

Is 21st Century Fascism Advancing Undercover?

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The European Parliamentary Election of last May 25 was marked by a strong push from the Europhobic and racist right, which was rife with currents of the extreme right. Its best showings were achieved by the United Kingdom Independence Party -UKIP (which received 27.5% of the British vote), by the Party of the People of Denmark (26.7%), by the National Front of France (24.9%), and by the Freedom Party of Austria (19.7), and one shouldn't forget the recent advances of the Swedish Democrats (9.7%) and of Alternative for Germany (7%). Beppe Grillo, the leader of Italy's 5 Star Movement (which garnered 21.1% of the country's vote) is also connected with some of these parties. With regard to the openly fascist parties on the European periphery, such as Jobbik in Hungary (14.7%) and Golden Dawn in Greece (9.4%) they represent a somewhat different case. One will note finally, that despite exaggerations spread by Russian propaganda and picked up by the western press, the two extreme right candidates in the Ukrainian presidential election together got just 2.3% of the vote.

About the Anti-Immigrant Parties

What are the common denominators of these rightwing parties? To begin with, they denounce immigration as the principle cause of the explosion of unemployment, of spending on social services, and of a "lack of safety." They also oppose the free movement of people within the European Union (EU). This is why they unanimously applauded the success of the initiative introduced by the Swiss People's Party (SVP - a hard nationalist rightwing party) "against mass immigration" in Switzerland last February 9. However, this does not mean that they are all completely against the EU. At the same time they reassert an unabashed imperialism with its modern day racist rhetoric that plays on Islamophobia in order to attack immigration from outside of Europe. The fascist elements don't hesitate to develop an anti-Semitic language that is spread discretely or covertly. Today these groups represent a physical danger to immigrants and gender minorities, but also a threat to solidarity activists as was shown recently in the case of Clement Meric in France.

These parties are all in favor of private property and free enterprise. They advocate the liberalization of the labor market and the reduction of tax burdens on corporations, and in particular on small- and medium-sized businesses. They assert that leaving the euro and building new customs barriers will revive the domestic economy. They propose demagogic measures for those with low income, but exclude raising the legal minimum wage, which they oppose, while asserting that they will defend and ensure the social well-being of citizens. They support industrial production without any concern for the environment. The National Front in France calls global warming into question while the United Kingdom Independence Party wants to banish the subject from British schools. They make repeated declarations in favor of the family and of housewives as well as supporting traditional education. They are partisans of the "moral order," and they don't hesitate to flatter homophobia. They defend harsher criminal sanctions and support the death penalty "for the most heinous crimes."

Combining the Historic Cultures of the Right

They say they are against the system, whether the governments are conservative or social democratic. "What holds these disparate elements of the UKIP together," writes Richard Seymour in England, "is the socially paranoid ideology of the hard right [for which] the EU is a socialist plot

concocted by Eurocrats who live at the expense of small business, encourage immigration, and the welfare state.” (*Red Pepper*, Sept. 2013). After the fall of the Berlin Wall, these parties went on a crusade against the EU which they liken to the USSR. They owe their success to their capacity to wed the historic cultures of the right: nationalist, militarist, colonialist, racist, sexist, homophobic, authoritarian, religious, conservative, libertarian, anti-socialist, etc.

Today they appeal to a mass electorate coming from large sectors of the wage-earning and middle classes who are deserting both the social democratic and traditional rightwing parties. Indeed, they contribute to a radicalization on the right based on widespread anger over the dismantling of social services, a process in which the parties in power have been zealous participants. They individualize workers by reducing them to an electoral body of angry whites, but mostly they divide the world of work between foreigners and nationals, people of color and whites, the unemployed and those with jobs, retirees and those still working, etc. They shy away from any collective response. This can be a significant asset to the bourgeoisie, especially in a country like France, where the cure of an austerity program along the lines of the Maastricht Treaty’s Euro-convergence criteria looks extremely severe.

