

# “We need the help of workers in Europe,” says Athens protester

Our reporters  
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Workers protesting Wednesday in Athens told the *World Socialist Web Site* they were angry and determined to fight back against the PASOK government’s imposition of savage cuts.

**Irene**, a tax official of 28-years standing from Athens, said, “We don’t know if there is any money for our pensions anymore. They have already robbed it from us. We are an experiment. These sorts of attacks have taken place in Latin America and in Asian countries, but this is the first time this experiment has come to Europe.

“What is happening is the destruction of the Greek economy and the Greek people. Everyone will be unemployed. Many of us already have loans from the banks and we can’t even pay them. People are losing everything they have. We cannot pay any more. We don’t believe that this policy of asking for more and more money from us will lead to anything except the destruction of the people.

“I have a loan from the bank, and already there is a 40 percent increase on the payments. Under the new situation it is increasing to 70 percent. I can’t pay it. I will lose my home. We are paying more in loans and taxes than we have money to live on. About 600,000 people have loans from the banks for their houses and they cannot afford any more. Most of them are losing their properties.

“This government does not want the rich to pay. It says only the poor people should pay.

“We need the help of workers in Europe. The common people of Europe need to be conscious that they need to be with us. They also have problems like us. Even German workers have problems. The Greek people are not against the German workers. The German workers have had to suffer pay cuts over ten years. I believe the German workers are the first victims of these policies of Mrs. Merkel.

“We have to fight together with the German workers for a global redistribution of wealth. If the German workers fight for better wages, we have a chance to do it as well. I think what is needed all over the world is a great redistribution of wealth. I have to believe in it and want to believe it, because there is no other way.”

**Ioanna**, 27, said, “This demonstration is not only against the government, but against this whole international development. The European elite are using Greece as an experiment to see how far they can go with the attacks on the population.”

Ioanna’s parents are working at a hospital and have suffered big wage cuts. “We are on the edge,” she said. She did not trust the trade unions or the supposedly “left” coalitions, Syriza and Antarsya. “There is no democracy here,” she said. “If Antarsya were in power, they would do the same as PASOK. It wouldn’t change anything.”

**Konstantinos** brought his own banner to the demonstration, reading: “Age 47, two years without a job... What options do I have? I can steal or commit suicide. Or I can fight for a job and my rights. That is what I am doing now.”

After his layoff from a telephone company two years ago, Konstantinos was forced to move back to the flat of his mother. Three adults and one child are now living on the mother’s pension of just 524 euros per month.

The telephone company he was working for dismissed 2,500 of 4,800 workers in 2009. He had worked for the company for 23 years. He described his current situation as “the worst conditions I have ever faced in my life. I want to work, but there are no jobs.”

Konstantinos said he had no faith in the trade unions or any political party. “GSEE and ADEDY are just working for themselves and I don’t believe in Syriza or Antarsya either,” he said.

**Vangelis**, a 22-year-old student, said he was convinced the government will collapse soon. “But nobody knows what is coming after it. I try not looking to the future, because it is so black.”

He said that many of his friends have lost their jobs or been forced to work reduced hours. “Some of them are getting just 300 euros per month,” he said.

He was distrustful of the trade unions: “They work just for themselves, not for the workers. The GSEE trade union president with an income of 250,000 euro has other interests than the workers.”

**Lamprimi**, a journalist with the municipal radio of Athens, said, “The government is trying to make us public servants so they can make us do what they want. At the moment we are not private, but the municipal radio is not a government job either. They want to attack freedom of the press and cut our wages by 20 to 40 percent.

“In Thessaloniki, journalists working for newspapers are on strike as they are being made to accept layoffs and 30 percent or 40 percent wage cuts if they want to keep their jobs.

“No one has been made to pay for bringing the country to this crisis. This is a corrupt parliament and a corrupt government and we have to pay for everything. That is why people are so angry. I believe that the government will fall.”

She told the WSWS: “I have to live very poorly now. I live in the western suburbs of Athens where I grew up. It’s a working class area. We have heard that things happened which were very bad during the civil war, but we never saw them. Now we are seeing them.

“I see people not able to live on 400 euros a month. There are people who have no money for prescriptions they need. There are people living near me who are hungry, and one elderly lady we know was having to eat rice with black beetles crawling in it.

“I also heard that kids were fainting at school from not being able to eat enough. They were ashamed to say their families didn’t have any food at home. This is something that has never happened in Greece. I’m 47 years old and have never seen anything like this.”

**Doris** is employed at the Athens School of Fine Arts. She said, “The government has already cut our salaries. We will probably not be paid for a few months now and they are going to sack a lot of people.

“We lost 200 euros from our salaries last month. For the next few months they are going to pay us 400 euros less, so we are going to lose 600 euros per month. Everything is getting more expensive.

“The government is taking instructions from the ‘troika’ [International Monetary Fund, European Commission and European Central Bank]. They tell the government what to do. For so many years now two families have governed the country and they have been stealing from the people for so long. And it is the workers who are paying, not the rich. No matter what we do, the government won’t listen to us.

“The last time we protested the police were already there and fired on us with tear gas. I got tear-gassed and I always take precautions and wear my mask. The police are instructed to hit us and they don’t care about anything.”

**Nick**, 50, teaches sociology and economics at a school in Athens. In recent weeks hundreds of schools in Greece have been occupied by pupils. His own school had not been occupied, but he has strong sympathy with the pupils doing this.

Regarding the GSEE and ADEDY trade unions, Nick said they did not represent the majority of the workers. “The people are not on this demonstration because of the trade unions, but despite the trade unions,” he said.

**Helena**, a 19-year-old student, said, “The government has created conditions where I can’t really study.”

Her uncle had lost his job and her grandmother had a 50 percent wage cut. “It was a clear decision of the government to support the banks and not the people”, she said.



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