

Greek workers strike against Syriza's imposition of EU austerity "multi-bill"

Alex Lantier**16 January 2018**

Workers in Greece struck Monday against the Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) government and protests erupted in Athens in the evening, as Syriza rammed a 1,300-page "multi-bill" of European Union austerity measures through the Greek parliament. The conservative New Democracy, the social-democratic Democratic Alignment, the nationalist Union of Centrists and the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn voted against the bill in parliament.

Shipping and public transport in Athens were almost entirely halted, amid mass opposition to fresh EU attacks on basic social and democratic rights, including the right to strike. Athens subway, bus and tramway workers and air traffic controllers all took strike action. Schools were closed and hospitals operated on skeleton staffs as doctors joined the strike. Tens of thousands of people marched in two separate trade union protests in the capital.

Clashes erupted between protesters and riot police in Athens after the Greek parliament, led by Syriza deputies, voted 154 to 141 to approve the multi-bill, which slashes family welfare payments, facilitates foreclosures and includes draconian limitations on the right to strike.

Protesters threw Molotov cocktails, pieces of cement and stones, while police retaliated with tear gas and stun grenades.

The eruption of workers' struggles against Syriza's attack on the right to strike and the relentless assault on living standards mounted by the EU since the 2008 Wall Street crash marks a new stage in the international class struggle. It explodes the political lie, which the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has consistently fought, that Syriza is a left-wing or socialist organization. It is a right-wing party, hostile to the workers.

It betrayed its election promises to end EU austerity and now plans to use antideocratic methods to muzzle workers' opposition.

This will have far-reaching implications well beyond the borders of Greece, as growing sections of the working class across Europe move into struggle against plans for mass layoffs and attacks on wages and social spending.

Similar petty-bourgeois populist and anti-Marxist parties across Europe that backed Syriza's election—from Podemos in Spain to the Left Party in Germany, the New Anti-capitalist Party and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's organization in France, and the Socialist Workers Party in Britain—also stand exposed as enemies of the workers. The growing conflict between the working class and these forces, which pass for the "left" of the European political establishment and are closely linked to the trade unions, will have explosive and ultimately revolutionary consequences.

These events are exposing before millions of workers the increasingly threadbare parliamentary-democratic façade of the EU and the European national governments, which function as a dictatorship of the financial aristocracy to oppress the working class.

The Syriza deputies in the Greek parliament simply rubber-stamped the "multi-bill," which was no doubt drafted by the EU and the major banks, without even bothering to read it. As Greece's right-wing daily *Kathimerini* wrote, with some embarrassment, "hundreds of pages of draft legislation had to be debated over just a few days, and there are legitimate doubts about whether deputies will fully comprehend what they are voting for."

It was widely reported and Syriza knew very well that the "multi-bill" contains drastic attacks, opposed by the people of Greece and Europe, on basic social and

democratic rights. It includes provisions for electronic auctions of foreclosed homes, aimed at keeping residents and neighbors from physically blocking foreclosures; deep cuts to family benefits; and measures designed to block strike action, such as requiring 50 percent of all union members (as opposed to 50 percent of all union members present at a strike vote) to support strike action before it can be taken.

Reuters noted that this is a measure Greece's "creditors hope would limit the frequency of strikes and improve productivity," that is, increase the exploitation of the workers.

Speaking in the parliament yesterday, Syriza leader and Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras tried to deny the socially counterrevolutionary character of this agenda. He pledged that this austerity package would be the last raft of cuts dictated by the EU to the Greek people under the terms of successive EU austerity memoranda. Hailing the "end of a long and difficult cycle," Tsipras said, "We are one step before the end of the program and the final end of the memoranda." He added, "In the summer, we will...leave behind a tough, unfair and harmful period."

Denying that the "multi-bill" aims effectively to scrap the right to strike, which is protected in Greece's constitution, Tsipras continued: "It's a shameless lie [to claim] that this government is enforcing demands by creditors and industrialists to deregulate the labor market. The right to strike is a sacred conquest of the working class."

The shameless liar here is Tsipras. His promises in parliament are as worthless as were his election promises to end EU austerity when he came to power three years ago this month. As he spoke in parliament, top EU officials were announcing that they would keep demanding draconian austerity measures in Greece even after the formal end of the EU bailout of the country.

"If there is further debt relief after the end of the program, then it is sensible to reach a further agreement," Thomas Wieser, an associate of former German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and outgoing head of the European Working Group (EWG), told *Kathimerini*. This implies that the EU will demand additional devastating social cuts should Greece seek to declare bankruptcy or restructure its unviable €323 billion sovereign debt or again ask the EU for help in

servicing its loans.

Syriza's "multi-bill" is part of an assault on the right to strike and other legal rights carried out over a protracted period by the bourgeoisie across Europe. This includes Britain's antiunion laws, the imposition of minimum service requirements banning public-sector strikes in large parts of Western Europe, and France's state of emergency and labor law, which allow for the banning of protests and the imposition of sub-minimum wage salaries.

The protests in Greece are bound up with rising working-class militancy throughout Europe—with German metalworkers and British rail workers taking strike action, growing strike activity in Spain, growing social anger at the French government's anti-worker agenda, and strikes by workers in Romania and other Eastern European countries. Faced with the escalation of the class struggle, the capitalist class is moving to tear up basic democratic rights.

The Syriza government is a fundamental strategic experience of the international working class as it goes into a period of resurgent class struggle. Struggles cannot proceed under the political and organizational control of the trade union bureaucracy and pseudo-left parties that, as the experience of Syriza abundantly shows, are hostile to the working class. The way forward is through the establishment of organizations of struggle independent of the trade unions that work to coordinate working-class resistance on a European and international scale.

Faced with the treachery and bankruptcy of Syriza, the working class urgently needs its own revolutionary political leadership, fighting for a socialist and internationalist perspective. This means the construction in Greece and every country of sections of the ICFI—the Trotskyist movement, which alone opposed Syriza from the standpoint of the international working class and warned of the treacherous role it would play before it came to power.



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