

Strikes continue in Greece

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Following parliamentary adoption of the fifth package of austerity measures, strikes are continuing in much of the Greek public sector.

The two large union federations—the private-sector General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) and the public-sector Civil Servants Confederation (ADEDY)—had called protests and a 48-hour general strike before Wednesday’s vote on the measures. Following the vote, the strikes were supposed to come to an end, but they are continuing in many areas.

Public transport workers twice extended their strike by 24 hours. Resistance continued on Friday, resulting in massive traffic jams.

Workers at the sanitation department decided to continue their one-week strike indefinitely and have won widespread support. Garbage is mounting up on every street corner.

The public sector is particularly hard hit by the new round of cuts. Workers have not only lost their Christmas and holiday bonus, but have seen their wages cut by 30 percent. Throughout the public sector, some 150,000 jobs are to go.

This social devastation takes place against a background of grinding poverty. Unemployment has reached 25.3 percent and continues to rise. Among young people, it has risen to 58 percent.

On Sunday, parliament will decide the budget for the next year and confirm the austerity measures passed on Wednesday. The government is increasingly wavering.

Only 153 of the government’s 179 parliamentary deputies supported the coalition in Wednesday’s vote. Many of the deputies belonging to the Democratic Left (DIMAR), six from the social democratic Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), and one from New Democracy (ND) refused to support the government.

In face of this development, representatives of the European Union have stepped up the pressure on the Greek government. Up to now, the passage of the

austerity measures was regarded as the precondition for paying the next tranche of international aid. Now, however, the EU now wants to delay this further.

A senior EU official told Reuters that it was highly unlikely the EU finance ministers would take a decision regarding the payment of the supposedly already agreed tranche of credit worth €31.5 billion at their meeting Monday.

This tranche has been withheld since June. The decision regarding payment is continually being delayed and used as a means of pressuring Athens to implement further cuts. On November 19, credit repayments of some €5 billion fall due, which Greece will be unable to pay out of its own resources.

“There is a very, very high probability... of a second round of discussions to finalize everything,” a senior EU official said. A spokesman for the German Federal Finance Ministry also stressed that the final report from the troika—the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund—would first have to be presented.

The debt agency in Athens has declared that it will issue bonds on Tuesday with an extremely short maturity in order to bridge the financial shortfall until the EU decides on payment of the next tranche of credit.

At the same time, even the rosy figures of the Greek government show that the latest austerity measures will not reduce the debt burden, but raise it. In 2013, total debt will reach over 190 percent of GDP. Observers assume that the EU will extend aid to Greece by a further two years before the country can borrow from the markets again. Greece will remain subject to EU diktats throughout this time.

It remains to be seen how the extension of the support, amounting to some €30 billion, will be financed. Further swinging cuts will be the order of the day.

It is highly questionable whether the current government coalition will be in a position to impose further social attacks against the mounting opposition of the working class. The Coalition of the Alternative Left (SYRIZA), the largest opposition party, is preparing for such a failure, making itself ready to take on government responsibility in order to guarantee repayment of Greece's debts to the banks.

In an interview with the German news weekly *Die Zeit*, SYRIZA Chairman Alexis Tsipras said his party was ready to take on responsibility. "SYRIZA will soon be forming the government in Greece," he said. Such a government would overcome the "political instability" of the present government, he continued, and restore the country's credibility in the eyes of its partners (i.e., creditors).

"We have to sit down at the table and find a solution, so that our partners no longer have to pay," Tsipras said. He promised that in the event of taking over the government, SYRIZA would embark on new negotiations on the debt and a discussion regarding a further "haircut" for the financial institutions.

He stressed his support for the European Union and announced that Greece under his government would meet its responsibilities towards its creditors, adding that "the Greek people" bear a "great responsibility" for the present crisis.



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