

The undemocratic and class character of the European Union

The CPI has been opposed to the Common Market since its inception and in particular since the whole of the country joined (the Republic as an independent state and the North as part of the British state). There continues to be a debate within the European labour movement over whether a “United States of Europe” is good or bad for working people. The economic forces driving EU integration—the people who really make these decisions—do not use such categories as “good” or “bad”: their values are based upon the maximisation of profits, market share, market penetration, labour availability, and global strategies of domination. Their economic and political class interests guide them.

The development of the Common Market in the 1950s and the process of its gradual development into what is now proposed—a strong, centralised European superstate—was and is driven by European monopoly capitalism. This is tied closely to and dependent upon the big nation-states, in particular the former European imperial powers that lost their colonies after the Second World War: France, Germany, Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

European monopoly capitalism needed both to break and to combine and strengthen the European nation-states into one unit in order to streamline investment, production, and the movement of goods, to establish a larger market, to consolidate labour resources, and to create a more friendly business environment. As separate economic powers they were not and are not capable of competing with American capital on their own, because of that country’s population, its vast natural resources, the scale and level of development of its productive forces, and its military power and domination. They also needed the concentration of capital to compete with Japanese capital for similar reasons.

The United States both welcomed and encouraged closer co-operation between European states in the initial phase as a bulwark against the perceived threat from the Soviet Union and the growing strength of working-class forces in post-war Europe and the role those forces played in the defeat of fascism. The contradiction between keeping socialism at bay and building up a potential economic and political competitor is now very apparent.

We are witnessing the development of these contradictions between the United States and the the European Union as the United States attempts to build and consolidate its influence in eastern Europe. It is attempting to have a subservient ally in relation to the European Union, using its political influence within a number of present and future member-states. This is to prevent the European Union emerging as a potential threat to its world imperial hegemony; it is using the tactic of divide and rule in the form of the “Old Europe” and “New Europe.”

European monopoly capitalism has many shared interests with US imperialism but does not want to be treated as a junior partner but rather as an equal in the overall strategy of global imperial domination. The division that emerged between Germany and France on the one hand and the United States over Iraq is a reflection of those tensions and potential

divisions and dangers in the future.

The expansion of the European Union eastwards is motivated by self-interest and the consolidation primarily around Germany, with France playing a junior role, to extend their control. It was also motivated by their desire to minimise the influence of the United States, while another underlying factor was the interest of the ruling class throughout Europe in blocking any way back to a socialist path of development by these former socialist societies. Parallel with this strategy is the naked economic advantage to be gained. They wish to control and dominate these low-wage economies, secure new markets, and exploit their resources and infrastructure.

Neo-liberalism is now the dominant economic philosophy within the European Union. A reflection of this dominance is the fact that the central thrust of the Single European Act (1987), Maastricht Treaty (1992), Amsterdam Treaty (1998) and Nice Treaty (2003) remains intact. These treaties are now to be totally repealed and superseded by the proposed EU Constitution Treaty as the legal, political and constitutional basis of the European Union.

Throughout the European Union, with the backing of the Commission, governments, including the Irish government, have been commodifying and privatising services in accordance with neo-liberal dogma and the proposed GATS regulations and the Lisbon Tasks. This, while simultaneously enriching a few, represents an attack on the living standards of the majority of working people.

Anti-democratic structures

The EU rules are about ever-increasing uniformity and the centralisation and homogeneity of decision-making. They are the conduit through which the neo-liberal social and economic model is being institutionalised in Europe. They are also carried through into its global relations with other countries, particularly developing countries. Policies favouring public enterprise as against private enterprise are legally forbidden by the proposed EU Constitution. No other model of social and economic development is to be considered or allowed.

The Commission has all the powers over economic policy. None of the bodies exercising power in the European Union are answerable to the voters, unlike the situation in member-states, where executive bodies are responsible under the national constitution. Economic integration and the concentration of capital within the European Union have steadily increased, as have trade and the movement of capital between EU member-states.

We will be caught in their gravitational pull. As power is removed and transferred to the EU level, the impact of this is an undermining of democracy at the national level and the building of an enclosed system at the EU level. This is increasing the distance between those who govern and those who are governed.

This process is concerned with removing political and economic decisions from popular democratic debate and influence. The whole process is about removing essential economic, fiscal and political decisions from the realm of national class struggles. This will ensure that such issues as poverty, unemployment, economic investment priorities and public ownership at the national level become mere technical issues, to be solved by committees of experts or consultants. Lobbyists for transnational capital are able to ensure that their interests are well catered for. Calls for more powers for the EU Parliament will not mean more democracy but less democracy. The whole process is geared towards blocking both the democratic and socialist objectives of the labour movement.

Increasingly, the governments of EU member-states will fulfil the role of territorial administrators and guardians of the repressive apparatus on behalf of the EU superstate. This is reflected in a number of ways, particularly with the establishment of Europol, a common arrest warrant, and the automatic extradition to another member-state even if the crime an individual is alleged to have committed is not illegal in his or her home country. There will be no necessity to provide evidence against the accused.

