

# Renewed general strike in Greece against the 13-hour day

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Last Wednesday, October 1, another general strike brought the whole of Greece to a standstill. Protests took place in 73 cities. With the 24-hour walkout, workers and employees were protesting against the new labour law introduced by the right-wing government under Nea Dimokratia (ND, New Democracy), which provides for longer working hours of up to 13 hours a day and further attacks on working conditions.

Doctors and hospital staff, teachers, taxi drivers, urban transit and rail workers, as well as seafarers and dockworkers took part in the strike. Not only trains but also ferries came to a halt, temporarily cutting the islands off from the mainland.

Demonstrators also expressed solidarity with Panos Routsis, who has been on hunger strike since September 15. His son died in the Tempi rail disaster in early 2023, the exact circumstances of which have been covered up by the state to this day. He is now demanding the exhumation of his son's remains and a forensic examination to determine the actual cause of death. The Tempi catastrophe, with 57 victims, triggered the largest mass protests in Greece since the financial crisis beginning in 2009.

Last week's general strike is part of a wave of strikes and protests across Europe. In Italy, more than two million people protested on Friday and hundreds of thousands the week before against the genocide in Gaza and the Israeli attacks on the Gaza aid flotilla. Workers at the Greek port of Piraeus also went on a 24-hour strike on Friday in solidarity with the Gaza flotilla. In France, workers have demonstrated against the government's austerity plans. Germany recently saw the largest demonstration to date against the genocide in Gaza.

In Greece, this is already the fourth general strike this year. In February, mass protests broke out on the second anniversary of the Tempi train disaster; in April there followed a general strike for higher wages; and at the end of August public-sector workers struck against a tightening of disciplinary law and the new labour act.

Only ADEDY, the umbrella federation of public-sector unions, had called the last strike. On Wednesday, the private-sector General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) also joined in, calling for a reduction of the workweek to 37.5 hours.

The new labour law is designed to intensify capitalist exploitation and cement it legally. As the WSWS has shown, most Greeks already have to hold down two jobs or more to make ends meet. The official abolition of the eight-hour day legalises the catastrophic working conditions that already exist and lead to

chronic overwork and a lack of workplace safety.

The 13-hour day in Greece could open the floodgates for similar labour laws across Europe. In Germany, Chancellor Friedrich Merz is already calling for longer working hours and is taking an axe to the welfare state. Greece, where the European Union has wrought social devastation in recent years, is to serve as a testing ground for other countries.

But as resistance in the working class to these social attacks grows, the unions are trying to contain, control and restrict it.

In its strike call, the GSEE warned: "In Greece, the average worker works 700 hours more per year than his European counterpart. The government's 13-hour day destroys family and social life, the right to rest and leisure."

What it omitted to say was that GSEE itself bears responsibility for the fact that Greek workers already put in so much overtime. For decades the union confederations have prevented an effective resistance to austerity from developing—one that would have to be organised across Europe and across all sectors. Instead, they have proclaimed isolated national "general strikes" that were nothing but pinpricks. Rather than stopping the government's austerity course, this union tactic accompanied and shored it up by channelling and dissipating the anger of workers, pensioners and students.

At the head of the union confederations stand long-time functionaries of the establishment parties, who for years have enforced austerity measures: Apostolos Mousios, head of ADEDY in the public sector, belongs to the ND-aligned union faction DAKE; Giannis Panagopoulos, the chair of GSEE, is a member of the social-democratic faction PASKE.

At the central rally in Athens, alongside union officials the leaders of the opposition parties also delivered their own press statements. Nikos Androulakis of the social-democratic Pasok warned that the new labour law would further worsen people's situation in the face of inflation and rising rents. Sokratis Famellos, head of the pseudo-left Syriza, declared that workers had "no future" with a 13-hour day, increasing workplace accidents and low incomes.

Not a word from these politicians should be taken at face value. Both parties—Pasok as well as Syriza—implemented the EU and International Monetary Fund austerity diktats during their time in previous governments, and thus prepared the ground for the right-wing ND to come to power. Today, they pose as critics and opposition; tomorrow, they would carry out exactly the same

social attacks as ND Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis because they serve the same interests of Greek and international capital.

