

The European elections and the struggle against austerity

Alex Lantier
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The outcome of elections throughout Europe has demonstrated the deep popular opposition to austerity measures that European and American finance capital have implemented ruthlessly since the outbreak of the global economic crisis.

This social anger has led to the defeat in France of right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy, and the elevation of Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande to the presidency.

In Greece, the main target of EU austerity measures since 2009, it produced a devastating repudiation of the duopoly that has ruled Greece since the fall of the military junta in 1974, the social-democratic PASOK party and the right-wing New Democracy. They fell to 13.2 percent and 18.9 percent of the vote, respectively. The Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) tripled its vote to 16.8 percent, emerging as Greece's second-largest party.

By their vote, broad sections of the working class and the middle classes have shown that they are looking for a left-wing alternative to the political and economic dictatorship of the financial elite. However, the parties that have made gains on the basis of the leftward shift in mass sentiment have no intention whatever of implementing any significant economic reforms, let alone a radical socialist restructuring of the existing set-up.

In France, Hollande repeatedly said he would slash budgets to comply with the EU fiscal pact. While proclaiming himself “not dangerous” to London bankers and making vague references to a pro-business “growth” policy to subsidize favored banks and industries, he praised the “German model” of lower wages and more labor “flexibility” for the workers. The financial markets seem to be taking Hollande at his word. On the first day after Hollande's election, France's CAC-40 stock market index ended up 1.6 percent.

In this situation, a layer of “left” parties—including some claiming to be “socialist,” “anti-capitalist,” or

“communist”—is playing a treacherous role. Their posturing as critics of the banks' policies is a conscious fraud. Drawn from and representing the affluent sections of the middle class that, in terms of their economic interests and cultural affinities, identify with the ruling elites, they set out to block any real challenge to the EU, the euro, and other institutions of European capitalism.

In France, Hollande came to power with the support of several such parties, including the Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who won 10 percent of the vote in the French elections, and the New Anti-capitalist Party. They called unconditionally for a Hollande vote.

In Greece SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras said that his party seeks a “Roosevelt-style New Deal” to modify the terms of the bank bailouts imposed on Greece. He said, “We are not against the euro, but we are opposed to the policies being pursued in the name of the euro.”

Such comments expose the class character of these parties, which accept an entirely capitalist political and economic framework that has spelled disaster for the working class. In Greece, real incomes have been slashed by up to two-thirds, unemployment has tripled and now affects over 50 percent of the youth, and poverty and homelessness are skyrocketing.

They are completely committed to the preservation of the EU, the euro, and European capitalism. To the extent that they propose anything, it is dreams of a neo-Rooseveltian policy combining fatuous calls for symbolic reforms and the inflationary printing of money. They oppose a struggle for power and the perspective of workers' governments throughout Europe and the world, carrying out socialist policies.

They face two major obstacles, however: the reality of the world capitalist crisis, and the powerful class interests of the financial aristocracy. Amid a scramble for shrinking world markets and cheap goods and labor, the bourgeoisies of the various European countries will only

agree on a common policy to the extent they can jointly offload their crisis onto the backs of the workers.

The working class has already had bitter experiences with the policies of the middle-class “left” parties in government, notably the 2006-2008 Italian government of Prime Minister Romano Prodi, which included *Rifondazione Comunista*. *Rifondazione* backed the same attacks against the working class as the right-wing parties: pension and budget cuts, and interventions in Afghanistan and Lebanon.

If the pseudo-left parties join governments today, amid a far more intense crisis of world capitalism, their policies will if anything be even more reactionary.

No meaningful social change is possible without breaking the political power of the bourgeoisie and tearing the economy from their grasp. This requires an international strategy and perspective to unite the working class in a struggle to overthrow capitalism.

Workers can give no support to forces backing the reactionary government of Hollande in France, a government cobbled together from forces within the Greek political establishment, or similar regimes throughout Europe.

Workers must refuse any calls for sacrifice made in the name of the EU, its budget policies, and the euro currency. Far from leading to greater prosperity and peace in Europe, these institutions have emerged as the chief forum for the various national bourgeoisies to try to hash out their growing differences by ruining the working class.

The historic task of the proletariat is not the reform or renegotiation of the EU project, but the international mobilization of the entire European working class in a struggle to overthrow it and build the United Socialist States of Europe.

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