

Globalised Capital and National Leadership*

Prabhat Patnaik

One of the most intriguing questions at present is why Europe's political leadership has become complicit in what appear to be US efforts at undermining European economies. The well-known American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, having already provided evidence that the United States was responsible for the blowing up of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, has now revealed that this blowing up was not even linked to the war in Ukraine; it was a deliberate move on the part of the Biden administration to ensure that Europe remained dependent on US gas despite its being far more expensive, rather than become dependent on the much cheaper Russian gas. The blowing up of the pipeline therefore was not just an assault on EU economies, especially Germany, whose costs of production would go up across the board because of it; it was also a direct subversion of a policy which the German government itself had launched. And yet there is not an iota of criticism, or even of disapproval couched in polite diplomatic language, by any German political leader of this act of economic sabotage directed against Germany.

What is more, in anticipation of the time when higher energy costs would really begin to bite (when the current subsidies being given by the German government to compensate for the higher energy price are ended), and in view of the generally uncertain energy outlook, there is a relocation of production that is taking place, away from Germany to the United States. And yet there is not a squeak from any German political leader on this brazen assault on the German economy. The question is: why?

While a proper answer must await further research, one element of the answer seems clear, namely, a large number of European politicians have been on the pay-roll of giant corporates of US origin; they are integrated into an international financial oligarchy associated with globalised capital, and they have little concern for national interests.

Rudolf Hilferding in his classic work *Das Finanzkapital* had talked of a personal union between the magnates of banks and those of industry, constituting the financial oligarchy. The financial oligarchy also had personal union with the personnel of the State, whereby the same individuals migrated with ease from one establishment to the other; this was one of the mechanisms that ensured that State policy was always framed so as to promote the interests of the financial oligarchy.

Hilferding however was writing in the context of national finance capitals. In the era of globalisation when finance capital has become globalised, while the State remains a nation-state, the personal union between State personnel and international finance capital for promoting the interests of the latter must necessarily mean a degree of unconcern on the part of State personnel for the condition of the nation itself, which basically means for the condition of the working people within the nation. And this is what we actually find.

The examples of personal union between current leading European politicians and global corporates, many of them originating from America, are quite striking. Friedrich Merz, the leader of the Christian Democrats in Germany, and in that capacity the leader of the opposition in Germany, has extensive business interests, is a

billionaire, and has served on several boards including the American Black Rock investment company. France's current president Emmanuel Macron was an investment banker at the Rothschild financial group where he had brokered a deal between Nestle' and Pfizer leading to the former's acquisition of the latter's baby food division.

The latest and most brazen instance is to be found in Greece, where Stefanos Kasselakis, an executive of Goldman Sachs, the American investment company, has just been elected the leader of Syriza, a supposedly Left-wing Party which had been in power earlier and is currently the biggest party of the opposition. Kasselakis has not been in politics before, knows next to nothing of the problems of Greece, has absolutely no familiarity with or ideological affinity towards the Left, and has generally avoided raising any major issues during his election campaign. His election was made possible by changing Syriza's Party Constitution so that anybody could become a member of Syriza at short notice and therefore eligible to vote in the leadership contest. There is every likelihood of Kasselakis being elected the next prime minister of Greece; indeed this was his main selling point during the election campaign for Syriza leadership.

The point of this new crop of European leaders having been executives of corporates of American origin is not that they promote American interests at the expense of their own country's interests, but that they are not bound by any considerations of national interests at all; instead they defend and promote the interests of globalised capital. Their position as corporate executives makes them committed to the interests of globalised capital, and hence committed to the political defence of globalised capital, which they believe can be provided only by unity among imperialist states. Trans-Atlantic unity therefore occupies a far more important place in their minds than it did in the minds of an earlier generation of European politicians.

We are seeing the emergence of a new kind of politician, outside of the fascist fold, in the imperialist countries; and this is most evident in Europe, of which Britain's Tony Blair was an early example. These politicians are often drawn from the corporate world, and often move back and forth between the corporate and political worlds. They have no ideology other than a commitment to neo-liberalism and a deep hostility towards the working class, even when they nominally belong to the Left or to Left-of-Centre parties: Tony Blair was a Labour prime minister, Emmanuel Macron was the finance minister in a "socialist" government, and Kasselakis has been elected to lead a "Left" party. And of course they have little concern for the interests of the nations they lead.

They are in short completely different from the De Gaulles and the Willy Brandts of yesteryear, who had ideologies, though different from one another, who worked in their national interests as they perceived it, and who were willing to stand up to the Americans. Apart from their political, as opposed to corporate, backgrounds, they also had attitudes more in tune with a period predating the hegemony of globalised finance capital.

The unity of imperialist states appears particularly urgent to this new crop of corporate-bred politicians in a period of crisis for (neo-liberal) capitalism. What is often seen as a threat to metropolitan capitalism arising from the tendency towards "multipolarity" misses this context of capitalist crisis; closing ranks among imperialist

states is seen to be essential as a means of surviving the challenge that is likely to arise, as much from the domestic working class as from the third world, in the face of this crisis.

This quest for unity among imperialist states, even at the expense of “national interests”, however, opens the way for the ascendancy of fascism in metropolitan countries, since the fascist elements still talk of “national interests” and hence still strike a chord with the working class. It is another matter that if they come to power they line up behind their domestic big business and hence pursue the same economic and foreign policies as the preceding liberal bourgeois governments had been doing; the case of Meloni in Italy only confirms this proposition. But when in opposition they invoke the nation and project themselves as its defenders.

This is globalised capital’s “heads I win, tails you lose” strategy in the metropolis in the face of the crisis. The idea is to cordon off politics in the metropolis within the binary of a “fascism-versus-liberal bourgeois” choice. The liberal bourgeois governments whose leaders are corporate executives themselves, rally to the defence of globalised capital through promoting a unity among imperialist states; if they get rejected by the people, then the only alternative that is presented before the people is the fascist alternative that invokes the nation but does the bidding of globalised capital. Its invoking of the nation takes the form not of opposing globalised capital but of opposing the immigrants, against whom, in typical fascist fashion, it arouses popular anger, holding them responsible for the travails faced by the majority of workers, owing to the capitalist crisis. It is for the authentic Left, not the one led by corporate executives, to expose and defeat this “heads I win, tails you lose” strategy of globalised capital.

* This article was originally published in the [Peoples Democracy](#) on October 8, 2023.