## The ban on the air-traffic controllers' strike

As in the August strike, this time a Greek court also banned the strike by air-traffic controllers and other aviation employees in order to protect the airlines' profits. The ban affected the unions of air-traffic controllers (EEEKE), the civil aviation service (OSYPA) and aviation meteorologists (ENIMAEK).

In previous years, too, the government repeatedly prevented air-traffic controllers' strikes by court order. Yet the extension of working hours is especially disastrous for airport personnel, who already work under enormous time pressure and heavy strain. Air-traffic controllers, who coordinate and monitor air traffic at airports and in national airspace, play a central role in flight safety. If they make mistakes because of work overload, dangerous air accidents are bound to happen. The tightening of the law immediately puts human lives at risk in this area.

With fewer staff, outdated equipment and lower wages, air-traffic controllers in Greece monitor more flights per year than in Germany. Regulations stipulate between 22 and 28 flights per hour, but in the summer season it can be up to 39. Since 2022 they have been working permanent overtime, which the airlines have long factored into their planning. Most recently, this led to significant flight delays at Athens airport because controllers monitored "only" the prescribed number of flights.

Before the strike ban, Transport Minister Christos Dimas (ND) publicly attacked the controllers and spread the myth that they were paid excessively high salaries. The ministry is planning a restructuring of the civil aviation authority that will further restrict employees' rights.

But the air-traffic controllers' union EEEKE responded to the minister's attacks with pitiful press releases. It said it was "disappointed" and had been trying in vain since the beginning of September to obtain a meeting with the minister, who had merely referred them to his staff and the leadership of the civil aviation authority. The union complained: "Unfortunately it appeared that the leadership of the Hellenic Civil Aviation Authority and the ministry had already decided in advance not to hear our proposals, which in their entirety concern the implementation of European regulations."

Instead of declaring a fight against the government, the union defended itself against allegations of high pay and stressed that controllers worked significantly more productively at lower labour costs than those in other countries.

One might think that an organisation presenting itself as the "employee's representative" would, in the face of repeated strike bans in recent years and chronic understaffing, raise the alarm and mobilise broad support across all sectors and from air-traffic controller unions worldwide to organise protests and solidarity actions.

But nothing of the sort. In its press release after the strike ban,

EEEKE lamented the transport ministry's lack of "insight" and prostrated itself before the ND government. "We ask ourselves whether, in this democratic state, the constitutionally guaranteed right to strike actually applies to our profession, or whether the government believes we are not allowed to strike," it wrote.

The multiple strike bans answer this "question" sufficiently—but EEEKE folded its hands and said reassuringly, "We would like to point out in all directions that air-traffic controllers are doing their job, and more than that, and that the system has been functioning since 2022 to this day because of our overtime. Without this overtime, delays in the last three years would have been many times higher than today. We will continue to do our work as best we can, with flight safety non-negotiable. To solve the problem and avoid even greater delays from 2026 onwards, the ministry and the civil aviation authority must do their job."

EEEKE said it respected the court decision and was withdrawing the strike call, but would continue to "inform the public" and ostensibly advocate for modernising systems, more staff, better working conditions and compliance with European aviation regulations.

Hoping and praying that the government authorities would "do their job"—with such begging letters—the union fosters the illusion that it is in the government's interest to improve controllers' conditions. But the government "does its job" by serving the interests of the ruling class and the airlines, which means extracting the highest possible profits at the lowest labour costs. EEEKE conceals the class relations laid bare in this conflict. It seeks to lull its members with the eternal refrain that appeals to the minister and the state can win concessions.

The fact that controllers have been working permanent overtime since 2022, and thereby keeping operations going, is down to their union, which refuses to wage a real struggle.

Air-traffic controllers—like other workers in Greece—must build new fighting bodies: rank-and-file action committees independent of the pro-capitalist parties and unions, linked up with workers across Europe and worldwide through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

And they need their own party, a Greek section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which will develop the fight against the attacks on their social and democratic rights on the basis of a socialist perspective.



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