

# **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.

Dzemaal 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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# 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 Čevapi 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.

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## ***Appeal for support from DITA workers in Tuzla***

***A European workers’ euro for 100 workers in Tuzla!***

*A very destructive war cost many lives and split the Bosnian working class. Then an international protectorate imposed new authorities, promising workers a “Swedish Paradise”. But what they actually got was a “Greek Hell”. There is no work for either young or old, there is little enough medical care and it isn’t free; You have to pay for schooling unless you go to a religious school; if the administration delays issuing you a new identity card, you simply lose the right to vote ... Meanwhile they have stopped trying to catch war criminals or doing anything for former combatants or war victims.*

*Peace is deadlier than war In Bosnia-Herzegovina. Privatisation of industry has everywhere brought factory closures and new capitalists on the lookout for property deals; The Polichem chemical group’s seaside hotel in Neum is worth ten times more than all its plant and thousands of*

workers in Tuzla.

The DITA detergent works are emblematic of political corruption and decay which stand out among the things that Bosnian workers have suffered. Only 132 of the thousand employees who provided all former Yugoslavia's industrial and household cleaning products remain. Shares that were sold to workers quickly ended up in the hands of particular people who saddled the firm with bank debt of millions of German Marks (the equivalent of the national currency km), embezzled the money, giving it to "partners" they control and then, either unable (or unwilling) to re-start production, handed the firm back to the state for a symbolic 1km. But neither the state nor the canton of Tuzla wanted this poisoned present. They ruled it "unconstitutional", but they also, incidentally, refused to give it back to the workers until they paid back the astronomic debts ... What do you do in nightmare like this?

The hundred or so workers still at DITA have received no wages for 32 months. They have tried everything: factory occupation, hunger strikes, demonstrations, occupying cross-roads, lobbying all the political parties and trying all levels of the justice system. Even now, whatever the weather, they go on the street once a week and protest angrily. There are many couples with husband and wife working in the same factory. Many workers lost everything in the spring floods. Since February they have been the first to demonstrate, and today they are still the last to leave the demonstrations. But morally and materially they are at the end of their tether. Should we wait until one of them pours petrol over her or himself or jumps off the public gallery of Parliament onto the Mafia men and their mouthpieces below, to burst the bubble of fear and "every man for himself"? A Romanian worker did just that recently.

Only the working class in the rest of Europe can help Bosnian workers. Internationalism must not remain an empty phrase. Fortunately there are still workers in Europe who can spare a pound or a euro to save their brothers in Tuzla from despair,

like the members of the First International who paid a shilling a year to help their brothers on strike in a foreign country.

DITA symbolises struggle and resistance in Bosnia Herzegovina. If they fail, a wave of demoralisation will drown the Tuzla area like a new flood. To support them now is to support ourselves tomorrow,

Radoslav Pavlovic

Monika Karbowska

Emina Busuladzic is the chair of the strike committee. You can read (below) an interview she did with Monika Karbowska, and her banking details for international aid (please mention "DITA") are as follows:

Emina BUSULADZIC, Muharema Merdzica br. 18, 75000 TUZLA

NLB Banka d d., Tuzla

Marsala Tita 34

75000 Tuzla, BiH

Telefon +387 25 259 259

Fax +387 35 302 802

Email: [info@nlb.ba](mailto:info@nlb.ba)

Name: Emina Busuladzic SWIFT: TBTUBA22 IBAN  
BA391320010526292230 Foreign exchange 105262922 JMBG  
0703956185034

Version française ci-dessous.

Bosnia:

"We want to live by our own labour,  
and for that workers need to control  
production"

Sunday 5 October 2014



Eminka Busuladjic

*Last June, militant feminist and internationalist Monika Karbowska visited Tuzla, the “cradle” of the social explosion which shook Bosnia in February. There she met the men and women who work at Dita, a factory which was at the heart of the popular mobilisation. This is her testimony and her interview with Eminka Busuladjic, union representative at Dita and one of the founders of the new Solidarnost union.*

