

Euro-election results reveal signs of

Political turmoil in Europe

Politicians and the media talked a great deal about “earthquakes” as the results of last month’s elections to the European parliament were published. This was especially true in France and the UK, where the established parties were beaten at the polls by the Front National (FN) and the UK Independence Party respectively.

“Failing to assuage voters’ anger could mean the erosion, if not the destruction of the union in a matter of years”, said veteran Austrian journalist Erhard Stackl, writing in *The New York Times International Weekly*. “In some countries, the vote against an integrated Europe was profound”.

Consoled

He consoled himself with the observation that nevertheless “two-thirds of the votes were cast for pro-European parties. And in Germany, the economic powerhouse of the 28-nation bloc, Chancellor Merkel and her allies still command a comfortable majority”.

Smarting under a series of lost seats in the European parliament, many established bourgeois parties needed all the consolation on offer.

Urgent

Actually integrating and developing a unified economic unit in Europe is a historic necessity. How urgent it is has been adequately demonstrated by two terrible world wars centring on the continent.

The simple fact that the bourgeoisie finds it profoundly difficult to carry out this fundamental task is striking proof of how deep the crisis of capitalism is.

But their brainwashing machine quickly springs into action to distract attention from this problem to a series of real or imaginary surrogates:

“There are three main reasons for the voters’ anger”, Herr Stackl continues: “dissatisfaction with political leaders, who are seen as uncaring and arrogant; frustration because of the slow economic recovery; and the

growing fear of foreigners. Encouraged by demagogues, citizens of the well-to-do countries are blaming immigrants from poorer countries for many of their woes”.

All established political parties from conservatives to social democrats speak and act on behalf of the capitalist class. They all work might and main to remove all the social gains working people have made in previous decades and centuries.

Unison

This includes all the so-called “socialist” parties, whether PASOC in Greece, the SPD in Germany, the Parti Socialiste in France or Labour in the UK, who all chant in unison that “the debt” – which is really a tax levied by bankers via national state fiscal systems on working people all around the world – “has to be paid down”, and that in order to do so, government spending on all social services, state education and

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health provision, housing and welfare and all the rest has to be cut, and whatever fragments remain, privatised.

It is not the personal qualities of politicians which is the question here, but their attachment to the needs of a particular class, the bourgeoisie. Whether or not people are conscious of it, their anger towards these politicians is caused by a series of attacks on working people on behalf of this bourgeois class.

Global depth

The “slow economic recovery” is caused by the global depth of the crisis of capitalism and, indeed, by what the bourgeoisie does in order to overcome it, for example cutting the living standards of swathes of working people across the continent, attacking benefits and wage levels, and so forth.

“The growing fear of foreigners” really is not just “encouraged” but fanned into flame by “demagogues”.

But, besides the vile gutter press which has carried out a sustained campaign of vilifying and scape-goating migrants, those “demagogues” also include significant forces in parties like the UK Labour Party. People who cannot recognise and fight their real enemy, concealed within a fog of business deals and obscure financial transactions, are incited to turn on their neighbours because of some imagined ethnic, national or religious difference. They are taught by these “demagogues” to judge their fellow working people by such standards and to blame them for a crisis they have not created.

Many commentators lump the FN and UKIP together with radical socialist parties like Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and others. This is sowing deliberate confusion. The FN and UKIP consciously seek a turn back into national economic isolation from the rest of the continent while whipping up backward chauvinism. Syriza and the others are a very different matter, and represent an attempt to resurrect political organisation among working people.

There are indeed some forces on the left which follow UKIP and the FN in denouncing European unity and migration, groups such as the Communist Party of Britain’s “NO2EU” campaign in the UK, but in fact anybody who agreed with these bourgeois politics were always mainly going to vote for an openly right-wing grouping anyway.

Indeed, the media also played a role in this, completely ignoring the “left” anti-EU candidates but lavishly splashing pictures of Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen at every opportunity across front pages and TV screens.

Less well

The subsequent media rhetoric about “earthquakes” hides the odd fact that most of these right-wing parties did less well in these elections than they have previously. The Dutch Party for Freedom of Geert Wilders saw their share of the vote tumble from an earlier prediction of 20% to a mere 13.3%. The Finns Party (“True Finns”) saw similar shrinkage in their vote. In

recent Hungarian elections, Jobbik won 20% of the vote, but in the Euro-elections they claim as a break-through, they only achieved 15%.

However, the outcome of the 2014 European elections strengthen and embolden some of the most reactionary forces across Europe. With resistance by working people to cuts and austerity continuing across the continent, often inchoate as is it, such forces will soon be unleashed to impose the bourgeoisie’s attacks on working people.

More than ever, a step forward in building a workers’ movement across the continent for a Europe of working people is essential. The answer to fascism does not lie in relying upon the bourgeoisie to sustain democratic methods when it is wracked by crisis. It lies in mobilising working people to fight for the needs of their class.

But this must involve overcoming the damage to working class organisation and consciousness brought about by the bourgeoisie’s attacks, the collapse of the USSR and its satellites and the degeneration of socialist and communist movements.

The articles by Balazs Nagy in this edition (although they were all written before the European elections) deal with the same issues through the prism of the French municipal elections and preparations for the Euro-elections. They provide the essential basis for grasping the current political situation and acting upon it.

Bob Archer
June 2014

Against reactionary, nationalist fascism!

Down with the bourgeois politics of the Front National!

The forthcoming European elections will no doubt produce unprecedented advances by the French Front National (FN). It gained considerable strength by its spectacular advances in the recent municipal elections, which have clearly given it a head-start in the European elections. So a critical examination of its programme, in particular in relation to Europe, is not only vital in itself but allows us to clarify what the essential problems for Europe are. It also allows us to look at all the other parties’ European policies.

Now, to decode what the FN’s orientation towards Europe is and what it

means, we must first of all describe its national policy. We must do this not on the basis of that party’s own deceptive slogans or what other people say about it, but on the firm basis of the only objective criterion for political evaluation, i.e. its class character.

What is the Front National’s real class character?

Actually, we need to establish clearly what the FN’s social basis is and indicate unequivocally which class’s interests are expressed in its programme and activities. This is the fundamental question which politicians and commentators either evade or com-

pletely muddle up, but it is the most important one.

There are, of course, some vague and hesitant answers which describe the Front National as a petit-bourgeois party, or one that speaks on behalf of layers of de-classed workers. And it is true that in the FN’s various shenanigans you will see out-and-out, provocative and panicked members of the petit-bourgeoisie as well as disorientated and desperate working people who follow this party. A large number of bourgeois propagandists also call this a “populist” party, alluding to its social demagoguery. But the only concrete

content of this description is simply the bourgeoisie's familiar contempt for anything in the slightest way connected with – the people.

All these descriptions are superficial. The adjective “populist” is so devoid of meaning that brain-dead journalists, in deference to the futile and inconsistent “great minds” they follow, apply it not just to the FN, but to Melançon's Left Party (Parti de Gauche) too! What do they care that the class nature and objectives of these two parties are radically opposed, or that by acting in this way they are depriving themselves of an investigative method that actually has some validity.

