

Workers International to Rebuild the 4th International

## BULLETIN May 2012

### **Dramatic turn in the European crisis – The challenge to Trotskyism**

Recent weeks have seen dramatic political changes in Europe. Nobody in authority had warned the working class and working people of the continent about the financial tsunami which was to hit them in 2008, and the shock and the confusion were at first great. Bourgeois governments and the bourgeois leaders of the European Union have been able to frame and adopt policies of deep cuts and austerity in order to siphon off wealth from the masses. They do this through attacks on the social wage and the welfare-state type arrangements in which it is embodied, using growing unemployment and intensifying attempts to erode workers' trade union and employment rights. They exploited the economic crisis to over-ride massive but confused public opposition to these policies in Ireland and France and across Europe's southern rim, opposition which reached its highest pitch of intensity in over a dozen general strikes and countless street demonstrations in Greece.

Nearly five years on, the economic crisis continues. The inflated values ascribed to banking assets – a key phenomenon of the 2008 crash – are still haunting finance capital, as with Bankia and others in Spain. The dour, sullen resistance to cuts by the masses undermines attempts to sustain the euro without a European state to impose fiscal policy in the “normal” bourgeois way. (This has led the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund to use blatant financial blackmail to impose governments against the people of Greece and Italy and dictate policy to the elected governments of Spain and Portugal --“do what we say or we will not ‘bale you out!’”).

The policy of “austerity”, by sharply reducing demand, foils attempts to restore European industry on a more competitive basis (i.e. a basis where more surplus value can be extorted from workers). Signs of recovery are blighted by the very steps taken to overcome the crisis.

This is reflected in a change in the consciousness of masses of working people, a confirmation in their minds that the policy of austerity is wrong and that it could and should be abandoned in favour of economic stimulus, in one way or another at the expense of the rich. It is this general trend which manifested itself in many contradictory ways this month in elections throughout Europe.

Local, regional, parliamentary and presidential elections within the last month have shown a powerful swell of opposition to the policies of the bourgeoisie in Europe. Given the opportunity, this opposition has expressed itself at a political level in the defeat of Conservative and Liberal Democrat local councillors in Britain, the defeat of the conservative regional government in Andalucia, the gains by the SPD in regional elections in Germany, Hollande's election to the presidency in France, the collapse of the Dutch government, and in Greece the electoral punishment of PASOK and New Democracy and the leap to prominence of Syriza.

This situation brings a profound theoretical and practical challenge to Trotskyism. These votes reflect an obstinate refusal by working people to accept what capital is handing out, a precious class resistance to the logic of the crisis. But they are still deeply and necessarily entangled with reformist illusions that the old gains can be defended without challenging capital as a whole, while in the absence of more forthright class-consciousness, nationalist illusions have flourished and also led to some reinforcement of the far right

Indeed, opposition to the bourgeoisie's attacks in the trade unions and communities has to start by convincing activists that the attacks can be rolled back and the cuts restored. The best leaders of the mass movement have developed a political line which precisely offers a way forward by making the bourgeoisie pay for the crisis by collecting unpaid taxes, raising taxes on the rich and switching from arms expenditure to social expenditure. Calls to repudiate the debt and expropriate the bankers (half of them are in state ownership already!) are only starting to evoke a consistent, solid mass response in some countries.

Hollande in France offers a sheer impossibility, to make good some of the losses in the social sphere while achieving new growth and paying down the debt. In a different, much more outspoken, way Syriza in Greece offers a way forward that avoids a break with the EU while resisting the Troika's demands.

In both cases, "re-negotiation" of the austerity agreements cannot satisfy both sides and in a very unstable situation can lead to new and unpredictable explosions.

Members and supporters of Workers' International cannot stand aside from the the working class under these circumstances. We must be whole-heartedly within the resistance movement and the organisational forms it takes. Our attitude must be that working people must test out for themselves their illusions in a reformist solution to the crisis along the lines of some sort of revived Keynesianism.

While some on the far left ("Counterfire" ex-SWP members in the UK!) actually believe that Keynesianism is a genuine solution, others have in advance decided on behalf of the working class that it is not and preach loudly and uselessly from the sidelines.

We must apply the tactics of the united front, in order as far as possible to help assemble class resistance to the effects of the crisis as a combat force increasingly conscious of its own strength and class solidarity. While never accepting in political debate among those who claim to be Marxists that a reformist outcome is possible, and seeking in every way to prepare those alongside whom we are fighting to face the big political questions, we should be guided by the methods and principles of the transitional programme in winning over the masses to our side. At the same time we can direct our fire at the European Union as the guiding centre of the bourgeoisie's attacks.

The text by Comrade Balazs Nagy: "Stop the Attacks on Social Gains! March Separately and Strike Together" is a fundamental text and an invaluable tool in this work. It is available in French and English online at [www.workersinternational.org](http://www.workersinternational.org), and also in English as a pamphlet.

Arising from its work and the delegation which visited Greece from Britain, the Greece Solidarity Campaign has pledged to organise a European Conference for a Europe-wide workers movement against austerity, in line with the main proposal in Balazs' pamphlet and following a specific request from Mikis Theodorakis. A preliminary video report of the delegation is available online at <http://fourmanfilms.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/cant-pay-wont-pay-solidarity-with.html>.

Workers' International to Rebuild the Fourth International must meet this autumn to take stock, centralise and organise its work and define its political line of march. For this purpose we need comrades to report on all their contacts who could be attracted to such a meeting and establish a fund for travel and other necessary arrangements.

This bulletin is the first of a monthly series to advance this work. I hope future issues will deal with the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, Africa as a whole, and the world crisis, as well as returning to developments in Europe and the work of our members in the Greece Solidarity Campaign.

Yours fraternally,  
Bob Archer