

Attacks on Greek teachers intensify

Christoph Dreier
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The confrontation between the Greek government and teachers has intensified. On Monday, thousands demonstrated against the government's invocation of a mobilization order against teachers—who are thereby placed under military discipline, required to work, and legally banned from striking.

The teachers will now vote on strike action today to oppose the mobilization order. Teachers announced their intention to strike on Friday, to coincide with the start of university admissions exams in Greece. The industrial action aims to block the extension of teacher working times by two hours, the sacking of up to 10,000 teachers, and the closure of schools.

The Greek government, comprising of the conservative New Democracy (ND), social democratic PASOK, and the SYRIZA split-off Democratic Left (DIMAR) responded to the strike plans by invoking civilian mobilization measures, forcing teachers back to work. Teachers are thereby treated like soldiers, with a strike considered equivalent to a soldier deserting his post.

According to the Greek newspaper *Enet*, initial results from the ballot of the regional associations of the teachers union, OLME, indicate a majority for a strike. Teachers who participate in a strike are threatened with imprisonment of up to five years and dismissal from their jobs, government spokesmen confirmed on Monday.

The public service trade union federation, ADEDY, comprising about 300,000 members, has made clear that it will not mobilize public employees to defend the teachers.

ADEDY officials have criticized the mobilization order, but have gone to considerable lengths to prevent solidarity action. A demonstration organized by the federation against the government's measure on Tuesday at Syntagma Square in Athens, was attended by just a few hundred people. This is even fewer than

the number of full-time officials employed by ADEDY and its affiliates in the capital.

The advertised “24-hour strike by the public service” failed to take place. Reportedly, only a handful of schools and hospitals closed. ADEDY and the private sector GSEE union federation have called for a limited, four-hour strike on Thursday.

Teachers who did attend the Tuesday demonstration came to vent their displeasure with the trade union federation. They challenged the head of the ADEDY Antonis Antonakos.

“We are here to denounce the strike-breaking role of ADEDY”, said one teacher from Athens. He referred to the fact that ADEDY had deliberately planned a protest for Tuesday to prevent solidarity strikes taking place on Friday. In Pyrgos, in the Peloponnese, a group of teachers burned their orders.

Following the mobilization order by the government, OLME called upon ADEDY to request its school employees to take solidarity strike action on Friday and ensure that schools were closed.

ADEDY rejected the request, declaring that the union did not want to jeopardize exams. Yesterday's toothless protest and the token strike on Thursday are aimed at covering up this shameless capitulation.

The threat to strike by OLME was in response to the immense wave of anger among teachers and other public employees to the latest wave of austerity measures and social attacks. Newly hired teachers already often earn no more than €585 a month. The latest cuts will make it even more difficult for many young, unemployed teachers to find a job. The official youth unemployment rate in Greece is currently 64 percent.

Under these conditions, teachers are not prepared to accept further cuts and school closures. Their readiness to confront the mobilization order and strike for their social rights reflects the sentiment of broad layers of

the Greek working class. OLME leaders were forced to announce strike action in order not to lose control of their hold over teachers, but they made clear from the start they would not oppose a possible civilian mobilization order, thereby encouraging the government to take the step.

Despite the threat of arrest hanging over teachers, the union leadership has responded with an offer of dialogue with the country's major parties. Yesterday evening ADEDY representatives met with the chairman of the largest opposition party, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), Alexis Tsipras, to discuss further action. Today they plan to meet with the ruling ND's representatives, and in the coming days with those of its coalition partners, DIMAR and PASOK.

The union leadership is doing everything it can to prevent a mobilization of the working class against the threats from the state. In January, metro drivers were placed under martial law and seamen faced similar treatment in February. In both cases the unions played a key role in forcing striking workers back to work and enabling the government's austerity policies.

The unions are assisted in this respect by various organizations such as SYRIZA, which defends both the state and the social attacks launched by the government. These parties fear the destabilization of the state apparatus and ask merely that the government demonstrate more tact in pursuit of its goals.

“Continual states of emergency do not allow for law and order but rather their collapse”, Tsipras said, discussing the mobilization order. His party has proposed the government withdraw its martial law order and agree to further negotiations with teachers after the exams have taken place, i.e. denying teachers the opportunity to carry out an effective strike.

The dictatorial measures taken by the Greek government have the full backing of the EU and its member states. On Monday, the finance ministers of the euro group responded to the civil mobilization order by agreeing to pay Greece its outstanding emergency loans. On Tuesday the rating agency Fitch raised the country's credit rating by one point.

Teachers cannot combat this organized social counterrevolution with trade union methods. The teachers' strike must be made the starting point of a broad political mobilization by the entire Greek and European working class, aimed not only against the

state but also against the unions and the pseudo-left groups that back them. The dictatorship of the financial elite, which has brought hunger and poverty to Greece, can only be broken in the struggle to establish a workers' government.



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