

# Greece's 2014 budget lays out more social attacks

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Late on Saturday evening, the Greek parliament adopted the 2014 budget, which proposes further social cuts and mass lay-offs.

Strikes and protests against these plans are increasing. Employees at Athens University have resisted the trade union leadership and are continuing their strike into its 14th week.

The budget, which was accepted by 153 votes to 142, plans spending cuts of €3.2 billion as well as €2.1 billion of tax increases. The cuts are mainly in the health care system, which is already in a catastrophic state, and in social insurance. The tax intake is to be increased through raising the property tax, which affects many ordinary workers in Greece.

As in every year since the outbreak of the crisis, the budget is based on optimistic projections of economic development. Experts have virtually ruled out the possibility that the economy will achieve the projected growth rate of 0.6 percent next year, after six years of recession. The current year's social cuts will turn out to be much worse than presently estimated.

The parliament will hold an emergency vote on the property tax this week. In addition, a draft law to make repossession of small houses and apartments easier to implement is to be adopted.

The "troika"—the European Union (EU) commission, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Central Bank (ECB)—has made passing both laws a precondition for a long-delayed release of a €1 billion bailout payment.

Before the loan is made available, a series of state companies are to be closed down or massively reduced in size, including the arms and engineering firm EAS. The troika has cancelled additional visits this year and will only return to Athens in January to evaluate the progress of the cuts.

This includes not only the new budget cuts, but also the previously agreed mass layoffs which are a central component of the 2014 budget. According to agreements reached with the troika, the Greek government has to transfer 25,000 public sector workers into a so-called mobility reserve this year, and lay off 4,000 workers immediately.

There are still between 1,000 and 1,500 outstanding layoffs, and the opposition to the mobility reserve is intensifying, as it is most often simply a transition to unemployment.

Administrative workers at universities are fighting against the halving of personnel and the transfer of 1,400 employees into the reserve.

Administrative workers at Athens University and the smaller technical university have been on strike uninterruptedly for the past thirteen weeks. The operations of the universities could not continue, as students and teaching staff supported the administrative employees.

The education ministry has threatened to place the administrative workers under martial law on several occasions, and has ordered police to disband strike pickets. Courts have declared the strike illegal. Disciplinary proceedings have been initiated against the university rector Theodosios Pelegrinis because he solidarised himself with the striking workers. Nonetheless, the workers remained determined and continued the strike.

By contrast, the university workers' trade union (ODPTE) sought from the start to isolate the strike and to limit the solidarity action of other workers. Over the past week, the union leadership has tried to finally halt the strikes. The education ministry offered talks and cynically suggested that it would lay off fewer workers but then cut the pay of all workers to cover the costs.

At an assembly of the technical university last Thursday, the union leadership managed to win a majority for the ending of the strike and the starting of talks with the government. Subsequently, the ODPTE called on the halting of all strike activity across all universities.

Despite the threats of the government and the pressure of the unions, workers at Athens university decided on Monday to continue the strike until Wednesday and then to decide on its continuation. The university's law faculty remains occupied by students.

The social confrontation at the universities is the sharpest expression of a more general development. The trade unions are increasingly less capable of suppressing the struggles of the workers, and the state is responding with mounting brutality.

Doctors at outpatient clinics have been on strike for two weeks against layoffs and have decided initially to maintain the strike until December 13. Health minister Adonis Georgiadis threatened the doctors that he would implement the job cuts more rapidly if they do not end their protest. Hundreds of doctors gathered before the health ministry last Friday. On Thursday and Friday, employees of the ministry of culture—which is also responsible for state museums and archeological sites—went on strike.

Over the past week, police attacked protests by school janitors and cleaners who were demonstrating against the loss of their jobs outside the ministry for administrative reform. The demonstrations to commemorate the murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos in 2008 by the police were also the target of police violence.

The increasing brutality of the state is a direct reaction to the social devastation that the EU and Greek government have produced in the country. These conditions are not compatible with democratic rights for the population.

Last week, a thirteen-year-old girl died from carbon monoxide poisoning. Her unemployed mother's electricity had been turned off, and due to the high taxes she could not afford heating oil. She therefore attempted to heat the apartment with a makeshift coal oven. An 86-year-old woman died in the same week due to the same reason. She had built an improvised oven.

Two people were severely injured last Thursday in a

fire in their apartment, which had been caused by candles. Their electricity had also been turned off. Thousands of Greeks currently share the same fate, because they are unable to pay their bills. The government is in the process of discussing how to privatize the energy provider DEI while reducing energy costs for business.

The horrific unemployment rate of more than 27 percent has led to worsening working conditions that often border on slavery. According to a report, workers in a confectionary factory on Crete were beaten, burnt and humiliated. They received €3 per hour for shifts lasting fifteen hours.

An increasing number of jobs are offered on a voluntary basis, with workers receiving only board and lodgings but absolutely no remuneration. An additional 700,000 employees are not paid on time. There are an increasing number of cases in which sub-contractors, who are contractually obliged to pay a certain wage, go to their workers after the end of a shift and demand part of the wages back in cash.

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