

Trade unions and Syriza collude in Greek herd immunity policy

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A total of 3,565 new COVID-19 cases were recorded in Greece on Tuesday. This is the highest number of cases recorded this month—surpassing last week’s peak of 3,109—when more than 2,500 new cases were recorded each day. Just under a third of cases occurred in Attica, the country’s most populous region which includes the capital Athens. Cases have been rising exponentially since the beginning of July, with over 26,000 new cases recorded in the first 15 days.

While deaths are relatively low at present, averaging around 10 a day since the beginning of the month, these will also begin to rise, given that there is typically a two to eight week lag between a rise of new cases and an increase in new deaths. According to an analysis of official data published by medical news site iatronet.gr on Monday, daily COVID-19 hospitalisations increased by 247.3 percent since the start of July, while according to the government’s own figures just over 28 percent of COVID-19 beds are currently occupied.

Like in the rest of Europe the rise in cases is a direct result of the homicidal policy of “herd immunity”, with the economy opened up just as the new more contagious and more deadly Delta variant is spreading all over the continent. Speaking to Skai TV July 16, Greek epidemiologist Gkikas Magiorkinis stated that “the Delta variant is currently 60 percent prevalent in Greece and it is unlikely that it won’t become the dominant strain.”

Greece began to gradually lift its restrictions at the start of May even though daily cases were still hitting an average of 2,000. On May 13, to great fanfare, New Democracy Minister for Tourism Haris Theoharis announced to the world in front of the Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion outside Athens, ‘We are opening our tourist industry to the world.’ According to the rules unveiled by the government, tourists could

travel to Greece from May 14 onwards provided they proof that they had either been vaccinated, recently recovered from the virus, or had a negative test result. The rules were a precursor to the European Union-wide digital vaccine certificate launched at start of this month to facilitate freedom of movement throughout the continent.

Even as the Delta variant was spreading throughout the rest of Europe, and despite less than half of adults over 18 having been fully vaccinated, the government pressed ahead with its plans to open everything up. At the beginning of this month, bars and night clubs were opened while the guest limit for weddings, christenings and other catered events was raised to 300 people.

Like in the rest of Europe and internationally, the government’s response has been to allow the virus to spread unabated to safeguard the profit interests of the ruling elite while presenting the vaccine as a one-stop solution to the pandemic. The chief response by the government to the surge in cases has been to require proof of vaccination or recovery from COVID-19 for people to enter indoor restaurants, bars and cafes. The same applies for bars and nightclubs, which in addition require patrons to be seated.

That the virus can still spread among the vaccinated is highlighted by the case of the island of Mykonos. The total number of active recorded cases quadrupled on Mykonos last week, despite most of its population being vaccinated as part of the government’s drive to vaccinate all adults in the Greek islands by the end of June before the peak of the tourist season.

The digital monitoring checks in place are also reportedly in shambles, with many infected tourists slipping through the cracks. Mykonos’ Deputy Mayor Alexandros Koukas admitted in an interview with state broadcaster ERT that “we were caught slightly off

guard.”

According to the latest figures Mykonos now has 365 recorded cases per 100,000 of population, the highest such concentration of cases in the country. Other hotspots are the island of Santorini with 307 cases per 100,000 of population and the island of Paros with 227 cases per 100,000 of population.

Allowing the virus to spread places at risk a large proportion of the population, while raising the possibility of new vaccine-resistant variants developing. But in an interview to *Antenna TV* on July 16, Development and Investment Minister Adonis Georgiadis made clear that any limit on economic activity is considered a step too far. “If it was winter we would have had a 15 day lockdown. However, we are in the middle of the tourist season and without tourism there is no money while at the same time we could not morally implement [a lockdown] since half of the citizens have been vaccinated.”

“This summer we will live with a virus upsurge,” he declared.

The government is only able to act with impunity because the trade union bureaucracy supports the policy of herd immunity. Private sector trade union confederation GSEE has refused to mobilise its membership of hundreds of thousands to demand the implementation of adequate public health measures to safeguard the population and halt the spread of the virus until enough people have been vaccinated. Instead in a press statement published July 13 it pointlessly called for “information initiatives in order to reach the desired vaccination levels of our fellow citizens in order to achieve the ‘wall of protection’,” as if the majority of the population needed convincing of the necessity of being vaccinated!

No less pernicious a role is played by the pseudo-left parties, with Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left–Progressive Alliance) in mid-April presenting its own proposals for opening-up the economy. Such is the pro-business character of the party that Greek daily *Ta Nea* recently commented on the absence of the party’s previous left posturing:

“Ordinarily after such a deep crisis in the global economy as a result of the public health measures as well as after such a traumatic experience like that of the pandemic, one would have expected that a supposedly radical left party would have moved to multi-faceted

programmatic and ideological counter-attack, speaking of the limits of the market, promoting the centrality of state intervention, underlying the explosion of inequalities, and demanding a radical reorientation of policy. However, Syriza has not moved in this direction. It acquiesced to the core of the pandemic’s handling and has only recently started to differentiate its message.”

Any such “differentiation” is of a purely tactical and face-saving character, as underscored by Syriza’s critique of the government’s plans to re-open the economy in May expressing “concern for the lack of a plan to kick-start the economy and a roadmap from the part of the government.”



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