

## ABOUT THE HELLINIKO (EX AIRPORT) PROJECT

Dear friends,

I address you on behalf of our committee for the creation of a public park in the area of the ex airport. I would rather use one of our Mediterranean languages, for example address you as *compañeros* and *compañeras* but English - whether we like it or not- is the only international language.

Now about Helliniko:

The area of the ex airport is approx. 5.500.000 m<sup>2</sup> and - after the addition of the corresponding beach strip- it sums up to approx. 6.200.000 m<sup>2</sup>. This means that it is the largest publicly owned urban and coastal area in Attica and probably one of the largest in Europe. The government's intention is to hand this area over to a private enterprise in order to "develop" it. (fig. 2)

The excuse for this is the money it will earn which will pay, as they say, some part of our national debt and, at the same time, it will substantially contribute to the economic development, so badly needed under the crisis circumstances. We shall see that both are either very weak or absolutely false.

But let's start from the beginning. What is so wrong about this plan, why do we declare it is a huge scandal so that we strongly oppose and struggle against it?

First of all because it deprives the people of the Athens basin (and not only) from a unique, an irreplaceable green space. The metropolitan park proposed by all 3 municipalities surrounding the ex airport can substantially improve the dramatic lack of green spaces in this basin, at the same time providing free spaces for sports, recreation, culture, scientific research and social services (as for example the metropolitan medical center already functioning inside this area, ran by volunteers and backed by the 3 municipalities already mentioned, mainly the Helliniko-Argyroupoli one.

Here I must inform you that the total green space in the Athens basin is only 2,5 m<sup>2</sup> per capita, while for example in London it is 9 m<sup>2</sup> per capita and in Vienna 20.

· We also oppose this plan because a very important public space is sold out to private business and speculation. Every public space by definition belongs to the people and, consequently, cannot become an object of commercial transaction. This is clearly stated in our legislation (Constitution included) which the Greek government audaciously defies.

Or should I say the German government?

· We also oppose this plan because they ruthlessly try to exploit the people's tragedy of unemployment - deliberately caused by our government in collaboration with the troika - in order to sell false hopes about the creation of thousands of jobs and so compel peoples' consent to their plans.

· We also oppose this plan because it deprives the people of this basin - which means almost half the population of Greece - from one of the very few seaside

spaces for free swimming and recreation near Athens, by building on and fencing the beach corresponding to the ex airport. For example a hotel of 7200 beds. They even plan to build on an extensive reef (submarine rock), destroying of course any kind of sea life on it. And there is a real wealth of life in reefs.

- We also oppose this plan because it deprives our youth (and not only) from the national Ag. Kosmas sport center, bluntly ignoring the founding law for this seaside strip existing for about 60 years. At the same time they want to get rid of a number of social and scientific institutions such as the Greek Center for Sea Research, the medical center already mentioned, a non-governmental institution for handicapped people's care etc etc. It all sums up to a real social disaster for the sake of the stock market sharks (let me add here that if those institutions were to be moved instead of abolished the cost of this would eliminate any profit from the area's selling out).

- We oppose this plan because they try to conceal or ignore - with the collaboration of willing mass media - the fact that there is an excellent general project designed by a team of city planners attached to our National Technical University (NTUA), a project which supports scientifically the public park proposal.(fig. 3)

- We oppose this plan because they plan to built 60% of the total area which corresponds to a build surface of a monstrous sum of 3.700.000 m<sup>2</sup> .The little green space left will most probably be privatized, obviously accessible only to the few people who can afford paying for the entrance and use of it, because it will belong to commercial usage such as hotels, casinos, expensive recreation, etc. They speak about a park of 2.000.000 m<sup>2</sup> and they have made nice plans and models to convince us, but there is no guarantee that even this small part of the total area will be really public i.e. with free entrance. After all, investors will be free to totally ignore this plan and make their own. (fig. 4)

- Finally, we oppose this plan because the whole area is being sold out at a ridiculous price - it is literally "being killed", as we say in Greek, for a payment of a very small part of our national dept. Namely they plan to give it away for half a billion Euros (which is the latest version of the price according to an independent newspaper). This is about 40 times (!) cheaper than its real value according to official standards. On the other hand, the Greek government will pay 2.5 billion Euros for the infrastructure of the project. So, there will be not only a huge social cost, but also a huge economic one. This of course doesn't mean that we would consent giving away the space at a fair price, because the social cost would never be compensated by the economic profit. We simply cannot translate everything into money.

This opposition has been expressed in many different ways, by people who struggle for the public character of the area, organized by our committee and the Helliniko-Argyroupoli municipality. They mostly implement what could be called creative resistance, as is shown in the following slides. ( fig. 5,6 and 7)

### **The Government's argument**

- They say that the maintenance cost will be unaffordable, if the greater part of the area becomes a park (as the University's project proposes).

Yet, according to this project, the annual maintenance cost sums up to about 5-10 million Euros which is absolute realistic to achieve, as the annual income from the parks various usages (rents, recreation, culture, etc) would be clearly more than that. For example the NTU's calculations prove that - if all rents from recreation,

marina, and the rest facilities had been collected, there would be an 80 million Euro fund for the beginning of the construction of the park.

·They also say that the government's plan will help substantially in economic growth, so badly needed under the crisis circumstances.

Our answer to this is that, of course, some jobs will be created whichever project is implemented. But in the governmental project's case many more might be lost because of the moving or abolishing of so many institutions already existing in this area.

### **Conclusion**

Of course, Helliniko is a major case but it is not the only case of public property being sold out. Hundreds of public areas, enterprises (for example trains or even the water public enterprises), electric or telecommunication companies, harbors etc. have already been or will be privatized. Most of them "fast track".

This shifting from public to private has proved to be disastrous throughout this more than 30 year old application of the neoliberal economic model all over the world. But the international elite in power won't catch the message. They pretend they don't understand because understanding is simply against their interests.

No doubt this situation is familiar to you all, because what is happening in Greece is also -one way or another- happening in the whole Europe and the whole world.

Yet this is their Achille's heel because if the peoples of Europe and the world find ways to coordinate their struggle towards social justice, towards "another world in which people will be above profit" our hopes will be well founded.

And what is happening here today is definitely a step towards this direction.