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Europe & the Bankers

The limits of democracy in Project Europe

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with the experience of the Basques and Northern Ireland, which demonstrate that when democracy doesn't work, they resort to a state of emergency, something which is as much a part of capitalist democracy as the illusion of elections. Don't forget that in March 2009, at the time of what proved to be a flop of a general strike in Ireland, Michael O'Leary, CEO of Ryanair, asked the government to militarize the country's airports in order to prevent any union action.

There has not been even the slightest hint of a revolution in Greece and already they've carried out a coup d'état — not a military one, true enough, but a coup nonetheless with a force that is greater than that of arms: the force of the euro. This should be proof enough for all those who still believe in the mantra of liberal values rooted in European society that these things can happen here, too. In the final analysis, capitalism is based on brute force and its exercises in democracy are merely formal, cosmetic. The "indignados" in their camps around Europe are right to demand real democracy, when everyone can see that the decisions that concern all of us are taken in Brussels and by the ECB.

We should of course never forget that there can be no democracy in politics unless there is democracy in economics. As long as the economy (i.e., the organization of the means to guarantee the people's subsistence) is in the hands of a minority, it will be at the service of a minority. And this minority will have power over the others, without having to worry whether it governs by means of referendums or technocrats. This is the basic limit of democracy, sacrosanct private property and this should be the first element that any truly alternative project must challenge if it is to overcome the crisis.

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they also lied, as is usual during election campaigns. Not only have they worsened the terms of the rescue package agreed by the previous corrupt government, they have announced further cuts in the next Budget which will hit the poor, social spending and the workers, while the bankers who created the mess continue to receive their millionaire bonuses because — according to Labour — those bonuses were agreed before the crisis started!

These governments will guarantee that this illegitimate debt will continue to be paid, that they will get every last cent out of us before these countries declare themselves bankrupt. There is no other logic to these Structural Adjustment Programmes and cuts in social spending that are strangling internal markets and de-stimulating spending. It's a case of getting everything you can now before the house burns down.

Governments are falling... but where's the alternative?

The tragedy in Europe is that governments are falling but there is no way out of the crisis being indicated by the mobilized people, partly because the popular movement itself is in crisis after decades of social pacts, immobilism and pacification and due to a quite thorough ideological penetration of the bankers' fallacies in every layer of society. There are the struggles in Greece, but so far they haven't proved enough. There are the "indignados" in Spain, but the working class there has only just started to wake up. In Italy and Ireland, protests are practically nonexistent. In Ireland, any mass mobilization is limited to the weekends (so as not to "damage" the economy), and as far away as possible from government buildings, where bankers are reminded of their social responsibility. As soon as the mass mobilizations that challenge the regime begin, what will happen in this (social) democratic Europe, so proud of its civil liberties? We've already had some idea

have spoken: they will not accept any hint of “populism” (the word that is used when “democracy” gets results that Capital does not want) and the hard times that are in it demand a strong hand both to control finances and to control the streets, a strong hand for the poor, but a generous hand for the poor speculators... the bankers in power!

Technocrats and liars in power

In the meantime, the Italians have a good many reasons to celebrate the downfall of the pathetic, decadent Berlusconi, who transformed his premiership into nothing short of a reality show, with a little extra spice from sexy showgirls, sex with underage girls and “bunga bunga” parties, all serving to cloak his links with the mafia and the rampant corruption throughout the country. But they have less reason to celebrate their new premier, Mario Monti. His history is similar to Papademos’: he was a European Commissioner, an adviser both to Goldman Sachs, speculators extraordinaire, and to the infamous multinational Coca Cola, and he is close to the current president of the ECB, Mario Draghi. We can only guess whose interests he will be serving, albeit perhaps more efficiently than the corrupt clown who has just left office.

In Ireland too the government fell at the end of last year, and in the improvised elections that were held in February, an apparently schizophrenic coalition was elected: Labour (who in Ireland are to the right of Tony Blair) and Fine Gael, a firmly right-wing nationalist party who once even flirted with Nazism, even to the extent of sending men to fight for Franco. They reached office by promising all the usual lovely things that are promised during election campaigns. They promised that they would review the outgoing government’s accords with the ECB and renegotiate the rescue plan; they also swore they would not shift the load of the debt onto the shoulders of the poorer parts of society. And in fact,

All that was needed was a profound economic crisis and a little discontent among the people for Europe’s democracies to abandon their liberal facade and show themselves for what they really are: the dictatorship of large Capital. It doesn’t matter what the citizens think, the coup d’état in Greece, the nomination of technocrats to the government in Italy and the government in Ireland radio-controlled from Brussels, these are the best proof of the fact that not even in Europe will they hesitate to put aside their democratic formalism if the interests of the 1% are in danger. While the general discontent and popular mobilization grows, what will happen next?

