

Trump's nationalist threats and the response of the European ruling class

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Less than two weeks after Donald Trump's inauguration as US president, the political authority in Europe of the US government has been shattered. As protests against Trump's travel ban spread internationally and conflicts erupt between Washington and the European Union over trade and military policy, the outcome of the US election is plunging Europe into an unprecedented crisis.

The new president is deeply unpopular in Europe. A FranceInfo poll found Trump had disapproval rates of 83 percent in Germany, 81 percent in France, 80 percent in Spain, 75 percent in Britain and 59 percent in Italy. The European population is sympathetically following protests in the United States and other countries against Trump, whose anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant measures are widely despised. They are seen for what they are: an attempt to persecute defenseless people based on appeals to nationalism and racism.

While the popular opposition to Trump expresses hostility to chauvinism and war, the European ruling class is strengthening its military and police forces in preparation for conflict with Washington.

Contradictions are emerging with enormous speed. In November, as he toured Europe to offer reassurances about Trump's election, President Barack Obama insisted that Trump had a deep "commitment to NATO and the trans-Atlantic alliance." Barely two months later, conflicts unleashed by Trump's election have undermined the relations between American and European capitalism that have prevailed since World War II.

Trump's election did not cause this breakdown. Rather, it served as its catalyst. His dismissal of the NATO alliance as obsolete arises from tensions among the NATO allies, centered on US imperialism's attempt to militarily counteract its decades-long economic

decline, particularly vis-à-vis Germany. Since his election, Trump has demanded that Germany buy more US cars, threatened to slap a 35 percent tariff on German car exports, hailed Brexit as a model for a wider breakup of the EU, and chosen officials hostile to the euro.

Trump's trade advisor Peter Navarro has denounced the euro, stating that it allows Germany to "exploit other countries in the EU as well as the US with an 'implicit Deutsche Mark' that is grossly undervalued." The US ambassador to the EU, Ted Malloch, said the euro "could in fact collapse in the coming year, year and a half." Malloch speculated that the election this year of neo-fascists in the Netherlands, France and, possibly, Germany might destroy the EU.

This is an unprecedented public declaration by Washington of hostility to the institutional foundations of European capitalism. In response, sentiment is growing rapidly within the ruling elites for a major reorientation of European foreign policy. *Der Spiegel*, the German equivalent of *Time* magazine, proposes a "radical break" in the alliance with the United States and "better relations with China." It adds, "A new Berlin-Beijing axis could at least partially replace the old trans-Atlantic order."

EU Council President Donald Tusk issued a letter Tuesday, on the eve of the EU summit in Malta. It named the United States—alongside Russia, China and Islamist terrorism—as an external threat. The letter warned that the situation is "more dangerous than ever before in the time since the signature of the Treaty of Rome," which established the European Economic Community in 1957.

Tusk calls for "assertive and spectacular steps" to use "the change in the trade strategy of the US to the EU's advantage by intensifying our talks with interested

partners.” Among the EU Council president’s proposals are “a definitive reinforcement of the EU external borders; improved cooperation of services responsible for combating terrorism and protecting order and peace within the border-free area; an increase in defence spending; [and] strengthening the foreign policy of the EU...”

The European ruling class’ plan to exploit hostility to Trump to justify aggressive military and police state policies must be rejected. Tusk seeks to further militarize a reactionary imperialist bloc, which collaborated with the United States in the wars in Libya and Syria. While mouthing sympathy for the plight of refugees, the EU has implemented policies that condemned thousands to drown in the Mediterranean.

If Tusk cynically pays lip service to “restoring” socioeconomic welfare, it is because the EU is already hated by workers for its austerity policies, which have slashed living standards across Europe since the 2008 financial crash and provoked waves of social protest. Austerity will only intensify, however, if more funds are diverted to the military.

Proposals like those of Tusk for a German-dominated EU to confront Washington simply pave the way for an escalation of conflicts, pitting European workers against their class brothers and sisters in the United States and splintering Europe itself.

For all its militarist bombast, the EU is on the brink of disintegration. With Britain already set to leave amid escalating tensions between London and Berlin, the European press is full of proposals to shrink the EU or the euro zone to a “core” Europe that can formulate a unified foreign policy. These proposals include plans to expel from the euro zone countries devastated by EU austerity in southern and Eastern Europe, including Italy and Greece, punishing them with shock currency devaluations by the financial markets.

A century after World War I, a new countdown to war has begun. It is rooted in inherent contradictions of capitalism—between the globally integrated economy and the division of the world into antagonistic nation-states, and between the socialized character of production and the private accumulation of profit by the capitalist class.

The economic and social contradictions that underlay the eruption of war in 1914 also led to the eruption of social revolution in Russia in 1917. The monumental

experiences of the 20th century must guide the response of the working class to the present unfolding crisis. Before the ruling classes of the United States and Europe plunge humanity into another military catastrophe, the working class must develop a strategy for a united global struggle for socialism.



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