

EU appointments reflect growth of national conflicts in Europe

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23 November 2009

There is only one conclusion that can be drawn from the appointments to the two new top posts in the European Union: In future, national interests will set the tone in Europe.

Those entrusted with the leading positions by the European heads of government are little more than puppets of national power interests. The appointments were largely agreed between Berlin, Paris and London.

The new president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, owes his office to Germany and France. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy had agreed on the Belgian prime minister in advance. His membership in the conservative camp and the fact that he originates from a smaller EU state gave him the necessary majority among the remaining EU government heads.

In recompense, Britain was awarded the new office of EU foreign minister. British EU commissioner Catherine Ashton's membership in the Labour Party secured her the support of the European Social Democrats.

Both candidates are virtually unknown. They have no power base of their own and no particular experience in foreign policy. They therefore pose no serious threat to the national interests of Berlin, Paris and London. Indeed, the new European foreign minister originates from the very country that has most vociferously opposed a common European foreign policy.

It has taken the EU ten years to create these new top positions. The Lisbon Treaty, which finally emerged from an endless series of negotiations, back-room deals and mutual extortions, set in place a new leadership structure for the EU. Three times—in France, the Netherlands and Ireland—these efforts fell victim to a “no” vote of the electorate, which correctly regarded them as an attempt to bolster the most powerful

European business interests.

The necessity for a stronger European leadership was always justified with the argument that Europe could be on a par with the great world powers only if it spoke with one voice. The anecdote about former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who once famously asked, “Who do I call if I want to call Europe?” was repeated endlessly. But now, after the Czech Republic became the last of the 27 EU members to ratify the Lisbon Treaty, the desire for a common voice seems to have evaporated.

For once, the entire European press is in agreement on this point. Italy's *Corriere della Sera* sees the appointment of “a Mr. and Mrs. Nobody” to the two top EU jobs as a “European declaration of surrender” and “a step, or more precisely, two, towards insignificance.”

Germany's *Die Zeit* opines that the EU has missed “an important opportunity” and that Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy and Gordon Brown are “the true decision-makers in the EU—and want to remain so.”

Poland's *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* writes: “It has been demonstrated that the community does not need a strong president, but rather one who does not get in the way of the implementation of individual [states'] interests.”

The Lisbon Treaty is a reactionary project. It does not embody the interests of the European people, but those of the most powerful European banks and corporations. The attempt to establish a European-wide great power is accompanied by the dismantling of democratic rights, deeper attacks on working class living standards, and increasing militarism. The project is being carried out on the backs of working people.

But if Berlin, Paris and London are now prioritising their national interests, this does not make things better.

On the contrary, it underscores the reactionary essence of the effort.

National sovereignty cannot be equated with democracy, as right-wing opponents of the EU claim. The national European governments have long pursued foreign policies in defiance of the wishes of the majority within their populations. Opinion polls have shown time and again that an overwhelming majority rejects the war in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Berlin, Paris and London not only continue the war, but increase their troop deployments.

Now the growth of militarism is converging with an intensification of national antagonisms within Europe. The installation of secondary figures in the top EU posts demonstrates this.

Tensions within the EU are not new, but they have clearly increased since the beginning of the world economic crisis. This is shown by the fierce disputes over what constitutes the permissible level of state debt, the aggressive and unilateral actions of the German government at Opel, the emergence of new disputes between Germany and Poland over populations that were expelled during World War II, and the unilateral foreign policy initiatives of President Sarkozy in the Middle East, accompanied by the sale of French weapons, atomic power plants and high-speed trains.

Nobody should believe that the national conflicts that plunged Europe into two world wars in the last century that cost the lives of millions could not flare up again. These contradictions were dampened temporarily after the Second World War by means of substantial American economic aid, high economic growth rates, and Western Europe's position at the forefront of the Cold War. On this basis, the emergence of the European Union was possible.

But these factors no longer exist. With the intensification of the international economic crisis, centred in the decline of the world economic position of the United States, national conflicts are once again erupting.

The European governments find enthusiastic support for their unilateral actions among the trade unions and the social democrats, who bang the nationalist drum the loudest when it concerns the defense of national economic interests.

Marxists have always held the view that the peaceful and harmonious unification of Europe is not possible

on a capitalist basis. As long as the interests of capital dominate politics, each European great power seeks to organize the continent by forcing its will upon its rivals and upon the smaller nations. This was the background to both the First and Second world wars.

The unity of Europe is in principle necessary and progressive due to the continent's close economic interdependence. But unification can be progressive and can serve the interests of the European masses only in the form of the United Socialist States of Europe. This requires a movement from below, which welds together the European working class as part of the international working class, links the struggle against social attacks and militarism with the defence of democratic rights, and fights for the socialist transformation of society.

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