

# Europe in 2013

**Peter Schwarz**  
10 January 2013

Europe remains mired in its deepest economic and social crisis since World War II.

In 2012, more people lost their jobs than in any other year for the past two decades, EU Commissioner Laszlo Andor said on Tuesday as he presented the “European Employment and Social Report 2012.” Those who were employed had less money in their pockets and the risk of sliding into poverty was rising inexorably, he noted.

It was “unlikely,” Andor added, “that the socio-economic situation in Europe will significantly improve in 2013.”

The situation is especially catastrophic in southern and eastern European countries. Previously, only wars have devastated national economies so thoroughly in such a short time as have the austerity measures of the European Union.

In Greece and Spain, one in four is officially unemployed, and over half of all young people have no work. Average household income has fallen by 17 percent in Greece over the past three years and by 8 percent in Spain. The health care, pension and social security systems face total collapse.

But despite the social catastrophe they have provoked with their austerity policies, European governments are intent on tightening the fiscal screws. They are no longer limiting themselves to the periphery of the euro zone, but are ever more ferociously attacking the working class in the core countries.

This is confirmed by new, draconian austerity plans for Italy, France and Germany, as well as by the closure of auto plants in Europe. In her New Year’s speech to the nation, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that the economic situation would “not be easier next year, but instead more difficult.” This is a clear warning.

In Britain, where almost a quarter of the population already lives in poverty, the Cameron government is

systematically dismantling the National Health System, public education and social welfare.

Not a single party in the official political spectrum offers a way out of this vicious circle of austerity, recession and social decay. Whether nominally left or right, they all agree there is no alternative to fiscal consolidation and the satisfaction of the financial markets at the expense of social services, education and health care. In the elections due this year in Italy and Germany, the only issue is which party or coalition is best suited to implement the diktats of the financial oligarchy.

In Italy, there are three camps standing in the election: the camp of Silvio Berlusconi, which unites the most criminal elements of the bourgeoisie with the open racists of the Northern League; the camp of Mario Monti, the international banks’ man of choice, who has in the past year implemented the most severe social spending cuts in the country’s history; and the camp of Pier Luigi Bersani, up to now the most reliable ally of Monti, whose main selling point is that he is better placed to integrate the trade unions and so-called “left” into the process of implementing government policy.

In Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens are seeking to replace the conservative neo-liberal coalition headed by Merkel in order to more efficiently impose austerity and cuts in social services. They demonstrated their qualifications during the tenure of the red-green coalition government led by social democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

A particularly insidious role is played all over Europe by the nominally “left-wing” parties. They regard their main task as keeping the class struggle in check and preventing the development of an independent movement of the working class. To this end, they make verbal criticisms of austerity while working to channel social opposition behind the trade unions, which support the austerity program of the bourgeoisie and

collaborate in its implementation. At the same time, the pseudo-left parties provide governments with the parliamentary majorities necessary for the implementation of their attacks on the working class, or they implement the attacks themselves.

In Denmark, the red-green alliance, a collection of “left” Social Democrats, Stalinists, Maoists and Pabloites, recently voted for the budget of the Social Democrat-led government, which follows seamlessly from the austerity policies of the previous conservative government.

In Greece, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) stands ready to replace the unstable coalition government of Prime Minister Antonis Samaras. SYRIZA has repeatedly assured the international banks of its readiness to repay Greek government debt and keep the country in the European Union.

In Italy, both the Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (Left Ecology Liberty) and Communist Refoundation are preparing to support a government led either by Bersani or Monti, as they did previously with the government of Romano Prodi. And in Germany, the Left Party is willing to provide an SPD-Green federal government with the necessary majority, as it already does at the state level.

These parties are left in name only. They represent a well-to-do layer of the middle class that is moving ever further to the right as the class struggle intensifies. They have fully integrated themselves into the bourgeois camp.

Under conditions where any solution to the crisis through the existing political structures is impossible, social conflicts must inevitably assume more open forms. Intense class struggles are on the agenda all across Europe. This has already been announced by the mass protests that took place in Greece, Spain and Portugal last year. It is inconceivable that hundreds of millions of European workers will accept the destruction of their livelihoods without a fight.

The intensification of the class struggle, however, does not automatically resolve the question of political perspective. Rather, it poses it more sharply.

If a progressive solution to the crisis remains blocked, due to the role played by the pseudo-left parties, then ultra-right organizations can benefit from the growth of social misery and despair. That is the bitter lesson of

the past century. The same danger can be seen today in the growth of ultra-right and fascist organizations such as Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn) in Greece, the National Front in France, and Jobbik in Hungary.

Workers must break with the trade unions and pseudo-left organizations which seek to tie them to the decaying capitalist system. By insisting that there is no alternative to further cuts and the impoverishment of large sections of the population, the ruling class is in fact acknowledging the bankruptcy of capitalism.

The only alternative to a relapse into mass poverty and barbarism is a socialist program. The banks and major corporations must be nationalized and placed under democratic control. Production must be reorganized so that it serves the needs of society and not the profit interests of financial speculators and parasites.

Such a program can be achieved only through the united struggle of the European and international working class. It requires the formation of workers’ governments and the establishment of the United Socialist States of Europe. The most urgent task is the building of new revolutionary workers’ parties as part of an international socialist movement—the Socialist Equality parties and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**