*Tuzla, June 2014: It is very hot when we arrive in this medium-sized town in north-eastern Bosnia. Like almost every town in Bosnia, Tuzla is in a valley surrounded by wooded mountains. These mountains conceal acres of industrial sites nestling in the hillsides: coal and salt mines (salt is the region’s historic natural resource) and the chemical plants processing these natural resources. Like all the countries run by the former “communist” regime, these medium sized towns in what was then Yugoslavia were provided with factories and the population had a golden age in the 1970s.*

*Tuzla is a town rich in long traditions of class struggle and workers’ solidarity. In fact it was the site of a workers’ revolution in 1920: Bosnian coal-miners came to the defence of Slovenian colleagues who had been sacked, setting up a short-lived Boshevik republic. An imposing statue in the dilapidated town square recalls for all time this gesture of the Tuzla worker.*

*On 5 February 2014 Tuzla gave the signal for a new workers’ revolt in Bosnia. Young people set fire to a public building in protest against the corruption of the canton government. The police retaliated and the little town was shaken by rioting. But then the workers at the DITA chemical complex, who had been protesting in vain for several years against*

privatisation, joined the movement and brought their Tuzla workers' traditions with them: they convinced the young people to stop burning public buildings down. They also convinced them to support strikes against privatisation.

Then protest movements broke out in 10 other towns in Bosnia, including Sarajevo. Even Republica Serpska was affected, with demonstrations in Banja Luka. The demonstrators demanded the removal of corrupt elites and reform of the political system inherited after the Dayton cease-fire, imposed by western powers, which generated corruption at every level (municipal, cantonal and federal).

That's when the activists in the Bosnian Left, which came out of the 2009 student movement and organised in several groups such as the Lijevo movement, had the idea of organising Popular Assemblies, or so-called Plenums, in the public cultural centres which still exist in every town in Bosnia.

Women played an enormous role in this renewal of the working class and social movement in Eastern Europe. We follow one of them, Eminka Busuladjic, one of the founders of the new Solidarnost union. Eminka started 30 years ago on the production line at the DITA factory. She worked her way up and is now in charge of research and development. She came under pressure to give up her trade union activities, but she has not let go; it's her factory and her life.

MK: Eminka, can you tell us about DITA and the struggles you have had so far?

EB: DITA, Industrija Deterdženata Tuzla, was one of the biggest chemical complexes in Yugoslavia. DITA produced liquid and powder detergents which were feedstock for industrial and domestic cleaning products as well as cosmetics. DITA was a well-known leader in this field in Yugoslavia and had a big presence in the local market. It had its own rail link and factory shops as well as a big sales

centre in Belgrade.

Run on the Yugoslav self-management model, the firm was nationalised when Bosnia was created, then privatised in 1998 for the benefit of "gangsters" who saddled it with 99 million German Mark debts and ruined it. Before privatisation, DITA had 1 000 paid staff and 400 "volunteers". They were all sacked and at present there are only about 118 workers left, about 75-80 of whom took part in the protests [last February].

When we were privatised, 272 people bought shares but out of those 272, 7 held more than 45%, and that was the management team. The workers were supposed to take out credits to pay for shares, between 1 000 and 10 000km credits on monthly salaries of 2 000km and monthly repayments of 500km [Km is the local currency based on the German Mark].

The director was meant to invest the money raised from the share sales, but he did nothing – the workers' capital was embezzled. There was never any real workers' control of the company management because they abolished public access to the accounts in 1989 and that's why it was so easy to destroy the company.

Since then investment has been zero and the machines deteriorating a bit more every day. But in the chemical industry the plant is so heavy and maintenance is so important that if you stop maintaining it that really does say you want to stop production, since it won't be easy to start up again. DITA is already some way down that road, with several production lines stopped.

(...) [The workers] know that DITA got big credits because the local director of [the Austrian bank] Hipobank was on the board, but nothing was invested because there was no workers' control over it.

(...) The management strategy was to have the workers believe



they would be paid once the liquidation of the business went through, so pushing workers to wish for the destruction of their own work-tool, selling off assets to pay themselves. (...) The aim was to wind up production and invest the money in tax havens.

MK: Can you tell us how DITA workers' recent struggles went and what your involvement in last February's Plenum movement was?

