

Greek workers speak out at referendum polling stations

By Robert Stevens and Christoph Dreier
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Since Friday's massive demonstration against austerity, the mood in Greece's capital of Athens developed even more decisively in favor of a "no" vote. "Good vote. Hopefully you will vote 'no!'" a young lady in a small street kiosk said to passing customers on their way to polling on Sunday morning.

One of them answered, "Of course I will vote 'no,' but we also have to think about the implications. What will happen if Tsipras uses the 'no' vote to get an austerity agreement with the creditors?" he asked.

"Then the Greek people will revolt," the kiosk vendor replied.

The decisive "no" vote was the expression of deep hostility among the Greek working class and pauperized population to the European Union's austerity measures. The social opposition proved much stronger than the incessant propaganda campaign of all the private broadcasting outlets and the flagrant threats of EU officials that a "no" vote would lead to a catastrophe.

Even though many voters hold illusions in the Syriza government and also in the EU, the vote was in stark opposition to Syriza's continued attempts to strike a deal with the EU institutions. Ultimately, the outcome of the vote represented an explosion of social resistance to EU austerity measures.

"I say no to austerity, no to the fascism, no to the proposals they made," **Irini** said at a polling station in the Athens district of Pagrati. "If Greece was a bank, it would have been saved," she added. Irini worked as a stewardess and is now retired. Over the last five years she has lost half of her income.

"I lived during the [1967-74] junta of the colonels," an elderly woman told WSWs reporters. "Today the situation is even worse than under the junta. We have really learned now about the bad face of Europe. Until

now we said yes, yes and yes. Now we have to say no."

Spiros was another "no" voter. He explained that his monthly wages were reduced from €1,300 in 2006 to €950 today. "With a 'yes' vote the crisis will continue for a lot of years." He thought that some reforms were necessary, "but not on the backs of the people, no cuts in salaries or pensions." He said he still believes in a better future and hoped that Syriza Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras would reach an agreement with the EU without imposing further austerity. "We have to vote 'no' to show [EU leaders] that we are human beings, not numbers," he said.

Eftichia is unemployed and relies on her husband's pension of only €300. She said, "I don't really trust the government. That is why I didn't vote for Syriza in January. I don't really believe that there will be an end to austerity by voting 'no.'"

Besides voters who expressed illusions in Syriza waging a struggle against the EU and IMF, many workers expressed similar concerns as Eftichia. "I don't trust Tsipras and the government, I just hope the best," said **Andromachi**, who also voted "no." "At the breakfast table we discussed this morning, why is this referendum actually taking place? We already voted for Syriza in January to end the austerity measures. Why are they asking us again now?"

Andromachi once worked as a ballet teacher but is now unemployed. She previously had three different jobs at the same time.

Among those who abstained, the mood against the government was sometimes even stronger. "To vote 'yes' means a new memorandum and to vote 'no' means also a new memorandum," said **Nick**, who is studying biology and working as a taxi driver at night. "The crisis has been going on for five years and it is not to be solved with the referendum. Workers have to control

the means of production,” he added. “I believe we have to go out of the euro.”

Iro made a similar point: “Whether I voted ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ we will still be in Europe as our government wants to be in Europe. So this vote is a farce.” She spoke passionately about the worsening situation she faced after years of brutal measures that have wrecked Greek society.

“If you ask me do we have a democracy in Greece, I would say we don’t have a democracy. They never asked us if we want this. Now my children and their children will have to pay for this. I don’t think it’s fair and that’s why I’m angry. Please tell people this. I’m alive but I am dead. I have no future. I think the people from the UK, from Spain, from France understand this, but not the politicians.”

Asked what she thought about workers and the poorest people paying for the continued enrichment of the wealthiest since the financial crash of 2008, she replied, “You said it all. This is the poor people paying for rich people. This is like it was in the 18th and 19th centuries. There used to be a song by the Dead Kennedy’s called ‘Kill the Poor.’ It is like this in Greece today.”

Even among “yes” voters, there was significant opposition to the austerity measures. Many were intimidated by the campaign in the mainstream media that was organized to threaten people who intended to vote “no.” Some said they voted “yes” as a protest against the government.

“If ‘no’ wouldn’t support the government, I would vote ‘no’ to make the Europeans understand that it can’t go further this way. But I want to vote against the government,” **Yanis** said. “We already voted for them to end austerity. Why do they ask again?”

“I know the consequences of a ‘yes,’ which will be very, very bad, very ugly,” said Roi, who works in a hotel. “But I don’t know the implications of a ‘no’ vote. The worst would be a return to the drachma. Tsipras is denying that, but the rest of Europe says that. They scared a lot of older people. And I am myself quite confused. Tell [German Finance Minister Wolfgang] Schäuble not to come to Greece. There is no more austerity possible, there is no more juice.”

Roi explained that she used to work in an ice cream factory, but her salary was reduced by 60 percent. “They hired and fired us as they needed. At the end, I

was on a zero hours contract.” In her new job, payment is very irregular. She said that workers at the hotel where she is employed were not yet paid for last month. “I can’t stand seeing pensioners standing in lines in front of the banks any longer,” Roi added.

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