

Greek workers strike against Syriza's austerity policies

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Over the weekend, masses of workers across Greece joined in a general strike and tens of thousands demonstrated against the package of brutal austerity measures adopted by the Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) government and passed by the Greek parliament Sunday night. In Athens, many thousands took to the streets, shouting slogans such as “Rise up to throw out the government, the EU and the IMF!” and “No to the dismantling of social security!”

The three-day strike shut down large parts of the Greek economy. Subway, bus and train drivers, teachers, public servants, journalists, ferry staff, rubbish collectors and workers in the private sector participated. Even owners of kiosks and small shops stopped work.

This did not prevent Syriza from voting in parliament for €5.4 billion in regressive tax hikes and €1.8 billion in pension cuts. The measures include an increase in the value-added tax (sales tax) from 23 percent to 24 percent, a tax hike for low-paid workers and small businesses, and a 20 percent rise in employee pension contributions for many sections of the work force.

These attacks are only the latest in a series of reactionary social measures carried out by the Syriza government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. It previously increased pension contributions, cut benefits and raised the retirement age to 67. These cuts have hit broad swathes of the population in a country where, due to mass unemployment and the European Union's shredding of the social safety net, workers' income has fallen by 30 percent and entire families are forced to survive on meagre pensions. In addition, public assets have been privatized, leading to more wage and job cuts.

The powerful response to the strike call against the Tsipras government, elected in January 2015 on the basis of pledges to end the austerity measures dictated

by the European Union, is the result of this bitter experience. Millions of workers are drawing definite conclusions about Syriza. It is increasingly being seen for what it is: a reactionary bourgeois government serving the interests of European and international capital. The supposedly “left” Syriza party is a tool of the CIA and the banks, determined to defend the European Union and rescue the bankrupt Greek capitalist class by reducing the working class to destitution.

This weekend's general strike signals a renewal of struggle by the Greek working class after the shock and demoralization caused by Syriza's betrayal. This struggle must take as its point of departure the lessons of the bitter experience with Syriza in 2015.

Syriza came to power by tapping into mass opposition to the EU, the International Monetary Fund and the banks after four years of devastating austerity. The organization had long operated on the periphery of the social democratic PASOK party, which first implemented the EU's austerity demands. Tsipras himself had been thoroughly vetted in the course of visits to Washington and the major European capitals before he was allowed to take office.

The implications of Syriza's alignment with American and European imperialism began to emerge immediately upon the party's taking office, when Tsipras named the far-right Independent Greeks as its coalition partner. Syriza did nothing to mobilize the vast opposition to austerity not only within Greece, but across Europe, which had been building up in the course of seven years of economic crisis. Instead, after a few weeks in power, Syriza repudiated its election promise to end the EU austerity program and agreed to continue the so-called bailout on the terms demanded by the EU, the IMF and the European Central Bank.

When a decisive majority of the Greek population voted “no” in the July 5 referendum on EU austerity, Syriza ignored the vote and agreed to new cuts that went far beyond the measures accepted by its social democratic and conservative predecessors. Under Syriza, the social crisis has intensified, with official unemployment currently standing at 25 percent and a third of households living in poverty.

The class character of Syriza and all of the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left organizations that promoted it as a “progressive” alternative for the working class stands starkly exposed. The deeper the capitalist crisis and the sharper the tensions within the EU, the more openly Syriza operates as a defender of Greek and European capitalism, working with the EU and international financial institutions to defend the privileges of its social base in the bourgeoisie and the upper-middle class.

Syriza has many accomplices in this political crime. Greece’s main trade unions are closely allied with Syriza and do all in their power to limit strikes and turn them into toothless protests. Pseudo-left groups around the world, from the International Socialist Organization in the United States to Germany’s Left Party and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, hailed the Syriza government and covered for its treachery. They have worked either to directly subordinate the working class to Syriza or promote illusions that the Syriza government can be pressured from below to adopt a new, progressive course.

More than a year of this government has demonstrated that it cannot be turned into a defender of the interests of working people because it and its leading party, Syriza, are instruments of the capitalist class.

As the Greek working class renews its struggle, it must consciously set as its task the bringing down of the Syriza government and the revolutionary mobilization of workers, young people and all oppressed layers of society throughout Europe and internationally. It must wage a ruthless political struggle against Syriza and the entire fraternity of pseudo-left organizations, including the Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE), which criticizes Syriza from the standpoint of Greek nationalism while working with the trade unions to contain and smother working-class opposition.

The working class must take the fight out of the hands of the trade unions and establish its own organizations of struggle—strike committees completely independent of the union bureaucracies, the bourgeois parties and the state. These genuinely democratic fighting organizations will form the nucleus of organs of workers’ power.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International explained last November in its statement, *The Political Lessons of Syriza’s Betrayal in Greece*, “Events have proven that the working class cannot defend even its most minimal interests by relying on bourgeois governments, even those staffed by so-called ‘radical left’ parties, or by attempting to pressure such governments to carry out policies favourable to it. The policies of Syriza show that workers have no choice but to take the revolutionary road.”



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