

# South Africa: Thousands on strike against poverty-level minimum wage



**SAFTU  
statement on  
National  
Strike  
Today!**



## **SAFTU-led march – an historic victory for the workers**

Wednesday 25 April 2018 will be recorded in the history of the South African trade union movement as an historic turning point, when workers took to the streets in their many thousands to demonstrate against a poverty minimum wage and amendments to labour laws which threaten the basic constitutional right to strike.

The South African Federation of Trade Unions congratulates and thanks all the members of its affiliated unions, civil society groups, political parties and members of the public who flooded the streets of Johannesburg, Cape

Town, Durban, PE, Bloemfontein and Polokwane, plus thousands more in rural areas and small towns who joined the protest by not working on the day.

The marchers delivered a thunderous warning shot to the government, employers and sweetheart union leaders that the people of South Africa are angrily opposed to the proposed national minimum wage of R20 an hour minimum wage, which entrenches poverty, legitimizes the apartheid wage gap and will keep thousands of workers in a daily struggle to survive, to feed the family and to pay for their children's education. It will make the world's most unequal society even more unequal and leave millions of the poor effectively excluded from the economy with all their meagre income being used just to survive.

There is no less anger at the proposed bills to amend labour laws, which will make it even more difficult for workers to exercise their constitutional right to strike.

Existing laws already require secret ballots to be held before workers can get a certificate for a protected strike, which most unions already use but as decided democratically by the members, not imposed by government.

Under the new amendments unions will have to navigate even more procedural obstacles, including extra laws on how secret ballots must be conducted, an even longer period for conciliation and picketing rules to be drawn up before a strike can begin.

A new clause will allow employers to sit tight, make no

attempt to negotiate and then go back to the CCMA and argue that the strike has been going on for 'too long' or is causing 'too much damage' and demand arbitration of the dispute, which will become compulsory unless unions object within a short period during which they have to consult their members. If they miss the deadline the arbitration can become compulsory, which would be an unconstitutional way to force workers back to work.

These bills will cause a particular problem for small unions with limited resources, and even more for groups of workers not in any union, who make up 76% of all employees but who have exactly the same constitutional right to strike. They cannot possibly comply with all these rules.

The effect of these bills will be to strengthen the power already dominant employers, and the teams of lawyers they hire to represent them. It will enable them emasculate trade unions, deny workers their basic human rights, allow their bosses to continue to exploit increasingly vulnerable workers and shift the balance of power even further in their favour.

if passed, these bills will severely worsen the already desperate plight of millions of workers, who face more job losses, casualisation of labour, a rising cost of living after increases in VAT, fuel levy and road accident fund levy, and deplorable levels of service in education, healthcare, and all other essential services.

The bills have been referred back to the Department of Labour for redrafting to include the submissions made to the parliamentary Portfolio committee on labour, one of which was made by SAFTU on 17 April 2018.

The federation will study the new drafts and demand that they are referred back for further discussion by Nedlac, but a Nedlac with SAFTU admitted, so that we can expose and oppose the scandalous deal on the bills which leaders of COSATU, FEDUSA and NACTU negotiated behind workers' backs and then signed off with government and business.

The bills will then return to Parliament and SAFTU will continue to persuade MPs to support its demands. Already we have convinced three parties to support our views – the Economic Freedom Fighters, the United Democratic Movement and the African People's Convention. We hope to convince more, including some ANC MPs.

We are also taking legal on a possible court challenge to parts of the bills.

But our campaign will never depend on MPs or courts to succeed, but on more of what we saw today – mass action on the streets, which will get bigger each time, until we finally achieve our goals which are for a living minimum wage of R12 500 and amendments to labour laws to make it easier, not harder, for workers to be able to enjoy their constitutional right to strike.

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# An analysis of the crises of Southern Africa

*A situation characterised by increasing burden of parasitism on the working people*

Southern Africa is in the throes of economic and political crises in **South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola**.

In South Africa there's a louder and louder clamour even from the ranks of the ANC itself for President Zuma's removal on the misleading conception of so-called State capture. Zuma's relationship with the Guptas is put forward as 'State Capture'.

(The fact is that the ANC State was always a comprador State for the ruling classes of South Africa. In this sense the State was 'captured' long before the Guptas. Police Chief Jackie Selebi's undignified relationships with organised gangsters uncovered in 2010 and the Marikana Massacre of miners in 2012 amongst general caretaking were adequate proof

of the aforesaid.)

Nevertheless, the South African State is all but bankrupt and the mismanagement of central institutions such as ESKOM (the power utility), which is now under investigation for 'State Capture', and the State's endangering and intrinsic inability to develop adequate infrastructure for capitalism are undoubtedly major issues behind the demand instigated by the ruling classes.

In the midst of the South African crisis, the Zimbabwean Army for all intents and purposes deposed Robert Mugabe due to internal squabbles in the ZANU-PF seemingly on the question of succession. However, the real reason (like in the rest of the sub-region) is clearly dwindling or depleted resources and a frenzy to be close to the last remaining State finances and to serve international capitalism under austerity, which insists on as few servants as possible.

(Unemployment is estimated in the bourgeois press at 95%. But since the 'estimate' is coupled with 'underemployment', it is actually impossible to 'estimate'. This 'statistic' was probably dreamed up in order to further revile Mugabe. What probably is true is that in one fell swoop working people have been rapidly turned into mostly temporary and seasonal contract workers. But this trend is anyway happening in the rest of the sub-region.)

Likewise, in Angola the new president Joao Lourenco, who took over from Eduardo Dos Santos in August this year, is reported to have dismissed Isabel dos Santos as chair of the state oil company Sonangol on Wednesday, 15 November. She is said to be \$3,5 billion 'strong' from oil income. Given that oil is said to comprise 90% of exports and the bulk of production, that payment is in dollars, but that there is a perennial shortage of FOREX (dollars), it will probably never be known how much she and others are truly 'worth', as the dollars seem to disappear before reaching Angola. (Exports in 2015 were

estimated at \$37,3 billion and imports at about \$22 billion. There should have been no problem with foreign valuta.)

President Lourenço had reportedly already dismissed the heads of several other state companies, including the three state-owned media companies. Bottom of Form Sonangol is reported to be a partner with some of the biggest international oil companies, including Exxon Mobil, Chevron and BP.

When MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) took over in 1975, they 'nationalised' all corner shops and retail outlets, replaced them with severely under-stocked 'Peoples Shops' and set up 'black markets', without price control, which allowed government ministers and officials to make profits many times over the purchase price of the items. These so-called black markets had hundreds of metres of shelves loaded with every conceivable item and openly operated with consumables and imported goods.

The same frenzy to loot as in the other countries of Southern Africa saw the MPLA ignore the many high-rise buildings under construction when the Portuguese had to leave in 1975. Until very recently they were left with their cranes still standing and the deteriorating infrastructure. Not even drainage was considered, let alone aesthetics.

If one considers the reports that from 2001 to 2008 Angola was one of the fastest growing economies in the world, with an estimated average of 11% growth, of which increased oil production constituted 17% of growth per year, it indicated a seriously sick situation in which the rest of the economy, especially agriculture, actually contracted by 6% per year: negative growth of 6% growth in essential economy sector. Agriculture is said to remain by-and-large subsistent.

Officially Angola has 26% unemployment, but some Angolans put it much higher, even 70%. There is no way to determine the true figure.

No doubt stirring popular anger had a say in these newest developments just as in Zimbabwe.

However, if there is any change, it will be to strengthen the grip of the IMF, World Bank, the European Union and the United States. But, given the nature of oil companies, the looting will undoubtedly continue in Angola, leading to a much harsher situation for the more than 50% of impoverished Angolans and the rest who are employed.

Namibia has seen the State go into bankruptcy due to uncontrolled looting since 1990. By 1996 they had figured out how to loot Pension Funds, in cahoots with mining companies such as Rio Tinto Zinc and the Goldfields South Africa. They further discovered how to loot State Finances through sham building and construction projects with costs inflated by multiples.

Buildings and construction projects at absurdly inflated costs litter the entire country and the capital city, Windhoek. The most notable of these was firstly the State House. The original cost estimate was a few hundred million rand, but it was finished at the astronomical price of 19 billion rand. Besides being the residence of the President, it was designed to house cabinet offices and conference halls. These offices are now standing unoccupied.

The second most cynical project was the Neckartal Dam, which was contrived before 2011 as an irrigation scheme in the far south of the country. The Southern African Institute for Environmental Assessment (SAIEA) had submitted a report that the project was not viable as the dam would require highly specialised skills and largescale capital investments to produce high value produce for the overseas market, which was the purported object. It was further pointed out that the nearby Naute Dam's capacity was not utilised to the full. The project continued irrespective. It was initially costed at R3,02 billion, but it escalated to R5,7 billion in 2017, when

the uncompleted construction ground to a halt due to State bankruptcy.

The particularly ludicrous procedures for contrived building and construction were as follows: Cabinet would decide on the project and determine the price; the consultants and quantity surveyors would work out the bill of quantities to correspond thereto; the fees of engineers, consultants and contractors would rise proportionally with the multiply-inflated initial price. The feasibility study would be made last. Members of the Cabinet and State officials would collect relatively small kickbacks. State assets worth billions would be sold for kickbacks of a few million. (The resultant bankruptcy ['illiquidity'] is thus not temporary, but permanent, as future assets such as for example State land were depleted.)

For the past year major projects like highways from Windhoek and construction generally have ground to a halt, but it is clear that the IMF, World Bank and the European Union have moved in for direct 'State Capture', albeit clandestinely in order to shield the Comprador State from a public perception of not only its uselessness and debilitating ineptitude, but encumbrance to true freedom.

The form and national peculiarities of each Southern African State may differ, even remarkably in some instances. For example, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique waged relatively effective guerrilla struggles, driving the colonial rulers to the negotiating tables, but nevertheless ended up as bourgeois (pseudo Stalinist) States. African National Congress (ANC) and South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) were foisted on South Africa and Namibia directly as Comprador States with parodies of armed struggles. The similarities are nevertheless much more essential than the differences. These situations could only be reached by a brutal and ruthless eradication of any local opposition: In 1977, MPLA obliterated 5000 youth in Luanda; Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) eradicated opposition by assassinating for Herbert Chitepo and working-



class youth in exile, and thereafter an estimated 30-60,000 and perhaps many more civilians in Ndebele in Southern Zimbabwe. It made many disappear, and massacred farm workers during its 'land-grab'. ANC waged a war within South Africa against the working class and its leadership, and, SWAPO and ANC waged terror against youth in exile.

But the content of the crises remains essentially similar: that is, bankrupt States seeking to be bailed out by 'white monopoly capitalism'.

The cash-strapped South African electricity utility ESKOM and South African Airways (SAA) now openly seek private partners ('white monopoly capital') to overcome inefficiency and to piggy-back on what is presumed to be an effective and competent private sector and the self-regulation of the market. The absurdity is still argued that making State enterprise attractive for private investors makes it profitable. Which begs the question: if a State enterprise is profitable, why sell it off?

Nevertheless, TELKOM's 46,000 employees are already targeted for reduction, although not the astronomical management incomes and lavish international lifestyles and obscene expenditures. A third of the employees are to be reduced.

In Namibia, the SWAPO government is appealing to the World Bank for help in getting private partners for the State Owned Enterprises.

Privatisation is demanded despite two major publications on the effects of privatisation in Eastern Europe, Africa and South America in the 1990s. UN researchers show that nowhere in the world has privatization yielded the vaunted results. Instead it has created mass unemployment, social destabilization and hardships.

The signs are clear that international financial instances have already moved into place and already demand 'austerity'.

