

Peter Schwarz: The European Union and the United Socialist States of Europe

Peter Schwarz
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We are publishing here the text of the speech given by Peter Schwarz, secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International, to the International Online May Day Rally hosted by the ICFI and the WSWs on Sunday, May 4.

Dear comrades,

In three weeks, close to 400 million voters in 28 European countries will be called upon to elect a new European Parliament. Only a fraction of those eligible to vote will actually go to the polls. And it is predicted that political parties rejecting the European Union will obtain a record result.

These are mainly parties of a far right-wing character, opposing the EU from a nationalist point of view and promoting chauvinism. They profit from the fact that every other bourgeois party—including the alleged left-wing variety like SYRIZA in Greece and Die Linke in Germany—is defending the European Union.

These parties claim that the EU offers protection against the return of national conflicts, war, dictatorship and all the horrors that haunted Europe in the 20th Century.

What a fraud!

In reality, the EU is the main instrument for inciting social divisions, fostering national antagonisms and developing authoritarian forms of rule.

The entire history of the European Union has confirmed the Marxist view, articulated by Leon Trotsky in 1917, that, “a halfway complete and consistent economic union of Europe coming *from the top* by means of an agreement of the capitalist governments is sheer utopia.”

“The economic union of Europe,” Trotsky continued, “which offers colossal advantages to producer and consumer alike, and in general to the whole cultural development, becomes the revolutionary task of the European proletariat in its fight against imperialist protectionism and its instrument—militarism.”

The European Union does not represent the unity of the European peoples, but rather the dictatorship of the most powerful economic and financial interests over Europe. It forms the framework in which the European powers organize their attacks on the working class, carry out their conflicts, and plan their wars.

Since the financial crash of 2008, Brussels, at the instigation

of Berlin, has imposed brutal austerity measures on Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland. It has condemned millions to unemployment and poverty; destroyed education, health and old-age benefits; and left the young generation without a prospect for their future.

The countries of Eastern Europe, which joined the EU exactly ten years ago, have been transformed into cheap-labor platforms for international corporations. They have gone through countless rounds of privatizations and cutbacks in social services, which have left the entire public infrastructure in shambles.

Next on the list of social counterrevolution are France and Italy. The EU Commission, the financial press and all the other mouthpieces for the international financial aristocracy are insisting that whatever is left of the hard-won social gains of the post-war period must be destroyed.

Germany, supposedly Europe’s strongest economy, is no exception from this assault on workers. Already now, one in three works in precarious conditions, one in four is without a full-time job, and one in six is at risk of poverty.

The resurgence of German militarism and the war drive in Ukraine are a direct result of these mounting antagonisms.

Faced with growing social opposition, a deepening economic crisis, the menace of a collapsing euro and the threat of a disintegrating European Union, German imperialism is repudiating the constraints on militarism imposed because of its crimes in the Second World War. As in 1914 and in the 1930s, confronted with insoluble economic and social contradictions, it resorts to militarism and war.

In the past, Germany’s dominant role in the European Union was mainly based on its economic strength. In the future, it will throw around its military weight to maintain its dominant role.

The growth of militarism will expose even more openly the reactionary character of the EU. Previously, it was mainly defined by economic issues—such as the free movement of capital and goods and the common currency. In future, the struggle against a common enemy will replace economics as the basis of the EU’s internal cohesion.

Given the huge costs of rearmament and the massive popular opposition, the turn to militarism will inevitably be accompanied by further attacks on the social and democratic

rights of the working class.

The European Union already plays the leading role in promoting the structure of a police state.

Edward Snowden has revealed that the secret services of Britain, Germany and France are closely collaborating with their American partners in spying on millions of people in Europe and all over the world.

Europol and other European police agencies have built massive data bases covering the whereabouts and personal details of millions of European citizens.

And the borders of Europe have been transformed into a fortress where thousands of refugees die every year.

Years of austerity and the emergence of militarism have exposed the utterly reactionary character of what was once wrongly called the European “labor movement”—of the Social Democratic parties, the misnamed Communist parties and the trade unions.

One hundred years ago, the leading parties of the Second International betrayed their anti-war program and supported their respective ruling classes in the First World War. Today, there is nothing the Social Democrats can betray. Programmatically and in practice, they are unreservedly pledged to militarism and attacks on the working class.

Ten years ago German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, a Social Democrat, set a European benchmark for attacks on workers’ rights and conditions with his “Agenda 2010.” Now, SPD Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier is leading the campaign for the resurgence of German militarism.

In Italy, the successors of the former Communist Party have pledged to reverse all the social gains won by Italian workers in decades of bitter struggle. Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is the darling of the corporate heads, the financial swindlers and the banks.

In France, Socialist Party President François Hollande has reacted to the latest electoral defeat by nominating the most right-wing figure in his party as prime minister. Manuel Valls’ mission consists of intensifying the war on the working class and making chauvinist appeals.

This will inevitably strengthen the neo-fascist National Front. This is not an unwanted side effect, but a consciously pursued political goal. Hollande would rather accept a National Front government than make any concessions to the mounting opposition of the working class.

The attacks on workers prepared by Valls cannot be carried out with democratic methods. The ruling class increasingly toys with the idea of calling upon the fascists to suppress the class struggle. This is not limited to France. The support of a fascist-led coup in Kiev by the European Union marks a sea-change in this regard.

The Social Democrats have the full support of the trade unions. They are no longer workers’ organisations, but privileged bureaucratic apparatuses. Their officials are handsomely paid to sell out the workers. Today, every

dismissal, wage cut and plant closure bears their signature. When they cannot completely prevent protests and strikes, they make sure that they lead nowhere.

An especially repugnant role is played by parties like Die Linke in Germany, the Front de Gauche in France and SYRIZA in Greece. They are closely tied to the trade unions. They do everything in their power to prevent the working class from building its own, independent revolutionary party. Occasionally, they employ “left” phrases to deceive the workers. But in practice, they are unconditionally defending capitalism and the European Union.

Our movement is utterly hostile to these forces and differs from them in every way.

We reject the European Union and all its undemocratic institutions, including the European Parliament. Our answer to the European Union is the United Socialist States of Europe. This is not just a slogan, but the basis of a revolutionary, socialist program.

Working people all over Europe are opposing the destruction of their livelihoods and the danger of war. We fight to unite them in a common struggle against capitalism.

We stand against every form of anti-immigrant chauvinism, racism and nationalism, including the advocacy of separatism in Scotland, Catalonia, Northern Italy and Belgium. That only sows further divisions between workers at a time when a united struggle against the common enemy is essential.

We advocate the formation of workers’ governments in every country and the unification of Europe on a socialist basis.

This is the only way to prevent the decline of Europe into nationalism and war, and to create the conditions for utilizing and developing its extensive resources and productive forces in the interests of society as a whole.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Britain and the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) in Germany are standing in the European Elections to fight for this program and to build sections of the ICFI all over Europe.



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