



# For a Socialist United States of Europe!

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The offensive against the European working class needs a co-ordinated response. Mark Abram outlines the socialist alternative to Maastricht - the United States of Europe!

Of the 'factors of production' the working class in Europe is less mobile, less internationalised, than capital. Only two million workers (i.e. less than 2% out of a workforce of 160 million) work permanently in an EC country of which they are not a national. The undeveloped character of international trade union and political organisations reflects this objective fact, a fact which puts the European proletariat at a great disadvantage to the bourgeoisie.

Whereas the EU bosses and governments have rationalised their coal and steel and shipbuilding industries by common consent, the workers have only achieved fitful acts of solidarity?usually rank and file initiatives, deprived of official support.

The European working class reflects this lack of 'Europeanisation' in its ideological backwardness, its spontaneous tendency over the last twenty years to be more anti-European than the bosses. Whilst in part prompted by wariness over the social cost of European union, this anti-European sentiment has also been strengthened by the left reformist advocates of dead-end economic nationalism.

The working class in Europe is not just nationally divided. It also includes seven million non-EU nationals, deprived of citizenship, often super-exploited and subject to state and non-state racism and harassment.

In addition, the effects of Maastricht have had differential effects on sectors of workers. While some workers have lost their jobs as a result of the rationalisation of the heavy industrial sectors, or due to take-overs aided by the Single European Act (SEA), other workers have benefited from the arrival of structural funds and the creation of jobs, that would not otherwise have been created.

The working class as a whole should not take a position for or against the Maastricht Treaty in referendums since the opposition to it is opposition to one form of capitalist development and in favour of another. Each of these forms of development have anti-working class implications and these must be resisted by the working class.

But it would be disastrous for the working class in any European country to line up behind one section of the bourgeoisie or another, to espouse protectionism and so on. This would fatally undermine the independence of the workers, and destroy the chances of effective international solidarity between sections of workers.

If we abstract from the differences between EU countries the stably employed sectors of European workers enjoy the shortest hours, longest holidays, highest pay and highest social benefits of any workers in the OECD. Yet at the same time the EU has the highest rate of unemployment?11% or 17 million?of the three major imperialist blocs.

These two social facts are of the greatest significance for the future course of the European labour movement.

There is a great danger that the unions will come to represent only narrow layers of a 'labour aristocracy?', while the mass of unorganised unemployed are alienated from them and even be used against them.

The official European-wide trade union organisation of the working class?the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)?is not a fighting organisation of the proletariat but an ultra bureaucratic lobbying machine on the European

Commission.

It claims to represent some 47 million workers, gathered in 45 national trade union confederations in 22 European countries (i.e. 95% of all unionised workers in these countries). It was in its origin and practice fiercely 'anti-communist', aiding and abetting pro-capitalist ideologies in the workers' states.

In Europe it has seen its role as representing the working class in the corridors of Brussels and Strasbourg. Armed with Articles 2, 117 and 118 of the Treaty of Rome, the ETUC has called upon the bosses 'to improve employment opportunities for workers and to contribute to the raising of their standard of living' and to improve the working conditions and social security systems.

Since the Single European Act and Maastricht, the ETUC has concentrated upon trying to get the Social Charter attached to the various binding inter-governmental agreements. The Social Charter or 'Community Charter on the Basic Social Rights of Workers' was adopted by all EC countries (except Britain) at the December 1989 EC summit in Strasbourg.

From the side of the bosses and the Commission it is intended to establish a minimum level of labour conditions so that countries cannot outbid one another for capital investment by offering conditions far below their neighbours. Germany in particular, saddled by the surviving post-war 'social partnership', wants a level playing field. Thus whilst it undoubtedly wants to attack its own workers it also wants other European bourgeoisies to 'level up'.

Seen from the side of the trade union bureaucracy, it is a social democratic guarantee that workers' living standards will be protected, that working conditions will be levelled up to the best existing standards across the continent. It is a reformist utopia.

The Charter was not even made a binding part of the Maastricht Treaty and must be acted out in the form of specific directives on each member country. Since 1992, of the 47 provisions, only the most trivial have been approved and with most 'on youth protection, sub-contracting, lay-off procedures etc.' there has been no progress.

Matters concerning immigration, social protection, workers' representation, laws on dismissals all need unanimity to pass. Qualified majority voting (whereby no one imperialist power can veto a new measure) only applies to matters of health and safety provision.

Meanwhile, those issues most sensitive to the bosses throughout the EU 'wage levels, union rights, the right to strike and lockouts' remain outside the terms of the Treaty altogether.

