November 14; support grows for Europe-wide general strikes

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All Together! All Together! Yes! Yes! Yes!

November 14 is a date to put in every activist's diary. On that day, there will be one-day general strikes by the big union federations in Portugal, Spain, Greece, Italy, France, Malta and Cyprus. And the list is not closed. Unions, youth organisations and social movements are mobilising in Belgium and in other countries in Western and Eastern Europe.

Even the conservative bureaucracy of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) which has hitherto shamefully supported the debt repayment programmes of the European Union, is calling for actions in solidarity with the various general strikes. Its executive, meeting in Brussels on October 17, also called for a day of action and solidarity on November 14, encouraging strikes, demonstrations, rallies and other actions?.

Not quite a pan-European general strike - but something which points in that direction.

At the moment, the mobilisations are strongest in southern Europe, where the effects of the crisis and the European Union-imposed austerity are greater. The initiative for November 14 came last month from Portugal's largest trade union, CGTP, which called a general strike on that date against exploitation and impoverishment?.

Then Spain's unions - Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras, the Unión General de Trabajadores and the smaller federations, announced they will join in on November 14 and ?celebrate the first Iberian general strike?. This comes against a background of a wave of protests against the 2013 State Budget, expected to include €39 billion in additional spending cuts and tax increases.

In Greece, the largest federation, the General Confederacy of Greek Workers (GSEE) has pledged another general strike will be held on November 14.

In Italy, according to organisers, 100,00 demonstrated in Rome on 27 October against Mario Monti's austerity government. In a separate demonstration, 20,000 doctors and nurses protested against the attacks on the health service. The unions will again take to the streets on November 14. The CGIL, and smaller rank and file unions like COBAS, will also be taking action on that day.

In France, the CFDT, CGT, FSU and the Union Syndicale Solidaires have called for action on this day ? with the CGT calling on its unions to strike against austerity.

November 14 is the crest of a rising wave of indignation against a battery of cuts - austerity with no end in sight - which has hit most European countries. The tide of protest has naturally run strongest in those
countries suffering the heaviest attacks? in Greece and the Iberian peninsular. But there are clear signs that resistance is now mounting in Italy, France and even in non-euro zone Britain.

On September 15, Portugal experienced its biggest demonstration since the Revolution of 1974. In Greece, on October 19, another general strike, the second in three weeks, took place against the Troika-backed right wing government of Antonis Samaras. In Spain, on September 26 and 27, hundreds of thousands demonstrated and huge numbers besieged the Spanish parliament as it was passing Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy?s latest cuts budget.

In Britain, on October 20, 150,000 marched and heard Len McCluskey, leader of Unite, the second biggest union in the country, call for a general strike and appeal for the crowd to vote for it - which they did in their thousands.

Florence 10 + 10

From November 8-11, representatives from social movements, campaigns, anti-austerity parties of the left and trade unions will gather in Florence. The event has been entitled Florence 10 + 10, partly to commemorate the first European Social Forum, which met there ten years ago and issued the call for an international day of action against the impending Iraq War. More importantly, it will draw the lessons of the last decade in order to prepare for the next, most immediately to prepare action against the austerity and the destructive reforms being implemented by the rulers of the European Union. The meeting should, once again, take the lead in calling for international action? this time a pan-European general strike against austerity, early in 2013.

An international conference called by the Coalition of Resistance, with participants from Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland etc, was held in London on 21 October. The meeting resolved:

?We will work together in the months ahead, cooperating for the ETUC Day of Action on 14 November, moving towards the Alter Summit in 2013, and increasing our work for left and movement unity, for common action, mutual solidarity, communication and coordination.?

The alternative summit referred to, backed by all the organisations mobilising for Florence 10+10, will probably be held in Athens in May or June of next year.

Hoch die Internationale Solidarität! - Long Live International Solidarity

So far, Europe?s rulers have played the game of divide and rule on Europe?s workers. Our trade union leaders, our so-called socialist parties, have accepted that some cuts must be made and thus allowed each sector to struggle over which will suffer the least. Internationally, they have not combated the filthy chauvinist propaganda of governments, media and the EU authorities that the workers of the heavily indebted countries are lazy and spendthrift. Class solidarity and International solidarity have remained empty phrases.

It's time to put a stop to this ruinous game and act ALL TOGETHER; as the French say, Tous ensemble, tous ensemble, Oui! Oui! Oui!

In every country, this means that both private and public sector workers must be drawn into the struggle. Where the bosses' lie machines argue that low wages and insecure employment in the private sector are economically necessary and justify privatisation, downsizing and off shoring, we have to insist on an end to Precarity. Secure well paid jobs with pensions for all at full union rates, jobs for the millions of unemployed, citizenship rights for the migrant workers, slash the tax burden on the workers and the poor and put it onto
the shoulders of the super rich, save the public services, health, education, transport, social security? services that everybody needs.

We need to recognise that isolated struggles, sector-by-sector, isolated national resistance and apolitical struggles will not succeed. Neither will one-day general strikes - no matter how big and impressive they are. Why? Because isolated actions and protests will not soften the hard hearts of the billionaires and their bought and sold politicians. In Spain and Greece, demonstrators have recognised the hollowness of normal parliamentary democracy when the media are all in the bosses' hands, when the police have the power to smash demonstrations and protect the legislators against the people.

As long as there are governments committed to austerity, made up of parties that serve the bosses and bankers, protest will be impotent to change things. What protests can do is mobilise people, demonstrating where the millions stand. But then decisive action needs to be taken, the millions must become a force. We need all out, unlimited general strikes, to drive out the cutters' governments, to scatter and dissolve the riot cops and repressive forces, to install governments based on the mass organisations of struggle of the working people, the unemployed and the poor.

We should press for the maximum participation on November 14 in northern Europe? in France, Britain, Germany and Scandinavia, in solidarity with those facing the most savage attacks. So far, the major unions have done little or nothing. Indeed, Berthold Huber of the German engineering union, IG Metall (a super-union with 2.4 million members) has even condemned Spanish and Portuguese unions for striking. However, anti-cuts committees and Greek solidarity committees will demonstrate in Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, and other German cities, with the support of local union branches.

In Britain, the various organisations campaigning against the cuts - the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) Unite the Resistance, the Coalition of Resistance etc. and the Greece Solidarity Campaign are all calling for actions.

Wherever possible, we should be building for local, workplace unions, trades councils and the TUC nationally to organise lunchtime pickets or evening rallies to make workers and users of services in Britain aware of what is going on across Europe. Already, the Southern branch of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) at the Department for the Environment, has passed a resolution calling for protests outside all civil service workplaces. In all such gatherings, we need to take forward the discussion on the need for a fight back?all together? in Britain? to say “Yes to a general strike!” We need to start campaigning now so that, when the next European action is called, hopefully from Florence? there will be a general strike in Britain too.

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