

# Greece Solidarity Campaign Delegation Athens

4<sup>th</sup> October to 7<sup>th</sup> October 2015

This delegation was composed of 17 participants. It was one of the largest GSC has sponsored over the last four years. TSSA sponsored MPs, candidates, trade union officers and contacts contributed significantly to the numbers.

The delegation coincided with a busy time for the newly re-elected SYRIZA led coalition government with most ministers preparing speeches and being sworn in. It came after a period of unprecedented upheaval in Greece with both a financial/economic, social/humanitarian and refugee crisis sweeping across the country. SYRIZA had two weeks earlier won a second general election, following their victory on January 25<sup>th</sup>. Their 7.5% majority again gave them a majority of seats but needed the support of ANEL, (Independent Greeks -anti-austerity nationalist party) to form a government. A third Memorandum of Understanding and Euro83 billion bailout had recently been agreed.

## Sunday 4<sup>th</sup>

Four delegation members met with "Without Middlemen" Solidarity market organisers at the market behind the Olympiakos football stadium. This is a relatively new initiative to provide farm produce and consumables at wholesale prices to citizens. The markets are growing in popularity. Most operate on a monthly basis.

## Monday 5<sup>th</sup>

Morning meeting with SYRIZA MPs and officials at Parliament building. **Giannis Tsironis**, the Government Minister for the Environment, **Costas Douzinas** recently elected as a Syriza MP for the Pireaus area), **Panos Trigazis** (Syriza international secretary) and **Mustafa Mustafa** (one of the first Muslim MPs).

Costas talked about the investment challenges to create a sustainable economy. Government aims to expand the third sector, social enterprises and exploit the idea of waste management. Costas said government would try hard to prevent dock privatisation but it was largely owned by the banks. He argued privatisation had been introduced in the first and second memorandum. The government is committed to passing a law that is highly problematic. He was opposed to the way it was imposed. The draft contract abolished the Public Port Authority (see article below). The contract was drafted by the Greek privatisation contractors and in contact with likely buyer, the Chinese owned CosCo. Chinese also want to build a high road and rail connection. The contract included parts of the coast and does not add value. Government had only seen draft contract two days ago and it contradicted Tsipras's pledge to include land and coast which was to be used for parks. Aim to renegotiate. There was also a court case by the Law Society of Piraeus and four local authorities. (See Pettifer & Davis Piraeus report Appendix 1) This was to be the first measure of evaluation in November after which Greece would receive the first instalment of the £3b loan necessary for bank recapitalisation.

Manuel asked about jobs and conditions guarantees for workers. Costas said all current jobs were guaranteed and would use ILO best practice including a return to collective bargaining and a rejection of the law that allows mass sackings.

He argued the third MoU was better than the first two. It provided some space for the left. He said the government was at no command to sell state assets at bargain basement prices and would choose what buildings to sell.

Geraint and Caroline asked questions about the green economy. Costas also said government would fight the privatisation of public electricity operations, both production and distribution (a large employer). 90% of transport is for fuel. He talked of need for a railway to be developed along the spine of the country. Wanted to see more thermal energy. He argued the fact that Norway spends 900 barrels of oil a day and Greece 1500 was crazy.

Emine asked about the growth of the far right and Golden Dawn and asked if privatisation was damaging national pride.

Costas acknowledged the huge and disturbing rise in racism and xenophobia across Europe and Greece. He saw the origins of the fascists' emergence in the war time Liberation which put the left into exile and turned victory against Nazism into defeat. This foundation of the neo-nazi movement in Greece was strengthened during the Colonels dictatorship period 1967-74. He saw Golden Dawn as a criminal gang and highlighted the murder of refugees and the rapper. Their prosecution was proceeding in the courts.

He saw previous governments as seeking to turn the Greek working into Chinese style workers with no rights. Greece was now starting a new experiment but with no recipe. Starting to build democratic socialism step by step, with no particular plan. It was important to counter the lies about the Greeks who for five years had resisted austerity measures.

