

Europe's crisis is getting deeper

by Jim H

The face of Europe is changing. A formerly rising European Union has now entered a phase where it is showing large cracks. It is unlikely to continue, at least in its present form.

There are a number of reasons for the changing circumstances. In the first place, the integration process has never been particularly popular amongst ordinary people, who have had a sense that it is not in their interests, because it is a product of the consolidation of the dominant capitalists in the continent.

This is particularly true in respect to the two most powerful countries, Germany and France. In fact, it is an expression of the expansion of German and French Imperialism, to suck out more of the results of the labour performed in the other countries.

Such conditions can only provide ongoing conflict along the lines of differing class interests. The European Union has unified the class struggle on a continental basis.

Within each country there is also conflict based on differing class interests.

Deepening economic crisis is making these opposing interests more intense. European monopoly capitalism is pushing hard to shift the burden of the economic crisis onto the backs of working people. This is what the imposition of austerity, tight budgets, privatisation, on a scale not seen for a long time, is all about.

For their part, the people of Europe seek respite from growing hardship. They feel the rising cost of living, growing unemployment, deteriorating government services and attempts to claw back a range of hard won rights. In the face of this there is a clear demand for a change in the way economies are run, and an end to the power of the big banks and monopolies.

The politicians of the principal capitalist parties and other institutions are not listening. They keep on the same path. Governments and parliamentary oppositions basically agree. All pander to the demands of the biggest national capitalists and German and French imperialism to which they are seen to be tied. For these reasons, politicians, parliaments, and the whole rotten system are on the nose. Growing lack of faith in the system is leading to rising struggle on the ground.

The recent meeting of the G10 witnessed a lack of agreement on action, because there is a growing fear of deepening political crisis and how the people will respond.

So it is hardly surprising that



Austerity protest in Rome

new governments are imposed by administrative means in Greece and Italy. There is no pretence about votes and mandates. Lock in the agenda of big business and then get on with the game of playing capitalist democracy.

Where this method does not work, devote massive resources to enlisting TweedleDum instead of TweedleDee. It ensures that nothing really changes for the ruling class.

Social democracy is being exposed for its bankruptcy like it has not been for a very long time. In the face of more hard line demands from big business, and opposing demands rising from below, it finds itself paralysed, with little room to move. Its ability to spread illusions about itself is compromised. Since its

reason for being is fundamentally to serve big business, it ultimately caves in to do exactly this.

For its turn, big business finds social democracy less useful, and works for its replacement where it is in government and exposed. Key examples are Greece's PASOK and Spain's Socialist Workers Party (PSOE). Both have paved the way for open reaction. The situations in Portugal and Ireland show strong similarities.

However, these conditions are having an impact, in one way or another, on all countries in Europe.

Social Democracy has for a long time pushed its bankruptcy through to the working class and people through its association with trade union and

social movements. There is also the legacy of revisionism, which seriously weakened the Communist movement by playing a similar role to Social Democracy, confusing and dividing the most forward thinking people.

Nevertheless, as the capacity to hoodwink is weakened, conditions for the possibility of a major break are in the making.

There is a general agreement that the economic crisis is set to become more intensified.

There is also recognition that as the effects of this bite harder, the preparedness of people to fight back will rise further. This is regardless of what parliamentary games the major capitalists and opportunists play.

"We will stand our ground", say Victorian nurses

A tidal wave of over 4,000 protesting public hospital nurses, midwives and community nurses in their red Australian Federation of Nurses t-shirts spilled into many streets and intersections in the centre of Melbourne on Thursday 24 November.

They were joined by hundreds of their supporters from other unions and communities.

This was the second day of mass action by public hospital nurses, in their fight for better pay, working conditions and protection and improvement of patient care in Victoria's public hospital system.

Two days earlier at a powerful and inspiring mass meeting 5,000 ANF members voted unanimously, and to a standing ovation, to defy Fair Work Australia orders to cease "protected" industrial action.

The nurses resolved they will continue their industrial action of non-emergency bed closures as long as the State Liberal government continues with its neo-liberal austerity measures in EBA negotiations that will reduce staff-patient ratios, replace qualified nurses with untrained staff, refuse more than 2.5% pay increases to nurses and bring back split shift.



The cuts to nurses' conditions and patient care is all a part of the federal and state governments' austerity measures to drive down public spending on public health and hospitals.

The Baillieu government responded with threats of docking the pay of nurses who refuse to comply with Fair Work's orders and continue with bed closures.

This only inflamed the outrage by nurses and the public. Nurses were simply implementing "protected" industrial action that does not endanger the safety of patients.

The courageous stand taken by nurses and their union has drawn strong and wide public support.

It inspires hope and confidence in all sections of the working class and working people joining the struggle.

No US Troops!

The Brisbane-based organisation Just Peace has reacted quickly to Obama's scheme to base US marines in Australia.

A public meeting will "bring together Brisbane peace, social justice and environment organisations to build an effective alternative voice on US troops being stationed in Australia."

Monday 5th December 7pm at the TLC building, 16 Peel St Sth. Brisbane