

What next for Greece (and Europe)?

THE SYRIZA-led Greek government made a bid to reverse the appalling and humiliating conditions laid upon the country by the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund).

The fiasco that followed deserves careful consideration by all trade unionists, socialists and working people more broadly.

SYRIZA is a coalition built around forces coming from the Euro-Communist sector which several decades ago split from the old KKE (Greek Communist Party). They promised a new kind of “left” politics, breaking the mould of sectarian wrangling over ideological shibboleths. (In the process they junked a number of political principles also, in particular the understanding of the basic conflict in society between capital and labour).

With the shock of the country’s bankruptcy and the fateful “Memoranda” reverberating around Greek society, with masses of people going, in real confusion, into semi-permanent occupation of the city squares, it was the coalition which became SYRIZA which captured the popular mood.

They drew from the intellectual tool-kit of Keynesian theory the idea that the economy could be launched into a new period of growth by the correct policies on the part of governments and the EU.

They presented the matter as an intellectual debate with an “elite” seduced by neo-liberal dogmas which had somehow reached political power pretty well everywhere, whether in the hands of formerly “socialist” or frankly conservative politicians.

Enough popular support mobilised for a “better” capitalist

policy, in the SYRIZA view, could reverse the situation and kick-start growth and protect living standards.

There are also attractive sides to what SYRIZA was offering: an attempt to find what united people instead of what divided them, a listening ear to what people were saying rather than the sectarian propagandist broadsides, a very practical approach to dealing with the mass poverty and collapse of welfare structures which followed government acceptance of the Memoranda.

The Solidarity Clinics and cost-price farmers' markets and food and toy banks in working class districts were both very much needed and started to generate a cadre of party activists. The Solidarity For All welfare network at the same time created a framework for an international solidarity movement with the people of Greece.

From a ramshackle coalition of left groups, SYRIZA became an organised political party with a political programme of socially progressive measures and the aim to reverse the Troika-imposed economic destruction of the country (The Thessaloniki Programme).

On this basis the party provoked a general election in February of this year in which they won enough seats, together with a small conservative anti-austerity grouping, ANEL, to form a government. (Certainly not a single one of the groups claiming to be Marxist revolutionaries could have come even close to dislodging the vile bunch of puppets masquerading as a Greek government up to that point).

The problem is, the leaders of the European Union are not simply an accidental grouping with this or that ideological outlook. They are the political representatives of a particular social class – the bourgeoisie. In capitalist society, this is the class which owns (and actually personifies) the big concentrations of capital.

“You might as well have sung the Swedish national anthem”

It is their position as the public spokespersons and administrators of capitalist society which gives these monsters their utter conviction that they are right and that the biggest popular majority vote in the world is wrong. How do these masters of the work know they are right? The money tells them. They put into words and action what finance capital actually means.

In the current issue of the British Labourite magazine *New Statesman*, the main Greek negotiator trying to persuade in the bourgeoisie to make some concessions, Varoufakis, describes:

“... the complete lack of any democratic scruples, on behalf of the supposed defenders of Europe’s democracy. The quite clear understanding on the other side that we are on the same page analytically – of course it will never come out at present. [And yet] To have very powerful figures look at you in the eye and say ‘You’re right in what you’re saying, but we’re going to crunch you anyway’ ... there was point blank refusal to engage in economic arguments. Point blank. ... You put forward an argument that you’ve really worked on – to make sure it’s logically coherent – and you’re just faced with blank stares. It is as if you haven’t spoken. What you say is independent of what they say. You might as well have sung the Swedish national anthem – you’d have got the same reply. And that’s startling, for somebody who’s used to academic debate. ... The other side always engages. Well there was no engagement at all. It was not even annoyance, it was as if one had not spoken.”

To try to “make the other side engage”, the SYRIZA government sought popular support in a referendum. Already repayment deadlines had been missed without any new agreements being reached, and the supply of liquidity to Greek banks was switched off. The referendum was held under conditions of a

fiscal blockade which threatened to gradually strangle the country as effectively as any naval blockade in history. Nevertheless a 61% vote to reject the Troika's exactions represented a high-water-mark in SYRIZA's popular support.

But it only made the EU "institutions" more intransigent. Prime Minister Tsipras himself now went to the EU with a set of proposals which represented abject surrender.

He promised to reform the tax system, accept increases in Value Added Tax (VAT), increase the pension age, increase employee pension contributions, cut back on early retirement and do away with benefits for the very poorest pensioners, sell off remaining state assets, cut state spending and take steps to destroy trade union rights.

But it now was not enough for the European bourgeois leaders. They were furious that the Greeks had had the gall to elect a government which rejected their measures for Greece; they resented the fact that the SYRIZA government cracked open a chink in the curtain of capitalist "austerity" and gave working people even the hope of something different. This had to be stamped out completely.

They insisted on a much clearer set of commitments on all these issues, spelled out in chapter and verse, and the right to have their creatures sit in on the drafting of the legislation to be rushed through the Greek parliament (using the votes of opposition parties, who of course had always supported these measures).

Why do the bourgeois leaders of the world who pull the strings which move the EU institutions – including Europe's national governments and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) insist on nothing less than abject surrender?

Why would they risk the possible repercussions, which could include Greece defaulting on her debts and even the break-up of the euro currency bloc? We know this from the fact that the

IMF (no doubt egged on by the US government) warns that Greece's debt burden is devastating and beyond recovery.

It is their own crisis of the capitalist system which urges them on regardless of the consequences. The upheavals in the world of finance which surfaced after 2007 were a huge systemic shock, but they were a real expression of the underlying crisis of imperialism.

By some estimates, the total amounts lost in, around and following the crash were truly massive.

On October 1 2012, the Wall Street Journal summarised the assessment of the former chief credit officer of Standard and Poor's rating agency Mark Adelson:

"An attempt at sizing up the economic impact produced varied and sobering results, with losses attributed to decline in world gross domestic product and household wealth, and other measures focused on the financial sector including bank write-downs and the increase in government support.

"The \$10 trillion to \$12 trillion drop in value of world stock markets and the \$5.7 trillion to \$12.8 trillion plunge in US output in the decade to 2018 give the best overall look at the costs, however, he said. "These numbers suggest total costs likely to run \$5 trillion to \$15 trillion ..." (<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2012/10/01/total-global-losses-from-financial-crisis-15-trillion/>)

The only solution which the capitalist masters of the world can find is to turn on the masses of working people and strip them of all the progress they have gained in the past.

By the way, the "bailout money" from the institutions mainly does not end up in Greece. As economics correspondent Philip Inman wrote in the UK Guardian newspaper on 29 June 2015:

"Only a small fraction of the 240 billion euros (£170

billion) total bailout money Greece received in 2010 and 2013 found its way into the government's coffers to soften the blow of the 2008 financial crash and fund reform programmes. Most of the money went to the banks that lent Greece funds before the crash. Unlike most of Europe, which ran up large budget deficits to protect pensioners and welfare recipients, Athens was then forced to dramatically reduce its deficit by squeezing pensions and cutting the minimum wage".

Capitalist society works through the creation of surplus value by labour and the "valorisation" of that surplus value, its conversion into new capital re-invested into new ventures for yet more profits.

This social formation – capital – which historically played a progressive role in the development of the productive forces, has now for a century been at the heart of the economic crisis as a barrier to their further development. That crisis rumbles on; it has not been overcome. In the attempt to solve it, the bourgeoisie must try to increase the portion of surplus value which it pockets at the expense of the portion which is claimed by the working class and working people more broadly.

Working class struggle has wrested significant concessions from the ruling class in terms of wages, welfare and pension rights, and normal expectations that the state will provide health, education and legal rights and facilities and the chance of a decent home in a reasonably healthy environment.

All these things were enshrined in political and legal arrangements through which workers and others could assert their needs.

So in order to be able to strip working people of the share of surplus value which they have been able to take previously, either in the individual wage packet or as a "social wage", the bourgeoisie has to attack, undermine and de-nature all these arrangements, which include socialist (or Labour)

political parties and, where they can, trade unions.

And this has been the basis for the degeneration of reformist socialist parties across Europe. Greece's PASOK, the German SPD, the Parti socialiste in France, Labour in the UK and all their like have been politically hollowed out and de-fanged over decades.

But the decline of reformist parties has not been matched by a collapse in the illusions and expectations of masses of people in Europe.

Despite nearly forty years of continuous attack, despite the massive and savage increase in productivity and the closure of many industries relocated overseas, in many respects the assault of capital is only beginning.

One has to envision the depth of what the new Conservative government is planning in the UK to have any grasp of the scale of social conflict the bourgeoisie is proposing across Europe: savagely stripping away the vestiges of a welfare system; systematically re-engineering the health and education services to turn them into objects of profit for business; massively depriving people of access to a decent home; ongoing destruction of the whole legal system which provided some sort of safeguard for the poor and the weak; an onslaught on human rights legislation.

"Austerity" is a word often bandied about, but it hardly covers what is actually proposed. The way working class life and communities have been under-mined and the decay and collapse of social-democratic and "Communist" political parties has led to a tendency to accept that "there is no alternative" and often a backward scapegoating of claimants, the unemployed and migrants.

Individualism has made progress among working people who a generation ago would have stood (and did stand) firm in defence of class rights. Old working class areas of the UK

have shown an appetite for voting along nationalist lines. Social fragmentation weakens the possibility of resistance and undermines traditionally powerful methods of struggle.

In the economic and social witches' brew that is Europe, the initial steps in the political recovery of the masses has been marked by these factors.

Loudly denouncing the sell-out on the part of social democracy, the leaders of the new formations such as SYRIZA, the section of the French Communist Party which re-engineered itself as the Parti de Gauche, PODEMOS, Die Linke and the rest demand very little that is not – traditional social democracy, pure and simple!

As (generally) followers of the late John Maynard Keynes, they do not call for a socialist revolution, but capitalism with its contradictions contained, smoothed over, managed and regulated by state intervention.

Their critique is not of capitalism as such – they are indeed not at all interested in abolishing it – but of “neo-liberal ideologues” who have allegedly inspired all the problems we face for some subjective reason.

Nevertheless, precisely because of this actually very moderate outlook, these parties are the vehicles through which the working people of Europe have started their political revival.

People are obliged to enter the path of struggle, but their first steps are hampered by profound illusions on the one hand and a profound disillusionment caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and of hopes of a socialist future on the other.

They will have to overcome both handicaps, but that will only be achieved along the road of resistance they are increasingly adopting.

The challenge for Marxists is to identify and put forward

proposals for action which lead the way to a confrontation with the system as a whole.

The future revolutionary leadership of the masses will be built in the unity and mutual struggle of the Marxists and the forces who come forward to conduct the present fight which is focussed most sharply on Greece.

This leadership will have to free itself from illusions that working people “share” any “values” with a bourgeoisie whose true values are exposed every minute in their relentless drive to impoverish, disarm and disempower us.

Bob Archer – July 2015

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In defence of the workers and people of Greece – first victims of capital's offensive

European march on Brussels!Response to the “Common Appeal for the Rescue of the People of Europe” launched by Mikis Theodorakis and Manolis Glezos,

by Balazs Nagy, Workers' International (20 February 2012)

From a stricken Greece, long-familiar voices are calling on the peoples of Europe to defend themselves and come to the aid of Greece and its working people. Above all for the working people of Greece, living standards and indeed the whole setting within which they live, and their public services and properties, are once more under vicious attack and their very existence threatened by the intensified, concentrated onslaught of aggressive and arrogant world capital. Greece was the cradle of our civilisation and is now in the cross-hairs as the initial site for the destruction of gains the modern age has contributed to that old civilisation: a series of rights, to fair wages, to work and decent housing, to the equality of citizens and individual and collective liberty as a whole. Greece is a symbol for all of this, since the suppression of these rights and advantages so lately won by civilisation, their deliberate destruction undertaken by capital, raises the spectre of their imminent annihilation along with the ancient civilisation born in Greece which is the foundation and natural framework for all that has been achieved. Theodorakis and Glezos are a thousand times right to

invoke the dark shadow of fascism on a Europe rendered numb and vulnerable by capital.

Greece and her working people are particularly undermined – and also denigrated and slandered – as they have been picked on as the first to undergo the creeping barrage of capital's heavy artillery. But don't fool yourselves! Working people in the other countries have already felt the first salvoes and the strategists of capital have them in their sights too. Portuguese, Spanish, Italians and all the rest ... they will not be spared by the shattering fire of this class war.

Our analysis of the crisis and its effects is not the same as that of the Greek authors of the appeal. We believe that the first and most important target are the workers and other working people of Greece. They are attacked, not because they are Greek, Italian or whatever, but because they are workers; that the attack on them is organised and waged by the world bourgeoisie, and not just by the American banks, which are only one pernicious head of the immense thousand-headed hydra. Ministers – whether unelected like Papademos and Monti, or elected, like Merkel and Sarkozy – are infinitely closer to Goldman Sachs than to the workers of Athens, Rome or Berlin, who in turn are class brothers of Greek, Portuguese or British workers. The current European crisis – to speak only of Europe – and the proposed “solutions” constitute a new and particularly important episode in a class struggle that has lasted over a century. In this struggle, Europe, as constituted in her institutions, is neither a neutral nor a well-intentioned entity, but an instrument of war on the social, political and cultural gains working people have made. How true this is is proved by its presence in the hated “Troika” with its pitiless dictatorship over Greece. Whatever differences there may be in analysis, the response of the working people of Europe to the appeal from Greece cannot but be massively positive.

To resist capital's attacks, it is high time that working

people throughout Europe take up the only weapon at their disposal: the organisation of their ranks. All they have to defend themselves with is their ability to mobilise. It must start immediately, as things are urgent. It must be concentrated and it must be strong. Hesitation and dispersal of our forces weaken us and strengthen our attackers.

The immediate goal of the mobilisation is to defend the working people and the whole people of Greece.

- Down with the dictatorship of the Troika with its shameful exactions!
- Throw this three-headed hydra out of Greece!
- The people of Greece are the only sovereign power with the right to determine what to do about the debt!

As a way to carry the struggle forward, we should without delay prepare and organise the march of the working people of Europe on the HQ of the bourgeois attacks in Brussels. From every country, the chosen columns of working people can converge on Brussels to express their determined opposition to the predators and the desire to colonise their initial prey – Greece, and to there present the determination and united strength of the working people of Europe in a huge demonstration as a culmination of the first stage of the action and a prelude to a broader struggle.

Alongside our forthcoming defence of Greek working people and in order to remove definitively the permanent threat facing all working people and all peoples, we should open the way for the main demand: for a Working People's Europe!

The very recent general strike against the same enemies by working people in Belgium as well as the decision of the European Trade Union Confederation to hold a big joint action at the end of February show that favourable opportunities exist for such an action.

Let us eagerly seize these opportunities to introduce our

action in order to give redoubled strength to the defence and resistance of the working people throughout Europe.

Stop the destruction of social gains!

March separately, strike together!

