



GSC UPDATE 5 - (7 July 2012)

1. Cameron plans to keep out Greeks – not in our name!

According to The Guardian (4.7.12),

“David Cameron is prepared to over-ride Britain’s historic obligations under EU treaties and impose stringent border controls that would block Greek citizens from entering the UK, if Greece is forced out of the Euro.” He claims “the powers are available if there are particular ‘stresses and strains’ arising from the Eurozone crisis.”

“Sticking with people through thick and thin is what being in a union is about. When you stand by them in times of difficulty, you are eventually rewarded.” Nick Malkoutzis reacted with eloquent fury to Cameron’s hellenophobic proposal here:

<http://insidegreece.wordpress.com/2012/07/04/why-are-you-afraid-of-the-greeks-mr-cameron/>. A subsequent piece examines the legal situation at <http://insidegreece.wordpress.com/2012/07/06/final-thoughts-on-cameron/>.

In a letter to the Guardian the Chair of the Greece Solidarity Campaign commented: “A former Conservative Prime Minister, inspired by the Greek resistance during the Italian and German invasions in 1940-1, said, "Hence we will not say that Greeks fight like heroes, but that heroes fight like Greeks". Our current considerably less than heroic, ungrateful, uncaring and xenophobic miserable apology for a Prime Minister is now determined to reward this bravery with a policy of ‘No homes for the descendents of heroes’, particularly in their hour of need. The 4 July 2012 Guardian article was headlined ‘UK may block entry to Greeks’. Well, it’s not in our name, nor presumably that of the over 30,000 UK retirees in Greece.”

If the policy of blocking entry involves deportation of long term residents, internet jokers have suggested that Cameron could start with various stolen statues from the British museum.

2. The Troika’s back in Greece and it’s not for a holiday –

<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,16067457,00.html> - For the first time since October 2011,

representatives from the EU commission, the IMF and the ECB - the "troika" of international

lenders - will meet in Athens to monitor the progress of Greek efforts to reform. It seems

that the New Democracy/PASOK/Democratic Left Government, despite a last minute vague

conversion to seeking to renegotiate the terms imposed by the Troika's memorandum, will seek to appease the Troika with extensive privatisation proposals.

3. Greek health system feels the pain of austerity measures

“ATHENS—Greece's government has made deep budget cuts. And now the country's doctors are cutting people open again ... Proud surgeons, some of them trained in the U.S., are doing large-incision gallbladder removal surgery for no good medical reason in 2012 — because their hospitals don't have the money to pay for the tools required for the keyhole laparoscopy that is the unquestioned standard in the developed world. “It's not the rule — but even if it happens for one patient, it's too much, and it needs to be discussed,”

Dr. Georgios Papadoulos, a 39-year-old urologist at the large Gennimatas public hospital in Athens, said last Thursday. “If we were talking about something like this three years ago, it would be a joke. Now it's not. “The problem is, sometimes you need to compromise the treatment. You may say, ‘This is the best way, but I cannot do it, because we do not have what we need.’ ” Drugs. Needles. Catheters. Gloves. Stents. Heart pumps. Surgical staples. All harder to obtain than at any point in recent history. None needed more urgently than today....” <http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/1218394--europe-s-debt-crisis-greek-health-system-feels-the-pain-of-austerity-measures#.T-xCfXjwPy8.facebook>

4. Debunk these racist Modern Greek Myths!

Greeks are lazy: This underlies much of what is said and written to blame the victims of the euro-crisis for their situation - the implication presumably being that a lax Mediterranean work-ethic is at the heart of self-inflicted downfall. And yet, OECD data among its members show that in 2008, Greeks worked on average 2120 hours a year. That is 690 hours more than the average German, 467 more than the average Brit and 356 more than the OECD average.

Greeks have the longest holidays: actually the paid leave entitlement in Greece is on average 23 days, lower than most EU countries including the UK's minimum 28 and Germany's whopping 30.

Greeks take any chance they can for a day off: actually the level of unauthorised absence in Greece is very low (1.5% in Greece; 2% in the UK; 2.6% in Germany; and 5.9% in Poland)

Greeks retire at 53: A lazy misreading of the provisions for early retirement on half-pay in Greek public service has been repeated so often that it has entered the folklore that the average age for retirement is 53 years old. In fact the average age of exit from the labour force in Greece is 61.7; higher than Germany, France or Italy and higher than the EU27 average. Since these statistics were gathered, Greece have had to raise the minimum age of retirement twice under bail-out conditions and so this figure is likely to rise further.

