

Europe's media warn of global social unrest

Chris Marsden
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When Karl Marx wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* that “a spectre is haunting Europe,” he did so on the eve of the revolutionary eruptions that began in Italy and France in 1848 and engulfed much of the European continent.

In recent days, a number of media commentaries have predicted a similar eruption of social unrest of revolutionary dimensions as a direct result of the worsening economic crisis. These warnings are accompanied by dire predictions that Europe will suffer the return of nationalist tensions, the emergence of fascist movements and even war.

Writing in the *Financial Times* May 24, for example, historian Simon Schama stated, “Far be it for me to make a dicey situation dicier but you can’t smell the sulphur in the air right now and not think we might be on the threshold of an age of rage.... in Europe and America there is a distinct possibility of a long hot summer of social umbrage.”

Schama notes that there is often a “time-lag between the onset of economic disaster and the accumulation of social fury,” but after an initial period of “fearful disorientation,” there comes the danger of the “organised mobilisation of outrage.”

This outrage will be directed against the super-rich and those seen to be responsible for the crisis, he writes, comparing “our own plutocrats” with the financiers so memorably targeted during the French Revolution of 1789 as “rich egoists.”

In the *Observer* of May 30, Will Hutton, its former editor and now an advisor to the British Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government on cutting public sector pay, declares, “The future of Europe is in the balance. The potential disintegration of the euro will be a first-order economic and political disaster. Economically, it will plunge Europe into competitive devaluations, debt defaults, bank bailouts, frozen credit flows, trade protection and prolonged stagnation.

Politically, whatever resolve there is to hold our disparate continent together, where the old enmities and suspicions are never far from the surface, will evaporate.... What will emerge will be a Europe closer to the 1930s. Fearful, stagnant and prey to vicious racist and nationalist ideologies.”

By far, the most apocalyptic warning of what is to come was made by *Deutsche Welle*, Germany’s international broadcaster, on May 26. Its article begins by returning to the warnings made in 2008 of the impact of the global economic collapse by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, IMF head Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Robert Zoellick, head of the World Bank. Strauss-Kahn had, for example, warned that “social unrest may happen in many countries—including advanced economies.”

Deutsche Welle writes that these warnings are “closer today than at any other time since this current financial crisis—the worst since 1929—began.”

Citing the demonstrations by hundreds of thousands in Greece, it warns that the same fate can engulf “financially fragile European governments like Spain, Portugal and Italy” and that “nations all around the world are concerned about rising social discontent.”

“There is a feeling among experts that the deep anger brewing in these countries is fermenting worldwide against the same institutions, the same people, and the failure of global capitalism,” the report continues.

It cites how the US director of national intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, warned the Senate Intelligence Committee of a continued economic crisis “increasing the risk of regime-threatening instability,” from which “the United States would not be immune.”

Deutsche Welle concludes with comments by Marie-Hélène Caillol, the president of the European Laboratory of Political Anticipation think-tank, and Gerald Celente, the financial and political trends forecaster and publisher of the *Trends* journal.

Celente explains, “What’s happening in Greece will spread worldwide as economies decline.... We will see social unrest growing in all nations which are facing sovereign debt crisis, the most obvious being Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Iceland, the Ukraine, Hungary, followed by the United Kingdom and the United States.”

Calliol states, “This crisis is directly connected to the end of the world order as we know it since 1945—and even earlier since the European colonisation process. Therefore, the whole global fabric centred on the US for 60 years is slowly collapsing, generating turmoil of all sorts.”

Asked where social unrest will end, she replies, “War. It’s as simple and as horrifying as that.”

Both Calliol and Celente reject claims that agitators are behind the wave of social unrest.

“There are no organisations behind this response—it’s a public response,” said Celente, who also invokes Marx’s monumental work. “This is a 21st century rendition of the ‘workers of the world unite.’ The people are fully aware of the enormous bailout going to the ‘too big to fail’s’ that they are being forced to pay for. The higher the taxes go, the more jobs that are lost, the greater the levels of protest.”

Such statements demonstrate how seriously Europe’s rulers take the growing danger of social revolution on the continent. That is what their advisors are telling them is the inevitable product of the worsening economic crisis. But this is made all the more certain by their own efforts to place the entire burden on the backs of working people in the interests of the major banks and corporations—in the process setting out to destroy what remains of the welfare measures and working conditions previously won by workers.

The ruling classes of Europe are preparing for the emergence of mass working class struggles through the promotion of various middle-class fake-left organisations to prevent the development of socialist consciousness and block the political independence of the working class—the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany, Syriza in Greece, etc. They are also preparing for the use of mass state repression and the introduction of dictatorial forms of rule.

The advantage presently enjoyed by the ruling class is that the working class does not have the required

socialist and revolutionary perspective and leadership to mount its own counter-offensive. Instead, those organisations falsely designated as representing the workers—above all the trade unions—act as a fifth column of big business.

Whether they organise their various one-day protest strikes, such as in Greece, Portugal, Italy and Spain, or do nothing at all like Britain’s Trades Union Congress, the unions function as instruments for imposing austerity measures and cuts through the deliberate suppression and containment of the class struggle. They work hand-in-glove with the employers and governments, whether these are their formally social democratic counterparts or the archest of conservative administrations.

In the end, this will only ensure that the emerging class struggle will pass over these organisations like a tidal wave. The *World Socialist Web Site* shares the prognosis outlined so well by Trotsky in the *Transitional Programme*: “The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism, and second, by the treacherous politics of the old workers’ organisations. Of these factors, the first, of course, is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus.”

Far from a source of complacency or fatalism, this prognosis underscores the crucial question of revolutionary leadership. The indispensable instrument for closing the gap between the revolutionary implications of the world crisis and the present level of working class consciousness is the Marxist party. Those who see the need for a socialist alternative should make the decision to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.

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