

The European Union and the return of European militarism

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Comrades and friends,

Next Friday is the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. On May 8, 1945, the supreme command of the German *Wehrmacht* officially surrendered.

In historical terms, 70 years are a short time. There are still two million people alive in Germany who were at least 15 when the war ended. They personally experienced the war as adolescents or adults. And those born later are familiar with the horrifying pictures of destroyed cities, suffering people and piles of emaciated bodies in the concentration camps.

Can such a terrible catastrophe recur in Europe?

For a long time the official answer to this question was “No”. The economic integration of Europe, the common currency and the removal of internal borders have eliminated the conflicts that transformed Europe into the center of two world wars, it was claimed. The European Union embodies the “Unity of Europe”. It ensures that Europeans will never shoot at each other again.

This has always been a lie. The European Union has not united the peoples of Europe. It is a tool of the most powerful economic and financial interests, who use it as a weapon against the working class at home and against their rivals internationally. The EU did not overcome the contradictions that transformed Europe into a hell between 1914 and 1945. Rather it reproduced them.

An examination of Europe today demonstrates that all the social diseases and contradictions that led to the disaster of two world wars are present once again.

Let us look at the social situation first. Never before have class contradictions in Europe been so acute. Twenty-five years ago, the reintroduction of capitalism in Eastern Europe was accompanied by promises of affluence and democracy. Now the incomes of many workers in these countries are lower than in China. The health and education system has collapsed. The governments are riddled with corruption.

The word “austerity” has become the epitome of endless attacks on wages, pensions, jobs and social benefits all over Europe. Greece serves as a pilot scheme. The diktat of the troika has resulted in the pauperization of millions of people.

In Germany, the continent’s leading economy, one in seven is poor. Thirty-nine percent of all those employed work in atypical jobs—part-time, temporary work, mini-jobs and so on.

At the top of society, wealth is exploding. The German stock index rose from 2.000 points before German unification to 12.000 points today. This astonishing increase is not the result of economic growth; it reflects the boundless enrichment of the financial oligarchy at the expense of the working class.

Social inequality has reached a dimension that is incompatible with democracy. While society is drifting apart, the political parties are closing ranks. No matter if nominally left or right, they all pursue the same reactionary policy. It is now virtually impossible to influence political events through the ballot box.

The ruling elites react to this by building a gigantic surveillance and police apparatus. They see the people as enemies that must be intimidated and suppressed.

The most malignant expression of the decline of Europe is the resurgence of militarism. Since the 1990s, various European powers have participated in the US-led imperialist wars in the Middle East and Africa. With the Western orchestrated putsch in Ukraine, however, European militarism has acquired a new dimension.

NATO has revised its strategy and is directing its huge arsenal of weapons against Russia. A nuclear war with Russia is no longer a theoretical possibility, but a real danger.

Europe is building up its military in order to participate in the predatory imperialist drive for a new division and redivision of the world. German imperialism is resuming its traditional direction of expansion by moving into Ukraine. But Russia is not the only goal. European imperialism is increasingly active in the Middle East and Northern and

Central Africa as well.

Behind the façade of European unity, tensions are growing. Berlin's stated aspiration to "lead Europe" provokes concern in Paris and other European capitals.

The conflicts that transformed Europe into a battlefield are re-emerging. The breakup of the European Union into its constituent national and even regional parts is on the horizon. For months there was a heated debate over whether the EU could survive a Grexit—an exit of Greece from the Eurozone. Now a Brexit—the withdrawal of Britain from the EU—is considered to be a much bigger danger.

NATO, the transatlantic alliance with the US, is riven by similar tensions. Notwithstanding their concerted action against Russia, Germany and the US are strategic rivals in Eastern Europe, in the Black Sea region, in Russia and in China.

The overwhelming majority of the European people reject militarism, chauvinism, xenophobia and social inequality. Millions of workers and youth are looking for means and ways to fight them. The continent resembles an overheated boiler, poised to explode.

What they are lacking is a viable perspective and a political voice giving expression to these strivings.

The breakup of Europe into competing states and regions that are fighting one another would be a disaster. But defending the European Union makes things even worse. The EU is the source of austerity, dictatorship and militarism—of the very factors that produce the centrifugal tendencies tearing Europe apart.

This was demonstrated once again by the recent events in Greece.

The Coalition of the Radical Left, Syriza, won the elections on the promise to stop austerity. It insisted, however, that it would not break with the EU and would remain within the Eurozone.

It took less than one month for the Syriza government to repudiate its election program and betray, totally and utterly, the impoverished working people whose votes placed it in power.

For the International Committee of the Fourth International, this abject betrayal did not come as a surprise. Syriza does not speak for the working class, but for sections of the Greek ruling elite and the affluent upper middle class.

They may have their tactical differences with the EU, but the last thing they want are measures that might destabilize European capitalism, let alone threaten their own corporate and financial interests in Greece.

That is why they did not appeal to the European working class, but instead formed a coalition with the xenophobic Independent Greeks. And that is why they capitulated to every demand of the troika. Meanwhile, they are preparing

for the violent oppression of social unrest.

The events in Greece are a major political experience for the international working class. The role played by Syriza is a devastating exposure of the reactionary character of the pseudo-left middle class politics that have replaced the proletarian class struggle with a panoply of "identity agendas".

The Left Party in Germany, Podemos in Spain and countless smaller groups throughout the world pursue the same agenda. They are enthusiastic supporters of Syriza and speak for the same affluent social milieu. They are preoccupied with achieving a more equitable distribution of wealth within the richest 10 percent of society. Envious of the extremely rich, they despise and fear the working class.

The alternative between defending the European Union and strengthening the national state is a false alternative. As we have seen, the EU itself is creating the forces that are breaking Europe apart.

The only means to unite the continent in the interest of its people, to use its immense resources for the benefit of all and to stop militarism, is through the United Socialist States of Europe.

Only the independent mobilization of the European working class can stop an impending catastrophe.

Workers of all European countries must unite against the European Union and its institutions. They must establish workers' governments, which expropriate large fortunes, the banks and major corporations, which reorganize the economy on a socialist basis and orient it to the service of society as a whole rather than the profit interests of the financial aristocracy.



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