

An exchange on the proposed constitution for Europe

10 July 2003

Below we post an exchange with a reader about the proposed constitution for Europe.

I would like your comments on the proposed draft of a European “Constitution” that has been paraded around the Thessaloniki summit a week ago. I am seeing a document that has been designed in lieu of the people and their needs and will be imposed upon us by the collective will of our immaculate leaders without even the token confirmation of the European show-parliament. The one piece where IMO gives away the spirit of it is in the proposed clause where the new “super-president” will have to have served as PM or president of a EU country for at least two years. That is to say, he will have provided ample proof of his willingness to serve the capital in his old environment and will be able to serve it in the new one as well.

Yours,

GF

Greece

27 June 2003

Dear GF,

Your critical remarks about the new constitution for Europe, recently discussed in Thessaloniki by the leaders of the European Union (EU), are basically correct. The new constitution has indeed been worked out independently from the needs and requirements of the overwhelming mass of the European people.

Despite the bluster by EU heads of state about “transparency” and “democracy,” the 200 pages of documents involved in this latest draft of the constitution will do nothing to tackle urgent social problems and the erosion of democratic rights that has taken place during the past few years in Europe. The constitution itself was drawn up by a panel of unelected bureaucrats. One critic of the constitution, Luxemburg prime minister Jean-Claude Juncker, commented to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*: “I have been involved in European politics for 20 years. I have never experienced such a lack of

transparency, a completely impenetrable procedure at the preparatory meeting which is so at odds with the democratic aspirations involved in formulating the document.... I have never seen a darker darkroom than the Convent.”

One should keep in mind the background to the discussions in Thessaloniki. Mass demonstrations have taken place throughout Europe against plans by governments of the right (France and Italy) or the so-called left (Germany), which are pursuing similar programmes for the complete dismantling of the social state, the privatisation of education and health care, and the erosion of basic rights. Taking the US as its role model, the European bourgeoisie is intent on imposing “American conditions” on the continent. As a result, the European elite has no solution to growing social inequality and misery, and did not waste a word on these issues in Porto Carras.

Instead, the bureaucrats and political leaders spent their time in Greece discussing how they could build bigger walls around and inside Europe to keep out refugees and foreign workers. The other main topic of discussion was the development of an independent European security policy.

Even on the issue of security, the constitution represents a hopeless compromise. A foreign minister will be elected and Europe will be able to develop its own policy, but any decisions must be agreed to unanimously. Bearing in mind the split that went right through the centre of Europe on support or opposition to the Bush-led war against Iraq, there is absolutely no possibility of Europe being able to develop a coherent alternative to the militarism of the Bush administration. Instead, European citizens will be called upon to foot the bill for increased military spending and the sort of adventurous colonial-type intervention now being carried out by France and Germany in the African state of Congo.

You are also correct in your remarks on the post of new

“super-president,” who will have expanded powers and a longer period in power to ensure the continuity of the interests of the main European players—the big banks and European concerns. At the same time, the provisions of the constitution are rife with anomalies. The new president will lead a parliament that will have jurisdiction in an additional 34 new areas of economic and political life. At the same time, the number of vetoes on specific issues that can be cast by member states has risen to more than 50.

Great Britain opposes the constitution’s charter of human rights because it recognises the right to strike. The Germans oppose the labour regulations because they fear it will lead to a flood of impoverished Polish workers into Germany. And in the next months, even more sectional interests will work to dismember and rework the constitution in their favour.

On every important issue, the new constitution represents a hash of compromises and concessions to national and particular interests. It resembles more a treaty between separate autonomous nation states than a real binding constitution for a single European state.

The complacency and smugness with which European leaders greeted their new constitution cannot hide the reality that the new draft paper is concealing explosive social and political contradictions and political problems that threaten to tear Europe apart.

The entire proceedings at Porto Carras only serve to underline that unification of Europe based on capitalist relations is a thoroughly reactionary project. A genuinely democratic and progressive unification of Europe can only be achieved based on a new broad socialist movement of the working class.

In the coming weeks, we plan to write further on these issues. Please keep in touch. We are very interested in learning more of the response in Greece to these important developments.

Best wishes,

Stefan Steinberg for the WSWs Editorial Board

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