EB: Realising, because of the successive sackings, that privatisation simply meant destruction, the workers who were left at DITA started a strike and occupied the entrances to the factories from 4 April 2011 until 19 March 2012. The canton government promised it would be bought by the Serbian Bohemia group.

Wages were paid for two months, but in that period equipment and products worth 2 million km were sold off, and that is probably what that manoeuvre was all about.

In November and December 2013 the workers revolted properly and blocked the entrances and exits to the factory. The company used private security guards to expel the workers from the site. The struggle came to a face-to-face showdown in front of the factory: the workers told the security guards they were not going to move and that they would not leave because they owned shares in the company.

That's when they realised that management were trying to close the plant. It became clear that the credit lines the firm had taken out were never re-invested in production. Moreover, the management were sub-letting part of the factory on behalf of the subsidiary, LORA, whose shares are also owned by DITA directors.

We used to meet every Wednesday to protest. On 29 January 2014, we once again demonstrated outside the canton government office. That's when the Marxist group, Lijevi,

*joined us and publicised our struggle in the media with photographs, films and articles. Then the protest movement took off in a massive way on 5 February. Police tear-gassed the workers and young people who were demonstrating. Police repression finally united the two components in the struggle, the workers and the youth.*

*10 000 people demonstrated outside the canton government building. In the end the government started negotiations. As it went on, the President of the canton resigned, but the situation at DITA was not resolved. The canton symbolically bought the company back for 1 mark, but the question of wiping out the odious company debt, which workers were demanding, never got mentioned.*

*The chemical union federation gave us no support, so we realised we had to act at a local level, with the support of local townspeople, our neighbours. For that, the experience of the Plenums, the Assembly and hundreds and then thousands of townspeople, open debates which took place at the cultural centre was an enormous school of democracy for us, and of rebuilding the links at a local level.*

*I took part in the first Plenum on 7 February thanks to meeting a Lijevi activist. I talked about our struggle at DITA and that's how unity between the workers and the other demonstrators was achieved.*

*There were 25 people at the first Plenum, and seven of them were arrested by the police. So we went to the court with them. There was a real risk that the police would actually start shooting. Trade unionists, including us, came along to stop the police firing at the demonstrators. At the Plenums, we set up working parties with economists to demand a review of all privatisations. It was the young people in Lijevi who helped us. The Plenums demanded: "Put the workers in the front!" The workers wanted to develop production and stop any new privatisations, and above all to raise the question of*

*the company's debts to the banks.*

*MK: How could the establishment of your union change the situation as it stands?*

*EB: The Plenums movement changed a lot of things because it put pressure on the courts, who started prosecuting "Mafioso" style privatisations and destruction of production machinery.*

*At the moment management organise "yellow" unions or call in people who did not join in the demonstrations to split the workers. It was to put a stop to that that DITA workers set up the Solidarnost union, to continue to put pressure on and struggle against the criminalisation of the Plenum movement: some people are still being prosecuted for "sabotage" and "crimes against private property" since the movement! Moreover, the unions are very fragmented. That's why the Plenums had the aim of unifying the unions in a common front.*

*Anyone can join the Solidarnost union. You can be a member even if you don't work at DITA. That broadens its base and turns it into a school of struggle. We want unemployed people, pensioners and students to get involved in the struggle. For example, pensioners from our industry have been a valuable source of support, and so have trade unionists in the electrical industry and health.*

*Before the war the unions were strong, but after they were talked down and destroyed. I'm a member of Solidarnost union but I'm on the strike committee too. Management accused me of lying and manipulation. They may even take me to court. Sub-contractors have also accused me of stopping them from working on the site. I don't think what these sub-contractors are doing benefits the factory. In any case they can't get me barred from the site because I'm a shareholder!*

*MK: What future do you want for the factory and what can activists around Europe do to support you?*

*EB: Every day the machines deteriorate a bit more. There is no time to lose. Two thirds of production has stopped, and some of the buildings are rented out to sub-contractors who store unidentified chemical products here and don't produce anything. Why should workers have to pay for the management's corruption and refusal to do its job? The workers won't let up the pressure: We are occupying the factory and we demand an independent inquiry into the mafia-style privatisation and we want the privatisation cancelled.*

