

Euro Debt Collectors Deny Medical Payments

May 24—Greek pharmacists staged a one-day strike yesterday in Athens, protesting the fact that the government has failed to reimburse them upwards of EU1 billion from the national health service, thereby creating a grave shortage of medicines, and threatening the lives of the people who depend on them. The pharmacists say they face an “emergency situation,” in which cancer and cardiac patients, among others, cannot get their life-saving medications, either because they can no longer afford them, or because they simply are not available. Reportedly, 163 essential medicines are now unavailable from pharmacies in Greece,

“I give it 15 days. If the European Union doesn’t release the loans it has promised by then, there will be scenes of utter chaos here,” said Dimitris Karageorgiou, secretary general of the Panhellenic Pharmaceutical Association. “The situation will become dramatic. Already we have cancer sufferers going from hospital to hospital to try and find drugs, because no one can afford to stock them,” he said. “If the shortages get worse, God knows what we will see.” Since the crisis started, he said, “120 pharmacies have closed in Athens alone, because of pressures from delays in payments for prescriptions from social security funds. Whatever you read about shortages is little. There are about 300 medicines that are no longer readily available. It’s tragic.”

“The situation with anti-cancer drugs is out of control, but what can we do?” one pharmacist said. “Because we’re not being reimbursed, we can’t pay suppliers, who can’t pay the companies. It’s a chain effect.”

Under orders from the EU-ECB-IMF Troika, Athens combined 13 social security funds into one, the National Organization for Healthcare Provision (EOPYY), which has had the

effect of allowing the government to centrally control the disbursement—in reality, non-disbursement—of funds.

“Record unemployment and mass emigration have meant that there is very little money coming into the funds,” Karageorgiou said. “You tell me: How can a pensioner, surviving on little more than 400 euros a month, afford cancer medications that cost 380 euros?”

There is great fear that if Greece is forced out of the euro, it will not be able to pay for medicines, and pharmaceutical companies are preparing emergency measures, according to *Athens News*.

With suicides among desperate ill and elderly people becoming almost commonplace, a 90-year-old woman and her 60-year-old son committed suicide together by jumping off a high building, holding hands as they jumped. The son, a musician, had left a note on a blog, saying he could not afford care for his mother, or even provide food. Last month, the nation was outraged when 77-year-old pensioner Dimitris Christoulas took his life in Syntagma Square, leaving a note saying he could no longer afford to live, and was committing suicide as an act of resistance.

On May 21, it was reported that, since the EU Memorandum imposing killing austerity in Greece was adopted, nearly 20% of the national budget now goes to debt service. Were it not for the debt payments, which are literally taking food and medical care from the population, the Greek budget would have a surplus.



A strike by Greek pharmacists highlighted the murderous effects of the Euro-dictated austerity. Here, a man looks into a pharmacy closed by the strike May 23.