

# Mass protests over Tempi train crash deepen political crisis in Greece

**Katerina Selin****16 March 2025**

The mass movement of young people and workers that broke out two years after the Tempi train crash is shaking the ruling class in Greece. Faced with the biggest protests in the country's history, the government is hanging on by a thread. While the trade unions are trying to keep the movement under control, the opposition parties are reacting with various manoeuvres in parliament.

On March 7, the government of the right-wing Nea Dimokratia (ND) survived a vote of no confidence by a narrow majority. Of the 300 MPs, 157 voted for the government, 136 against. Seven were absent, including far-right party Spartiates and the former Prime Minister of ND, Antonis Samaras.

After the general strike and the biggest protests in the history of Greece at the end of February, tens of thousands of demonstrators have again protested in recent weeks, demanding "truth and justice" for the 57 victims of the train disaster in 2023. Railway workers held rallies; in Athens, police used tear gas and batons against protesting youth in Syntagma Square.

On Wednesday, an event was held at the Panton University in Athens at which Maria Karystianou, the mother of a Tempi victim and member of the Association of Tempi Relatives who initiated the protest movement, also spoke.

On Thursday morning, students protested in Athens and Thessaloniki. That evening, thousands gathered with posters and banners at an open-air concert in Syntagma Square in memory of Tempi. The students had called for the event with the following words: "A song for the people who lost their lives in the trains. ... We will go on to the end! Either their profits or our lives!"

A recent survey by Greek opinion research institute MRB also shows widespread dissatisfaction among the population. The majority of those surveyed (72.2 percent) regarded the train crash as a crime, not as an accident; 78.5 percent doubted that the government was committed to solving the Tempi accident, and 57.5 percent were in favour of early new elections. There were 70.3 percent who even endorsed the statement that all trains should be shut down for as many years as it takes to restore the necessary safety to the railway.

The ND government responded to the pressure by reshuffling the cabinet. The new ministers were announced on Friday and sworn in on Saturday. According to leading daily *Kathimerini*,

government circles are talking about a "significant new beginning" because some younger politicians are getting important posts. But in reality, it is a desperate attempt by the government to create a more stable cabinet with some cosmetic changes to quell working class resistance. The fact that the key posts of foreign and defence ministers remain unchanged also demonstrates the continuity of military support for the war in Ukraine and Israel's genocide in Gaza.

In some appointments, the cabinet reshuffle signals a further shift to the right. Former Economy and Finance Minister Kostis Hatzidakis, who has enforced the profit interests of corporations and banks against Greek workers, is now being promoted to Deputy Prime Minister. Transport Minister Christos Staikouras is resigning and will be replaced by Christos Dimas (formerly Deputy Finance Minister); his new deputy, Konstantinos Kyranakis, is said to be responsible for the reform of the rail network. Dimas and Kyranakis are both young ND careerists.

As the new migration minister, Makis Voridis, a notorious far-right hardliner, will lead the government's anti-refugee policies. Ultra-right health minister Adonis Georgiadis, who has drastically cut the health budget during his career, retains his post. Right-wing Labour Minister Niki Kerameos, who as former education minister triggered mass protests by teachers and students against the government's deadly lockdown policy during the first phase of the pandemic, also remains in office.

Another change at the political top took place on Thursday. Konstantinos Tasoulas was sworn in as the new president, an office which has primarily a representative function in Greece. At the same time as he was sworn in, relatives of the Tempi victims filed a lawsuit against Tasoulas. They accused him of having been actively involved in the cover-up of the Tempi disaster in his previous role as parliamentary speaker, for example, by not passing on lawsuits against individual politicians and keeping silent about them.

Last week's vote of no confidence was tabled by the largest opposition party, PASOK, in collaboration with Syriza, the Syriza splinter groups Nea Aristera and Pleski Eleftherias, and nine independent MPs. During the three-day parliamentary debate, these parties posed as the voice of the protest movement and the "left" opposition to the right-wing ND.