*As for what activists elsewhere in Europe can do: The European Left can help us by sending activists who can publicise our struggle and our work ... We want to revive the region, we want to live off our own labour, and for that workers need to control production.*

*Tuzla's trade unionists need support, publicity and solidarity from working people in Europe. The most important thing is the working people's committee of the Plenum. We need to work to build up confidence between workers. A new revolt is brewing.*

*MK: Do any women work at DITA and are they involved in the struggle?*

*EB (laughs): Women are cleaner-living and more dangerous and have more endurance! The men can get drunk and put the struggle in danger! Women don't.*

*The demand to have the privatisation reviewed is revolutionary. Workers in Tuzla look on the privatisation as simply a criminal act when all's said and done, just like working people at Walbrzych in Poland who denounce the way their town has been destroyed by closures and privatisation and seizure of their property by oligarchs who have no right to it. It's not just about stopping a criminal act, but declaring it null and void, i.e. re-nationalising the firm. The emergence of this demand is a huge step forward in*

*Eastern Europe. Workers never gave up Yugoslavia's past, and it's coming back with the dream of new solidarity, a country where working people can once again have the respect that is their due, and, why not, power?*

*Bosnie : « Nous voulons vivre de notre travail et pour cela les ouvriers doivent contrôler la production »*

*dimanche 5 octobre 2014*



*Emina Busuladzic*

*Nous présentons ci-dessous la contribution de Monika Karbowska, militante féministe et internationaliste, qui en juin dernier s'est rendue à Tuzla, « berceau » de l'explosion sociale qui a secoué la Bosnie en février. Elle y a rencontré les travailleuses et travailleurs de DITA, usine qui a été au cœur de la mobilisation populaire. Elle nous fait parvenir son témoignage et l'interview d'Eminka Busuladjic, responsable syndicale chez DITA et fondatrice du nouveau syndicat Solidarnost.*

*Tuzla, juin 2014. Il fait très chaud lorsque nous arrivons dans cette ville moyenne au Nord Est de la Bosnie. Comme presque toutes les villes de Bosnie, Tuzla est située dans une vallée très encaissée entourée de montagnes boisées. Ces montagnes cachent des hectares de sites industriels nichés dans le creux de la vallée : mines de charbon, de sel, la*

ressource naturelle historique la région, ainsi que des usines chimiques de transformation de ces ressources. Du temps de la Yougoslavie, comme dans tous les pays de régime « communiste », ces villes moyennes ont été dotées d'usines et la population y a vécu son âge d'or dans les années 70.

Tuzla est une ville riche d'une longue tradition de lutte de classes et de solidarité ouvrière. En effet, en 1920 Tuzla a été le théâtre d'une révolution ouvrière : les mineurs de charbon bosniaques prirent la défense de leurs collègues slovènes licenciés. Ils ont fondé alors une éphémère république bolchévique. Une imposante statue dans un square délabré rappelle toujours la geste du travailleur de Tuzla.

Le 5 février 2014 Tuzla donnait le signal d'une nouvelle révolte ouvrière en Bosnie. Des jeunes brûlèrent un bâtiment public pour protester contre le gouvernement cantonal corrompu. La police riposta et des émeutes secouèrent la petite ville. Mais voici que les ouvriers du complexe chimique DITA qui protestaient en vain depuis plusieurs années contre les privatisations se sont joint au mouvement en lui apportant les traditions ouvrières de Tuzla : ils ont convaincu les jeunes de ne pas brûler les bâtiments publics. Ils les ont aussi convaincus de soutenir les grèves contre les privatisations.

Alors des mouvements de protestation éclatèrent dans 10 autres villes de Bosnie dont Sarajevo. Même la Republika Serpska a été touchée avec des manifestations à Bajna Luka. Les manifestants exigeaient le départ des élites corrompues et la réforme du système politique hérité du cessez le feu de Dayton, générateur de corruption à tous les échelons (municipal, cantonal et fédéral) et imposé par les puissances occidentales.

C'est alors que les militants de la gauche bosniaque, issus du mouvement étudiant de 2009 et organisés dans plusieurs groupes dont le mouvement Lijevi, ont eu l'idée d'organiser des Assemblées populaires, dites Plénums, dans les centres culturels publics existant encore dans chaque ville de Bosnie.