The New Faces of Barbarism

The Fascism and Nazism of the 1920s and 1930s was constructed by mass organizations that had served as a battering ram for the most combative sectors of capital, staving off the threat of revolution and then destroying workers’ organizations, eliminating democratic rights, and establishing a long term reduction in labor costs. We’re obviously not there today, except perhaps in Greece where Golden Dawn explicitly refers to such a model. But in the rest of Europe, how does the current far right upsurge serve dominant class interests, given that the political and trade union left is in disarray? In fact, given the scope of social regression that they are planning, of which the south of Europe gives us a foretaste, it is probably more useful than one might have thought. It means in fact nothing less than depriving a numerically stronger than ever wage-earning class—the famous 99%—of its main social and democratic achievements in the 20th century, which it rightly considers to be elements of civilization, but that the famous 1% still find far too costly, despite the cutbacks imposed during the last 30 years.

What were these achievements? First, the idea that wages should allow one to live “decently,” that is to say, to cover a range of needs that go beyond the physiological minimum: a diversified diet, attractive clothing, consumer durables, leisure, culture, etc. Moreover, the belief that indirect wages or social insurance (for sickness, disability, unemployment, retirement, etc.) is vital for a large part of the population that does not have any means of production or income of its own, and cannot therefore be considered, even partially, to support itself or somehow subsist. Then too, there was confidence that there would be massive subsidization of public services (education, health, social housing, transport, etc.) supported as necessary by a progressive tax. Now all of this is challenged by “the dictatorship of the markets,” backed by increasingly opaque and authoritarian institutions, which has led some working people to take up the slogan of Spain’s *indignados* we must fight for “real democracy here and now.”

How to Build a United Front

Even if today the great majority of the traditional organizations of the old labor movement accept de facto the extremely brutal austerity plans in the name of the “imperatives” of national industry’s need to remain competitive, the unions’ relative weakness doesn’t necessarily allow them to convince the workers that they should go like sheep to the slaughter without resisting. Workers remain deeply attached to the value of their labor power, the result of a long historical evolution marked by many battles, which capital cannot therefore reduce as dramatically and quickly as it

would like. It is precisely because the nationalist-populist right justifies the imposition of a radically reduced standard of living for large sections of the popular classes—the undocumented migrants, people of color, young part-time workers, and women—reducing the value of their wages, that it contributes to undermining the historic achievements of the working class. In the same way, in lauding the housewife at a time when, for the great majority of the working class, two wages have become indispensable to the maintenance of a family, it justifies an increase in free domestic work, which permits a reduction in the costs of the reproduction of the labor force. Finally, in beginning to organize popular sectors with which the traditional parties have practically no more organic connections, the right lays the basis for a challenge in the streets to the labor unions, social movements, and the left.

An acculturation process of this magnitude is inconceivable without a high degree of physical and mental violence, particularly against women, which would be the price to pay for such a decline in civilization. To drive forward, capital will need, in addition to control of the state, auxiliary forces within civil society. In this sense, it is not unfounded to speak of a new proto-fascist threat to the Europe of the 21st century, provided that one emphasizes that its forms could be quite different from those of the past. Nothing would be worse than to play again the musical scores of the past that failed in the 30s, so we must avoid two pitfalls. Firstly, that of a "republican front" with the "social democratic" or "center-right" supporters of social dismantling; and, secondly, that of the division of anti-neoliberal electoral slates which oppose these policies.

Such a united front for the satisfaction of social needs, against capitalist austerity, and to oppose the national-populist right, must give pride of place to the fight against racism, fully integrating immigrants into its mobilizations, all of this within an internationalist perspective. To do this, we must denounce the actions taken by Frontex, the security service of Fortress Europe, as well as condemning the more restrictive immigration laws adopted by European states, often on the initiative or with the guarantee of social democratic parties. The struggle of migrants against their arbitrary detention and expulsion, but also against the humiliation and slave labor against which they are often compelled to fight is our struggle. Such a convergence in action cannot be strengthened without clearly stating its trans-European dimension. Despite its limitations and its purely electoral dimension, one must recognize the achievement of an Italian party — The Other Europe with Tspiras — that defined itself in terms of its support for the Greek Syriza party and garnered 4% ...Despite its limitations and its purely electoral dimension; one must recognize the significance of its showing in the European elections. The commitment of such forces to resist together on a common platform does not imply in any way denying the autonomy of each of them to democratically define its own objectives in the fight, its own repertoire of actions, and its own political orientations.

Translation by Dan La Botz