He argued Syriza must reconnect with the social movement. For seven months the government had been hostage to hostile forces e.g. the civil service and Institutions. The government had not been allowed to operate or get into a proper four year term. 'If we can get to the new year without a major disaster, we aim to be in office for two terms', he said. He saw what Syriza was doing as starting a new kind of society.

Caroline and others asked why the 3<sup>rd</sup> MoU was better than other two.

Giannis argued the people wanted to stay in the European Union. He said the government had been blackmailed but that they were trying to find alternatives. He wanted the social economy, only 1%, to grow. Government would tackle corruption. He cited a recycling company. In 2011 an inspector had found bad practice. However, the case was still running five years later, but the old governments gave the company more licences. Little companies are killed because of fiscal discipline and pressure for primary budget surpluses. New MoU accepts a fiscal deficit of .5%. He said unemployment was down and would save E20b. Therefore no more sackings of civil servants or cuts in pensions and wages.. Main aim was to modernise the state, end corruption, reorganise the civil service (learn from the British), introduce a minimum wage, ban firing of workers, restore collective bargaining. All this has got to be negotiated.

Although taxes would rise, especially VAT – a regressive tax, there would also be moves to end tax avoidance and higher taxes on capital and assets to reduce inequality. He quoted the finance minister (Tsakalotos) in saying the government were trying to create space for ministers in social areas like education, health and welfare.

Wanted to see a Debt Jubilee conference, following the 1953 London conference, which put a moratorium on German debt.

Delegation members asked further questions, but session had to end after brief discussion for parliamentary activity.

**Afternoon visit to Omonia Solidarity Clinic** (with large refugee intake). Discussion with staff/committee members including presenting a donation of E2500 from Medical Aid for Greece. **Sofia Tzitzikou**, pharmacist, founder member of the clinic and also chair of the UNICEF branch of Greece spoke briefly to the delegation (the clinic was seeing patients). Delegation learned that the rent for the clinic building was paid by French and

German solidarity groups. There were daily GP surgeries, with 50 volunteer doctors, 30 volunteer dentists working shifts, 130 volunteers overall. Clinic ran from Monday to Friday 11am to 7pm and saw 500 patients every month, many increasingly were migrants.

We also spoke to Costas a 27 year old volunteer dentist who did all work apart from prosthetics. He would not be part of the 'braindrain' of dentists to UK although in Britain dentists could earn six times more than his £500 monthly income.

**Action points:** Continue to raise funds; publicise the work of clinics; sensitise the public to collect unused and non-expired medication; NHS donations (working out a method of how to post).

*Late afternoon meeting of Labour MPs, councillors & members with Giorgos Papandreou – ex PASOK Prime Minister and president of Socialist International. (no longer in PASOK, but leading a separate breakaway party that did not contest the last elections).*

*Early evening Meeting of Labour MPs and part delegation with Gianis Varoufakis – ex Finance Minister, (no longer an MP and an independent).*

*Meeting of Caroline Lucas and aide with Green Party Environment Minister.*

Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>

Morning Meeting with **AEDDY** representatives (Greek equivalent of public sector TUC). **Giorgos Harissis**, chair of PAME (ex-SYRIZA, now with LAE), Odysseus ? and five other officers. They ranged from New Democracy, PASOK, Syriza, Popular Unity (LAE) and no party affiliation. Venue: AEDDY offices

First they expressed hope that trade unions would be influential in Jeremy Corbyn led Labour Party. Odysseus said we were meeting in a critical time for working people in Greece. The AEDDY Council was about to endorse a programme of action. The 3<sup>rd</sup> MoU will lead to a new depression in the economy with higher unemployment, especially amongst youth. They feared further erosion of pension and pay.

Reported a dramatic drop in public investment in social care, education, local government and social benefits. For example public education was 3.9% of GDP, now it was 2.9% and by 2019 would be 1.9%. They also saw a threat to trade union representation.

The extra-parliamentary (non-party) left had strengthened position on AEDDY Executive.

