

Athens Polytechnic uprising

The Athens Polytechnic uprising in 1973 was a massive demonstration of popular rejection of the Greek military junta of 1967–1974. The uprising began on November 14, 1973, escalated to an open anti-junta revolt and ended in bloodshed in the early morning of November 17 after a series of events starting with a tank crashing through the gates of the Polytechnic.

Greece had been, since April 21, 1967, under the dictatorial rule of the military, a regime which abolished civil rights, dissolved political parties and exiled, imprisoned and tortured politicians and citizens based on their political beliefs.



The junta, trying to control every aspect of politics, had interfered with student syndicalism since 1967, by banning student elections in universities, forcibly drafting students and imposing non-elected student union leaders in the national student's union, EFEE. These actions eventually created anti-junta sentiments among students. The first massive public action against the junta came from students on February 21, 1973. Law students went on strike and barricaded themselves inside the buildings of the Law School of the University of Athens in the centre of Athens, demanding repeal of the law that imposed forcible drafting of "subversive youths", as 88 of their peers had been forcibly drafted.



The police were ordered to intervene and many students were reportedly subjected to police brutality. The events at the Law School are often cited as the prelude to the Polytechnic uprising.

On November 14, 1973 students at the Athens Polytechnic went on strike and started protesting against the military regime. As the authorities stood by, the students, calling themselves the "Free Besieged" barricaded themselves in and constructed a radio station (using laboratory equipment) that repeatedly broadcast across Athens:

Here is Polytechnion! People of Greece, the Polytechnion is the flag bearer of our struggle and

your struggle, our common struggle against the dictatorship and for democracy.



In the early hours of November 17, 1973, the transitional government sent a tank crashing through the gates of the Athens Polytechnic. Prior to the crackdown, the city lights had been shut down, and the area was only lit by the campus lights, powered by the university generators. An AMX 30 Tank (still kept in a small armored unit museum in a military camp in Avlonas, not open to the public) crashed the rail gate of the Athens Polytechnic at around 03:00 am.



In unclear footage clandestinely filmed by a Dutch journalist, the tank is shown bringing down the main steel entrance to the campus to which people were clinging. Documentary evidence also survives, in recordings of the "Athens Polytechnic" radio transmissions from the occupied premises. In these a young man's voice is heard desperately asking the soldiers (whom he calls 'brothers in arms') surrounding the building complex to disobey the military orders and not to fight 'brothers protesting'. The voice carries on to an emotional outbreak, reciting the lyrics of the Greek National Anthem, until the tank enters the yard, at which time transmission ceases.



The student uprising is hailed as a valiant act of resistance against the military dictatorship, and therefore as a symbol of resistance to tyranny.