

Economic crisis in Greece

Immigrants made scapegoats

THREE HUNDRED 'undocumented' immigrant workers began a hunger strike on 25 January, demanding documents and equal rights. The majority of them (240 people) travelled from Greek cities to Athens and occupied a section of the law department at Athens University, in which refurbishment works were taking place. The others travelled to Thessalonica.

Christina Ziaka,
Xekinima, (CWI Greece)

When the 300 immigrant workers decided to organise the hunger strike, they asked the Greek Left and anti-racist groups to build the solidarity campaign. Xekinima and its immigrant members' branch were involved from the very beginning.

Most of the '300' come from Maghreb countries in north Africa, and are fully integrated in Greek society, where they have lived and worked for years.

A large number previously had residence and work permits, which they lost along with their jobs. They immediately lose their legal status if they do not complete 200 days of social insurance payment in one year.

'No man's land'

GREECE HAS become more and more a 'no man's land' for the majority of immigrants and asylum seekers. The number of undocumented people has grown to half a million.

Desperate immigrants who tried to escape from Greece to other European countries were deported back here following the EU's 'Dublin II Agreement'. In some areas of Athens, parks and squares have become the only shelter for jobless, undocumented, homeless and starving people to gather.

These are the atrocious conditions that gave rise to the hunger strike – a desperate struggle by people who feel they are left with no other options.

The Greek government is concerned that the hunger strike could act as a symbol of struggle, particularly as it also has to deal with strikes by public transport workers, doctors and pharmacists and with more workers likely to follow.

The government faces an additional challenge: the growing "re-



Inside the occupation.



Leaving for new premises.

fuse to pay" movement that aims to block and reverse the recently announced increased prices for highway tolls, public transport and public hospitals.

Greek prime minister, George Papandreou, like other politicians before him, decided to shift the public 'discussion' and to scapegoat and demonise the '300' movement.

Early in the morning of 27 January, the government gave a deadline to the 300 and their supporters to leave the university law department or police would force them out in 24 hours.

By 5pm that day police surrounded the law school and blocked the doors when more than 500 people were inside.

The 300 and the solidarity com-

mittee organised an emergency assembly. They decided to evacuate the building only if there was an alternative place offered to host the hunger strike or else the police would have to try to force them out. Greeks volunteered to form the front lines at the doors and to be arrested first.

During negotiations that lasted eleven hours, it was announced that an individual had offered the 300 a building. During the long negotiations, thousands of people came onto the streets of many Greek cities and towns in spontaneous demonstrations of solidarity.

The police allowed people to come out of the law school at 4am. Two days later, five prominent Greeks from the solidarity committee were

charged with "illegal transportation of people".

At the same time the minister of the interior denied any possibility of legalisation and repealed a decree under which 15 immigrant hunger strikers were legalised in 2009. The minister called on all immigrants' communities in Greece to 'comply' with the law, "to prevent their members from participating in events that would act as hot spots".

The immigrants continue the hunger strike under very difficult conditions. Half of them have to stay inside tents, often under heavy rain. But they are in high spirits, which is linked to the news of the Tunisian and the Egyptian uprisings.

A new demonstration, a concert and an international day of solidarity on 11 February have been organised so far, to support their cause.

Class unity

XEKINIMA PUTS forward a programme calling for the unity of the working class, no matter what their nationality or religion. For immigrant workers who have lost their legal status, we demand they are allowed to regain it. We call for a drastic increase in the asylum recognition rate, for the withdrawal of the Dublin II Agreement and the granting of travel documents to all those who want to leave Greece.

No more money for repressive measures, such as the fence the Paspok government plans to build on the borders with Turkey.

As well as this, the unions should enthusiastically campaign for union rights amongst all sections of the workforce. The big banks and big business should be made to pay for the economic crisis, not Greek and immigrant workers!

We appeal to unions and workers' /community/student and youth organisations to send protests to the government and solidarity messages to the hunger strikers.

Please send messages of protest to:

- Giannis Raggousis – Minister of Interior: ypourgos@ypes.gov.gr
- The Prime Minister, George Papandreou: dialogue@political-forum.gr

Please send copies of your protests with your messages of support to: hungerstrike300@gmail.com and to Xekinima: Xekinima@hotmail.com

Solidarity messages needed for US prison reform activist

IN THE aftermath of an historic prison strike in Georgia, late last year, inmate activists are facing systematic violence and repression. On 9 December, inmates across six Georgia prisons staged a week-long strike. They demanded an end to endemic human rights abuses, arbitrary violence, slave-like labour conditions, profiteering and corruption, inadequate food and medical care, among other abuses.

Socialist Alternative (CWI USA)
reporters

On 12 January 2011 an inmate activist, Shawn Whatley, was handcuffed by prison guards as his cell was searched.

When he briefly spoke to his mother, Shawn reported that he had been put in solitary confinement and was severely beaten, suffering broken bones and facial injuries.

He was then transferred from Telfair State Prison to Ware State Prison. Shawn reported that at least 37 other inmates were already missing

and transferred to other prisons.

Shawn explained that he was targeted, in part, for his communications with outside support groups, which included an extensive interview with SocialistAlternative.org recorded shortly before his beating.

This physical brutality and retaliation by the Georgia State Department of Corrections is their response to the historic prisoner strike last month, which they characterised as a "riot." However, despite provocations, the strike was a completely non-violent mass civil disobedience.

Prisoners simply stayed in their cells, refusing to participate in the regular routine of forced labour.

Please make phone calls and send emails and/or letters to Department of Corrections Commissioner Brian Owens, as well as Georgia's new Governor Nathan Deal.

Please send copies of protest letters to nysocialists@hotmail.com. For more information, contact Socialist Alternative at info@socialistalternative.org. A model letter can be found



Prison overcrowding is a scandal in most US states.

on www.socialistparty.org.uk

Send your protest to:

- Office of the Governor Nathan Deal, State of Georgia, 203 State Capitol, Atlanta, GA 30334 Fax: 404-657-7332
- Ware State Prison (where Shawn

was recently transferred) 3620 Harris Road, Waycross, GA 31501.

- Telfair State Prison/Milan Unit (Where Shawn was previously held and beaten) 210 Longbridge Road / 410 Pickerton Street, Post Office Box 549, Helena, GA 31037

the **committee for a**
workersinternational

THE COMMITTEE for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. The CWI is organised in 40 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

www.socialistworld.net

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. Recent articles include:



Ireland: Final "bang" of an imploding government

"We need Joe back in the Dail". You can hear this sentence very often, canvassing in Dublin West, fighting to get Joe Higgins, Socialist Party (CWI in Ireland) MEP, re-elected to the Irish parliament.

CWI reporter, Dublin



Tunisia: Revolution at a crossroads

An entire new period has opened up in Tunisia, in which the building of socialist forces will be the most vital and urgent task.

CWI reporter from Tunis



Jordan: Thousands gather in Amman to demand reforms and change.

Demonstrations continue despite the announcement of increased wages, subsidies and political reforms

Khalid Bhatti, SMP (CWI in Pakistan)