They talked of a lost generation. They talked of the need for a pan-european way of saving that generation. With unemployment near 30% it had only been through the traditional family networks that people had kept going.

The teacher rep talked of some schools without teachers and some not opened this term. In the area of specialist schools for autistic children should have ten staff, but less than half so could not open.

On the European Union some were for and some against.

Generally they were not optimistic about prospects, even with a Syriza government. One speaker said that any legislation had to be agreed by the lenders, so he was sceptical about a radical government programme.

Trade unions were not affiliated to Syriza or other political parties in the way they are in UK.

They wanted to work with government but only one minister had yet replied to discuss their programme.

Questions were asked about whether they felt Syriza had let the unions down; about being given the tools to work to repay debt and what appetite there was to leave the Euro.

ADEDY reps said hardly a penny from bailouts had gone to productive work or people. Most of the cuts had happened in the public sector. Greek pension funds had taken a heavy cut. They agreed trade unions should seek creative alternatives. One commented 'when we sit down with government the only discussion is how do you want to die'.

It was reported 300,000 workers had left the public sector. Trade unions in the private sector had been even harder hit.

On immigration they said the Greek people had been very supportive of refugees. Greece had accepted more than 1.5m immigrants since 1992 with no outside help.

**Lunchtime Meeting with Zoe Konstandopoulou**, ex-president of the Greek Parliament and convener of the Committee for the Truth about the Debt. (ex-SYRIZA, now LAE) Heracles Aktypis, Moisis Elitis, Despina, Spanou and one other member of the Committee.

Zoe summarised the findings of the report (*Truth Committee on Public Debt-Preliminary report*) published by the Greek parliament. The report examined how the debt was created, how it was inflated and the legal and illegal justifications and how it turned into a burden on the people. How a private debt was converted into public debt. Zoe explained why the debt was illegal, illegitimate and odious.

Debt Committee members said the report had not been used by the government. All changes in the 3<sup>rd</sup> MoU had been rushed through with 'ultra urgent sessions'. Institutions admitted the debt was unsustainable but would not accept a 'haircut'. One third of MPs had refused to support the bailout deal.

E325b debt meant each baby born in Greece owed E32,500. The new E833b loan meant each baby owed E41,000. It was unsustainable.

On page 43 of the Report was a summary of the privatisation proposals covering public companies, ports, airports, archaeological sites and explaining the impact on human rights and the independence of the Greek state.

Heracles spoke of the myths behind the debt:

1. That Greek workers were responsible;
2. That Bailouts did not pay for services but only to private creditors
3. Overspending government. But only area overspent was defence – double other departments. But only 25% of debt was due to overspending. Argued at least 40% of debt does not belong to Greece.

A million workers in the private sector had gone unpaid, sometimes for several months.

Manuel, the MPs and other delegates asked questions leading to further discussion on the ending the neo-liberal project, taking a test case to European Court of Human Rights; suing the banks. Also reported there had been a vicious press war against Zoe.

### **Summary:**

Future of Debt Truth Committee uncertain.

Picture of Greece in last five years are pictures of Europe if we don't stop the process.

Creditors designed the elections in Greece ...in place of people now have people placed.

**Action:**

Agreed we need a campaign for cancellation of the debt.

Work for a European Debt conference.

Highlighted conference on debt in Brussels on 16<sup>th</sup> November.

Afternoon Meeting with **SOLIDARITY for ALL** (SfA, the co-ordinating network of Social Solidarity Centres and initiatives). Briefing by staff about the general Solidarity Movement, followed by a session with reps from the **Network of Social Solidarity clinics and pharmacies** (including Health sector trade union representatives) to discuss the Health crisis, the Medical Aid for Greece (MAfG) approach. Donation of E4300 given to the Centre for other social clinics and pharmacies. Venue: The offices of SfA, Academias Street No 54

Discussion followed a wide range of issues including the refugee crisis and continuing humanitarian crisis resulting from austerity. Reported that there were now 400 solidarity structures in Greece with 52 clinics all staffed by volunteers.

