

The European elections and the crisis of the EU

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The results of last week's European elections represent a massive rejection of the European Union. Twenty-two years after the Maastricht Treaty and ten years after the incorporation of many Eastern European states, most people see the EU for what it is: the tool of powerful capitalist interests.

Ever since the financial crisis of 2008, the institutions in Brussels have played a central role in reshaping Europe in the interests of finance capital. They have shifted billions to the banks for the benefit of the rich, plundered the welfare state by means of drastic austerity measures, and seen to it that wages were forced down and exploitation and unemployment pushed up. Together with the US, the EU is pursuing an aggressive imperialist foreign policy, pushing Europe to the verge of a military confrontation with Russia in the weeks before the elections.

Under these circumstances, many people regard the official propaganda that the EU is a guarantor of well-being and peace as pure hypocrisy. But this discontent finds no positive expression because the trade unions and the supposed "left" parties undermine all protests and mass actions. Hence the popular opposition is expressed in a passive and, in part, reactionary form.

Well over half (57 percent) of all registered voters in Europe did not take part in the elections. The disillusionment was particularly high in the Eastern European states that joined the EU over the last 10 years. In Slovakia, only 13 percent of voters went to the polls; in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland and Croatia less than a quarter of voters participated.

In several countries, voters punished the incumbent governments. In France, Spain, Britain, Greece and the Netherlands, the social democratic and conservative parties, which for decades have either alternated in government or governed together, suffered massive losses.

The decay of the establishment parties has taken on pernicious and dangerous forms in some cases. Since all the establishment parties—whether conservative, liberal, Green, social democratic or "left"—support the European Union, far

right and openly fascist parties have been able to profit from the discontent.

In France, Britain and Denmark, such ultra-right parties have become the strongest force. In Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and Hungary they polled in the double-digits. The Sweden Democrats and the fascist Golden Dawn in Greece obtained almost ten percent of the vote.

The growth of these right-wing and fascist forces represents a danger. They are determined to realise their reactionary programme and enjoy support from the state and security apparatus as well as growing sections of the ruling class. However, it would be wrong to interpret their growth as the result of mass support for their chauvinist, xenophobic and authoritarian programme. What is driving voters into their arms is social desperation and frustration.

The main responsibility for the growth of the right rests with the parties of the European Left and the pseudo-left groups in their ranks and their orbits. The only thing "left" about these organisations is their name. They do not speak for the working class, but for a small better-off layer of the upper-middle class. They regard their most important task as blocking an independent movement of the working class against capitalism, and work closely with the trade unions and social democrats to this end.

They defend the European Union and the free market. In so far as they criticise capitalism, they speak for the top 10 percent of society who look with envy upon the richest 1 percent, or 0.001 percent, who earn and own far more than they do. For the working class, they have only contempt and enmity. Germany's Left Party has shown this in several state executives, where they have implemented brutal austerity measures.

The pseudo-lefts fear an independent movement of the working class, while they are prepared to come to an arrangement with the right-wingers and fascists. They have shown this in Ukraine, where they have glorified as a "democratic revolution" a movement that rests on fascists and is aimed at subordinating the country to the European Union and the diktat of the International Monetary Fund.

By defending the European Union, the pseudo-left groups enable the right-wing and the fascists to pose as a radical opposition. This is particularly clear in France. It is possible to understand the rise of the Front National to become the strongest party in France only if one studies the corrosive role of these organisations over a period of decades.

In 1968, the petty-bourgeois left reacted to the general strike, which shook bourgeois rule to the core, by turning in shock to the Socialist Party (PS) and its leader François Mitterrand, a former functionary in the Vichy regime and a minister in the Fourth Republic. To this day, one can still find former members of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR—Revolutionary Communist League), the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI—International Communist Organisation) and other pseudo-left organisations in the leadership of the PS. One such figure, OCI member Lionel Jospin, became prime minister in the 1990s.

When the influence of the Socialist Party collapsed 15 years ago, this initially benefited the pseudo-left groups. In 2002, the candidates of the LCR and Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Struggle) won 10 percent of the vote in the first round of the presidential election. The Socialist Party candidate, Lionel Jospin, ended up behind Front National candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, who contested the second round against the conservative Jacques Chirac.

As millions took to the streets against Le Pen, the pseudo-lefts lined up behind Chirac and called for his election. Ever since, they have supported the Socialist Party, which today is implementing brutal attacks on the working class. It is the Front National that has profited. In last week's European elections, it won 25 percent of the vote, while the Socialist Party won only 14 percent, the Left Front (Front de gauche) polled 6.3 percent, Lutte Ouvrière obtained 1.2 percent, and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) just 0.3 percent.

The pseudo-left has reacted to the rise in votes for the Front National by moving closer to the Socialist Party. The Communist Party has published a “solemn appeal” to build a “popular front of the 21st century” in which all the “left” forces (including the Socialist Party) join together. The NPA is calling on “the organisations of the social and political left” (also including the Socialist Party) to unite against “the growth of the extreme right.”

The pseudo-lefts play a similar role in other European countries. In Germany, the Left Party is preparing for entry into a federal government and has adopted the official political line on all domestic and foreign policy questions.

In this regard, SYRIZA in Greece, whose leader Alexis Tsipras is the candidate of the European Left for president of the EU Commission, only apparently represents an exception. SYRIZA has become the strongest party in

Greece because it promises an end to austerity. However, it neither can nor wants to keep its election promises. Its policies will not differ from those of the social democrats. SYRIZA prepares the ground for the further growth of the fascists of Golden Dawn.

The continuing attacks on the social and democratic rights of the working class will inevitably bring about fierce class battles. The rise of the right will meet with resistance. The Front National is hated in large parts of the French working class.

The Socialist Equality Party in Britain and the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit in Germany participated in the European elections in order to prepare for these battles, provide them with a perspective, and build sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout Europe. Only an independent political movement of the working class can lead the struggle against fascism, war and capitalism.

Our campaign focussed on two issues: the struggle against war and the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe. We fought for a political line upon which the struggle of the working class can and must develop: the rejection of the European Union and the nationalists and fascists, and the unification of the international working class in the struggle for a socialist Europe.

Our goal was not to win as many votes as possible by means of populist slogans, but to tell the truth to the working class and prepare it for the coming struggles. Many workers will go through important experiences in the coming period. In the International Committee of the Fourth International they will find a party and a programme through which they can fight for their interests.



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