

# Europe faces political “earthquakes,” BBC warns on Democracy Day

Paul Mitchell  
24 January 2015

The BBC declared January 20 a special “Democracy Day” in commemoration of the 750th anniversary of the first parliament of elected representatives at Westminster, the de Montfort Parliament. In collaboration with the House of Commons and the House of Lords, which have deemed 2015 a “Year of Parliament,” BBC broadcast a day of live streamed events, discussion and debates. Ruling elite concerns about a revolutionary response to the crisis of capitalism were at the heart of Democracy Day.

For the occasion of Democracy Day, the BBC commissioned a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) which warned that there is a growing risk to democracy ... and it comes from the people themselves!

The report states that the rise of populist anti-establishment parties is set to cause political “earthquakes” across Europe in 2015, with some winning elections and mainstream parties “forced into previously unthinkable alliances.” The “most immediate political challenge” is in Greece, where a snap general election on January 25 could lead to a “far left, populist” government.

“The election of a Syriza government would be highly destabilising, both domestically and regionally. It would almost certainly trigger a crisis in the relationship between Greece and its international creditors, as debt write-offs form one of the core planks of its policy platform,” the EIU says.

Other European countries facing problem elections include Denmark, Finland, Spain, France, Sweden, Germany and Ireland. The UK, particularly, is “on the cusp of a potentially prolonged period of political instability” because it will be “increasingly difficult to form the kind of single-party governments with a parliamentary majority that have been the norm.”

The country has seen the most dramatic decline in

political party membership in Western Europe since 1980—around 65 percent.

“An upsurge of popular protest has swept through Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America in recent years. Other regions such as Asia and North America have been less susceptible, although have not escaped entirely,” the EIU continues.

“The mainsprings of the protests have been different—some have been responses to economic distress, others are revolts against dictatorship; some are expressions of a popular desire to have their voices heard by political elites, others express the aspirations of new middle classes in fast-growing emerging markets.”

The day’s proceedings sought to explain these calamitous events, which represent an existential crisis not only for the official parties but for the bourgeois state.

Professor Conor Gearty, Director of the Institute of Public Affairs, opined in a session titled ‘How do we go about saving democracy?’ that “We don’t have to go the whole way with Lenin to acknowledge that democracy has not effortlessly produced equality.” As an alternative the professor called for more regionalism.

Similar sentiments were echoed by BBC Political Editor Nick Robinson who chaired the panel discussion “Can Democracy Work?” Robinson has made the calls for revolution by comedian Russell Brand, who refused to appear on the programme, a particular target. (See: BBC attacks Russell Brand to defend a discredited political setup ).

Robinson insisted that this May’s UK election would be a “gripping” battle because of the presence of “Other” parties on the ballot paper—UK Independence Party and the Scottish National Party. However, both are bourgeois parties committed to capitalism. UKIP’s

anti-immigrant, anti-European Union rhetoric is aimed at channelling social tensions in a reactionary nationalist direction. It would support a minority Tory government and demands greater deregulation of business and a “streamlined welfare system.” The SNP is demanding the slashing of corporation tax in Scotland as part of any post-election horse-trading, which can only further decimate workers’ wages and living standards.

Many people have rightly concluded there are no fundamental differences between the parties, and a cross on a ballot paper every few years does nothing to alleviate their problems, growing inequality and the power of the super-rich who really pull the strings.

In response, the BBC sought to show its viewers that Britain was better than elsewhere in the world and that the British ruling elite was attempting to rectify problems. Early headlines, disseminated uncritically around the world by other news outlets, proclaimed the UK government the most “open” in the world, according to research carried out by the organisation set up by the inventor of the World Wide Web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee. The US and Sweden came second and third in the rankings!

This news is cold comfort to Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, whose terrible treatment at the hands of all three governments barely received a mention during the day.

Berners-Lee, in an interview with the BBC’s Home Editor, Mark Easton, pointed out that while the UK government might be “open”, it still had “a long way to go”. People should also remember it was the worst country for spying on its own citizens.

The claim about the openness of the UK government met with almost universal derision in the programme’s online comments pages. One, by watriler, said, “Information—yes but we have an unelected second chamber, a head of state determined by the carefully designed accident of birth and the CoE [Church of England] embedded in our Parliament. The whole of the NHS has no democratic accountability other than the SoS [Secretary of State]. The current government is undermining local government democracy through a thousand cuts.”

Another declared, “Oh, sure, I may have access to lots of information. The problem is, much of it is inaccurate, untrustworthy or manipulated for public

consumption. Maybe I am cynical, but it’s the behaviour of two generations of politicians which has moulded my attitudes.”

A further comment wondered, “UK government transparent? Where’s the Chilcot Report [into the 2003 invasion of Iraq] then? The last witness was FOUR YEARS AGO and still not released.”

While the BBC takes part in an exercise to bolster the authority of Parliament, Democracy Day was the occasion for former head of MI6, Sir John Sawers, to reveal something of the ruling elite’s real preparations to counter the political earthquakes on the horizon. He called for new surveillance tools for the security services, for Internet companies to allow access to data and criticised Edward Snowden for throwing “a massive rock in the pool” by revealing the “informal co-operation” between companies and security services.

It was also revealed that British security agency Government Communication Headquarters stored thousands of emails from journalists working for the world’s biggest news organizations during a November 2008 “test exercise”, and classified investigative journalists as a “security risk” alongside terrorists and computer hackers.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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