

Court proceedings begin in Greece over 2023 Tempi rail crash deaths

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Court proceedings over the deadliest rail crash in Greek history began on April 1, continuing on April 6.

The crash occurred on February 28, 2023, in the Tempi valley of central Greece, after a passenger train collided with a freight train, resulting in the horrific deaths of 57 people. Among those killed were many university students and 11 rail workers. The passenger train—going north from Athens to Thessaloniki—had been travelling on the wrong track for 12 minutes and 18 kilometers before it impacted with a southbound freight train.

Harrowing footage released in January last year indicated that 30 of the 57 victims were still alive for a period after the crash and died following a massive explosion.

The deaths were not an accident but a crime of capitalism. This act of social murder was made possible by the complete absence of safety on the rail network after years of cuts by successive austerity-imposing governments, culminating in the network's privatisation in 2017.

The disaster is still raw in the consciousness of Greek workers and youth. Millions took to the streets to demand justice in the initial and anniversary protests over the past three years in Greece and among the diaspora in Europe, the US and Australia. See [here](#), [here](#) and this year's protests [here](#).

36 people are being tried in the court case, including the three station masters who were on duty at Larissa station the night of the crash. The rest include 28 former executives and employees at Greece's state-owned Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE) rail network manager and its engineering arm ERGOSE, the railway regulator RAS, two high-ranking civil servants at the Ministry for Transport, and two former executives at Hellenic Trains (Greece's private rail operator owned by Italy's state-owned railway group).

Thirty-three of the defendants face felony charges related to dangerous interference with rail transport, which can lead to life imprisonment. The two Hellenic Trains executives and one Human Resources Manager at OSE only face misdemeanour charges.

Absent from the dock are any of the political figures who

oversaw Greece's railway network being turned into a death trap.

Both court sessions focussed primarily on procedural matters. With over 350 witnesses set to testify, the trial is expected to last up to three years. The next session is due for April 27.

The trial was initially set to begin on March 23, on the same day as a 24-hour rail strike took place, called by the Panhellenic Federation of Railway & Fixed-Track Transport Workers. However, proceedings were cut short after complaints by victims' families and lawyers over stifling and cramped conditions in the courtroom.

The court case is being held in the Geopolis conference centre of the University of Thessaly near the city of Larissa, not far from where the crash happened. However, after converting the Geopolis for this purpose the courtroom's capacity is just over 450 with nowhere near enough space. *Documento* reported, "'Shame' was the chant that dominated among the relatives of the 57 deceased, as there were only 120 seats available in the 283-square-meter courtroom. Among those standing were several of the 250 lawyers, as well as journalists; in fact, the bench requested that they leave due to lack of seating capacity, a request opposed by the victims' relatives."

Nothing was done in the week leading up to April 1 to rectify the situation, let alone find a more suitable venue. Instead, the government relied on an unprecedented show of force to control entry into the venue and silence any dissent from the families and their lawyers.

The father of one of the victims, Panos Routsis, was violently pushed by police, which required him to get medical attention. Outside the hospital where he was treated, Routsis said: "During a recess, while I was trying to speak with my lawyer, six policemen pushed me so violently that I felt dizzy, my blood pressure went up and I had palpitations."

Commenting on the large police presence, the President of the Association of Bereaved Families, Pavlos Aslanidis, stated that "there were around 15 policemen next to the

courtroom bench and in front of the presiding judge.”

Aslanidis said of the lack of space, “they have crammed us right at the back. The room could have been prepared a lot better. There are areas left and right that remain partitioned off for reasons that we don’t understand.”

Families are currently only able to confer with their legal teams during recesses. According to reports, some were unable to gain access to the main courtroom on April 1 and were directed to an adjacent room where they followed the trial via a screen.

In an interview to ERT, Antonis Psaropoulos, who is both a lawyer in the trial as well as the father of a Tempì victim, stated that “a fair trial cannot take place when the presence of its participants is restricted or allowed only in turns... there should be at least 500 to 600 people inside the courtroom.”

The heavy police presence and unsuitability of the venue are expressions of the utter contempt in which the ruling class holds the victims’ families.

The right-wing New Democracy (ND) government sees them as obstacles to its ongoing cover-up operation over Tempì, aimed at protecting the guilty. The official government line—a narrative immediately rejected by millions of people—was that the sole cause of the crash was the “human error” by the station master on duty that night.

Immediately following the tragedy, standard forensic protocols were bypassed and 300 cubic metres of soil was removed from the site of the crash and replaced by gravel.

Speaking to reporters outside the Gaiopolis, Vaso Pantazi, one of the lawyers representing the victims’ families, said: “For the first time, we have in our hands videos, photos, and drone footage that investigators took during the first hours after the crime, proving that the area was ‘gravelled up’, which is what the relatives have been shouting about from the very first moment.”

Seeking to capitalise on ND’s handling of Tempì, the pseudo-left Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance) issued a March 23 statement saying, “these images [of chaos in the courtroom] are not merely indicative of incompetence. They are testament to a policy that from the outset handled the Tempì crimes by downplaying it and covering it up.”

The fact is that Syriza is just as culpable for what took place at Tempì, given that *they* oversaw the 2017 privatisation of the railway as the governing party during 2015–19. Too busy selling off the railways and other public assets for a pittance to corporations, Syriza did next to nothing to implement the so-called “Contract 717,” a public works initiative aimed at modernising Greece’s archaic, decrepit rail signalling infrastructure.

The contract was initially signed in 2014 under the previous ND/social democratic PASOK administration and

was set to be completed by 2016. However, by 2017 only 32 percent of the work had been carried out under Syriza’s watch, with work subsequently stalling.

While ND claims that 80 percent of the work has now been completed, Greece still does not have a full nationwide remote traffic control system, with parts of the network still relying on manual signalling. This is the case in the Thessaly region, where Tempì is located, following widespread damage by storm Daniel in September 2023 to recently installed infrastructure.

Speaking last year on the implications, the President of the National Organization for the Management of Railway Safety and Transport Security (EODASAAM), Christos Papadimitriou, said, “My personal opinion is that those who delayed the implementation of Contract 717—and I am speaking of the senior leadership—have contributed decisively to the loss of these kids’ lives [at Tempì].”

The crime at Tempì has discredited all the main bourgeois parties. One of the main chants at demonstrations is: “Syriza, PASOK, New Democracy, this crime has a history!”

The political vacuum is reflected in the high polling of the new party, “We Begin – The Independent Citizens’ Movement”, launched on April 1 by Maria Karystianou, former president of the Tempì Victims’ Families Association. A poll conducted just before the April 1 announcement found that 17.8 percent would consider voting for it.

This put Karystianou potentially ahead of PASOK, which is currently polling at 12 percent, with ND ahead on 25.5 percent. Syriza, widely hated for the betrayals of the anti-austerity mandate it was elected on, has never recovered and struggles to reach 5 percent in the polls.



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