

# 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