But it is also superficial to view the FN as a petit-bourgeois party, even if there is an element of truth in it. It is true that the Front National is petit bourgeois in its composition, like similar bodies all over Europe. That was also true in the past of Hitler's and Mussolini's parties, and the rest of them, before they seized power. This widely-held opinion arises from immediate impressions based on superficial features of these parties, which various cohorts of petit-bourgeois do flock to join. It goes no further than the social composition of these parties, and completely neglects to describe their clearly and explicitly bourgeois programme.

The NF's bourgeois nature is clearly underlined by the party's programme and – as we shall see in detail later on – by what it actually does. But so-called “classical” bourgeois and social-democratic politicians and all their spokesmen make all that disappear as if by magic. This blindness is the intellectual expression of the class and social stratum to which they belong, and they also display it towards all past fascist movements (from Hitler and Mussolini to Franco and Salazar).

This conception, which camouflages the social nature of fascist parties behind their social composition, was taken up and amplified by Stalinists in the 1930s and pressed into service for their Popular Front policies to rescue bourgeois society. Certainly the tenacious persistence of this superficial point of view right up to the present owes a lot to the still considerable influence of Stalinist ideology, which continues to poison minds at large, long after its progenitor's power collapsed. As for the kinship between the FN and past (and present) fascist parties, it can be confirmed to the extent that their specific – and shared – bourgeois character is clearly understood. To check this we need first to make a brief detour into the past.

Lessons of the past help us to understand the present

What we need, to help us orientate ourselves correctly, is a theoretical elucidation of the historic experience of those years, in particular Trotsky's Marxist explanation, which remains totally valid today. Against all the general, botched and inconsistent characterisations one encounters today, he alone provided a serious analysis of fascism based on the class struggles and movements in capitalist society in its period of decline. Of all the many writing he devoted to this subject, let us pick his study: *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat* (1932), which I strongly recommend to all activists.

In it, Trotsky notes that in the period of its imperialist decline, capital is able to stay in power only through the entire support of either social democracy or fascism. And if the strength of the proletariat is paralysed by the lack of its own political organisation or the inability of its leadership to march towards the seizure of power, these auxiliary arms of capital will grow stronger. But the inevitable accentuation of the general crisis of capitalism and its growing exhaustion sap and undermine the traditional pedestals upon which social-democratic activity is based: reforms and parliamentary democracy. The exacerbation and prolongation of the general crisis thus abolish the foundations upon which social-democracy rests (reforms) and alters the framework within which it operates (parliamentary democracy). So social democracy grows noticeably weaker while the fascists, with their unbridled social demagoguery, grow stronger.

Only a thin membrane today separates France – or indeed the majority of European countries – from a similar situation. To be able to re-establish capitalism's former equilibrium and check the decline that threatens it, the bourgeoisie urgently needs not just to completely demolish the gains the proletariat made previously, but also to smash (or completely domesticate) its organisations. At the moment, they reckon that they can do that without recourse to the direct terror of fascism. They have already appreciably undermined democracy in an authoritarian and Bonapartist direction both within each country and at a European level. They have also succeeded in destroying a considerable mass of social rights and advantages, and all without any large-scale social shocks. Even if they still have a long way to go, all the signs are

that they will be able to continue along the same lines.

So you can sum it up like this: The so-called democratic rule of the bourgeoisie, profoundly corrupted by the virus of Bonapartist authoritarianism, has already shown much more muscle in imposing tough decisions, while at the same time that class is still afraid of the kind of leap into the unknown involved in going over openly to fascism, the memory of which is still painfully alive. It prefers to stick with the social democrats who anyway seem determined enough to destroy social gains and rights and working class organisations (or at least severely discipline them). Above all, they are reassured by the remarkable weakness and torpor of the workers' organisations, the virtual absence of a vigorous response by the proletariat. So everything encourages them to continue as they did in the past.

But despite all that, the crisis has grown more severe and instability has increased. Bourgeois voices are raised demanding a further and more decisive turn, pressing ahead to restore capitalism's health. The European Commission, the French employers' organisation, Medef, and other members of the bourgeoisie show no gratitude to Hollande for services rendered but grow yet more demanding and openly arrogant. Alongside this, the fascists' strength and influence spread and they prepare to take power. Under these conditions the bourgeois nature of Front National stands out increasingly and its kinship with fascism becomes obvious.

An aggressive bourgeois party custom-built to save moribund capital at any price.

The class character of the Front National's programme leaves no room for doubt. It is flagrantly bourgeois. At the same time the FN takes care not to place too much emphasis on its total, open support for capitalism, so as not to compromise the social posture it has usurped. However, its programme and the corresponding propaganda nowhere put in question capitalism as such as a well-defined social and economic system. Its criticisms are aimed not at the system itself but solely at its current policies, against which it advocates the application of different policies of the same capitalist system.

So of course it carefully avoids seeking to overthrow capitalism or agitating for this. Consequently it is deliberately opposed to the social revolution and looks forward to coming in

power in accordance with all the rules and customs of bourgeois parliamentary politics, even if it would not hesitate to shoulder them aside should the need arise. But, like all other fascist formations past and present, they won't lay a finger on the sacrosanct private ownership of capital.

Now unlike the traditional bourgeois parties and their social democrat partners and rivals, the FN and its like do not rest content merely to present a different programme. These parties base theirs on a virulent and provocative social and political criticism of economic, social and cultural defects, not as something inherent to the capitalist system, but as the direct consequences of alleged corruption of national space and its invasion by various ethnicities and nationalities.

This is where the fascist nature of the Front National and its ilk right across Europe emerges clearly and unequivocally. Sociological and political criteria are replaced by nationalist and racist phrase-mongering. Hitler and his supporters found an "explanation" for the social sufferings of the masses in an imaginary Jewish plot. We know what atrocities this vile anti-Semitism led to. At present the Front National focuses its attacks on Arab-origin French workers and working people and on refugees. But of course they have merely adapted the self-same genocidal propensities to demographic and political changes and are keen to shrug off the highly-injurious association with the still vivid memories of the death camps. But as long as capitalism continues and tries to halt its decline, anti-Semitism and its fascist thugs will also remain active.

Now this nationalism and racism do not emerge – and never did historically – as excessive national sentiment somehow outside of or above classes. As they always did, they form the foundations of a policy and propaganda with a clearly-defined class basis. Its violent anti-Arab attacks are concentrated on and aimed against the most numerous and most vulnerable section of the French working class and working people, which is those of Arab origin and/or identity. But curiously they spare rich emir parasites and, as if by magic, turn into fawning admirers when it comes to Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, these great rentier parasites of world capitalism. (Ingrained anti-Arabism on the part of a few fanatical mystics does not alter this fundamental political fact).