When the Arab peoples began to agitate at the start of the year, European countries quickly began to distance themselves from the dictators they had been nursing for some time, in order to seize the flags of change that the people were demanding in the streets. By doing this, they sought to calm the clamour for social and economic demands and substitute them with cosmetic democratic reforms, as if the struggles of these peoples had not been about the right to bread but the right for access to the polls. There were some who accused the Europeans and their big brothers in Washington of hypocrisy: while they were “horrified” at the repression in Syria, they supported it openly in Bahrain and Yemen; while they waved the bugbear of radical Islamism in Yemen, they openly supported a regime of jihadists that was seeking to impose sharia law in Libya; while they were demanding the resignation of Assad, they closed one eye to the medieval monarchies of the Emirates, Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. It is absolutely no surprise, since the imperialists (and the USA and EU are imperialists in the classical sense of the term) never act unless it is for a goal that fits in with their own material and geopolitical interests. Hypocrites they may be, but their hypocrisy is fairly predictable.

Others also denounce hypocrisy on the part of the Europeans when they talk about “democracy”, seizing this concept too and deforming it at will, when what they were doing was carefully chan-

nelling the process of change in the Arab countries in a typically Leopard-esque way (“change everything in order to change nothing”), so that there would be no more open dictatorships but monitored “democracies”, with the army as the final custodian of the imperial interests. After all, the only freedom they know how to defend is the freedom of the market¹.

But there were also others again who corrected us saying that the European countries were not hypocrites, but merely contradictory: i.e., that it wasn't that they were not “democratic” in themselves, it was that they had one policy at home and another abroad. Foreign policy was naturally determined by their venal interests, whereas domestic policy was supposedly based on well-rooted democratic values.

It just needed the entrance onto the scene through the Puerta del Sol of the “indignados” in all their glory and majesty for this myth of a democratic Europe to explode. Western democracy, as some call it, works as long as no-one protests. As Chomsky has so dramatically demonstrated, in advanced capitalist societies the real mechanism of control is not so much the police baton as the creation of forced consensus by means of a stifling form of propaganda. Once the people decide to move outside the tight limits on democratic liberties by this small elite that governs, European democracy shows its teeth and imprisons, beats (no-one dares say torture, but it is also this) and even kills. It happened in Genoa ten years ago and it has happened several times in Greece, but the memories of European citizens are fragile things...

¹ On monitored democracies that are being set up under the patronage of the EU and the USA in countries which have deposed their dictators, see the articles I wrote some months ago: www.anarkismo.net and www.anarkismo.net

The Bankers Coup in Greece

Last week we witnessed a real coup d'état in Greece. When the “social democrat” George Papandreou took the crazy initiative of calling a referendum to decide whether Greece would continue to remain as part of the Euro zone, he was immediately pressurized into quitting. The pressure, naturally, did not come from the Greek people but from the mandarins of the European Union. Why is the EU against a referendum? What can be more democratic than a referendum, where the people get to have a direct say on policies that directly concern both them and the next three generations at least?

The EU's opinion on referendums is all too well known to anyone living in Ireland, where people twice voted against European Treaties (Nice in 2002 and Lisbon in 2008) and on each occasion were forced by Brussels to vote again after being threatened (and not in too roundabout terms) with all sorts of dire consequences ranging from expulsion from the EU to expulsion from the Eurovision Song Contest.

In Greece, they knew that they would have lost the referendum and so it was aborted in the most anti-democratic of ways, showing how they can force an entire people into remaining part of a commercial zone that is bleeding them to death with illegitimate, extortionate debt. They got rid of the social democratic Papandreou and substituted him, without any election, with a certain Lucas Papademos, ex-governor of the Bank of Greece until 2002, then vice-president of the European Central Bank and finally economic adviser to Papandreou. This is the man who was responsible for the transition from the drachma to the euro, who had a leading role in the irresponsible loans to Greek banks and, lastly, who personally promoted the failed economic policies of a government that brought an entire country to ruins. In other words, we are talking about the persons who alone is more responsible than any other for the mess that the Greeks find themselves in today. But the bankers