Greek workers strike over cost-of-living as Mitsotakis government pours billions into rearmament

Robert Stevens
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Greek public sector workers mounted a 24-hour nationwide strike against the conservative New Democracy government Wednesday. Called by the ADEDY civil servants' confederation, workers in 30 labour centres and over 10 union federations in some private sector industries also participated.

The labour centres are local trade union councils, which bring together unions from all industries in a city or region, while the federations involved are national bodies that organise workers by sector. Federations representing construction workers, food, milk and beverage workers, accountants, pharmaceutical workers and entertainment workers joined the strike, as did the Press and Paper Federation. Seafarers joined, with the PEMEN, Stefenson and PENEN unions calling a 24-hour strike that kept ferries in port across the country.

Greece's public hospitals, health centres and the EKAB ambulance service ran an emergency skeleton service. Hospital workers in the POEDIN federation and doctors in OENGE joined the strike. Ministries, regional and municipal offices, tax offices, social security services and citizens' service centres (KEP) were disrupted, with the municipal workers' federation POP-OTA among those taking part.

Many schools were affected as primary and secondary teachers walked out, and EYDAP water company unions joined. A court banned the OSYPA civil aviation federation from striking at the government's request. But civil aviation telecoms staff, who guide pilots at small airports without control towers, still walked out, cancelling 32 flights at 15 regional airports.

In Athens, the metro, electric railway and tram ran only between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., and suburban rail drivers held stoppages.

More than 70 rallies took place in over 60 towns and cities across the mainland and islands. In Athens, tens of thousands marched after gathering at Klafthmonos Square for the rally of ADEDY and the Athens Labour Centre. Thousands more organised by the All-Workers Militant Front (PAME), the trade union front of the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece (KKE), gathered at the Propylaea.

In Thessaloniki, thousands of workers rallied at the Venizelos statue before marching through the city centre.

Among those demonstrating in Athens was Dimitris, a university student nearing the end of an interior architecture degree. He also works in a furniture and model-making workshop.

Speaking to the *Orange Press Agency*, he explained, "The cost of living has skyrocketed, my salary runs out by the 15th of the month. We're young, we're entering the labour market, and we can't support ourselves or stand on our own two feet." He added, "We're here to demand the basics, to be able to live with dignity. Not to be paid poverty wages, not to run out of money. Simple things, nothing extraordinary."

ADEDY's main demands are for pay rises to make up for lost purchasing power and the restoration of the 13th and 14th monthly salaries for public employees, which were sharply reduced to fixed amounts in 2010 by the social democratic PASOK government. They were abolished in 2012 under the New Democracy–PASOK–Democratic Left coalition government.

ADEDY estimates public servants have lost €35 billion to €40 billion in income since 2012. Including the cuts made to pensioners' incomes, the total exceeds a staggering €50 billion. Proportionate to population, this would be the equivalent of stripping €400 billion from public sector workers and pensioners in Germany, €330 billion in France, £280 billion in Britain and more than $1.8 trillion in the United States.

Government spokesman Pavlos Marinakis said that restoring the 13th and 14th salaries would "cost €3 billion a year. We wish the money existed, but it doesn't." In August, the Council of State, Greece's highest administrative court, upheld their abolition, citing "fiscal stability."

The money *does exist* but is being shovelled into military spending at record levels. The strike took place as Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis presses ahead with the largest rearmament programme in Greece's modern history, with the country a key base for US and NATO wars. ND's 2027 budget, tabled last week, raises spending on weapons purchases to €4 billion, from €3.2 billion this year. The budget is part of a €25 billion, 12-year arms programme announced in April 2025.

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The walkout is the latest in a Europe-wide wave including the November 11 one-day general strike in Spain, 24-hour stoppages in France, Italy and Greece, and mass protests in Albania, Serbia, Belgium and Portugal.

Wednesday's strike followed the general strike in Italy last Friday against the Meloni government's budget of war and austerity. On Monday, a nationwide mobilisation in Belgium saw widespread strikes against the De Wever government's austerity agenda, as up to 70,000 marched in Brussels.

The determination of Greek workers and youth to fight is in stark contrast to a trade union bureaucracy desperate to hold back the growing militancy and anti-capitalist sentiment. After calling two one-day strikes earlier this year, and a limited stoppage in October, ADEDY again restricts its mobilisation to a single one-day action.

ADEDY is also to head off growing anti-war sentiment by confining its strike call to economic demands. In March, ADEDY called a rally against "the involvement of our country" in war. Its latest call, issued on November 17, lists 14 demands but says nothing about war, military spending or Greece's role in the US-Israeli war against Iran, Israel's genocide in Gaza or NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine.

Greece's largest union body, the private sector General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), refused to call out its members in support of public sector workers. A survey of 6,000 private sector employees by GSEE's own Labour Institute (INE GSEE), carried out in late 2025, found that 35.5 percent work beyond their normal hours. Of these, 34.5 percent were not paid for the extra hours, *The Press Project* reported.

The brutal conditions enforced on workers, including cuts in workplace safety, have led to a series of devastating deaths. Last year, the construction workers' federation OSETEE recorded 201 deaths at work, the highest in four years, *in.gr* reported. Research presented this week estimated that some 3,400 deaths a year in Greece are linked to the workplace.

Since February, GSEE President Yiannis Panagopoulos has been at the centre of an embezzlement and money laundering investigation. The Anti-Money Laundering Authority froze his assets in an investigation into €73 million in state and EU funding for training programmes.

The GSEE is run by factions loyal to the main parliamentary parties. At its congress in April, the faction led by Panagopoulos, aligned with PASOK, increased its vote to 42.89 percent and its seats on the governing body from 19 to 20. New Democracy's DAKE took eight seats.

The KKE holds a major position within this bureaucracy. Its Democratic Militant Cooperation (DAS) faction, part of PAME, came second at the GSEE congress, with 26.57 percent and 12 seats. Four DAS members sit on the GSEE Executive Committee alongside Panagopoulos.

In ADEDY, DAS is the largest faction on the 17-member Executive Committee, with five seats, against four for New Democracy's DAKE. DAS member Nikos Vourdoubas, president of the DOE primary teachers' federation, chairs ADEDY's General Council.

However DAS holds no senior officer posts in either confederation, allowing the KKE to share in running both bodies while keeping its distance from their decisions.

Such was the anger at the GSEE leadership's refusal to call strikes that labour centres across the country defied it, revealing the duplicitous role of the KKE. By early November, 23 labour centres and 11 national federations, many of them led by KKE supporters, had voted to strike. The KKE-aligned *Katiousa* reported that by November 23, this had risen to 29 labour centres, including the Athens Labour Centre, and 14 federations.

During the 2010–19 austerity offensive, the GSEE and ADEDY called dozens of one-day general strikes to allow workers to let off steam, while the bureaucracy collaborated with successive governments imposing ever deeper cuts. The unions assisted Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) into power in January 2015 and collaborated with it to the end. Imposing vicious austerity on behalf of the capitalist class, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, Syriza never restored the 13th and 14th salaries.

The struggle against the onslaught of the ruling elite in Greece and everywhere can only be successful when organised independently of the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) urges the formation of independent, democratically controlled rank-and-file action committees in every workplace.

The class struggle in Greece must be expanded in a joint offensive with workers across Europe, uniting them across industries and borders to prepare a European general strike. Greek workers must take up this fight, as part of building an international socialist movement against capitalism and war.

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