On the Crisis in Europe

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Europe is currently in turmoil. Its streets are populated almost exclusively by protesters and police. Commercial and social activity has come to a near standstill; schools are devoid of students, and factories and industrial plants lie idle. This is not limited to one or two nations; a similar situation is unfolding across several countries and cities throughout Europe. During the day, clashes erupt between demonstrators and the police. As the police deploy tear gas, water cannons, and batons, the public retaliates by hurling stones. Large shops, closed throughout the day, are taken over by protesters as evening falls. People could be seen freely grabbing whatever they could find inside those stores and running off, with no one, neither shop staff nor police, present to intervene. The police appear helpless. This is a brief glimpse of the unrest currently sweeping across Europe.

This movement is taking place in the southwestern region of Europe—home to ancient civilisations and nations considered both developed and prosperous. Countries currently experiencing intense protests include France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Albania, Austria, and Greece. The unrest is spreading to other nations, including Germany and Serbia, with no sign of subsiding soon. There is no central coordinating body leading these movements, nor are they being orchestrated in a planned manner by any revolutionary political party. This movement is, in essence, an instinctive, and spontaneous expression of the long-simmering resentment among young students, reformist trade unions, and the ordinary working people.

Student protests, which began at an ordinary rural school in France, initially sparked by awful classroom conditions and a shortage of teachers, have now spread across the entire country. Police and protesters are clashing in the streets. So far, four people have died during protests in France. On September 27, a 14-year-old boy suffered a extricated jaw after being struck by a grenade fired at close range by a police officer. On September 29, a police officer was reported to have choked a 14-year-old girl, while a young man had his hand severed after being hit by a police-fired grenade. Paris's historic, 143-year-old town hall has been reduced to ashes, and there is no count of how many vehicles have been set ablaze on the streets. It is estimated that over a million people took to the streets on October 17 during protests in major French cities, including Paris, Marseille, Lyon, and Bordeaux. Reports indicate that the government deployed 70 thousand police officers for the demonstrations held yesterday, Saturday. To date, 3 thousand 4 hundred protesters have been arrested, while more than 1 thousand 2 hundred police officers have reportedly been injured during confrontations with the protesters. The core demands of the demonstrators relate to basic livelihood issues: reversing the government's decision to cut public spending, increasing the social security fund, boosting state investment in education and healthcare, curbing inflation, and raising wages etc.

In Italy, hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets over issues concerning inflation, low wages, the high cost of healthcare, and housing. Clashes between protesters and the police have begun to break out in cities such as Rome, Milan, Turin, and Bologna. In Spain, the core demands of the movement include wage increases, control of inflation, and improved, and affordable access to housing. The movement has intensified further following the eviction of an 87-year-old woman named Maricarmen from the rented home where she had spent nearly her entire life, on the grounds of non-payment of rent. In Belgium, protesters are focusing their opposition on government budget cuts to public spending and rising prices. In Portugal, the protesters are demanding higher wages and lower housing rents. Similarly, in Albania, Austria, Greece, and Germany, protesters are calling for the reversal of government decisions to cut public spending, a reduction in the cost of living, wage increases, and improvements to education and healthcare. It appears that the protesters' demands are similar across these countries; all of them are linked to people's basic livelihood.

It is perhaps a coincidence that the major European nations currently experiencing intense social unrest are the very same countries where capitalism first developed. Alongside the United Kingdom, these nations include France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, and Portugal. As capitalism reached its highest stage, these nations transformed into imperialist powers. History is a witness that these imperialist states established colonies across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The aforesaid

Western European nations are considered economically prosperous; the prosperity gained primarily upon the vast wealth plundered from their colonies.

The labour movement in Europe had been strong ever since the rise of capitalism. Following the success of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917, the European labour movement attained significant momentum. Fearing the implications of this, imperialist rulers began using a small fraction of the wealth looted from their colonies to exert financial influence over the revolutionary leaders of the labour movement. Consequently, the labour movement gradually shifted away from the objective of establishing proletarian power, narrowing its focus instead to reformist demands. Lenin termed this "trade unionism" and strongly opposed it. Thus, the infiltration of the labour movement by imperialism paved the way for the emergence of revisionism within the communist movement.

Following the Great Depression of 1929, unemployment surged across capitalist nations. This did not merely trigger an economic crisis; it created structural problems within the capitalist economic system itself. Meanwhile, influenced by the Russian Socialist Revolution, revolutionary movements began to advance throughout Europe. It became very difficult to suppress the socialist movement and sustain the existing social order using only traditional, and liberal-democratic methods. In an effort to shield capitalism from the influence of socialist Russia, Adolf Hitler, an adherent of ultra-nationalist ideology, established the National Socialist German Workers' Party in 1920 in Germany. Similarly, Benito Mussolini, who had a socialist background, founded the National Fascist Party in Italy in 1921. Just one year after assuming leadership of his party, in 1922, Mussolini became the Prime Minister of Italy. Likewise, in 1933, Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany. Both of their objectives were to dismantle the liberal democracies that had emerged following the First World War and to establish fascist empires globally through war. The Second World War began on September 1, 1939. However, the fascist powers faced mounting defeats. Mussolini was shot and killed on April 28, 1945, while Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945. The Second World War concluded after Japan surrendered in August 1945 and formally signed the instrument of surrender on September 2, 1945.