By Balazs Nagy, member, Workers International

ALL over Europe, the various capitalist governments are inflicting drastic and very similar austerity measures and plans on working people. Obviously people in other continents are not exempt from the effects of the deep crisis of capitalism either, but it is here in Europe that they take on their most significant and vicious dimensions. This is the cradle of capitalism and therefore of the workers' movement.

In the past, with the support of all working people, this movement succeeded in winning significant rights and advantages during over a century of bitter and stubborn struggle. The crisis is far from over, however those in government spin it. The determined frontal attacks on the gains and rights workers have won will grow in number and ferocity, so it is very important to know what they really represent and where they come from.

Thirty (not so) glorious years

These attacks by the capitalist class did not just start with the current crisis. In fact the material, social, political and cultural rights working people enjoy are incompatible with capitalism-imperialism (the overall period since the beginning of the twentieth century, when finance capital merged with industrial capital), particularly in its current state of senile decrepitude. They were never freely given, but all of them were won from the system by force in heroic struggles by working people over many years, during and after World War II, but also well before then. At that point the balance of forces, internationally and within almost every country, swung clearly in favour of the working class. Terrified by the underlying support for the powerful revolutionary wave in

Europe – and bankrupt – the capitalists were only able to defuse the revolution with ready help from the leaders of parties which called themselves socialist and communist. But this came with a price tag attached, and so there started the series of measures and reforms which culminated in what became known as “welfare states” or “social market economy” (in Germany) and the so-called “thirty glorious years”. But even then the rot had already set in.

Even if they had wanted to, the capitalist class and their governments could not have granted these reforms and advantages to working people on a permanent basis. And they certainly did not want to let working people keep that fraction of an accumulating mass of profits, which was squeezed out of them in the first place anyway. In the end they could not allow it to go on, especially since, as time went by, although the total sum grew, the rate of return was shrinking by the minute. To put it in capitalist economic language, the return on investments or the profits on capital were no longer enough. Marx and his followers describe this as the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. At its root was above all the progressive shrinkage of the world market for expensive western capitalist goods.

From this flowed two major consequences which were to shape the course of capitalist-imperialism and the behaviour of its major players. It was not totally transformed, but it would be correct to say that its features were altered in a significant and historical way. The first change was that it became a system that not only could not carry any more genuine reforms, but actually had to do away with and destroy the reforms and advantages which it had been forced to concede under pressure in the past. The second was to do with its structure. The emergence of the imperialist phase at the beginning of the twentieth century had already meant:

“... the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this ‘finance capital’ of a

financial oligarchy”.

This now went a lot further. In fact, in attempting to overcome market saturation and the declining substance of profit, this marriage of convenience between industrial capital and finance capital gave birth to a legitimate but monstrously deformed offspring – the uncontested hegemony of finance capital. Inevitably this artificial, overblown, distorted and ill-proportioned substitute for real profits mutated into an insatiable parasite sucking the life-blood of the whole of society.

But please note carefully: well before it could infect every pore of society, the capitalist class – both mother and father of this formation – did everything it could to take back and revoke the reforms and concessions it had been forced to make earlier. At first it did not dare attempt a full, general, global offensive against all these concessions, because it felt too weak. The working class and working people in general justifiably continued to think that the right to sickness insurance, to a decent pension, to full employment and proper care, to free education – in short, the whole system and network of rights, assistance and protection – were an essential part of their wages, and that capital had taken a big enough cut out of them already. They correctly took these things as a legitimate “social wage”, theirs by right.

This was far more than the increasingly insatiable capitalist class were prepared to tolerate. But, however desperately they wanted to launch an open frontal attack on these rights and concessions, congenital cowardice in the face of the organised strength of working people cooled their ardour and a cunning instinct to side-step such confrontations moderated it.

Consequently, in the first phase of its war on the rights and concessions working people had gained, in the 1960s and 1970s, the capitalist class mainly concentrated on undermining real

wages and working conditions. They made constant and repeated attempts to claw back the inroads that the “social wage” made into their profits, doing what they could to increase the productivity and intensity of labour and nibble away at wages. But powerful strike actions, drawing in their wake not only wider categories of working people but even top union leaders, blocked these attempts and a succession of partial struggles restored the real value of wages by force. In the course of those “thirty (not so) glorious years”, for example, working people in Britain twice brought down governments through the sheer scale of their struggles – once the Labourite Wilson and once the Tory Heath. In France, at the same time, working people engaged in a series of struggles, including a remarkable national miners’ strike. They then united in 1968 in a long general strike and inflicted a resounding setback on De Gaulle, who had been tasked precisely with smashing their resistance and taking back their “social wage”.

Nor should we forget the German working class and working people as a whole. Already bled white by Hitlers’ counter-revolutionary dictatorship and the years of total war, they were both divided and tied down in the late 1940s in the four zones of military occupation. Thus the previously powerful German working class, with its pivotal role at the heart of Europe, was isolated and kept off the scene. And just to make sure, working people in Germany were also stigmatised with the vile insinuation that they were collectively responsible for Hitler. The reactionary and extended occupation regime was followed by the long drawn-out trauma of the country’s surgical separation into two with the assistance and complicity of Stalin. This veritable act of vivisection was only compensated for, and above all partially masked, by the efforts of international capital as a whole during the cold war to use the western part of Germany as a shop-window for their prosperity.

For many a long year, capital was forced to put up with paying

this whole "social wage". Alongside repeated unsuccessful attempts to make up for this in other areas (real wages, productivity, etc.), it never stopped trying in every possible way to weaken working people and to prepare the conditions for a general assault on their rights and gains. Step by step, exploiting every opportunity and helped by the complacent and often complicit leaders of the workers' movement, the capitalist class nibbled away unceasingly at the scope and extent of the advantages working people had gained. But above all they acted to reduce the latter's strength and ability to resist by corrupting and suborning the general staffs of their organisations. It continued the already long process of domesticating the trade unions, and also of breaking up their unity using rival and competing leaders. Working people's right to defend themselves was, little by little, patiently reduced and increasingly strictly regulated, so that strikes and demonstrations – not to mention other forms of direct action – were confined and fettered in a rigid and repressive legal straightjacket.

For all this, the European capitalist class were not able to claw back all the concessions they had been forced to give. But, more and more threatened by shrinking profit margins and the international situation, they were forced to take drastic steps to take back the reforms and improvements they had previously conceded. At the same time they tilted the structure of their system towards something that looked more lucrative: the supremacy, not to say dictatorship, of finance and its bastard child, speculation.

Capital's frontal attack – and the fall of the USSR

The global offensive was unleashed by Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the US. Thatcher soon faced a formidable miners' strike, and even though they were left in the lurch by the bureaucracies of the other unions, the miners stood up to the government's offensive as long as they could. Their defeat was the signal for a general offensive right across Europe. It was

the beginning of a great general frontal attack on working people's gains, an attack whose origins, however, lay much earlier. Never forget that the capitalist class had spent years carefully honing their weapons for this great offensive.

It is also important to emphasize that the continent-wide scope of this offensive was supported by strong, allegedly socialist, parties led by François Mitterrand in France, Gerhart Schröder in Germany and Tony Blair in the UK, ably assisted by bureaucrats at the helm of so-called Communist Parties.

The bourgeoisie's "European" project fitted in with the trend towards the concentration of capital and offered the means and the tools to consolidate and boost this offensive. So the general attack on the rights and gains of working people known as "neo-liberalism" was centred on the "European" institutions in Brussels, Strasbourg and Frankfurt. Each section of the European bourgeoisie gained at least three advantages from this. The first was unquestionably that it allowed them to shelter their own anti-working class offensive behind the attractive screen of building a united Europe. The second advantage resulted from the fact that it appeared as if policies and measures directed against the interests of working people emanated from a centre in Brussels and each individual country was merely carrying them out; this appearance implied that nobody in any particular country was to blame, so that nobody in a given country could be held to account. The third and last advantage rested on the fact that this centre, detached from any real political and social life, is so profoundly anti-democratic and the majority of its members so anonymous, that any struggle against it is impractical, not to say impossible, within the normal framework of democratic politics; its chiefs and their staff are parachuted in anonymously, unelected and without apparent qualifications. It is a monstrously distended bureaucracy which abuses the whole idea and conception of Europe, while in

reality it is nothing but a scurrilous parasite unable to achieve anything, let alone a European entity. On the contrary, this overblown, very expensive and useless organism is an agent of the capitalist class' main and most pressing objective and acts solely to organise, regulate and supervise its overall offensive and to destroy systematically the rights and gains working people have won.

Shortly after the concerted attack on working people's rights intensified in this way, a historical event of considerable importance gave a new and extra boost to the capitalist class and their offensive. At the same time, it both directly and indirectly weakened working people's resistance. There is no doubt that the collapse of the Soviet Union stiffened the capitalists, consolidated their position and increased their confidence. Quite apart from what anyone thought about the fall of the USSR, and despite the disastrous role of the bureaucracy which was both its manager and its grave-digger, the whole world working class and working people everywhere lost an advanced post and a precious base for their goals of emancipation. For how long we do not know, the relationship of forces has tilted clearly to the advantage of the capitalist class and to the detriment of working people.

Capital and all its devoted supporters, in a rush of blissful satisfaction and smug arrogance, crowed their overweening self-satisfaction and arrogance to all and sundry, culminating when one of their intoxicated "thinkers" even proclaimed the end of history. In any case, the sequel was clearly more and stronger cynical and shameless attacks by capital and its supporters and a confused and chaotic retreat by workers forced onto the defensive. Over the last twenty years or so workers have continued to retreat more and more markedly. Some of their big organisations, following leaders already integrated into the system, have identified themselves with the temporary victors, while others have melted like butter in the sun or simply vanished. Unions, too, which used to be

official defenders of working people, have, under the leadership of inveterate bureaucrats, publicly become “social partners” of vengeful capital. Even the sinister warning creaks of a system in temporary – but nevertheless alarming – crisis did nothing to disturb these good folks’ deep content.

Shock therapy disguised as “reforms”

In this state of artificially induced euphoria, bumptious capital nevertheless went on reducing, cutting and one by one taking back the advantages working people had won, limiting, circumscribing and slimming down their reforms. All these good people were brutally awoken from their pleasant reverie by the alarm bells of the latest great crisis. We are right in it now, but there is no point going into detail about that here. Everybody knows perfectly well that to reduce the negative impact on themselves and to get out of the crisis, the capitalist class and their system – as is their nature – are doing everything they possibly can to put the whole burden of dealing with and “solving” the crisis onto the backs of working people. However, what is less clear to a lot of people ? because it is hidden ? is the fact that the crisis is being used as a pretext to ratchet up out of all proportion the scale and force of capital’s murderous offensive, which is bearing down on the people of Europe like a tornado.

Governments of every type are shamelessly presenting the destructive attacks they inflict as “reforms”. This viciously abuses the traditional attachment working people have to genuine past reforms which actually tangibly improved their lives. Sadly, the unanimous din from the opinion-formers means this pernicious deception has contaminated the whole of society. More seriously, the general staffs of the left parties and of the unions use the same dishonest terminology, whose purpose is precisely to camouflage the dismantling and destruction of the very same genuine reforms in the near and distant past. That is how the “troika” – which has assumed right of attorney over Greece’s financial affairs – commands

and supervises the stripping and deprivation of the working people of their gains and rights while all the time presenting this destruction as “one-off structural reform” for the “benefit” of the Greek people. As we all know, language and choice of words are never innocent.

Here “disaster capitalism” is applying the “shock doctrine” used more or less all over the world as described by the journalist Naomi Klein. Her book has never been refuted or disproved. (While we are on this subject, there is no doubt at all that her accusations are true and supported by a mass of proven facts. What you can hold against her is that she presents this whole scandalous and revolting situation as an excrescence, a deviation within a healthy capitalist system, whereas it is its essence in its present phase of decline, naturally woven into the very fabric of its existence.) What is happening in Greece – and this is just the prelude – gives us a foretaste of the determination of the capitalist class and its acolytes to squeeze the very last halfpenny out of a people who they have (most democratically) quarantined so that they can be offered up to the tender mercies of “the markets”, i.e. to capitalists usurious to the marrow of their bones.

For Europe’s working class and millions of working people, the most important thing to understand is that what is happening is no accident or passing whim, not some passing attitude on the part of capitalism arising just from this particular crisis. Get your heads round this: you should expect absolutely nothing from the capitalist system and its servants. They themselves are all telling us that their society is ill-suited to meeting the needs of working people, that it cannot do it. They keep repeating the mantra that working people are to blame for “living beyond their means”, but this merely recognises and confirms that their system really is not able to guarantee the advantages and rights people rely on. That is something that really is “beyond their means”. Indeed, thinly-veiling an implied threat of

punishment, they have decided to dismantle and end all the previous social gains for once and for all in order to bend working people into the narrow straitjacket of their moribund system's stunted "means".

An historic turning point

We are at an historic moment. In the past, the capitalist class launched successive attacks aimed at reducing the gains working people had made, culminating in a general offensive by Thatcher and co. which exploited the weaknesses of the workers' movement. Now the capitalist system is using the crisis to develop a final all-out assault on working people. It is not just another skirmish or even a partial or isolated confrontation, such as we have often seen in the past, nor even their subsequent extension and development into a general offensive. It is a new stage over and above that, where the ferocity, extent and depth of the blows struck and our capitalist opponents' resolute firmness of purpose absolutely all reveal their determination to go all the way. One further proof of this implacable determination is their peculiar insistence on ravaging gains even beyond the point where the attacks deliberately reduce, indeed annihilate, any resources that offer a potential way out of the crisis. Now it is the turn of Italian working people to sit in the hot seat: others are not far behind ...

In such a threatening situation, you can only welcome the fact that people get angry in the face of so much deceit and malice and express that anger publicly. There are more and more of them all over the world, an obvious sign – following the spectacular and uncompleted risings by a series of peoples in North Africa and the Middle East – of a reawakening of working people that it still groping for a way forward. All of these expressions of anger and protest in place of resignation and fatalism are in themselves precious as the first signs of incipient consciousness of the threatening reality. But bearing in mind the enormity of what is at stake, the global

extent of the conflict and the enemy's unyielding determination, passive indignation and verbal protest are helpless. Those in power, by the way, simply see them as public disorders, at worst annoying, or maybe as street entertainment. Annoyed or amused, they are not going to change by one iota their destructive plans. You really need to do a lot more. In this respect you have to salute the Portuguese working people whose powerful general strike has shown us how to fight. There is no doubt that Greek working people, who have been savagely attacked by capital, will find a path to the kind of vigorous struggle they have always waged over the years. There is also no doubt that other European countries will follow the same path.

The response must be international

Anyone who will not put up with cuts and measures that destroy their rights and advantages, or with present and future austerity plans, and wants to oppose them, needs to get their heads round the idea that this struggle goes far beyond national boundaries. Capital's frontal attack is international, even if it is carried out on national soil and tailored to fit each specific national set of circumstances. The enemy is everywhere the same. Consequently, struggles confined within the framework of one or another nation, fragmented and isolated from the others, lack the necessary strength to repel attacks that are international in nature and to force into retreat an adversary who is also completely international. Solidarity and links between the various movements in different countries are important but inadequate on their own. We absolutely must field against these degrading plans and actions a movement that is both organically international and also struggles on an international scale. Obviously none of that precludes movements and struggles in each individual country, which provide the base and the framework necessary for any international action.

