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Greece

Greece: the mass movement is back on track!

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February 28 was a historic day for Greece. The general strike represented the biggest mobilization at least since the fall of the military junta, in 1974, if not in the history of the Greek state altogether. Unprecedented rallies took place in more than 260 cities, including dozens abroad, as far as Argentina, South Korea, and Australia.

On the same date, in 2023, a massive crash between a passenger train and a freight train cost the lives of 11 workers and 46 passengers, mainly youth. This was the fruit of a long process of degradation, accelerated after the national railway company was sold off to the Italian Ferrovie di Stato Italiano, as part of the privatization and divestment policies dictated by the economic adjustment programs of the Greek governments, the IMF, and the EU. Big demonstrations, and two massive general strikes, were organized at the time too. However, the union bureaucracy, including the Communist Party, refused to call for further strikes, and the mass movement retreated. A couple of months later, the right-wing government was re-elected by a stunning 41%, inducing frustration in large sectors of the left, who failed to see that it was just too soon for the implications of anger to be reflected on social consciousness. But the seed had been planted.

Recently, a clear case of cover-up was revealed, including the physical burry-up of evidence that could expose the company and state officials. A few weeks ago, on January 26, a call by the association of the parents of the victims for a rally outside the Parliament attracted several thousands of people in more than 200 cities in Greece and abroad. This changed the agenda. The National Confederation of public sector workers and radical primary or second-level unions of the private sector called for a strike on the anniversary of the crash. At first, the bureaucracy of the National Confederation of private sector workers refused to join the call, but pressure from below soon proved irresistible. They were forced to change their decision, so February 28 was a day of universal general strike.

On the way to the strike, it was evident that participation would be extraordinary. Arrogant and disrespectful statements by top ranks of the government made the situation even more explosive. And the volcano erupted. Almost nobody went to work, and almost nothing was operating. Participation in the demonstrations in every city is estimated from 25 to 40% of their overall population, with a very large proportion of youth among the protesters. In Athens, massive police repression was not successful to disperse the crowd for hours.

Very large petit-bourgeois layers were mobilized by the democratic demands for justice. However, it was the working class that played a major role. Most victims belonged to the working class, as it is mainly working-class people and university students who travel by train, given the shabby situation of the railway in the country. Accumulated anger about the erosion of the income of the working class has fueled the explosion further. The unions were the organizers, along with the association of parents, unlike what was initially the case with the Indignados movement, where much work had to be done for convergence with the organized workers. This happened despite the treacherous role of the national union of railway workers, totally controlled by the government, unlike the train driver primary union that asked for strikes from the beginning.

In the last few days, the government of Mitsotakis has shifted its line. They portray the strike as a day of national mourning, which is not to be exploited by the opposition. But it is too late to change the game. The government stays together only due to the lack of a credible opposition. But it would be very difficult to withstand a second strike.

All opposition, from the far right to the left, is supporting the movement, at least in words. But the far right, despite profiting from the crisis of the government, is unable to play an active role in the mobilizations. In January, a few far-right banners appeared before the rally, only to disappear as soon as it started. In the strike, the far right was

totally absent, unless undercover. In a couple of cases, fascists identified among the crowd were attacked by activists. It is only a defeat of the mass movement that can offer the far right the opportunity to divert anger in a reactionary direction.

It was therefore the banners and flags of the left that one could see in the rally. But it is also true that no parliamentary, center-left or reformist party suffices. SYRIZA lacks credibility because it was actually the SYRIZA government that sold the railway off. The social-democrats of PASOK have somewhat recovered in the last years, but don't appear to be profiting from the movement – besides, it is the only party that has voted for each and every austerity pact in the Greek crisis. The populist party of Konstantopoulou, a split from SYRIZA, is gaining ground in terms of opinion polls, but has absolutely no forces in the unions and the mass movement. The CP has substantial forces indeed – but it refuses to promote any radical demand, including the resignation of the government (raised even by PASOK) or the nationalization of railways.

No party is really leading the opposition. The current fragmentation of the political system, resembling the first years of the crisis, bears new opportunities.

Independent anticapitalist and revolutionary organizations, with their restricted but existing forces, play a significant role. They contributed to the pressure on the unions. They were well located in the frontline of the rally, before the platform of the speakers. They insist on the need to continue. While avoiding a sectarian stance in the face of the vast pluralism of the mobilizations, they maintain an independent outlook, seeking to propose a more radical orientation for the mass movement, underline its class nature, and provide the means for its self-organization. Nevertheless, to play this role, and to dispute the lead of reformists, requires overcoming our own limitations, programmatic immaturities, hesitations, or routines.

We need new milestones. The first one is the women's day that has already played this role in 2023, by mobilizing unions and the masses. We then need a new general strike. Building on similar past experiences, we need local people's assemblies in the neighborhoods and workers' united-front committees in workplaces. We need the movement to endorse clear demands: down with the government, nationalization of railways under workers' control, safe public and cheap transport, stop privatizations. And, finally, we need an orientation that this time will go further than the expectation for a government of the institutional left, that will only lead to mass disappointment.

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