

General strike in Greece to demand higher pay, end to austerity, and justice for Tempi rail crash victims

Robert Stevens
9 April 2025

Workers in Greece held a general strike on Wednesday hitting every sector of the economy. It was called by the two main trade union federations with demands for higher pay and a reversal of austerity measures in the face of sky-rocketing living costs.

It was preceded on Tuesday by a 24-hour strike by journalists in the public and private sectors called by the Panhellenic Federation of Editors' Unions. Among their demands was for a starting salary of €1,250 euros across all media.

Tens of thousands of workers demonstrated Wednesday in the capital Athens, second city Thessaloniki, and other major urban areas.

Metro, Tram, and Electric Railway (ISAP) ran from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to facilitate access to and from protests in Athens. Much of public transport ground to a halt in the capital with train services, including the suburban railway (Proastiakos), completely suspended. Seafarers backed the action with ferries remaining in port. Also backing the strike were municipal workers, members of the POE-OTA union.

Schools closed with primary and secondary education teachers participating. Students joined the strike to protest education cuts and private universities.

Health workers participated, with public hospitals dealing only with emergency incidents. This followed a 24-hour stoppage by members of the Panhellenic Federation of Employees in Public Hospitals (POEDIN) on March 19 across public hospitals in Athens.

Flights were grounded as air traffic controllers joined the strike. Also striking were members of the Panhellenic Federation of Food and Tourism Workers (POEET).

Rallies with thousands participating were held in Athens' main squares. The main trade union federations held separate rallies in Syntagma Square, and Klafthmonos Square, while the Stalinist Communist Party's All Workers' Militant Front (PAME) union federation gathered at Propylaea. In Thessaloniki, strikers assembled at the Venizelos Statue.

The main demands of the ADEDY public sector trade union federation were: "for the implementation of measures to tackle the high cost of living and housing crises; Immediate proper increases of wages in the public sector; For the government to legislate the return of the 13th and 14th salary in the public sector." This last demand refers to holiday bonuses for civil service workers that were sacrificed by Adedy's affiliated unions during the brutal austerity imposed by successive governments since 2010.

The strike call by the private sector General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) stated that Greece was the "last but one" country "in the whole of the European Union in terms of purchasing power with a large section of citizens spending more than 40% of their income on housing and heating."

While the ADEDY and the GSEE ensured that the strike's main demands were over economic issues, it was held just 41 days after the February 28 general strike and mass protests to demand justice for the 57 victims of the 2023 Tempi train crash.

February 28 saw the largest strikes and protests in Greece's history. The movement for justice over Tempi contains the opposition of the working class to 15 years of brutal austerity by the ruling conservative New Democracy (ND), and the supposed opposition parties,

the social democratic PASOK and Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left).

In this unprecedented situation, Adedy's leadership began its call for the strike by making clear its overriding objective of preventing a challenge by the Greek working class to capitalism. It declared that justice over Tempi, an end to the cover-up and the punishment of those responsible for the crime was "also a demand for the rule of law, participation of citizens in decision making, social control and accountability and ultimately a deepening of democracy."

Despite the efforts of the union bureaucracy, Tempi remained very much in the air during Wednesday's general strike, with workers and youth bringing homemade placards to demand justice. The report of the *To Vima (The Tribune)* newspaper was headlined, "Mass Strike in Greece: Wages, Inflation, Tempi at Core". It cited the comments of Kostas, an education worker, who said: "I'm not prepared to see a government of murderers, who two years after Tempi we see that they continue this destructive policy with absolutely no accountability taken."

"And this is reflected in the reactions of the people, in the demonstrations, prominently, the February 28 demonstrations. And today's general strike is a continuation of that strike."

Workers gave vent to the increasingly desperate social crisis, as inflation remains at around 3 percent—higher than the European average—with millions suffering a real-terms fall in wages. A representative of private sector workers, Dina, told Reuters at the Syntagma Square demonstration in Athens, "The workers' salary only gets us through the 10th or the 15th day of the month, it cannot cover basic needs, such as housing and food, education and health."

In January, Greece's minimum salary was among the lowest in the European Union (EU) behind Portugal and Lithuania, according to Eurostat.

Kathimerini (The Daily) reported, "At 1,342 euros a month, the average gross salary still stands 10% lower than in 2010, when Greece signed up to its first [austerity] bailout, according to labour ministry data." It noted that Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis "has promised to bring the minimum wage up to €950 euros by 2027, as it targets an average gross monthly salary of €1,500 euros, closer to the EU average. But monthly

expenses for food, utilities and housing have been growing fast." Every worker knows this is a pipedream. The minimum wage increased in April from €830 euros a month to a still miniscule €880 for salaried workers. For wage earners, the daily wage increased from €37.07 to €39.30.

The pay of a newly graduated university educated nurse is just €863.82 a month, barely rising from 2011 when it was €803.92. For an assistant nurse monthly salary is just €736.61—*actually lower* than the €757.74 euro in 2011. Greece's hospitals, collapsing under the weight of austerity, need another 45,000 staff to function properly.

The upsurge of class struggle is also associated with growing opposition to the militarism of the ruling class at home and across Europe. Greece has long been one of the highest military spenders in NATO (reaching 3.5 percent), well above the 2 percent quota of GDP for military spending expected of NATO members. According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies, over the last 16 years of brutal austerity from 2008-24, Greece's ruling parties squandered a staggering €112 billion on the military.

Wednesday's general strike was held just days after the government announced an additional €25 billion in military spending over the next decade—a task that will require even more savage attacks on the working class.

The growing mood of resistance was summed up by a worker, Vagelis, who told *To Vima* at one of the Athens rallies: "We are striking for all those workers who didn't go home due to the 300 [plus] workplace accidents last year, we are striking against the increasing cost of living crisis, we are striking for better wages and we are striking against what is called the 'war economy', which is basically cutting money from our needs to fund wars respectively for their profits".



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact