

The European Protest Movement

Is Europe in "Pre revolutionary" Mode?

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Region: [Europe](#)

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"Off with their heads" and "man the barricades" the cries of the famed "sans culottes" rang out and sent shivers down the spines of the doomed Bourbon dynasty way back then. These poor yet determined revolutionary men fighting for a semblance of social justice and disparagingly referred to as "without knee breaches" by the ruling royals and aristocracy seem to reverberate in today's urban European settings.

220 years after the French revolution, scenes somewhat reminiscent of the almost long forgotten revolts, are again visible on the streets of Paris. They appear to be pre revolutionary in their scope and political impact. The fall out from all this maybe like a horror film come true for those at the top.

Unions of all sorts have mobilised in protest of what is perceived as anti social government policy of President Nicolas Sarkozy, or a final assault on what remains of the welfare state, decimated by decades of rampant and reckless ultra liberalism which has since run amok. This has paralyzed the country by widespread strike action. From rail to air, transport has been virtually halted. Public employees and their union members fearing for the security of their jobs and anticipated state imposed reforms in the public sector have made many in French angst ridden.

Is Europe in all out revolt or this a dress rehearsal for the real thing?

On Thursday in Spain, echoing the current social unrest in France, unions have taken the cue from their French counterparts and announced upcoming mass protests to denounce huge lay offs and egregious abuses in the name of personal gain and profit in the world's banking sector on both a national and global banking scale. Spain now holds the ignominious title of having the highest unemployment rate (unemployment is over 4 million in 2009 so far) in all of Europe. An unflattering distinction which it had not held since its pre EU membership days.

The country is experiencing massive layoffs in the construction industry, mainly due to an American style bursting of a speculative property bubble, related to over inflated housing prices and unbridled development. The scale of the anticipated protest may not be as big as those in France but social tensions are apparently as high or at the boiling point and about to blow over.

A Greek tragedy in the making

The upheaval in France and Spain follows weeks of social disturbance in other parts of Europe this month, including the Baltic States, Bulgaria and overall Greece where very

violent protest headed by so called “anarchists” and other “leftist” or what official might refer to as “riff raff” took place. A new wave of protests has begun this week. The violent protests seem to be sparked but decades of neo liberal policies imposed from above coupled by the sudden drastic and devastating socially downturn in many EU member state economics. There are now, news reports coming out of Greece of “arsonists” and “anarchists” attacking foreign car dealerships.

Certainly this is all quite troubling for the government. Those in power should ask themselves this: “Are the assailants targeting the symbols associated with a luxurious lifestyle led by a select few fellow citizens?” Or this : “Are the attacks against police stations, the exclusive Athens boutiques and their private security companies (or goons) all part of an overall general exasperation with current policies which have bred intolerable social inequity , and are part of a popular uprising against the ruling classes and their valets the law enforcement stooges? “.

Whatever the causes may be, the protests have spread beyond the cities and now paralyse the Greek countryside as well. This week farmers staged a huge protest using 5,000 tractors to block road and border crossing to neighbouring states, in protest of dropping agricultural prices for their goods and most likely as well their increasingly precarious way of life. The ongoing protests threaten the distribution of food supplies in the country and beyond.

Out in the cold but not alone: Iceland’s Revolution

The long tolerated excesses of the so called “super rich” continue to shake up Europe amidst the worst economic crisis not seen since the great depression. The aftershocks of the collapse of the global banking sector can be seen in Iceland. The once prosperous and stable island is now in total disarray. Recent, streets protest in the quite fishing port of Reykjavik, have led to the fall of the government.

Icelanders are apparently apoplectic about the recent implosion of their national economy thanks to over leveraged lending and excessive deregulation or laissez faire policies greed driven bankers adopted , which led to overexpansion aboard and eventually the bankruptcy of the country, when local banks became inundated with “toxic loans” generated during the sub prime mortgage boom years. This week the government fell to be replace by Johanna Sigurdardottir, 66, whose Social Democratic Party is talking with the Left-Greens on a new administration after protests helped force out her predecessor, Geir Haarde of the Independence Party.

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