

# Greece: Student protests target Karamanlis government

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Protests by students and young people continue following the police killing of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos on December 6 in the Exarchia district of Athens.

On Thursday, further details were revealed about the killing of Grigoropoulos as a result of ballistics tests. The *Kathimerini* newspaper cited an unnamed source who said the results appeared to "contradict the claims made by the policeman charged with the boy's death."

The newspaper reported that the police officer had originally said that he fired his gun, holding it above his head, as a warning shot. The sources quoted by *Kathimerini* said that "the results ... indicate that the officer had fired with his arm at a right angle to his body in the direction of the child, not straight above his head in a warning shot, as he has claimed."

Thursday was the 13th day of continuous protests, with a demonstration estimated at 10,000 taking place in Athens. The march began on the grounds of Athens University and once more ended at the Greek Parliament. It was attacked by large numbers of paramilitary police who had formed a cordon around the parliament building. The police used tear gas canisters and stun grenades against the demonstrators, who responded by throwing stones and Molotov cocktails.

The slogans of the demonstrations have become increasingly hostile to the New Democracy government of Costas Karamanlis. Among the banners held by the students was one declaring, "Topple the government of blood, poverty, privatisations." Another read, "Mourning is not enough, the struggle goes on."

Demonstrations were also held in Greece's second city of Thessaloniki and in the town of Lamia and on

the island of Crete. In Patras, the third largest urban centre with a population of more than 220,000, the local trade union headquarters was occupied by protesters demonstrating against the pro-government policies of the unions and calling for an indefinite general strike. The previous day the headquarters of the General Confederation of Workers of Greece (GSEE) in Athens had been occupied.

Opposing the demands, GSEE leader Yiannis Panagopoulos declared, "The GSEE does not govern this country."

Many high schools and universities remain closed due to ongoing occupations by thousands of students and youth. According to a report by CNN on Friday, at least 800 high schools and 200 universities remain shut nationwide. According to the BBC, 70 people have been injured by the police and about 400 arrested since the protests began.

The protests coincide with a number of industrial struggles. On Thursday, air traffic controllers staged a three-hour strike that resulted in the cancellation of all but emergency flights at Athens International Airport. The controllers, members of the civil service trade union ADEDY, are protesting government policies and demanding a pay rise.

Public transport workers also struck transport services. Doctors, teachers and hospital staff also took industrial action. Hospitals were forced to operate with a skeleton staff as employees held a 24-hour strike. Delegations of striking workers marched in support of the students to the demonstration at the parliament building.

Anger amongst workers and youth has been exacerbated by the shooting and wounding of Giorgos Paplomatas, a 16-year-old boy, in the Peristeri district of Athens on Wednesday evening. He was standing on

a street corner talking to friends when he was shot in the hand by an as yet unidentified assailant. Witnesses heard two gunshots being fired.

Giorgos Paplomatas is the son of Constantinos Paplomatas, a prominent official in the Greek Teachers' Federation, which is affiliated to the Greek Communist Party (KKE). Giorgos is a member of the youth wing of the KKE. Paplomatas's father described the shooting as "a murder attempt ... by sinister forces," according to the *Kathimerini* newspaper.

A police statement following the shooting claimed that there were no officers in the area at the time the shots were fired. According to reports, the bullet apparently came from a 38-caliber handgun.

On Thursday evening the KKE held a demonstration in Peristeri to protest the shooting. A demonstration was also held on Friday and was reportedly attended by 1,500 people. One of the demonstrators, university student Dimitris Andriotis, told the Associated Press, "This is an answer to state repression. We will not stop coming out into the streets until our demands are met."

On Friday, the two largest trade union federations held a rally in central Athens to protest the government's 2009 budget. A rally of professors was held outside parliament. Later in the evening, a concert against state repression was staged.

Following the occupation of the state-owned NET TV channel on Wednesday, other media stations were temporarily occupied on Thursday in several cities. According to one report, "The municipal radio of Tripoli, *Nea Tileorasi* TV in Chania, *Politeia FM* in Sparta and *Star FM* and *Imagine 897 FM* in Thessaloniki were occupied." On Friday, *Kydon TV* in Chania was also occupied.

Students have called for further demonstrations today throughout Europe and around the world to protest against state violence and murders.

A number of analysts have concluded that it may not be possible for the government to remain in office much longer. But they foresee a crisis of rule continuing to unfold due to the attacks on the social conditions of workers, youth and students that are driven by the scale of the economic crisis. Theodoros Livanios, the head of research at polling firm Opinion, said this week, "With the world economic crisis, whoever is in power will face unpopular choices to keep Greece stable."

Diego Iscaro, an analyst at IHS Global Insight, stated that the attacks on education and the pension rights of workers, and the privatisation of state services had to be imposed at all costs if the Greek economy were to remain stable. "Even before the riots, reform was proving difficult, but now it is going to be very, very difficult," he said. "To achieve sustainable growth in the medium term, these reforms must happen. In the next five years, growth will be slower than what we've seen for a decade."

Under conditions of mounting social and economic crisis, the role being played by the trade union bureaucracy and the Communist Party in attempting to prevent the radicalisation of youth and students from spreading to the working class is critical for the Greek bourgeoisie.

On Friday, *Avriani*, the daily pro-business right-wing newspaper, published a front page which featured a photo of the Greek Communist Party leader, Aleka Papariga, alongside a headline reading, "Either citizens or the KKE should take it upon themselves to restore public order and protection of the democratic system if the police are not able to do so." Under her photograph, the newspaper commented, "Aleka Papariga's party is the only organised political force that has dared to publicly condemn the 'hoodies' and expose their dirty role." The article went on to declare ominously that "the country is going through the second week of descent into chaos and the crumbling of institutions designed to maintain public order. Society's tolerance, including the citizens who advocated in favour of strategic restraint, has run out."



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