There is no doubt that what makes a movement of struggle and

its action international in character, and what forges its fighting potential, is that it really is international. That is the only way it can measure up to the international character of the plans, actions and offensive of an adversary who is attacking the social position and conditions of life of working people all over the globe, even if what he does varies considerably country by country and continent by continent. Despite the distances that separate them and the great divergence between their respective positions and conditions, that is what solidly unites, for example, working peoples engaged in their own local battles who have recently revolted in the Middle East and North Africa. And that is why there are signs that the working people of Europe are stretching out a fraternal hand to their natural allies, the revolutionary working people of Egypt and Syria engaged in their own bloody struggles.

“Anti-globalisation” a blind alley

Nevertheless, it is necessary to reject calls for an “anti-globalisation” struggle. To characterise the current world economic and political system as “globalisation” is simply wrong. The bourgeoisie and its ideologists have invented and introduced this mystifying term to hide behind its eminently **geographical** character the present phase of their **economic** and **social** system, which is that well known capitalism-imperialism that is now in a state of advanced senility. As for capitalism, in its distant and still vigorous youth Marx and Engels described “globalisation” in the Communist Manifesto:

“Modern industry has established the world market ...” “The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country...” “In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations.”

These notions and concepts of capitalism and its globalisation have long since formed part of the elementary knowledge of the

whole of humanity. We are still dealing with the same old system. The changes are only quantitative and moreover are connected with an enormous worsening of its defects.

So it is no surprise that those who have risen to the poisoned bourgeois bait and support "anti-globalisation" are inextricably trapped in confusion. It is very hard for them to shake off the accusation of a bad dose of protectionism, since that is actually the reactionary nationalist and historically outmoded antidote to the world market, with its largely interconnected and interdependent parts. All the noise about "de-globalisation" takes us straight into a dead end alongside the confused and backward-looking prophets of anti productivity, when there are officially a billion people in the world suffering from starvation, not to mention other millions condemned to vegetate in poverty. We should reject capitalist "productivity" spurred on by greed for profit, but we should also fight to expand production to meet the immense unsatisfied needs of humanity.

It is understandable that the first steps of those who want to struggle against the actions of capital should lead them to embrace "anti globalisation" or "anti productivity", but these first steps lead into a blind alley scarcely different from that of the "indignant ones". These are a one-way street to confusion and disillusionment.

The capitalist class cannot unify Europe

The situation in Europe pits us above all directly against a section of the European capitalist class more or less gathered together into a deeply contradictory, unstable and muddled conglomerate called "Europe" or more precisely the European Union. And it is through this body with its monstrously swollen head that it hopes to impose its outrageous plans to wipe out the social advances working people have won. That objective is its central pre-occupation and determines what it does. From this point of view and for that aim, the governments of the European countries, varied as they are, act

as its arms and executive agents, even the ones which appear to keep their distance.

That is why the movement against the attacks and attempts to dismantle and destroy working people's rights needs to be organically international, very concretely Europe-wide, and not simply an occasional adding together of those arising in each country. While reinforcing these, the European movement as a whole needs to concentrate its fire on the capitalists class's self-proclaimed centres (Brussels, Strasbourg, Frankfurt) and on its planned dirty deeds and manoeuvres.

But it is highly important to understand that a continent-wide movement to defend working people cannot be anti-European. On the contrary, it is the capitalist class that struts around in stolen "European" clothes to hide their concerted attack behind fine phrases about Europe. To tell the truth, this exploitative and oppressive class with its train of servile politicians is absolutely incapable of unifying Europe. The birth of this class was all mixed up with the birth of the nations with which its entire life is bound up. Two catastrophic world wars testify to this, obviously from the negative side. And since it was only the appearance of this class way back in time that gave birth to nations, so only its disappearance will signal that they too will also die away. The several decades of the European venture provide adequate proof that the capitalist class is quite incapable of unifying Europe but at the same time stolidly determined and able to attack and demolish the gains and rights working people have won.

The colossal level of indebtedness, or rather specifically the way the debts are configured in Europe, is one of the main aspects of the current world crisis which has clearly put into relief these two "European" faces of the capitalist class. Instead of bringing them together on the road to a greater European integration, it has laid bare the divisions between countries, even their extreme separation. At the same time as

successive capitalist governments have let domestic inequalities build up and grow to a monstrous level, their "European" agents have reproduced and reinforced these many and varied inequalities in their stunted "Europe".

They have already divided Europe into several more or less concentric circles. There is the outer circle of poor, untouchable pariahs waiting for their masters – usually their former imperialist rulers – to save them by letting them into a second circle of the chosen elect. They are tossed around according to the whim of the lords of Europe, the banks and their packs of patronising politicians. Within the circle of the chosen elect, there are two more circles: that of the countries which are doubly elect because they possess the single currency and the others, looked down on pityingly, who have not yet tasted that bitter fruit. Even though they have caught the same disease of debt, small and large, from Poland to the UK, they are not fettered directly to the calamitous consequences of an artificial currency. (Of course, their working people undergo the same frontal attack by capital on their gains. On this there is no country that is different, inside or outside Europe.)

And then, behind the deceptive veil of the European "Union", within an already pretty restricted inner circle, the policy of destroying social rights and gains in order to save the capitalists has increased and enlarged the inequalities between countries. That artificial pseudo-currency the euro has powerfully contributed to extending and increasing these inequalities. The monetary aspect of the crisis has revealed and at the same time deepened not just a "simple" growth in inequality but a veritable fissure between these supposedly "united" countries. The leaders of the "more equal" ones and their entourage speak slightingly about certain "less equal" countries like Greece, Portugal, Italy, etc. which these arrogant leaders disdainfully describe as the "periphery" of Europe, echoing the contemptuous and fearful French mantra

about the “dangerous *banlieue*”.

Today even this – only yesterday broad and compact – camp of close-knit European insiders has fairly well broken apart. Confronted with a veritable rout in which the concentric circles of a pseudo-Europe are gradually shrinking and tending openly and cynically to be reduced to the so-called “German-French axis”, “pro-European” politicians and journalists speak and write openly about the possibility of the euro collapsing while their “Europe” falls apart. It is worth repeating that their artificial money, conceived in the feverish imagination of monetarist dogma and first seeing daylight under the magic wand of voluntarism, is before our very eyes colliding with the realities of a fragmented Europe on which it will inevitably break apart. Glimpsing this abyss, some economists, more lucid than the mass of politicians and other “experts”, foresee a much narrower grouping of countries as the only way to furnish a more or less realistic and adequate base for a euro which is being tossed about in the air like a shuttlecock. But one can also see clearly the obvious fear leaders have of taking this route, one more proof that the capitalist class are by their very nature incapable of unifying Europe. The euro is an artificial currency condemned to disappear, and its collapse will lead to that of the capitalists’ counterfeit Europe.

Of course this capitalist class and its leaders will never acknowledge that their European (misad)venture is a fiasco. After all, for better or for worse, it is in line with the move towards greater concentration of capital and guarantees it a wider unrestricted market. But most of all, rickety and deformed as this scaffolding is, it provides a framework, a way and a cover (and now also as a pretext) for organising, pursuing and carrying out its frontal attack on the rights and gains workers have achieved, which is ultimately essential if they are to keep their crumbling system going. On Europe, the sharper the contradiction becomes between reality and the

capitalist class's obstinacy, the heavier the burden they will put on the backs of working people.

Dream of a "social" Europe or fight for a working peoples' Europe

So what is needed to fight this general and frontal attack by the bourgeoisie is a broad movement of working people. While they camouflage that attack behind the pretence of dealing with the crisis, that is actually the concrete form in which the attack is taking place. You can see that clearly in Greece, Ireland, Portugal and a succession of other countries. Italy is next on the execution block. Given the nature and extent of these attacks, the movement against them cannot but be international and, more concretely, Europe-wide.

Every single one of the great organisations traditionally supposed to defend and promote the interests of working people stops at the borders of its own country, despite the well-known fact that they have sister organisations in every country in Europe. They do have some sort of European or even international centres, but what stands out is these zombie bodies' total and absolute lack of any European-wide platform or programme. What most of them do is mimic the capitalist class's attitude on Europe, including its general offensive disguised behind a fig-leaf of "reforms". At most, they embroider lovely little designs to set themselves apart, but always on a canvas provided by the capitalists. What they absolutely will not ever do is work out and put forward a coherent programme for Europe, different from, and opposed to, the one currently in force. Not to mention the essential precondition for such a programme, i.e. a critical global analysis of the capitalist class's programme.

At most, the leaders of these organisations will from time to time humbly petition the "competent authorities" to give Europe a social dimension by introducing a series of social norms among the other conditions and criteria of their "European project". In this connection it is brutally

revealing that these norms and social rights have been deliberately set aside and have simply disappeared from all plans for "Europe". These ridiculous Don Quixotes never say a word about that and make fools of themselves when they occasionally flaunt themselves as champions of social rights. It never occurs to them to put forward social demands of their own.

Obviously it is extremely important to defend the gains workers have made in each country, because the general offensive to dismantle them often takes a particular form depending on specific national conditions. But if it stays at this national level, the movement to defend them will be delayed and ultimately defeated. We must both strengthen them and unify them into a Europe-wide movement right from the outset. But such a continent-wide movement cannot be limited to just defending social gains, which at the end of the day is a *negative* objective. The only way it can attain the stature it needs is if it has a *positive* goal to aim for. To put it another way, it is not enough to be *against* something, you have to be fighting *for* something. The banner of this movement must therefore say what it stands for, i.e the construction of a "working people's Europe". Only a struggle with a clear and open orientation on that scale will be in a position to parry and defeat the capitalist class's frontal attack on working people's rights, an attack embodied in their their pseudo-Europe with all its destructive plans.

It would be pretentious and premature to try to work out in advance a detailed and complete programme for the movement towards a working people's Europe, but we should state some aims and demands which flow from the concrete current situation, as well as some of the principles and methods which ought to guide its activity and help it bear fruit.

Main central demand

First of all there is the crisis of this bankers' Europe which currently centres on the colossal levels of debt faced by all

the countries in the euro zone (and the rest), causing intractable quibbling and haggling in search of a "solution" which looks more and more like squaring the circle. (Unless, of course, they can impose massive impoverishment on working people under conditions of totalitarian oppression.) The Greek leader Papandreou made a feeble attempt to escape this implacable vice by suggesting that the Greek people should be consulted over what to do about the debts in a referendum. The moment he said this, all the leaders of Europe and their entourages rose in protest as one man, violently and angrily, as if stung by a scorpion. What impertinence! How dare he ask the people what they thought, when those in charge have already decided to squeeze them and their rights even harder! This vain effort tore away the mask and showed the true face of their runt "Europe".

On the one hand this was one more confirmation that they will never be able to pay back the gigantic debts (which at the same time sheds light on the cynical, off-hand, way these leaders trample democracy underfoot). On the other, it exposed how profound the crisis – or rather death agony – of the euro actually is. How significant that not a single one of all the "socialists" who are up to their necks in this "Europe" and its euro stood up for their "comrade" Papandreou.

What is more, the plan to salvage creditor capital (and definitely not the Greek people), born amid so many protracted and painful labours, also required a good dollop of help from – that same capital. Whether the banks are willing to repeat the experience is more than doubtful. Attempts to consolidate the much-touted European fund to help states meet their debts are certainly not welcomed with open arms in every quarter and are in fact in a bit of a sorry state. The queue of potential victims – Italy, Spain and then France – is coming into sharper focus. The billions that have to be paid back are joined each day by further billions as the usurious interest rate keeps going up, set and raised arbitrarily at the

insatiable whim of finance capital, or – to use the oracular, antiseptic language of the spin doctors – “the needs of the markets”. They make old Shylock look a mere beginner.

The sorcerer’s apprentices of modern “Europe” are at least partly responsible for setting up this reality, but they cannot contain the infernal mechanism which is at one and the same time their servant and their master. Desperately trying to get a grip on a situation which slips through their fingers and threatens to carry them away in their turn like Papandreu or Berlusconi, they have opened fire on the ratings agencies. These are unquestionably parasites on the system which have the juicy job of informing finance capital how profitable their investments are, using a continuous grading system. Their ratings are scanned as anxiously as the class dunces read their end of term reports. Because the agencies have recently handed downgrades even to their star European pupils in view of their poor economic performance, these former teachers’ pets have turned on them furiously and used some rather choice language over the loss of their cherished triple-A ratings. Just like the ancient Romans who put to death the messenger who brought bad news.

The steady and yet disproportionate growth in the already monumental weight of debt actually reflects the real economic situation. That, and the quite bleak prospects for the future mean that it will never be possible to pay the debts back. The few more clear-sighted economists and journalists point out that the main reason for the debts is that economic growth is slowing down considerably, if not just marking time. Consequently they point out that the way forward is a series of measures to improve and increase this growth. And they are right – on paper. Growth is not an isolated, separate economic phenomenon which you can stimulate and increase at will. In capitalism, it depends exclusively on the ability of domestic and export markets to absorb the goods produced. Without going into detail, suffice it to say that these markets are more or

less saturated, resulting in chronic over-production. In any case, for a long time now markets have been inaccessible to European (and American) goods which are too expensive and (with the exception of Germany) of inferior quality. That is the actual fact hiding behind the insistent calls by a handful of economists and even fewer politicians for production in Europe to be made more competitive. To put it in simple everyday language, they must produce goods at a better price and of a better quality, etc., if they are to sell them against ever tougher competition from the massive quantities of goods at unbeatable prices appearing from the so-called "emerging" countries, made possible by the shameless super-exploitation of their workers.

Of course capital and its economic and political managers, as ever, see a way out of their serious situation, but it is *their* "way out" in line with their system, starting with a savage determination that their debts will be paid in full, come what may. Next, they seek to improve their economic competitiveness, i.e. cut their production costs. This is exactly what they are doing with their continuous attacks – not to say a veritable grand offensive – on the rights and advantages working people have gained, achievements which are now definitively incompatible with this reduction in production costs, and therefore with their system as a whole. But they do not stop there. In the next wave they will take direct aim at real wages, and this has already started in places. Do not forget that the German capitalists consolidated their industrial competitiveness by drastically squeezing incomes across the board through a wage freeze "agreed" by compliant trade unions, and this has been going on for years!

Don't pay the debts!

All this means that for a prolonged period the crisis is going to get worse and consequently we must expect a redoubled and sharper offensive against working people on all fronts. There can only be one serious response: we must propose a *general*

refusal to pay back these debts, which are growing all the time as the interest goes up. This should be the first demand of the Europe-wide workers' movement in connection with their call for "a working people's Europe". At the same time it builds a barrier against further destruction of workers' rights. The series of harsh austerity plans inevitably threatens human civilisation as a whole, a terrible sacrifice on the hideous altar of capitalism in decline.