Les femmes ont joué un énorme rôle dans ce renouveau du mouvement ouvrier et social à l'Est. Nous suivons l'une d'elles, Eminka Busuladjic, fondatrice du nouveau syndicat Solidarnost. Eminka a commencé il y a 30 ans dans la production à la chaîne de l'usine DITA. Elle a gravité les échelons et actuellement elle est responsable de la recherche et développement. Elle a subi des pressions pour arrêter le syndicalisme. Mais elle ne lâche pas prise. C'est son usine et c'est sa vie.

MK : Eminka pouvez-vous nous présenter DITA ainsi que les luttes que vous avez menées jusqu'à présent ?

EN : DITA Industrija Deterdženata Tuzla, était un des plus grand complexes chimiques de la Yougoslavie. DITA produisait des détergents liquides et en poudre, qui servaient de matière première à des produits de nettoyage industriel et domestique, et aussi des cosmétiques. DITA était un leader dans ce domaine en Yougoslavie, connu, très présent sur le marché local. Elle avait un accès propre au chemin de fer et des magasins d'usine ainsi qu'un grand centre de vente à Belgrade.

Gérée en système d'autogestion yougoslave l'entreprise a été nationalisée lors de la création de la Bosnie puis privatisée en 1998 au profit de « gangsters » qui l'ont endettée à hauteur de 99 millions de Deutsche Mark et ruinée. Avant la privatisation DITA comptait 1000 salariés et 400 « volontaires ». Tous ont été licenciés et il ne reste actuellement que 118 travailleurs dont 75-80 ont participé aux protestations [de février dernier].

Lorsque la privatisation a commencé les travailleurs ne se rendaient pas compte que cela menait à la fermeture de l'entreprise. Le directeur de l'époque avait été élu « manager de l'année » et promettait monts et merveilles. Il insinuait que l'usine n'était pas productive car l'électricité ainsi que les matières premières seraient trop chères.

Lors de la privatisation 272 personnes ont acheté des actions mais sur les 272, 7 détenaient plus de 45% et c'étaient les

cadres de l'administration. Les ouvriers ont dû prendre des crédits pour acheter des actions – de 1000 à 10 000 KM de crédits sur des salaires de 2000 KM avec des mensualités de 500 KM.

Le directeur devait investir l'argent des actions mais il n'a rien fait – le capital des ouvriers a été détourné. Il n'y a jamais réellement eu de contrôle de gestion de l'entreprise parce que la comptabilité publique a été abolie en 1998 et c'est pour cela que c'était si facile de détruire l'entreprise.

Depuis l'investissement est nul et les machines sont détériorées de jour en jour. Or dans la chimie l'équipement est tellement lourd et son entretien tellement important qu'un manque d'entretien signale fortement l'envie d'arrêter la production qu'il ne sera pas facile de reprendre plus tard. DITA est sur cette voie après l'arrêt de plusieurs de ses lignes de production.

(...)

[Les ouvriers] savent que DITA a obtenu de grands crédits parce que le directeur local de Hipobank [une banque autrichienne] était au conseil d'Administration mais rien n'a été investi parce que les ouvriers ne l'ont pas contrôlé.

(...) La stratégie de la direction était de faire croire que les ouvriers seraient payés une fois que la liquidation de l'entreprise serait prononcée, en poussant ainsi les ouvriers à vouloir la destruction de leur outil de travail afin de vendre les actifs et de se payer ainsi. (...) L'objectif était de liquider la production et de placer l'argent dans des paradis fiscaux.

MK : Pouvez-vous nous dire comment se sont déroulées les luttes récentes des travailleurs de DITA et votre participation au mouvement des Plénums de février dernier ?

EB : Comprenant à force de licenciements successifs que la privatisation est une destruction, les travailleurs restant à DITA commencent une grève et occupent les entrées de l'entreprise du 4 août 2011 au 19 mars 2012. Le gouvernement cantonal promet le rachat par le groupe serbe Bohemia. Deux



mois de salaires ont été payés mais pendant ce temps-là l'équipement et des produits de la valeur de 2 millions de KM [1 million d'euros] a été vendu et c'était bien le but de la manœuvre.