In Katima Mulilo, the CEO of the Municipality stated that 'urban land' is not for 'poor people' and bulldozed settlements in order to save money on services. In Okahandja letters have been issued to settlements giving notice of bulldozing.

In general, the comprador States are clearly putting on their nicest clothes to woo imperialism back to take over their State functions as there is little to loot anymore. But, this has set off intense proliferation of factions in the States and squabbles amongst them. (This explains the nice and friendly *coup d'état* in Zimbabwe)

Given the desperation of the working people in the deteriorating economic situation and their falling living standards, within the context of a crisis of leadership they cling to each hope generated by demagoguery of the compradors to bring change. And yet, there are many sceptical observers amongst them.

In Zimbabwe, many notice that it is the same old edifice which proclaims new salvation.

Likewise, in South Africa and Angola, working people are observing the situation with caution.

### **CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP**

Working people find it hard to respond to the looming threat. Whilst no doubt their largely amorphous stirrings are the main pressure for the compradors to feign a hope for real change, they are also in crisis, a crisis of leadership.

This crisis is historic in context.

Especially in South Africa and Namibia, the working classes have generated their own leadership in the union struggles which started in 1971/2 in Namibia and lit the veld fire of workers' struggles in South Africa since 1973.

Whilst these struggles led to real union rights by the 80's, the ANC and SWAPO have led physical attacks against the working class and its leaders since 1976. By 1984 they had succeeded in disbanding or killing the union and workers' leadership and corralling workers' organisations behind the nationalists through the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW). In 1990 in Namibia and 1994 in South Africa, this union leadership abandoned the workers for an alliance with what they now call 'white monopoly capitalism'.

Since 1992 when The Labour Act which contained significant rights for workers was promulgated in 1992. Since then the SWAPO regime, together with corporate lawyers, started dismantling labour rights, first through endemic corruption in the law courts, then using the introduction of illegal practices such as contract labour, and then by rewriting the Labour Act in 2007 to put it in line with neo-liberal requirements of a total onslaught on labour rights.

This same process was followed in South Africa with the Labour Relations Act of 1995 and its later amendments and conventions introduced illegally such as contract labour.

These developments suggest that the working people must generate a new and independent leadership both at union and political levels.

They need a union leadership which leads them in the struggle against the erosion of rights gained through three decades of bloody struggle. They still have union rights to organise and strike. But, they need a conscious and alert struggle against the facilitation of the comprador class to enable capitalist corporations to erode workplace rights by slave conventions.

There is no point living with your head in the political clouds while working people need to understand their historic tasks through fighting for concrete rights.

The meaning of fighting for political power on a mass scale can only come from the fight for the protection of past gains and rights against slave labour conditions, which the IMF, the World Bank, the EU and the US are set to further entrench through the compradors of Southern Africa.

**Hewat Beukes**

19 November 2017

**Notes:**

The bourgeoisie of Southern Africa was a comprador class for imperialism before and after 1994. (Compradors are traders in a colony or semi-colony who facilitate their country's pillage by imperialism.)

The Apartheid State was able to build a pseudo welfare state on the backs of the working people, who with their families comprised 90% of the South African nation.

The entrance of black governments heaped a further burden on the working people. Not allowed to dig into corporate capital and assets, they took hold of working peoples' assets and life savings.

The entrance now of direct control by the imperialists heaps the ultimate burden on the working masses of Southern Africa.

They will not be able to bear any further burdens.

**Editor's Note:** this is an edited version of a document that is already circulating on social media.

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# Why they voted Leave

*Mirek Vodslon, 5 July 2016*

“Why we voted leave: voices from northern England” is the title of a documentary (<https://vimeo.com/172932182>) which is really worth giving some thought to. To be more exact, it is a militant message in the form of a documentary. In just under 12 minutes it also shows some of the problems with the Lexit (“left exit”) or “socialist Brexit” position. It was “filmed and edited by Sheena Sumaria, Guerrera Films”, is being advertised by the left group “Counterfire” and shows an anonymous interviewer speaking to five other persons, also unnamed, a Remain voter and four Leave voters in Doncaster.

The supposed need to “take our country back” or “make Britain Britain again” comes up early on. These concerns are first and foremost on the minds of two interviewees. The main reason (mentioned by one of these workers) is to control immigration.

Another two voted Leave “for change” and one of these states that his vote was not about immigration. But why is this change going to be a change for the better? They don’t say, and neither does the interviewer who apparently agrees with these two. She converses with them at length and asks them about Corbyn. Their answer is that they are or were Corbyn supporters despite him adopting the Remain position or until he did. The interviewer, like the Socialist Party and Counterfire, thinks that Corbyn’s Remain campaign was a terrible concession to the right wing of the Labour Party. The interviewer is ready to give him “one more chance” but not two.

One interviewee pleads, like Corbyn, for remaining in the European Union in order to change it. After 30 seconds, the interviewer takes over and “refutes” this lonely “Remainer” simply by asserting that she does not believe in social

reforms of the undemocratic EU because the capitalists rule the EU and have the opposite agenda. So, yes, these are voices justifying why they voted Leave, at about 20 to 1 in terms of time, without any real debate with working-class Remainers.

There really is an unorganised working-class anti-EU “movement”. The video shows that and also that it is in part “guided” by this desperate consideration: It can’t get any worse (wrong!), so I vote for whatever promises a change. The presumably socialist interviewer belongs to the movement and supports this fraction of it. An even larger part of this movement voted for change and “knew” what kind of change they wanted, the one that they mistakenly believed would make British imperialism stronger. These two tendencies, desperate adventurism and nationalism, do not exclude each other.

We are not talking here about the nationalism of an oppressed nation. These workers have been falsely persuaded that their oppression is the result of the oppression of their British nation by the European Union but, no, this is the nationalism of a medium sized decadent imperialism, part of whose ruling class dreamt of becoming “great again” by abandoning the EU and especially by getting rid of EU’s minimal social standards. Workers supporting this act against their own immediate interests. The irony on top of this bitter irony is of course that the success of that project is already accelerating both the decadence of British imperialism and the demise of the EU.

The false premise of British workers’ nationalism is the “austere” view that jobs, wages and social resources (NHS, schools, libraries, benefits etc.) – in fact the whole of the working and living conditions of workers – are self-evidently limited British national treasures. From that follows the necessity to guard these precious “possessions” both against foreign workers and against foreign powers like the EU.

These “austere” limits are obviously *the* issue that socialists

need to take up with working-class Leave voters (and with all other workers, of course). Practical goals have to be proposed and cast as demands. Those can be only international demands to break with austerity and stop competition among workers, like demands of a European minimum wage allowing a decent living standard, and generally a European minimum of decent social standards.

The EU is able to finance large European programmes. For instance, German finance minister Schäuble has just proposed a big European programme of armament. This is an ideal occasion for Die Linke in Germany, Podemos in Spain, Front de Gauche in France, the renewed Labour Party of Britain and trade unions all over Europe to mobilise not just *against* this horror, but *for* a positive counter-proposal, a European plan of public works to improve the lives of working people and give them work, especially but not only in “deprived” regions like northern England. That is, make the transition from international “protests” to an international mobilisation for demands to make Europe a place fit for working people.

Such demands can unite European workers and so make an international mobilisation possible. British workers can and must fight for such demands together with workers on the continent despite being now out of the EU by virtue, or rather by the vice, of a mendacious referendum. This has made their situation worse and solidarity with continental workers more difficult to organise, just as the “outsourcing” of a section of the workforce of a company makes it more difficult to organise the solidarity of the whole workforce. Both British and continental workers must now use their trade unions and political parties to intervene strongly in the Brexit negotiations in order to preserve as many of the conditions of that solidarity as possible and even develop them. This concerns especially workers’ rights specified in the European treaties and conventions, however meagre they may be. No British exception undercutting those rights! No restriction of

the free movement of workers across Europe, including Britain! These rights must be included in the settlement.

Unfortunately, most working class Leave voters have apparently already made up their minds that British subjection to the EU and especially immigration imposed by the EU are the problems. Coming back to the film, its thrust is to adapt to this position instead of offering an internationalist alternative to it. The interviewer may be an internationalist herself but she refuses to consider reforms of the EU and thus any real steps along a path of an international transition to a socialist Europe. This disarms her when it comes to arguing for internationalism and this may be why she does not even try to take up the subject of internationalism with her polite interviewees. Had she tried some abstract internationalist proclamations on them (called "socialist" or "left" "argumentation for Brexit" by some ultraleft groups), she might have reaped polite disinterest or even a remark that such proclamations have no connection with their plight.

Instead, she offers the heartbreaking spectacle of a socialist confirming British nationalistic delusions with the following idea: "Austerity is coming from the EU because the EU governs governments". I beg to differ. This is one of the lies propagated by the class enemies who led the successful Brexit campaign. Efficient lies must be half-truths. In his case, it is just one fourth of the truth. First, the EU is a conglomerate of national states who have the last word in it, which is why the EU is currently paralysed on several questions. Second, the EU Commission does *appear* to govern governments and this appearance *has* been used to shield these governments from their responsibility for imposing austerity. This is the partial truth in the lie. The main part of the truth is that ever increasing "austerity" is an absolute necessity of contemporary capitalism which is why it is being imposed by all its political representatives, national and "European" and why the working class cannot wait much longer



to get rid of capitalism. No less important is the fact that capitalism pushed back into the narrow limits of the British national state will have to impose even more severe austerity, and is already planning to do so.

The interviewer having herself adopted some irrational beliefs instilled by the bourgeois Brexit campaign, it is no wonder that she tends to gloss over the irrational or even reactionary aspects of her interlocutors' opinions in order to make these opinions *look* like expressions of some hypothetical kind of class consciousness that could do without internationalism. Except that this hypothesis is refuted not just by theory, but also by the long experience of working class movement.

These contortions are required to try to underpin the main thesis of the film, which is: the Leave vote of workers was a class vote. What the film really shows is that the vote of the five "Leavers", including the interviewer, was not about the *struggle* of their own class. It was desperate and in part it was about slogans adopted by a fraction of the enemy class: "national independence" of Britain, mostly in order to curb immigration. If these five voices did cast a class vote, then it was the vote of a class that despairs of herself and has given up being a subject with a goal in life. So, by what it really shows, the film warns us of the possibility that *this sort* of working-class consciousness might prevail. If it does prevail, it will pave the way for barbarism to engulf humanity. Instead of glorifying it, socialists need to think hard how to rebuild real, organised, socialist class consciousness, even if it begins – as it obviously does – as that of a class which must first regain confidence and test seriously if it can defend or recover decent working and living conditions without overthrowing the capitalist class and its state.

To wrap it up, the interviewer spends time reminiscing on the defeat of the miners' strike of 1984-1985, the following

deindustrialisation, and the fall of thousands into unemployment and despair. The lesson is that class struggle, in this case a defeat decades ago and subsequent defeats on top of that, are among the deep causes that created the contemporary conditions in which parts of the working class arrive at such utterly wrong conclusions as those expressed by four of the interviewees and the interviewer herself. No less important a cause has been the prolonged absence of a socialist alternative, but the film does not even touch on that. Whatever the causes, wrong conclusions from past struggles remain wrong.

The interviewer wished to correct the view that working-class Brexiters are all racists. She succeeded in that. Even one of the two working-class British nationalists interviewed is no racist, i.e., he does not derive his identity or that of his enemies from skin colour, skull metrics or pedigree. The other British nationalist is a waste collector, was interviewed at work on the road and had no time to explain himself. Both are certainly afraid of their "foreign" class brothers and sisters and want to keep them out. They are xenophobes.