Historical regression of this sort would not be confined to economic and social conditions; gloom would also spread across political life, and to an extent it already has. No-one should forget that in a similarly tortured situation fascism conquered power in Germany, having already triumphed in Italy. It is no accident that it is already making giant strides in several European countries on the same basis of capitalist convulsions and taking advantage of the same dereliction of their most elementary duties by workers' official leaders. If workers and their representatives remain inactive and turn their backs on this struggle to defend themselves boldly and unite their forces at a European level, there is no doubt that new Hitlers and new Mussolinis will take their place. The worrying progress they are already making in a growing number of countries goes hand in hand with no less disturbing retreats by the workers' movement. The only effective way to fight these shades of barbarism was and is an energetic united struggle to defend the rights workers have gained and to transform a Europe shrouded in shadows into a free "working people's Europe".

While it would be silly and pointless to try to work out a complete scheme of detailed demands for such a Europe-wide workers movement in advance, it does seem necessary to put forward a few important points and principles to guide its activity.

Against a stunted "Europe" and its banks

The central target is European policy, summed up and

concentrated in the offensive described above, and Europe's anti-democratic central institutions. The Europe-wide workers' movement is directed against this policy which is profoundly anti-democratic in every way. The movement will be aimed directly against these so-called European institutions whose establishment, character and methods, in line with their policy, are not merely anti-democratic but brutally opposed to democracy. These tyrannical organs are veiled in an anonymity from behind which they issue and impose binding decrees without appeal, squandering vast sums of money in the process. Swarms of idle parasites gravitate around the innumerable pressure groups, wooing and winning support for this or that group of capitalists. In the name of elementary democracy, the Europe-wide workers' movement will fight these anti-democratic monsters, spectres of a long-vanished feudal rule. The Europe-wide workers' movement should loudly insist that the whole lot of these autocratic, parasitic and enormously expensive bodies should be abolished. And while we are about it, it will fight to establish democratic bodies based on the mass participation of workers and all working people.

Everything about the problems under discussion shows very clearly that this Europe-wide movement will have to have a working-class character. It also means that that this has to be laid down clearly and unequivocally. This stands out when it comes sketching even in outline the aims, programme and method of such a movement. As the partial mobilisations have so far have emphasised, the Europe-wide workers' movement must beyond doubt be directed against the main threat, i.e. finance capital and its institutions, which are already exploiting the crisis to unleash a large-scale offensive. It is therefore clear that, from the start, the movement must aim to undermine the very basis for this evil offensive. The conviction arises naturally that in doing so it is impossible to disentangle social and economic troubles in general, and the refusal to repay the debts in particular, from the circumstances and position of the banks. Consequently one of the very first

demands will be to end banking secrecy which, by the way, will remain a pious wish unless it is accompanied by nationalisation of the leading banks under workers' control.

That is the natural, logical and concrete way to strike a real blow at the source of their power, as opposed to the endless chatter and demagogic fantasies, devoid of both content and consequences, around "regulation" of finance capital and its movement. It is also the only serious way to strike a definite blow against the pressure towards impoverishment. Only a radical step like this, under the watchful supervision of workers, would provide at the same time an indispensable basis for and a means to manage credit vigorously and healthily and get an effective grip on the arbitrary up and down movement of interest rates. Such steps are also important in defending the many thousand small, often family, firms which are being mugged by capital. They are the natural allies of working people and their movement in this struggle. What is downright culpable is the almost total silence on these basic questions emanating from the big "Left" organisations. In this they have absolutely turned their backs on their own – not too distant – past.

Renew the trade unions

To even get off the ground, never mind flourish, a Europe-wide workers' movement absolutely must be allied to the trade unions. Actually there is much more at stake here. The current situation is marked by the general merciless offensive of capital on the one hand and the successive retreats and political and organisational disarmament of the working class and all working people on the other, so the trade unions are a particularly important force and tool in the workers' hands. After all, the sole and original reason for unions is to rally working people together, represent them and defend their interests. They are probably the only levers that actually exist in every country and internationally which can give a decisive boost to their movement, unifying and strengthening

them. That is precisely why, ever since they first came into being, capital has always done whatever it could either to destroy and outlaw them, or co-opt them and turn them its own servants.

They have long since succeeded in shepherding unions, through their leaderships, into a sort of "peaceful co-existence" or even class collaboration, sometimes masked or hidden, but suspended and interrupted outright in times of heightened class-struggle. From this point of view, the characteristic trait of recent decades, while capital has been preparing and launching a general offensive, has been the way these trade union leaderships have turned openly and publicly into auxiliary detachments of capital, or, as they themselves put it bluntly, "social partners".

One disastrous consequence of this attack on the innermost core, the most fundamental being of trade unionism, and the kind of behaviour it gives rise to, has been a considerable fall in membership. Massive desertions by workers and working people in general express a lack of trust in trade unions and have reached alarming proportions in every country. One of the most urgent tasks facing the European workers' movement is to put this into reverse and take back the unions – from top to bottom.

The mass of workers who did stay on in their unions did not follow the same path as the trade union bureaucracies, of class collaboration codified and underlined by their conversion into "social partners". This stopped the rot from spreading too far and prevented the unions from becoming fully integrated into the state. Despite losses, they have actually maintained their independence and thus their ability to get back into the fight.

On this basis, workers and all working people can and should get back into their unions. In any case, the unions belong to them and not any particular individual, least of all the trade

union bureaucrats who put at risk the the very existence of unions, whose main justification after all is that they stand up to capital. The decisive argument in this re-conquest of the unions by workers is this: without these organisations and their mobilising capacity, it would be very difficult, not to say practically impossible, to develop a powerful Europe-wide movement of workers.

However, it goes without saying that this campaign to take back the unions means that they must at the same time be turned back into organisations of struggle against capital's offensive. To do this, a platform of union-organised workers must urgently express in words the need to break with class collaboration ("social partnership") in order to achieve independence from bosses and government.

Combative actions, not carnivals

Merely deciding to go for that sort of independence, or just talking or writing ringing declarations about it, will not bring it. It will only take concrete shape through involvement in real, resolute struggle against capital's offensive and all its manifestations. Such a struggle is fundamentally different from all the pretend and pseudo-actions used as a pretext by the leaderships of the "social partner" unions, first and foremost because it completely denounces capital's offensive and condemns it from every angle. That means clearly-defined and precise workers' demands rather than the kind of puerile gestures requesting "realistic negotiations" which trade union bureaucrats often indulge in. It also requires serious actions and combative, determined demonstrations instead of the happy-go-lucky clownish carnival-like processions used to lull working people into a false sense of security.

A particularly important criterion in this involvement is its international – above all Europe-wide – scope and character. Trade unions have significant links and even an apparatus at an international and European level. The acutely painful situation we are in means that these entirely bureaucratised

links and offices must be turned boldly into (or replaced by) pillars of continent-wide struggle against capital's offensive and the machinery of it concentrated in Brussels, Frankfurt and Strasbourg. A series of actions in these centres and across Europe should replace the very occasional European rallies disguised as tame village fêtes.

This shows why there is no way the great mass of working people will be able to re-conquer the trade unions without re-establishing complete workers' democracy within them. Besides freedom of discussion, the main test (success criteria) for such democracy is freedom for tendencies and factions to express their views including the right to organise an opposition. This internal democracy is vitally necessary and the only way to work out the best orientation, achieve the necessary flexibility and make sure that the most appropriate slogans are selected. It is the best guarantee against the deadly snares of capitulation through unprincipled opportunism or marginalisation in sectarian sterility. Of course it is also the only way to give the unions back to working people and make the changes to them that are needed.

A Europe-wide workers' movement can only exist and develop through the involvement of a multitude of political, trade union, cultural, etc. organisations and movements in the various countries. In the nature of things, these organisations function on the basis of a very broad spectrum of different conceptions and programmes and a variety of attachments and affiliations. What will unite them and assemble them into a single movement – besides their working-class character – will be their determination to fight back against capital's attacks on the rights working people have won and the gains they have made. In a situation like this, there is only one way to achieve and guarantee on the one hand the unity and integrity of the movement and on the other the freedom and independence of each of its components. That is the historically-proven method of the international workers'

movement, the united workers' front. Almost 100 years ago Lenin, one of the great leaders of this movement, summed it up succinctly in the words: "March separately – Strike together!".

This is the only effective way for our broad and diverse movement to achieve its common goal.

December 2011

Italian election tsunami by Balazs Nagy May 2013

There is no point simply repeating the results of the latest Italian elections. Everybody knows them. We also know the astonishment, apprehension and barely-disguised fear they caused among the bourgeoisie and its European satraps and propagandists. Even most of those who are genuinely against these were completely gobsmacked. So pretty much nobody understands what is going on. To penetrate the mystery of it all, you obviously need to go a bit further, to look behind the contestants' political badges and the voting figures. Those colours and facades are only the superficial, immediate and direct reflections of a deeper-going relationship of forces between social classes. Of course this means looking at the political actors and the votes they get. But it also means, unlike all the – sincere or partisan, merely superficial or frankly cosmetic – commentators, looking a little more closely behind the candidates' branding and costumes, especially if you hope to derive useful lessons of general interest beyond the borders of Italy.

To do that, we need first of all to clarify the historical and political conditions which have left their indelible mark on

these elections.

The break-up of bourgeois democracy

Important political developments are usually explained, discussed and analysed using the generally prevailing method, i.e. in themselves, separated from their social and historical context. This short-sighted approach is characteristic of various sets of bourgeois analysts. Sadly, it also influences a number of political currents which in other respects oppose capital. But in imposing this narrow view on the Italian elections, the great mass of reports, once they had expressed their dismayed – or indeed satisfied – stupefaction, have been content merely to describe the results. They did not look for any deeper cause of this veritable upheaval beyond pointing out that the Italian people had massively rejected the destructive bourgeois offensive, before wandering off into conjecture and subjective and even fantastic speculation. But the internal motive forces behind this readjustment of political lines remained beyond their reach.

One of the most fundamental things to bear in mind about our epoch, what makes it different from the 19th century, is that from World War I onwards capitalism visibly entered into the phase of its decline and death-agony. To avoid overloading this article, I shall spare the reader the very complete analysis Lenin provides of this imperialist stage of capital compared to the preceding phase, nor shall I polemicise against the dogmatic perception of this decline which mechanically imposes it on reality as if it were a constant uniform downward motion. On the contrary, it must be emphasised that this decadence is not a static given, an immutable element suspended like some external threat over a constant and unchanging society. Far from it, since it is bound up with this economy's and this society's organism, it is part and parcel of it, just as ageing and physical decrepitude are a result of the declining phase of a human body. And just as a human being declines, so too imperialism is declining to the point of exhaustion. Since Lenin's essential analysis of imperialism's anatomy (including the

damnation of its soul) in 1916, the system has continued to trace a generally downward curve. Of course it has not been an uninterrupted linear fall, but nevertheless a flagrant, notorious and necessary descent, despite occasionally stopping or even starting to rise again, as Trotsky describes it like the brief periods of lucidity in a being in its death agony, interludes which bring neither respite nor cure.

Keeping a constant eye on this decline and refreshing our analysis of it (as indeed of other manifestations of imperialism) has been and remains an important task for the workers' movement. Understanding it is an indispensable tool for all those who struggle for working people's emancipation. After Lenin's death, his companion in arms, Trotsky took on the responsibility for constantly improving this valuable and necessary compass, a task made all the more difficult and arduous by the way in which the Stalinist bureaucracy perverted and rendered gangrenous the USSR and the Communist Parties, altering and falsifying the teachings of Marx and Lenin and persecuting Trotsky and his comrades even to the point of assassination.

Concretely and constantly examining this decadence, in particular the incessant deterioration in the democratic system of the bourgeoisie's political regime as an intimately-linked product of it, was one of Trotsky's most important preoccupations. All his analyses of the processes involved in the decay of petty-bourgeois democracy deserve our attention, since this degradation has not only not stopped, but country by country and period by period it has got worse and assumed a variety of forms depending on the mutual positioning of the classes and the intensity of the struggle between them, and also on specific national circumstances.

One undeniable symptom of imperialist decadence is the noticeable shift in the physiognomy of economic crises. Once again it suffices, without going into details, to mention their much greater frequency and the appearance of great general crises of a new type. These are world-wide in scope, spreading from one economic sector to another (finance,

production, distribution), becoming infinite in duration and, inevitably, leading to a re-modelling of political life. These crises of a new type drastically reveal the total bankruptcy of capitalism-imperialism and call imperatively for its overthrow. Thus they openly pose the question of power.

The first such crisis lasted from 1929 to 1945, since World War II was an integral part of it, both as its ineluctable outcome and as its "solution". We are currently living through the second, whose depth and duration are also starting to disturb a good number of even bourgeois economists. In France, only Hollande and his people retain, for public consumption, as it were, any illusions over the approaching end of a "cyclical" crisis. So this "normal" president hopes for a "normal" crisis.

But at the height of the crisis of the 1930s Trotsky provided a galaxy of magisterial analyses of political upheavals that were the worm-eaten and toxic fruit of imperialist decline. The most important, he showed, arose from classical democracy's inability to contain the violence of class contradictions produced by imperialism. Hence the bourgeoisie's orientation towards more authoritarian political systems. This is why democracy degrades and rots and is abolished.

How Trotsky examined fascism, what he called for and proposed and what he warned against, are more or less well-known. But these have become separated from the theoretical basis of his investigation and reflections i.e. imperialist decadence and the sharpening of class contradictions, which are pushed into the background or frankly ignored. So, as Trotsky himself had occasion to comment, an examination of concrete reality has been replaced by the abstract categories of "democracy" and "fascism".

This is how Trotsky presented this problem (just after Hitler's tragic seizure of power).

"The Stalinist theory of fascism ... represents one of the most tragic examples of the injurious ... consequences that can follow from the substitution of the dialectical analysis of

reality ... by abstract categories formulated upon the basis of a partial and insufficient historical experience ... The Stalinists adopted the idea that in the contemporary period, finance capital cannot accommodate itself to parliamentary democracy and is obliged to resort to fascism. From this idea, absolutely correct within certain limits, they draw in a purely deductive, formally logical manner the same conclusions for all the countries and for all stages of development.” (“Bonapartism and Fascism” in Writings of Leon Trotsky (1934-35), New York, 1974, p. 51)

Among the Stalinists’ generalisations, Trotsky then notes, they worryingly “forgot” that “between parliamentary democracy and the fascist regime a series of transitional forms, one after another, inevitably interposes itself, now ‘peaceably,’ now by civil war”. With many comrades today in danger of sliding into the schematic method of the Stalinists, this advice is irreplaceable. How important it is, is emphasised by the fact that over that decade of the 1930s, Trotsky never stopped stripping down and analysing bonapartism as one of the intermediate forms between parliamentary democracy condemned to disappear and its replacement by fascism – or the proletarian revolution.