En novembre et décembre 2013 les ouvrier/res se sont révolté/es définitivement et ont bloqué les entrées et sorties de l'usine. La direction a expulsé les travailleurs du site par des vigiles privés. La lutte a pris l'aspect d'un face à face devant l'entrée de l'usine : les ouvriers répondaient aux vigiles qu'ils ne partiraient pas parce qu'ils sont des actionnaires de l'usine.

La prise de conscience que la direction cherchait à fermer l'usine est venue alors. Il devient évident que les crédits accordés à l'entreprise n'ont jamais été réinvestis dans la production. De plus la direction sous-loue une partie de l'usine et l'argent part sur le compte de LORA la filiale dont les directeurs de DITA sont aussi actionnaires.

Nous nous rassemblions tous les mercredis pour protester. Le 29 janvier 2014 nous avons encore protesté devant le gouvernement cantonal. C'est alors que le groupe marxiste Lijevi nous a rejoint et a médiatisé notre lutte par des photos, des films et des articles. Puis le mouvement de protestation a démarré massivement le 5 février. Les policiers ont gazé les ouvriers et les jeunes qui manifestaient. La répression policière a finalement unie les deux composantes de la lutte, ouvriers et jeunes.

10 000 personnes manifestaient devant le bâtiment du gouvernement du canton. Finalement le gouvernement a commencé la négociation. Par la suite le président du canton a démissionné mais la situation de DITA n'avait pas été résolue. Le canton a racheté l'entreprise symboliquement pour 1 Mark mais la question de l'effacement de la dette odieuse de l'entreprise que les ouvriers réclament n'a pas été abordée.

Le syndicat de la Fédération de Chimie ne nous soutenait pas. Nous avons donc compris que c'est au niveau local qu'il fallait agir, avoir le soutien des habitants de la ville, des

voisins. Pour cela l'expérience des Plénums, Assemblée de centaines puis de milliers d'habitants, de débats libres qui ont eu lieu au Centre Culturel a été une énorme école de démocratie pour nous et de reconstruction de liens au niveau local.

Le 7 février j'ai participé au premier Plénum grâce à ma rencontre avec un militant de Lijevi. J'y ai parlé de notre lutte à DITA et c'est ainsi que l'unité entre les ouvriers et les autres manifestants se fait.

Au premier Plénum il y a 25 personnes. 7 personnes sont alors arrêtés par la police. Nous les avons alors accompagnés au tribunal. Le risque que la police tire à balles réelles était grand. Les syndicalistes dont nous étions sont venus pour empêcher les policiers de tirer sur les manifestants. Au Plénums nous avons fondé des groupes de travail avec des économistes pour exiger une révision de la privatisation. Ce sont les jeunes de Lijevi qui nous aident. Les Plénums exigent « mettez les ouvriers en premiers » ! Les ouvriers veulent développer la production et éviter les autres privatisations. Surtout que la question des dettes de l'entreprise vis à vis des banques se pose.

MK : Comment la création de votre syndicat peut-elle changer la donne ?

EB : Le mouvement des Plénum a beaucoup changé les choses car il a mis la pression sur les tribunaux qui ont commencé à condamner les privatisations mafieuses et la destruction de l'outil de production.

Actuellement la direction organise des syndicats « jaunes » ou elle appelle des gens qui n'ont pas protesté pour diviser les travailleurs. C'est pour contrer cela que les ouvriers de DITA ont créé le syndicat Solidarnost. Pour continuer à mettre la pression et pour lutter contre la criminalisation du mouvement des Plénums : des personnes sont toujours poursuivies pour « dégradations », « sabotage » et « atteinte à la propriété privée » depuis le mouvement ! De plus les syndicats sont très fragmentés. C'est pour cela que la lutte des Plénums a pour but d'unifier les syndicats pour un front

commun.

