

Greek police storm ERT broadcasting centre to end workers' occupation

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Early on Thursday morning, over 100 police stormed the building of the former Greek national broadcaster ERT. Workers had occupied the building and continued to broadcast television and radio programming voluntarily, after the government shut the public broadcaster down overnight in June, leaving the 2,700 workers without a job.

The police broke into the building and forced the 50 journalists and technicians who were present to leave. Four were arrested. "They grabbed me by the hair, even though we offered no resistance. I will identify the police," said ERT journalist Vaja Padiadaki.

"That's how fascism acts, shifty and in the dark," another colleague called out as they left the building.

The workers maintained the broadcast until the last minute, calling for solidarity rallies. "This isn't just about ERT, it isn't just about our jobs, it's about democracy," said the newsreader during the clearing of the building. "Don't bother with legality, defend democracy...because we meet together on the streets, because we are leading the same struggle, we are calling on you to come now to the centre of the state broadcaster ERT."

Hundreds of demonstrators spontaneously responded to the call and were brutally attacked by police with tear gas. Journalists at other broadcasters and newspapers responded to the police action with a spontaneous three-hour strike on Thursday. Thousands gathered in front of the broadcasting centre on Friday. On Saturday hundreds of demonstrators tried to reenter the building, but were brutally stopped by the police.

Former ERT colleagues erected a makeshift studio, transmitting the evening news via the internet. Over a million people followed the live-stream. In the background police could be seen preventing protesters from reaching the building. The journalists declared

they would stay for as long as it took for them to get their jobs back.

The action against the public broadcaster signifies a massive escalation of violence against striking and protesting workers. The closure of ERT became the trigger for mass opposition against the government's lay-offs in the public sector.

When the government pulled the plug on ERT overnight in June, thousands of workers struck and protested in support of the employees and followed their protest broadcast. Thousands of people gathered daily before the building. The mass movement led to a deep government crisis, which resulted in the exit of Democratic Left (DIMAR), the smallest coalition partner, from the governing coalition.

The clearing of the building was necessary to reestablish "law and order," announced government spokesman Simos Kedikoglou. "They had transformed the broadcasting centre in to a sort of centre of resistance against the decisions of the government."

The minister responsible for broadcasting, Pantelis Kapsis, warned several weeks ago that reporting on Greece's role as chair of the European Union was at risk due to the occupation of the ERT building.

The brutal action of the government is directly connected with the visit to Athens by the troika of International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Central Bank (ECB) and EU commission. The creditors are discussing with the government how the agreed lay-offs can be imposed against the sustained opposition of the workers, and new cuts prepared. The storming of the ERT building was evidently a precondition for this.

At the same time, a court illegalized the two-month strike of university employees. Education minister Constantinos Arvanitopoulos lodged the submission. In the cases of striking sailors, subway drivers and

teachers this was used each time as the means to place the workers under martial law and force them back to work. University staff members intend to decide on the continuation of their strike today.

The university strike is part of widespread protests by the entire public service sector against plans to lay off 25,000 workers and transfer them to a so-called mobility reserve. There have been repeated strikes in hospitals, administrative buildings, courts and public transport. The banning of the university strike is directed against all of these protests.

The lay-offs are a precondition for implementing further cuts. No details on the concrete results of the negotiations with the troika have been made public to date. Labour Minister Yannis Vrotsis has already assured the troika of his support for a reduction in the social insurance contributions of companies. This measure will inevitably lead to further social cuts.

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There were no protests worthy of the name by the major trade unions, ADEDY and GSEE, to the attack on the ERT workers and the banning of the university strike. In the past, the unions have played a central role in bringing workers back to work after strikes had been banned.

The largest opposition party, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), introduced a vote of no confidence against the government in parliament after the storming of the ERT building. The debate began on Friday and concluded on late Sunday night with the vote of confidence.

As expected the government won the vote easily, 153 to 124. The government controls a majority of 155 in the 300-member parliament, and DIMAR had already pledged on Friday to abstain. The vote strengthens the government in a crucial moment. A further confidence vote is now ruled out for the next six months.

Syriza's initiative had a purely symbolic character. In this way, it attempted to contain popular discontent, while at proving itself to be a force for stability to the Greek ruling elite and the EU.

"The government has imposed a putsch against itself and against legality," stated Syriza deputy Zoe Konstantopoulou. This legality now had to be reestablished.

Syriza chairman Alexis Tsipras reassured a forum at

the University of Texas on Tuesday that his party would ensure that Greece does not leave the EU, but instead renegotiate the austerity dictates.

The Greek police were described only a few weeks ago by Tsipras as democratic. Now they are taking brutal action against workers and have close ties to the fascists. In addition, he called on the governing New Democracy to form a joint alliance to defend democracy.



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