European Directive 30/5/02 allows state agencies to track what individuals are accessing on the internet and to intercept phone, fax and e-mail communications. They do not need a court order or permission, nor do they need to suspect a person of having committed an offence. This is clearly about political control of dissent. The agreed EU definition of terrorism as “intentional acts destabilising the fundamental political, constitutional, economic and social structures” could be and no doubt will be used against workers who are involved in industrial action in a wide range of services, particularly state employees.

The whole process is about “controlled democracy.” The EU Council of Ministers has the power to ban political parties from speaking in the European Parliament. The Council of Ministers can also remove public funding from parties that refuse to develop a “European awareness.” This controlled democracy functions by diktat in the form of directives to national parliaments without discussion or debate—like city and county managers imposing directives and rules, without any opportunity or ability by local government or local communities to change or influence them. An example of this is the directive in relation to waste incineration in the Republic.

The forces driving European integration are the economic and political elites representative of European monopolies. This integration is totally lacking in democratic legitimacy. The role of the left in relation to this process must be to give a lead to struggles against the subversion of democracy that is involved, always taking into account the specific conditions and history of each country.

The draft Constitutional Treaty continues to be foisted on the peoples of Europe, despite being democratically rejected by both the French and Dutch people. This is just another example of the elites’ subversion of democracy. They need to secure its adoption, as it will place working people throughout the European Union in a straitjacket and erect even higher barriers in the struggles for democracy and social progress.

Complicating the struggle for social and national justice

The continuing integration within the European Union poses serious questions for Irish democrats. Can the needs of our people be met within the economic straitjacket of this new emerging superstate? Can the European Union deliver democracy and accountability? Can it deliver the changes that such a democratic struggle demands without unravelling or changing the nature of the union itself?

A new layer has been added to the struggle for national democracy in that we must now battle to win back areas already conceded to the European Union, without which it is impossible to advance to a socially progressive Ireland. We recognise that we need to open up new areas of struggle for more flexible forms of co-operation in a Europe of democracies and diversity.

The Irish struggle for national democracy and independence has been made progressively more complicated and difficult as many of the powers of an independent, sovereign Ireland have been transferred to the EEC and European Union. This has meant in practice that, in addition to the struggles for civil rights, democracy, community reconciliation, and social progress, Irish national democratic forces have had to confront and battle against the erosion of Irish democracy that has come with involvement in the European Union. This has proved to be a very difficult battle, as was illustrated by the manoeuvres of the ruling class after their defeat in the first Nice Treaty referendum.

We would welcome the break-up of the European Union, but the possibility of that happening at this time is slim, particularly as Ireland, one of the smaller member-states, would be vulnerable to the economic consequences. If one or more of the bigger countries were to withdraw, that would open up a completely new scenario. Our strategic position is to work for its break-up, but we must develop tactics that bring new forces into play and defend Irish national interests. This presents new challenges to those forces that share our understanding of the European Union.

We need to develop strategies for exploiting the inherent contradictions within the whole process, thereby leading to a situation where the character of the European Union itself changes. We need to develop the contradictions between democracy and diktat, between the interests of monopoly capitalism and those of working people. The democratic and the class question are interrelated and intertwined.

Our party has gained much experience from the struggle to build the civil rights movement in the North of Ireland. We know that the demands for democracy and democratic reforms exposed the inherently anti-democratic nature of the Unionist regime and began the break-up of unionism.

This requires us to make demands that involve democratic opinion in general and working people in particular to expose these contradictions. The CPI believes that the European Union is not accountable and cannot deliver democracy. The needs of the

people cannot be met within the economics of the European Union.

It is our view that there is no benign European imperialism. There is no European superstate that could be built to combat and confront aggressive US imperialism that of itself is not imperialist. From our analysis of the class character of the forces involved and the interests propelling us towards a new centralised imperial superstate, the current direction of the European Union is not in the interests of Irish workers nor, we believe, in the best interests of workers throughout Europe.

Defending and extending international and regional democracy

It is our view that an anti-monopoly, democratic alliance needs to be built here in Ireland to work with other democratic forces within the European Union and other European states. We believe that the following demands would form the basis of that alliance:

- To internationalise the struggle for national democracy and not leave it to the parties and chauvinistic forces of the right
- To fight for policies that are centred on mutual solidarity between peoples and nations
- To have more flexible relations between the different nations and states of Europe, to work towards relations that are built upon respect for national independence and national sovereignty
- That international or regional regulations should be introduced only in problem areas that cannot be solved by individual states
- That national parliaments or peoples alone determine what powers should be exercised at the international or regional level
- To fight for a more flexible economic model of policies and co-operation in Europe
- To struggle for controls on capital and on its ability to exploit regional differences within the European Union as it now stands
- To defend the gains of the working class in relation to social provisions
- To build alliances against the privatisation of services, such as water, health, education, and other social services
- To withdraw from the “Partnership for Peace”
- To scrap the Rapid Reaction Force
- To engage in an ideological struggle against the spurious and artificial “European values.”

In spite of Europe’s shared cultural heritage, the violent history of plunder, slavery, colonialism and wars of the European elites must be exposed. They have no right to claim that human rights or democratic concerns are especially characteristic of the European continent. We are faced with either taking the course of compromise and compliance with the EU elites’ strategy or that of struggle and resistance.