This bourgeois-fascist lineage or genealogy on the part of Front National

is entirely confirmed by its real attitude to so-called austerity policies. It castigates them in general and as a whole as mistaken and useless, since in their view all problems would be solved if only all foreigners were expelled, but in reality it does not engage in the slightest struggle against the anti-working class measures involved. One would look in vain for any plan or real struggle by the FN against the constant pension cuts, the systematic erosion of rights at work, or unemployment. On the other hand, it is well known that it was really the FN who first thought of slapping the disgusting and contemptuous label "welfare dependents" on social welfare recipients, especially the unemployed, and calling for payments to be stopped. If they have for now shut up on this typically ignoble fascist demand, it is because the fascist contamination is so strong that other bodies are doing their work for them (like Sarkozy through his fascist adviser Buisson, and after him the Socialist Party interior minister Valls against Roma, or now the Union for a Popular Movement [UMP] MP Wauquiez on "welfare dependency")

The programme of national isolation is a fascist policy

The fascist character of the Front National's bourgeois programme emerges most brutally in relation to Europe and its future. To strip it down, we need first to cast a brief glance at the bourgeoisie's own orientation on Europe.

Painfully, and at the cost of two world wars involving massive destruction, this bourgeoisie, or rather its dominant faction, has arrived at a significant pragmatic conclusion: that the powerful contradiction between the forces of production, which have become European (and even global), and the strict maintenance of national divisions, is one of the causes of capitalist decline and thus a permanent source of war; that even this massive destruction, despite an unheard-of level of devastation, has done nothing to stop this decline but only slowed and prolonged it, all the while growing in extent and intensity. It was this empirical understanding which forced the bourgeoisie to undertake among other things the unification of Europe under the iron rod of its larger monopolies.

Now the whole undertaking of building Europe is completely impossible for the bourgeoisie, whose birth was linked to and completely bound up with the birth of nation states. For the same reason, the death of these nation states will for sure only come over the corpse of the bourgeoisie. Events in recent

years completely confirm this truth. The more the bourgeoisie has engaged on the road to its version of European "unity", the more it has stoked up its crisis, the more it has weakened itself and torn itself apart. Its very first hesitant and shaky steps towards its alleged European unification already increased the general destruction at every level and increased many-fold the difficulties all working people have suffered. Above all, and despite these unprecedented ravages, difficulties of every kind continued to grow, the class struggle has intensified, doubts persist and become widespread – and the death agony of capitalism intensifies.

The Front National certainly picks up in a very lively way on what is badly wrong in the traditional bourgeoisie's (and its social democratic allies') attitude to Europe, not to correct it, but to denounce European reunification as an unsuitable, not to say harmful, approach to resolving the general crisis of the system. Against it they advocate the abolition of the Euro and other attributes of unification and a frank return to national sovereignty as we used to know it.

But such a leap backwards into the past is nowadays impossible; it would create immense upheavals which could quite possibly throw humanity a long way back. How damaging that would be was proved by the atrocities of war as long ago as 1914 and confirmed by the even worse atrocities between 1939 and 1945. Nowadays the European jigsaw of nation states existing separately from each other as independent entities is no more than an historic relic based on differences of language and culture. When we look at the material basis of life, we see economies really intertwined, an organic linking or fusion between the economic products of the various countries which has far outgrown any kind of self-contained national economies existing in parallel and lends them an increasingly integrated character at the European and even international level. Even if this "unification" is being done in a capitalist way, i.e. by cruelly grinding away involving material destruction, suffering on the part of millions, and above all glaring imperfections and inadequacies, it is concretely being done and there is no possible way to turn the clock back that does not involve general chaos.

This is because what is at stake here is the historic development of the socialisation of production on a grand scale, something that even the bourgeoisie has continually had to adapt to,

albeit in its own capitalist way, in order to mitigate the growing and murderous contradiction between this process and the private character of ownership. The absurd, rickety, incomplete character of their “European turn” faithfully reflects their fear and inability to see things through to the end, and then on top of that they had to adjust to the international socialisation that has been (wrongly) described as “globalisation”. Their grotesque attempts to mitigate the threats of serious instability that arise in the capitalist system from this growing international socialisation by establishing official but ramshackle European, American, Asian etc. regional groupings and then the G20 are testimony to how potent this socialisation process is.

These bourgeois reactions to the challenges posed by the socialisation of the world (and European) economy cannot but be timid and incomplete, because not only do they rest on the basis and framework of capitalism, they also aspire to consolidate the system. But instead of mitigating the sources of disequilibrium and instability, they increase them and sharpen the contradictions even more. And so the bourgeoisie’s European adventure has considerably increased imbalances across the continent, increased economic instability and further deepened the contradictions between the various countries in the continent. The persistent isolation which has greeted French intervention in Africa (Mali and Central African Republic), then the paralysing cacophony of contradictory interests over Ukraine and Putin’s policies express this natural inability to achieve real European unity.

For a workers’ programme for Europe!

The conclusion is obvious: All criticisms of the Front National which do not expose its bourgeois character badly miss the essential point. Obviously none of the bodies such as the (Conservative) UMP, the Socialist Party (PS), etc., can do that, so their criticisms of this dangerous rival are reduced to angry shouting of a generally moral order. Their hands are particularly tied in this respect in that they all on occasion without a second thought draw from the same nauseating bourgeois political arsenal as the Front National. Their policies towards Roma and other refugees illustrate this perfectly. At a European level they are compelled to defend their own anti-working class machinery in servile and ingratiating terms against the spectre of the aggressive FN nation-state.

In fact, expecting any political organisation that is not itself resolutely opposed to the bourgeoisie to come up with a class critique of the Front National is really like trying to square the circle; it’s literally impossible! And the absence of such a fundamental critique on the part of organisations which nevertheless put themselves forward as opposing the capitalist system as a whole reveals how seriously they lack any such ambition.

But a few additional comments are required on the European policy of the Left Party (Parti de Gauche), who do aspire to represent working people and so deserve a closer examination. For all our political sympathy for this organisation, or rather, precisely because of the solidarity we feel towards it, we are obliged to repeat a criticism we already made during the French municipal elections: It quite clearly does not have a working-class programme. It didn’t have one during the previous elections and the lack is possibly even more glaring in relation to Europe.

Of course we do know this party’s criticisms of the bourgeoisie’s current European monstrosity and its austerity policies. We agree with them. But it is essential to recall that even the harshest, severest and most extensive criticisms workers pour out on this Europe do not add up to a political programme. If they themselves were enough to create such a programme, you would not need a political party. On the other hand we are undergoing the terrible effects of the Europe imposed by the PS, UMP and their allies. We also know that in this area the Front National wants a return to nation-states. These are the two orientations available to the bourgeoisie. But what, concretely, does the Left Party want? In the absence of a clear and direct answer, one can only speculate.

The party’s documents talk about the need to reject Europe as it is so as to “open the way to put it right socially, economically and ecologically”. It also demands that Europe should be “re-founded on social, ecological, democratic and peaceful foundations” and also wants a “new model of development in Europe”. It declares it wants to “put an end to the Europe of finance”, asserting the need to “break with productivism: set up a Europe-wide ecological planning system”.

