

# Greek police make first raid on university since fall of military junta

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Within days of being installed at the behest of the international financial elite, the new Greek coalition government led by top banker and prime minister Lucas Papademos has signalled its intention to impose cuts by authoritarian means.

On November 17 the government utilised the abolition in August of the Academic Asylum law by the previous social democratic PASOK government to authorise the police entry into a public university, at Thessaloniki, for the first time since 1982.

The Academic Asylum' legislation law, barring the police from campuses, was passed in the early 1980s. It required police to seek the permission of a prosecutor before being able to enter the grounds of higher education establishments. Students were guaranteed sanctuary from arrest or state brutality.

The law was enacted in response to the brutal murder of students who took part in an uprising at the Polytechnic in Athens on November 17, 1973, by the US-backed military junta. On that day students launched strike action under the slogan of “bread, education, freedom”, against the Greek military, led by George Papadopoulos, which had taken power in 1967.

Since the fall of the junta in 1974, students, youth and workers throughout Greece have marked November 17 as the end of a three-day period of protests and remembrance of the victims of the Greek colonels' regime.

This year, in the aftermath of the October 19-20 general strike that saw the largest protests on the streets since the fall of the junta, the Papademos regime quickly moved to crack down on the annual demonstrations.

As of November 15, a first instance prosecuting court was put on standby to “handle possible incidents” according to the Athens News Agency.

The ANA reported, “According to plans, 11 prosecutors will be on round-the-clock standby on Tuesday and Wednesday, one of whom will be at the Operations Centre of the Attica Police Headquarters.” It added, “On Thursday [November 17], three prosecutors will be at the Attica Police Headquarters and another 12 will be on standby. The plans also anticipate, if necessary, the number of prosecuting officials to be increased wherever their presence will be required.”

In the capital, more than 30,000 people participated in the march that, by tradition, departs from the Athens Polytechnic on a route that ends at the US embassy. This was the largest November 17 demonstration seen in years. According to reports the demonstration was policed by 7,000 officers, including 700 heavily armed riot police.

Police attacked the protesters with tear gas and stun grenades. At least 90 people were detained for questioning and 13 arrested. One young protester was hospitalised after injuring both legs when police chased him.

Large protests were also held in the cities of Patras and Thessaloniki, and on the island of Crete. In Patras police used tear gas to disperse demonstrators.

In Thessaloniki 15,000 people protested and were also attacked by the police with tear gas. During the evening riot police officers entered the grounds of Aristotle University. Police chased a group of youth into the grounds of the university and then into one of the faculties. According to eyewitnesses, the police then detained one of the youths for questioning.

The raid took place as members of the university senate and students were attending a classical music concert conducted by the composer Thanos Mikroutsikos in the main auditorium.

The abolition of the right to Academic Asylum was carried out as part of the education reform bill submitted by education minister Anna Diamantopoulou. Under the instruction of the TroikaEuropean Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bankthe Papandreou government laid the basis for the privatisation of higher education. The bill introduced tuition fees and allowed for autonomous administration of universities. Free education is to be guaranteed only for three years, with fees to be imposed for further years of study. Non-academics and individuals external to universities will be permitted to run institutions that will be assessment-based, with funding based on orientation to industry. Existing national pay scales will be abolished and replaced by productivity-related pay scales.

University budgets had already been slashed by 30 percent in 2010 and another 20 percent in 2011.

PASOK has been entrusted with several key ministries in the new Papademos government. As noted, Diamantopoulou, the author of the abolition of Academic Asylum, has taken control of the education ministry. There is clear evidence that the abolition was carried out in collaboration with the US Obama administration. One of the diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks last year documents comments from Daniel V. Speckhard, the former US ambassador in Athens. In December 2009, Speckhard wrote that the law of Academic Asylum was “nothing more than a legal cover for hoodlums to wreak destruction with impunity” and “threatens the academic and student communities.”

Speckhard complained that Greece's universities “have become a war zone where police are afraid to show up” and claimed, “Due in large part to constant disruptions to classes, the average Greek student takes six years to complete a four-year degree.”

Seeking to justify state repression, he wrote, “Campuses have become havens for criminals, most of (whom) are involved in crimes such as drug trafficking, assault, theft, counterfeiting of DVDs and CDs, looting and vandalism.”

Speckhard praised the Athens Law School, which “took a bold step toward restricting access to its campus, proposing introducing a student ID system similar to that used by the Sorbonne and posting guards at its gates.”

Noting that PASOK were amenable to changing the law of Academic Asylum, despite their previous commitment to retaining it, Speckhard enthused, “The fact that changes to the university asylum law are even being discussed is a big step forward for Greek society, an indication that, for many, this formerly sacred legislation may be past its prime and no longer applicable to today's reality.”

The destruction of the social conditions and living standards of the Greek working class cannot be imposed through democratic means. Less than four decades after the fall of the military regime, a new right-wing government, which includes the neo-fascist LAOS party, has been imposed, with no mandate from the population. It has been tasked with carrying out the brutal requirements of the financial aristocracy in Greece and internationally.



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