The Social Charter is in no sense whatsoever a programme for a workers' Europe and the ETUC is not an organisation that can draw up or fight for such a programme.

But the existing forms of cross-border rank and file trade union organisations are very weak.

In the 1960s and 1970s the various car plants within the US automobile multinationals were able to establish some shop stewards' level organisation (e.g. the Fords Combine).

Episodically practical solidarity movements have arisen (e.g. during the British miners' strike in 1984-85), but without leaving anything significant in its wake.

However, the French strike wave of late 1995 indicates an important counter-trend. The French workers, whose most militant sectors are under the leadership of the fiercely 'anti-European' (and patriotic) Communist Party and CGT union federation, nevertheless did not raise anti-EU/Maastricht slogans to the fore in this struggle. Indeed the CGT organised a joint demonstration in northern France with a visiting delegation from Germany's biggest and most militant union IG-Metall. Demonstrators chanted the slogan of a European general strike.

The French press interestingly called this the 'first revolt against globalisation'. If so national isolationism was not at

all in evidence.

Nor have recent examples of international links been restricted to Europe. The solidarity gained by the Liverpool dockers' strike of 1995/96 from their US and Australian counterparts was accompanied by declarations from them that 'if capital is global then labour must go global too?.'

What is needed is a conscious project to build these links at every level and to build links with the workers' movements in other continents at rank and file level. The initiative for this will come, as it always has done, from the most politically conscious part of the working class: its revolutionary vanguard.

In an increasingly pan-European industrial and service sector such links and rank and file organisations can and must be built up: to collect information, pierce the veil of business secrecy, disrupt the plans of the bosses to play one plant off against another.

Over the next year each national bourgeoisie will aim to convince its workers that their proposal for a Europe a la carte, multi-speed Europe, twin-track Europe etc. is in their best interests.

All this must be rejected. We advocate neither a united imperialist Europe exploiting the world and clashing increasingly with its rival blocks (NAFTA and Japan) nor for 'independent' rival European imperialisms, racing against each other to introduce South East Asian conditions in the labour market whilst stoking up nationalism amongst the working class.

The workers of Europe must establish their class independence from both their national capitalists and from the institutions of a would-be European imperialist superstate.

But workers should use the heightened transnational consciousness in Europe to actively build organisations and links from below, to make propaganda and agitation for the kind of demands outlined above and to attack all the existing reactionary legislation and constitutions of the EC states.

Across Europe we should fight for common economic and transitional demands:

' For a sliding scale of wages and for a legally enforceable minimum wage. For a system of universal benefits (sickness, unemployment and retirement pensions) starting from the best examples already gained by workers across Europe. For workers' control of the welfare funds which are only a deferred portion of wages created by their own labour as well as a legal guarantee that none fall below the minimum wage. No to the Plan Juppé and all the equivalents in the EU. Solidarity with all workers struggling against attacks on their existing social gains.

' An urgent campaign, organised by the trade unions, to fight growing unemployment. By the year 2000 if we do not stop it, employment levels will be over six times higher than in the 1970s. Workers in work can start by fighting for a drastic reduction of the working week to a legally enforceable 35 hours throughout the EC and in each plant and combine fight to impose within the plant workers' control over hiring and firing and the hours worked.

' The threat of dismissal must be met with the demand for a sliding scale of hours to divide out the work available. The majority of new jobs being created in Europe are on short-term contracts, are often only part-time and where the employers restrict or deny union rights. The necessity for 100% trade unionism goes alongside the fight to show that unions can win permanent contracts and full-time status wherever this is wanted by the workforce. End short term contracts. For a legally enforceable right to security of employment.

' Down with anti-trade union laws designed to shackle resistance to convergence measures; for rank and file links in all industries. For the unconditional right to strike: no compulsory state organised ballots, no cooling-off periods or legal delays

' For the free movement of all workers within and into Europe open the borders! For the right to political asylum.

Down with all immigration controls! Down with the TREVI and Schengen treaties!

? Not a penny for a European police force or a European army?down with NATO and the Western European Union!

? All NATO and UN troops out of Bosnia and the republics of former Yugoslavia.

? Down with the unelected European Commission and Council of Ministers.

? For the election of a sovereign European Constituent Assembly from all countries of the EU and for all those seeking to join it?convened and protected by the fighting organisations of the working class.

No to the bosses? Europe. Yes to a Europe of the workers?open to all the workers of the world. Only workers? revolution and workers? council states can unify Europe on a progressive basis.

? For the Socialist United States of Europe?a federation of revolutionary workers? states open to all peoples who wish to join it.

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