The strange insistence that most working-class Leave voters are no racists draws attention away from the terrible fact that working-class xenophobia has become a mass phenomenon. Not just in Britain, all over Europe. Trying to sweep that fact under the rug is plainly irresponsible and self-delusional. Nationalism and xenophobia will not go away simply because workers are now being taught a lesson about the negative effects of Brexit which are already setting in. On the contrary, further negative experiences threaten to make xenophobia fester and become fascism.

The question is, how to prevent that? British-nationalistic and xenophobic workers are not likely to be among the first who will be won to a socialist programme. They have some serious rethinking to do because there can be no programme of the working class which is both socialist and nationalist, or

both for workers' solidarity and for excluding foreigners from it. It will take time, fresh positive experience of struggle and above all help from other sections of the working class.

There are now two ways to deny them that help. One is to blame them for the living conditions to which capitalism condemns them and which engender despair and backwardness, and treat them all as enemies. Most are not, most have not yet joined fascist squads, it is still possible for socialists to talk to them, as the film suggests. The other way to fail them is to treat their convictions as a minor difference. Pat them on the shoulders and say: "Well done, you voted for change. You also voted against immigration but you meant no offence, did you? Cheers, mate."

Socialists, revolutionaries, especially Marxists who supported the "socialist Brexit" or Lexit adventure, need to do no less rethinking than these workers: about their negative role and about how on earth they could make such an enormous mistake. What is wrong with their "Marxism", their organisations and their respected "Marxist" leaders who led them into this impasse? I do hope that this reflection starts now. Simply proceeding with whatever each group thinks is next on the agenda is not an option. Or if it is, it is the option of ultimate degeneration and demise.

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## **What next for Greece (and Europe)?**

THE SYRIZA-led Greek government made a bid to reverse the appalling and humiliating conditions laid upon the country by the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and

International Monetary Fund).

The fiasco that followed deserves careful consideration by all trade unionists, socialists and working people more broadly.

SYRIZA is a coalition built around forces coming from the Euro-Communist sector which several decades ago split from the old KKE (Greek Communist Party). They promised a new kind of "left" politics, breaking the mould of sectarian wrangling over ideological shibboleths. (In the process they junked a number of political principles also, in particular the understanding of the basic conflict in society between capital and labour).

With the shock of the country's bankruptcy and the fateful "Memoranda" reverberating around Greek society, with masses of people going, in real confusion, into semi-permanent occupation of the city squares, it was the coalition which became SYRIZA which captured the popular mood.

They drew from the intellectual tool-kit of Keynesian theory the idea that the economy could be launched into a new period of growth by the correct policies on the part of governments and the EU.

They presented the matter as an intellectual debate with an "elite" seduced by neo-liberal dogmas which had somehow reached political power pretty well everywhere, whether in the hands of formerly "socialist" or frankly conservative politicians.

Enough popular support mobilised for a "better" capitalist policy, in the SYRIZA view, could reverse the situation and kick-start growth and protect living standards.

There are also attractive sides to what SYRIZA was offering: an attempt to find what united people instead of what divided them, a listening ear to what people were saying rather than the sectarian propagandist broadsides, a very practical approach to dealing with the mass poverty and collapse of

welfare structures which followed government acceptance of the Memoranda.

The Solidarity Clinics and cost-price farmers' markets and food and toy banks in working class districts were both very much needed and started to generate a cadre of party activists. The Solidarity For All welfare network at the same time created a framework for an international solidarity movement with the people of Greece.

From a ramshackle coalition of left groups, SYRIZA became an organised political party with a political programme of socially progressive measures and the aim to reverse the Troika-imposed economic destruction of the country (The Thessaloniki Programme).

On this basis the party provoked a general election in February of this year in which they won enough seats, together with a small conservative anti-austerity grouping, ANEL, to form a government. (Certainly not a single one of the groups claiming to be Marxist revolutionaries could have come even close to dislodging the vile bunch of puppets masquerading as a Greek government up to that point).

The problem is, the leaders of the European Union are not simply an accidental grouping with this or that ideological outlook. They are the political representatives of a particular social class – the bourgeoisie. In capitalist society, this is the class which owns (and actually personifies) the big concentrations of capital.

**“You might as well have sung the Swedish national anthem”**

It is their position as the public spokespersons and administrators of capitalist society which gives these monsters their utter conviction that they are right and that the biggest popular majority vote in the world is wrong. How do these masters of the work know they are right? The money tells them. They put into words and action what finance

capital actually means.

In the current issue of the British Labourite magazine *New Statesman*, the main Greek negotiator trying to persuade in the bourgeoisie to make some concessions, Varoufakis, describes:

*“... the complete lack of any democratic scruples, on behalf of the supposed defenders of Europe’s democracy. The quite clear understanding on the other side that we are on the same page analytically – of course it will never come out at present. [And yet] To have very powerful figures look at you in the eye and say ‘You’re right in what you’re saying, but we’re going to crunch you anyway’ ... there was point blank refusal to engage in economic arguments. Point blank. ... You put forward an argument that you’ve really worked on – to make sure it’s logically coherent – and you’re just faced with blank stares. It is as if you haven’t spoken. What you say is independent of what they say. You might as well have sung the Swedish national anthem – you’d have got the same reply. And that’s startling, for somebody who’s used to academic debate. ... The other side always engages. Well there was no engagement at all. It was not even annoyance, it was as if one had not spoken.”*

To try to “make the other side engage”, the SYRIZA government sought popular support in a referendum. Already repayment deadlines had been missed without any new agreements being reached, and the supply of liquidity to Greek banks was switched off. The referendum was held under conditions of a fiscal blockade which threatened to gradually strangle the country as effectively as any naval blockade in history. Nevertheless a 61% vote to reject the Troika’s exactions represented a high-water-mark in SYRIZA’s popular support.

But it only made the EU “institutions” more intransigent. Prime Minister Tsipras himself now went to the EU with a set of proposals which represented abject surrender.

He promised to reform the tax system, accept increases in Value Added Tax (VAT), increase the pension age, increase employee pension contributions, cut back on early retirement and do away with benefits for the very poorest pensioners, sell off remaining state assets, cut state spending and take steps to destroy trade union rights.

But it now was not enough for the European bourgeois leaders. They were furious that the Greeks had had the gall to elect a government which rejected their measures for Greece; they resented the fact that the SYRIZA government cracked open a chink in the curtain of capitalist "austerity" and gave working people even the hope of something different. This had to be stamped out completely.

They insisted on a much clearer set of commitments on all these issues, spelled out in chapter and verse, and the right to have their creatures sit in on the drafting of the legislation to be rushed through the Greek parliament (using the votes of opposition parties, who of course had always supported these measures).

Why do the bourgeois leaders of the world who pull the strings which move the EU institutions – including Europe's national governments and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) insist on nothing less than abject surrender?

Why would they risk the possible repercussions, which could include Greece defaulting on her debts and even the break-up of the euro currency bloc? We know this from the fact that the IMF (no doubt egged on by the US government) warns that Greece's debt burden is devastating and beyond recovery.

It is their own crisis of the capitalist system which urges them on regardless of the consequences. The upheavals in the world of finance which surfaced after 2007 were a huge systemic shock, but they were a real expression of the underlying crisis of imperialism.

By some estimates, the total amounts lost in, around and following the crash were truly massive.

On October 1 2012, the Wall Street Journal summarised the assessment of the former chief credit officer of Standard and Poor's rating agency Mark Adelson:

*"An attempt at sizing up the economic impact produced varied and sobering results, with losses attributed to decline in world gross domestic product and household wealth, and other measures focused on the financial sector including bank write-downs and the increase in government support.*

*"The \$10 trillion to \$12 trillion drop in value of world stock markets and the \$5.7 trillion to \$12.8 trillion plunge in US output in the decade to 2018 give the best overall look at the costs, however, he said. "These numbers suggest total costs likely to run \$5 trillion to \$15 trillion ..."* (<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2012/10/01/total-global-losses-from-financial-crisis-15-trillion/> )

The only solution which the capitalist masters of the world can find is to turn on the masses of working people and strip them of all the progress they have gained in the past.

By the way, the "bailout money" from the institutions mainly does not end up in Greece. As economics correspondent Philip Inman wrote in the UK Guardian newspaper on 29 June 2015:

*"Only a small fraction of the 240 billion euros (£170 billion) total bailout money Greece received in 2010 and 2013 found its way into the government's coffers to soften the blow of the 2008 financial crash and fund reform programmes. Most of the money went to the banks that lent Greece funds before the crash. Unlike most of Europe, which ran up large budget deficits to protect pensioners and welfare recipients, Athens was then forced to dramatically reduce its deficit by squeezing pensions and cutting the minimum wage".*



Capitalist society works through the creation of surplus value by labour and the “valorisation” of that surplus value, its conversion into new capital re-invested into new ventures for yet more profits.

This social formation – capital – which historically played a progressive role in the development of the productive forces, has now for a century been at the heart of the economic crisis as a barrier to their further development. That crisis rumbles on; it has not been overcome. In the attempt to solve it, the bourgeoisie must try to increase the portion of surplus value which it pockets at the expense of the portion which is claimed by the working class and working people more broadly.

Working class struggle has wrested significant concessions from the ruling class in terms of wages, welfare and pension rights, and normal expectations that the state will provide health, education and legal rights and facilities and the chance of a decent home in a reasonably healthy environment.

All these things were enshrined in political and legal arrangements through which workers and others could assert their needs.

So in order to be able to strip working people of the share of surplus value which they have been able to take previously, either in the individual wage packet or as a “social wage”, the bourgeoisie has to attack, undermine and de-nature all these arrangements, which include socialist (or Labour) political parties and, where they can, trade unions.

And this has been the basis for the degeneration of reformist socialist parties across Europe. Greece’s PASOK, the German SPD, the Parti socialiste in France, Labour in the UK and all their like have been politically hollowed out and de-fanged over decades.

But the decline of reformist parties has not been matched by a collapse in the illusions and expectations of masses of people

in Europe.

Despite nearly forty years of continuous attack, despite the massive and savage increase in productivity and the closure of many industries relocated overseas, in many respects the assault of capital is only beginning.

One has to envision the depth of what the new Conservative government is planning in the UK to have any grasp of the scale of social conflict the bourgeoisie is proposing across Europe: savagely stripping away the vestiges of a welfare system; systematically re-engineering the health and education services to turn them into objects of profit for business; massively depriving people of access to a decent home; ongoing destruction of the whole legal system which provided some sort of safeguard for the poor and the weak; an onslaught on human rights legislation.

“Austerity” is a word often bandied about, but it hardly covers what is actually proposed. The way working class life and communities have been under-mined and the decay and collapse of social-democratic and “Communist” political parties has led to a tendency to accept that “there is no alternative” and often a backward scapegoating of claimants, the unemployed and migrants.

Individualism has made progress among working people who a generation ago would have stood (and did stand) firm in defence of class rights. Old working class areas of the UK have shown an appetite for voting along nationalist lines. Social fragmentation weakens the possibility of resistance and undermines traditionally powerful methods of struggle.

In the economic and social witches’ brew that is Europe, the initial steps in the political recovery of the masses has been marked by these factors.

Loudly denouncing the sell-out on the part of social democracy, the leaders of the new formations such as SYRIZA,

the section of the French Communist Party which re-engineered itself as the Parti de Gauche, PODEMOS, Die Linke and the rest demand very little that is not – traditional social democracy, pure and simple!

As (generally) followers of the late John Maynard Keynes, they do not call for a socialist revolution, but capitalism with its contradictions contained, smoothed over, managed and regulated by state intervention.