*Solidarnost est un syndicat ouvert à tous. On peut en être membre sans être un travailleur de DITA. Cela élargit la base et constitue une école de lutte. Nous souhaitons que les chômeurs, les retraités et les étudiants rejoignent la lutte. Par exemple les retraités de l'industrie ont été un soutien précieux ainsi que les syndicalistes de l'électricité et de la santé.*

*Avant la guerre les syndicats étaient forts mais après ils ont été décriés, détruits. Je suis membre du syndicat Solidarnost mais aussi du comité de grève. J'ai été accusée par la direction de mensonge et de manipulation. Il se peut que je sois poursuivie par le tribunal. Je suis aussi accusée par les sous-traitants de les empêcher de travailler sur le site. Je pense que ces sous-traitants ne font rien de bon pour l'usine. De toute façon ils n'ont pas le droit de m'interdire d'entrer sur le site car je suis actionnaire !*

*MK : Quel avenir souhaitez vous pour votre usine et que peuvent faire les militants européens pour vous soutenir ?*

*EB : Chaque jour détériore davantage les machines. Nous n'avons pas de temps à perdre. Les 2/3 de la production est arrêtée et une partie des bâtiments est louée à des entreprises sous-traitantes qui y déposent des produits chimiques non-identifiés sans rien produire. Pourquoi est-ce aux ouvriers de payer la corruption et l'absence de gestion de la direction ? Les ouvriers ne relâcherons pas la pression : nous occupons l'usine et exigeons qu'une enquête indépendante sur la privatisation mafieuse soit menée et la privatisation annulée.*

*En ce qui concerne ce que peuvent faire les militants européens, la gauche européenne peut nous aider en envoyant des militants médiatiser notre lutte et notre travail. (...) Nous voulons que la région revive, nous voulons vivre de notre travail et pour cela les ouvriers doivent contrôler la production.*

*Les syndicalistes de Tuzla ont besoin de soutien, de médiatisation et de la solidarité des travailleurs d'Europe.*

*Le plus important est le comité des travailleurs du Plénum. On doit travailler à créer de la confiance entre les ouvriers. Une nouvelle révolte se prépare.*

*MK: Est-ce que DITA emploie des femmes et est-ce qu'elles participent à lutte ?*

*Eminka rit : Les femmes sont les plus propres, plus dangereuses et plus endurantes ! Les hommes peuvent boire et mettre la lutte en danger, les femmes non !*

*La revendication de révision de la privatisation est révolutionnaire. Pour les ouvriers de Tuzla la privatisation n'est rien d'autre qu'un acte criminel finalement, tous comme pour les travailleurs de Walbrzych en Pologne qui dénoncent la destruction de leur ville par les fermetures et les privatisations et l'accaparement de leurs biens par des oligarques illégitimes. Il ne s'agit pas seulement stopper un acte criminel mais de l'annuler donc de renationaliser ! L'émergence de cette exigence est une avancée énorme en Europe de l'Est. Le passé yougoslave que les travailleurs finalement n'ont jamais renié revient sous avec le rêve d'une nouvelle solidarité, un pays où les travailleurs auraient de nouveau le respect qui leur est dû et pourquoi pas le pouvoir.*

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## ***On events in Bosnia-Herzegovina: a letter to a Trade Unionist***

*Dear Comrade,*

*Let's think through what positive and appropriate proposals to put forward in discussion with Bosnian worker or socialist activists. We will be of some use if we just find ways to*

help a given social movement to draw from the experience of the international workers' movement (which we know something about) which is long-buried in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We don't need to invent anything, especially not substituting ourselves for the Bosnians; all we need do is generalise and bring together the demands they themselves are fighting for.

1. **The character of the movement:** (1) it is clearly social, workers and young people suffering chronic unemployment; (2) This movement is up against a political regime with the following characteristics:
  - political paralysis as a result of the Dayton Accords which installed a two-headed federation alongside another state (republica serbska), this means no common measures of any significance can be achieved;
  - endemic corruption whose source is the nationalist political parties;
  - a liberal viewpoint, from which the fourth, social-democrat, component of the coalition is also not exempt;(3) The whole has produced the worst possible remedy for a war-ravaged country: all-round privatisation. The slogans on the demonstrations and the political programmes of the collectives involved ("Udar" and "Revolt" in Tuzla) reflect this diagnosis.
2. **Our position** consists of: (1) supporting this profoundly correct movement; (2) clarifying it from the class point of view (to oppose provocations, running battles with the police, looting and arson), things which workers instinctively agree with; (3) sifting out which of the demands raised are most appropriate to unite, structure and develop the movement.
3. The main demand comes from the movement itself:
  - **Stop all new privatisations NOW, review all existing privatisations, no privatisation without workers' control!** How? By a national commission of persons of integrity, including qualified economists (like e.g. Stoyanov, currently an economist at the university of Rijeka), independent of the government and the bosses,

