

Troika Austerity Devastates Europe

by Our European Bureau

Sept. 19—According to a new study, entitled “A Cautionary Tale,” by the British-based anti-poverty charity Oxfam, if the austerity policy now imposed in Europe continues, the number of people living in poverty by 2025 will have increased by 25 million, bringing the total up to 146 million, or almost a third of the European population. In 2011, 121 million people were at risk of poverty in the EU, representing 24.3% of the population according to Oxfam, which used the EU’s official definition of poverty.

The report, to be released today, is the latest account showing that the IMF-EU austerity policy violates basic human rights. In April, the United Nations declared the EU’s bailout policies a violation of human rights, based on the finding of Cephass Lumina, the UN Human Rights Council expert on foreign debt and human rights, who spent four days on an inspection tour of Greece.

The Oxfam Report

Max Lawson, Oxfam’s Head of Advocacy, said: “Austerity is making an already bad economic situation far worse in the UK and across large parts of Europe. Cuts to social security and public services are combining with falling incomes and rising unemployment to create a deeply damaging situation in which millions are already struggling to make ends meet. The unprecedented rise in the number of Britons needing emergency aid from food banks is just one example among many of how poverty is on the march in the UK.”

Oxfam warns that 800,000 children and 1.9 million adults in the UK could be pushed into poverty by 2020, with the loss of some 1 million public sector jobs by 2018. And in Spain, 115 families *per day* are being evicted from their homes.

Lawson said: “We were founded in 1942 because of the famine in Greece; no one would have believed we would be here more than 70 years later, saying, Greece is in a terrible state.” In 1942, one million Greeks died

of starvation because of the Nazi occupation and the shipping blockade of Europe established by Great Britain.

“The UK, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain—countries that are most aggressively pursuing austerity measures—will soon rank amongst the most unequal in the world if their leaders don’t change course,” he added. “The only people benefiting from austerity are the richest 10% who have seen their share of income rise whilst the poorest have seen their share fall.”

Oxfam’s report points to the diktats imposed by the IMF on Ibero-America and Asia countries in the 1980s and 1990s, which meant slashing public spending and liberalizing their markets. “These policies were a failure: a medicine that sought to cure the disease by killing the patient. They cannot be allowed to happen again.”

“The European model is under attack from ill-conceived austerity policies sold to the public as the cost of a stable, growing economy, for which all are being asked to pay,” said the report. “Left unchecked, these measures will undermine Europe’s social gains, creating divided countries and a divided continent, and entrenching poverty for a generation.”

The Horrors in Greece

Meanwhile, anecdotal reports reaching the media confirm that the health “reforms” imposed on Greece by the Troika are killing people. In a huge “reorganization” of the hospital network in metropolitan Athens, five hospitals were turned into “health centers,” with patients transferred to other hospitals, where, for lack of room, patients are relegated to beds in the hallways. The same hospitals are reporting severe shortages of personnel, equipment, medicine, and even syringes and toilet paper.

The Greek blog KeepTalkingGreece.com reported that a 70-year-old patient was transferred from his local hospital, which was unable to perform an emergency operation, to another 70 km away, which could not perform the surgery for lack of operating rooms and staff. When transferred again to an Athens hospital, 210 miles away, he died en route.

There is a critical shortage of intensive-care units because of the cuts. While the European average is 12 ICU beds per 100,000 residents, in Greece, the ratio is just half that. The shortages of medicines, and long waits to see a doctor, are only getting worse.