

Greek unions hold one-day general strike

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Greek workers struck yesterday in the latest general strike called by the private sector General Confederation of Greek Labor (GSEE) and public sector Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY) union federations. Also participating in the protests was the PAME trade union federation, affiliated to the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece.

Public transport ground to a halt in the capital Athens, with no train or ferry services operating. While bus services ran to enable the public to get to various protests, national rail service workers held a 24-hour strike, including the suburban Proastiakos railway and the metro link from Doukissis Plakentias to the airport. Archaeological sites and museums, both state-run and private, were closed, including the Acropolis.

The GSEE and Adedy called a joint demonstration at Klafthmonos Square in Athens centre at 11am. Speaking to the BBC, a nurse on the protest outlined the scale of the crisis in public healthcare due to years of devastating austerity measures. She said, "Health is a privilege only for the rich. Public hospitals are not working properly. There's no medicine. There is no material for operations. There is nothing."

Protests went ahead in Thessaloniki, Piraeus and other towns and cities.

Although representing around 2.5 million members nationally, the trade unions ensured that those on strike were nowhere near that number. Wednesday's strike and protests were, on the part of the trade unions, yet another duplicitous exercise in demobilising a genuine struggle against five years of austerity measures that have produced a social catastrophe.

Public hospitals operated with reduced staffing, while private hospitals were unaffected. Flights in and out of Greece were also unaffected. The Athens Metro (barring the closure of four stations by the police), Electric Railway, buses and trolleys operated as normal between 9am and 9pm.

The strike was deliberately called just a few days before Greek Orthodox Easter, with many workers having already left for holidays and many public schools closed.

On this basis the Greek Federation of Secondary Education state school teachers union's call for attendance at a 10.30am protest in Athens was a farce. This is under conditions where attacks on teachers working conditions, demanded by the "troika" of the European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank and imposed by the New Democracy, PASOK, Democratic Left coalition are of an unprecedented nature. Teachers' work week is being increased by two hours with no extra pay from September and may rise by a total of 25 percent, while many staff face the threat of layoffs. Public education spending cuts are set to reach 47 percent of expenditure in 2016 compared with 2009.

The GSEE and Adedy called for a joint demonstration at Klafthmonos Square in Athens centre at 11am. The participation of workers was tiny compared to previous protests, with only a few thousand in attendance. Workers, many who have participated in more than 20 one-day general strikes and countless other protests over the last years, have drawn the correct conclusion that the trade unions are not seriously in the business of opposition. When one factors in the presence on the Klafthmonos protest of members of the various pseudo-left groups such as Antarsya and the supporters of the main opposition party SYRIZA, who function as the main cheerleaders and props of the trade unions, the number of workers present is starker still.

Over the past three years workers in Greece have continually fought back in large numbers against the destruction of their jobs, wages and livelihoods. In October 2011, up to one million protested nationally in demonstrations that were the largest since the fall of the

fascist junta in 1974. The role of the unions has been to call a one-day general strike, timed to take place after the latest austerity measures have been nodded through parliament. Where they have been unable to prevent the outbreak of strikes beyond their control, they have stood aside and allowed the government to enact emergency laws to force strikers back to work with the use of riot police and the army.

Wednesday's protests came just three days after the Greek parliament voted to push through the sacking of 15,500 public service workers, to further slash the minimum wage and extend the despised property tax. Resolutely opposed to mobilising the collective strength of the working class to bring down the government, the unions staged a pathetic assembly of around 300 people outside parliament Sunday as the vote was passed.

In doing so they ensured the hated coalition government had a free hand to impose these devastating measures.

In contrast to the token character of the unions' action, the state's repressive forces were fully mobilised. A thousand riot police assembled in the centre of Athens on Wednesday, in case of any unrest.

The GSEE called the protest under the slogan of "May 1st, day of memory, honour and struggle." The invocation of the great traditions of International Workers Day by the union bureaucracy is entirely cynical. While they prattle about "honour and struggle", they spit on such traditions and remain locked in close alliance with governmental partner PASOK, which has played the leading role in imposing mass austerity on working people.

After coming to power in 2009, promising an alternative to the hated New Democracy of then Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis, PASOK carried out the diktats of the troika to the letter.

The result was soaring unemployment and poverty, which saw PASOK virtually wiped out as a political force during the June 2012 election. Its remaining MPs then joined the Democratic Left (a split off from SYRIZA—the Coalition of the Radical Left) and the conservative New Democracy in a coalition pledged to continue austerity.

It was PASOK, who, over the weekend, introduced a last minute amendment to the overall austerity bill, which was accepted by Finance Minister Yannis

Stournaras. It proposed that the unemployed work for public programmes for less than the current minimum wage. Those over 25 will be forced to work for just 490 euros a month and the under 25s for just 427 euros a month (17.1 euros a day).

The cutting of wages below the minimum wage and even its abolition is a key demand made by big business leaders in recent meetings with Kostas Hatzidakis, Greece's minister of economy and development (see, "After Cyprus, more austerity in Greece").



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