The way these desires are formulated suffers from a dreadful lack of precision, expresses unforgivable naivety and at times betrays crass ignorance. It very clearly shows that instead of an exact and precise political pro-

gramme, the Left Party presents a fairly confused jumble of vague aspirations and scrambled and indistinct hopes and desires. In any case, the one priority that does stand out clearly in this wish list is to leave the capitalist structure of economy and society fundamentally unchanged, since all this party wants to do is at most alter (or “re-found”) it in the sense of relegating finance to a subordinate position and reorganising the economy according to ecological doctrine.

In doing so, this list abandons all the tried and tested methods of working people’s struggles such as putting social demands in the foreground and the alliance with trade union struggles. It replaces them with the cheap and tacky ideology of ecology, whose main function is to absolve the capitalist system of its innate responsibility for destroying nature and to re-direct the blame against people in general.

Now all these specific wishes are entirely compatible with preserving the continued existence of capitalism. They do not at all demand that it should be destroyed, but merely that it should be corrected and improved. (Clearly this party’s leaders do not realise that even some of these innocent wishes are in complete contradiction with capitalism as it really is. And in that case capitalism will either tolerate these garrulous but basically inoffensive charlatans or it will confront them brutally because its crisis is getting more serious. As always happened throughout history, when that occurs, the great majority of these naïve quacks will choose capitulation while a tiny minority will decide to fight but, unprepared and overtaken by events, will go down to certain defeat.)

But a workers’ programme takes an entirely different route: It calls things by their proper name. So it starts resolutely and publicly from how flagrantly and obviously bankrupt capitalism is when it comes to providing the slightest solution to or improvement in the day-to-day difficulties working people in Europe face. The future capitalism holds for them is getting gloomier and less secure, and the system itself cannot accurately predict even the main lines of where it is going. It will not find refuge in any one of its long-past variants: certainly not its old, bankrupt, democratic version and even less whatever it can lash together in terms of the nation-state. Such a programme would clearly enunciate the need to abolish this bankrupt capitalism and replace its pseudo-Europe with the goal of a United Workers’ (or

Socialist) States of Europe, the only road to any real level of continental economic and social integration. We call on all worker-activists and their political organisations, especially the ones in Left Front, to adopt that sort of programme.

It is easy to see that such a programme could not be achieved all in one go, but needs to be prepared and facilitated by a whole series of obvious immediate demands which, as transitional demands, would lead to the inevitable conclusion that such a programme is needed. Besides providing activists with a framework to mobilise in, it is essential that, to meet the requirements of a genuine workers' programme in leading us to socialism (actual break with capitalism, real class independence and living working-class internationalism), such a programme should contain:

1. Joint planning at a European level of the activity of all political formations really fighting for a working peoples' programme for Europe, and standing international co-ordination between them.

2. It is important to state the objective of a struggle for a Working People's Europe, as the anti-chamber to the Workers' United States, in opposition not only to the current bankers' Europe but also the fascists' goal of nation-states.

Several partial demands can be condensed into this one:

a. It implies the struggle to unify right across Europe the legislation which embodies social advantages and gains on the basis of the most favourable (minimum wage, pensions, social security, etc.).

b. It involves sustained activity in relation to and alongside the trade unions with a view to extending co-operation to organise this struggle.

3. The demand to cancel the state's immense debts should be prominent in the programme. It is through the reimbursement of these debts and the interest that lenders (banks etc.) regularly siphon off a significant portion of the surplus value produced in the debtor countries. On the other hand, the obligation to repay the debt is used as a pretext to cut and destroy social rights and gains. So debt and repayment constitute the main current source of extra profit and a vital lever for exploiting the working class and working people in Europe. To make it easier to understand and popularise this demand, we should co-operate with all movements calling for a public, independent examination and general audit of these debts.

4. Reducing the struggle against unemployment to the national level is a return to past failed practices or at least represents a serious illusion now that the inter-dependence of the various countries of Europe is so far advanced and the unemployed form about 20 per cent of Europe's active population. This fact makes an active movement essential which challenges

capitalism's claim to dominate and direct the economy. That is the demand for workers' control of businesses threatened with closure and the establishment of a struggle for workers' control to ban unemployment.

5. Finally, a real fight for genuine European democracy is vital against all the bourgeoisie's despotic bodies and arrangements. A real general clean-out is needed to close them down and reorganise them (the European commissions and directorates and all bodies such as the European Central Bank, the European Parliament, etc.) to ensure that there exists a new set of European arrangements that function in a healthy way in the service of working people. The pre-condition for such a clean-out is preparing, convening and holding a European Constituent Assembly.

A workers' programme of this kind puts to shame all the various schemes and horse-trading which preoccupy the leaders of the Left Front about what organisations are called and whose names is on the ballot paper as miserable squabbles of a cheap parliamentary politics unable to hide the absence of a workers' programme worthy of the name. However, perhaps a pathetic result at the ballot box will shake these organisations' centrist outlook and unleash a movement for their renewal. It is a hope to cling to.

**Balazs Nagy,
May 2014**

some lessons of the March 2014

French municipal elections

The entire French press is unanimous. Whether "left" or "right" in their traditional political colouration – the difference is actually pretty superficial – they compare the so-called "socialist" party's resounding discomfiture in the municipal elections to Napoleon's historic disaster on the Berezina River in Russia in 1812, the prelude to his ultimate defeat. For once the accuracy of their judgement is beyond dispute. So our first response is above all to see what we can learn. It's a perfectly straightforward and normal thing to do, although our conclusions differ noticeably from everyone else's.

First of all it is important to emphasise that elections change absolutely nothing in the fundamentals of the capitalist social system or, therefore, in the overall situation. This view is

sharply opposed to the popular belief carefully fostered by the usual politicians and organisations of the "left". Even if elections do change that system's form or shape, they move within the framework it imposes and are an integral part of it. Whether municipal, parliamentary or European, they are just part of how the (so democratic!) system in place functions, while remaining profoundly bound to the way it moves and works.

How true this is has been more than adequately demonstrated, and two major and opposed schools of thought on the matter were in evidence during the elections. One body of opinion – an extremely heterogeneous one (especially if you include the right wingers) – traditionally asserts that elections really can bring about effective changes

in the system. It has to be said, regretfully, that even a party such as the Front de Gauche (Left Front) and its component parts – which we see as actually standing on the side of working people, and as such on our side too – remains a prisoner to these blinkered electoral (parliamentary) politics. Its leaders, in effect, leave us to suppose mistakenly, or even themselves assert, that a strong showing (and all the more so outright victory) at the polls would enable them radically to change the capitalist social system.

Abstentions are a kind of vote

In contrast to these shallow parliamentary politics, another large and growing section of the population regularly and deliberately abstain. Although municipal elections suppos-

edly affect people more directly, these latest ones saw record abstention levels, particularly among young people.

Most bourgeois politicians and commentators get onto their moral high horse over this. They have the nerve to impugn such people's "republican" credentials, and the audacity to accuse them of helping the right wing. Here or there, the reproach is added that they make it impossible for the Left Front and/or its component parts to make consistent progress, and so change the system.

