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Joe HIGGINS

Socialist Party, Member

Initiative for a European-wide "Week of Protest & Solidarity" (June 21 to 26) by Left Members of the European Parliament

Dear friends,

We write to you as elected members of the European United Left / Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) in the European Parliament. We represent workers, pensioners, the unemployed, students, youth and those socially excluded.

In many European countries there are very severe attacks on the wages pensions, living standards and public services of the people we represent. It is clear that the massive financial package agreed by the EU Finance Ministers on May 9 in Brussels will only intensify the pace of attacks that are taking place across Europe.

At this stage, working people in Greece, in particular, are in the front line of these attacks. They face a 10% cut in wages and spending in the public sector, an increased retirement age, VAT increases and the freezing of pensions. But working people in Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Italy have also faced and continue to face severe attacks on their living standards. It is also clear that these attacks will not be confined to workers in the so-called "peripheral" European economies - workers in all of the countries across Europe are set to have pension rights further eroded, downward pressure on wages, cutbacks in social services and social welfare as well as the continuation of large-scale unemployment.

These attacks are in line with the broader strategy of the European establishment, as outlined in the "EU 2020" strategy paper - which alludes to the need to increase the pension age together with the number of hours worked by European workers and a strict return to the "Growth and Stability" pact, which will require a slashing of public spending in many countries.

These attacks are also combined with a poisonous attempt to divide workers along national lines. This has been particularly evident in the media in Germany and many other countries. Lies about the conditions of workers in Greece are spread to create the impression that ordinary Greeks are responsible for the crisis in their country and must pay the price. The Left must counter this disinformation with facts and figures showing the real situation. For example, contrary to the myth of lazy Greek workers retiring early, the average retirement age in Greece is 61.4 years, higher than the European average!

The Greek workers have demonstrated a heroic willingness to struggle against these attacks in the last weeks. Portuguese and Spanish workers have indicated the same willingness to fight.

Important statements have been made by European trade unions and Left organisations against the attacks on working people. We now feel that there is a need for an active joint response across Europe - to cut across the attempts to divide workers and to give people confidence to fight back.

We propose to initiate a "Week of Protest & Solidarity" for the week of June 21 to 26. What we envisage is political parties, trade unions, social movements and activists coming together and holding a major protest in their country in that week.

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The purpose is to proclaim that Left and social organisations reject the policy that it is working people who must pay for the crisis, that we demand an end to the dictatorship of the markets, demand that the financial institutions are taken into public ownership and we declare that European workers stand together in solidarity.

We respectfully invite your organisation to discuss the possibility of supporting this initiative and committing to build significant European-wide protests on that date. For us, the key question is clearly solidarity with Greek workers, but also taking up the issues of the attacks in the various countries where the demonstrations take place.

We understand of course that the details and precise slogans will have to be worked out to take into account the political situation in the country where the protests take place. However, we propose that the following basic demands could form the basis of the discussion across Europe:

- *Workers, pensioners, the unemployed, students, youth and those socially excluded must not pay for the crisis - Make the super rich and bankers pay**
- *Solidarity with the working people of Greece and for the unity of working people across Europe.**
- *No to cutbacks, wage cuts, unemployment and increases in the retirement age**
- *No to privatisation of public services**
- *End the dictatorship of the financial markets, credit ratings institutions and the IMF**
- *Stop the bailouts of the banks - nationalise the banks and financial institutions in the interests of working people**

We feel that successful co-ordinated protests in the week of 21 to 26 June would have a major impact and send a clear message to the European establishments. It would assist the struggles of workers in the various European countries and be a vital step in building a European-wide resistance to the ongoing neo-liberal agenda.

Obviously time is moving very quickly. We want to build a broad coalition on a European wide basis to build for these protests, to be matched with broad coalitions on a national basis to build for these protests. We would be very much obliged if you could get back to us as soon as possible with your response.

We hope that you might look positively on these proposals and that your organisation can assist in building for European-wide protest toward the end of June. Please spread the call to your contacts and contact us to let us know your thoughts and we would be happy to meet to discuss progressing this issue further.

Yours in solidarity,

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