# Austerity is devastating Greece

(21 October 2015) Imagine that you can not pay the metro ticket to get your kid to the hospital. The kid needs regular treatment of a psychiatrist. But cuts in your wage have left you and your family with such low income that this would wreck your budget. Cuts in wages and social security contributions have this effect in Greece. It is well documented that the number of suicides has increased dramatically in Greece. A psychiatrist tells us this during a visit to the largest public hospital in Athens. The visit is part of several discussions our trade union delegation has with workers. They are employed by public institutions. We are a delegation that includes several Mediterranean unions, PSI president, EPSU general secretary and EPSU vice-president.

We meet with the representatives of the ADEDY executive committee on 13th

October. They explain in detail how the austerity policies impact on workers and Greek people. 25% of the workforce has been cut and the number should go down even further. The economy is in recession since 2009. Bargaining rights have been suspended. Agreements are undermined by giving employers privileges. And the Eurogroup ageement as well as the new memorandum seek to continue these policies. The government has hardly any power. All decisions need approval of "the Institutions". But it is the small stories that hit you. Stavros says he was in his hospital the weekend. It had run out of indicators needed for blood measurements to determine if someone has kidney failure. There was no money to pre-order. Parastethics (artificial limbs) were not available. Representatives of the local branch of the health federation of ADEDY said their hospital would only get 50% of the budget foreseen for this year. Doctors and nurses as well as other staff are not replaced adding further strain on a cash strapped hospital. Cleaning, catering and security staff are all outsourced. The result is lower pay and conditions for these workers. And the ethos of private contractors is driven by other concerns as that of the public health institutions. Nurses, doctors and other medical staff like laboratory workers all gave their stories. The austerity policies are destroying the public health system. And as several shopstewards were underlining - it is a destruction sought. It does favour the establishment of private clinics for the wealthy. The clinics are run by companies linked to the political and financial elites of Greece.

And this was also the opinion of shopstewards of a nursery in Chalandri we met 14th. Of the 9 nurseries 5 were closed in this municipality. Where the staff could care for 900 small children before only 300 could be dealt with now. Working hours increased from 6 to 8 with no additional pay. 52 workers had left. Waiting lists had tripled. And again private nurseries sought to fill the gaps. They are only affordable for people with a higher income. The mayor and vice mayor explained this to us.

The delegation met with ADEDY members, volunteers and the mayor and vice - mayor of the municipality concerned in a temporary refugee shelter. It was established in an athletics complex. Refugees who arrived at the Greek Islands were brought here and sheltered for a few days. The overall majority in this complex had arrived from Afghanistan. While the Greek authorities provided some funding the services were run entirely by volunteers. We talked with nurses, doctors, pensioners and others. People could come and get medical advice and medicines. Both provided by volunteers. This refugee shelter was open and people could come and leave. Most of the refugees left after 2-3 days moving on to the North of the country

and further on their journeys. Volunteers gave them a small bag with food for three days. It would operate until the end of the month. Then an extension or a new solution had to be found. There were other emergency shelters which housed mostly refugees from Syria. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that half a million people have already arrived in Greece this year.

The EPSU General secretary further met with electricity and water unions on 15th October. The energy unions are fighting the privatisation of the high voltage transmission network ADMIE . This is foreseen in the Eurogroup agreement of 12 July. It makes little sense though. It is clearly part of an ideological agenda pursued by the European Commission. EPSU will support the workers in their fight against the privatisation. And also the water workers see privatisation of their companies back on the political agenda. The large scale mobilisation and total rejection of the privatisation of the Thessaloniki water company does not count. A long list of public companies that can and should be privatised is part of the third memorandum.

We agreed to be active with ADEDY in arguing against the austerity policies. A key moment will be a general strike that is foreseen in early November. The government will have to get approval for a new package of measures to implement the memorandum in Parliament.

The delegation included:
Dave Prentis PSI President, EPSU Vice-president and UK Unison General Secretary; EPSU vice-president Francoise Geng (CGT sante, France) and her colleague Matthieu Piotrkowsi; the general secretaries of the Cypriot unions of OEKDY and OHO- SEK Michaelis Michail and Andreas Ilia, Enzo Bernardo coordinator of the Mediterranean constituency and the Italian union CGIL-FP his colleague Nadia Pagano, Fatima Aguado of the Spanish union CCOO FSC, UNISON colleague Liz Snape currently TUC president as well as the EPSU General Secretary. It took place 13 and 14 October 2015 in Athens.

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