Their critique is not of capitalism as such – they are indeed not at all interested in abolishing it – but of “neo-liberal ideologues” who have allegedly inspired all the problems we face for some subjective reason.

Nevertheless, precisely because of this actually very moderate outlook, these parties are the vehicles through which the working people of Europe have started their political revival.

People are obliged to enter the path of struggle, but their first steps are hampered by profound illusions on the one hand and a profound disillusionment caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and of hopes of a socialist future on the other.

They will have to overcome both handicaps, but that will only be achieved along the road of resistance they are increasingly adopting.

The challenge for Marxists is to identify and put forward proposals for action which lead the way to a confrontation with the system as a whole.

The future revolutionary leadership of the masses will be built in the unity and mutual struggle of the Marxists and the forces who come forward to conduct the present fight which is focussed most sharply on Greece.

This leadership will have to free itself from illusions that working people “share” any “values” with a bourgeoisie whose

true values are exposed every minute in their relentless drive to impoverish, disarm and disempower us.

Bob Archer – July 2015

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# **APPEAL TO SUPPORT THE RESISTING GREEK PEOPLE and its TRUTH COMMISSION ON PUBLIC DEBT – FOR THE PEOPLES' RIGHT TO AUDIT PUBLIC DEBT**

*To the people of Europe and the whole world!*

*To all the men and women who reject the politics of austerity and are not willing to pay a public debt which is strangling us and which was agreed to behind our backs and against our interests.*

We signatories to this appeal stand by the Greek people who, through their vote at the election of 25th January 2015, became the first population in Europe and in the Northern hemisphere to have rejected the politics of austerity imposed to pay an alleged public debt which was negotiated by those on top without the people and against the people. At the same time we consider that the setting up of the Greek Public Debt Truth Commission at the initiative of the president of the Greek Parliament constitutes a historic event, of crucial importance not only for the Greek people but also for the

people of Europe and the whole world!

Indeed, the Truth Commission of the Greek Parliament, composed of volunteer citizens from across the globe, is destined to be emulated in other countries. First, because the debt problem is a scourge that plagues most of Europe and the world, and secondly because there are millions and millions of citizens who are rightly posing basic and fundamental questions about this debt:

*“What happened to the money that made up this loan? What were the conditions attached to it? How much interest has been paid, at what rate? How much capital has been repaid? How was the debt allowed to accumulate without benefiting the people? Where did the capital go? What was it used for? How much was diverted, by whom, and how was this done?”*

*“And also: Who took out this loan and in whose name? Who granted the loan and what was their role? How did the state become involved? By what decision, taken with what authorisation? How did private debts become ‘public’? Who set up such inappropriate schemes, who pushed in this direction, who profited from them? Were offences or crimes committed with this money? Why has penal civil, criminal and administrative responsibility not been established?”*

All these questions will be subjected to rigorous analysis by the commission, which has an official mandate to “gather all information relevant to the emergence and disproportionate increase in public debt, and to subject the data to scientific scrutiny in order to determine what part of that debt can be identified as illegitimate and illegal, odious or unsustainable, during the period of the Memoranda, from May 2010 to January 2015 as well as in the preceding years. It must also publish precise information – which must be accessible to all citizens, provide the evidence to back up public declarations, raise awareness among the Greek population, the international community and international

public opinion, and finally draw up arguments and demands calling for cancellation of the debt.

We consider that it is the most basic democratic right of every citizen to demand clear and precise answers to these questions. We also consider that refusal to reply constitutes a denial of democracy and transparency on the part of those at the top who invented and use the "debt-system" to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. And even worse: we consider that by jealously keeping for themselves the monopoly right to decide the fate of society, those at the top deprive the overwhelming majority of citizens not only of their right to make decisions but above all of the right to take their destiny and the fate of humanity into their hands!

This is why we are launching the following urgent appeal to all citizens, social movements, ecological and feminist networks and movements, trade unions and political organizations that reject this ever less democratic and humane neo-liberal Europe: Show your solidarity with the Greek resistance by supporting in action the Greek Public Debt Truth Commission and its work in identifying that part of the Greek public debt which is illegal, illegitimate, odious and/or unsustainable.

Defend it against the outrageous attacks it has been subjected to from all those forces in Greece and the rest of the world who have an interest in keeping the truth about the "debt-system" hidden from view.

Actively take part in the citizen debt audits that are being developed throughout Europe and elsewhere.

Share your support and solidarity on your social networks, since this support and international solidarity is the only way to thwart the ruling powers' plan to suffocate Greece and the people who are fighting against our common enemy: the politics of austerity and the debt that is strangling us!

We are confronted by an experienced adversary, united, well-coordinated, armed with extraordinary powers and absolutely determined to pursue its offensive against every one of us to the bitter end: we who constitute the overwhelming majority of our societies. We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of resisting separately, each in his own corner. So let us unite our forces in a vast movement of solidarity with the Greek resistance and support for the Truth Commission of the Greek Parliament, multiplying such debt audit commissions everywhere where that is possible. Because the struggle of the Greek people is our struggle and their victory will be our victory. Our unity is our only strength

**United we stand; divided we fall!**

***Click here [GreekDebtTruthCommission.org](http://GreekDebtTruthCommission.org) to sign this Appeal***

**A first indicative list of 300 personalities supporting the Appeal**

1. Immanuel Wallerstein, sociologist, historical social scientist, and world-systems analyst, USA
2. Noam Chomsky, MIT, USA
3. Ken Loach, film and television director, UK
4. Hugo Blanco Galdos, historico dirigente movimiento campesino indigeno, Peru
5. Etienne Balibar, philosophe, France
6. Frei Betto, writer, political activist, liberation theologian, Brazil.
7. Leonardo Boff, theologian and writer, Professor Emeritus of Ethics, Philosophy of Religion, and Ecology at the Rio de Janeiro State University, Brazil.
8. Gaillot Jacques, France, Évêque

9. Paul Jorion, Belgique, Détenteur de la chaire "Stewardship of Finance", Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
10. Padre Alex Zanotelli- missionario comboniano(Napoli-Italia)
11. Ada Colau (major candidate, Barcelona en Comú) Barcelona-Estat español
12. Susan George, honorary president of Attac-France; president of the Transnational Institute, France
13. Costas Isychos, Deputy Minister of National Defense, Greece
14. James Petras, retired Bartle Professor (Emeritus) of Sociology at Binghamton University in Binghamton, New York and adjunct professor at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada who has published prolifically on Latin American and Middle Eastern political issues, USA
15. ALBIOL GUZMAN Marina parlamentaria electa del Parlamento Europeo en las Elecciones al Parlamento Europeo de 2014 por la coalición de La Izquierda Plural.
16. DE MASI Fabio, Ökonom und Politiker (Die Linke). Bei der Europawahl 2014 wurde er in das Europäische Parlament gewählt.
17. CHRYSOGONOS Kostas, European parliamentarian, Syriza, Greece
18. LOPEZ BERMEJO Paloma, sindicalista y política española. Fue elegida eurodiputada, Izquierda Plural, España
19. Ransdorf Milislav, Member of the European Parliament for the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, Czech Republic.
20. FORENZA Eleonora, , Parlamentaria Europea (L'Altra Europa con Tsipras) membro della segreteria nazionale del Partito della Rifondazione Comunista, Italia



21. Arcadi Oliveres, economista català i un reconegut activista per la justícia social i la pau, Catalunya
22. Jorge Riechmann, Jorge Riechmann, ensayista, poeta y profesor de filosofía moral (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid). Miembro del Consejo Ciudadano de Podemos en la Comunidad de Madrid.
23. Joanne Landy. Co-Director, Campaign for Peace and Democracy, New York City, USA
24. Tariq Ali, writer, UK
25. Mariana Mortagua, députée Bloco, Portugal
26. Cecilia Honorio, députée Bloco, Portugal
27. João Semedo, députée Bloco, Portugal
28. José Soeiro, député Bloco, Portugal
29. Jeffrey St. Clair, editor of CounterPunch, author of Born Under a Bad Sky and Grand Theft Pentagon, USA
30. Nico Cué, secrétaire général de la FGTB Métal, Belgium
31. Jaime Pastor, Profesor de Ciencia Política y editor de Viento Sur.
32. Michael Lowy, écrivain, professeur, France
33. Paolo Ferrero, segretario nazionale del partito della Rifondazione Comunista- Sinistra Europea, Italia
34. Farooq Tariq , General secretary , Awami Workers Party, Pakistan
35. Andrej Hunko, depute Die Linke, Germany
36. Annette Groth, depute Die Linke, Germany
37. Mireille Fanon Mendes France ,Expert ONU, France

38. István Mészáros, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, University of Sussex, Hungary/UK
39. Pierre Khalifa, coprésident de la Fondation Copernic, France
40. Aminata Traore, ancienne ministre de la culture du Mali
41. CARMEN LAMARCA PEREZ, catedratica de Derecho Penal Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Espana
42. Francisco Louçã, Bloco de Esquerda, Portugal
43. Pablo Micheli, secrétaire général de la CTA (Central de los Trabajadores Autónoma de la Argentina)
44. Joxe Iriarte "Bikila", Miembro de la coordinadora nacional de la organizacion vasca, Alternatiba y de la coailicion Eh-Bildu.
45. Mary N. Taylor, member of editorial board, LeftEast website/Assistant Director, Center for Place, Culture and Politics, City University of New York., USA
46. Ahlem belhadj, pédopsychiatre; militante féministe, Tunisie
47. Achin Vanaik, founding member of the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace and a co-recipient of the International Peace Bureau's Sean McBride International Peace Prize for 2000, India
48. Michel Warschawski, écrivain-activiste, Israel
49. Eleonora Forenza, eurodeputata "L'Altra Europa con Tsipras", Italia
50. Besancenot Olivier, NPA, France
51. Sol Trumbo Vila , Economic Justice, Corporate Power and Alternatives Program , Transnational Institute (TNI)

52. Jesper Jespersen, professor of Economics, Roskilde University, Denmark
53. Marta Harnecker, writer Chile
54. Michael A Lebowitz, economist Canada
55. Krivine Alain, NPA, France
56. Marco Revelli, professore universitario ed ex portavoce "L'Altra Europa con Tsipras", Italia
57. Marcel Francis Kahn, medecin, France
58. Houtart Francois, Fundación Pueblo Indio del Ecuador
59. SAMIR AMIN, Professeur d'Université, Président Forum Mondial des Alternatives, France
60. Mariya Ivancheva, member of editorial board, LeftEast website/Post-doctoral research fellow, University College Dublin, Ireland
61. Pablo Echenique, Podemos, Espana
62. Gustave Massiah (AITEC (Association Internationale des Techniciens Experts et Chercheurs), membre du Conseil International du Forum Social Mondial, France
63. Juan Carlos Monedero, Podemos, Espana
64. Achcar Gilbert, professor SOAS University of London, UK
65. Gerardo Pisarello (Barcelona en Comú) Barcelona -Estat Español
66. Paul Lootens, Président, Centrale Générale FGTB, Belgium
67. Vicent Maurí, Portavoz Intersindical Valenciana, Espana
68. Pablo Micheli, secrétaire général de la CTA (Central de los Trabajadores Autónoma de la Argentina)

69. Dr Pritam Singh DPhil (Oxford) ,Professor of Economics,Department of Accounting, Finance and Economics, Faculty of Business, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK

70. Raúl Camargo Fernández, candidato en la lista de Podemos a la Comunidad

de Madrid. Miembro de Anticapitalistas, Espana

71. Miguel Benasayag, philosophe, psychanalyste, Argentina/France

72. Vincent DECROLY, ancien parlementaire fédéral indépendant, membre du Secrétariat de VEGA (Vert et de gauche), Belgium

73. Catherine Samary, économiste et altermondialiste, France

74. Harribey Jean-Marie, professeur de sciences économiques et sociales, France

75. Coutrot Thomas, économiste, porte parole d'Attac France

76. Aziki Omar, Secrétaire général, ATTAC/CADTM MAROC

77. Marga Ferré, Coordinadore General de areas Izquierda Unida, Espana

78. Vladimir Unkovski-Korica,member of editorial board, LeftEast website/ Assistant Professor, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

79. Alessandra Mecozzi,Libera International, Italia

80. Dr. Elmar Altvater, Politikwissenschaftler, Autor und emeritierter Professor für Politikwissenschaft am Otto-Suhr-Institut der FU Berlin., Germany

81. Guido Viale, economist, promotore della lista "L'Altra Europa con Tsipras », Italia

82. Gustave Massiah (AITEC (Association Internationale des

Techniciens Experts et Chercheurs) membre du Conseil International du Forum Social Mondial, France

83. Dr Guy Standing,, Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, Professor in Development Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Co-President, Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), UK

84. Julio Perez Serrano, Head of the Contemporary History Research Group, Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Universidad de Cádiz, Espana

85. Roberto Musacchio, già eurodeputato, Italia

86. Véronique Gallais, militante et actrice de l'économie sociale et solidaire, membre du conseil scientifique d'Attac France

87. Jean Gadrey, économiste, Conseil scientifique Attac, France

88. Rossen Djagalov, member of editorial board, LeftEast website/ Assistant Professor, Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey

89. Paul Mackney – Co-Chair, Greece Solidarity Campaign, UK

90. Katz Claudio, economist, profesor, Argentina

91. Monique Dental, présidente fondatrice Réseau Féministe "Ruptures" France

92. John Weeks, economist. He is a Professor Emeritus of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, UK

93. Luciana Castellina, già deputata e già presidente Cultura del Parlamento Europeo, presidente onoraria ARCI

94. Tijana Okic, University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Philosophy, Philosophy, Faculty Member, Bosnia/Herzegovina

95. Josep Maria Antentas, profesor de sociología de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), Espana
96. David Graeber, London School of Economics, Usa/UK
97. Sergio Rossi, Full Professor & Chair of Macroeconomics and Monetary Economics, University of Fribourg, Switzerland
98. Óscar Carpintero, Profesor de Economía Aplicada, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales, Universidad de Valladolid, Espana
99. Geoffrey Harcourt, Emeritus Reader in The History of Economic Theory, Cambridge 1998; Professor Emeritus, Adelaide 1988; Visiting Professorial Fellow, UNSW 2010–2016, Australia
100. Janette Habel , universitaire, France
101. ANDREJA ZIVKOVIC, sociologist and member of Marx21, Serbia
102. Philippe Diaz, cinéaste, réalisateur de « The End of Poverty », USA
103. Attac Castilla y Leon . España.
104. Andrew Ross, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis, New York University, USA
105. Lieben Gilbert, Secrétaire Générale CGSP Wallonne, Belgium
106. Esther Vivas, periodista, Estado español
107. Pierre Salama, economiste, professeur emerite des universités
108. Teresa Gómez, economista, miembro del Círculo 3E (Economía, Ecología y Energía) de PODEMOS
109. PACD (Plataforma Auditoria Ciudadana de la Deuda), Espana

110. Liliana Pineda, abogada, escritora -15M-movimiento por la defense de agua, Espana
111. Claude Calame, Directeur d'études, EHESS, ATTAC, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Centre AnHiMA (Anthropologie et Histoire des Mondes Antiques, UMR 8210), France
112. Teivo Teivainen, Professor of World Politics, University of Helsinki, Finland
113. Yannis Thanassekos, Professeur de Sociologie politique, ancien directeur de la Fondation Auschwitz, collaborateur scientifique à l'université de Liège, Belgium
114. Enrique Ortega,, professor-movimiento por la defense de agua, Espana
115. Dr. Karl Petrick, Associate Professor of Economics, Western New England University, UK
116. Rosa Moussaoui, grand reporter à L'Humanité, France.
117. Eric Corijn, Professeur Etudes Urbaines, Vrije Universiteit Brussel
118. Dr. Jorge Garcia-Arias, Associate Professor of Economics, University of Leon, Espana
119. Lankapeli Dharmasiri, member of the Polit Bureau of the N SSP, Sri Lanka
120. Colectivo Internacional Ojos para la Paz
121. Yves Sintomer, Membre de l'Institut Universitaire de France, Professeur de science politique, chercheur au CSU-CRESPPA (CNRS/Université Paris-Lumières), France
122. Prabhat Patnaik, Economist, New Delhi.
123. Roger Silverman, Workers' International Network, UK

124. Des Gasper, professor of public policy, The Hague, Netherlands
125. Dr Julian Wells, Principal lecturer in economics, School of Economics, History and Politics, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Kingston University, UK
126. Lluís Alòs i Martí, professor economia, Barcelona
127. Benoit Hazard, Anthropologue, Institut interdisciplinaire d'Anthropologie du Contemporain (UMR Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales/ Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), France
128. Bruno THERET, Bruno Théret, économiste, Directeur de recherche émérite au CNRS, université Paris Dauphine, France
129. Steve Keen, professor Head, School of Economics, Politics & History, Kingston University London, UK
130. Jennar Raul Marc, écrivain, France
131. Franchet Pascal, vice-président CADTM, France
132. Adda BEKKOUCHE, Juriste, France
133. Marie-Dominique Vernhes, Rédaction du "Sand im Getriebe" (ATTAC), France
134. Claude Serfati, Economiste, France
135. Samy Johsua, professeur émérite Aix Marseille université
136. Dr. Antoni Domenech, Full Professor of Methodology of Science Faculty of Economics, University of Barcelona, Espana
137. Bibiana Medialdea, economist, Espana
138. Judith Dellheim, Berlin, Zukunftskonvent, Germany
139. Dra. Patricia Britos (Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Argentina)



140. Syed Abdul Khaliq, Focal Person, Executive Director  
Institute for Social & Economic Justice (ISEJ) Pakistan
141. María Elena Saludas, ATTAC Argentina / CADTM – AYNA,  
Argentina
142. Gerard PERREAU BEZOUILLE, Premier Adjoint honoraire de  
Nanterre, France
143. BENHAIM RAYMOND, CEDETIM, ECONOMISTE, France
144. António Dores, Professor Auxiliar com Agregação do  
Departamento de Sociologia do Centro de Investigação e Estudos  
de Sociologia (CIES/ISCTE-IUL), Portugal
145. Annie Pourre, No Vox International, France
146. Pedro Ibarra catedrático ciencia política Universidad  
país vasco, Espana
147. Dan Gallin, Global Labour Institute, Geneva, Switzerland.
148. Cossart Jacques, économiste, France
149. Richard Danie, responsable syndicale FGTB, Belgium
150. Rome Daniel, Attac – Professeur d'économie gestion,  
France
151. ANGEL GARCÍA PINTADO (escritor y periodista), Espana
152. Gotovitch José, historien, Professeur hon. Université  
Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium
153. Nacho Álvarez, Professor of Applied Economics, University  
of Valladolid, Member of Podemos, Espana
154. Dr. Jeff Powell, Senior Lecturer, Economics, Department of  
International Business & Economics, University of Greenwich,  
Old Royal Naval College, London, UK
155. J. Francisco Álvarez DNI 41981064S Full Professor of

Logic and Philosophy of Science. National Distance University of Spain. Madrid, Espana

156. Christian Zeller, Professor of Economic Geography, University of Salzburg, Austria

157. Dillon John, Ecological Justice Program Coordinator, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, Canada

158. Jean-Claude SALOMON, DR honoraire au CNRS, conseil scientifique d'Attac, France

159. Dr. Oscar Ugarteche, Instituto de Investigacione Económicas, UNAM, Ciudad, universitaria, Coyoacán, México DF 04510, Coordinador OBELA, Mexico

160. Alberto Montero, economistas de Podemos, Espana

161. Dr Vickramabahu, new same society party- NSSP, Sri Lanka

162. João Romão, Music Sociologist, University of Leipzig, Germany

163. Michel Rouseau, Euromarches, France

164. Julio Alguacil Gómez. Profesor de Sociología. Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Espana

165. Fernando Rosas, professeur universitaire, Portugal

166. Dr Neil Lancaster, Senior Lecturer, Department of Accounting and Finance, DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY, LEICESTER, UK

167. Rosaria Rita Canale, Associate professor in Economic Policy, Dept. of Business and Economics, University of Naples "Parthenope", Italia

168. Antonio Baylos, Professeur du Droit de Travail. Université Castilla La Mancha, Espana

169. Abdallah Zniber, ancien président du réseau Immigration

Développement Démocratie (IDD) – France

170. Eric Fassin, sociologue, Université Paris-8, France
171. Paul Ariès, politologue, rédacteur en chef du mensuel les Zindigné(e)s, France
172. Nuno Rumo, Democracia e Divida, Portugal
173. Roland Zarzycki, Not Our Debt, Poland
174. Nicolas Sersiron, Président cadtm France et auteur, France
175. Noemi Levy, phd in economics. Chair professor Noemi Levy, UNAM. Economic Faculty, Mexico
176. Domenico M. Nuti, Emeritus Professor, Sapienza University of Rome, Italia
177. Christine Pagnouille, ATTAC Liège, Université de Liège, Belgium
178. . Dr Judith Mehta, heterodox economist, recently retired from the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK.
179. Maria João Berhan da Costa, CADPP, Revista Rubra, Habita, Portugal
180. Héctor Arrese Igor, profesor Universidad de Buenos Ayres, Argentina.
181. Ciriza Alejandra, Dra. en Filosofía por la UNCuyo. Investigadora Independiente del CONICET, INCIHUSA CCT Mendoza. Directora del Instituto de Estudios de Género (IDEGE) de la Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina.
182. René Passet, Professeur émérite d'économie à l'Université Paris 1- Panthéon-Sorbonne, France
183. Dr. Susan Caldwell, professor (retired), Conseil

d'administration d'Alternatives, Montréal, Canada

184. Dr. Deborah Potts , Reader in Human Geography, King's College London, UK

185. Dr. James D. Cockcroft, author, professor (retired), Honorary Editor Latin American Perspectives; a founder Red en Defensa de la Humanidad; Montréal, Canada

186. Daniela Tavasci , senior lecturer ,Queen Mary University of London, UK

187. Wilfred Dcosta, Indian Social Action Forum – INSAF, New Delhi, India

188. Malcolm Sawyer, Emeritus Professor of Economics, University of Leeds, UK

189. Matyas BENYIK, Chairman of ATTAC, Economist, Budapest, Hungary

190. Ricardo Ortega Gonzalez, economista, funcionario de Eusko Jaurlaritza-Gobierno Vasco, Espana

191. Gabriel Colletis, Professeur de Sc. économique à l'Université de Toulouse 1-Capitole. France

192. Adam Rorris, National Coordinator, Australia-Greece Solidarity Campaign, Australia

193. Carlos Durango Sáez , Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Espana

194. Dr. Laura Horn, Associate Professor, Roskilde University, Denmark

195. Dr. Peter Herrmann, Федеральное государственное бюджетное образовательное учреждение высшего профессионального образования «Российский экономический университет имени Г.В. Плеханова/

Federal state-funded educational institution of higher professional education Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Russia

196. Dr. Miriam Boyer, ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Germany

197. Jérôme Duval, CADTM, Estado español

198. Michael Hartmann, Professur für Elite- und Organisationssoziologie, Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany

199. Dr. Ulrich Duchrow, professor, Scientific Council of Attac Germany

200. Mogens Ove Madsen, Associate Professor, Department of Business and Management, Aalborg University, Denmark

201. Guglielmo Forges Davanzati, Professor of Political Economy, University of Salento, Italia

202. Mehmet Ugur, Professor of Economics and Institutions, University of Greenwich Business School, UK

203. Jacques Berthelot, économiste, France

204. Herbert Schui, Prof. of Economics, Germany

205. Mateo Alaluf, Prof émérite de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Belgium

206. Michele CANGIANI, economist, écrivain, université Ca' Foscari, Venise, Italia

207. Marcela de la Peña Valdivia, Chargée de missions (Sociologue, Maitrise en gestion interdisciplinaire de l'environnement, spécialité femmes et développement. Certificat interuniversitaire d'évaluation de politiques publiques, Suisse

208. Jean Batou, professeur, Université de Lausanne, Suisse

209. Julia Varela Fernández, catedrática de sociología de la universidad complutense, Espana
210. Benny Asman, Economic historian, Belgium
211. Pepe Mejia, activista/militante de Attac Madrid, Plataforma contra la operación especulativa en Campamento, Plataforma en Defensa de la Sanidad Pública de Latina, miembro de Podemos y de Anticapitalistas, Espana
212. Joaquin Aparicio Tovar, Catedrático de Derecho del Trabajo y La Seguridad Social. Decano, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Espana
213. raffaella bolini – Arci
214. International Alliance of Inhabitants (Cesare Ottolini IAI Global Coordinator)
215. Marco Bersani, Attac Italia
216. Professor Robert Dixon, Department of Economics, The University of Melbourne, Australia
217. Nicolás Giest, argentinian lawyer, and a also a researcher about the argentinian external debt, Argentina
218. Anastassia Politi, metteur en scène – comédienne, France
219. Luis Glez Reyes. Ecologistas en Acción, Espana
220. Georges Menahem, Economiste et sociologue, directeur de recherche au CNRS, MSH Paris Nord, France
221. Franck Gaudichaud, enseignant-chercheur Université Grenoble-Alpes (France)
222. Iván H. Ayala, profesor universitario, investigador del Instituto Complutense de Estudios Internacionales, Espana
223. Asier Blas Mendoza – Profesor del Departamento de Ciencia

Política de la Universidad del País Vasco UPV/EHU, Espana

224. Jean NKESHIMANA, Country Program Manager, Terre des Jeunes du Burundi

225. Piero Di Giorgi, direttore di Dialoghi Mediterranei, Italia

226. Dr. Stefanie Wöhl, Guest Professor, University of Kassel, Political Science Department, Kassel, Germany

227. Enzo Scandurra, Full Professor of Urban Planning, Sapienza University of Rome, Italia

228. Massimo Pasquini, Segretario Nazionale Unione Inquilini, Italia

229. Manuel Martínez Forega, Crítico literario y filólogo. Estudios de Filología Española, de Filología

Románica y de Derecho en la Universidad de Zaragoza, Espana

230. Josep Maria Antentas, profesor de sociología de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), Espana

231. Barry Finger, Editorial board member, New Politics, Netherlands

232. Giusto Catania, Assessore al Comune di Palermo. – Ex Deputato europeo, Italia

233. Janette Habel , universitaire, France

234. Francesco Denozza, Professore ordinario di diritto commerciale., Dipartimento di diritto privato e storia del diritto., Università degli Studi di Milano, Italia

235. Javier De Vicente, (on behalf of) UNION SINDICAL OBRERA (USO), Secretario Confederal de Accion Internacional, Espana

236. Sebastian Franco (Alter Summit wants to sign the Call for

the Commission on debt audit).

237. Jonathan Davies, Professor of Critical Policy Studies, De Montfort University, UK

238. Katu Arkonada – Red de Intelectuales en Defensa de la Humanidad, Espana

239. Juan Tortosa, periodista, Espana

240. Eleonora Ponte, Movimento NO TAV Valle di Susa, Italia

241. Pablo de la Vega, Coordinador Regional, En representación de la “Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo (PIDHDD Regional)”, organización de derechos humanos de carácter regional, con presencia en 15 países latinoamericanos y caribeños, y sede administrativa en Quito Ecuador

242. Matias Escalera, Cordero, Escritor y profesor, Espana

243. Enzo Traverso, Cornell University, USA

244. José Manuel Lucía Megías, Catedrático de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Escritor, Espana

245. Juan Ramón Sanz, Presidente de la Fundación “Domingo Malagón” Madrid España

246. Bruce Clarke, artiste plasticien, France

247. Luis Buendia, Associate Professor of Economics, Espana

248. Dominique Taddéi, économiste, ancien député, président de la commission des lois à l’Assemblée Nationale, France

249. Isabel Pérez Montalbán, escritora, Espana

250. Pablo Duque García-Aranda. Músico y profesor. Madrid, España

251. Frédéric Neyrat, philosophe français, ancien directeur de



programme au Collège international de philosophie et Docteur en philosophie (1998). Il est membre du comité de rédaction de la revue Multitudes et de la revue Lignes, France

252. Daniel TANURO, militant écosocialiste, membre de la LCR, Belgium

253. BRACONNIER, Yves, CGSP-Enseignement-Luxembourg, Belgium

254. Jean-Marie Roux, économiste et syndicaliste France

255. Antonio Canalia sindacalista CGIL Piemonte Italia

256. Michel Cahen, senior researcher, CNRS/Sciences Po Bordeaux, France.

257. Yu Maxime, Compositeur-Comédien, Liège, Belgium

258. Renato Zanolli – Commissione Ambiente PRC Torino – Italia

259. Luis Cabo Bravo, miembro de IU de Madrid y de la dirección del PCE, Espana

260. Giorgio Ferraresi, "Società dei territorialisti", già Ordinario di urbanistica al Politecnico di Milano, Italia

261. Edouard Bustin, enseigne les Sciences Politiques à l'Université de Boston et est, également, membre du Centre d'études africaines, USA/Belgium

262. Guillermo Cruz, Guillermo Cruz, realizador de documentales (Euroestafa), España,

263. Françoise Clément, chercheur militante altermondialiste, France

264. Gianni Fabbris – coordinatore nazionale di Altragricoltura –

Confederazione per la Sovranità Alimentare, Italia

265. Luis Dominguez Rodriguez. , Presidente de Attac Castilla

y Leon.

266. Antonio Martinez-Arboleda, Reino Unido, profesor universitario, Espana

267. Werner Ruf, Professor an der Universitaet Kassel, Germany

268. Ricardo García Zaldívar. Economista. Activista (Attac España

269. Pratip Nag, Unorganised Sector Workers Forum, India

270. Marc Amfreville (professeur Paris-sorbonne), France

271. L'Initiative de Solidarité avec la Grèce qui Résiste – Bruxelles, Belgium

272. Jean-Michel Ganteau, Professeur, Université Montpellier 3, France

273. Marco Revelli, professore universitario ed ex portavoce "L'Altra Europa con Tsipras", Italia

274. Rosa Rinaldi, Direzione Rifondazione Comunista

275. Sylvie FERRARI, Associate professor in economics, University of Bordeaux, France

276. Srecko Horvat, Independent scholar, Croatia

277. Karl Fischbacher (Labournet-Austria)

278. Guido Ortona (Prof. Ordinario di Politica Economica), Dipartimento DIGSPES,, Università del Piemonte Orientale, Italia

279. oscar flammini, Espacio de Cultura y Memoria "El Rancho Urutau" de la Ciudad de Ensenada, Provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina

280. Isabel VAZQUEZ DE CASTRO, Enseignant-Chercheur,

formatrice ESPE, France

281. Arnal Ballester, dessinateur. Catalogne, Espana

282. amal Juma, coordinator of the Stop the Wall Campaign.

283. Liliane Blaser, Documentalista, Venezuela

284. Gonzalo Haya Prats, profesor y director del Departamento de Teología en la Universidad del Norte de Chile; profesor de habilidades directivas en instituciones de enseñanza empresarial en España

285. Sol Sánchez Maroto. Socióloga/Antropóloga/ Activista (Attac España)

286. Raquel Freire, cineasta, activista, Portugal

287. Lisa Tilley, Erasmus Mundus GEM Joint Doctoral Fellow, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick | Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

288. Thomas Berns, professeur, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Blegium

289. Francesca Gobbo , former Professor of Intercultural Education & Anthropology of Education, University of Turin, Associate Editor of "Intercultural Education", Italia

290. Marcos Del Roio, prof. de Ciências Políticas UNESP, Brasil.

291. Andrea Zinzani, researcher in Political Geography, CNRS (Paris), France

292. MARIAN SANTIAGO (ciberactivista ecosocial), Espana

293. Gloria Soler Sera, Barcelona, escritora-profesora, Espana

294. Sara Rosenberg, escritora y dramaturga, Argentina-España

295. CARINA MALOBERTI, Consejo Directivo Nacional – ATE-CTA

(Asociación Trabajadores del Estado – Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina)

296. Convocatoria por la liberación Nacional y Social, Frente Sindical:

Agrupación Martín Fierro (Varela, Mar del Plata y Neuquén

297. Massimo Torrelli, Responsable “L’Altra Europa con Tsipras”.

298. Hichem SKIK, universitaire, dirigeant Parti “Al-Massar” (Voie démocratique et sociale), Tunisie

299. Inma Luna, escritora, poeta, periodista y antropóloga, España

300. Manuel Giron, catedrático, Alicante, España

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# **AN APPEAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR COMMUNITY FROM THE WORKERS OF DITA FACTORY, TUZLA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

We, the workers of Tuzla-based detergent factory DITA, have been fighting a wave of corrupt privatisation, exploitation and asset stripping that is destroying the industry of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

For over two years now, we have guarded our factory around the clock to prevent the removal of machinery and assets.

The process of privatisation of DITA was carried out in collaboration with corrupt politicians, judiciary and banks, which failed to carry out due diligence, and provided toxic loans to the new owners – money that never reached the factory.

Our country is suffering from lack of rule of law: criminal elites have pushed through amendments to the criminal code that mean there is no court that can try financial and trade crimes.

This legalised theft has denied us our basic human rights: we are over 40 monthly salaries in arrears, all of which left us hungry and destitute; we have been forced to watch our family members die because we could not afford medical treatment.

Now bankruptcy proceedings have begun. We are resolved to maintain the occupation of the factory and are refusing to recognise the authority of the trustee managing the bankruptcy unless the interests of the workers are protected, or new investment to reactivate the factory is found.

We are now at a critical point. Without outside support it may only be a matter of days before we are forced to build barricades and resist enforcement from special police forces.

We appeal urgently to the international Trade Union movement for moral and material support.

DITA factory workers, Tuzla, 16 April 2015

Emina Busuladžić, Head of the Strike Committee

Dževad Mehmedović, Shop Steward for the Union of Non-Metal Workers

Contact: [busuladzic.emina@gmail.com](mailto:busuladzic.emina@gmail.com)

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# **Working people in Bosnia at the end of their tether: Two Tuzla workers – former combatants – plan suicide.**

*(Since this article was written, we have learnt that the press and the police were following the marchers and the police confiscated the petrol cans along the way. Fearing that they might actually do as they threatened, the Sarajevo government gave the two a fictitious minimum-wage factory job for a year. They came back home alive.)*

200 Tuzla workers set off on the “One-Way March” to the Croatian border at Orasje, saying they didn’t want to stay in their own country without jobs or a future (See “A cauldron ready to blow”, *Workers’ International Journal* no 10, January 2015). There has been an exodus of tens of thousands of Kosovars and their families to Europe. Although the guns have fallen silent, death still stalks the Balkans. Tossed on the scrap heap like a load of rusting machinery, and not having any political perspectives, the working class is condemned to gestures of despair.

