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Europe

Their battle and ours

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For a long time 'Europe' was just an idea. Perhaps a good idea, certainly an inoffensive idea, but in any event something far off in the distance. The neo-liberal offensive of the 1980s and the fall of the Berlin Wall changed this.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/EuromarchB-2.jpg>]

Between 1986 and 1990 two crucial decisions of a strongly political nature were taken: to establish the single market and move towards a single currency. From something marginal and gradual, the process of European unification has moved to political centre stage. European economies are being harmonised and a supranational (mini-)state is being built from above. In the current political and economic conjuncture, this state will be born undemocratic and its policies will be anti-social.

The EU is being built behind people's backs and against the working classes. The 'Social Charter' put forward (but only feebly defended) by the European trade unions has been kept out of the Maastricht Treaty. As a result, the EU is being launched under the principle of 'Market uber Alles', without any European social norms. It is leaving the world of labour disarmed in the face of the neo-liberal onslaught. It is opening the door to across-the-board regression. The EU is not and will not be social! A new, wholly modern 'social question' is haunting Europe.

The big lie

Those who govern us are not unaware of the threat that this poses for 'civil peace', 'social cohesion' and the EU itself. 'Without popular support, Europe will not be built': they all sing. How do they reconcile this with austerity policies? By acting as if 'people don't understand' and paying for mammoth publicity campaigns. If the people have lost confidence in their rulers, it's time to elect a new people! And above all: it's time for big lies, faked statistics, and bluffs about the future. If you believe them, unemployment is falling, the economy is recovering, budgetary common sense has been restored, the monetary union is a done deal, and the future looks glorious. This morally polluting smoke screen is indispensable for them so they can settle their business among themselves while anaesthetising peoples and proletarians.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/EuromarchA.jpg>]

The historical moment between 1989 and 1995 was brief, but deep and painful: the damage to the workers' movement and the advances made by the bourgeoisie are considerable. The workers' movement, which had continued resisting country by country, was reawakened in November-December 1995 by the magnificent struggle of the French workers and students. This was the first great strike against Maastricht, though in only one country.

European resistance

In spring 1997, the brutal shutdown of the Renault plant in Vilvorde, Belgium, with delocalisation planned to a cheaper location in the south of the EU, revealed to what point this Europe has been tailor-made for the bosses. The joint fightback by Belgian, French and Spanish workers showed that the lesson of the winter of 1995 had been learned: every major social struggle nowadays requires immediate solidarity on a European scale. Trade unionism will be European or it will not exist!

We are reaching a cross-roads. The great leap forward towards monetary union is accelerating. The anti-social burden is weighing heavier. At the same time, the EU is 'programming' the labour movement's calendar for us. It is binding together our goals and synchronising our struggles. It is lining up the adversaries in direct confrontation, obliging everyone to choose sides, and pushing each current and organisation to develop its analysis, programme and strategy.

In the last ten years, the EU's progress has meant a parallel progress for the neo-liberal agenda, to the point that this agenda is now written into the main EU treaties. This shows that 'uniting Europe' means two things: regulating relations among national states, but also choosing a social model. The choice is between: production for the profit of a few, or for the needs of the great majority. Between private and social ownership of the major means of production. Between private domination and popular self-management. Between unbridled competition and generalised solidarity. Between pillage and exploitation of the Third World and generous co-operation for harmonious development on a planetary scale. These are two mutually exclusive analyses, two choices, two different roads to the future!

The tide is turning

'European unity' is not some great ideal: it is a concrete struggle. The dominant classes will mobilise all their powerful resources in order to win. But they have their problems as well. The world market economy, at the moment of its triumph, is not solving its crisis but aggravating it. Neo-liberal ideology is on the way out. The tide is slowly beginning to turn.

In Europe in particular, the bourgeoisie has several disadvantages relative to its Japanese and US counterparts. The European workers' movement is still incomparably stronger than in the USA or Japan. Nor does there exist a (European) national-chauvinist feeling comparable to that in Japan and the US.

The European bourgeoisies are asking European wage-earners, women and young people to limit their demands and subordinate their movements in the name of a common historic destiny, of the defence of the European 'social, humanist' model, of resistance to the almighty dollar, the invasion of Japanese products and Wild West capitalism.

This 'soft' rhetoric confirms that, behind the European Union, they are planning Fortress Europe and a European superpower. No-one should forget that the European bourgeoisies have a long history of power behind them; and that their brutal exercise has never been hindered by a certain degree of political and ideological refinement. The language of Europeanism achieves its goals only to the extent that the workers' movement is politically powerless and there is no credible anti-capitalist alternative. The battle for Europe is not cut off from the daily reality of class struggle!

Marxists should not let themselves be trapped in the false dilemma: either you are for Europe or you are against. The choice is not either the EU or nationalist reaction. From the moment of its birth, the socialist workers' movement has always been internationalist. As early as the late 19th century, Marxists understood that the national state was becoming too narrow to ensure a harmonious development of the economy and society.

We oppose the EU in the name of another Europe, not in the name of the national state. The EU is not a weapon against globalisation, it is part and parcel of globalisation. It does not hold back the 'Americanisation' of our societies, it fosters it.

Their battle and ours

Only a different Europe, a social Europe, a Europe that breaks with capitalism, will find the strength and spirit to eliminate the 'old demons' of our continent and create hope for the future.