The Greek state fritters an excessive amount of what taxes it collects on state expenditure when public expenditure in the UK (94% of GDP) is lower than that of Greece (40%).

These and other myths (e.g. that Greece is a weak economy that should never have been a part of the EU; that the first bail-out was designed to help Greek people, but unfortunately failed; that the second bail-out is designed to help Greek people and will definitely succeed) are disposed of in an excellent article at

<http://sturdyblog.wordpress.com/2011/06/18/democracy-vs-mythology-the-battle-in-syntagma-square/>

5. **Some things you can do in solidarity with the people of Greece**

- Indulge in some 'solidarity tourism' by going on holiday to Greece and talking with the ordinary people.
- Link your branch with a school, workplace or community in Greece.
- Challenge those who peddle cheap anti-Greek jokes and myths.
- Organise a meeting or education event to explain the situation to people, possibly linked with an anti-cuts group such as the Coalition of Resistance
- Oppose Cameron's proposals to close UK borders to Greeks: they (and we) have a right to go to other EU countries.
- Organise a social event, e.g. with film, music, dance and food.
- Organise a stunt or protest with a Greek focus at an appropriate venue.
- Write to MEPs and MPs asking what they are doing to learn about and help the situation of Greek people.

- Introduce a motion on Greece in your union, students union, pensioners organisation etc
 - Discuss how things might be run better if we started, not from the needs of banks, but from meeting people's needs - remembering new needs such as social care for the elderly.
 - Oppose, as those we met on a delegation to Greece urged us to, the cuts being made by our own government. Join the big TUC March – For a Future that Works! – on Saturday 20 October.
 - Sign Tony Benn's Appeal for Solidarity with the people of Greece at <http://www.greecesolidarity.org/?p=43>
 - Join or affiliate your organisation to the Greece Solidarity Campaign: you can run off an information leaflet with membership form <http://www.greecesolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Greece-Solidarity-Leaflet.pdf>
 - Help us generate some regular income by making a regular donation (even £1 per month) by filling out the Standing Order Form <http://www.greecesolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/standing-order-mandate.pdf>
6. **Extract from a Letter from GSC Chair to Claude Moraes MEP:** "It has been disappointing that (for the last three issues at least) your newsletter has shown no solidarity with the people of Greece or any of the other so-called 'PIGS' countries whose social fabric is being torn apart. What are you and Labour MEPs doing on this issue? It is becoming an important for us here, not least because it seems as if Greece is a test-bed for extreme neo-liberal measures to be used on us. The sudden growth of the 'Golden Dawn' 'party' of fascist thugs in a country with no tradition of organised fascism (as distinguished from military intervention) and the shameful treatment of migrants (in a country renowned for 'philoxenia') has its roots in the appalling deterioration in the social conditions of the people. Might I suggest, in addition to retaining contact with the sister party PASOK whose vote has plummeted to 12%, that you make early contact with Syriza, the radical left coalition, whose vote has risen from 4.5% to almost 27% in under three years because of its anti-austerity stance."
 7. **We are writing to all the major unions asking them to affiliate** to the Greece Solidarity Campaign. If you think you can help, e.g. by putting a resolution in your union, contact GSC trade union liaison officer Bob Archer c/o the GSC.
 8. **Is Cyprus next - the euro-crisis domino effect** <http://www.athensnews.gr/portal/11/56792>
 9. **Inspirational Poetry:** The resilience of the Greek people is captured in this poem by Nobel prize-winning poet Odysseus Elytis: "Αν η Ελλάδα καταστραφεί τελείως, θα μείνει μια ελιά, ένα κλήμα και μια βάρκα. Είναι αρκετά για να ξαναχτιστεί από την αρχή." ... *which translates as ...* **"If Greece was ever destroyed completely, there would remain an olive tree, a grape vine, and a boat. These are sufficient to rebuild it from scratch."**
 10. **The excellent video of the GSC delegation to Athens : 'Can't Pay Won't Pay Solidarity with the People of Greece** - Spring 2012 - is available on YouTube on http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=G2WcC3y3RN4. We plan to organise further visits both ways to help improve mutual understanding of the austerity measures we are all suffering.

11. You can subscribe to a very useful free Greek Listings Newsletter at <http://www.eugreeka.com/subscribe>.

αλληλεγγύη και φιλία - solidarity and friendship – Paul Mackney – Chair, Greece Solidarity Campaign www.Greecesolidarity.org<<http://www.Greecesolidarity.org>