from the rich,” said Giorgios. “They have not sweated for their wealth, like the workers, normal people. We are all equal and we should all live equally.”

Along with Eva and Giorgios, members of the Greek community in Berlin responded well to the PSG’s campaign. Nikos, who runs a bar in the district of Neukölln, recently hung one of the PSG’s placards in the window. “It is important that the Greek and German workers struggle together,” he said.

Nikos was not impressed by Syriza from the outset. “I did not think that they would implement their election promises,” he said. “But it shocked me that they would go further than any previous government.” When it came to the referendum, he was extremely annoyed; he felt that the Syriza government’s response had nothing to do with democracy.

At a Greek community centre in Steglitz, the situation in Greece and the betrayal by Syriza were also at the heart of the discussions. At a table in the community centre’s garden, Aris, a logistics worker, spoke with his neighbors, an office manager and a care worker for the elderly who wished to remain anonymous.

Aris attacked the German media, which had attempted to set Germans and Greeks against each other. “They portrayed everything as if the Greeks are

lazy, as if they all had money.” The propaganda and lies “are heartbreaking,” the care worker added.

Aris became very serious when asked about the subject of Syriza. “Syriza came in to government at the end of January. They had the time from the end of January to the beginning of June to control the situation and make the necessary plans. But until the last moment, they just waited.” Step by step, the Syriza government gave up its positions to the creditors, in the hope of negotiating a deal. Now, they are implementing an austerity package that no previous government would have dared to attempt.

The office manager responded with confusion to Syriza’s betrayal after the referendum. But for her, it was a positive sign that the Greek population clearly spoke out against austerity. The “no” from the working population of Greece had sent a signal throughout Europe, and gave her “the feeling of not being alone.”



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