These abstentions, however, express a definite verdict on the existing capitalist system as a whole, fundamentally rejecting it and repudiating the absurd belief that voting can change the system. In this sense, they are right and we defend them against those "republican" paragons of (questionable) virtue, even though we think that abstaining is negative and sterile and therefore inadequate.

An accurate map showing the percentage of voters who abstained in the recent French municipal elections would clearly show another France living on the periphery of the cities in the proletarian banlieues. It is working-class France, including the unemployed, suffering under savage austerity. The bourgeois press was so bold as to reveal a tiny corner of its extent and significance. In Paris' "red belt" there were 58.6 per cent abstentions in Ivry, 56.8 in Stains, 56.7 in Vitry-sur-Seine; then 56.7 per cent in Vaux-en-Valin in the outer suburbs of Lyon and 55.5 per cent in the disaster-stricken working-class town of Roubaix in the North. The figure is the same for Trappes in the outer suburbs of Paris, the biggest victims of galloping inequality. Bourgeois journalists and all the petit-bourgeois milieu editorialise about this in the abstract – wringing their hands over the losses suffered by ... the middle class! The working class and its fate simply disappear from these people's preoccupations. This arises from a deliberate desire to minimise this "dangerous class's" importance, even to the point of denying its existence. So you can bet they will never draw up any such map because it would cast rather a pall over their chatter and somewhat upset their peace of mind.

Elections cannot change the capitalist system (as we can see in the daily more severe blows it inflicts on us), but political organisations would be making an unpardonable error if they concluded that there is no point in elections.

Why elections matter

In the first place, they are important because they quite faithfully reflect each party's impact and influence, providing a pretty accurate graphic image (including abstentions) of the level and nature of the population's political consciousness.

This political thermometer marked a general defeat for Hollande and his government and, in passing, wiped out all the myth-making that had gone before about municipal elections being all about strictly local issues: all those who in 2012 had expected this government to protect them against the attacks of capital, this time around voted against his party or abstained. That message is clear. In this sense the bourgeois way the newspaper *Le Monde* explains what this vote means is deliberately misleading. They write that Holland is now "paying the bill for a poor start to his tenure because it was not sustained by a clear and clearly-articulated project". (Editorial on 1 April 2014). But the obviously bourgeois nature of his project was exactly what working people did understand and voted against. Nevertheless, in its usual convoluted way, the newspaper does express the bourgeoisie's innermost concerns and its insistence that greater determination should be shown in serving that class. Their complaint expresses these requirements and their preferred response, which is to take matters directly in hand via their own traditional parties. In this they are encouraged by Hollande's own bourgeois proclivities. That explains the significance of the heightened profile of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) and the Democratic Movement (MoDem), parties which express the bourgeoisie's desire to press ahead with the destruction of social gains. We can be quite sure that Hollande will do everything he can to satisfy these expectations and will (if possible) become even more hostile to what working people want.

The fascists' strength (barely) conceals their bourgeoisie character

The considerable advance made by the National Front (FN) is almost entirely due to its demagogic propaganda which appears to defend the interests of workers and working people. But watch out! This tactic of appearing to defend working people is a well-established and well-known trick used by all extreme-right parties. In the 1920s Hitler developed the same stratagem, presenting himself as a defender of working people. He went

so far as to call his party "socialist", merely adding the adjective "national". As for Mussolini, he came straight out of the Italian Socialist Party. As with all fascists, social demagoguery was their most important weapon, and this is what the National Front has picked up on. But how demagogic this political line is, is revealed clearly by the fact that it does not attack the whole bourgeoisie and its social system. It only sets its sights on one of its political lines, the one currently in the foreground: Europe. It advocates a different line, i.e. the withdrawal into nationalism represented by the other, minority, section of the European bourgeoisie. So the FN attacks the bourgeoisie's majority (European) policy, but not the bourgeoisie as a class which exploits other classes, nor its capitalist system. Far from it, it vigorously attacks immigrant workers, in other words the majority of the working class, and carries on alarmingly about workers' gains, denouncing various benefits. It has derived great advantages not just from this lying demagoguery, which continues to conceal its avowedly bourgeois nature, but also the fact that no single party has yet unmasked it as a bourgeois party. Normally, criticisms merely affect its anti-European stance and its racist and nationalist phobias, without touching on the bourgeois basis on which they grow like excrescences.

Why is the Left Front marking time?

Elections are also an opportunity for all those united around shared political aims to rally together so as to further extend their ranks. This is particularly true of all those who wish, on the basis of a programme, to make a step forward towards freeing working people from the yoke of the capitalist system. So the elections offered the Left Front a chance to develop. How, then, can we now explain that, despite the terrible crisis of capitalism and the fact that workers rejected this society, the Left Front did not just fall a long way back from its spectacular results in the presidential elections, but was clearly overtaken by all bourgeois parties, including the FN and the UMP?

This absurd situation is a consequence of the Left Front's political ambiguity. While it makes it clear that it thoroughly opposes the French and European bourgeoisie's recent austerity policies, it does not come out clearly against the capitalist system as such. It stays vague and enigmatic on this cardinal point which really does require some straight talking. This obscurity is revealed in the lack of a clearly work-

ing-class programme directed against capitalism as the social system at the root of all austerity. This lack of a programme, and the fact they are locked into the normal bourgeois election framework, have condemned them to limp along far behind the others. In short, their position does not measure up to the situation. How can you expect the Left Front to unmask the National

Front as a bourgeois party if they equivocate over their own objectives? The municipal elections show that, under these conditions, the Left Front is condemned to mark time while the National Front has made considerable progress, including among discontented workers. So the main lesson of the elections is obvious. They show ever more clearly that, instead of

looking for scapegoats, the main task facing our Left Front is to make an objective assessment of its activity as a whole, above all its political programme,

**Balazs Nagy,
April 2014**

New Valls government:

A government of anti-working class struggle

The recent local government elections in France and the formation of a new government are a good opportunity, indeed a direct incentive, to say more about the mean, twisted and nasty way the Hollande team running the country think. Their politico-social reasoning is very simple, not to say simplistic. It is what you might call classical social-democratic thinking of a kind well-known over the last hundred years or more.

Resolute defenders of decadent capitalism

The main thing that really marks these people out, among all those who claim to be on the side of working people, is that they present capitalism as an eternal system whose existence you just have to accept. So according to this disgrace to the name of socialist, everything we do is necessarily limited and determined by the framework of capitalism and its general rules. But as a consolation to working people, according to this conception, the capitalist system can be put right, amended and improved, and our job is to contribute to that. This cheapskate philosophy which has long been selling the mission of liberating the working class for a mess of pottage still had some limited validity when, in return for this sell-out, the bourgeoisie was still able to concede various actual reforms. But imperialism is the period of capitalism's decline – something which social democrats obstinately deny – in which, because it is exhausted, this system is organically unable to concede the slightest reform.

Now the present crisis has brutally revealed that this decline has got to the point where not only have reforms become impossible for this moribund system, but in order to survive it needs to attack and destroy previous reforms. This need is what explains its general

offensive against existing reforms and its intransigent determination to fight that right through to the end.

