

France: The “hi-viz” movement

A translation of a report from A.V. in Marseille. Published on lernenimkamp website in 23 November 2018

The “hi-viz” movement started with motorists protesting against the increase in fuel prices following an increase in the tax on diesel fuel.

For years diesel fuel prices in France have been low, and this led many people to buy diesel vehicles. Now the taxes on diesel fuel are going up. Calls for road blocks started on Facebook and other social networks. These began on Saturday 17 November. According to government sources, 280,000 people gathered together at 2,000 different locations on that day, blocking roads, demonstrating and occupying motorways. The road blocks have persisted since then.

Although parties like La France Insoumise or the far-right Rassemblement Nationale support this movement in the media, they do not officially contribute to it. What you hear on the roadblocks is above all peoples’ fury at Macron and his government. For years, and in particular since Macron came to power, living conditions for the majority of French people have been getting worse. He has cut taxes affecting the rich (what the French call “ISF”), raised the tax burden on pensioners and civil servants (“CSG”), cut housing benefit and at the same time introduced an annual cut of 40 bn euro on business (“CICE”). Inflation is rising more strongly and wages are stagnating, so real wages are falling. And now motorists, particularly in medium-sized towns, have to pay more for fuel, although they have no alternative way of getting around at a time when we are all told labour has to move more mobile. The overwhelming majority of people know that they are not paying this tax to protect the environment, and that in the framework of the reform of the state railways more and more routes are

being closed. The entire French tax system is unfair. In comparison with what they earn, French workers pay a lot more than the rich, the shareholders, the bourgeoisie. A few weeks ago Macron told an unemployed person he only needed to cross the road to find a job. Today thousands of French people are not just crossing the road, they are blocking it shouting "Macron demission!" – "Macron resign!" With his pro-rich policies and his arrogance (he recently told a pensioner to quit complaining), Macron has lined up over 70% of French people – basically the whole working class – against him. To add fuel to the flames, the security service, who mostly had no idea on 17 November where the road-blocks and demonstrations were going to happen, have reacted very hesitantly. But since last Monday things have changed. Since Saturday thousands of workers, tradespeople and -noticeably – lots of women have been blocking France's roads. The movement is strongest in the medium-sized towns. However, on 17 November there were also actions in Paris, where over 1,000 demonstrators nearly got through to their stated target in front of the Elysee Palace (Macron's Official residence). Now the government is trying to criminalise the movement, portraying the demonstrators as wreckers. Even if the movement has ebbed a little, it remains popular. And it has a new goal: the 24 November demo in Paris.

The demonstrators want Macron to resign and they know that power lies in the Elysee Palace.

Apart from the road transport industry sector of the (moderate socialist) Force Ouvriere union, who yesterday called for support for the movement, the "hi-viz" movement has not yet been supported by the big union confederations. The (traditionally Communist-led) CGT confederation calls for support for a demonstration they have already planned for 1 December. It is left to the bourgeois press to speculate about the movement's far-right potential. A lot of people are wondering why the trade unions are hesitating about joining

the movement. The same is true of France Insoumise, which has not so far got involved in the struggle as an organisation. The well-known France Insoumise parliamentary deputy, Francois Ruffin, stated on the evening of 21 November on TV that France Insoumise is not calling for Macron's resignation, but that if he continued to defend only the interests of big business he would have to go. This lack of determination and political clarity help the government. Francois Ruffin demands a reduction in the fuel tax, more tax justice and the reintroduction of the wealth tax. That is right. These are also demands which the unions could bring into the movement.

Basically, the question of power is raised. So far neither France Insoumise nor the union leaders have contributed to bringing the government down. On 24 November the "hi-viz" are planning to head for Paris in numbers to force the government to listen to them. We can assume that these workers and intermediate layers who are not organised in unions will try to head for the Elysee Palace. They are right to do so. Today trade unions can establish a clear platform of demands and offer support in organising this demonstration.

"Hi-viz vests": Unions slow to join the dance

The below article is a translation of an article appearing in French on the Mediapart website:

(<https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/231118/gilets-jaunes-les-syndicats-hesitent-entrer-dans-la-danse>)

(Notes)

(CGT, Force Ouvriere and CFDT are the three main and separate

union congresses in France, broadly-speaking divided along political lines, SUD is the common name for some more radical independent, breakaway unions. It is difficult to really know how best to translate “gilets jaunes” (yellow waistcoats), which applies to both the fuel-tax demonstrators and their “uniform”, the hi-viz safety jacket.)

“Hi-viz vests”: Unions slow to join the dance

23 November 2018: By Mathilde Goanec and Dan Israel.

If most national trade union leaders hold their noses when the “hi-viz vests” are mentioned, activists locally are taking the plunge citing the levels of social crisis. Nevertheless, there are still raw edges, mainly because of instances of racism and some of the demands about cutting taxes.

