

Greece's New Democracy party seeks to overturn law protecting students from police repression

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The proposal by Greece's new Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, a member of the right-wing New Democracy (ND), to end the country's Academic Asylum law must be taken as a serious warning by the Greek working class. The Greek ruling class is preparing the grounds for a dictatorial state reminiscent of Greece's 1967-1974 junta, from whose bloody legacy the law was born.

The law, put in place in 1982, bars police from entering university campuses. Police can only enter campus grounds if given permission by university administrators. The law guarantees students protection from arrest or state brutality. Such a law exists nowhere else in Europe.

The law was put in place in response to the brutal murder by the US-backed military junta of at least 23 students and pedestrians, including a five-year-old boy, during the uprising at the Polytechnic University in Athens, now called the National Technical University of Athens, on November 17, 1973. On that day, the third day of protests, students launched a strike under the slogan of "bread, education, freedom." Students were calling for the downfall of the Greek military junta, led by CIA-connected George Papadopoulos, which had taken power in 1967. That day, tanks and soldiers would come crashing through the university's gates and carry out the slaughter.

November 17 is marked annually by demonstrations of youth and workers throughout Greece in remembrance of the victims of the Greek military dictatorship.

In 2011 the law was scrapped under the PASOK government, and for the first time since the collapse of the junta in 1974, Greek police entered university

campuses on November 17 of the same year, a day marked by Greece's largest protests in years. That evening, police entered the campus of Aristotle University after chasing a group of youth into the grounds.

The Syriza government, led by former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, reinstated the asylum law in 2017. This cynical ploy, two years after Syriza took power, was done knowing full well the law could easily be overturned by successor governments in the near future, something of a certainty given the deep hostility by the Greek working class to Syriza at the time.

After coming to power on the promise that it would fight austerity measures, and receiving the undying adulation of pseudo-left groups like the Democratic Socialists of America and *Jacobin* magazine, Syriza betrayed the Greek masses and implemented the austerity diktat of the European Union (EU). The Greek working class, students and youth were thrown to the wolves. Youth unemployment reached devastating levels and today stands at 40 percent, while Greece's adult population suffers 18 percent unemployment. This is in addition to the ending of universal health care and the slashing of incomes and public pensions.

Syriza also oversaw the strengthening of the police apparatus, which it brutally unleashed on Greek workers and students during protests. At the same time, the Syriza government corralled helpless refugees fleeing from war and certain death into concentration camps, in which many still languish today. Syriza's embrace of state repression found its sharpest expression with Tsipras's flowering relationship with the butcher of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, military dictator General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

The right-wing ND is only intensifying Syriza's repressive measures. After it defeated the pseudo-left party in the legislative elections earlier this month, new Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis (ND) promised to increase state violence and repression. He said, "We will strengthen the police, which has to do its job well. We have to protect policemen, while there has to be more police activity in the centre of Athens. For the next government security is a political priority ... Police commanders of precincts that go into hostile areas will be rewarded."

Mitsotakis is putting forth the lie that the Asylum law has allowed university campuses to become festering centers of violence and drug use. He said, "We want universities where students and teachers aren't afraid; universities that we are not ashamed of ... I pledge that no space will be occupied in our public universities. The gangs that today exist there will be eradicated."

In reality, Mitsotakis, representing the aims of the Greek ruling class, wants to strip away protections from the working class and students that would prohibit the ND government from violently repressing, or as Mitsotakis bluntly put it, "eradicating" demonstrations and strikes by students and workers. This aim is also bound up with the fact that campuses have also been used by refugees as shelters from the Greek police.

In every country the ruling class is responding to the growing revolutionary challenge from below with a sharp shift to the right and toward dictatorial measures. The threat to scrap the Academic Asylum law comes at a time of growing class tensions that have seen a wave of explosive protests and strikes.



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