

Greek university strike enters fifth week

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Administrative workers at eight Greek universities—Athens University, the National Technical University of Athens, the Athens University of Economics and Business, Thessaloniki’s Aristotle University and the universities of Patra, Thessaly, Crete and Ioannina—are on strike for their fifth consecutive week.

The strikers are protesting government plans to eliminate 1,349 administration positions by placing the workers in a so-called mobility pool, which will see them fired if no other job is found for them in the public sector or other higher education institutions. Given the massive spending cuts being implemented by the Greek government, the “mobility pool” is nothing more than a step on the road to unemployment.

The measures will effectively render Greece’s universities dysfunctional. According to the newspaper *Eleftherotypia*, at the University of Athens the layoffs will translate to a loss of 37.2 percent of non-teaching staff, making the number of students per non-teaching staff member more than six times higher than that of equivalent British universities.

In the last four weeks, the strike has also been accompanied by protests by university authorities, whose senates voted to shut down operations. In response, the Minister of Education filed a suit with *Areios Pagos*, Greece’s Supreme Court, charging rectors of those universities with misconduct. The ministry has also filed suits with local prosecutors to force university authorities to comply with government policy by submitting the lists of staff that are to go into mobility.

So far, university authorities have refused to do so, and rectors have launched a legal challenge at the Council of State, Greece’s highest Administrative Court. The deadline set by the government for the submission of the data is October 10.

The decision by rectors to go to the Council of State

is ultimately aimed at dissipating popular opposition to the government assault on higher education and winding down the strike action. Last week, the senates at all eight universities where there is currently strike action passed resolutions setting the timetable for the resumption of normal operations.

At a press conference on September 30, Yiannis Mylopoulos, rector of the University of Salonika and President of the Synod of Rectors, adopted a conciliatory tone. Referring to the votes by senates to shut down the eight universities as “symbolic” and of a “public relations character”, he called on the government “to discuss with the universities the problems that exist and to commonly agree a process to assess administrative structures, which is scientifically based and documented and thus commonly accepted. The universities are committed to accept any result that comes out of this agreed process.”

The government plans are part of the latest attacks on the Greek public sector, which aim at placing a total of 25,000 public sector workers in “mobility” by the end of December. By the end of 2014, the government aims to have eliminated 150,000 positions in the public sector.

The strike is part of a wider wave of militancy in the public sector against layoffs. Two weeks ago, there was a 48-hour public sector strike against the layoffs. High school teachers were on strike for three days that same week.

The teachers’ strikes won mass support from students, who fear the impact of the cuts being imposed, as well as the government’s overall assault on education. According to the *GRReporter* web site, by September 27, 100 schools were under occupation by their students.

The site noted, “It is expected that a presidential decree will stipulate that the school year for all students at schools undergoing occupation for more than three

days will be extended.”

Earlier this year students throughout Greece protested the government’s move to overturn the constitutional right to free, universal education under the so-called Athena Plan.

As with all previous strikes against austerity measures, there is a conscious effort on the part of the union bureaucracy to isolate the latest strikes and to minimize disruption, so the measures can be passed. The leadership of the Greek Federation of Secondary Education State School Teachers (OLME) has already declared that it will limit its future actions to token rallies and protests against the planned layoffs.

For its part, the Greek Communist Party (KKE) is attempting to foster illusions in the same trade union bureaucracy that has systematically helped successive governments in imposing austerity. In a statement last week the Executive Secretariat of PAME (All Workers Militant Front, the KKE’s trade union faction) called on “public and private sector trade unions to take initiative by any means, in order to support and stand in solidarity to the just struggle of university administration employees.”

In this, the KKE, like other pseudo-left forces such as SYRIZA (the Coalition of the Radical Left), are seeking to promote the union bureaucracy and the mechanisms of negotiation between the unions and the state that have dealt bitter blows to the impoverished Greek working class. Union officialdom and the pseudo-left forces have either applauded, or done nothing to prevent, the repeated smashing of industrial action by security forces acting on orders to “militarize” strikers. They are hostile to an independent struggle of the working class against austerity.

SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras has sought to use the university dispute to ingratiate himself with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. Following a meeting with the Synod of Rectors two weeks ago, he claimed that the attack on Greek universities is solely the government’s choice and not a result of being forced to do so by the EU and IMF.

He then went on to say that SYRIZA will fight both within and outside of parliament to keep Greek universities alive. The action within parliament has so far consisted of a single question submitted by SYRIZA deputies late last week condemning the government’s attacks on universities.

Two weeks ago two SYRIZA representatives on the governing council of ODPTE (Federation of Tertiary Education Administrative Personnel), Zacharias Trigazis and Tasoula Vezirtzoglou, gave an interview to *O Dromos tis Aristeras*, the newspaper of the Communist Organisation of Greece (KOE), a Maoist party within SYRIZA.

In the interview Trigazis acknowledged the increasingly militant mood in the Greek population, saying that, “We see this every day. The people we talk to who tell us ‘that unless this government falls we will achieve nothing.’” Trigazis wanted none of this, however insisting that while the union bureaucracy has to re-adapt “and play the central role we want it to, this readjustment is difficult and the relationship [of forces] adverse.”



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