**Key points:**

Solidarity schools had been opened for immigrants and poor. Aiming to organise at secondary level.

SfA does three to four big distributions of basic foods among centres. They campaign to persuade producers to donate concentrated olive oil. They also promoting the 'without middlemen' markets.

They are democratic decision making collectives

Refugees had provided a new challenge but this was being met. The main problem for refugees was being trapped on northern borders or on the islands. 320,000 refugees arrived in Greece in the last four months. Registration takes 2-3 days for Syrians, 15 days for others. Then they receive papers and can travel through Greece. Many with little or no money or papers stay in Greece. 8,000 per day were arriving.

10 clinics in the Attica region have 10,000 volunteers.

A new development was the decline in Greek students having private tuition (a regular feature of the Greek education system). Solidarity centres were now developing free supplementary education.

Medicines were shared throughout the network according to where the need and specialist requirement is greatest.

We talked about the organisation of the unemployed. Trade unions were not good at including this large group. SfA would aim to work closely with the unemployed and trade union solidarity groups to create a bigger movement.

Afternoon meeting with **KEERFA** (the Network of AntiFascist/Anti-Racist organisations) and representatives of Migrant organisations (including the Bangladeshi Welfare Foundation (involved in the Strawberry Fields campaign), Kurdish and Philipino groups. Lengthy discussion on the current situation on the refugee crisis, anti-fascist action and update on the Golden Dawn trial (NB GSC has recently contributed to the legal costs of KEERFA who are acting as observers supporting the prosecution). Emine and Makbule were able to speak with various migrant rights leaders in Turkish and Kurdish.

Meeting hosted by **Petros Konstantinou**, Athens District councillor (ANTARSYA) and convener of KEERFA at his offices.

Petros introduced the discussion. He had a long-standing record of anti-fascist and anti-racist work. His offices provided space for a variety of migrant organisations to meet and network.

He talked about how the bombing of Syria was creating millions of refugees. He spoke of the barriers erected in Turkey to stop refugees passing through. He spoke of the fences inside Europe. He said the Greek government had agreed a dispersal plan. The new minister for migration had said the biggest camp for refugees in Greece would be open (not closed). There was huge sympathy in Greece for the refugees although he argued that the government was putting pressure to move migrants out of central Athens. They were treated as guests not citizens. He pointed out that you have to be Greek Orthodox or Christian to be a citizen. This was a breach of UN Convention on Human rights. Five years ago refugees received poor treatment. Of 60,000 asylum applications up to 2009 only 15-20 agreed. Three people were killed waiting to be accepted. There had been big protests and the system had now changed.

Teachers unions have launched a campaign for refugees to stay 'Refugees Welcome Here'. Food collections were organised without mediation of the state.

Costas reminded us again of the border fence between Turkey and Greece, 95% of refugees prevented from entry by road. Costas claimed Syriza had cooperated in closure of border. He said that 'last week Greek and Turkish coastguards will cooperate with Frontex'.

Issues of migrant citizenship also came up. Key points: Refugee children should be given citizenship. There is a 'Citizenship without exclusion' campaign. Current position was that children should study for nine years before citizenship. There was no new law for legalisation of migrants. 1500 now get asylum of 60,000 applications.

Wendy said that in UK applications can only be made five years after birth, longer if mother not born in the UK.

Austria had sent 100 staff to Greece to set up hotspots which Costas argued were to help referral back.

Costas also spoke about the impending Turkish election and the danger of civil war.

On the question of **secularism and human rights** we were informed that the Greek state continues to use the ideology of Christian orthodoxy. Islamophobia is a problem. There was not one mosque in Athens. Where there is a Turkish Muslim minority people meet underground. No licence for a Muslim cemetery. There are a few synagogues with a small Jewish community. Huge repression of Jews during Holocaust, but no property returned.

**Golden Dawn anti-fascism and trial.** 7% votes for GD does not represent a working class vote...this was going down in many working class centres. Shift in elections still broadly to left. Parties to left of Syriza got almost 10%.

Anti-fascist movement has been very effective on streets. GD on the defensive. 'Zoe made a big mistake in arguing parliament was not legal without presence of Golden Dawn MPs (who were imprisoned).'

Reminded us the Pavlos Prisos and Shahzad Lukman had been murdered and that KKE meetings had been terrorised.

Costas gave a detailed account of the 18 months to date of the Golden Dawn trial involving 68 members and about half their parliamentary group (nine MPs). As we met witnesses were beginning to be called. KEERFA had requested publicity but no cameras allowed at trial. Proceedings are not recorded. Lawyers are not allowed to

show video evidence. There were three cases against GD: The murder of Pavlos Pfsos; attacks on 25 trade unionists; attack on Egyptian fishermen.

Golden Dawn had 120 lawyers working to support them. Lawyers for KEERFA have small resources. Immediate appeal for E60,000.

#### **Action:**

Agreed would approach Anti-Fascist Action/Unite Against Fascism for a contribution.

Approach the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers to make a donation. (Wendy to raise).

Meeting lasted almost three hours.

#### **Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup>**

MPs and several other delegates had returned to UK but six members attended this meeting with Professor **Dimitris Christopoulos**, vice-president of the International Federation for Human Rights. Held at the offices of the Hellenic League for Human Rights, Exarheia district, Valtetsiou16. This was the largest NGO in Greece with over 1000 members.

Dimitris explained that the organisation was founded by lawyers in 1953, five years after the end of the civil war.

In 1967-74 Greece was expelled. Readmitted in 1974. He had joined in 1990 and had been on the Board since 1997. Main focus was on migration, religious freedom and citizenship.

Dimitris explained the view of Greek LfHR re Dublin Convention on asylum seekers was that it should stay. Problem in the past had been with irregular migrants. He highlighted the problem of 400,000 undocumented people in Greece between one and five years. He said Greece had good reason to advocate a change in Dublin Convention, but he did not support changing it. The German government had changed policy and he believed it would be replaced.

Hi NGO was also involved in Golden Dawn Watch, a monitoring unit.

He had helped draft the new law on citizenship and advocated reform of nationality law. Dimitris argued the Greek nationality code was one of the most restrictive in Europe. Big success had been the 2010 law. This repealed the old, reactionary law based on religious and ethnic elements. However the new law did not go well and triggered an extreme reaction from the far right with lawyers working for Golden Dawn to repeal. After five years of struggle he believed Greece now had a good nationality law (agreed on 28<sup>th</sup> August). If law is implemented 250,000 children will get nationality. He was sceptical of the ability of the state to implement the law given its poor resources and infrastructure and a weak culture and will.

Dimitris argued Greece was a crippled democracy, but still a democracy. He rejected the discourse of 'occupation by the Germans'. Also rejected idea that 'parliament was a brothel' proposed by some on the left.

Proposed three points on migrants/refugees:

1. Busting the myth that Greece is a transit country. Although many migrants do leave only a proportion go to Germany or Sweden or elsewhere.
2. Need to register the population—up to 400,000 irregular migrants. Little is known about them. Need to know who is on Greek territory, issue id and possibility of work.

3. Citizenship—this is an open front with the far right and church. Being a Greek citizen is very important, everyone had id in Greece.

'Greece needs to find a light in the dark' on the matter of citizenship he argued.

Dmitris also echoed some points from earlier meetings about the Golden Dawn trial. He argued GD strategy was to discredit the whole political system via the MoU. But they had made mistakes. The murder was one. He also felt GD had reached its political limits, though not organisationally.

His organisation had also undertaken a survey on the 'deep state' covering church, police and judiciary. (GSC to obtain a copy of the 120 page report).

### **Interviews**

Clive Lewis and Martha Osamor also gave interviews to the Greek radio station KOKKINO 105.5fm and Syriza newspaper.

Contact also made with a German-Greece solidarity group that had been on a week-long visit.

### **DELEGATION PARTICIPANTS**

Clive Lewis MP

Geraint Davies MP

Kate Osamor MP

Caroline Lucas MP

Manuel Cortes General Secretary Transport & Salaried Staff Association; President Greece Solidarity Campaign

Chris Clark, TSSA National Executive. Former parliamentary candidate.

Dr. Adrian Heald. Former parliamentary candidate.

Biswas Kuntal. New Statesman/New Internationalist.

Paul Scholey, Head of Employment Rights, Morrish Solicitors.

Sam Tarry, Political Officer TSSA

Wendy Pettifer, solicitor

Emine Ibrahim (Turkish speaking Haringey councillor)

Makbule Gunes (Kurdish speaking Haringey councillor)

Dave Augel UNISON West Midlands

Cath ? Caroline Lucas PA

Isidoros Diakides, chair GSC

Mike Davis, Press officer GSC/Editor Chartist

(Programme organisers)

On Tuesday several members of the delegation went to meet Girogos Gogos of the dock workers



union in Piraeus (report below).

## **Appendix 1**

### **Privatisation of Piraeus port**

#### **Wendy Pettifer & Mike Davis report on findings from a recent GSC delegation**

The port of Piraeus faces wholesale privatization as a condition of the third Memoranda bail-out. As a part of the recent Greece Solidarity Campaign delegation to Athens some members went to meet Giorgos Gogos, general secretary of the Union of Dock Workers at the Port. He explained that the Hellenic Development Asset Fund was created to privatize the Port. The majority shareholder is the Greek State and is the equivalent of an Arms Length Management Organisation. The state owns 74% of the Port of Piraeus while 26% is the privately owned containerization part of the dock. This share is owned by CosCo, a Chinese Company. The port currently consists of integrated pieces of land including cargo handling, passenger terminals, cruise and ferry terminals and the car terminal.

The requirement of the third memoranda is that 51% of the 74% of the Port of Piraeus currently owned by the Greek State be transferred to a private bidder, therefore giving that bidder a majority shareholding of the 37 square kilometres of land, including the profit making domestic ferry service included within the definition of the Port of Piraeus. This is a pre-requisite of receipt of the bail out funds. It is a national asset, contributing to state funds, and contains the domestic ferry terminals, which provide a life line for Greek society, with affordable fares between the mainland and the islands as well as recently a lifeline for mainly Syrian refugees for whom the Piraeus Port Authority provides free bus passes from passenger terminals to the metro station. It also includes wasteland which the local community planned to turn into a recreational area close to the coast and an area of important archaeological significance where ancient Athenians moored their boats. 1,100 people across four unions are employed by the Port: dockworkers, ferry operators, foremen, white collar workers.

The inclusion of the requirement that a long lease of land on which the social infrastructure exists, be included in the privatization bid came as a complete surprise to the Greek State, and as we spoke the Supreme Court of seven judges was considering an application from four of the local authorities included in the Port of Piraeus to get an Injunction to prevent the inclusion of their social infrastructure, including domestic roads, in the privatization process.

The land includes schools, clinics, houses, roads and services and if sold, will be used to create a high speed rail/road link to the hinterland. Judgement is expected within one to eight months.

Although there are three potential bidders: Costco, APM and ICTS (a Phillipino company), the proposal is tailored to CosCo, a company backed by the Chinese State. In the container port they have already casualised work practices: there is no register of workers and no full time employment. In July 2014 Cost Co workers, who are non-unionised staffed a 24 hour strike in a bid to obtain union recognition.

There have been strikes and rallies in the city to establish a common front against the privatization process. Many are disappointed that Syriza, on re-election has currently failed to stop it. Costas Douzinas, newly elected MP for Piraeus also spoke to the GSC delegation. He stressed that Syriza opposed the privatisation introduced in the first two Memoranda and was working hard to change the nature of the contract. He highlighted Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's promise to exclude land, some public buildings and coast from the sale process. He was also mindful that this issue was the first measure of evaluation (in November) for the first instalment of E3bn loan to enable recapitalization of the banks. The message from the dockworkers was an open dialogue with all stake holders is needed but that privatization must be stopped.

**From Chartist no. 277 November/December 2015**

Appendix 2

## **Greece needs growth not austerity to rebuild democracy**

The humanitarian disaster unfolding in Greece is a wake-up call for all those who want the flame of democracy to burn brighter and not to be blown out by the cold wind of austerity. I've just returned from Athens with other MPs and trade unionists having witnessed first-hand the voluntary food and medical centres desperately trying to cope with growing needs and having met with MPs forced to implement cuts and privatisation. It's not a happy sight, there is a better way and it is our business.

The scale of social and economic destruction in Greece is deepening as austerity is making the debt, and the capacity to re-pay it, worse not better. Cuts and taxes have helped to shrink the economy by a quarter so debt as a proportion of the economy has grown from 133% in 2010 to 175%. In Britain less draconian austerity has not shrunk the economy but it has held back growth so our debt as a share of GDP has grown from 55% to 80% since 2010. In Britain, such policies have created rising child poverty, foodbanks and homelessness but in Greece we see the future they entail taken to greater extremes. A quarter of the workforce are unemployed, wages and pensions have been cut and one in two children live in poverty. Meanwhile, over three million people are without health insurance. Of the 252m Euros lent by the Troika since 2010 less than 10% has reached those most in need with the vast majority used to bail out banks and private debt.

In July sixty per cent of Greek voters rejected the proposals put forward for deepening austerity and wholesale privatisation but the Troika offered no serious alternatives which forced a split in the new Syriza Party. Encouraged by powerful creditors, this provoked the Greek Government to hold a snap election in September so that rebel Syriza MPs, standing independently, could be defeated. One of these, the former Speaker Zoe Konstantopoulou, chairs the Truth Committee of economists, auditors and human rights lawyers who contend that Greek debt is essentially the illegitimate transfer of private bank debt to sovereign debt to the Greek public. In Britain we nationalised the banks and their debts but in Greece the IMF has admitted that the transferred debt is unsustainable.

This is ignored by the Troika who are relentlessly reducing Greece's capacity to pay future debt, including through the rapid privatisation of national economic assets. One new Syriza MP said that MPs had only been given a week to look at the contract for the sale of Athens' Port of Piraeus. The Port represents a strategic import gateway into Europe for the Chinese who would pay anything for it before investing in a rail system to fast-track goods into the Single Market. I suggested Greece bids for say 5% of the value of future import turnover as the price but in practice the fire-sale will mean they will probably only get a small one-off payment instead of a growing income stream. Meanwhile, the nine airports are being sold for 1 billion euros when 1.2 billion has recently been invested in just one of them. As the assets are sold, young graduates and skilled workers are leaving Greece and expenditure on state education is being cut. In other words, instead of investing in skills and infrastructure – in rail, solar forests to power Europe, digital skills for the future etc. -Greece is being economically denuded of its temples and talents.

The others who went to Athens – MPs Kate Osamor and Clive Lewis and trade unionists led by Manuel Cortes of TSSA and Greek Solidarity – agree that the EU should provide a combination of debt write-off and strategic investment in growth to get Greece back on track. Of course Greece bears some responsibility for its own condition. It was let in the Euro under false pretences and some changes to retirement ages, pensions and tax collection are overdue but we cannot let that obscure the facts that we are witnessing the destruction of democracy, public services and national pride in a way, and at a pace, that threatens the future of Europe. Greece need a helping hand along a stony pathway instead of being beaten along the way.

I was reminded of Aneurin Bevan's contention that amidst economic difficulty, when property comes into conflict with poverty, property will attack democracy. Now is such a time and it is for us, in solidarity across Europe, to defend democracy itself and put forward a programme of growth in place of cuts to protect the public good against the growing power of private interests.

**Geraint Davies MP is a Member of the Council for Europe and of the UK European Scrutiny Select Committee.**

**24<sup>th</sup> October from LabourList**