When we called CFDT member Pierre-Gael Laveder off the cuff, he replied (hi-viz vest on his back) straight from the Magny road-block at at Montceau-les-Mines (Saone-et-Loire). Last year, this man was one of the main actors in the fight against the closure of the Allia factory at Digoïn. Now “newly redundant” he is a “hi-viz vest”.

However, Laurent Berger, the national secretary of his union, has not called on his troops to join the movement. On Monday 19 November he even denounced the “totalitarian” tone of some of the meetings. Nevertheless, concerned about the movement’s increasing popularity, the leader of the CFDT on Saturday proposed to Emmanuel Macron to quickly unite unions, the employers and associations “to set up a social pact for ecological conversion”, a proposition which the government turned down flat. All this means little to Pierre-Gael Laveder, who wears no label when he goes to the “hi-viz vests” meetings, quite happy to play locally the role of go-between his national secretary hankered after.

“There’s a bit of everything on the road-blocks: tradesmen, shopkeepers, public service people ... and quite a few trade

unionists", Laveder explains. "I think it's important to be there because what we're fighting for here are things we stand up for in everyday union work: an increase in buying power and a wage rise. It makes sense to me".

Like the CFDT, most union leaderships are hesitating, while on the ground many union activists have taken the plunge, even though the "hi-viz vests" always start a lot of arguments. The CGT position, for example is somewhat embarrassing. Less than a week ago Philippe Martinez was hammering out the line: "The CGT does not march alongside either people on the far right or bosses who talk about taxes but also mean social (National Insurance) contributions."

All the same, on 20 November the national union published a statement calling on the government to respond to the "urgent social situation" which the "hi-viz vests" emphasise. Visiting Rouen last Thursday, Philippe Martinez went further, conscious of the pressures in his own organisation: "What worries us is not the 'hi-viz' movement but those who try to exploit it".

There was the same shilly-shallying at Le Havre, a town the authorities are keeping a very careful eye on because it hosts a port, docks and refineries. A general assembly of the local CGT discussed "hi-viz" on Wednesday 21 November. Activists didn't want to "be associated with 'hi-viz'", but planned to carry out a series of actions in parallel, especially since some of them are already out on strike over wages, for example at Total (six of whose seven French refineries are affected this Friday). On Thursday morning a two-hour leafletting session and a partial roadblock took place at the Oceane roundabout, where "hi-viz" have been setting up off and on since Saturday.

Sandrine Gerard, the secretary of the local CGT branch, has also informed Mediapart that there will be "growing popularity" from Monday 26 November with a possible blockade of "the economy" at Le Havre, almost certainly referring to

the refineries. According to our information, the Le Havre CGT docks and harbour group, which has an extremely high percentage of union membership but is very tight-lipped where the media are concerned has been even clearer and passes the line on to members calling on them “not to let the caravan of anger pass by” but mix “their red vests with the yellow vests”.

For all their concern about who might be trying to exploit the movement, the group believes “there is a place for the CGT in this movement” and calls on “all members to participate in progressive assemblies”. Their comrades in La Mède (Bouches-du-Rhone Department) have already taken the plunge: they have been blockading their Total refinery alongside “hi-viz vests” since Thursday 22 November.

Even before 17 November, the union’s chemical industry group was warning that the “hi-viz vests” anger was not “illegitimate” and calling for a mobilisation a mobilisation in all the main sectors such as transport, oil, energy, ports ... and the Lavera refinery and the fuel depot at Fos-sur-Mer in Bouches-du-Rhone have been regularly blockaded by “hi-viz vests” since Saturday.

Force Ouvriere union’s national leadership is undergoing a big internal crisis and has not really adopted a stance. However, their Transport section, which is the strongest union in road transport and ambulance drivers, has officially called on members to join the “hi-viz vests” and join in actions in favour of greater buying-power. “We call on them to come to the support of existing movements” General Secretary of the transport section of the union, Patrice Clos, explains, one of three candidates standing to replace Pascal Pavageau at the head of the national union.

If the unions are going forward on tip-toe, the official reason given for that is first of all the occasionally racist, sexist and homophobic tone of a very disorganised movement

which is pulling in all kinds of directions. The CGT is sticking to its guns: "This period of powerful contrasts of light and shade can give birth to monsters, and citizens should not allow their anger to be diverted by those pushing xenophobic, racist and homophobic ideas", the union says, referring to instances of physical and verbal violence experienced at a certain number of assemblies since 17 November.

Specifically the CGT section covering Customs Officers responded in a very lively way to publication on social media of a Facebook video showing "hi-viz vests" at Flixecourt (Haute-de-France department) congratulating each other on discovering migrants in the cistern of a tanker lorry and calling the police, and by the way making fun of the customs service. "Confident in their racist convictions, they preferred to call the police rather than an aid organisation which could have helped them", the union group says in a press release. "This video shows protagonists calling for a 'giant bonfire' All this is reminiscent of very sad and inglorious events in our history". The union follows up with an official complaint for slander and defamation of their service and incitement to racial hatred.

