

The significance of the European election

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A few days ago, the European parliament in Strasbourg started a large-scale advertising campaign under the slogan: “The European election—your decision”. The aim of this expensive campaign involving media advertising spots, glossy brochures and giant posters is to lure as many as possible of the 375 million voters in the European Union to take part in the European election to be held on June 4-7. The electorate in a total of 27 countries will elect 736 deputies to the European parliament.

European parliamentarians are worried because of the widespread lack of interest in the election.

A Euro-barometer poll of around 27,000 citizens carried out at the request of the European parliament found that only 16 per cent were aware that the elections would take place in June, and only 34 percent of those asked declared that they would “probably” take part in the election. The French daily paper *Libération* then wrote of an unparalleled level of voter abstention. At the last elections five years ago 45 percent of the electorate in the EU’s 25 member states at the time had turned out to vote.

The widespread lack of interest in the election is an expression of growing opposition to EU institutions, including the parliament in Strasbourg. There is barely any other parliament in the world which can compete with the European parliament when it comes to lack of power and insignificance. European parliament decisions are not binding for national governments, and the decisions made by the European Union are in fact drawn up by the European Commission and by the Council of Ministers.

While many national parliaments have a role in the legislative decision making—as laid down in their respective constitutions—allowing them to appoint a head of government and also select ministers, this is not the case for the European parliament. The president of the European Commission is appointed by the heads of state and governments of the member states and merely confirmed by the European parliament.

The parliament has more the character of a debating

club. Many parties use their well-paid seats in the European parliament to reward or pay off veteran politicians who have outlived their usefulness. The public’s contempt for the manner of selection of European politicians for the parliament is often expressed as follows: “If you have a grandpa, send him to Europe.”

The political insignificance of the parliament stands in obverse relation to the overblown image European deputies have of themselves. They describe themselves as the only directly elected members of the world’s biggest supranational institution and as the representatives of approximately 500 million citizens.

The real function of the European parliament, however, consists of providing a phony democratic cover for the activities of the EU institutions based in Brussels and its army of 40,000 highly paid bureaucrats, who are not subject to any democratic control but are rather at the beck and call of numerous business lobbyists.

All of the governments in Europe use the EU to shift the burden of the financial and economic crisis onto the population. This is the purpose of the free-market regulations, systematic dismantling of democratic rights and the establishment of a European police state decided upon in Brussels. The European Commission has already become a synonym for deregulation, liberalization and the dismantling of employee rights. Instead of alleviating social and regional divisions in Europe, the commission intensifies them. The EU institutions, including the European parliament, are ever more blatantly emerging as the instruments of the European great powers and the most influential sectors of European big business.

From this standpoint the growing hostility towards the European Union on the part of broad sections of the population is to be welcomed.

However, it is not enough to turn one’s back on the EU and the European elections. If the future of Europe remains in the hands of the financial aristocracy and the EU bureaucracy in Brussels, then the results will be disastrous. It is necessary that workers intervene and take the fate of Europe into their own hands.

This is the purpose of the broad intervention in the European election by the Socialist Equality Party (PSG) in Germany and the British Socialist Equality Party (SEP), together with all the supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Europe. We aim to provide a progressive orientation, i.e. a socialist perspective, to the growing movement of opposition to the EU.

The international financial and economic crisis has already had catastrophic effects for Europe. Industrial production has decreased dramatically, and the recession is developing at record speed. According to the latest reports, industrial production (excluding the construction industries) in the 27 EU countries sank in February by an average 18.4 percent, compared to one year previously.

At the start of this week, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* titled an editorial “The third phase of the crisis” and wrote: “There is a strange contradiction between the economic crisis and its perception by the public. Economic data is continually being revised downward, and the prognoses are becoming increasingly gloomy. The Germans, however, remain calm.” The paper maintains that this state of affairs “will soon be over”, however. “The crisis will reach its third phase in the coming months: The social security systems will be struggling to cope.” That will affect people much more than previous stages of the crisis.

The situation is particularly bad in Eastern Europe. Twenty years after the collapse of the Stalinist regimes, it is now clear that the introduction of capitalism represented a colossal social reverse. A small elite of *nouveaux riches* and old Stalinists appropriated the existing social wealth and have acquired princely fortunes while broad masses of the population are condemned to poverty.

None of the established parties represents the interests of the population. This also applies to so-called left-wing parties. Oscar Lafontaine’s Left Party in Germany, Mélenchon’s Left Party and Besancenot’s New Anti-capitalist Party in France, Refounded Communism in Italy, SYRIZA in Greece and similar formations in other countries were set up to fill the vacuum created by the decline of social-democratic and Stalinist parties across Europe. These “pseudo-lefts” offer their services as a mechanism for ensuring public order and maintaining the capitalist system and see their major role in preventing a revolutionary development by workers.

In this situation the PSG and the SEP intend to use the European election to familiarize voters with a socialist

program and encourage a broad discussion.

At the heart of the program is an international perspective, which assumes that workers must co-operate across all borders in a joint struggle to defend jobs, wages and social gains. All attempts by governments and the trade unions to shift the burden of the crisis onto the population and play off one section of workers against others must be decisively rejected.

Workers bear absolutely no responsibility for the crisis. They did not engage in risky speculative transactions. They did not shovel millions or billions into their own pockets. Instead of making hundreds of billions available to the financial aristocracy to rescue their profits, it is necessary to prosecute and appropriate the wealth of those responsible for the crisis.

The principled defense of jobs, wages and working conditions requires a break with the trade unions, which continually sign up for new concessions and use contracts to implement degradations and prevent any independent movement of the working class. Factory committees must be developed to organize methods of struggle, including strikes and occupations, completely independently of the trade unions and work councils.

Such a mobilization must be made the starting point for the creation of workers’ governments in Europe, which put the needs and interests of society as a whole above the profit interests of big business. In the struggle to establish the United Socialist States of Europe, the upcoming European election is of considerable significance.



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