PASOK leader Nikos Androulakis accused Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of criminal responsibility for the train crash. The head of the pseudo-left Syriza, Sokratis Fanellos, denounced the cover-up and declared: “The real dilemma is whether we should allow Mr Mitsotakis to lead Greece into chaos.”

With this statement, Fanellos made clear what Syriza’s real concern is. It is not about the investigation of the Tempi crime, for which Syriza is partly responsible due to the privatisation of the railway operator during its time in office. Rather, he does not want Mitsotakis to “lead the country into chaos,” by which Fanellos means the danger of a revolutionary development in the working class that could shake not only the government but the entire ruling class. The role of PASOK, Syriza and their various offshoots is to save the capitalist order and prevent the mass movement from spreading.

Another of Fanellos’ concerns is that Greece needs domestic calm in order to play a more influential role in foreign policy in view of the present world situation. At a meeting of Syriza’s Political Secretariat during the weekend, the party leader stated:

Geopolitical instability is intensifying the demand for a change of government. Our country is absent from important international decisions and developments. A strong security policy requires a strong foreign policy and a strong society. The government is not serving any of these needs.

A special parliamentary committee of 27 MPs (14 from ND, three from PASOK, two from Syriza, one from each of the other parties) has also been convened this week to supposedly investigate the allegations of a cover-up of the train crash by former minister Christos Trianopoulos in the Prime Minister’s Office.

No one should have any faith in a committee of inquiry that includes the very parties that were complicit in the crime and belong in the dock. This manoeuvre is designed to delay the real investigation into the Tempi accident and continue the cover-up. It is a farce with a clear political objective: to bring the anger of the streets under control and lead the movement into a cul-de-sac.

The criticism of ND by the “left” opposition parties and their feigned sympathy for the Tempi victims is window dressing. Their empty words cannot hide the fact that the same parties created the very conditions that led to the train crash.

The social democratic PASOK, which was already tanking politically and only managed to win back some votes thanks to the right-wing policies of Syriza and ND, implemented the first rounds of austerity measures from 2009. In the May 2012 election, PASOK was historically punished: It fell to 13 percent—from almost 44 percent in 2009. Nevertheless, it was

again included in the government and, together with ND, implemented the austerity dictates of the “Troika” of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

After PASOK and ND had become so hated that they could barely control popular resistance, it was the turn of Syriza. Riding the wave of protest in January 2015, it won a historic election victory and called a referendum on whether to implement another austerity programme demanded by its creditors. The clear “Ochi” (no) vote was immediately trampled underfoot by Syriza. In the following years, it implemented a rigorous austerity agenda and privatised the state railway operator Trainose in 2017. Having also been completely discredited, it lost the 2019 elections by a landslide and has since been languishing in the polls at around 6 percent.

Zoi Konstantopoulou’s party Plefsi Eleftherias (Course of Freedom) is currently still ahead of Syriza in the polls. She is trying to capitalise on the Tempi protests by presenting herself as a defender of the relatives and demonstrators. Konstantopoulou, a lawyer, was a leading Syriza member for many years and is the daughter of the former leader of the Syriza’s predecessor Synaspismos.

In January 2015, Konstantopoulou was elected to parliament for Syriza, and in February the same year she was elected as speaker of parliament. After the referendum in the summer, she joined the breakaway Syriza MPs in the new Popular Unity party (Laiki Enotita). A year later, she founded her own party, Plefsi Eleftherias, which advocates nationalist positions.

All of these parties offer no perspective for the working class but are an obstacle to its struggle for justice and better living conditions. While they claim to stand on the side of the protesters, they defend the capitalist system, which is the cause of the Tempi disaster and social decline.

As the WSWS emphasised in a recent commentary, workers and youth must turn away from these bankrupt organisations and their affiliated trade unions and turn to an international socialist perspective and strategy. This requires the formation of rank-and-file action committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the establishment of a Greek section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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