So at 9 o’clock this morning two Tuzla workers, former combatants, set off to walk from Zivinice (an industrial suburb of Tuzla) to Sarajevo, planning self-immolation with petrol in front of the Federal Government building there.

Sefik Muminovic (55) and Dzemal Zahirovic (59) fought for Bosnian independence against Serbian and Croatian fascists. In poor health and with nothing at all to fall back on, they have

made many attempts to find help from various institutions. Seeing their families languish in black decline, they have decided to end it all. They wrote a public letter in the hope that their deaths would save their families.

“We tried to get a meeting at the ministry of former combatants for Tuzla canton, but they said they could do nothing for us us. We tried to talk to our Mayor in Zivinice but he wouldn't let us through the door. We met with humiliation wherever we went, and this in a country we gladly sacrificed our health to defend. We and our whole families are in despair and starving. That's why at 8am tomorrow (Monday 13 April) we will kiss our loved ones goodbye in front of the town hall and then, after a moment's silence in front of the war memorial to our dead comrades, we will pick up our petrol cans and head straight for Sarajevo. There's no point to a life spent in poverty”, said Sefik Muminovic on the *Tuzlanski.ba* website. (1)

They issued a public statement:

“We, Sefik Muminovic and Dzemal Zahirovic, have decided to set off at 9am from the Zivinice town hall on foot for Sarajevo, where we will PUBLICLY IMMOLATE OURSELVES in front of the Federal Government building as a protest against this society which we fought for and which cannot guarantee us a dignified life. We have already been dead as human beings for a while now. But we will not sacrifice our pride. Let the whole world witness our serious state of health as our families starve to death.”

Muminovic fought in the 210th Brigade Sprecanski detachment. After the war he worked in the Djurdjevik mines for five years; he was sacked from there while on sick leave.

“They promised they would give my boy a start at the mine to stop me from taking them to court. But they tricked me, nothing came of it. The manager wouldn't see me. None of us at

home – my wife, my son, my daughter, my daughter in law or me – have any work. We've got nothing left to eat. I tried to commit suicide, but they saved me at the last minute. The former combatants' ministry for the canton say they can do nothing. I cannot see any way out; we are knocked back everywhere we turn. All I can do now is end it all", Muminovic told the daily *Avaz* in despair.

Dzemat Zahirovic belonged to the elite 121 Unit, was twice wounded and gets nothing despite officially being 40% disabled. He says:

"When the war started I immediately joined the defence of the state. I was on every battlefield. And what does this state give us?! I have six children. One daughter died last year from sheer poverty. Nobody in the family has a job, although we are all able to work. I wish the politicians would wake up and help the combatants who have been let down by everybody. If I eat today, there will be nothing left for tomorrow. What sort of life is that?"

This morning they said tearful farewells to their nearest and dearest and the local people and set off from Zivinice. "The whole town of Zivinice ... is echoing with tears, cries of anguish and sadness", *Tuzlanski.ba* reported this morning.

We do not know what will happen today and in the days to come. But the workers' movement in Europe, its activists and anyone at all who claims to be on the left have a duty to come to the aid of the working people of Bosnia. The international struggle of working people functions according to the principle of communicating vessels: those who pay today can draw doubly and triply tomorrow when they need to. Before we can help Bosnian workers to stand up politically, we have to help them out of the despair in which they languish.

I propose a permanent Bosnian workers' solidarity fund to which everybody can make a monthly payment of 5 or 10 euros



for as long as they decide, following the example of the solidarity fund set up in Nancy for the Greek clinics in Patras and Athens. We will set up a bank account for this purpose in the next few days together with comrades in solidarity with the workers of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

May I use this opportunity publicly to thank all those who supported the Dita workers in Tuzla last autumn: 1,600 euros were sent from the ATTAC 54 account to the Tuzla trade unionist Emina Busuladzic.

The original French version of this article was published online on 19 April 2015 at <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article34766>

By Radoslav Pavlovic, 13 April 2015

Notes:

1.

<http://tuzlanski.ba/demobilisani-borci-iz-zivinica-najavili-cin-javnog-spaljivanja-zbog-siromastva/>

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## **Workers' Front Croatia: An interview with DIMITRIJE BIRAC**

*'Yes, we want to abolish capitalism'*

*One of the founders of Workers' Front says: "Our final goal and the character of the party are anti-capitalist, and our current aim is to show that all the problems we talk about, such as unemployment and the collapse in production, are*

*consequences of the socio-economic system, and not of the success or failure of this or that economic policy”.*

**Q: Worker’s Front has been organising for six months or so, but last week you decided to show yourselves in public. Who belongs to your organisation beside the linguist Mate Kapovic and the trade unionist Denis Geto?**

DB: Mainly young people, activists, workers, students, unemployed people. We will introduce some of them to show that it’s not limited to a tiny group.

Our organisation is working along two lines: The first is to work on the infrastructures in different towns, the second is to form links with working people, to support workers’ protest demonstrations and to get in touch with various trade unionists, particularly those who want to put up a struggle.

We are open to all those who are interested in changing society in line with our principles and transitional demands.

**Q: You have said the future party will not have a classic hierarchical structure, but is there a formally constituted leadership at the moment?**

DB: We think that it is necessary to function in a more democratic way, with rank and file members controlling the leadership. Of course there has to be an organised leadership, but for the moment it’s still all coming together.

We still have a lot of work to do on the organisation and structure, but what we can say is that we are preparing a workers’ trade union conference where we will try to bring together a number of militant trade unions.

We have meetings where we discuss uniting the workers movement, and in that sense we are in touch with trade unionists like Zeljko Luksic of HZ (Croatian Railways), Zvonko Segvic of Brodosplit shipyard, and trade unionists in the

power and chemical sector independent union (EKN) and the "Feniks" Post Office union.

We have also been in touch with Mija Stanic about a referendum over the plans to raise money by selling or leasing off parts of the highway network.

**Q: Apart from a few positive comments, most of the media have ignored the appearance of the Anti-Capitalist Party?**

DB: Most of the commercial media have ignored us. On the other hand we did get a reaction from alleged adherents of the neo-classical school of economic thought, who have gained a monopoly position in economic science over recent decades. They do everything in their power to depict us as charlatans and try to discredit us by saying we are not real working people.

According to them, only a blue-collar factory worker with a moustache and a spanner in his hand can count as a working person.

The fact that we are getting resistance from these two quarters only goes to show we are doing the right thing.

The origins of the crisis lie in the system itself.

**Q: How do you see economic reality, as against these people?**

DB: We think that the profound causes of the crisis in Croatian society are that for the last 20 years a political caste which is the product of this socio-economic system caused further social deterioration, the way people are alienated, and the degradation of work.

All the other problems flow from these three main ones, and behind all these processes is the mechanism our economists know nothing about because economic science has dropped the study of reality, whereas this mechanism is the one through which a minority appropriates values created by the rest of

society.

If you postulate that it is more essential to satisfy the needs of capital arising from private appropriation than those of society, then society finds itself removed from all control over work as a whole, over the value created, and then we have a spontaneous process which society cannot control.

Economists who are militant supporters of private capital may well proclaim how rational and efficient it is, but in fact it is a fundamentally irrational system, perhaps the most irrational in the whole of history.

This is the situation: technical progress is greater than ever, but people are working harder and harder and longer and longer for wages which buy them less and less.

**Q: So in Croatia there are fewer people working more and more, while the others become surplus to requirements?**

DB: It's one more proof that the system is irrational, because it cannot use the social potential that is there to develop society's productive forces. But it is also one of its characteristics, because when you have lots of unemployed, the price of labour power falls and in that way, people accept any wages just to get work. All these contradictions show that the necessary structural change cannot just come from the economic policy of a political party, since the source is precisely in the socio-economic system.

**Q: What do you propose?**

DB: We propose a cut in the working week from 40 hours to 35 hours at existing wage levels to increase the number of those in work.

We propose to raise the relative wage, or to put it another way, the part of the wealth the worker creates which comes back to that person, to lower the retirement age, and increase

pensions and the minimum wage, to cap the spread between minimum and maximum wages at a ratio of 1:4, to place banks under social control and other steps to develop society, not profits.

We should put a stop to privatisation.

**Q: The tendencies you describe are present everywhere. What can the State do to counteract them?**

DB: We are not working for some sort of utopian society, but something that flows from the mode of production itself.

We are not enemies of technology, but we are against the capitalist application of technology which means we see the productivity of labour rise, but that is not done for the benefit of society, nor in order to shorten labour time and the proportion of our life we spend at work.

On the contrary, that is getting longer and longer, and the surplus value created is more and more appropriated and more and more used to create new value.

The data shows that while Gross Domestic Product (GDP) keeps rising, globally and in Croatia, wages have risen more slowly than GDP. In that sense we are afraid that you cannot proceed just by redistributing the profits and the value created, since you can introduce taxes, but you cannot by doing so change the system which creates the inequalities.

We see that in periods of economic upswing, capital only grows because it does not pay labour adequately and then, in a period of crisis, the only way capital can get out of it is to reduce the price of labour power so that investments once again become profitable.

We do not say that the state on its own can resolve this problem. Capitalism is a global system, and people should cooperate and organise society in common.

But it is possible to set an example by lowering the working week to 35 hours, so that others can take the question on board.

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# Croatia: Programmatic Principles of the Workers' Front

See also the [Invitation to a conference in Zagreb](#)

1. **The Workers' Front** is a political organization of workers, unemployed, retirees and students, fighting for a radical change of political and economic relations for the benefit of all oppressed and those who live off their work, for realisation of their social demands, and for protection and extension of their rights.

Unlike the existing parliamentary parties in Croatia, including those which in a populist and opportunist way occasionally appeal to workers, the Workers' Front does not aim to establish itself as a traditional political party. Our goal is not to get integrated in the institutions of the system and secure parliamentary seats, salaries and pensions through petty politicking or to advocate only surface reforms, make different coalitions and compromise with those who are responsible for the current situation in the country.

The goal of the Workers' Front is to bring about a radical change of the society we live in through a political struggle, both on economic and political levels. Therefore, participation in elections would only be one of the means to achieve our goals. In order to be able to accomplish this, we

must build an organization rooted in workplaces and connected with everyday social struggle of the disenfranchised.

Unlike the existing political parties, our organization will be truly democratic within itself but act in a disciplined and effective manner. We strive for an organization of activists who would continuously be engaged in trade union, women's rights and students' movement, as well as in the struggle for the rights of all oppressed social groups.

We strive to be a political voice of the social movement which would gather into its ranks 99% of the exploited people in capitalism, and finally, to be an organization that would fight for an essential change of the social order and for transfer of the totality of political power from the hands of the political elite, large capital and banks to the hands of the people.

**2. Capitalism and the so-called "free market"** are directed against workers and the majority in society and inevitably lead to their exploitation and poverty, both in Croatia and on a global scale. They form an unstable system which exists in the periods between two global crises and in each one of them hundreds of thousands of workers are thrown into the streets, their lives being destroyed, all in order to save the profits of the richest few.

The accumulation of profits on the backs of workers, unemployed, students and pensioners and against the interests of the majority, is the motivating drive of those that rule society, while everything else like employment, food security, housing issues, etc., is just a by-product of the profit economy which may get only partially realized, but never to the full extent and never for society as a whole.

