Wave of school occupations in Greece demanding safe classrooms and opposing attacks on education

Robert Stevens
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A wave of school occupations has broken out in Greece to demand safe classrooms, and to protest attacks on education by the New Democracy government.

Occupations have taken place at many high schools and especially in lyceums in the most populated area of the country—Attica, which includes the capital, Athens, and other town and cities on the mainland and islands including Thessaloniki, Patras, Volos, Lamia, Chania, Heraklion and Rethymno.

Students are demanding smaller classes and an end to the 50%+1 protocol under which schools will only close classes if a there is one person more than half the class who has COVID. They insist on free and frequent rapid tests in schools for all children, and not just self-tests, and recruitment of the necessary cleaning staff. Students also demand the recruitment of more teachers.

A central demand is for the abolition of the minimum admission system for university qualification. This was passed by the right-wing government in February and establishes a minimum entry requirement for university and a maximum graduation term. It requires students on most courses to complete their degrees within six years.

As in all countries, children have been sent back into school with hardly a mitigation measure to prevent them getting COVID. The TOC newspaper's web site reported Wednesday that 4,026 cases, almost a third (29 percent) of all new cases recorded in Greece for the week September 20-26, were aged 4-18 years. This was an increase of 21 percent among that age group in just one week.

A statement published Saturday by the Athens Students' Coordinating Committee, which has organised many of the protests, denounced government lies that pupils would return to safe classrooms. "The first weeks of school operation have proven that the government's big words that 'schools will operate normally this year' are fairy tales." The statement added, "You have returned us to an oppressive stressful school. We are running from school to tutorials, from tutoring to studying to make up for the huge gaps we all have."

In the summer Kyriakos Mitsotakis' government passed a law under which the country's 180,000 schoolteachers can be required to hold all classes online, from pre-school nurseries to sixth forms preparing for university entrance exams. Refusal to participate can lead to teachers and pupils, many of whom do not have the necessary equipment, being victimised. This law is now being used against schoolchildren and teachers who are supporting the occupations and are being deemed absent from class.

The statement continued, "You have chosen to gamble again with life and our right to education! Get ready to face us again this year! Let's go! The government thinks it has found a new 'trick' to terrorize us: Running webex [the digital platform set up for remote learning] when a school is being occupied. (By the way, you didn't care about running webex so much last year when students didn't have microphones, cameras, etc., nor do they care about students getting sick with Covid now…"

The organisation has called national protest for October 11. It said in reference to the suppression by the government against a mass movement of pupils occupying school nationally a year ago to oppose unsafe classrooms, "Let us remind you that last year you brought us prosecutors, police, threw chemicals at

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us, arrested students and still didn't stop us."

The statement called for "parents and teachers to fight together! Student Councils, Parents' Associations and Associations of Teachers".

There is widespread support for the students' fight among teachers. At a General Assembly of the OLME teachers trade union on September 25, as the occupations were escalating, delegates voted to back the student occupations. Expressing the sympathy of rank and file- teachers, by 92 percent they ratified a proposal to strike, or abstain from tele-education, where there are already student occupations underway. By the same margin, they voted in opposition to the Ministry of Education's stipulation that teachers be assessed for their performance.

Occupations began Friday and by Tuesday had spread throughout the country. On Tuesday, ERT reported that 19 schools were occupied in Thessaloniki.

TOC reported, "In Veria [in northern Greece], the 1st 2nd and 4th Lyceum, the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th Gymnasium are closed due to occupation, while for a short time the students of the Music School and the 3rd Lyceum of Veria were also occupied."

"Many secondary schools in the Peloponnese are under occupation. Already in Tripoli… the 1st Gymnasium - Lyceum, the 2nd Gymnasium—Lyceum, the 3rd Lyceum, the 4th Lyceum and the EpAL [Vocational Lyceum] of Tripoli are under occupation."

The website reported that "the 3rd high school of Sparta is under occupation since today, Monday 29 September."

In Corinthia, the Gymnasium and Lyceum at three schools, Zeugolati, Vrachati and Velos were occupied.

Between Friday evening and Monday morning 24 schools were occupied in Epirus. TOC reported, "According to the data available so far, eleven schools in Arta, seven in Giannina, two in Preveza and four in Thesprotia are under occupation." It noted that in Giannina, "The students are raising demands related to pandemic measures and issues related to school infrastructure."

TOC also reported that in the Magnesia region of Greece, of which Volos is the capital, eight schools were occupied, "with students raising many issues, mainly about the coronavirus measures."

In the regional unit of Phthiotis in central Greece, pupils at the 7th Gymnasium of Lamia began occupying on Tuesday morning. The presented demands including that self tests be available for all and that masks must be used. TOC reported that "they demand that the class be closed when a student becomes ill…"

Many schools on Greece's islands were occupied, with at least seven under occupation in Corfu. In Crete, data from the Department of secondary of education confirmed that the occupation had hit 14 schools in Heraklion. The goodnet web site reported that schools occupied included, "1st, 2nd ,4th middle School, high School, Panormos, high School of the Diocese, the high school Spili, high school Anogia, —1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th YELL county, the Experimental secondary school, Music School, the 1st and 2nd EPAL."

The occupations to demand safe classrooms, in the middle of a pandemic in which the youngest in society are being infected on mass are part of a growing movement internationally against the homicidal policies of the ruling elite. It is significant that these demands are being made alongside ones to demand more spending on education and on the recruitment of teachers.

On Friday October 1, parents in Britain and internationally are holding school strike and refusing to send their children into unsafe schools, following a proposal by British parent and campaigner Lisa Diaz. The *World Socialist Web Site* urges parents, teachers and pupils in Greece to support this strike and to send your messages of support here.

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