

Greek police enter schools, quiz children on political activities

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Greek police, under the orders of the Ministry of Public Order & Citizen Protection, have begun to enter schools in order to establish the political views and activities of schoolchildren and their families. Efimerida Ton Syntakton has revealed that in recent weeks, police have entered many schools in and around Athens on this basis, including at Agia Paraskevi, Psychico and Kallithea and Keratsini.

Efimerida Ton Syntakton reported, “A new era of law, order and intimidation begins in schools, which it seems will fall under the remit of the Ministry for Citizens' Protection as well as the Ministry of Education. How else can one explain how within one week at least five high school students were taken in for questioning by the police and were asked about their families' political leanings because they took part in a school occupation? There have been dozens of instances of police conducting ‘visits’ at primary and nursery schools in the Attica region.”

The newspaper noted that school headmasters were not informed as to the reason why police asked to meet with them. According to reports, police officers requested the personal contact details of headmasters and elementary and nursery school teachers and harassed them over the phone.

One of the police raids took place at the Keratsini High School on February 8, where students questioned by police were singled out because they had participated in a protest occupation of the school in October. Last autumn, teachers' strikes won mass support from students, who feared the impact of the cuts being imposed, as well as the government's overall assault on education. By late September, more than 100 schools nationally, including Keratsini High School, were under occupation by their students.

The school is in the same suburb where anti-fascist

hip-hop musician Pavlos Fyssas was stabbed to death by a member of the fascist Golden Dawn group in September 2013. During his funeral, students interrupted their lessons nationwide to commemorate Fyssas.

More recently, on January 31, around 4,000 participated in an anti-fascist protest of mainly young people in Keratsini, at the scene where Fyssas was killed.

This is the context of growing social unrest and radicalisation of young people in which the police arrived at Keratsini High School, where they took five children, out of seven children on a list that had been provided to them, to a local police station.

Among the questions the children were asked at the station were, “What do your mother and father vote? What jobs do your parents do? How is your family's financial situation? Which of your teachers were in favour of your strike action [school occupation]? Why did you go on strike? Were you abetted by teachers or a political party?”

The newspaper reported, “It is noteworthy that one of the students made a statement without his parents being present.”

The interrogation of the schoolchildren at Keratsini also revealed that the Ministry of Public Order & Citizen Protection is attempting to enlist the assistance of the education authorities in their surveillance operations. Efimerida Ton Syntakton added, “While the children were horrified by the interrogation they were subjected to at the police station, parents and teachers were overtly annoyed with the lyceum headmistress who gave a total of seven names to the police. Prior to this, she had telephoned the station the previous week to give names of students that had taken part in the student occupations last October. In contrast,

the headmaster of the Gymnasium that shares the same grounds refused to notify the police authority in a similar fashion.”

SYRIZA, the Coalition of the Radical Left, stated that the Keratsini incident was sanctioned at the highest level. It reported, “The preliminary investigation that saw underage students taken into the Keratsini police station...was ordered by a written request by the Supreme Court’s prosecutor’s office to the Piraeus Appeal Prosecutors and subsequently to the Head of the Piraeus prosecutor’s office.” *Efimerida Ton Syntakton*’s investigative report uncovered a circular from the General Attica Police Authority (GADA), revealing that the operation was part of a coordinated effort. The document contained the following instructions:

“Full documentation of all school units within GADA’s jurisdiction and submit these to the relevant subdivisions in excel format.

“Arrange personal contacts and meetings with the principals of the above schools in order to record existing problems and needs during school operations as well as the collection of any requests that will be submitted by them and are within the remit of the Ministry of Public Order and Protection of Citizens in general and of the Police specifically.

“Drawing up of in-depth reports for the above and the submissions of their views of these to the relevant police subdivisions.”

The police response to the leak was an attempt to justify it by claiming the operation was about “the protection of young people from various dangers such as drugs, criminality (i.e., attacks against pupils to violently extract mobile phones and money), pupil victims of traffic accidents, all of which constitute a duty of care for the police.”

Such lies are contradicted by the overt political nature of the operation in which schoolchildren were asked a number of questions, of a very specific character, relating to their political views, activities and affiliations, as well as those of their teachers and families. A SYRIZA parliamentarian revealed that the pupils were pressured by police officers to give the names of their peers who took part in the school occupation.

On February 17, a protest against the police operation was held outside the offices of Piraeus’s public prosecutor. Among those participating were

schoolchildren, students and youth, as well as the Keratsini-Drapetsona Parents’ Association and other parents’ associations from Piraeus. The local teachers’ union held a two-hour walkout, allowing teachers to attend the demonstration. Those in attendance carried placards with slogans including “The struggle continues” and “Terror will not pass”. Many of the youth chanted slogans in opposition to the government’s moves to criminalise their right to protest.

Following the outcry against the police operation, the prosecutor’s office announced, without explanation or apology, that it had “archived” the case and no further action would follow. Prior to that, at least one media outlet had reported that children might face charges and possibly a court case.

Repression and outright criminalisation of the right to protest is being stepped up, in order to impose mass poverty against millions of people. The full force of the state has been used to crush strikes, and laws that were last used during the 1967-1974 rule of the military junta have been resurrected to enable this. Subway staff, refuse workers, truckers, workers at state broadcaster ERT and university staff have been forced to end strikes and protests due to brutal repression.

Such draconian measures, sanctioned at the highest levels by the government at the behest of the troika, must of necessity target young people who are systematically denied any future and access to decent education, health care and a job and have joined the numerous protests over the last years.

Students have conducted protests at universities around the country, both in defence of their right to an education and in solidarity with university staff who are being sacked as part of thousands of job losses throughout the public sector. In November 2011, Greek police made their first raid on a university since the fall of the military junta.



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