A fundamental characteristic of capitalism is the irreconcilable difference between the two basic classes:

capitalists, holding monopoly over the means of production, such as banks, companies, factories, chain stores, hotels etc., and making profit through the work of others, and workers, i.e. all those who rent their labour to survive.

This antagonism cannot be resolved in any other way but by the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and its political system, which represents the ultimate goal of the Workers' Front, achievable only on a broader scale.

In Croatia, the newly made capitalists, or *tycoons*, assisted by their political allies, i.e. parliamentary parties, have destroyed most of industry, which is a natural consequence of the drive for private profit, rather than the interests of the entire society, and sold everything that took decades and many generations of workers to create.

The representatives of large capital and the powers that be keep cynically saying to the poor, "you have to work harder and give up more" trying to sell them the twisted logic that they will be better off with lower salaries and fewer rights.

The Workers' Front will uncompromisingly confront that kind of logic and system. We want the exploiters and political elite to know that "the time has come for you to pay". Our principles are that everyone deserves a job that pays a decent wage; the burden of the economic crisis needs to be shifted from the backs of the poor onto the backs of the richest; democracy needs to stop being an empty phrase used by capital to hide its dictatorship and become social reality through which working people can realize their interests; all privatizations and sales of state assets need to be stopped immediately while all basic resources of public interest should be nationalized; implementation of workers' control over the entire industry.

Since the aforementioned is in severe conflict with the principles of the capitalist system, as well as with the



interests of the ruling class and political elite, the realization of these goals is possible only with the abolition of capitalism.

3. **Although recently founded**, the Workers' Front does not start from scratch. The rich history that inspires and teaches us is a hundred-year-old history of the international trade union and workers' political movement. It is precisely the persistent and devoted struggle of workers organized into trade unions and parties during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that won us the political and material rights we still enjoy today but which have been increasingly under attack, including an eight-hour day, universal suffrage and social protection.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is only the trade union and political struggle of workers that can, as a first step, counter neoliberalism and bring new victories to those who live off their wages alone, and then make possible the realization of a new society in which the currently oppressed working class, together with allied groups, will take power.

In accordance with the aforementioned, the Workers' Front will strive for the workers' movement to return to its revolutionary roots and reintroduce it openly into politics. Populist politics and political trade-offs will be confronted with a clear workers' social program, and preposterous appeals to the common sense and mercy of the ruling class will be replaced with activism, struggle and pressure from below.

Furthermore, the Workers' Front will try to help the development of true and revolutionary trade unionism and support trade union activities while integrating the WF members into them to create the synthesis of political and trade union activism.

We will strive for reforms of current trade unions as well as for transfer of as much influence as possible to the mass of trade union members and their democratization, for the rejection of the current bureaucratic rigidity and accommodationist politics now carried out by the leadership of the biggest labour unions, so they can become one of the most important tools in the workers' struggle.

4. **The rule of big capital** has long outgrown national borders. The complete domination of corporations and banks, uniformity of neoliberal measures implemented within Europe and beyond, and the most powerful nations in the world that pursue imperial politics and continuously launch military campaigns in order to preserve their interests, influence processes in each country, including Croatia.

It is impossible to fight for the rights of workers, students, unemployed, retirees and other oppressed groups only within the borders of one country.

Therefore, the Workers' Front bases its views and activities on full solidarity with all workers and social struggles in the Balkans, Europe and the world, supporting and trying to actively participate in the global movement of dissatisfaction with capitalism and undemocratic systems, including the capitalist parliamentary system whose rise we have witnessed all over the world, from the USA to Spain and Greece to the Arab world. Furthermore, the Workers' Front believes in the need for unity of all workers and all oppressed people in the struggle against the dictatorship of big capital, which is why it most vehemently opposes all the ideologies and movements (nationalism, chauvinism, racism, homophobia, fascism, clericalism, etc.) that want to divide the oppressed, keep them alienated and turn them against one another.

All the oppressed share the same interests, which can only be realized in unity and solidarity with others. The Workers'

Front supports the creation of a strong and coordinated European workers' movement and close connections between all the oppressed in the world. Consequently, the Workers' Front solidarises with all nationally oppressed peoples whose lands are occupied and their language and cultural rights denied.

5. **Above all short term goals**, the fundamental goal of the Workers' Front which determines its activities is the abolition of the capitalist economic and political system and the institution of social ownership over the means of production, built on principles of workers' management of economy and the political power of the working classes, using democratic decision-making to address all questions of direct interest to people across the board – at the level of the workplace, organization, neighborhood, city, and finally, the whole country.

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## **Bosnia: A cauldron ready to blow?**

*RADOSLAV PAVLOVIC recorded a day of high drama as workers in Tuzla marched to the border*

*Sunday 28 December, 2014: 09:00: As I write, high-tension developments are unfolding in the class struggle in Bosnia-Herzegovina. No-one can tell in advance how it will play out.*

Ten minutes ago, 200 workers from 4 firms in Tuzla – Dita, Konjuh, Aida and Livnica (detergents, timber processing and furniture-making, shoe-making and a foundry) – gathering at the Croatian border in Orasje, decided to actually leave the country and go looking for work and a crust of bread anywhere in Europe. They don't even know if they will be let over the border, but what they do know is that this is their last hope; they are fighting a life-and-death struggle at the highest political level. They have nothing to lose: they weren't even able to afford cheap sweets to give their children for Christmas.

### **Tensions**

Tensions have been building up for years, and it has picked up pace since the revolt in February whose sparks ignited explosions in big towns all over the country. But none of their demands were met. What's worse was the feeling hundreds of thousands of workers in this country had that they were being treated like worse than beggars, like idiots. Over recent months, especially in recent weeks, they have knocked on every door, lobbied all the politicians, demonstrated in the street, occupied cross-roads, even slept on the steps outside the canton government building so that freshly-shaven cabinet ministers could meet them to examine the unbearable situation. They got nowhere!

The thousands of workers who used to be employed at these factories are today down to a few hundred. The factories are publicly-owned but condemned to death by the public authorities on behalf of private business people who are mostly Mafiosi. The Bosnian state, which came out of the Dayton agreement with three heads of state, two entities and nine cantons simply does not have a clue what to do with its working class. This ramshackle entity, run under the eye of a European satrap, would make many a former colony blush. Year after year, factory after factory, the economy has been left to rot, industrial plant has gone to rack and ruin and

corruption has flourished at every level. The international market has left Bosnia-Herzegovina by the wayside like a bunch of beggars unable or unwilling to work for Bangladeshi wages – \$35 a month – when you need 200 euros a month to survive in Bosnia. The only ones who get anything in Bosnia are the leading officials, all hand-in-glove, whether nationalist or social-democrat, and a state-of-the-art riot squad with all the latest gear.

From time to time over recent years the canton government has made one-off special payments to the compulsorily unemployed. Then they promised 400KM (convertible marks) or 200 euros, equivalent to a month's salary, for the end of the year, but they changed their minds. Apparently they had no legal basis for the offer, there was no credit line available, etc.

### **Response**

Then, faced with a determined response from workers, they started to haggle, offering 120KM one day, then 180 KM the next, then 220KM (drawn from the Red Cross) and coupons for the rest of the 400KM.

That did it! Two hundred workers decided to get up and leave their country, "leave Bosnia to the gangsters" and go anywhere else in Europe. They walked the 75km from Tuzla to Orasje in three days, in good order and determined, for all the cramps and blisters. Determination grew as country people, young people, townsfolk came out as they passed and offered them everything they could.

### **Solidarity**

A wind of general solidarity breathed on the highroad. Even the cops who came with them to control the traffic felt like part of the march. Medical personnel, all kinds of benevolent associations, former combatants, they all gave without hesitation, while at the government building in Tuzla, all was total paralysis and confusion. The whole town was ready

to explode if the slightest thing went wrong for the marchers. With mobile phones, communications are immediate and total. The other night, the canton government (who are still in place, although they have actually resigned?!) intervened to beg the marchers to stop. But their hands were empty, since they needed authorisation from the canton parliament before they could offer anything. People got more and more angry, saying: "They really do take us for idiots!"

Only minutes ago they were thanking a head teacher (who had loaned them his school for the night) and set out for the Sava river. Before they went, one of them threatened to throw themselves into the icy waters of the Sava, which flooded a third of the country last spring, if they were not allowed to leave the country. Bosnian and Croatian police chiefs have said in advance they will only let people with passports through, but only 23 of the 200 have one. What will they do? They have declared a hunger strike under the starry Bosnian flag that marks the border of the fleur-de-lys State. Support from a Croatian trade union at Osijek, a town 60km away, raises hopes that comrades in Croatia, where everybody has been talking about a Workers Front for the last two weeks, will make a symbolic gesture of support, a symbolism beyond price at so tense a moment. The coming hours will cast a long shadow in future over the class struggle of Tuzla workers. Either the government will give way all along the line, or it will set the whole town alight! There is no room left for half-measures on either side. 200 euros will see people through one month. A victory or a defeat for workers will last years.

To end with, this is what Hasan UZICANIN, a trade union leader at "Aida", said ten minutes ago:

"We don't know what is going to happen from one minute to the next. We don't know what to expect. The spokesperson for the Osijek trade unions (in Croatia) have declared total support. I don't know if they can help us to get over the border.

## ***“Trailed around”***

*“They’ve trailed us around shamelessly, we want to leave this country because you can’t live here. I’m 53 years old and my 18 years’ service at the company means nothing to any of them. I’ve got nothing to live off, although I’m employed at a state-owned business.”*

**10.30:** *Bosnian police are preventing them from crossing the border and threatening them. One woman worker is ill and has been taken away in an ambulance. It is snowing hard. Hasan says: “Either they let us all through, or no-one will get through!”*

**Postscript at 14.30 Sunday 28 December 2014:** *Today the wall round Europe was too high for the workers of Tuzla. The border police were under very strict instructions not to let anybody through the border without a passport! Very few did have one.*

## ***Big brothers***

*The European Union is first of all two big brothers, then the smaller ones, then the children by a second marriage, and then the more or less distant cousins, finally the ones born out of wedlock ... The massacre at Srebrenica in full sight and with the full knowledge of the whole of Europe twenty years ago stirred profound emotions at the time but that doesn’t seem to count for much on the money markets and stock exchanges today ...*

*Even the weather was against the workers: It got very cold and it snowed heavily. With the average age closer to 50 than 30, exhaustion after three days on the road left the women hardly able to stand. A hundred of the toughest ones stood their ground in front of the border post and the implacable police for several hours, the abyss of Europe yawning in front of them, the abyss of Bosnia behind ...*

The mayor of Tuzla was elected by workers' votes and was happy to provide the after-sales service. Three buses were sent to Orasje at ten in the morning. At 13:30 they set off back to Tuzla. A whole hospital was requisitioned to receive the marchers who were completely exhausted, for the Bosnian state looks after those in its care, even if that doesn't extend to giving them enough to eat. There would be warm drinks and the famous Ćevapi kebabs. They even hired six cabs to get everybody home! Yesterday they couldn't raise a bus fare, today everybody gets a taxi home. It's a miracle!

### **Bitterness**

But the miracle only fools those who want to be fooled. Edina ALICIC, president of the union at Aida, swallows her bitterness and says: "You had to go through it to understand it. It's something we will remember for the rest of our lives. And it's not over yet. We won't stop."

Even as I write this, citizens are heading for the meeting-place at the canton government office to form a welcome party. Everybody remembers this building was set on fire last February. Hasan, who wanted to go on but not to let everybody get dispersed, says they are going straight there "to see if they haven't freshened it up a bit in the five days we were away. If not, maybe we could sort it out and put it back as good as new so everybody can admire it". Work may not start tonight, but it will one day soon.