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EU austerity drives repression in Greece

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In her lightning visit to Athens on Tuesday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel made clear that the European Union (EU) intends to intensify its attacks on the social rights and conditions of working people throughout Europe.

Shielded by 7,000 riot police, Merkel raced through streets that had been cleared of people to attend a meeting with Greek Premier Antonis Samaras. Her purpose was to ensure that Samaras not back down in the implementation of the savage austerity measures dictated by the EU. Merkel then met with selected entrepreneurs who hope to make a killing based on the starvation wages being imposed on Greek workers.

On the same day, an all-party coalition of the ruling Socialist Party, the right-wing Union for a Popular Majority, and the centre-right Democratic Movement voted in the French National Assembly for the fiscal pact Merkel had negotiated with former French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Although Sarkozy's successor, François Hollande, won last May's election in large part by pledging to renegotiate the fiscal pact, it was passed without so much as a comma changed. It commits France to reducing its budget deficit by radical social cuts.

Greece has been the example for all of Europe since it applied for bailouts in 2010. Wage cuts, mass layoffs and the destruction of social welfare programs imposed by successive Greek governments at the behest of the troika (the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank) serve as a template for every other European country.

Though this policy has plunged Greece into the deepest recession in its history—condemning broad layers to poverty and unemployment, while pushing up Greek debt to record highs—it is now to be intensified and extended to the whole of Europe via the fiscal pact.

The austerity drive at every step undermines its stated goals: reducing state debts and maintaining the cohesion of the euro zone. However, it facilitates a second, unstated agenda. The European bourgeoisie, operating through the EU and the European governments, will not stop until they have lowered the living standards of European workers to those of Foxconn workers in China and miners in South Africa.

Even now, in the midst of the crisis, obscene levels of wealth are being accumulated at the top of society. Greek millionaires who have collectively deposited billions in Swiss bank accounts are left untouched, even though Greece's finance minister has been in possession of incriminating data on their actions for two years. The billions of euros from the European bailout funds flow directly to the banks, and from there to the coffers of the rich, while workers are systematically robbed.

Greece is in the forefront not only of assaults on social rights, but also of political attacks on the working class.

So far the government had relied mainly on the trade unions and pseudo-left organizations such as the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) to keep the resistance of the working class in check. The unions have organized limited protests to permit workers to let off steam, while they work with the government and spread illusions that the EU can be reformed and made to implement pro-working class policies.

However, these methods are wearing thin. SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras pledged in last June's election that he, together with the newly elected French president, would change the course of the EU. As the adoption of the fiscal pact in Paris this week has demonstrated, this perspective is a complete chimera.

Now the Greek bourgeoisie is turning toward the methods utilised by the ruling class in Europe in the 1930s: fascist terror and authoritarian rule. They are mobilising the most backward social layers to intimidate and suppress the working class.

The police torture of demonstrators protesting against the fascist party *Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn) is a warning to workers internationally. Things that have occurred in Athens prisons recall the torture at Abu Ghraib and crimes last witnessed in Europe under fascist dictatorships in Greece, Spain and Portugal in the 1960s and 1970s.

In recent months, state forces have worked to build up Golden Dawn, providing political cover for its attacks on immigrants and left-wing opponents of the government. It is well known that a large percentage of the police in Greece are members or supporters of the fascist Party.

All of this is silently tolerated by the representatives of the EU. While the German press reacts with concern to swastikas brandished this week by some anti-Merkel protesters, it says nothing

about the activities of the fascists in Greece. This is because all European governments are preparing to forcibly suppress working class resistance. In Germany, the Federal Constitutional Court recently threw out a previous ruling and now permits the German army to intervene domestically.

The social devastation being imposed in Europe is incompatible with democracy. The more class antagonisms intensify, the more the ruling elites feel compelled to resort to authoritarian forms of rule. What began with the persecution of immigrants in Greece has expanded in a short period of time into the torture of political opponents, and will in future be directed against the entire European working class.

The defence of social and democratic rights is inseparably linked to the struggle against the institutions of the EU and its counter-revolutionary policies. As was the case in the 1930s, Europe is confronted with stark alternatives: either the ruling elite plunges the continent into war and dictatorship in its attempt to secure its wealth, or the working class takes power and replaces the EU of the banks and big business with the United Socialist States of Europe.

This requires above all that workers and youth break with the unions and pseudo-left parties that seek to subordinate them to the EU institutions and the bourgeois state, thereby opening the way for the growth of fascist tendencies like Golden Dawn. The realization of such a program is only possible based on an independent movement of the working class and the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International as the international party of the working class.