Television programme shows how German companies benefit from privatisation in Greece

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The latest EU austerity measures have nothing to do with a Greek bailout, as is being universally claimed in the press. In truth, it is about increasing the profits of the German corporate and financial elite. Greece is to be plundered and exploited in the interests of the largest European powers, and especially Germany.

This was one of the key statements in the last edition of the German television program "Monitor" broadcast July 23. Broadcast the day after the adoption of the latest EU agreement by the Greek parliament, the programme took a critical look at the German government's Greek policy.

The broadcast critically examined the 900-page austerity bill introduced into the Greek parliament by Syriza at the behest of the EU, and interviewed foreign journalists who commented on the return of the "German question" and the "nasty Germans". In addition, there was a section dealing with the significance of the establishment of a Trust Fund (Treuhand). This is the centrepiece of the EU's new austerity programme for Greece enforced by German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and Chancellor Angela Merkel. The Trust Fund would be mainly under European supervision and thus under German control. Greece must transfer its state-owned assets to the fund, which aims to raise 50 billion euros with privatizations, including airports and ports, postal services, railways, highways, electricity, gas and water supply, buildings, beaches, even whole islands and much more.

At the European Union (EU) summit in mid-July, Schäuble rejected the offer by Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras, coordinated with France and the IMF, to pay 500 million euros into the fund each year raised through privatizations. According to the Süddeutsche Zeitung of July 14, Schäuble left the negotiations "for the umpteenth time" and then boasted before the media of his intransigence, "I said 50 billion, 50 billion!"

The claim that this money should pay off Greece's debt and get its banks and economy back on track was refuted by "Monitor". Under the headline, "Billion-euro deals with Greece: Who profits from privatization?" the programme reported the example of Fraport, the Frankfurt Airport company. Already last year, Fraport had applied for operator licenses at Greek airports, and especially those on the main tourist islands, and was awarded the contract. The deal, however, was initially frozen following Syriza coming to power in January.

But the surrender of the Syriza government to the EU has now given Fraport free rein. Using the Trust Fund, Fraport wants to take over the 14 most lucrative airports, including the crown jewels on tourist islands such as Rhodes, Mykonos, Santorini and Corfu, running them for at least 40 years, and all for only 1.23 billion euros and an annual fee of 22.9 million euros. The other 30 airports, which need to be subsidized, would remain with the Greek government. "This is a model that has not been applied yet anywhere in Europe. This fits more with being a colony than an EU member state," commented Greek Minister of Infrastructure Christos Spirtzis on the broadcast.

Corfu Mayor Kostas Nikolouzos, whose airport enjoys a large turnover due to the crowds of tourists coming to the island, complained in an interview that the country was being "robbed of the means" to repay its debts. State-owned companies and facilities were being "hawked off far below their value", a representative of the German Institute for Economic

Research warned. This would cause trouble for future Greek governments, he said.

In return, German companies, such as Fraport, could expect big profits, as the figures show. The number of flights to the coveted Greek airports rose in the last year by over 188,000, an increase of 13.8 percent, and the number of passengers increased by 19 percent to more than 22 million, about one-third of the volume at Fraport's home airport in Frankfurt.

Lufthansa Consulting belongs to the Greek Trust Fund's advisory team, and is familiar with the economic data of the airports. They confirmed that although the figures were confidential, Fraport could "certainly assume a lucrative business". The conclusion of the programme was that the Trust Fund will be used to broker profitable businesses for a German company, which, moreover, is majority state owned, namely by the City of Frankfurt and the federal state of Hesse. The proceeds of privatization will flow into German state coffers—at the expense of the Greek state.

The true intentions of Germany's Greece policy have also become clear in other media reports. Following the capitulation of Syriza, and after weeks of campaigning against "the Greeks", whose racist tone fatally recalls the period Greece was occupied by the Nazis, some business editors have begun to lay out the bargains the German corporate and financial elite might hope for in Greece.

Leading German business daily Handelsblatt also reported on the Fraport deal, and wrote that the state of Hesse was now organizing "political support for the Greek deals in Brussels. In the past week, state premier Volker Bouffier (Christian Democrat) visited the Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker." On July 21, Handelsblatt published an article under the cynical headline, "Summer Sale in Athens", listing possible sales objects, including numerous Greek islands. Fabulous travel photos taken from Private Islands Online depicted "the eleven best islands" that are on sale. The caption reads, "Experts forecast Greek islands will sell out in the coming years."

On July 13, the German Economic News website wrote that Schäuble's Trust Fund proposal mainly had met with outrage and resistance because the original plan envisaged it being integrated into Germany's KfW Bank. According to the report, "The Trust Fund proposed by Wolfgang Schäuble, into which Greek state-owned property would be transferred, has caused uproar throughout Europe. The fund is in fact a 100 percent subsidiary of the German state bank KfW."

When questioned, the Head of the Economic and Commercial Section of the Greek Embassy, Christos Dokomes, said that was not entirely correct. Whereas there was co-operation with the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), it was agreed that the Trust Fund would have its headquarters in Athens, would be managed by the Greek government, and be supervised by the European institutions.

What is clear is that Schäuble and the German government will use the Trust Fund to exploit Greece like a protectorate with limited sovereignty. The extortion of the Greek population goes even further than what was organised using the Treuhand following German unification in 1990. At that time, the Treuhand was used to privatise or close down state-owned businesses and facilities in the former East Germany, with Western investors picking up bargains at knock-down prices and masses of workers being made unemployed.

Today, the Trust Fund will create even greater unemployment in Greece. The latest edition of news weekly *Der Spiegel* states, "The [German] government considers it imperative that many Greek citizens lose their jobs under the third aid package." The article is headlined, "Greece—more unemployed", and cites the Parliamentary State Secretary Jens Spahn (Christian Democrat) listing which reforms "must be especially adopted in the Greek labour market", namely, "mass layoffs according to the timetable agreed with the Institutions".