

European governments condemn Trump's statements on Charlottesville

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Donald Trump's defense of Nazi and white supremacist protests in Charlottesville that led to the killing of counter-demonstrator Heather Heyer has provoked a deep political crisis in Europe. European states that for decades presented themselves as having built democracy after fascist rule during World War II thanks to Washington's leadership of the "free world" are scrambling to distance themselves from the White House and denounce Trump's pro-Nazi opinions.

Trump's praise for "very fine people" at the far right protests and his denunciation of "both sides" in Charlottesville unleashed a torrent of criticism from European officials. German Chancellor Angela Merkel told *Deutschlandfunk*, "That is horrible, that is evil. That is racist far-right violence. This must be pursued with all strength and determination, wherever in the world it occurs."

Martin Schulz of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Merkel's main rival in the German general elections, attacked Merkel for being "compliant" with Washington. He said, "I am convinced that you will achieve more with Trump if you tell him, 'Watch out, this is not how this works.'" After calling for a fight against racism and anti-Semitism during the German election campaign, Schulz wrote on Twitter, "You have to stand up and fight Nazis. What Trump is doing is extremely dangerous. Those who trivialize violence and hate are betraying our Western values."

British Prime Minister Theresa May called the Charlottesville events "horrendous" and declared, "I see no equivalence between those who propound fascist views and those who condemn them. I think it is important for all those in positions of responsibility to condemn far-right views wherever we hear them."

French President Emmanuel Macron wrote about Charlottesville on Twitter, saying he was "By the side

of those fighting racism and xenophobia. It's our common struggle, yesterday and today."

The killing in Charlottesville marks a dangerous watershed for the international working class. A nationwide "Unite the Right" rally by hundreds of heavily armed Nazis and white supremacists briefly occupied a US city and carried out a political murder designed to terrorize opponents. Trump's remarks make clear that this action, which could not have occurred without foreknowledge of US domestic intelligence, has support from significant factions of the American state.

Empty invocations of "Western values" by the European political establishment to present themselves as fundamentally different from Trump, however, are false and hypocritical to the core. While some in the media dubbed Merkel the "leader of the free world" after Trump's election, the fact is that events like those in Charlottesville could easily happen in Europe.

Across the European continent, the far right is rapidly consolidating their influence in the security services and armed forces. While Greece's pro-Nazi Golden Dawn party and France's neo-fascist National Front (FN) have the votes of half the police force in their respective countries, the German state is investigating a network of neo-Nazi army officers who planned to carry out a rash of assassinations and falsely blame them on immigrants.

European fascist groups have repeatedly carried out political killings—from Norwegian fascist Anders Behring Breivik's slaughter of 77 people, mostly social democratic youth, in 2011, to Golden Dawn's murder of Greek hip-hop musician Pavlos Fyssas, the Revolutionary Nationalist Youth's fatal assault on French anti-fascist student Clément Méric in 2013 and the 2016 killing of UK Labour parliamentarian Jo Cox

by fascist Thomas Alexander Mair.

If the Charlottesville events mark a watershed, it is because Trump's statement is unprecedented in its direct support from the head of state for this type of murderous far-right activity. It shows that sections of the ruling class are working today, as in 20th century Europe, to incite a fascist movement on which to base their rule. Absent a revolutionary movement in the working class, the danger of fascism is very real.

The European media—unable to address, let alone explain the accelerating disintegration of bourgeois democracy across its traditional homelands in America and Western Europe—instead shout moral imprecations against Trump as an individual.

In an editorial denouncing Trump as “beyond the moral pale,” the British *Guardian* wrote: “Racism, antisemitism, white supremacism and Nazism, new or old, are wrong. A leader who cannot bring himself to say this clearly and unequivocally is not just clueless. He also forfeits his claim to moral authority and much of his right to be respected as leader. Yet that is where Mr Trump has put himself. The question facing America in the wake of these events is how to get through to 2020 with its values, institutions and social decencies intact.”

France's *Le Monde* blamed Trump's “unprecedented transgression” on his attempt to exploit “the bad demons of white America.” However, it pointed directly to the greatest concern of the ruling class in Europe: “The reaction of the American president, which is erratic and unpredictable as usual, risks unifying against him a wave of indignation that goes far beyond the camp of his political opponents.”

From Europe, however, it is not so difficult to understand the calculation Trump is making, when he indicates his sympathy for the “very fine people” of the neo-Nazi movement. After a quarter century of unpopular imperialist wars from Iraq to Afghanistan, rising social inequality and relentless social attacks on the working class in the United States as in Europe, it is ever more impossible to clothe capitalist politics in even in the formal trappings of democracy. As anger and alienation from the political elite grow relentlessly, the ruling class is seeking another basis for its rule.

What, indeed, has the European Union's (EU) policy been since the 2008 economic crisis? When anger mounted in Greece against destructive EU austerity

policies in 2011, the EU dismissed Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou and installed an unelected technocratic government based on a coalition of the far-right Popular Orthodox Rally with conservatives and Papandreou's social democrats. And now forces across the continent who present themselves as hostile to the far right insist that its nationalist positions are legitimate elements up for debate.

When the darling of the petty-bourgeois “left,” the pro-austerity Syriza (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) party, took power in Greece, it formed a coalition government with the far-right Independent Greeks. And Macron, who today hypocritically presents himself as an opponent of Trump and of xenophobia, began his presidency with a “Republican salute” to the political heir of France's Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, FN candidate Marine Le Pen, in his election victory speech.

Finally Schulz, as he denounces racism and demands a confrontation with Trump, is trying to overcome Merkel's wide lead in the German elections with appeals to racism—declaring that he thinks immigrants living in Leipzig need “a good slap in the face, so they realize who sets the agenda in this country.” Irrespective of Schulz's attitude to Trump, such reactionary filth will only strengthen far-right politics in Germany and across Europe.

The danger of fascism revealed by Trump's comments on Charlottesville extends far beyond the borders of America. It is rooted not in the individual persona of Trump nor the sins of “white America,” but in the overall international decay of capitalism. As in Europe in the last century, the only way forward is the development of a revolutionary and internationalist movement of the working class against fascism and the danger of dictatorship and war.



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