But social democrats are incorrigible; they have not abandoned their grotesque fantasies, but adapted them precisely to the many-faceted requirements of this offensive on the part of a bourgeoisie with its back to the wall. For all Hollande's solemn oaths – and this sheds some light on the social democrats' consummate duplicity – they then told us all the fibs about the need on the one hand to swell the coffers of international capital by paying back the debt, and on the other to help our "own" impoverished capitalist with yet more billions. Against all the evidence they still maintain the lie that thanks to this "aid" the "grateful" bourgeoisie will do everything it can to secure the well-being of working people. Even a few weeks ago Hollande was still handing out dozens of billions in line with this "plan", but he and his ilk were the only ones (like all self-respecting social democrats) who still believed the incredible dream that in exchange the bourgeoisie would give unemployed people work. (Through these outrageous deceptions they hoped to justify making "savings" by drastically cutting expenditure on health, education, all welfare benefits, wages, right to a job and so forth, to the point of threatening their very existence.) Alongside this savage demolition of genuine previous reforms – and to show that they are true reformists carrying out actual reforms – they have flooded the country with a wave of so-called "societal" reforms – at the margins of and even outside of social and economic life – such as same-sex marriage, electrical cars and so forth. The main function of these pretend "reforms" has invariably been to

distract attention from how busy they are destroying previous reforms.

The local government elections brought a stinging defeat to those who, in their arrogant and pretentious duplicity, thought that working people had swallowed this hogwash hook, line and sinker. They were sincerely and profoundly surprised when they saw the results. But to go from there to imagining that Hollande and co would revise their policies and adapt them to what working people want would be an absurd illusion. Far from it!

Losses accumulate and other miseries threaten workers

The new government is not just a body committed to carrying on Hollande and co.'s bourgeois policy of robbing working people. In view of the preceding government's alleged "dawdling" in getting on with the job and also the bourgeoisie's growing appetite, not to say bulimia, it is going to toughen up considerably. After 26 March, the employers' body Medef trumpeted: "A more ambitious trajectory than the 50 billion cut already announced is now absolutely imperative", (*Le Monde*, 30-31 March 2014). Then the headline on the same newspaper's editorial of 1 April spelled out what the government has to do: "Hold course! No wobbling, get on with it!" And then Hollande's road map made it clear: "The only responsible outcome ... is to set afoot and then roll out reforms aiming at securing an economic recovery". We all know the terrible reality hiding behind these anodyne words. The self-proclaimed leaders of the bourgeoisie in Brussels have also jumped at the chance to insist on greater rigour from the French government. And the commercial treaty being prepared between Europe and the US has up its sleeve further blows which will make any hopes of an

economic recovery by France, already pretty well compromised, even more precarious.

Hollande reacted swiftly, obeying not indeed the wishes of the disappointed voters but the requirements of his real, bourgeois, bosses. He quickly established a new government team tightly organised around his closest social-democratic partners. His new prime minister, Valls, is ready-made to epitomise it, with his even more pronounced right-wing political orientation and aggressive character. It is no accident that he has long wanted to rid his party's name of the adjective "socialist". So right from the start this team presents itself as an advanced detachment of a bourgeois attack formation. The odd reassuring and sooth-

ing phrase where required do not alter this truth. We shall have occasion later on to comment in greater detail on this new government's anti-worker offensive, the first elements of which, aiming to dismantle the social security system, we have just seen.

There certainly is a change, not to say a turn. Here is an end to the procrastination and shilly-shallying which, however much they suit Hollande's innate weakness, have become intolerable to the bourgeoisie and seem contrary to the nature of the new government. The presence of people with a "left" aura like Hamon and Montebourg has nothing to do with any real left. Much more, it signifies the end of equivocation or misunderstanding surrounding these

careerist's reputations. Indeed, if there is a real left in this party, apart from the usual fake-left loud-mouths like Lienemann and co., now would be the time to say so in opposition to the deployment of definite measures and attacks against workers' gains. Above all, now is the time for all organisations who speak and act in workers' interests to rally round the Left Front to prepare together a broad united front of all working people against the redoubled attacks by capital and its new government.

**Balazs Nagy,
April 2014**

(All three articles by Balazs Nagy are reprinted from various issues of the French "Lutte des Classes" publication)

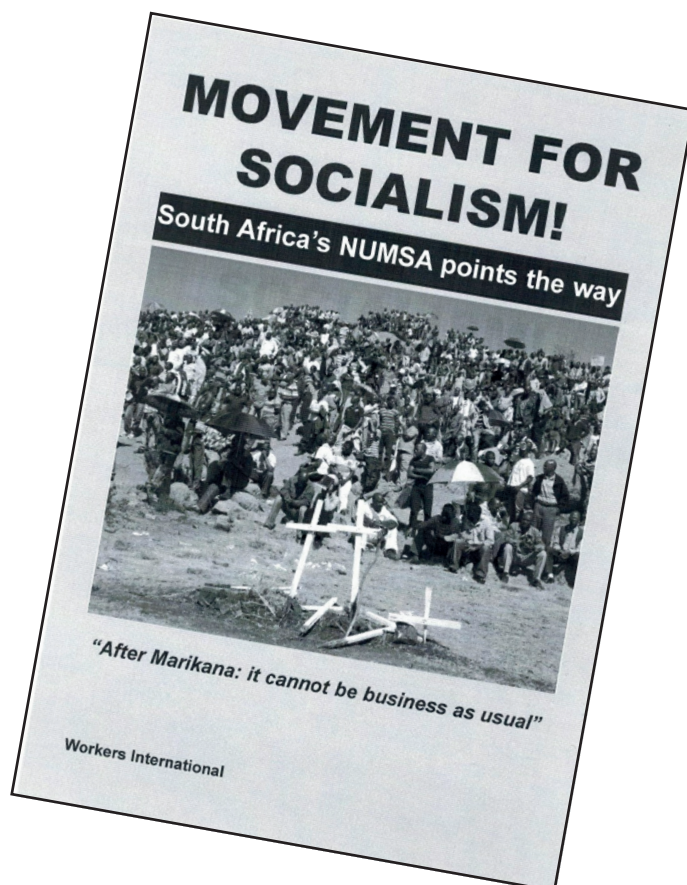
On 7th May 2014 the African National Congress (ANC) was returned as the government of South Africa, but there is deep disquiet. For the defeat of apartheid did not bring an end to capitalism as many militant activists had hoped, and a small group of the ANC at the head of the government and their cronies in the trade union leaderships have prospered while imposing neo-liberal policies which are impoverishing the masses. Meanwhile the workers' movement has been set back in a number of different ways in the last 20 years.

In response to this, even before the general election, at its Special National Congress in December 2013, the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) had withdrawn its support from the ANC and its ally, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and had already begun a series of actions to establish a united front to coordinate struggles in the workplace and communities. These stormy developments in the class struggle in South Africa have profound implications for working people everywhere. This book highlights the way forward proposed by the leaders of the NUMSA to resolve the crisis. To assist readers outside of South Africa to understand how this came about, we include the history of the struggle by South Africa's working class and its close links to the Namibian workers' movement to overthrow white majority racist rule as part and parcel of the struggle for socialism by participants in the movement.