From this rich literature, which is particularly relevant to an understanding of our present problems, we should also quote his article “Whither France?” written three months later. His words in this study resonate today even louder and with particular acuteness:

“Capitalism not only cannot give the toilers new social reforms, nor even petty alms. It is forced to take back what it once gave. All of Europe has entered an era of economic and political counter-reforms. The policy of despoiling and suffocating the masses stems not from the caprices of the reaction but from the decomposition of the capitalist system. That is the fundamental fact which must be assimilated by every worker if he is not to be duped by hollow phrases. That is precisely why the democratic reformist parties are disintegrating and losing their forces one after another

throughout

Europe".

(<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/whitherfrance/ch00.htm>)

Just like now, as if he had just written these words today, although it was actually almost 80 years ago! And of course it raises the question: Where are we now?

The bourgeoisie's European con-trick

Trotsky's teachings and advice help us to grasp today's situation. Using this Marxist method we can get an understanding of the recent elections in Italy and bring out the main political lessons they offer. But it would be quite wrong to see the current crisis as a mere copy of the previous one, even though they share the same formal basis – i.e. the decline of imperialism – and the current crisis does resemble its forebear in the 1930s.

The great crisis is not a simple repetition of its ancestor in the last century. In the intervening period the prolonged death-agony of capitalism-imperialism has weakened the system to the point where most, if not all, its traditional reserves are exhausted. The shift of its centre of gravity to Asia is a significant symptom of this exhaustion which in turn has made the retrogression faster and worse. Faced with continual depletion of its normal internal resources and threatened with complete exhaustion, anaemic world capitalism relies entirely on the artificial intravenous drip-feed of finance and the illusory nutrients it brings. At the same time, its most enfeebled European branch has decided to risk all on a death-defying "European" feat of acrobatics which flies in the very face of the continent's eminently national character. And paradoxically, it has found a lifeline by developing and generalising this survival therapy.

Conveniently screened behind the claim to be "building Europe", it has brought together and concentrated the last measures (before fascism!) for regenerating capitalism and has imposed them on every country. These stewards of European capital have gained some space to impose the bitter doses by presenting them as necessary steps towards European

integration. There is no way national parliaments would have simply swallowed them without provoking severe crises and the inevitable risk of mobilising working people into tumultuous resistance. In any case, they do not have much room for moving towards the kind of bonapartist regime that Trotsky described in the 1930s as one of the intermediate regimes between parliamentary democracy and fascism. The sort of (even pretend) wheeling and dealing between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat which is a typical feature of bonapartism would be very difficult given the anaemic state the bourgeoisie is in. It is unable to offer even the shadow of a reform and is in urgent need of resurrection, which has turned out to be impossible without tackling head-on all the gains the working class has made; there is hardly any room left for any kind of balancing act between the classes, even an illusory one. Nevertheless, bonapartism is very tempting, especially in France, where Sarkozy recently tried to put it into practice – although that too rested on the “European” fiction. That remains the basis and framework of all efforts to turn towards bonapartism, elements of which, especially the authoritarian side, are present in every country.

Nevertheless, this Europe remains indispensable for the bourgeoisie, first of all because it allows them to be sparing in the use of fascism, which is not only a costly adventure but also very risky and dangerous for them because European workers have not forgotten its horrors. However, it would be seriously wrong to dismiss it completely because it is still the bourgeoisie’s final resort. So as their declines leads to more and more problems accumulate, fascist parties are gaining strength across Europe and biding their time. This can be seen everywhere, from Greece to the Netherlands. For the time being, however, the bourgeoisie is more inclined to rely on the supposed European unification which they have shaped to their own requirements, i.e. to a considerable extent perverted.

First of all, the mongrel edifice which they and their supporters call Europe is admirably adapted to fill the space

between democracy and fascism that used to be occupied by national bonapartism. It has the immense advantage of neutralising and shrugging aside democracy and its useless, "dangerous" institutions while maintaining their empty husks or rather, to be precise, degrading them into transmission belts for their own purposes. The crying lack of democracy that is a distinctive mark of the whole of this European edifice, and the obviously authoritarian and profoundly anti-democratic way it functions, are not mistakes arising from miscalculation, chance or caprice. They reveal its essence, express its nature and indicate its vocation to compel, impose and assert the will of the bourgeoisie while side-lining democratic procedures with which it is incompatible.

The sole and invariable aim of all their "recommendations" is to set up projects to save and shore up capital which is on the ropes and a bourgeoisie which is adrift without a rudder. They are handed down like decrees to docile national "parliaments". (Strangely not a single one of these measures aims to improve the lives of working people!) This being the case, those who, however sincerely, ask this Europe to apply the most elementary democratic principles, or even its own social regulations, have got the wrong address and simply make themselves look stupid. Instead of begging for these things you have to win them in struggle. The mission of this Europe is precisely to dictate what capital requires, side-lining democracy that gets in the way. The present great crisis powerfully exposes this and testifies to it in the most striking way.

The current crisis and the role of debt

This great crisis did not explode simply as a consequence of contradictions of the capitalist-imperialist system already familiar from the 1929-1945 crisis. It was fed and bloated on top of that by all the extra costs arising from the long-drawn-out decadence and deterioration of imperialism and efforts to contain it.

Public debt requires particular attention in this regard because it plays a special role and is important,

concentrating within itself the whole extra weight of capitalist retrogression and the vain efforts to overcome it. I cannot deal with it fully here, but it would be wrong to leave it out entirely, since it has a central place in the world – and particularly European – bourgeoisie's arrangements.

Briefly, then: this high level of public indebtedness has its origins in the more and more marked deficiency in capitalist accumulation which from more or less the middle of the twentieth century was decreasingly able to play the role of stimulating constantly expanding extended reproduction. This inadequacy, which is the main basis and organic reason for the capitalist-imperialist system running out of steam and falling into marked decline over a long period, inexorably drove it under the domination of its financial component. The poor returns on production – profit – was no longer enough to secure it vigorous renewal. As indicated above, it needed an artificial and total intravenous drip of finance. To put it another way, finance went from being a partner to a hegemonic position. One consequence was a serious drop in state income, already reduced by the cuts politicians like to make to the taxation of the bourgeoisie. This happened just as state expenditure was rising. This process as a whole necessarily culminated in all bourgeois states being massively in debt, especially in the economically most advanced countries.

A feature of a general crisis is that it exposes weaknesses and problems of the system for all to see, and so it was with this catastrophe. The real weight and extent of current debt far surpasses the normal and necessary role of money-capital loans in the production-cycle of capital and the classic debt-levels which go with them. Still lacking the space to deal with it properly, here, I can mention only what seems absolutely essential to understanding the situation.

As we saw above, finance capital has gained the upper hand and become a monster whose tentacles tightly embrace the whole of social life. Of course it is not the mythical monster that bourgeois politicians and journalists try to portray it as,

lurking inaccessibly behind the enigmatic domination of "market forces". It is certainly flesh and blood, sheltering in the banks and similar institutions and personified in the cohorts of shareholders, small-time speculators and other parasites.

What really is strangely new about this situation and at the same time represents a deepening of the "decay" Lenin spoke about, is the fact that this finance capital has managed to turn all the countries of Europe (not to mention others) into permanent debtors bound to yield up their regular feudal dues like medieval serfs. The most fundamental role of this thing they call Europe and its institutions is to tie these modern serfs to their financial masters and make sure they pay the many and various exactions upon them. The previously independent national leaders and their parliaments unquestioningly carry out orders and instructions prescribing how they are to fulfil their role of collecting the cash. Their main activity is to raise, amass and guarantee the considerable sums owed to the sacrosanct "markets" as they suppress and destroy all social gains previously achieved. It is a fully-worked-out system where astronomic debt levels make any hope of final payment vain and utopian, especially since, while countries and workers bled white in this way find they are completely unable to reproduce the necessary wealth, their governments still keep turning up regularly at the banks to borrow further billions. So the debts grow and this whole edifice of abject exploitation is set to go on and on for ever.

This problem as a whole is the concrete expression of Lenin's overall characterisation of imperialism as an epoch of "wars and revolutions" or "as capitalism in transition, or, more precisely, as moribund capitalism" disintegrating under the weight of its contradictions. By 1934 Trotsky was talking about the "capitalist system decomposing". Now, the essential meaning of the current situation which the above analysis reveals is a growing inability on the part of the bourgeoisie to preserve and guarantee its domination using the old means

to which it has become accustomed and its chaotic search for a way out. Lenin clearly described this as one of the necessary conditions for revolution. Despite all fairy stories, there is no doubt that we are in a period in which revolution is maturing, and in which the main job of all those who take seriously the emancipation of working people is preparing for it. The facts clearly pose the choices: workers' revolution or a descent into barbarism (of which war is one of the components).

Displacement of class forces – key to the election results

The Italian election results were unexpected and astonished everybody. They express the fact that, on the rotten basis of capitalism-imperialism, there has been a veritable general political re-alignment in Italy, a social re-positioning that has brutally redrawn the political map. In reality we are at the end of a series of enormous whirlwinds, of dislocations and regroupings involving political parties in Italy since the 1990s. These have been years of real cataclysm which have shaken political life from top to bottom, radically changing the traditional spectrum of parties. These twenty short years have wiped the two main opposing parties off the map: the one, Stalinist and the other, bourgeois Christian Democracy.

Their collapse reflected their inability to hold back and channel workers' and peasants' struggles using their old, outdated methods and means, an impotence which was accentuated by the way these struggles intensified on the basis of the worsening decadence of capitalism and attempts to deal with it on a "European" level. Their political re-composition in a new configuration was obviously motivated by their abiding desire to shore up the rickety bourgeoisie and thus bar the way to the masses of working people. They only differed – sometimes acutely – over how to do it. The recent elections provide us with the first materials assessing the outcome of this metamorphosis, which no doubt will exert a strong influence on national – and European – political life.

The potential impact across the continent will be very deep because what was directly at stake in the political contest in

Italy itself was the way the European project expressed itself in that country. It was in relation to this central axis that the political actors and their organisations defined their programmes. Their national views and topics were merely derived from these commitments. Moreover, this same transformation or mutation of purely national programmes into European stances had already marked previous elections, in Greece or France, for example.

The main issue in the Italian elections is the outstanding fact that, following their Greek brothers, the Italian proletariat inflicted a stinging defeat on the bourgeoisie's concentrated offensive. They swept aside its nefarious objectives and measures and its anti-democratic methods, thus crushing the political line of their Italian personification and direct proxy of Brussels and Frankfurt, Mario Monti, along with the shattered remnants of bourgeois parties who clung to him. This proletarian drive was expressed directly in the votes, but also in the pressure exerted upon all other classes and their parties.

First of all, the elections exposed and set the seal on a fault line in the Italian bourgeoisie, breaking apart under the heavy burden of re-structuring its forms of rule. One significant wing realised the difficulties involved in applying in Italy the European offensive aimed at taming and subjecting the proletariat and rejected this path. It chose a different route to weakening and dominating working people, the route of adventurist demagogy and runaway nationalism. The fact that this coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi did very well at the polls underlines how important this orientation on the part of the bourgeoisie is. The two parts making it up arose not so long since out of the decomposition of the traditional political parties of the bourgeoisie. They testify to a significant political re-composition on the part of one section of it. Side by side with the adventurist party of the bourgeois wheeler-dealer Berlusconi, the Northern League expresses a clear orientation towards an authoritarian nationalist regime, thus straddling the tendency towards a

rupture in national unity. The League openly espouses the desire to drive ahead with the super-exploitation of the south of the country, the famous Mezzogiorno, and even to cut all state aid to this traditional "internal colony" of the Italian bourgeoisie. Even now the average income per head of the population in the Mezzogiorno is 40 per cent less than in the north of the country. Between 2007 and 2010, gross domestic product (GDP) in the south fell by 6.1 per cent, while in the centre-north the reduction was "only" 4.1 per cent, and since 2008, 70 per cent of job losses have been in the Mezzogiorno (Le Monde, 22 February 2013).

This coalition kept afloat by Berlusconi's demagogic adventurism and the Northern League's threadbare local patriotism clearly forms the antechamber to a second edition of fascism. Rather than unifying the country, bourgeois Europe's aggressive policy of ravaging it and imposing authoritarian centralisation have heightened the contradictions and inequalities between provinces, dividing them and pushing them towards separation. A considerable part of the "national" bourgeoisie straddle this drive – this is very clear and far-reaching in Italy – and, dragging along a good proportion of the petty bourgeoisie, adopt a no less retrograde and reactionary nationalist orientation, going so far as to repudiate the unity of the country.

(It should be noted in passing that this phenomenon is not confined to Italy. Besides the visibly nationalist parties in many countries, one can also see several movements for national dismemberment. That is concretely on the agenda not only in Italy, but also in Belgium and Spain for example. Of course such a turn on the part of a section of the bourgeoisie in this or that country cannot at all be a path to national emancipation, even in cases as legitimate as the Catalan and Basque nations in Spain. For working class activists to take this nationalist path would mean them being swallowed up in the process by which the façade of bourgeois national unity breaks apart, which would weaken the desirable unity of the country's proletariat. The nationalist turn, even under

apparently positive slogans, is precisely the other variant of bourgeois politics, through which it seeks to maintain its leadership and hegemony by trying to channel the revolt against bourgeois Europe into a nationalist dead-end pointing straight at fascism. The bourgeois "independence" adventure would only add to the already immense burdens Catalan [or Basque] working people have to bear and certainly not bring any "national" advantages. Real independence for Catalonia will only be obtained in the course and within the framework of a struggle for socialism throughout the whole of Spain. Now the indispensable condition for such a struggle, and especially for a successful outcome, is the fighting unity of all Spanish working people. The Asturian miners realised that recently when they marched to Madrid to unite their struggles with other working people against bourgeois Europe's anti-working class measures.)

The other significant section of the bourgeoisie lines up behind the so-called "left" coalition of Pier-Luigi Bersani. The dominant segment of this coalition is the Democrat Party which also, but only partly, came out of the break-up of the old political apparatus (party) of the bourgeoisie and its re-composition during the 1990s. But unlike the parties of the opposing coalition of Berlusconi, the birth of this Democrat Party follows a different fracture line and also a sticking-together of ill-matched pieces. The new bourgeois parties, particularly Berlusconi's "People of Liberty" and the Northern League, are bourgeois formations of a distinctly DIY character, but their class origins are homogenous. The Democrat Party, on the other hand, has its roots in the dissolution of the once-powerful Stalinist party of Togliatti. Since this party dissolved itself in 1990, its majority have undergone a period of decomposition punctuated by various break-aways and re-compositions. This opportunist mutation, accompanied by alliances and ruptures, culminated in the current Democrat Party founded in 2007. But it also contains the fusion of this Stalinist rump with the "left" vestiges of Christian Democracy.

It should be noted straight away that the sudden degeneration of the CP and its amalgamation with a piece of the bourgeois Christian Democrat party, although written into the DNA of Stalinism – as one saw in the USSR – was treated with obstinate silence by the European and world press, which modestly abstained from stirring the stink of this rottenness in its reports on the elections. This Democrat Party draws its strength from its implantation in the various workings of the state and municipal machinery and among the trade union bureaucracy. President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano, formerly Togliatti's crafty opportunist henchman, was one of the bosses of this party which simply installed the government of the bankers' agent Mario Monti in power – without elections – in 2011 because their European Union told them to.

