

German parliament votes by a large majority for Greek austerity plan

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The German Bundestag (parliament) passed the new austerity measures for Greece by a large majority on Wednesday, as expected, with 454 deputies voting in favour, 113 against, and 18 abstentions.

More than half of the votes against came from the Christian Democratic camp, as 63 members of the Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU) parliamentary grouping voted against and 3 abstained. This puts the number of CDU-CSU members who refused to support the chancellor slightly higher than a month ago, when the Bundestag voted on commencing new negotiations with Greece. At that time, 60 voted against and 5 abstained. In addition, only 4 CDU-CSU deputies missed the vote then; this time 17 stayed away.

Despite the growing number of dissenters within the camp of the dominant party in the German coalition government, the special session of the Bundestag was in a much calmer mood than a month ago. While last time the session was tense and nervous, now routine and boredom prevailed. In addition to Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and the respective parliamentary group leaders, it was mainly backbench deputies who participated in the debate.

During the last session, Schäuble had left little doubt that he would have preferred a withdrawal of Greece from the euro zone. This time, he actively campaigned for the new austerity measures and loan agreements.

With relish, he noted that the Greek prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, would “now have to do the opposite of what he had promised.” The change in Athens was palpable, he said. “Given the fact that the Greek parliament has already adopted a large part of the measures, it would be irresponsible not to use the chance for a new beginning in Greece now,” Schäuble said.

The capitulation of the Syriza government has clearly strengthened the Merkel government. The nervousness over the July vote was not due least to the fact that the German government was afraid that the crisis in Greece would also strengthen resistance to its austerity measures in Spain, Italy and France, and exacerbate class tensions across Europe, including Germany. This had led to divisions in its own ranks.

Now, Berlin is relying on the Tsipras government to carry out attacks on the Greek working class, which put all previous ones in the shade, and intends to tighten its austerity diktats across Europe. “It is strange that hopes now rest on a government in Athens, whose leader until recently had totally condemned the austerity policies, but should now put the great turn into effect and, according to his own assurances, is determined to do so,” commented the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ).

The mouthpiece of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange does not regard the dissenting voices in the CDU-CSU as significant. “Merkel is unlikely to be enthusiastic about it, but can live with it, her assertiveness and Berlin’s dependability are not seriously damaged,” wrote the newspaper. “The great rebellion of their own people did not take place.”

The Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens and the Left Party have significantly contributed to strengthening Merkel’s position. The vast majority of the SPD and Green members voted for the austerity measures.

SPD parliamentary leader Thomas Oppermann praised the fact that the Greek government was finally ready to implement “comprehensive reforms.” For the first time since Tsipras’s arrival, he said, he had the impression that there was the will in Athens to implement the reforms. The Greek government must

now do so, he demanded, while he decisively opposed any debt forgiveness for the bankrupt country.

Even Green parliamentary group leader Anton Hofreiter supported the new austerity measures, but accused Chancellor Angela Merkel of not advocating the cohesion of the European Union (EU) and the monetary union aggressively enough.

While a majority of the Left Party group voted against the Greek austerity plan, this served primarily to maintain a semblance of democratic opposition. Left Party speakers expressed not a word of criticism of their sister party Syriza, which is implementing the brutal measures against the Greek population. And they were careful not to even hint at a call for resistance against a policy that means abject poverty for millions.

Parliamentary group leader Gregor Gysi, who was the first to speak for the Left Party, avoided the actual subject for a long time. He talked about other issues, such as the threat of civil war in Turkey, before he finally dealt with Greece.

And here he limited his criticism to the fact that of the new €86 billion in credits, €54 billion were for funding old debts and interest and €25 billion to support the banks, but not one euro was for investments. This was absurd, because it also jeopardised repayment of loans to Germany, complained Gysi. Similar criticism has also been expressed by the International Monetary Fund and many bourgeois economists.

The no vote by the Left Party has nothing to do with a principled rejection of the course of the German government. On the contrary, it covers up for it. It would have “been strange if in an important European policy matter, the whole House were all on the same line”, noted the already-quoted FAZ editorial. “In the end, controversy and dissent are the salt in the democratic soup.”

This soup has degenerated into a mush. For Gysi, as for his political colleague Tsipras, it is all about saving the capitalist system and its institutions and to protect them from the growing opposition of the working class. The Bundestag on Wednesday was more or less united behind a package of measures that condemns the Greek people to extreme poverty for decades, virtually eliminates democracy and transforms the country into a protectorate of the most powerful European powers.



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