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What does Modi's victory mean?

The sweeping electoral victory of the BJP under the leadership of Narendra Modi has been greeted worldwide with a mixture of euphoria and alarm.

For big business, the justification for the euphoria lies in Modi's record as chief minister of the state of Gujarat between 2002 and 2010, when he presided over an average growth rate of 16.6% a year. However, Gujarat's rapid growth actually pre-dates Modi by a whole decade: it had already been the fastest-growing of India's fourteen major states between 1991 and 1998. Moreover, even during Modi's tenure of office, Gujarat was not in fact India's fastest-growing state: its record was exceeded by Uttarkhand and Sikkim.

Gujarat's rapid rate of development was based mainly on Modi's policy of sweeping away the few remaining vestiges of state regulation to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). Modi calls his state the "global gateway to India". But even by the measure of FDI inflows, Gujarat's economy remains dwarfed by other traditional havens for foreign investment, such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

There is even greater justification for the alarm felt especially by India's minorities and lower castes, and above all by India's 176 million Muslims, in the horror of the Gujarat pogrom of 2002, which was orchestrated by Modi's government. Up to 2,000 Muslim men, women and children were hacked, burned or bludgeoned to death in an orgy of communal rioting, and 200,000 made homeless, while the police stood aside. Modi's considered response to this bloodbath is that he feels the same level of regret as he would "if a puppy had been run over by a car".

The Indian "miracle"

India and China are often bracketed together as the powerhouse of the world economy. However, this coupling is deceptive. Both India and China offer huge reserves of cheap labour; but India cannot match the incomparably more developed and efficient infrastructure provided in China by decades of state investment and planning. The fact is that India's economy is still only

one-fifth the size of China's, and falling fast behind it.

From a high point in 2010-11, when GDP rose by 9.3%, India's growth rate has slumped in just three years to 4.4%, and inflation is running above 8%. Despite its huge reserves of cheap labour and its desperate adoption of deregulation, the truth is that India with its rickety infrastructure and unstable administration is still an unattractive proposition for international investors. In World Bank league tables, India ranks 60th in the world in terms of productivity and competitiveness (China is 29th), 134th for "ease of doing business", and 179th for "suitability for inward investment".

Information technology and business process outsourcing are among the fastest growing sectors of the economy, contributing 25% of the country's total exports in 2007-08. The growth in the IT and software sector – and of course the proliferation of call centres – are largely attributable to the availability of a huge pool of cheap, skilled, English-speaking workers. Thus, where Indians had in the past largely performed the services of cooks, housemaids and washerwomen for the British raj, globalisation and digitalisation had now elevated them to the world's typists, receptionists and filing clerks. By 2009, seven Indian firms were listed among the top fifteen technology outsourcing companies in the world.

As for India's manufacturing industry, it relies on a combination of cheap labour and new technology, with its textile industries especially dependent on child labour, from the fields to the mills to the clothing and carpet workshops.

With a "middle-class" population now estimated at 300 million, India offers a perfectly viable domestic consumer market capable of sustaining the booming growth of recent years. However, the economic "miracle" still leaves a vast majority of peasants and urban poor destitute and living at subsistence level, with about 400 million people in India – one third of India's population, and one-third also of the world's total poor – barely surviving below the

poverty line of \$1.25 per day. Far from bringing prosperity to the people, India's boom has been confined to a small affluent minority. On the contrary: there has been a substantial widening of the gap between rich and poor, dating from the demolition of price controls and subsidies along with the rest of the economic "reforms" dictated at gunpoint by the IMF and the World Bank in 1991.

Deregulation

It should always be remembered that before colonisation, in 1700 India's share of world income had equalled that of all Europe combined, at almost a quarter. By the time it had gained independence in 1947, India was among the very poorest countries in the world in terms of per capita income.

From independence in 1947 to the new economic turn in 1991, India's economy had been based upon a high level of state ownership; protectionism; high tariff walls; import and exchange controls; import substitution; interventionist policies; a system of state rationing; and a dependence on favourable trade terms with the Soviet Union. There were even nominal "five-year plans". At one point, income tax levels – which were always treated in practice as purely hypothetical – were fixed at a maximum of 97.5%. The inevitable outcome was cheating on a massive scale, smuggling, and a wholesale evasion of regulations, exchange controls and taxation – a carnival of rampant bureaucratism, corruption and inefficiency, in which the ruling class routinely violated the rules of its own administration.

The USSR had been India's major trading partner, and its collapse in 1991, together with the spike in oil prices precipitated by the first Gulf War, created an immediate balance-of-payments crisis for India. Teetering on the brink of an outright overnight default on its loans, India was forced to beg the IMF for a \$1.8 billion bailout. The price was instant de-regulation.

There followed a bonfire of state controls. Whether under the Congress governments of Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh, or the BJP government of Vajpayee, regulations and sub-

sides were demolished and India thrown wide open to penetration by the multinationals. An influx of hot money flowed into India, and for a few years it became one of the world's fastest-growing economies. On the basis of purely abstract fantastical hypothetical projections, it was predicted that India could overtake France and Italy by 2020, Germany, UK and Russia by 2025 and Japan by 2035. It was even projected that India was on course to overtake the USA.

The BJP and Congress

Under the patronage of the British raj, a narrowly-based indigenous capitalist class had already begun to take root in the decades prior to independence. Today such families as the Tatas, Birlas and Mittals are world-stage tycoons. But in the early period of independence, it had suited the Indian ruling class to shelter behind a political aristocracy posing as protector of the minorities; champion of the poor; secular, democratic and even "socialist". The flimsy pretext for this was its dependence on nationalisation, protectionism, state subsidies, friendly relations with the USSR, and above all its need to secure a home market safe from the constant risk of communal disintegration and national fragmentation.

This was always largely a cynical and hollow facade, though, long abandoned in practice even by Congress. Congress was little more than the cynical political exploiter of the insecurities of the minorities. This can be seen in its true criminal record: the formal and legal institutionalising of caste rivalries; the dictatorial Emergency regime; the regular dismissal of opposition state governments; suppression of national revolts; tolerance of caste atrocities; periodic fostering of communal riots; brutal military repression in Kashmir; successive wars with Pakistan; explicit endorsement of the massacre of Sikhs in 1984, etc...

Narendra Modi's political vehicle the Bharatiya Janata Party is an explicitly communal Hindu outfit, the political voice of a conglomerate of reactionary and sinister forces. These include the Vishva Hindu Parishad, the Hindu communal movement which provoked conflict throughout India in 1992 by mobilising 150,000 rioters to storm the Babri Masjid mosque at Ayodhya; Shiv Sena, an overtly fascist party modelled on the Nazis and based in Maharashtra, which in early 1993 perpetrated a massacre of 3,000 Muslims in Mumbai in a pre-planned act of ethnic cleansing; and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a five-mil-

lion strong paramilitary Hindu communal mass movement of which Modi is a lifelong member.