Besides this Democrat Party, Bersani's coalition also involves two small and obscure parties which eke out an existence in the shade of this "big party" as independent "socialist" and ecological survivals of the great political upheaval.

All in all, these two coalitions are separated not only by their programmes but also by their antecedents and class backgrounds. They express the two divergent projects through which the bourgeoisie is trying to discipline and dominate the working class and get a grip on its crisis: one of them by getting together with Europe, the other by retreating into nationalism. This fracture has laid bare the perplexity this perdition-bound class is in over how to secure its domination. And that is how this conflict between the two variants in Italy led temporarily to a no-score draw.

One unusual feature of these elections and this conflict is the appearance of Giuseppe (Beppe) Grillo's formation, which played a significant role. Their high share of the vote (25.5 per cent in the elections to the lower chamber, 23.7 per cent for the Senate) reveals how far the bourgeoisie's decomposition and its contradictions have gone. This "Five Star Movement" is not even an actual structured organisation but, is described by its chief ideologue Gianroberto Casaleggio as a vague community whose members are linked by

internet (according to Le Monde, 14 March 2013). But working class activists need to characterise this unstable and little-known nebula according its social composition and political content and orientations. (Information on this is taken from the well-documented article by Marc Wells and Peter Schwarz on World Socialist Website, 13 March 2013).

The spokesperson for this Movement, Beppe Grillo, is one of the richest men in Italy, with an annual income of up to 4.3 million euros in 2005. But the real head of his political network is Casaleggio, the prosperous founder of Milan ITC firm, "Casaleggio Associates". One of his close supporters, Enrico Sassou, is currently taking a back seat to disarm possible criticism, since he is the director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Italy and editor of "Harvard Business Review Italia". But "Casaleggio Associates" itself is linked by partnerships to several powerful American and British firms.

This on its own provided a serious indication of the class nature and direction of this movement. So it was quite understandable that the millionaire Leonardo Del Vecchio, owner of a firm called "Luxottice", and the steelmaker Francesco Biasion of Vicenza supported Grillo. Explaining his support, Biasion said he wanted to encourage the Movement because "nowadays business is in the grip of the bureaucracy and the unions".

However, the Movement is far from being directly an association of well-to-do bourgeois. The great majority of its supporters, especially those who front it up and form the vast majority of its 163 new members of parliament, are young graduates and students, IT workers, accountants, teachers, surveyors and others, the same déclassé intellectuals pauperised by the crisis in a "casualised generation" that exists in every country. This impoverished and completely disorientated stratum shares many point in common with those who Mussolini's movement recruited, or Hitler's Nazis. Their aimless wanderings express the sad lack of a genuine revolutionary movement. What we have here really is a petty-

bourgeois setup which has drawn in a great number of working-class voters because of its virulent opposition to bourgeois austerity and those who serve it.

According to the Demos Institute (quoted in Le Monde, 16 March 2013), the Grillo Movement received 49 per cent of working-class votes, while Bersani's Democrat Party only won 21 per cent of workers! Among the unemployed and jobless, these figures were 42 per cent for Grillo against 20 per cent for the Democrat Party. The "Five Star Movement" also garnered 40 per cent of the vote among artisans, peasants and small business-people, more than Berlusconi's party at 32.5 per cent.

So while they threw out their immediate enemy, the Monti government, working class votes were dispersed between two political blind alleys. The fact that they were politically derailed to this extent is distressing and requires fuller explanation. Further on, we will examine in a little more detail the absence of a real workers' movement and its politics, which is the main reason for this temporary loss of direction. Let us just note for the moment that the relatively low proportion of working-class votes cast for Bersani's coalition is also explained, above and beyond their distrust of this formation's politics, by its announcement that it was going to maintain Monti's anti-working class measures. Working-class revulsion over this policy, however, was not enough to eliminate all illusions in this "left". Nevertheless, it was strong enough to channel a mass of working class votes towards Grillo's petty-bourgeois Movement. But this formation's ideology and political line are not just completely foreign to the working class, they are even diametrically opposed to workers' reality-based conception of the world and, above all, their political aims. Casaleggio, considered to be the spiritual guide of this setup, is one of the illuminati, his visions motivated by virtual online information which he confuses with reality. In his video clips he predicts the imminent disappearance of social classes, ideologies, political parties and – of course – trade unions,

leaving behind a "community" with "generalised participation" through the internet. This is a fantasy world which smells strongly of fascism, with its characteristic elimination of any democratic organisations acting as intermediate connections in society, replacing them with direct links between the individual and the boss. But it is the comedian Grillo who translates these crypto-fascist hallucinations into a political language laced with demands that are very often as shrill as they are demagogic.

This political position categorically denies the existence of social classes, replacing them with "two social blocs". In bloc A, Grillo places "millions of young people who have no future" vegetating in "casual jobs", very often unemployed and "the excluded" who "themselves want to become institutions ... and create a new Italy out of the ruins". Here, too, he puts "small and medium businesspeople who ... are forced to shut up shop or kill themselves out of despair". How easily one can discern in these summary and simplistic descriptions the contours of an alliance between the upper layers of the petty-bourgeoisie and various elements of the Lumpenproletariat, essential components of the fascist shock battalions.

In bloc B, on the other hand, he places "those who are surviving the crisis" who, he says, "often have a decent current account and a good pension, or the security of a public sector job". He indulges in a demagogic amalgam by putting workers and working people in state and municipal employment alongside the parasitic bourgeoisie in one bag in his bloc B. By doing this, Grillo is trying to divide the working class and working people by setting up young and impoverished layers against older workers and those who work in the public sector.

He keeps insisting that the struggle between these two blocs has replaced the class struggle, which he hold up to public ridicule. In this way he hides what is really at stake in the struggle, carefully protecting the bourgeoisie while driving a wedge between working people, so that the sharp edge of his demagogy tends to be directed against these working people.

For example, it is not so easy to see through it when he claims that we face “a generational conflict in what is at stake is age and not class”, whereas things are a lot clearer when he writes that “every month the state has to spend 19 million on pensions and 4 million on civil service salaries. This burden is no longer sustainable”.

It is hardly surprising that certain bourgeois commentators are drawn towards Grillo’s programme even if in general they condemn his demagogy. In any case, the vast majority of them do not say a word about the fascist overtones in what he says, or simply treat it as vague, indefinable political adventurism. Fortunately this movement remains very instable and its disparate elements could easily break up along class lines.

But where is the party of the working class?

These elections were marked by a noteworthy – and at first sight surprising – apparent contradiction between on the one hand the immense pressure the proletariat exerted on the majority of political actors to reject the bourgeoisie’s European offense and on the other the obvious absence of any genuinely working class organisation and policy. In this sense they differ considerably from the elections in Greece and France, where coalitions like Syriza and Front de Gauche were able to embody the first and certainly limited but already effective steps towards rebuilding the working class’s political weapon, its party, without falling into sterile sectarianism.

Now nothing of the sort has emerged in Italy, despite the powerful workers’ movement, rich in long-standing and once-flourishing revolutionary traditions. It is also the country of Antonio Gramsci, the great Marxist organiser and educator of Italy’s communist movement in the 20th century. So it is absolutely essential to understand this tragic discrepancy between the working class’s history and basic instincts and the flagrant and deplorable lack of its own party. To grasp the content of this and the main reason for it, we need to broaden the scope of our analysis.

Gramsci's original theoretical heritage was already falsified and perverted by Togliatti's Stalinist party so they could use it as a theoretical cover for its opportunist move to so-called "Euro-communism", the antechamber to its own liquidation and suicide. From another side, faced with this shameless deceit, young intellectuals undertook the necessary work to theoretically cleanse this heritage. However, one fraction of these intellectuals, Antonio Negri and his ilk, chose to act on the ultra-left opposite pole to the Stalinists' right deviation (but just as alien to Gramsci's thought), falling into the black hole and blind alley of terrorism, while another group of these intellectuals turned their backs on political action, converting this heritage into academic canons of a "political philosophy".

As for the political development of Italian communism, that too followed a twisting path. During the bourgeois transformation of the Italian Communist Party into the Democratic Party of the Left in 1989-1990 (later they even dropped the word "Left"!), a minority rejected this road, shortly afterwards setting up the "Rifondazione Comunista" (Communist Re-foundation). Now you might have thought it was going to return to its revolutionary roots, but this rebel party, which remained faithful only to the worst opportunist moments of its Stalinist hey-day, degenerated along the same class-collaborationist itinerary, while formally insisting on the name "communist" more or less in the same way that François Hollande's party clings to the word "socialist". We cannot go into the whole trajectory of this "Rifondazione" here.

Nevertheless it should be said that in 2006 it, too, entered Romano Prodi's bourgeois government (2006-2008) and with 41 MPs furnished a substantial part of its parliamentary base (having already supported the first Prodi government from 1996 onwards). It supported not only that government's attack on pensioners (also labelled a "reform") and its deep budget cuts, but also sent troops to occupy Lebanon and later Afghanistan. No surprise, then, that in the 2008 elections it

lost all its MPs and the Prodi government had to give way to Berlusconi! "Rifondazione" stayed outside Bersani's coalition in the latest elections, but it linked up with a sort of alliance of various groups, including the bourgeois anti-mafia judges, which in the end got 2 per cent of the vote, which was not enough to have even a single MP!

This sombre itinerary is highly instructive, especially just now, when it is so highly important for the working class to achieve the kind of political re-grouping that is bearing the first promising fruits with Syriza in Greece and Front de Gauche in France (having already seen the appearance of Die Linke in Germany). The collapse of "Rifondazione Comunista" in Italy forcefully reminds us that nothing is guaranteed, that even the most promising fruits can easily go bad and rot. The repellent example of "Rifondazione" is all the more edifying in that it embodies the final degradation of the Italian section of the so-called Fourth International formerly led by Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel and Pierre Frank.

Indeed, "Rifondazione" accepted various political groups into its ranks as organised factions, including "Sinistra Critica" ("Critical Left"), the Italian section of this Pabloite pseudo-international led by Livio Maitan (who remained a wise and devoted supporter of this International right up until his death in 2004). Of course, an entry of this sort is entirely justified as long, and only as long, as you use it to help advance the independent position of the working class in preparation for its revolution. But from the outset there were serious grounds for doubting that this would happen, since Pablo and his companions have long since been severely criticised for bartering revolutionary proletarian politics against illusory hopes of a revolutionary development on the part of the Stalinist bureaucracy. So they adapted to this bureaucracy and as a consequence revised the teachings of Marxism. Maitan and his Italian friends were faithful and active supporters of this orientation.

The inevitable happened. Instead of putting forward a revolutionary opening against the politics of "Rifondazione

Comunista", the "Sinistra Critica" group, motivated by its Pabloite origins and training, simply adapted to the "Rifondazione" mould to the extent of becoming its strike force in a typically popular front policy (joining up with the "progressive" wing of the bourgeoisie).

The source of this profoundly wrong and mistaken policy lay in their emollient appreciation of the situation and moderate view of the tasks that flowed from it. In those elections, as they have long since, the vestiges of the Stalinist bureaucracy swear by all that is holy that these tasks consist purely and simply in improving and correcting aspects of the capitalist system, and that that is all that it needs. In this they join hands with the old Social Democratic reformists and they are indeed renewing co-operation with them. On the way they jointly influence a whole range of new petty bourgeois movements. Moreover, they also contaminate several of those who claim some allegiance to the working class.

But the crisis brutally exposed the fact that, confronted with complete bankruptcy when it comes to carrying out the most basic functions of its decomposing and anachronistic system, the bourgeoisie turned naturally to destroying the great advances made by humanity represented by the working class and its achievements. It is happening to everything, from the many and varied conditions for a materially and culturally decent life to democratic rights and the framework in which they operate. The bourgeois social class was once an active participant in this historic progress, if not its actual promoter, but it has become its ruthless gravedigger. The crisis reveals, brings out and accentuates these profound tendencies in the capitalist-imperialist system in its death-agony, acting as such since its formation described by Lenin. Past and recent history prove there is no magic remedy or miracle cure which can soothe the pain caused by this bedridden system or patch up its open sores. Capitalism-imperialism has to be eliminated and its power overthrown. That not only does not exclude participation in elections – it often makes it absolutely necessary.

But "Rifondazione", including its "Critica Sociale" component, did not stand in elections in order to express this essential demand on the special terrain offered by elections, nor to open a clear path to this revolutionary solution. Far from it, they confined themselves to offering their own recipe for improving that same system of exploitation. Their insignificant results prove that, in the role of improvers of the system, they could only be a minor assistant, as it were a poor relation of proper, established bourgeois families. On the other hand, we have seen, as was only to be expected, a large number of working-class voters were misled by Grillo's vociferous demagoguery which – in the absence of any revolutionary opening – they took to offer such a hope.

But this role of minor assistant rescuing the system which "Rifondazione" and its ilk fulfil in Italy is not new, nor specifically Italian. They have even more important fellows, not just in Europe, who urge workers to repair broken pots instead of showing them how to get rid of the noxious bosses and their malign stewards. They are the main obstacle to a revolutionary development, so it is essential to reject their false, deceptive conceptions.

Therefore a theoretical clarification is just as badly needed as the elaboration of a political line. They will both develop in an implacable struggle not only against the ideological poisons of the bourgeoisie but also against wrong ideas which divert the class struggle and park it in other sets of opposites. The restricted framework offered by this article makes a detailed examination of them impossible, but it is nevertheless important to cast a glance at the some immediate effects of the Italian elections and sketch a way out of the present blind alley.

The immediate impact: Bourgeois Europe drifting rudderless

Voting patterns in the Italian election results provoked general anxiety and consternation throughout bourgeois Europe, noisily expressed by its politicians and journalists. Let us leave aside this panicky, thunderstruck moaning and their grotesque and yet significant warnings. For example, the

puppet president of the Council of Europe, Van Rompuy, hopes to be “convinced that the new Italian government will continue on the path of its predecessors”. Clearly this is one towering intellect with not a clue what is going on (we shall see later how his prayers were answered). In any case, they all “discreetly did homage to the great loser, Mario Monti” (Le Monde, 28 February 2013). In other words, whatever a great European people massively and unequivocally voted for, these unblushing democrats lost not one whit of their determination to smash working people in order to save the bourgeoisie. Anybody who thinks you can budge these ferocious defenders of capital should ponder these words.

However, much as it is an unpardonable illusion to believe that elections can turn the situation around to the benefit of working people, it would also be a serious mistake to believe that they are no use at all. As for the Italian elections, they have not only radically changed the political terrain in the country, but also inflicted a perceptible shift in the European political scene. This still weak but nevertheless apparent metamorphosis is merely the visible expression of a hardening in the class struggle which, at this stage, is still largely entangled in various intermediate linkages.

