

Workers and youth at Athens protest speak to the World Socialist Web Site

Our reporters
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A number of workers and youth who participated in Wednesday's Greek general strike and mass demonstrations in Athens spoke to a *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team about their understanding of the economic crisis and its impact.

Costas Stoumpiadis said: "I am a state municipal worker and I work in Crete. The workers and the unions are under attack. Our salaries, social security and everything are being attacked. The government is doing this, because they want to take away our eight-hour day and the five-day work week. Everything that we fought for over years, and everything that our parents fought for, the new government is trying to take away. This is why we are on the streets.

"Our salaries are being threatened and this is not due to national conditions, but international ones. That is why we have set out to defend our rights and, if necessary, we will have to attack as well. What is making us angry is that they are trying to make the workers pay for this crisis. But we know that we did not make this crisis."

Costas Sarris, a media worker employed at a large newspaper, told the WSW: "The main feeling among the workers is anger about these measures, because we did not create the crisis and we are being asked to pay for it. This crisis was created by the rich people. So every worker, including workers in journalism, thinks that this strike is a big step forward. And we cannot have just one strike. We have to go forward and hold further protests of all workers, so that the rich people are made to pay, and not us.

"I agree that Greece is being used as a test case for the whole of Europe, and you could say also internationally, because this crisis is global. In Europe the crisis looks deep, but you can see the same situation of massive debt in the United States. You can see it in

Britain, you can see it in major economies. The problem is that in all these countries they try to save the rich people and the banks by spending public money to cover the financial hole. And now they ask for us to pay this back!

"The problem with Greece is that it is not a powerful economy and it is more difficult to fill the financial holes. So the attack here is very strong and offensive.

"I think Papandreou and PASOK made a U-turn, because they had such a major victory in the last election, with a 10 percent majority over the conservatives. Now the government breaks every promise it made one by one.

"I think the people are shifting and realising that there is no solution within the current politics. So the people are trying to find an alternative.

"We are facing big cuts and many layoffs, especially in the media sector. Previously, that was the diamond of the economy. It was a very wealthy sector. Now we are having strikes in the media sector.

"They are freezing salaries and making the job more difficult to do. We also have debt, because if we want to spend any money we have to borrow it because the salaries are very low in Greece. So many lower paid workers have very big problems."

Katerina Malakou is employed in the public sector in Athens as a social insurance worker. She told the WSW: "I will tell you that what is certain is that the workers did not cause this crisis and we cannot stand any more wage cuts. This is because the salaries of the public sector workers are already very low in Greece compared to other European countries. I receive 1,100 euros and some bonuses, and I never receive more than 1,500 euros. I have worked there 25 years and I am not a new employee.

"I think what should have been done is not to have

taken loans from the banks. Instead, we should get the money out of the banks because they stole our money in the first place. Now they are loaning us money in order to take from us more money in the end! It is unfair and the workers never should pay for this.

“I want to give two messages. The first is that all the workers all around Europe should unite and resist this crisis. We should not let the capitalists take our rights away from us. We should not let the financial houses have so much influence.

“The second message is directed to the German government. They should remember that 50 years ago they were here again and they ruined this country. And now they are trying it to ruin it again, this time through an economic system.

“I agree with you workers have to unite across borders and prevent all these decisions being made against us now. However every state has minor political differences and these have to be fought within the country itself.”

The WSWs also spoke to two students, Antony and Dimitris, who attended the demonstration.

Antony spoke about the problem of youth unemployment in Greece. He said, “I don’t know if we have the worst rate of unemployment in Europe, but I know that our country is a test for international capitalism. They want to see how the workers are going to react. If we oppose them and refuse to let them make us pay for the crisis they created, this will be the first signal for what will happen in all the other countries that I believe are going to be in the same situation, sooner or later.

“It’s very important for all the people to realise that they don’t have to pay for this. In my personal opinion they are trying to make us think that we should, by saying that if we don’t pay, everything is going to end for us. They are saying that there is no other way to organise our society or our economy.

“So the capitalists have already found a way to get out of it. To get themselves rescued from their crisis, they are trying to make as much profit out of it as they can. They know that the danger for them is over, but they make us think that it’s not over so that they can make us pay more taxes, to be more obedient to the rules they are planning to make in the future.”

Dimitris said, “My family does not have problems

with money for our education, but I personally know that in the future there will be problems as the situation is going to become much worse. We will have major problems to find a job later, and also the crisis is mostly affecting the lower income people.

“As for the question about capitalism and the economic crisis, they expected the situation we have now. The way we have set up our society and the way that the multinationals function internationally means that the money goes to the few.

“The previous government last year gave 28 billion euros to the banks in order to save them from their crisis. And now, with the austerity programme of PASOK, we try to collect less than what they gave last year to the banks.”

Referring to the education cuts now being implemented, Dimitris said, “Now they want to cut what are supposed to be pillars of our society. They try to cut money from things that it is our right to have. We have the right to have free education, free proper education, not this thing that they are calling education for us right now.

“I mean education from the moment we are children until the end of our university period. They are trying to make cuts in pensions, to cut salaries, cut health insurance. These are things for which we have paid, our parents have paid for, and which we are still going to pay for.”

WSWS supporters distributed copies of the statement “Socialism and the Greek debt crisis” to workers and youth participating in the Athens demonstrations.



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