Acrobatics

CGT activist Vincent Labrousse was prominent in the struggle to save jobs at the La Souterraine factory (Creuse Department) in September. Now sacked, he too is careful in discussing the composite character of the movement. "I can't march with people from the fascistosphere. It goes against nature", this activist explains. "But they are not the only ones in the movement. Others simply want to denounce the society of exclusion we are being led into. I support them". Moreover, about fifty of his comrades were present at the road blocks on Saturday. "In our CGT industrial group there is no rejection. Some of us support it but don't go. Some do go there. Others will go".

The sociologist Jean-Michel Denis, who specialises in trade unions and social movements, points out that most trade union bodies are in "horror of spontaneous movements". "Most of those demonstrating here are wage-earners", CGT member Fredo, who we met in Rouen, states simply. "What do they want? More purchasing-power. Our job is, without imposing anything, to get them to think about the question of wages. After all, that's the heart of the matter."

Activists also claim that the movement can also help to restore faith a little. "I'm really struck by the conviviality, the atmosphere ... We've obviously got a lot to tell them, but a lot to learn as well", explains Manu at Rouen. "What's not to like about blockading Disney, supermarkets, petrol stations?" notes Laurent Degousse, who is a member of the independent union SUD Commerce in Paris and one of the founders of the social front "Front Social" "In any case it's very effective. 2000 people gathering together on 17 November. If it works, it's mainly because you can come as you are and it's on your doorstep. These are lessons for the social movement to bear in mind".

Xenophobic, sexist and homophobic language which does occur in certain assemblies also do not discourage this "Solidaires" (independent union) activist, although he too mentions strong pressures within his organisation, which is used to sticking close to the social movement but is also involved in particular in anti-fascist and anti-sexist struggles. "Concretely, it's not enough to say 'that stinks' and 'that's infected by the far right', and in any case that's not the atmosphere on the road blocks. Even if it can crop up, since there is all sorts of everything in this movement, which has neither structure, leaders, or security stewards. But I think the determining factor is the rejection of Macron's policies and his very person". On Saturday he will put on his violet vest (union colours) to join in with the yellow crowd. "If you go there to play the red professor, it's guaranteed that it

won't work, so no preachy-preachy".

"Solidaires" in any case spoke along more or less the same lines on 19 November, but without an official call to demonstrate. This trade union body firmly opposes neo-liberalism and the far right and its representatives, but it proposes to draw all forces together and to "look for what we agree on". It has also, in vain, invited the other national union bodies to meet to discuss possible mobilising strategies.

The national unions are just as much at sea as the political leaders. They are grappling with contradictions and prepared to adopt fairly acrobatic postures in the process. "Some trades unions have had such a hard time of it in recent years that they are telling themselves, for once things are moving, let's not miss the boat" notes researcher Jean-Michel Denis. "But it's still very complicated. The values expressed by the demonstrators are very mixed in character, not to say pretty reactionary." For example, what they have to say about fiscal matters, often anti-tax, doesn't go down well with activists very attached to the public services and a redistributive system.

"In other spontaneous movements like the 'nuits debout' (when protestors spent entire nights awake in crowds) or the indignados, there was a kind of left-wing consciousness, a shared culture which made a link", Denis emphasises. "Nothing like that here. The people we are dealing with don't seem to have any habit of mobilising, or to have lost it. In their yellow vests, you also see small-scale craftsmen, home helps, liberal nurses, etc. these are categories of people who don't work in big businesses with big groups of trade unionists, and where they live, work has been more and more de-structures. That doesn't help when it comes to building bridges with traditional organisations.

A few trades unionists on the ground admit to a little

bitterness at seeing struggles which have for years been carried on in the shadows suddenly emerge into the light – outside of the trade union field. “We fight year-in-year-out in the workshops, in the street, for wages, pension rights, against unemployment. When we go and ask the ‘hi-viz vests’ to help us against the reforms of pension rights, will they then turn up?” asks Jean-Luc Bielitz, CGT delegate at Smart on the Moselle. But he won’t throw everything overboard: “I think we should jump onto the movement if it keeps going. The union is there to walk with them. Who in this crowd is going to negotiate with the government? Who is the leader today!”

Nevertheless, the period resonates as a lesson for Pascal Raffanel of the CFE-CCG at Bosch. “Trades unions have a few questions to ask themselves. If the resistance struggle is carried out solely on the basis of social networks or citizens’ movement, that could be the death of trade unionism.”. Laurent Degousse, who has long campaigned in the Front Social for a very aggressive trade unionism, is even clearer: I think that because of our repeated setbacks on the social level, we have created a monster, and the void has been filled as best it could. It is mainly the people in power who are responsible, including those we have been walking with in trade union work and politics for 15 or 20 years.