What is indirectly reflected in the recent clear fissure splitting the alleged unity of bourgeois Europe is the pressure from workers amplified by the Italian election results. One part, especially in the South where they are more openly exposed to workers’ fury, openly questions the so-called unilateral policy of austerity. One should not overestimate this vague desire, which is only a pale echo of the powerful proletarian rumbling. But nor should one underestimate it, but use it and push it further, which, fortunately, the Front de Gauche seems to realise.

But it is also urgent for the Front to use it to extend and consolidate its struggle to generalise it into a European working-class orientation, and within this framework to work for the formation of a political European force alongside Syriza, Die Linke in Germany and other similar organisations –

possibly also Italian, so as to bring together opposition to the destructive policies of Brussels.

Now such an opposition could not be limited simply to rejecting the bourgeois offensive. Were to be content simply to say "another policy is possible", this would disarm it and render it ineffective. We need, on a European level, to back this assertion concretely with positive policies for a Europe of Working People. This practical orientation backed by demands leading up to it are what we should be putting forward. One main demand of this sort must be to propose measures to get a grip of finance and its instruments, such as banks, and the use of indebtedness. A programme of that sort would put some backbone into the preparations for European elections in May 2014.

A rallying call of this sort for a Working Peoples' Europe, without going into detail about the demands which should accompany it, is urgently needed. It would be a genuine political expression of the intensification in working-class mobilisation and radicalisation. Already on 2 March, hundreds of thousands of Portuguese workers, following in the footsteps of their Italian brothers and sisters, organised powerful demonstrations to demand: "Troika Go Away!", and while bourgeois politicians and journalists strive to present these same workers as docile sheep you can keep shearing, they have themselves calmly disproved such self-serving fabrications. And the Portuguese Socialist Party, terrified of losing influence, immediately denounced the very austerity it used to support. Even the right-wing government has caught the spirit of revolt among those who are now openly trying to soften the intransigence of austerity in Europe.

Horse-trading over this was the only agenda item at European meetings (finance ministers on 4 March, then heads of state and heads of government on 14-15 March). At the very heart of a Europe already variously divided, cracks now appeared within the Euro-zone itself. Two opposed camps started to emerge, with France, Spain, Italy and Portugal pitted against inflexible members like Finland and Austria with Germany at

the helm, the latter also having a real grip on the European bureaucracy.

The issue they are fighting over is relatively significant; they are arguing about choosing and deciding the best way to secure the bourgeoisie's power in current extremely difficult circumstances. Should they continue and even reinforce the austerity policy, or should they not – without abandoning their goals – slow down the pace and soften their demands to avoid a social explosion?

No sooner had this row started, than the finance ministers came up with their “solution” to Cyprus' debt problem. It's a pity we cannot spend more time on this point which is most instructive from every angle. Let us just say that they took a series of dictatorial steps which flagrantly breach their own bourgeois rules protecting bank deposits. In their high-handed impatience towards a vulnerable little country left high and dry on the unfathomable mud-banks of the bourgeois offensive, they took money straight out of the Cypriots' own pockets. To “rescue” Cyprus from her debts, they “generously” robbed her of 10 billion euros, and – as if that were not enough – they simply and unblushingly slapped a tax on all bank deposits. When the leaders of the Parti de Gauche used the word “bastards” to describe the 17 finance ministers who decided on this particular act of burglary, the press squealed in scandalised outrage. But it would be difficult indeed, not to say impossible, to find another name for this shameful theft. When, under pressure from the entire population, the Cypriot parliament rejected this theft, Le Monde (“the bourgeoisie made newspaper”) talked about “Europe at an impasse” (21 March).

The European puppets and their new, greenhorn, financier had to go back on a decision which was as brutally undemocratic as it was blatantly aimed at people of modest means. But the mask slipped again. Their ever-poorer and more dispossessed Europe has crossed another threshold in its slide towards inglorious general rout. There is no way to know in advance what concrete steps this disintegration will involve, but particularly since

the Italian elections the warning signs have become more palpable. The growing tension in the relationship between the anti-democratic executive centre in Brussels and the rubber-stamp European Parliament in Strasbourg is more obvious by the day. At the 13 March session, the MEPs by a huge majority rejected the new European budget which had taken 26 hours of painful and angry negotiations between ministers to achieve.

It would be wrong to overestimate the significance of this act, which in any case left intact the total set at 960 billion, and failed to discuss the surprising fact that for the first time ever this budget was smaller than the previous one. This astonishing reduction ought itself to have as a warning to all those who keep crowing about the progress their Europe is making.

This is not the place to go through all the other signs that bourgeois Europe is tending to fall apart gradually, but just note how in a single year (official) unemployment has risen from 10.9 per cent of the active population in the eurozone to 12 percent. It is 26.4 per cent in Greece and Spain, followed by around 12 per cent in Italy and France. And consider the disturbing conclusion of a survey which estimates that 67 per cent of young people under 30 in Spain are thinking about emigrating. This shows up not only the state bourgeois Europe is in but how destructive it is, too.

There has been a hint of a ministerial revolt against austerity in France, too, particularly in the week ending 13 March. That was when fifty or so striking PSA-Citroen workers at the closure-threatened Aulney car plant invaded the building where the National Council of the Socialist Party was meeting. These workers accused the government of betraying them, and the left wingers there, including several ministers, applauded them. An open breach was only avoided because everybody present suddenly started to "talk left". Even prime-minister Ayrault talked about the "European right not listening" and the need to "restore the balance of forces in Europe". As if! ... The paid conciliators had a real job on their hands, as very often, if not always, is the case, one is

tempted to say.

It is surely no coincidence that that dyed-in-the-wool bourgeois politician and Giscard d'Estaing's former right-hand-man, François Bayrou, reacted immediately with quite a significant open letter to President Hollande. This political boss without a following – Bayrou had so clearly anticipated Sarkozy's defeat that he alone among his bourgeois colleagues voted for Hollande – saw the danger immediately. It's a shame we cannot look in more detail at this panicky warning which at the same time was a real apology for the European bourgeoisie's offensive and a profession of faith in sustaining it. That on its own constituted an unequivocal offer to serve Hollande in a more structured way. To put it broadly, he offered his services as Prime Minister under Hollande in the place of the largely discredited Ayrault. In any case this threat had a certain impact in moderating the mood of revolt in the Socialist Party and the government, since even if it did lead a small number of critics did vote against ratifying in law the anti-working class agreements between the employers' associations and some unions, this time, again, the conflict was blurred and an actual break avoided.

But since the crisis is only going to get worse, sharpening the contradictions, this rebellion has not said its last word and a more trenchant expression of it is still brewing. That is why Mélanchon's tactic of trying to encourage criticism of bourgeois Europe inside the Socialist Party is fully justified, particularly if such criticism can be underpinned with a clear anti-bourgeois European policy that can identify its goal in a Working People's Europe.

Now the bourgeoisie is vigilant and sees the dangers which threaten its plans. Most recently its Brussels janitors opted to slacken the pressure slightly and give and give members states a bit more time to reduce budget deficits below 3 per cent of GDP. But we need to be vigilant, too, because this is a trick. They present this new timetable as if it were a gift, a sign of some supposed change in the rigor of their policy,

whereas in reality the budget plans had turned into a fiasco they could not keep up. They are simply displacing the pressure on budgets into a determination to carry out more and greater attacks on employment rights, pensions, social security and all the rest.

For a working class and socialist opening in Italy, too!

Political life has not stood still in Italy, either. The elections were a testimony to the fact that the bourgeoisie has not been able – now its traditional tandem of Christian Democracy and Stalinist CP has broken up – to reorganise a durable political, governmental, expression of its power. The elections testified not only to this, but also to a veritable political fault-line in the bourgeoisie over programmes and methods for re-constituting this power in some renewed form. Subsequently a series of successive setbacks in forming a government have confirmed the fact – which has dramatic implications for them – that Italy is now radically ungovernable using traditional political means. But on its own this dramatic situation for the bourgeoisie does not imply any relief, never mind a solution, for working people who cruelly lack any theoretical equipment or practice that matches their aspirations.

Under these conditions and in view of the fact that politics, too abhors a vacuum, various dangers start to take shape on the immediate horizon. One of them – and it is real – is that the bourgeoisie will take one of the authoritarian roads leading to fascism in order to overcome its crisis. It will not be held back by any democratic principles or rules, but by the fear that such an upheaval might arouse a massive revolt by working people. However that may be, while they deploy some fascist objectives and slogans, the Italian bourgeoisie, like the rest, is not yet quite ready to institute and operate fascist power.

That is the main reason why the gestation of a new government is so long and painful, and its content so explosive and in such violent contradiction to the verdict of the elections – while in the end somehow maintaining the illusion that nothing

has changed. In reality the forced marriage between Berlusconi the groom getting the most out of the prenuptial agreement, and the Democrat Party as reluctant bride, is inevitably heading for a series of conjugal dramas. It will be all the more paralysed in action and unsustainable in the long run for being based on cheating the voters. To put it another way, it has thumbed its nose at the new disposition of class forces, so it has set off on the wrong foot in relation to them. Whatever promises and paltry concessions the new government made when it came in are like plasters and poultices applied to a dying man.

And yet ... condemned as it is the rack, even this government might just, precisely in order to prolong its existence, tie in with the rising anti-establishment wave across southern Europe for a "softening" of austerity. In fact everything points to the possibility that it will add its voice to Hollande and others who are begging for a respite. Meanwhile, since this new Italian government was first installed, the European bourgeoisie and certain of its factions here and there have cherished the illusion that they might be able to avoid the split in Europe and the threatening political crisis by uniting "left" and right wings in the same governments. In precisely such a "united" government in Italy they see an opportunity to overcome the crisis and prevent an opposition from crystallising through this kind of "grand coalition". But at the moment only a very nervous "left" in the shape of the so-called "socialist" parties would take such a lure seriously and give up the prospect of forming a consistent opposition in the face of such a "threat".

Now in fact such a "grand coalition" is unviable even in Italy, where the bourgeoisie is well aware that it cannot find a satisfactory way out of the crisis, and has finally resigned itself to an improvised lash-up. The more the different components of it cling to their certainties, the more radically and swiftly the worsening social contradictions will tear apart its artificial unity. And that is where the danger of a fascist adventure by a section of the bourgeoisie becomes

real. The Northern League could well be biding its time to exploit precisely that situation, using the strength of an enraged and disorientated petty-bourgeoisie and a desperate Lumpenproletariat to try such an adventure.

It is high time for really socialist and communist activists who up to now have been trapped in the bourgeois blind alleys offered by “Rifondazione Comunista” and “Critica Sinistra” to pull themselves together. Not because there might be a danger of fascism, but because the worsening contradictions make necessary a political re-grouping of the working class. In particular they should address the abovementioned organisations because we cannot agree with the American comrades of David North’s World Socialist Web Site who stigmatise them as bourgeois organisations. The more lucid and closest to the working class of their members should make an honest assessment of a conception and a political line hanging on to the extreme left of a bourgeoisie in its dotage. A renewal is possible, and its beginnings lie beyond the national soil. It will have to open up via a clarification of the socialist attitude at a European level, which nowadays is the only way to delimit oneself from every version of bourgeois politics, either nationalist or originating from Brussels.

In this respect, Marxist practice will shrug off the heavy burden of the “Rifondazione” / “Critica Sinistra” combination groaning under the weight of a Stalinist heritage, either completely ossified or somewhat amended, by following in the footsteps of Syriza and the Front de Gauche. This route is also open to Italian comrades. By struggling for a Working People’s Europe, they will find a way towards living Marxist and towards the re-appearance of the Italian working class directly on the political scene, a working class long relegated to the background by a Stalinism which, although officially defrocked, never abandoned its political practices.

Balazs Nagy

May 2013

The people's struggle will destroy the Memorandums and fascism

Speech to the second festival of the Youth Section of SYRIZA:
by Alexis Tsipras, the leader of the radical left party, SYRIZA.

“Fury in Greece and abroad is what has lit a fire under the Greek government, which up to now seemed not to understand and was looking forward to collaborating with the neo-Nazis”, Alexis Tsipras emphasised during his speech to the SYRIZA youth section's second festival.

“You can be quite sure that (Conservative Prime Minister) Mr. Samaras and his colleagues have not changed their minds. They were forced to change tack. And we don't care, in fact we are glad they did and we celebrate it. It's a big victory, a victory for democracy, a victory for the anti-fascist movement, a victory for European democracy”, the president of SYRIZA said, at the same time explaining that it would nevertheless take a lot more other measures to eliminate the fascist threat.

“There is a Chinese proverb that when your enemy retreats, you have to chase him down. Fascism will not die on its own, we have to crush it. Because alongside all young people in Greece, we know, we think and we proclaim that our future is not fascism. Our future is neither barbarism nor capitalism. And today the Memorandums are not our future. Our future is to OVERTURN them.”

Tsipras went on to denounce what Antonis Samaras had said the previous day. "Those who made the current regime have got to a point where they see national elections as an enemy, an adversary, a scarecrow for justice and liberty in the country. Mr. Samaras' justice can put up with government by decree, with limitations on liberty and basic rights. It can put up with authoritarianism and repression, with immigrants living in fields and with tolerating Nazis. But it cannot put up with elections. According to TV reports, elections are a threat to regularity and stability. There in two words is justice according to Mr. Samaras and the people he represents, which is the greatest, the most brutal, the most barbarous, the most abominable injustice for the majority of Greeks. Their stability is social instability, a disaster for the lives of millions of people, a blind alley for young Greeks."

In conclusion, the President of SYRIZA emphasised that Greece cannot any longer put up with being governed by people who have led it into a catastrophe. "We are many, and we are become more every day. The people trust us, not because they have all suddenly turned left, but because we are not like the other liars, hypocrites and egoists. Because we do not look at politics as a career but as a way of changing our destiny and that of the country. Because we dream of a country dominated by liberty, social justice, democratic stability, a sense of perspective, and prestige. Because we have a long history. Our origins lie in the EPON battalions, insurgents, rebels. We are among the most resolute defenders of democracy. So don't expect us to bend. We have a country. We have values and ideas. We have experience. And we are determined to win".

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After the assassination of P.Fyssas: Either we crush fascism or it will crush us

Statement by Kokkino (Red) after the assassination of Paul Fyssas by Golden Dawn neo-Nazis

18 September 2013

The cold-blooded killing 32-year-old Pavlos Fyssas by Golden Dawn neo-Nazis opens a completely new period in the fascists activities. Following the criminal attack on members of the Communist Party at Peramai a few days previously, the killing of the anti-fascist Pavlos Fyssas is now an open declaration of war by the fascists on the left and the workers movement. Golden Dawn members are no longer content with the logic of Kaiadasii, and targeting the weakest layers in society

(migrants, gays, etc.), but are now starting to target their natural enemy: the workers movement, the youth, and the left. This sudden escalation in fascist violence is neither accidental nor spontaneous, since it emerges in a period of growing strike struggles against the Memoranda, of growth in the influence of the left, and with the government clearly facing a brick wall. In fact, Golden Dawn will clearly aim to crush the workers movement and the left in order to show the bosses (the capitalists, bankers and Troika) how useful they can be and gain their full confidence. The army of murderous gangsters elements guided a few a few days ago at Meligaslas by Kasidiarisiii is poised to act and prove its usefulness. And its usefulness is not confined to murders and attacks on the left; they are trying over and above that to show the government that it can count on the neo-Nazis to intimidate or destabilise and overthrow a left government. That is what it means when reputable journalists nowadays write and speak about the need for conservative forces to co-operate with Golden Dawn in order to avoid a left government.

