

The election of Trump and the crisis of the European Union

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The sixtieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which laid the foundations for the European Union, will be celebrated in Rome this March. This anniversary is reminiscent of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which was celebrated with great pomp in East Berlin in October 1989. Only a few weeks later, the GDR collapsed. Likewise, the European Union is in the throes of a fatal crisis. All the tensions, conflicts and contradictions that the Treaty of Rome was supposed to have overcome are emerging once again.

The ferocious denunciation of the EU by US President Donald Trump—his threat of retaliatory tariffs, his suggestion that he might seek an alliance with Russia at the expense of Europe, and the close connections of his chief strategist Stephen Bannon to right-wing extremists in Europe—has made it clear that the EU can no longer base itself on the support of the US, a fundamental prerequisite of its existence in the past.

In discussing the Iraq war in 2003, the WSWWS explained that the post-war order was “in fact, a departure from the historical norm.” David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the WSWWS, wrote that “[t]he more basic tendency of American capitalism, rooted in its somewhat belated emergence as a major imperialist power, had been to augment its world position *at the expense* of Europe.” This analysis has now been confirmed. Trump’s stance on the European Union is only the most extreme expression of a development that has been underway for a long time.

Highlighting the deepening tensions, the White House has increasingly cast Germany as an economic adversary of the United States. Peter Navarro, the head of Donald Trump’s National Trade Council, went so

far as to effectively declare Germany a currency manipulator. He said the euro was “grossly undervalued” and was equivalent to an “implicit Deutsche Mark,” whose low valuation, as the *Financial Times* put it, “gave Germany an advantage over its main trading partners.”

Earlier this week, Jens Weidmann, the head of Germany’s Bundesbank, shot back that “German companies are above all competitive because they are excellently positioned in global markets and convince with innovative products.”

Berlin has reacted to Washington’s threats through economic and military countermeasures, trying to unite Europe behind its own hegemonic aims.

German weekly *Die Zeit* published a report entitled “Counterattack,” which claims that the EU has begun “to prepare for a trade war against the US.” It plans “to react to punitive tariffs from the Americans with retaliatory measures,” and is seeking a free trade agreement with Mexico and several Asian states. “Where the Americans shut themselves off, the Europeans should, instead, be open,” it states.

Berlin is making use of the threats from Washington and the possibility of closer relations between the US and Russia to bring Europe under its own dominance. For some time, a discussion has been carried out in the German media that portrays Brexit and the election of Trump as opportunities rather than merely a danger.

This week, outgoing German President Joachim Gauck gave a speech on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Maastricht Treaty in which he said that “[t]he time has come for European countries and in particular for Germany, which for many years took their lead from the United States, to become more self-confident and autonomous.” He cynically insisted that it was necessary not to “abandon the values on which the

European project is based,” and called for Europe to “increase its defence capabilities.”

Germany’s attempt, seven decades after its defeat in the Second World War, to rise once again to dominance over Europe is exacerbating national tensions and providing political fodder for right-wing nationalist forces.

In most European countries, the ruling class is split on this question. In France, while the far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen is demanding France’s exit from the EU and is orienting to Trump and Putin, her possible opponent in the runoff election, Emmanuel Macron, is emphasizing a decidedly German- and EU-friendly course.

However, the fundamental cause of the crisis of the EU is not to be found in the election of President Trump. Even before the US election, the EU had already entered the deepest crisis in its entire history. Brexit, the Euro crisis, national debt, the refugee crisis, tensions between east and west and between north and south, and the rise of right-wing, chauvinist parties threatened to break it to pieces.

At the same time, explosive social tensions are developing beneath the surface. One out of ten people in Europe is officially unemployed, and one out of four is impoverished or socially marginalized. In the poorest countries in Eastern Europe, the average monthly wage is only €400. Even in the wealthier countries, millions of people work under precarious conditions on the edge of destitution.

The ruling class is responding to this crisis by militarizing, strengthening and arming the state apparatus, closing borders and imposing unending austerity. The European working class confronts two dangers, which are in fact two sides of the same coin. First, it is faced with the transformation of the EU from an economic union into a military union that is also arming itself to suppress internal social and political dissent. For example, France has been under a state of emergency for 15 months. Second, it is faced with the splintering of Europe into national states under right-wing authoritarian regimes. Both of these trajectories mean a decline into war and barbarism.

However, the worldwide crisis of capitalism, expressed most sharply in the rise of Trump and the crisis of the EU, also produces the objective prerequisites for an offensive of the working class, the

only social force that can prevent a repetition of the catastrophes of the twentieth century.

The only progressive basis for European integration is the program of the United Socialist States of Europe. To wage a successful struggle against war, nationalism and social inequality, the working class needs an independent, revolutionary leadership, which opposes all representatives of the ruling class on the basis of a socialist perspective. This leadership is the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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