

Violation of basic human rights: Austerity, the destruction of the health system and the urgency of a debt moratorium in Greece

Tuesday 28 April 2015, by [UDRY Charles-André](#) (Date first published: 9 April 2015).

A meeting of the Red Network was held in Athens on April 4, 2015. One of the three workshops brought together about a hundred people who are active to varying degrees in the health sector: doctors, nurses, paramedics, those responsible for hospital pharmacies, cleaners, members of local committees who have prevented the closure of a primary care centre, one of the doctors responsible for the social dispensary at Hellinikon. The discussion combined testimony, analysis and initiatives. A common thread ran through all the interventions: we should stop waiting for the results of the permanent and highly-mediatised negotiations of the government, which maintain the population in a passive attitude; we must build initiatives that ensure the connection between caregivers, population, the trade-union structure (META) influenced by Syriza and the members and supporters of Syriza. Given the massive and continuous state of decay of the health system, a slogan has to be put forward: immediate refusal to pay the interest on the debt and repayments that are presented as unavoidable, and the immediate use of these funds for the health sector.

The decision of the Tsipras government to abolish the €5 charge for medical visits is largely illusory, because the sums represented by the one euro to be paid by patients when buying medicine are much greater. In the interventions of caregivers, one fact stood out: the vast majority of managers in the health system and the hospitals have not been changed. The bureaucratic and clientelist apparatus of New Democracy and PASOK remains in place. Ministers can always make statements - they do so every day and in every way - but changing a structure depends on having a real plan and on social mobilization. No new model of effective control of hospitals has been established. The government, of course, does not support any mobilization. The acceptance of the so-called European constraints forms the corset that holds together the different elements of this government, who each play their cards, sometimes in conformity with their convictions. This helps to create illusions among observers about the possible effects of so-called internal contradictions. We witnessed the same illusions at the time of the first government, called "in dispute", of Lula in 2003, although the government structure of the PT was more solid.

The leadership of Syriza in its formal majority can make a declaration, but it does not take any initiative that would make the link between the crucial issues of the health system and the payment of the debt. However, the social emergency is starting to be used - admittedly for the moment in a propagandist way - by the Right, indicating that the government is not only failing to keep its promises, but it is allowing the situation to deteriorate.

In contrast, all the experience of open meetings of the local structures of Syriza show the interest and the readiness of the population to reopen a primary care centre, to prevent a hospital closure, to increase the number of doctors, to create the conditions for a return of doctors who experience their expatriation as a deportation. One after the other, people recount how in such and such a department the number of doctors has gone down from twelve to four and the number of nurses from has fallen from ten to two. Moreover, a survey is going to be published concerning the situation

of the major hospitals in the Athens area and of primary care facilities. A neurosurgeon who has worked in the two main hospitals described the sharp increase in nosocomial infections (infections contracted in a health establishment) and indicated the effects over the long-term (two, three generations) of this situation. What he said was reinforced by the intervention of a pediatrician.

The debates on the illegitimate debt and its origins are admittedly very important. But the question is posed within another human temporal framework: today, tens of thousands of men and women, Greeks and migrants, are starving, are sick, and are not cared for. The answer cannot be that the government spends €300 million for so-called humanitarian measures (reconnection of electricity, distribution of food stamps), in the style of World Bank safety nets, at the same time as it votes to spend €500 million to renovate the anti-submarine air force, a proposal pushed forward by its Minister of Defence.

Admittedly, this minister, Panos Kammenos, of the Independent Greeks, did not confine himself to only this task, a priority for him. He was present on April 4, when the establishment of an audit committee on the debt was presented. An initiative that deserves all our interest. Moreover, the President of the Republic, Prokopis Pavlopoulos, stressed its importance. He expects the results in several months. Prokopis Pavlopoulos, given his record in New Democracy and in various governments, in particular from 2004 to 2009, is aware of the explosion of debt in the 2000s, as illustrated by the recent article by Michel Husson [1]. Something that, out of pure opportunism, representatives of the Democratic Left (DIMAR) took the opportunity of recalling, highlighting the career of the President during the period of indebtedness under Karamanlis [2].

As Antonis Davanellos pointed out in a recent article for the really radical left, faced with the disastrous record of the government, initiatives to change as far as possible the relationship of forces within Syriza - and also in the trade union movement, in its militant sectors - are paramount. [3] This is in view of deadlines that are coming up in the short term (June 2015). This battle to change more clearly the relationship of forces, primarily in Syriza, must be combined with massively putting forward concrete demands whose implementation is only possible to the extent that a moratorium on the payment of interest on the debt is decided on immediately. The forces of the Left (from Syriza to Antarsya, including those members of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) who appreciate the acuteness of the social crisis), who want the immediate implementation of the programme of Thessaloniki agenda, presented on behalf of Syriza by Tsipras on September 14, 2014 [4] expressed this in multiple forms during the meeting on April 4, when the radiograph of the health system was in fact that of Greek society.

The article by Dr. Louise Irvine reproduced on this website [5], whose data are from the end of 2014, already gave the alarm signal in January 2015. She was not the first. The Lancet had already made a real audit of the health system in February 2014. It reflected the needs of the population and therefore the universal rights that flow from that.

Charles-André Udry

P.S.

* Translation IVP. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org>

Footnotes

[1] Michel Husson, "Grèce: pourquoi une dette de 100% du PIB avant la crise?".:

[2] See I Efimerida Ton Sintakton ("Editors' Daily") April 6, 2015.

[3] socialistworker.org "The government, Syriza and the people":
<http://socialistworker.org/2015/04/07/the-government-syriza-and-the-people>

[4] See Tovima "Tsipras presents SYRIZA program at International Fair in Thessaloniki".

[5] ESSF (article 34696), [What 'austerity' has done to Greek healthcare - "What I witnessed appalled me - and brought tears to my eyes":](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article34696)
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article34696>