The Second World War, initiated to destroy the Soviet Union and expand fascist empires worldwide, resulted not only in the defeat of the fascists themselves but also in the emergence of a significantly more powerful socialist bloc globally. In 1949, the New Democratic Revolution was accomplished in China, and socialist states were established in Eastern European nations, namely Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Yugoslavia. The economic devastation left in the wake of World War, the growing appeal of Stalin, the triumphant hero of the Second World War and leader of the world proletariat, and the victory of socialism in China and Eastern Europe posed a formidable ideological, political, and economic challenge to imperialist rulers. To reconstruct 17 war-torn European nations, revitalise the European economy, and contain the spread of socialism, the United States introduced the $13 billion Marshall Plan in 1948. Furthermore, the Keynesian mixed economy and the welfare capitalist model were promoted to mislead people influenced by socialism.

Under this model, most economic aspects of scientific socialism were incorporated, mainly in Europe, in their policy, while the ideological and political aspects were set aside. Pro-people schemes including free healthcare, free education and scholarships, unemployment benefits, social security allowances, maternity and child-rearing support, and adequate pensions for retired employees were implemented. These economic programmes were introduced specifically to counter the influence of socialism. Meanwhile, on April 4, 1949, a military alliance, NATO, was formed under the leadership of the United States to defend mainly Europe against potential aggression from the socialist bloc. Although it was said that all member nations would share the expenses, the major burden fell upon the United States, and this situation persists to this day. More recently, Trump has exerted significant pressure on Europe to increase its financial contributions to NATO.

Given that American imperialism took on the responsibility of defending Europe against threats from the socialist bloc, European rulers did not have to be concerned more about their own security. Furthermore, possession of wealth seized from former colonies, along with a workforce highly skilled in science and technology, allowed European life to continue with relative ease for some time. European leaders lived a rest assured life, failing to foresee the challenges that lay ahead. After

several decades, situation began to change. In the 1970s, the global economy collapsed due to a severe economic crisis. To avert this crisis, imperialist powers introduced neoliberalism, which pushed markets into a realm of global competition. Other countries began producing goods that were both cheaper and of better quality than those manufactured in Europe. Unable to hold their own in global market competition, European industries gradually withered away and European markets flooded with Chinese goods. Meanwhile, America's global dominance also began to gradually decline. All of these developments served as alarm bells for Europe.

Against this backdrop, Europe's economy gradually weakened due to several factors: pressure from the United States to increase NATO spending; a decline in domestic production; disruptions in fuel imports from Russia caused by the war in Ukraine; the growing appeal of Chinese goods in European markets; rising costs associated with the Ukraine conflict as the U.S. began to scale back its involvement; and the multi-dimensional inflation triggered by fuel supply linked to recent tensions between Iran and the U.S. The depletion of accumulated wealth originally plundered during the colonial era, and the end of colonialism following the Second World War contributed to this decline further. This represents the internal dimension of Europe's current crisis.

Meanwhile, as sources of national revenue dwindled and expenditure requirements grew, governments across Europe resorted to borrowing from financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to cover their expenses. Consequently, public debt reached significant levels: 119.1% of GDP in France, 139.9% in Italy, 101.4% in Spain, 140.8% in Greece, and 110.2% in Belgium. To ensure the repayment of these loans, the IMF and the World Bank started exerting intense pressure on these governments to cut national spending and adopt austerity measures. Under this pressure, governments began drafting budgets that slashed public services and benefits previously enjoyed by their citizens, to secure the funds necessary to repay their debts to the IMF and the World Bank. Thus, the visible causes behind the current crisis in Europe are the soaring cost of living, which places a crushing burden on the general public, and the government's gradual reduction in public facilities. It is a clear confirmation of what Marx and Engels wrote in the Communist Manifesto: that the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

To resolve this problem, one must identify its underlying causes. They are the inherent contradictions of capitalism. Neoliberalism brought these contradictions to the surface. In other words, the current crisis in Europe is the result of the European ruling class's efforts to safeguard corporate profits, an attempt to compensate for the losses incurred from the 2008 economic recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent inflation at the expense of the proletariat. Although this crisis has now erupted in Europe, the fire of this crisis is smouldering across the entire globe, whether in imperialist countries or the oppressed nations. The only solution to this crisis is a scientific socialist revolution, led by the proletariat and guided by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

At this juncture, a question comes up: how far will the current movement in Europe go? This is an important question. The 'Unite Communist', an organisation formed in France to unite genuine communists to build a revolutionary communist party, has issued a statement on October 14 concerning the ongoing movement in France. The statement writes, "It is clear that the current movement will not lead to revolution. There is no crisis severe enough among the masses or within the bourgeoisie, nor is there a Communist Party capable of leading the masses in their struggle. In this regard, the current movement is politically and ideologically dominated by the reformist parliamentary and labour union left. But the current movement is full of hope. It is one of many signs that we are moving toward radical changes within the next decade or decades." This assessment is correct.

The spontaneous protests erupted not only in oppressed nations but also in underdeveloped and developed countries, in general, and most notably the current movements in Europe, in particular, suggest that conditions for the proletarian revolution are becoming increasingly favourable, even within developed capitalist nations. In the past, based on the analysis of the characteristics of 'welfare capitalism,' Mao identified Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the 'storm centres' of revolution. Today, however, neoliberal capitalism is driving not only oppressed nations but also developed capitalist

countries toward a deep economic crisis. Consequently, it is no longer just the nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, oppressed by imperialism, that are storm centres of revolution; but developed capitalist nations unable to compete on the global stage are also becoming storm centres of revolution. The fact that the United States, once the initiator of neoliberalism, now leans toward protectionism, while China has embraced neoliberalism, is highly noteworthy. It signals a paradigm shift in the previous situation and concept. Within the contemporary international communist movement, revolutionary communist parties must pay close attention to this transformation and focus on developing the line, strategy, and tactics for a proletarian revolution.

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