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The Crisis and Core & Periphery in the Eurozone

Peripheral Vision

Paul Bowman

19 May 2011

At the same time that we are witnessing a wave of popular protest in North Africa and the Middle East against aged and corrupt neo-colonial dictatorships, in the heart of Europe we are witnessing something unprecedented and absolutely extraordinary.

History appears to be moving in the 'wrong direction' in the so-called peripheral countries of the Eurozone.

In the last 12 months first Greece, then Ireland and now Portugal have been forced into the arms of so-called 'bailouts' by the European Central Bank with the aid of the IMF. In the cases of both Ireland and Portugal this meant the imposition of 3–4 year comprehensive economic programmes of austerity that gave the lie to the subsequent elections that followed or will follow shortly after. Despite the best efforts of the political and media commentators to pretend that it's 'business as usual', this has effectively meant the ending of any democratic influence on economic policy by the electorates in these three countries, now subject to economic direct rule from Frankfurt.

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This movement from capitalist liberal democracy back to a new form of colonial mandate is the reverse of the direction that the liberal worldview has told us is 'normal' for the last half a century. From the decolonisation struggles of Asian and African countries in the 60s and 70s, through the gradual emergence of Latin America from under the heel of US-sponsored military dictatorships, the conventional story has been of an inevitable historical progression from colonialism, through neo-colonial dictatorships to the eventual end goal of liberal democracy. In that light, what has now happened to Greece, Ireland and Portugal is so far off the script that the corporate media have yet to grasp its full meaning.

Let's be clear about this — we are not trying to externalise all blame for the current situations in our different countries onto the banks and financial interests of the core countries. Certainly here in Ireland we have scores to settle with local capitalists who continue to hang on to their ill-gotten gains, having dumped their losses on the ordinary taxpayers. But neither is it the case that the situation that we 'peripherals' find ourselves in is purely the doing of the local business class, in isolation from the bigger picture of capital flows within the Eurozone.

In Ireland's case, the outline of how the large movements of UK, German and other European bank money into Ireland in search of a quick buck fed the property bubble, and the fundamental robbery of making the Irish population liable for the losses of these European banks, is beginning to be heard amongst a number of voices in the media. Following on from that the call for a default on the debts the state has taken on from the banks has been raised. While we support the need to build an opposition with the strength to force a default onto the agenda, the question of default is not the fundamental issue here. The fundamental issue is one of power and democracy in the current composition of Europe. The fundamental issue is the reversal of history that is transforming the Eurozone into

a new imperial space where the peripheral regions are to be ruled as provinces of the core homelands.

Our project is not a struggle for bourgeois justice. We know that real justice is not possible under capitalism. To fight against the injustice of the current distribution of austerity is to promote the reformist and pro-capitalist agenda that if only the austerity was equally shared, then justice would be restored. But so long as capitalism persists, the basic injustice of the exploitation of the majority for the expansion of capital and the enrichment of its minority representatives will continue. We reject the perspective of liberal critics of Frankfurt's dictatorship, that it is based on a violation of capitalist principles of fairness and casts the struggle in a narrowly nationalist 'beggar thy neighbour' frame. We understand that the Eurozone's reversal of history and evisceration of liberal democracy is not a violation of the logic of capitalism, but its very product. Our project is not for a fairer distribution of misery and oppression of workers. Instead, our project is one of resistance, transformation and liberation.

Peripheral Vision then should not be understood as being simply an attempt to defend the interests of the workers of the peripheral countries against the agenda of the Core, but a transformation of our societies that is in the interests of all workers, whether Core or Periphery, inside or outside the Eurozone. In the same way that feminism is not only about transforming the conditions of women but also men's, in the way that the struggle against racism is more than defending the rights of minorities but creating a fair and equal society for all, so Peripheral Vision is not the mirror image of the Core Vision — the advancement of the interests of 'insiders' at the expense of 'outsiders' — but its opposite — an end to all inequality of power, of all exclusions, and a transformative vision of real equality.

Fine words, but how to put them into action? Just as you cannot have a feminist vision without the voice of women be-

ing central and you cannot fight racism without listening to the voices of people of colour, so we cannot create an alternative vision to the model of Core domination without a process of collective articulation of perspectives from the peripheral regions. This cannot be done by the capitalists and politicians of our different states because they represent the interests of those who are dependant on the free flow of financial capital in the Eurozone, not the workers. Nor can we do it by demanding as a preliminary an allegiance to some pre-existing rigidly-defined political ideology or analysis. This would simply be the mirroring of a core-periphery dynamic on an ideological level. We must accept that the principal of harmony between means and ends requires that we come together as equals, horizontally, and without preconditions. That is preconditions other than the general principles of horizontality, means-ends coherence, anti-capitalism and working class self-reliance already mentioned — we have to start somewhere, after all!

We hope with the meeting on the theme of Peripheral Vision at the Dublin Anarchist Bookfair, to begin a process of dialogue and comparing our experiences of the austerity offensive in our different countries, and our resistance to it. We hope that this is the beginning of a many-threaded series of communications between, not only friends from the peripheral countries within the Eurozone, but also our neighbours in the 'external peripheral' countries of Eastern Europe and the other shores of the Mediterranean, as well as with comrades in struggle in the Core countries. We each have different pieces of the jigsaw we need to bring together to create a new vision for a more just and egalitarian recomposition of Europe open to and in solidarity with the wider world.