

Europe reacts to US election with fear and apprehension

By Peter Schwarz
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Europe is reacting to the American presidential election with a mixture of disgust, nervousness and fear. The many commentaries communicate a sense that a political turning point of historic proportions is taking place.

Many interpret the election as a prelude to the end of the trans-Atlantic alliance that has anchored European policy for the past 70 years. The political and military alliance with the US not only drew together imperialist powers that had fought each other in two world wars, it contributed to the stabilisation of Europe and containment of the class struggle.

The American election therefore augurs major new class struggles in Europe. The British *Financial Times* writes: “Rarely in a US presidential election has the choice been so stark and the stakes so high... The international order of the past 70 years is fraying, maybe even breaking down.”

The German *SpiegelOnline* notes: “Our world may still seem different from an earlier period of crashes and wars. There are, however, more and more parallels. A US President Trump could trigger a new global disaster.”

A Trump victory is regarded as the political equivalent of a nuclear power plant meltdown. There are various shades of opinion about the foreign policy of a Trump administration, but there is little doubt that his “America first” policy would have devastating consequences for Europe.

The European Council on Foreign Relations regards Trump as “an existential threat to the transatlantic alliance.” If he wins, according to a paper published October 12, “he will launch a revolutionary presidency--pulling back from NATO and other security guarantees, undermining key parts of the global free trade regime, and building closer relations

with strong-man leaders than with allies.”

The German weekly *Die Zeit*, usually a model of restraint, denounces Trump as a “foreign policy adventurer,” possibly even “a psychopath or fascist.”

The Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (Institute of Science and Politics) warns that “one can not rely on Trump’s unpredictability or extreme positions being ‘hedged in,’ whether by a consultative staff, the cabinet, the military or Congress.”

Fears of a Trump victory are also reflected in public opinion. One poll in Germany this week showed that only 4 percent would vote for Trump if they were eligible to vote in the US election. Some 77 percent said they would vote for Clinton. This is not due to any enthusiasm for the Democratic candidate, however, but rather an overriding desire to stop Trump.

Even among the political elite, enthusiasm for Hillary Clinton is limited. The *Financial Times* declares that Clinton is “despite her faults... eminently qualified to be the first woman in the White House,” but many other commentaries are more critical. They suggest that an electoral victory for Clinton would at best delay the conflicts associated with the rise to prominence of Trump.

Clinton’s aggressive attitude toward Russia and her warlike course in Syria are particularly repugnant to broad layers of the European population as well as sections of the ruling class. While the population fears that a military confrontation with Russia could turn Europe into a nuclear battlefield, the ruling class sees its economic and strategic interests at risk.

For example, any intensification of the current economic sanctions against Russia would hit many European countries hard and exacerbate conflicts within the European Union. A number of countries (Poland, Great Britain, the Baltic states) are fiercely

anti-Russian, while others (Italy, Greece, Hungary, in part Germany) are pushing for a loosening of existing sanctions and better relations.

“If the Germans and Americans fail to reach agreement on Russia and that centre ceases to hold,” the European Council on Foreign Relations warns, “transatlantic unity will break down and the Western approach to Russia will devolve into confusion.”

Many observers, however, realise that Trump is not the cause, but rather the result of a profound crisis of US capitalism that will only intensify under a President Clinton.

“But even in the event of a Clinton presidency,” the European Council on Foreign Relations document continues, “Europe would be foolish not to learn lessons from the experience of Trump’s candidacy. Trump represents only an extreme version of a growing feeling in the United States that, in a time of relative decline, the country is getting a raw deal from its allies. The partnership cannot persist along the current lines for too much longer. The promise of future elections fought along Trumpian lines means that America will likely become more self-centred and less predictable as an international partner, no matter who is president.”

The ruling classes of Europe understand this all the better because a similar development has taken place in Europe. Decades of attacks on the living standards of the working class, the unrestrained enrichment of a tiny financial oligarchy, and the disastrous consequences of the financial crisis of 2008 have brought class antagonisms to the breaking point.

As in the US, the established parties are largely discredited. Most European countries do not have such a rigorous two-party system as the US, where billionaires and millionaires set the tone for both the Republicans and the Democrats. But the policies of the various established parties in Europe are also virtually identical. They all represent the interests of finance, big business and the wealthy middle classes, i.e., the richest 10 percent.

In country after country, social democratic parties (the British Labor Party under Tony Blair, the Social Democratic Party under Gerhard Schröder, the Socialist Party under François Hollande) and pseudo-left parties (Syriza under Alexis Tsipras) have played the main role in attacking the rights of the working class. Those politically profiting from such policies are, in the main,

organizations and politicians of the far right. Many commentaries have drawn parallels between the European far right--the French National Front, the German AfD, the Austrian Freedom Party--and Donald Trump.

The comparison is justified. But, as in the US, the entire ruling class is moving to the right in Europe. Its only response to the global crisis of capitalism is militarism, the buildup of the state apparatus, and the whipping up of xenophobia and nationalism.

Twenty-five years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the world increasingly resembles the first half of the 20th century, when economic and social crises and conflicts between the imperialist powers triggered revolutionary class struggles and two world wars.

Only an independent intervention of the international working class can prevent the descent into a new catastrophe. Against this background, the election campaign of the Socialist Equality Party in the US assumes great importance. It is the only party in the elections with a socialist program to unite the working class in the struggle against capitalism. At the heart of the SEP campaign has been the building of an international movement against war.

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