The RSS has five to six million members and over a million organised "volunteers" who hold regular public paramilitary drills. It was founded in 1925 as a conscious counter-weight to the growing influence of socialist ideas within India's national liberation movement. It openly praised the ideology of Mussolini and Hitler and identified the Nazi holocaust as its model in its mission to destroy the Muslim community. (India has the second largest Muslim population in the world: more numerous than Pakistan or Bangladesh, and exceeded only by Indonesia.) In the words of one of the founders of the RSS, Golwalkar: "To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here." It was an RSS member who assassinated Gandhi in 1948.

Communalism and neoliberalism

For the BJP, a combination of communalism and neoliberalism is nothing new. The previous BJP government under Vajpayee (from 1998 to 2004) had presided over wholesale privatisation of state enterprises. Meanwhile, along with the VHP and RSS, BJP cadres had instigated the provocative destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya and the subsequent pogrom in Mumbai in 1993, prior to the Gujarat massacre.

However, the hands of India's traditional ruling party Congress are hardly much cleaner. The IMF-imposed programme of privatisation and budget cuts was first introduced under the Congress administration of Narasimha Rao and further promoted under the world banker Manmohan Singh. Congress had meanwhile long abandoned in practice its always at best ambiguous and hypocritical secular stance. To take just one glaring example: in 1984 it was Congress politicians who had ordered the assault on the Golden Temple at Amritsar and then deliberately orchestrated the massacre of thousands of Sikhs in Delhi and throughout India.

In a society graphically polarised between a narrow plutocracy and the destitute masses, a class so manifestly parasitic as the Indian capitalist class has somehow to whip up an artificial mass base. Like every ruling class in its epoch of decay, ultimately its survival depends upon the magical power of myth. Today the symbol of homespun self-sufficiency represented by the spinning wheel is giving way to age-old epic Hindu mythology. True, riots and

massacres are messy affairs that tend to get in the way of business. But such passions have a momentum of their own; they can't be simply switched on and off. It is unfortunate that random eruptions of communal violence may sometimes destabilise order and discipline, but these are the political price paid by the ruling class to stay afloat.

There is a difference in the rhetoric of the two rival parties; but hardly nowadays a trace of difference in policy. The process of wholesale privatisation gained momentum under Congress and BJP governments alike. Similarly, the storming of the mosque at Ayodhya, the worst communal riots since 1947, and the pogrom in Mumbai all took place under the Congress government of Narasimha Rao.

A new mass party

Under capitalism, the population of India face horror without end: the daily rape and slaughter of women, the degradation of the lower castes and "untouchables"; the constant threat of communal pogroms against the Muslims and other minorities; police brutality and victimisation.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) and its precursor the Communist Party of India have utterly discredited themselves over decades of unprincipled political manoeuvring with the respective rival reactionary parties of the ruling class. There will be no way forward for India out of the dual torture of poverty and repression until the emergence of a new mass party voicing the needs and aspirations of the workers from call centres to textile mills, the landless peasants and farm labourers, the exploited and unemployed of the shanty towns, the women and the downtrodden.

**Roger Silverman
June 2014**

(Cde. Silverman is one of the founders of Workers International Network. This article, which was specially commissioned for Workers International Journal, has also been posted on <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/socialistdiscussion>. WIN also has a Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/WorkersIntlNetwork>)

Ukraine independent unions appeal to workers of Europe:

Support our struggle against the oligarchs!

Reprinted from <http://rs21.org.uk/2014/05/16/appeal-of-the-kryvvi-rih-basin-miners-to-the-workers-of-europe/>

The attention of the world community is currently focussed on the confrontation between pro-government and anti-government forces in Ukraine. This confrontation is becoming all the more tenacious and bloody. All the more it is being turned into an interethnic confrontation that is fuelling a hysterical mutual hatred between workers of different nationalities.

What remains beyond people's attention at this moment is the sharpening social and economic situation, and not only in the regions where the fighting is taking place. The rapid devaluation of the hryvnia (Ukrainian currency), the steep rise in prices of consumer goods, transport, utilities, as well as the cutbacks in production in many enterprises – all this has led to a sharp fall in workers' real wages. By our estimates there has been a 30-50% fall in real wages.

The announcement by the governor of Dnipropetrovsk oblast (province) of an increase in pay for April of 20% was actually turned into an insulting hand-out to workers of 300-700 hryvnia (£25-58). Miners received only 15% of the actual rate, which often makes up less than half their actual income. As well, the money was paid out as "material support", which means it will not be included in the calculation of their average monthly wage and therefore in the calculation of their annual leave.

As a result we have no option but to demand an immediate doubling of the real wage in the interests of preserving social peace in this country. We are deeply convinced that the main cause of the destabilised situation in the country is the greed of Ukrainian and Russian oligarchs, who pay a beggar's wage to workers, send all their profits off-shore and don't pay taxes in Ukraine. In fact the oligarchs are almost completely exempt from taxes on their profits.

We turn to you with a call to support our struggle against the oligarchs, who have brought Ukraine into the current crisis and who continue to

destabilise it further, threatening to provoke a fratricidal war in Ukraine which without any doubt will have catastrophic consequences for all of Europe. It is necessary to put pressure on the corporations of the Ukrainian and Russian oligarchs, many of whom have their shares placed on the London Stock Exchange.

There is a mounting labour dispute in the enterprises of EVRAZ plc, whose headquarters are in London. On 11 May 2014 the miners marched through the streets of Kryvvi Rih to the administration of the EVRAZ Sukha Balka plc and showered its office with loose change as a sign of protest against the fictitious "wage increase" for April. The Independent Union of Miners of Ukraine calls upon the British public to picket the offices of EVRAZ plc and the offices of other Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs' corporations in London and other cities in Europe. If we don't force them to come round the chances of preserving peace in Ukraine will be elusive.

At the same time we are demanding that the authorities officially recognise the miners' self-defence and the arming of miners' brigades. Organised workers and workers' self-defence are precisely that stabilising factor which can effectively

prevent the escalation of violence in Ukraine. In those places where organised workers are controlling the situation mass actions never turn into mass killings. The workers defended the Maidan in Kryvvi Rih. The workers did not allow any violence when they took under their control the situation in the city of Krasnodon during the recent general strike there.

We call upon the workers of Britain for solidarity. In particular we will be grateful for any information and humanitarian support, but the biggest need we feel right now is for personal protective clothing for members of the self-defence brigades (body armour and the like) and mobile radio communications equipment.

- ***Long live international workers' solidarity!***
- ***By preserving the peace in Ukraine we will preserve the peace of Europe!***

Oleksandr Bondar, Head of the branch of the Independent Union of Miners of Ukraine at the EVRAZ Sukha Balka plc
Yuri Samoilov, Co-ordinator of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine in Kryvvi Rih, Head of the Independent Union of Miners of Ukraine in Kryvvi Rih.

Marxist considerations on the crisis Part 1 By Balazs Nagy

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