

Greece's largest ever protests and general strike demand justice for Tempi rail crash victims

Robert Stevens
28 February 2025

Greece saw a huge show of strength by the working class and youth Friday, with hundreds of thousands taking part in the largest protests in the nation's history. They were on the streets of the capital Athens and every other city and town to demand justice for the 57 people who died in the 2023 Tempi train crash and an end to a government cover-up.

The protests were supported by demonstrations at more than 100 Greek embassies and consulates internationally, across all six inhabited continents.

Marking the second anniversary of the February 28, 2023 deaths, the protests were called by the Association of Relatives of Tempi Victims and were even larger than those it called at the end of January. Forced to recognise the mass oppositional mood, the ADEDY public sector trade union federation and the private sector General Confederation of Greek Workers called general strikes.

Fully 265 protests were held in Greece and 112 internationally—almost 400 in total. Major international rallies included Berlin, Germany; London, Edinburgh and Manchester in the UK; Rio de Janeiro in Brazil; New York and Boston in the US; and Sydney, Australia. An online map co-ordinating the protests was viewed more than 1.8 million times.

Participation in the latest Tempi demonstrations is larger than anything the unions can, or would ever consider, mobilising, threatening the downfall of the conservative New Democracy (ND) government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

According to one estimate almost 430,000 people protested in Athens. Every inch of the city's main Syntagma Square was filled and its adjoining streets were packed with protesters. The rally was set to assemble at 11 a.m., but the square was already full not long after 8 a.m. The daily *Efimerida ton Syntakton* (*The Newspaper of the Editors*) noted that masses of people were unable to get anywhere near Syntagma, with the protest stretching as far as a kilometre away in Omonoia Square and, in another

direction, the Propylaea.

Many brought homemade placards and banners condemning the government as “murderers” for overseeing the preventable deaths. Among the slogans chanted and on other placards were “I have no oxygen” and “Privatizations kill.”

“I have no oxygen” were the last gasping words of a young woman passenger who called the 112 European emergency number to report the crash, after the train she was on collided with a freight train. This caused a massive fireball, with bereaved families convinced this was due to the freight train carrying an illegal cargo of flammable material—a fact covered up by the government.

Even the police, notorious for underplaying the size of demonstrations in Greece, said there were over 170,000 people just in Athens, and 325,000 people on the streets nationwide.

Greece has seen many widely supported general strikes since the imposition of mass austerity by successive government beginning in 2008. But the scale of the protests over Tempi and the latest general strike are magnitudes larger, as the entire country was brought to a standstill.

A similarly enormous protest was held in the second-largest city, Thessaloniki.

The strikes began the evening before, as Coca Cola workers walked out at a factory near Athens. Transport came to a halt as international and domestic flights were grounded by air traffic controllers, with trains, trams and bus services stopping. Seafarers, train drivers, doctors, nurses, teachers and lawyers all struck. Government offices closed, along with many shops and businesses, and hospitals only opened for emergencies. Even some of the most upmarket cafes, restaurants and bars closed due to the mass mobilisation.

The only transport running in Athens were trains to get protesters to the central squares. Even this was barely possible, with *Ef Syn* reporting, under a headline “This has never happened before!”, that “metro stations have been

flooded with thousands of people. The National [main motorway] is suffocatingly full, the trains have increased their schedules in order to serve the people who want to get off in the center, but people cannot fit into the carriages.”

The newspaper editorialised:

A huge social “tsunami” has formed that is not limited to mourning. It is not satisfied with honoring the memory of the 57 victims of the crime in Tempi, passengers and workers on the fatal trains. But it wants truth, vindication, punishment of the real culprits.

The authorities did everything possible to disrupt the protests and prevent people reaching the squares, even closing the Metro stations at Syntagma and Panepistimiou. A massive contingent of over 5,000 police officers, including riot police, was mobilised to confront the protesters—a substantial proportion of the 65,000 who make up the Hellenic Police nationwide. After several hours, and with the crowds growing, riot police used tear gas and stun grenades in Syntagma square, forcing demonstrators to disperse. APE-MPE photojournalist Orestis Panayiotou was injured in the head by a police stun grenade.

Among dozens of arrests made by police were 25 protesters who climbed onto the roof of the Hellenic Trains headquarters and unfurled a banner reading “Murderers.”

Many thousands refused to be cowed and returned to Syntagma to continue protesting. Thousands more came back into the square later Friday evening to protest. Speaking to the Reuters news agency, protester Evi said she was there to mourn the dead, “but also because the government has tried to cover things up.” Christos, a musician said, “The government hasn’t done anything to get justice... This wasn’t an accident, it was murder.”

In her speech to the crowd in Syntagma, Maria Karystianou—who lost her 21-year-old daughter Marthi in the crash and who is the president of the Association of Relatives of Tempi Victims—faced the parliament building and said, “I am addressing the murderers of our children. You treated our dead with disrespect and contempt. Human parts and bones of our children remain unburied in hidden locations. You have committed the ultimate sacrilege, and you will receive what is due through the vengeance of the dead.”

The anger of millions was spurred by the release on Thursday of a long-awaited report into the disaster by the Hellenic Air and Rail Accident Investigation Authority (HARSIA). Many details in the report shatter the

government narrative and its cover-up.

The report states, “It is impossible to determine what exactly caused [the fireball], but simulations and expert reports indicate the possible presence of a hitherto unknown fuel.” The government has long denied that any fuel was onboard the freight train, maintaining the fiction that a gigantic fireball, 80 to 100 metres in length, that engulfed the passenger train carriages after the collision was produced by silicone oil on the train transformers.

At the presentation of the report the investigators noted that ‘the site autopsy was not done properly, in order for us to then determine the fuel that caused the fireball’.

In the face of Friday’s massive protest, Prime Minister Mitsotakis issued a provocative and self-serving statement declaring the crash was down to “human errors” and “chronic failings of the state,” while refusing to take any responsibility for the mass deaths on his watch.

The mass eruption of anger over Tempi—which has brought to the surface opposition to the attacks that have been implemented against the working class over decades by capitalist parties of all political stripes—may now see not just Mitsotakis’ own downfall, but that of his government. The entire rotten political set-up in Greece is implicated.

Next week, after months of prevarication, Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), will join the social-democratic PASOK in presenting a joint no-confidence motion against the government.

The pseudo-left Syriza, in power from 2015 to 2019, deepened an austerity offensive against the working class without precedent on the European continent. As part of a privatisation spree, Syriza sold off in 2017 the state railway network, TrainOSE, for just €45 million, leaving an already under-resourced railway service to the profiteers, with rail workers forced to rely on antiquated technology, including manual signalling systems.

As the WSWS noted, “Post-privatization, Greece’s rail network is one of the most dangerous in Europe. From 2018 to 2020, according to the European Union Agency for Railways, Greece recorded the highest railway fatality rate per million train kilometres among 28 European nations.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact