

NUT CONFERENCE (TORQUAY-6/4/12)

The speech of Themis Kotsifakis, General Secretary of the E.B of OLME in the opening session of the conference

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the Executive Board of OLME (Greek Federation of Secondary Education State school Teachers) I would like to express our warmest greetings. It is indeed very important for me to be here with you today and express both the anxiety and the militant spirit of the schoolteachers in Greece. Please accept our heartfelt thanks for your invitation.

The Greek Governments sacrifice the needs and the rights of the majority of the society in order to confront the crisis, always at the expense of employees. The public debt is the result of usurious loans and the illegal connection between politicians and the huge financial interests which have increased public expenses. This debt serves as a pretext to secure the interests that dictate the policy implemented by the Government, the EU and the IMF.

The measures imposed on employees and their impact on our lives constitutes a tragic reality:

- Continuous wage and pensions cuts up to 55% in the public sector and up to 32% reduction in basic salary in private sector
- Increasing retirement age limits and dismantling our insurance funds
- Dismissals in the public sector
- Tragic cuts in social spending (education, health and social security policies). Privatization of public utilities. Selling out public wealth and land to private investors.
- Abolition of the collective bargaining agreements
- New and continuous tax measures which affect mostly employees and the majority of Greek people, leaving intact tax evading of large companies and those who own the country's wealth.
- With the new memorandum, among the new measures additional cutbacks are being imposed.

The government uses friendly media waging a massive and false propaganda in order to persuade people to accept austerity measures, blaming employees for the financial crisis instead of the government and the EU policies implemented during the last decades in Greece.

Indeed, it is a big lie what the Greek government maintains that there is a bloated number of civil servants who are also well-paid.

It is also a lie that the government has taken measures to reduce the debt. In fact it has taken measures which lead to a political dead-end while the public debt has increased instead of being reduced.

The official unemployment has doubled and has already surpassed 20%, reaching 50% among youth, the perspective being a further increase.

The workers restrict even further their expenses in covering their basic needs in order to survive. Poverty and misery are spread over larger social groups. In fact, incidents of hunger among pupils have already been recorded in schools. Every day economic disasters caused by this policy, result to an escalating number of suicides

Greek education is literally and officially under the troika custody! The decisions on the way education functions in all levels are based on strictly financial criteria aiming at a “cheap school”, that is, the new school which is subject to the laws of the market.

As a result of this education policy:

- 1056 schools have closed down
- Education support services and facilities such as Libraries, Youth Consultancy Centres, or Support Teaching Courses have been abolished.
- The number of teachers has been reduced by 20%.
- There is 40% reduction in teachers’ salaries. Their development is performance based and subject to evaluation.
- Retirement age limits have increased whereas pensions have been reduced.
- Public spending on education has been reduced even further expecting to reach 2, 23 % of the GDP by 2015.

It is clear to us that they will continue taking new measures, unless we stop them with our struggles.

We understand that now our claims must be political. Employees stand up and face this ongoing storm and declare that there is a solution. There is another policy! It is not employees that caused the public debt. We do not recognize this debt. We demand that it is deleted.

- **WE MUST OVERTHROW THIS POLICY**
- **TROIKA MUST LEAVE THE COUNTRY**
- **WE DEMAND OUR LAWFUL RIGHTS, WE DEFEND OUR ACHIEVEMENTS**
- **We must overthrow the neoliberal policies throughout Europe.**

We, the teachers, all along with the other employees and Trade Unions in our country have organized demonstrations, protests and building occupations. The Government deals with all our protests with aggression and violence, the police not hesitating to hit citizens even children and elderly people. The demonstrations were mercilessly stricken by police turning the centre of Athens into a gas chamber. We are determined to continue our struggle.

Our belief is that Greece is **just the point of departure**, as similar policies have been implemented or are under implementation across Europe. Therefore, we believe that there should be a coordinated reaction of all Federations of workers, youth and social movements across Europe.

We are aware of the fact that the government in the United Kingdom adopts cuts in salaries and social goods. We are aware of the fact that Greek and British employees are affected by this neoliberal policy. We know that those who benefit from this policy are the banks, the stock markets and the large companies. It is our duty to overthrow the policies which subvert our working rights, and dismantle both the welfare state and public education in Europe.

With our joint struggle we can overthrow the neoliberal policies in Europe. We strongly believe that employees are going to win. All together for another Europe!

Thank you very much for your attention.