

“It is easier to attack an immigrant than a banker” - Extreme right astonishing victories in European elections

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The unthinkable has happened: In the recent elections for the European Union, extreme wing parties won over 100 seats in 28 countries. The May elections confirmed the terrible political crisis striking all over Europe.

First, the Front National is rooting itself in French society. According to the polls, 43 percent of the workers who voted cast their ballot for the FN, as did 37 percent of the unemployed. Although the Socialist Party is in power, its lists attracted 8 percent of workers and 14 percent of the unemployed. One out of every three youth voted for the extreme right-wing anti-immigrant party.

Although some EU countries saw a growth in immigration since the Second World War, that growth has dramatically increased from the 1980s, particularly as people from developing countries sought refuge from war, oppression, natural disasters or poverty. In northern Europe, right-wing party formations specialize in populism, anti-immigrant and Islamophobic hysteria.

Today most European countries have sizable immigrant populations, including Pakistani immigrants. In fact, the two countries where Pakistanis are most concentrated, the United Kingdom and Denmark, have seen a sharp rise of anti-immigrant parties. The United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP), a right-wing party, came first with 27 percent of votes cast.

In Denmark the People's Party also won 27 percent of the vote while the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) scored more than 20 percent. “Anti-Europe” parties – as in Germany, Poland or Sweden – were strengthened. Overtly fascist organizations like Golden Dawn in Greece, which won nearly 10 percent, or Jobbik in Hungary, which amassed nearly 15 percent and beat the social democrats, continue to flourish.

Contributing to the victories of these anti-immigrants/Islamophobic parties is a shift in the workers' movement. Its goal of seeking to better the lives of all workers is fuzzy and has led to being attracted to right-wing ideology. As the workers' movement weakened in the face of the economic crisis, social identity also weakens. It is usually replaced by national identity, and gives way to social tension. In this situation racism can run wild in sectors of the popular classes. There is a saying that “It is easier to attack an immigrant than a banker.”

During terms of office for both conservative and social democratic governments they implemented the neoliberal policy of austerity. As a result there has been massive voter abstention and setbacks for both the traditional right and the social democracy.

However there are exceptions with the rise of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Having suffered decades of dictatorship under Franco and Salazar, Spain and Portugal has no neo-fascist formations.

In The Netherlands, the fall in the vote for the Islamophobic party led by Wilders has been attributed to the country's economic upturn. Finland also saw a decrease in the "True Finns" vote; in Flanders (Belgium) the far right Vlams Belang found their vote fall, albeit to the benefit of the Neo-Flemish Alliance, which is pro-independence and conservative.

This isn't the first time in the history of Europe that people have faced the rise of the extreme right. In the economic crisis of the 1930s, it became necessary for the capitalists to ensure their profits by the super-exploitation of labor. This reason, along with the propulsive and force of the Russian revolution, led the dominant classes to choose the fascist option.

Rising Tensions

The current Ukrainian crisis and possible national dislocations in central Europe bring to mind the nationalist confrontations prior to the war of 1914-18. Of course, the situations are not comparable. Unlike the earlier period, the European bourgeoisie chooses integration into capitalist globalization. Secondly, the capitalist class is completely integrated into the parliamentary game. Lastly, it doesn't perceive any revolutionary threats that would force it to choose a fascist solution. Clearly Italy's National Alliance has broken with its fascist ties.

In France, the Front national combines "leadership" and the "neo-fascist matrix" with objectives of integration into the traditional political game. Certainly the FN has evolved, both in terms of its themes and its leaders. This is no longer the fascist organization of the 1980s. Yet it has not repudiated its neo-fascist origins and matrix. On the one hand the FN is "de-demonized" but on the other hand it includes openly fascist currents inside and at its margins. The FN's rise provokes a double phenomenon: a pressure on the traditional right and a space where extra-parliamentary fascist groups attack the activists of all left forces.

There are group in this category of "populists" the so-called "Europhobe" formations like UKIP in Britain, the Alternative for German (AfD), or the "Law and Justice" party in Poland. Across this nationalist and populist spectrum, there are fascist segments that under certain circumstances of sharpening social and political conflict can go on the offensive against immigrants and democratic organizations. The situation in Greece, with the development of Golden Dawn, illustrates the role of these gangs against the left and immigrants.

Whereas the dominant classes need in power stable parties or coalitions seeking integration in the world economy— the parties of the parliamentary traditional right or social democracy— they in a period of profound political destabilization they are faced with an upsurge of nationalist, populist or neo-fascist parties. What would, for example, be the consequence of the rise of the UKIP in Britain? This might lead to its exit from the European Union. And what would the EU be without the UK? This instability, brought on by neoliberalism, could lead to the dissolution of the EU, which is not what the elite want to see. This long phase of economic, social and political decomposition of European societies, can lead to unforeseen situations in which the extreme right might grab power.

The traditional right wing suffered a reversal; nonetheless it has confirmed its majority in the European Parliament with 213 deputies against 190 for the European Socialist Party. In alliance with liberal and centrist forces, it will control the next Parliament.

The German Christian Democracy continues to hold the political leadership of the European right and sets the policies and governments of national unity, in concert with the social liberal left, in several countries. Coalitions among the right, center and neoliberal left function in Germany, The Netherlands, Austria, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Belgium and Finland. It remains the axis of domination.

But beyond these results, the traditional parliamentary right is weakened and fragmented. First there is no consensus on the question of Europe itself. Some call for optimum integration in the EU, others are “Eurosceptic” forces and under pressure from the extreme right.

The Christian Democratic parties—along with certain popular right and various centrist parties—often top the polls but are no longer anything but electoral machines. Faced with the pressure of the extreme right and its brand of nationalism, the right radicalizes and fragments. It radicalizes under the influence of the far right parties, notably on questions of immigration yet fragments between a “hard right” and sectors that seek to ally with the center, attracted by social democracy. Of course another factor is corruption. In France the UMP leadership is tormented by corruption scandals that weaken it— to the benefit of the Front National.

What progressive role can immigrant communities play in these countries? First, they need to recognize that they are in the eye of the storm. The EU election results will bring destabilization and hardship, not peace and harmony. The immigrant community must prepare to stand with workers’ movements, trade unions and progressive parties. Immigrant communities can revitalize them and build a movement that refuses to pit workers against each other.

Immigrant communities have voted for the traditional social democratic parties in Europe. However with the collapse of most of these, new formations have emerged that are willing to defend immigrant communities. The Coalition of the Radical Left, popularly known as Syriza, won over 26 percent of the votes in the recent EU election, thus beating the social democrats and conservatives. The bulk of the Pakistani immigrants living in Greece voted for Syriza. This is a model for what needs to happen throughout the European countries if the immigrant community is to have an honorable life.

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P.S.

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