This sudden escalation should ring alarm bells and mark a decisive turning-point in the anti-fascist struggle of the left and the workers movement. We must now understand that anti-fascism is not a secondary front among others and not think that you can automatically fight the fascists simply by struggling against the Memorandums. On the contrary; there will be no turning back austerity and the Memorandums unless the anti-fascist struggle develops in parallel, since the whole basis for the rise in the fascist right is its intention to maintain the status quo and the interests of capital. First and foremost, we must put an end to any illusions about an institutional confrontation with fascism, either by a coalition of all the whole range of constitutional parties or through the state apparatus. There can be no alliance with forces which not only carry out policies of brutal austerity and racism, which therefore actually strengthens Golden Dawn,

but also, many of them, support its terrorist actions against workers struggles. Similarly, the anti-fascist struggle cannot be confined to putting pressure on state institutions to get them to do something. The police have been so penetrated by fascists that relying on them for defence against fascist attacks is not just a bad joke, but a dangerous illusion with painful consequences for the movement and its members. Meanwhile, the most vital thing is to build a united front against fascism bringing together the forces of the left (Syriza, KKE, ANTARSYA), workers organisations, youth movements and anti-fascists with the aim of developing and co-ordinating anti-fascist action everywhere. Any sectarianism, perceptions of purity, or fatalism must stop now, otherwise there is a serious risk of repeating the mistakes of the past, when the left tried to sort out its differences within the context of the struggle against fascism. Finally, it is necessary to develop self-defence groups in every area and every work-place in order to curb murderous fascist violence and ensure the safety of the movement, migrants and all the victims of neo-Nazi attacks. All such efforts should also have a central co-ordinating body able to guard and secure the main events and activities of the movement.

Kokkino,

Athens, Wednesday 18 September 2013.

- i. Shipyard area near Pireus where Golden Dawn is trying to establish trade unions.
 - ii. Kaiadas was a gulf in ancient Sparta where they threw disabled babies, criminals and prisoners of war.
 - iii. Golden Dawn Member of Parliament and spokesperson.
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Greece and Golden Dawn: The lessons to learn



THE only way to understand fully recent events surrounding Golden Dawn and its activities in Greece is see this movement as arising from and accurately expressing in its violent criminal nature the bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie's capitalist system as a whole.

This bankruptcy causes the economic and social crisis shaking Europe and above all Greece, where it has gone the furthest. Greece is the sharp point of their attack on the lives and conditions of working people.

This system in crisis needs and breeds bodies like Golden Dawn.

It is the bourgeois class as a whole, with its European "project", its IMF and its "Troika" which is to blame for this crisis and which both provides the conditions for and actively fosters the growth of such organisations.

Unless this is understood, the relations between Golden Dawn and the Greek state must remain a mystery. It is clear that the group has for a long time had extremely strong links with the right wing political establishment. It is now notorious what extensive support they have enjoyed among the police. Prompted by mass revulsion at the murder of Pavlos Fyssas and nudged by the same leading politicians and officials of the European Union who have inflicted untold misery on the Greek people, the Samaras government indulged in a great act of political drama.

Charade

First it sacked a number of police officers, many very senior, who are known to be linked to Golden Dawn. Then prudently masked "counter-terrorist" officers publicly dragged Golden Dawn's leaders into police custody and before the courts. Others raided their homes and offices, uncovering a sickening

hoard of Nazi and racist memorabilia, documents and weapons. Within an extremely short space of time the state prosecutor produced a hair-raising indictment of their activities and structure.

This was hardly the thorough legal slog it might appear: All leading figures in the Greek bourgeois establishment are perfectly aware of what Golden Dawn is and how it operates. Then, almost as quickly, wholesale mlb jerseys the group's leaders are released on bail, among mounting concerns that the legal authorities will manage to fumble the case and in the end let them off scot-free.

The 1920s and 1930s are replete with examples of similar adventures which befell for example Hitler's Nazi Party after the "Beer Hall" putsch in Munich in 1923, or later under the Von Papen and Brüning cabinets in the early 1930s. One minute the Nazis were banned as terrorists; the next, Göring and his brown-shirts were put in charge of the whole police-force over a broad swathe of Germany as a prelude to the Nazi takeover.

Under these circumstances, legal and constitutional steps offer no effective guarantee or protection against the kind of future Golden Dawn and their ilk want to impose. What is needed is a way out of the crisis of capitalism. Working people are faced with a choice: either they destroy capitalism and open the way to socialism, or they face a future of fascism.

That is why we reproduce in this special issue of our Bulletin the statement by Kokkinos, the left wing group within the radical left party SYRIZA. Once these political issues are understood, a look at the events which бытъ followed the death of Pavlos Fyssas becomes highly instructive.

Ten days in Greece

An anti-fascist rapper and engineering worker, Fyssas was stabbed to death by a large group of neo-Nazis on the night of 17/18 September in the Keratsini area of Piraeus. Police arrested a suspect associated with Golden Dawn, Giorgos Roupakias, who confessed to the killing

In the following days, tens of thousands took to the

Meistritele streets in anti-fascist marches and rallies, with supporting events across Europe.

The nation-wide revulsion against the planned and deliberate stabbing of Fyssas was fed by press reports and interviews which cast some light on the internal life of Golden Dawn. One anonymous ex-member interviewed by Ethnos newspaper painted a picture of a classic fascist party with a violent, dictatorial and criminal inner core. The interview was translated into English by Greece Solidarity Movement New York (www.akny.org/2013/09/insider-blows-open-Greek-neo-nazi-operations).

The informant became involved because the local branch in Nikaia put out a call on Facebook saying some Pakistanis were going to attack their offices. He paid 20 euros, proved he was Greek, and got a membership card and number.

However, from being a member he quickly graduated to the "nucleus" of activists who "will do everything, no matter what, without question". The "nucleus" became fashionable and grew so quickly that a further "closed" nucleus was even established within the "open" core. New members soon had to "participate in five or six actions" to win acceptance.

Although "actions" included graffiti writing and terrorising immigrants, it turned out that having "hit a Pakistani ... afterwards I would sell him protection" ... "the local chapter of Golden Dawn protects the Pakistanis. The chapter takes the clothes donated from regular people for the poor, and they sell them to Pakistanis who sell them on the street market and then give a percentage of the profit to Golden Dawn". The "closed nucleus" also pocketed much of the money raised in this way and through donations.

The unemployed leader of Golden Dawn in Nikaia, the informant reported, and his wife "live in a big, comfortable house... He pays for electricity, water, maintenance, he lives respectably ..." All this is done with the full knowledge of Golden Dawn top leaders and Members of Parliament. Members who tried to protest suffered badly: "Comrades who spoke about those things openly were beaten up. They had gone with proof and evidence

and they were beaten up and kicked out of the party”.

The Nikaia branch – which provides muscle for Golden Dawn activities over a wide area –has an “attack battalion” of about thirty members. They wear a “city uniform” of black-and-white camouflage clothes. But when involved in an attack, they wear black clothes and motorcycle helmets to hide their faces, and they do not carry any Golden Dawn identifying symbols.

On one occasion the local leader was rendered “totally beside himself” when anarchists marched through the area. He ordered all his men onto the street with helmets, shields and whatever clubs they had. Weapons like that are normally kept hidden in houses and frequently moved to evade police searches.

To become a member of the “closed nucleus”, the informant reports “you have to have a really strong stomach. To accept everything. You are a zero, nothing. Do you know what it means to tell you to get down and do crunches and then they kick you on the sides in front of everyone? You’re nothing, and whatever they tell you to do you must do it. You have no opinion. It’s an order and that’s the end of it!”

He explains that while prominent public leaders of Golden Dawn may not have Πωλε?ται known of the attack being prepared on Fyssas, it could not have happened without the knowledge of the leader of the Nikaia “nucleus”. The killer, Roupakias, had earlier been appointed to the Nikaia five-member council “without elections Legacy or nothing”.

The Nikaia Attack Battalion had been involved in several attacks on migrant workers and also the attack on KKE Communist party members in Perama a short time previously.

The informant finally walked away from Golden Dawn “because of the thefts and thuggeries. Being a nationalist doesn’t mean I kill someone.” He cites occasions when police sympathetic to Golden Dawn help them when they are arrested for violence.

The informant describes how former and dissident Golden Dawn members have their Facebook sites hacked and material wiped. He states that members are indoctrinated in Nazi ideology and described the young people in the “Centaur” youth movement and “Innova” motor-scooter squads (named after the scooter brand).

Following revelations of this sort and in the middle of a growing wave of indignant protests, on Monday 23 September the Greek government announced the resignation (actually sacking) of two Police Generals, inspector-general of police for southern Greece Lieutenant General Yiannis Dikopoulos and general police director of Central Greece Apostolos Kaskanis. Seven other police officers were suspended for alleged links with Golden Dawn.

As the BBC's Mark Lowen reported: "There have long been claims of widespread support for the neo-Nazis, included figures showing that in some areas one in two police officers voted for them in last year's election."

Prime Minister Antonis Samaras vowed that he would not allow Golden Dawn to "undermine" democracy: not bad for a man who was "elected" to his position by a Greek people with a Trioka pistol at their heads!

Meanwhile Golden Dawn denied any involvement in the killing of Fyssas. On 25 September, leader Nikos Michaloliakos warned that "mud-slinging and slander" would "open the gates of hell". (This was always the public line of fascist and Nazi cheap nba jerseys parties: "We are not violent thugs and we will kill anyone who dares say we are!")

Golden Dawn claimed that the media were behind a "dirty war" to annihilate it and denounced Britain's Guardian newspaper as "the newspaper of capitalists in the City" (of London) for inciting violence against the group. Golden Dawn's online statement talked about "the role of certain embassies in the entire operation to dismantle" their organisation.

That same day, 25 September, support for Golden Dawn was reported to be plummeting by 4 percentage points, down from 10% in opinion polls. Newspapers reported that judicial authorities had indicated they would investigate whether Golden Dawn acted as a criminal neo-Nazi organisation, and reported that at least five major leaders of the group would be charged in conjunction with Fyssas' murder. Public order minister Nikos Dendias said he had sent the Supreme Court evidence of Golden Dawn involvement in more than 150 incidents

of attacks on immigrants, leftists and trade unionists dating back to 1992. Human rights organisations have linked the group to over 300 attacks, mainly on migrants, in the last three years.

Heavy pressure from Brussels

The "Guardian" added to an online report on 25 September that: "Greece has come under heavy pressure from Brussels to clamp down on the openly racist party, with several Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and other officials expressing doubt over whether the country should be allowed to assume the rotating presidency of the EU in January if it fails to do so."

The next day a posting appeared on a blog maintained by the "Special Forces Reserve Union" (KEED). This 26 September posting called for cheap mlb jerseys the government to resign site and for Greece to withdraw from the draconian Memoranda agreements which imposed appalling austerity measures on the country in return for "rescue" packages. It demanded that those responsible for Greece's financial crisis should be hauled in front of "Special Courts" and that all German business, personal and state property in Greece should be impounded to pay reparations Germany owes arising from World War II.

Listing a number of acts of negligence on the part of the government, the posting called for the armed forces to assume control of the country as the only institution which could secure all the demands it made.

The reservists said a "government of national unity" should be installed, chaired by the President of the Supreme Court and to include "proven personalities with no political links". They demanded immediate suspension of the Memorandums, the banning from office of all politicians currently in government, all Build immigrants to be immediately be shipped out of the country, and that the armed forces along with the security forces should take over Greece.

(Anger in Greece's officer caste has been simmering. Last April GreeceReporter website reported that Greece's military

were smarting under their inability to keep up with Turkey's armed forces.

“The military isn't just bleeding – it's boiling”, Hellenic Navy officer Yannis Katsaroulis said in an interview with Germany's Deutsche Welle. ... “We recently met with the defence minister to voice our anger about the cuts and one of us, a brigadier, piped up and said we are all set on voting for Golden Dawn in the next elections”, he said. Katsaroulis added: “Don't be surprised if tanks roll out onto the street and a military rebellion occurs. Everything is possible at this point”.’)

On Friday 27 September Golden Dawn was still toughing it out in the face of continually mounting opposition. Leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos warned that the party could well pull its MPs out of Parliament unless the government crackdown ceased. If they resigned, there would have to be special elections in the constituencies they represented, which could well let in opposition candidates who would overturn the government's slender majority. But Deputy Prime Minister Evangelos Venizelos was unperturbed, describing the move as “not a threat. It's a great opportunity”, and prosecutors investigating Golden Dawn said they had found evidence that would help them to prove that it is a criminal organisation.

The following day, Saturday 28 September, Greek police arrested Michaloliakos on charges of forming a criminal organisation, along with party spokesperson Ilias Kasidiaris and fellow MPs Ilias Panayiotaros and Ioannis Lagos and 12 other party members. The arrests were made by masked officers of the anti-terrorism unit.

A serving police officer who reportedly acts as a bodyguard for the party had also been arrested.

Many commentators were first of all surprised by these measures on the part of the government. This is the first time since the collapse of the military dictatorship in the 1970s that a party leader has been arrested. Also the government and the state have shown amazing tolerance of Golden Dawn since it made big election gains last summer and has risen in the

opinion polls.

Among the thousands and thousands of anti-fascists who have spent the last ten days organising demonstrations and rallies against Golden Dawn there is of course huge relief and a feeling of a hard-won success at this crack-down. At last the state is using some of its resources at least to bear down on a violent criminal neo-Nazi group.

But some commentators – like the Guardian's Helena Smith and (UK) Channel Four's Paul new Mason – talk much more guardedly about Greece entering “uncharted waters”, and the arrests “fuelling” the political crisis in Greece.

None of the circumstances and conditions which have led to the growth of Golden Dawn have gone away.

The exposure of Golden Dawn's structure and methods is a double-edged sword. It can excite and attract the dispossessed and the demoralised as much as it repels those who trust the rule of law.

The government that is cracking down on them is obliged to carry out a further series of attacks on the Greek people while maintaining the misery already inflicted on them.

It may not take fascism in Greece ten years to get from dress rehearsal to premiere.

It must also be remembered that Greece's fate is totally an issue for the whole of Europe. A victory for fascism in Greece (arising out of the conditions imposed by the crisis) will strengthen reaction across Europe, just as a victory of the working class and the masses which makes big inroads into the privileges of the ruling class will assist in a continent-wide awakening of the working class and working people.

More than ever, a continent-wide movement of working people to assert their rights is an urgent necessity.

Bob Archer, October 2013