

Greek government outlaws teachers strike

By Robert Stevens
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The Greek New Democracy-led coalition government signed a civil mobilisation order Saturday in order to outlaw a teachers strike, scheduled to begin on May 17.

Prime Minister Antonis Samaras signed the decree after the OLME secondary school teachers union leadership had voted, the previous day, for the strike to go ahead. The union authorised another five-day strike from Monday May 20, pending agreement by its local chapters.

The Greek government is continuing a policy that effectively outlaws industrial action. Its policies are akin to those of the most naked dictatorship.

Civil mobilisation orders were originally only used in times of national emergencies such as earthquakes. But since the advent of mass austerity in Greece in 2008, the undemocratic legislation has been used exclusively to smash up any opposition by workers to their pauperisation. The order nominally drafts those workers targeted into the military, by conscription, and carries the threat of mass firings, arrests and jail sentences of up to five years for any who then resist or defy military discipline.

The decree sanctions the mobilisation of all 88,000 of Greece's secondary school teachers and comes into effect from 12 noon on May 15, ahead of the May 17 strike, scheduled to coincide with this year's university entrance examinations that 110,000 students are set to take. It is the first time that a civil mobilisation order has been imposed *prior* to a planned strike.

The New Democracy, social democratic PASOK, Democratic Left coalition are on a war footing. Every secondary school teacher in Greece faces the sack. As the order was signed, New Democracy spokesman Makis Voridis said he did not exclude the possibility of laying off those teachers who do not comply with the order.

This is the third time such an order has been used

against workers this year. In January the government issued a civil mobilisation order backed by hundreds of riot police who brutally smashed up a nine-day strike by Athens subway workers. This was followed by the extension of civil mobilization to 2,500 rail and tram workers, after they protested the suppression of the subway workers.

In July 2010, the then PASOK government, in order to carry out the first austerity programme demanded by the international banking elite and Greek super-rich, issued a civil mobilization order to break a strike of 33,000 truck drivers. In October 2011 it was used again to break a strike of refuse workers in Athens.

The dictatorial measures against the teachers follow the government's latest agreement with the "troika"—the European Commission, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank—to impose further attacks on the pay, terms and conditions of teachers, forcing them to work for two extra hours each week without pay. Around 10,000 teachers are also threatened with job losses due to a decision to reduce the number of substitute teachers.

The government has been able to mount such attacks solely thanks to the absolute refusal of the trade unions to mount any opposition. No civil mobilisation order has ever been defied by the unions, individually or by the GSEE and Adedy public and private sector federations. They have instead suppressed every manifestation of opposition to the troika, while calling numerous token 24-hour general strikes that have become less and less frequent.

The chief concern of the union apparatus, including OLME, whose leadership is comprised of bureaucrats affiliated to the main governing parties, has been to maintain cosy relations and their own privileges.

OLME, particularly the Co-operating Movements of Educators faction, is closely linked to the main opposition party SYRIZA (the Coalition of the Radical

Left) and has adopted a more militant posture. This culminated in its call for a strike to be held during the exams.

Following the signing of the civil mobilisation order, OLME also made a pro-forma call on the GSEE and Adedy to call another yet another general strike for May 17. This call is fraudulent, as it is directed to the very organisations that have played the key role in policing social discontent and maintaining the government in power.

OLME made clear that it never had any intention of waging a serious struggle against the order. The government proceeded to outlaw the strike unhindered because OLME had telegraphed its intention to surrender without a fight. Last Wednesday OLME President Nikos Papachristos said, “In the final analysis if the government decides to put us in khaki, we will return to schools with our heads held high and trade unionists will be able to look their colleagues in the eye.”

Papachristos is a member of DAKE (Democratic Independent Workers’ Movement), New Democracy’s trade union faction. On Friday evening he was removed from the party in order to send a message that no opposition will be brooked, however timid.

OLME in effect authorised a strike that it never intended to see through, using the threat of a civil mobilisation as an excuse to call off the action announced.

SYRIZA has played a critical role in facilitating the dictatorial move by the government. Prior to the mobilisation order being signed, it stated that it would back whatever course the union decided to take. However, as soon as the order was signed the party’s press secretary Panos Skouletis meekly declared that civil mobilisations were “something which harms democracy” and “ *should only be adopted in exceptional circumstances.* ” [emphasis added]

SYRIZA has officially sanctioned the future use of such draconian legislation by governing parties that have resorted to the measure again and again. Were it elected to office SYRIZA would not hesitate to do the same.

The latest events in Greece must serve as a clear warning to workers in Greece, throughout Europe and internationally. They follow the recent lockout of 70,000 teachers by the Danish government when they

refused to accept a drastic increase in working hours.

Governments across Europe are turning to ever more dictatorial methods of rule to break up opposition in the working class when it threatens to break from the confines imposed by the union leaders. In Greece the ruling class intends to outlaw strikes entirely.

While the ruling elite stop at nothing to achieve their aims, the working class is led by parties and trade unions that work as the covert partners of the enemy.

Repeatedly allowing the ruling class to get away with such bans and proscriptions and to continue with its austerity agenda raises grave dangers. Everything now depends on a break with the pro-capitalist trade unions and all the pro-austerity parties, including SYRIZA. What is required are not empty demands on the bankrupt and discredited GSEE and Adedy, but a mass mobilisation of the working class to bring down the hated coalition government, and its replacement by a workers’ government based on socialist policies.

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