

EU summit in Ypres: National conflicts and militarism

Peter Schwarz**30 June 2014**

The European Union summit last Thursday and Friday began with a solemn ceremony of remembrance in Ypres. The 28 EU heads of state and government were commemorating the beginning of World War I one hundred years ago.

In the autumn of 1914, the German advance against France ground to a standstill at the Belgian town. In the following three-and-a-half years, more than half a million soldiers and civilians died senseless and agonizing deaths in trench warfare for tiny gains in territory. The once blossoming town of cloth merchants was completely destroyed.

The commemoration in Ypres was planned as a political celebration of the European Union. Faced with growing popular opposition to the EU, it was supposed to convey the message that the EU is a safeguard against the relapse of the continent into barbarism and war.

“We must never forget how helpful the concept of European unity is when it comes to preserving peace,” said the curator of the local war museum, Piet Chielens.

In reality, the opposite is the case, as the ensuing summit confirmed. The EU does not preserve European peace. Rather, it is an arena within which the same national and economic interests once again collide that in 1914 pushed Europe into war. It is a breeding ground for social inequality, nationalism and war.

It is only a matter of time until the contradictions being stirred up by the EU will tear apart its own institutions and lead to violent conflict. Such a development was already prefigured at the summit.

The conflict over the future president of the European Commission escalated to a point where, for the first time in the organization’s history, a member state, Britain, is threatening to leave the European Union. The withdrawal of such an important country would not only exacerbate the contradictions between the EU and the UK, but would also undermine the EU’s internal balance and lead to a

heightening of tensions between Germany and France.

The conflicts within the EU are accompanied by an aggressive foreign policy and growing militarism, giving rise to the danger of a war with Russia. Among the most important “achievements” of the summit was the signing of association agreements with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which will bind the economies of the three former Soviet republics closely to the EU and remove them from the Russian sphere of influence.

In November 2013, then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign an association agreement with the EU. In response, the EU and the US organized the Maidan protests in Kiev, collaborated with fascist forces to bring about Yanukovych’s downfall, and unleashed a civil war in the east of the country. Now they have signed a free trade agreement with Ukraine without taking into consideration even in a minimal way the interests of Russia, with which Ukraine is closely linked economically.

The summit also stepped up the attacks on the European working class. To shore up British Prime Minister David Cameron after his defeat over the election of the next EU Commission president, the summit agreed to a further opening up of the internal market, an increase in free trade, and “protections” against the supposed abuse of social services (a euphemism for anti-immigrant policies). This is grist for the mill of right-wing anti-immigrant and nationalist parties.

French President François Hollande and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi obtained the necessary room for manoeuvre to implement anti-working class labour market “reforms” by means of a more flexible approach to the EU Stability Pact. Their model is the Agenda 2010 policies of former Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, which spawned a huge low-wage sector in Germany. These measures will further erode the possibility of younger workers finding regular, decent-

paying jobs.

The outbreak of the First World War a hundred years ago was the result of the insoluble contradictions of capitalism. The global and socialised organization of production, which links hundreds of millions of people with one another, could no longer be reconciled with the nation-state and the private ownership of the means of production on which capitalism is based.

The imperialist powers responded to this contradiction by attempting to forcibly redivide the world economy and submit it to their control. In Europe, the youngest and most economically dynamic imperialist power, Germany, collided with the older imperialist powers, Britain and France. In two world wars, Germany tried to reorganize the continent in its own interests, both times ending in disaster.

The same contradictions are at work again. They are the cause of the imperialist wars in the Middle East and the aggressive intrusion of Germany into Eastern Europe. The enormous scale of social inequality and the domination of an unscrupulous financial oligarchy, scouring every corner of the world for profit, render impossible any rational resolution of social problems.

The European Union does not promote peace. It serves the ruling class in its conduct of class war at home and military war abroad. It does not embody the unity of the European peoples, but the interests of the European great powers, banks and corporations.

The prevention of new wars is inseparably bound up with the struggle against the European Union, which has become a synonym for the destruction of the livelihoods of working people and everywhere provokes popular outrage and rejection. The only form in which Europe can be truly united and at peace is the United Socialist States of Europe—a federation of workers' governments that expropriate the large banks and corporations, placing them in the service of society rather than private profit.



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