under the control of elected **workers' councils (committees)** in all workplaces and institutions, including students and especially in the big mining and industrial units, and structured at a Federation level; total **transparency** of this Commission's work via public media (TV and major dailies): People should know the whole truth about a quarter of a century of fiddles! This Commission should have the authority to set up its own investigation and enforcement branches, as there can be no confidence in the state fraud squad, corrupted by the crooks in the ruling political parties who appoint and supervise them. Immediate payment of unpaid wages! Social security for all! Free access to schooling and hospital treatment for all! Cost-of-living indexing of wages and pensions, etc.

4. A **Federal emergency job-creation plan!** Between those who have lost their jobs and those who have never had one, unemployment stands at 44%. This is a question of life and death for hundreds of thousands of men and women. Unless the government can very quickly come up with a plan to absorb mass unemployment, they should go! They should resign or be thrown out by the people. Working people always prefer peaceful and democratic solutions, but if that means keeping in power the class of capitalist rascals impotent in the face of unemployment, working people and young people will not stand idly by as society decays. If they can find the will, tenacity and discipline to elect their own **central organ of committees or councils of struggle**, they can put forward a government of suitably qualified people of integrity. Without their own permanent, democratic and durable rank-and-file organisations, all the demonstrations, petitions and cries of anger will go up in smoke. If the country has to look abroad to borrow money, at least it should be used to create jobs. Life is more important than the laws of the market!

5. Commission to review privatisations and Emergency plan to deal with unemployment are merely the first measures to put in place. There still remains the institutional Gordian knot of the Dayton Peace, which engendered a state paralysed from birth. Two or three states in one, half a dozen canton-states in each of them, states which straddle each other so that main roads have to leap-frog over each other on flyovers and suffering unparalleled legislative anarchy and negligence – the situation is untenable. Social progress is what brings peace, not the nationalism which rampaged during the war. The only way forward for working people and young people in the Federation is stretch out a hand to their fellow-citizens, workers and young people of the so-called “republica serbska”: For an **independent, united and democratic Bosnia-Herzegovina!** No Bantustans! There is room in such a joint federation for all the peoples of the region, for all nationalities, all religions and all alphabets, but not for war criminals or state mafias. A joint confederation of three peoples ready to turn the page and secure their children’s future is possible. Two or three states in one, pulled this way and that by great power influence, is not. Bosnia-Herzegovina is condemned to political paralysis, economic stagnation and social decay. Working people and young people in “republica Serbska” have a choice: live together in a common state, with the federation guaranteeing national rights, or eke out a miserable existence as hostages of a state which was criminal when Mladic and Karadzic ran it and has turned into a mafia state under Dodik. Working people and young people in Tuzla, Sarajevo, Bihac and Mostar have shown that they do not want to sacrifice their futures on the altar of nationalist party rule; it is up to their fellows in Bania Luka to respond by joining their struggle for an independent, united and democratic Bosnia-Herzegovina and refusing

*to be held hostage to rule by a mafia that can neither acknowledge the crimes of Srebrenica nor catch the guilty.*

*I think that is essentially the size of it. Privatisations and unemployment – immediate key issues. Medium-term perspective: a re-united country, break with the paralysing Dayton arrangements. Means to do it: Committees of struggle (of action) of working people, unemployed and young people — essentially all the stuff nobody else mentions. Long-term perspective: links with the working and young people in Serbia and Croatia, who have had to put up with the same liberal treatment (privatisation, unemployment) and the same nationalist straitjacket. In brief: suggest ways to strengthen and broaden the movement.*

*All the best*

*Radoslav Pavlovic, 10 Feb 2014*