

Strikes and protests mount against austerity in Greece

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“Today, it is no longer safe for us to go onto the streets,” a politician of the Greek ruling party PASOK told the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. “We are the government and we are alone.”

Widespread popular anger against the government in Greece has only intensified following the latest round of austerity measures. Incidents abound of politicians of both the social democratic PASOK and the conservative opposition New Democracy (ND) being pelted with eggs and on occasion stones when they show themselves in public. Angry crowds have repeatedly besieged the homes of politicians and chanted “thieves, thieves” and “Give the money back!”

According to surveys conducted by Eurobarometer, 82 percent of Greeks have lost confidence in the government and 83 percent distrust the parliament. Sixty-seven percent no longer trust the European Union. Other polls show that PASOK would today win just 15.5 percent of the vote in a new election.

The huge gulf between the working population on the one hand and the government on the other was clearly evident at a demonstration in Syntagma Square in Athens on Sunday. According to the daily newspaper *Eleftherotypia*, thousands of homeless people, young couples with children and pensioners demonstrated peacefully against the austerity measures of the government. Referring to the “memorandum” drawn up by the “troika”—the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Central Bank (ECB) and European Commission—they shouted, “Take the memorandum and get out of here!”

Among the demonstrators were dock workers, bank employees, employees of the DEI (electricity works), teachers and former employees of Olympic Airlines who have lost their jobs and have had their pensions reduced by 40 percent.

The arrogance and contempt of the troika representatives for the Greek population was revealed in a report in the *Guardian* newspaper on Saturday. The article described how a team of technical experts from the European Union descended from their bus in Syntagma Square on the way to their hotel prior to the demonstration on Sunday.

“They walk past a man curled in a fetal position at the top of Ermou, a pedestrian street that leads off the square. They pass another slumped across a cardboard sheet, his head in his hands, then a tousle-haired immigrant, arms outstretched as he murmurs: “Mr., Mr., euro, Mr.” But the men and women don't look. They walk on cheerily chatting towards their hotel.”

Completely indifferent to the suffering of the Greek people and intent on pursuing a class-war policy across Europe, the troika experts were all agreed, according to the *Guardian*, that “on the ground, things will get a lot worse.”

Despite the peaceful nature of the protest on Sunday, police used tear gas and truncheons to disperse the demonstrators. Even children were attacked and one woman was admitted to hospital with serious injuries.

The demonstrators denounced the police, shouting, “The junta did not end in 1973”—referring to the brutal military dictatorship of the colonels who ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. “If more of us gather they cannot scare us,” said one pensioner. She talked about her children, who had been forced to cancel their studies and are now unemployed.

Struggles are taking place all over Greece. Some 159 schools across the country have been occupied by students protesting against cuts in the education system. In the city of Patras alone 30 schools have joined the protest.

This week, taxi drivers plan to go on strike, and on

Monday workers in the metro, tram and city rail system stopped work for 24 hours. In front of the Ministry of Health therapists, staff and supporters of the therapy centre for drug addicts formed a human chain to protest dramatic cuts in subsidies and personnel. Flight controllers have been working-to-rule for a number of days, resulting in delays and the cancellation of many flights.

The protests are an expression of the growing anger and desperation of Greek workers, who have already faced cuts of up to 30 percent in wages and pensions this year, while energy and food prices have soared as much as 100 percent. The troika made this “fiscal consolidation” a prerequisite for the disbursement of emergency loans needed to avert a default by Greece.

But the social cuts have only led to a deeper recession than forecast. Tax revenues have fallen, the Greek burden of debt has grown and the government has failed to meet deficit-reduction targets set by the troika. The representatives of the IMF, EU and ECB have responded by demanding further austerity measures as a precondition for releasing an €8 billion tranche of bailout funds without which Greece will go bankrupt by mid-October.

Last week, the government announced further cuts in pensions and wages and the dismissal of 30,000 civil servants. In addition, new increases in consumption taxes are being imposed.

Greece already has the lowest income levels in the euro zone (51 percent of the average). Some 80 percent of workers earn less than €1,500 per month and 61 percent less than €1,000. More than 30 percent of those under 24 are unemployed, and only a third of the unemployed receive the meagre state support of €454 a month.

These cuts are part of a general assault on the working class being carried out by the ruling elite across Europe. The crisis is being used to carry out a social counterrevolution aimed at destroying all of the past social gains of the working class.

Mass poverty is growing at one pole of society, while at the other the financial-corporate elite is adding to its vast wealth.

In 2008, the Greek government transferred 106 billion euros to the banks to save them from collapse. According to figures reported last June by the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, the sums salted away by Greek

millionaires and billionaires in Swiss accounts amounts to €600 billion. This is twice the total public debt of Greece.

The ruling elites have already made clear to all that they are prepared to enforce their austerity program despite the opposition of workers. Prominent European politicians stressed this week that they did not exclude the possibility of an orderly bankruptcy, which would wipe out all of the remaining social benefits of Greek workers at a stroke. The police violence against peaceful protesters shows that the Greek ruling elite is preparing a shift to authoritarian forms of rule.

The confrontation between the financial elite and the workers will intensify. In this situation, the trade unions and their pseudo-left allies play a critical role in blocking a mass industrial and political movement of the working class against the PASOK government and the Greek ruling class.

The unions have done their utmost to channel the anger of workers into harmless protests and avoid any serious confrontation with the government and the European Union institutions. Now, the two major union federations, ADEDY and GSEE, have postponed any further nationwide actions until October. Once again they are calling for one-day strikes and protests, to be held October 5 and 19. This gives the Greek government breathing space to push through the new package of social attacks.

The unions have organised such “general strikes” repeatedly over the past several years in order to dissipate militant resistance and demoralize the workers. The Coalition of the Radical Left, SYRIZA, which has close links to the German Left Party, is trying to bind workers to the PASOK government by proposing a coalition government “of all progressive forces,” including PASOK and the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE). Such a government would in no way be “progressive,” but would use the bureaucracies of the trade unions and the “left” political parties to enforce the troika program against the working class.



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