

We Stand With the Greek People Fighting Austerity – For Their Sake and Ours

WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY IN GREECE is only the most extreme example of a global phenomenon: the world's political and economic elites, who are responsible for the current economic crisis, want to make the rest of us pay for that crisis, no matter how much suffering this creates. But Greece also exemplifies the determined resistance of millions of ordinary people who refuse to pay for a crisis they did not cause. Their fight is a model for all of us.

Greeks are subjected to an extraordinarily harsh austerity program that has devastated the lives of most of the population. Draconian measures demanded by European bankers and politicians and carried out by the Greek government have drastically reduced workers' wages, pensions, social welfare and labor rights; poverty and hunger are rising rapidly, and suicides of people unable to cope with their rapidly deteriorating circumstances are increasingly common. Hospitals lack basic medical supplies, and the underfunding of government social insurance is making it impossible for many Greeks to obtain the medicines they desperately need to survive. Current unemployment for the general population is officially 23 percent, but in reality closer to 30 percent, and over 50 percent for young people.

Meanwhile, the Greek government continues to bail out Greek banks and to sell off precious public assets at scandalously low prices. For global elites, Greece is a laboratory for a savage form of neoliberalism – the wholesale privatization of public goods, deregulation of markets and turning the workforce into a powerless and financially precarious underclass wholly dependent on employers.

But Greeks have forthrightly declined to play the role of guinea pigs. We are deeply heartened and inspired by the Greek people's resistance. They have mounted general strikes, massive demonstrations and occupations, and, most recently, they have voted in large and increasing numbers for a leftwing political party, SYRIZA, which is leading strong opposition to the government's catastrophic policies and has a good chance of winning the next election.

Greece is worse off than most developed countries, but it is not unique. The worldwide crisis, which is actually worsened by austerity policies, is being used as an opportunity to take away hard won social and labor rights everywhere. Though most other countries haven't yet seen policies as punitive as those in Greece, throughout the OECD unemployment remains high, while cutbacks lead to massive layoffs, and deficits are used as an excuse to attack public services. In the United States the banks have foreclosed millions of homes, students are burdened with huge debts they are unable to repay, and a vicious assault has been waged on the collective bargaining rights of public sector workers.

Austerity policies also pose a critical threat to democracy. Increasingly, elites seek to insulate economic decision-making from democratic control. To them, not just Greeks but ordinary people everywhere cannot be trusted to act "responsibly" and therefore do not "deserve" democracy. For the elites, austerity is imperative not

only to "solve" the crisis, but also to restore unfettered markets – that is, the very conditions that threw the world into an economic and social meltdown in the first place. The people, who fail to grasp the wisdom of neoliberal ideology, cannot be allowed to interfere.

At the same time, however, grassroots democratic resistance to austerity is intensifying. As in Greece there have been large-scale strikes, demonstrations and occupations of public space in Egypt, Spain, Chile, South Africa, Mexico, China, Quebec, Wisconsin, and the Occupy movement around the world.

In Greece, the left is also struggling to prevent the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn from turning people's rage and desperation against immigrants. Golden Dawn's violent pogroms are paralleled by the Greek government's persecution of immigrants, both documented and undocumented. The crisis has likewise fostered the growth of the extreme right in Europe and the U.S., as well as xenophobic demagoguery and repression by "mainstream" politicians. It is all the more urgent, therefore, to support the Greek left and to promote elsewhere its radical democratic proposals: taxing wealth, nationalizing banks, cutting military spending, boosting wages and social services, and strengthening labor rights.

WE ARE ALL GREEKS!

Greece is the site of a cruel experiment by economic and political elites: driving people into extreme poverty and stripping them of their social rights as a "solution" to the economic crisis. It is an experiment that these elites wish to extend throughout the world. They have already begun. We declare that it doesn't have to be this way. We stand with the Greek resistance to austerity, both as a moral imperative and because it shows the way to secure a decent future for people everywhere.

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To: Joanne Landy & Thomas Harrison, Co-Directors, CPD

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