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The dictatorship of finance capital: Greece and Ukraine

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As Greece teeters on the verge of bankruptcy, European Union officials are tightening the screws on the indebted country.

They are demanding that Greece repay its debts and further slash pensions as a precondition for new loans. They have replied to Syriza's brief delay in repaying 300 million euros by threatening to cut off credit to Greece and push its state and financial system into bankruptcy. This could force Greece to reintroduce its own national currency to avert a collapse of its banks and even set into motion the dissolution of the euro currency and the EU itself.

Berlin is adopting a "hardline, 'take-it-or-leave-it' approach," the *Financial Times* wrote yesterday, citing one euro zone official who said, "The only answer they're looking for from the Greeks is to say 'yes.'"

As the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank walked out of talks with Greek officials, Donald Tusk, the former Polish prime minister and current European Council president, said, "We need decisions, not negotiations, now."

It is instructive to compare the treatment of Greece with that of another bankrupt country, Ukraine. In the same edition as the article citing European officials on Greece, the *Financial Times* has an editorial demanding a diametrically opposed policy in Ukraine, calling on creditors to forgive much of its debt.

Ukraine's creditors, the *Financial Times* writes, have a "moral obligation to agree to a restructuring that reduces Ukraine's debt to sustainable levels." If Ukraine's creditors refuse to reach an agreement, the newspaper declares, "Ukraine is right to raise the possibility of declaring a moratorium on debt servicing." That is, the government in Kiev would be right to delay payments to its creditors, as Greece briefly did to the IMF, or even to cancel them outright.

Why does the journalistic voice of European finance capital wax lyrical on a "moral obligation" to aid the Kiev regime even as it demands no let-up in the financial strangulation of Greece?

"Staving off Greek collapse is vital to the euro zone's stability, but its strategic importance is dwarfed by that of Ukraine," the *Financial Times* explains. Pointing to the Kiev regime's role in fighting a "proxy war" against neighboring Russia in eastern Ukraine, the newspaper adds, "On an issue of such geopolitical magnitude, private financial interests cannot be allowed to dictate public policy."

Behind the apparent contradiction in the treatment of Greece and Ukraine stand the reactionary class interests of finance capital in the leading imperialist powers, which are pursued with ruthless determination.

Ukraine's far-right regime is a key cog in the campaign of Washington and NATO for a vast military build-up across Europe, threatening all-out war against Russia. It was installed in a US- and EU-sponsored putsch, led by fascist militias, to serve as the cat's paw of an imperialist drive to compel Moscow to accept a semi-colonial status.

As it wages a bloody civil war against pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine, the Kiev government is slashing jobs and utility subsidies, rehabilitating the legacy of Ukraine's World War II Nazi-collaborationist forces, and banning public mention of the October Revolution and communism. The imperialist governments are well aware that if billions of euros are handed to Kiev, the entire sum will be spent on war. Not a penny will go to Ukrainian workers.

There are no such geo-strategic considerations when it comes to the regime in Greece. EU officials know the leaders of Greece's ruling party, Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), too well to think of them as a revolutionary threat. However, Syriza was elected on the basis of broad popular opposition to six years of EU austerity and to the country's traditional parties of government, which had implemented savage cuts.

The European banks are seeking to make clear in relation to Greece that they will not tolerate any concessions to popular opposition to austerity. The looting of billions of euros from workers will continue, no matter what.

The experience of the five months since the election of Syriza in January contains critical lessons for the Greek and international working class. It has vindicated the warning of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) that only the struggle to unify the working class internationally and mobilize it in revolutionary struggle against capitalism offers a way forward.

Syriza assumed power claiming that a deal could be reached with the EU, and that Greek workers' grievances could be addressed within the framework of capitalism, imperialism and the European Union. To the extent that Syriza had a scheme to somewhat modify the EU's austerity agenda, it was to exploit tensions between Berlin, the leading power promoting the EU's austerity policy, and Washington and other European capitals that favor a more stimulative monetary policy.

It made no appeal to the explosive anger against austerity building up in the working class in Germany, Britain, France, across Europe and in the US. Instead, it aligned itself with the foreign policy of imperialism, declining to veto EU sanctions against Russia and cynically abandoning its election promises to reverse austerity, signing a pledge within weeks of taking office to abide by Greece's previous EU austerity agreements.

It took Syriza no time at all to demonstrate the bankruptcy of its anti-Marxist perspective, rooted in the interests of more privileged sections of the upper-middle class. The United States, Britain and France did not lift a finger to help Greece. Syriza was quickly exposed as a political instrument for the subordination of the working class to a bankrupt social order.

Cuts continue to rain down on the Greek working class, whose living standards are being set back decades. Visiting Berlin Thursday, Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis made clear his government's commitment to even further concessions to the European banks. He called for "surgery" to slash Greek pensions, saying, "We need to find ways of eliminating early retirements, of merging pension funds, of reducing their operating costs, of moving from an unsustainable to a sustainable system, rationally and gradually."

In the meantime, the imperialist war drive against Russia continues to escalate, with US and NATO officials organizing military exercises across Eastern Europe and threatening pre-emptive missile strikes against Russia. World war is ever more starkly on the political agenda.

What is at stake is the future not only of Greece, but of all of Europe and the entire world. The survival of capitalism and the imperialist world order to which it gives rise poses imminent dangers to the working class and to human civilization itself.

This perspective underlies the struggle of the ICFI to build sections in countries across Europe that will fight to mobilize the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the United Socialist States of Europe.