The rise of Europe's far right

Chris Marsden
23 November 2013

It is widely predicted that Europe's far-right parties will register significant gains in next May's European elections.

The rightist parties will campaign primarily on the basis of opposition to the European Union, in most instances posing as opponents of austerity measures imposed by the EU throughout Europe. By shifting somewhat from their usual preoccupation with immigration and Islam, they hope to capitalise on popular hostility to the EU and its austerity agenda.

The "mainstream" political parties—of the official "left" as well as the right—are politically responsible for a situation in which the far right can strike such a pose, since the entire political establishment is implicated in the savage attacks that have been inflicted on Europe's workers since the financial crash of 2008.

Throughout Europe, social democratic parties—in government and in opposition—have worked to ensure that the working class pay for the crisis of the profit system through mass unemployment, wage cuts and the decimation of social services. As a result, the social democrats have become as unpopular as the EU itself.

The same holds true for the trade unions, which have stifled all opposition to austerity and the EU, despite efforts by workers year after year to fight back, particularly in those countries such as Greece, Spain and Portugal hardest hit by austerity.

The pseudo-left groups have acted as a political brake on the working class, insisting on the sanctity of the EU and opposing any break with the social democratic and trade union bureaucracies. This allows the far right to capitalise on the resulting political paralysis of the working class and channel social discontent along reactionary lines.

Two examples suffice as illustrations.

The most spectacular gains for the far right have taken place in France, due to the broad-based hatred for Francois Hollande's Socialist Party (PS) government. The National Front (FN) of Marine Le Pen is securing a quarter of the vote in recent polls. It heads a new alliance with Geert Wilders's Dutch Party for Freedom forged for the purpose of mobilising the anti-EU right on a common platform.

Last month, the FN easily beat the conservative Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) in an election for the canton of Brignoles, after the "left" candidate supported by the PS and the Communist Party (PCF) was wiped out in the first round.

The response of the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) to growing popular hatred for Hollande has been to cling all the harder to the Left Front, consisting of the PCF and the Left Party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, even as the Left Front clings to the PS.

NPA leader Alain Krivine recently wrote that within the Left Front there is "an essential debate that we must participate in: should we simply oppose austerity policies, or build a real left political opposition to a government whose capitulations feed the far right?" Krivine's claim that one can build a "left political opposition" to the PS together with the Left Front, whose forces have spent decades either inside the PS or in parliamentary alliances with it, is an absurd lie.

The NPA peddles such illusions because it is an ally of the PS. It seeks to disguise its role by promoting the Left Front so as to better demoralize working-class opposition to the PS's policies.

In Greece, the far right has taken on overtly fascist forms with the emergence of Golden Dawn, which has the support of some ten percent of the electorate.

Alexis Tsipras is the leader of the main opposition party Syriza and the darling of the pseudo-left. He was selected as the candidate of the Party of the European Left for the position of president of the European Commission in the upcoming EU parliamentary election.

Far from advancing an anti-capitalist alternative to

© World Socialist Web Site

austerity, however, Syriza offers its services as the political linchpin of a new government of national unity, should the present coalition led by conservative New Democracy fall as a result of social opposition.

At its last congress in July, Syriza did away with its previous federal structure, which allowed various pseudo-left tendencies to operate as open factions within Syriza. Tsipras declared it was necessary to form a single party "to make Syriza more sound, more efficient, more ready to govern and lead this country."

The pseudo-left have naturally acceded to this new set-up.

Tsipras made clear that Syriza was appealing for a political alliance stretching from the Greek Communist Party (KKE), to the right-wing Independent Greeks, to members of the social democratic PASOK party, which is currently part of the right-wing coalition government. He specified as his allies "all the people of the Left, whichever party they belong to," "all democrats and patriots" and "all those who put freedom and national sovereignty before calculation and self-interest… Even to those conservative citizens who today feel offended by the racist propaganda against Greece, by [German Chancellor] Merkel's gestures, and by the troika's humiliating drills against our country."

Syriza's nationalist rhetoric constitutes a defence of Greek capitalism and an attempt to tie the working class to the bourgeoisie. By insisting that an alternative to austerity is compatible with membership in the EU, providing only that the terms of Greece's debt repayments are renegotiated, Syriza upholds the European ruling classes' conspiracy against the working class and the dictates of the global financial oligarchy.

Speaking at a conference at the University of Texas on November 4, Tsipras made clear that his overriding concern is the stability of Greek and European capitalism. "We have an economic union and a common currency, and other available alternatives are worse," he declared. "An exit will not benefit anyone."

Not only combating the growth of the far right, but the very fate of the working class depends on breaking the political stranglehold of the social democrats, the trade unions and their fake-left apologists. The NPA and Syriza are led by an affluent middle-class layer that seeks to carve a political niche for itself in government, in the state apparatus and within the trade union bureaucracy in return for suppressing any independent struggle by the working class. Their greatest service to capital is to besmirch socialism by associating it with a slavish defence of the existing order.

The Socialist Equality parties in Germany and Britain stand unambiguously in opposition to the EU and all of its constituent governments. Against the Europe of big business, austerity and political reaction, we advance the perspective of a unified struggle of the continent's workers, for the formation of workers' governments and the United Socialist States of Europe. To realise this perspective, new and genuinely socialist parties of the working class must be built as sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site