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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 ***to sign this Appeal***

A first indicative list of 300 personalities supporting the Appeal

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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 NSSP, 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 Does, 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 Investigaciones 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 Rousseau, 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, ecrivain, 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 Canalià sindacalista CGIL Piemonte Italia
256. Michel Cahen, senior researcher, CNRS/Sciences Po Bordeaux, France.
257. Yu Maxime, Compositeur-Comédien, Liège, Belgium
258. Renato Zanolì – 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 Torreli, Responsabile “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, Espana
300. Manuel Giron, catedrático, Alicante, Espana
-

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. 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.

Dzemal 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/>

Necessity of a broad workers' front – Attack is the best defence! Invitation to a conference in Zagreb 31 January – 1 February

[threecolumns]

Workers' Front (<https://-fronta.org>) invites you to attend and give a talk at the trade union conference which will be held in Zagreb at the Centre for Culture and Information (KIC) 31 January – 1 February 2015 (Saturday and Sunday)

This trade union conference is the continuation of the past two conferences organized by Workers' Struggle under the working title "Workers' resistance to the destruction of companies" in 2012 and 2013, which tried to help create space for discussion, tighter connections and a network for information exchange between trade unionists, as well as social movement activists, and contribute to the strengthening of labour movement in Croatia. The Third Trade Union Conference, "Necessity of a broad workers' front – attack is

the best defence!" is organized by Workers' Front, an initiative aiming to become a workers' party which should give additional importance to this conference.

In the light of increasing poverty of a large majority of the population, declining economy and unprecedented social stratification, as well as a joint attack on the workers' rights by all political parties and business elite, we intend to question past strategies of organizing workers' resistance and offer a vision of an alternative model which would unite trade union and political levels of struggle into a stronger entity.

The aim of this conference is to exchange trade union experiences in terms of workers' struggle, forge closer links between militant trade unions and point out the necessity of labour unions for all workers.

We think that it is of essential importance for unionists and activists to join forces in a common resistance against this social and economic system and its supporters – the political elite. Some of the most honest and active Croatian trade union leaders will be present at the conference, such as Mario Iveković (Novi sindikat/New Trade Union), Mijat Stanić (HAC / Croatian Motorways), Željko Stipić (Preporod School Trade Union), Zvonko Šegvić (Brodosplit Shipyard) and Denis Geto (HEP/ Croatian Electricity Company). Alongside the trade unions leaders will be members of the Workers' Front who will present their opinions regarding political, but also trade union landscape in Croatia. Beside domestic unionists, we have also invited international speakers to the third union conference: unionist Goran Lukič from the largest Slovenian trade union organisation ZSSS (Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia) members of *Združena levica* from Slovenia (the United Left) and activists and workers from Serbia and

We hope to see you at our conference in Zagreb.

If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,

On behalf of Workers' Front:

Dimitrije Birač: +186 99 594 9485

Denis Geto: +186 98 165 568

Marko Milošević: +186 95 659 6149

kontakt@radnicka-fronta.org

For more information regarding the previous conferences, please refer to the following links:

<http://www.radnickaborba.org/2012/11/22/sindikalna-konferencija-radnicki-otpor-unistavanju-poduzeca>

<http://www.radnickaborba.org/2012/12/03/veliki-uspjeh-sindikalne-konferencije-radnicke-borbe>

[http://www.radnickaborba.org/2012/12/12/deklaracija-sindikalne-konferencijee \[/threecolumns\]](http://www.radnickaborba.org/2012/12/12/deklaracija-sindikalne-konferencijee [/threecolumns])

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 thing 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

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

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.



Eminka Busuladjic

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 Lijevi 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, Lijeви, 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 Lijeви 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 Lijeivi 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 gravi 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.

India: A discussion on “What does Modi’s victory mean?”

[threecolumns]

By Roger Silverman, June 2014

(Cde. Silverman is one of the founders of Workers

International Network. The original article, which was specially commissioned for Workers International Journal, has also been posted on <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/socialistdiscussion>. WIN also has a Facebook Group: [https:// www.facebook.com/WorkersIntlNetwork](https://www.facebook.com/WorkersIntlNetwork))

The article I wrote recently on the Indian election results initiated a correspondence with the son of a British friend who is currently working in Banglaore, India. He has illusions in Modi, and we have had a fairly spirited exchange of ideas. I have copied here my latest reply to him...

Thanks for your reply. For me, too, it is stimulating to have my ideas challenged (even when they are right!). I haven't got time for a thorough reply now, but here are a few interim points to keep the discussion going:

You keep quoting the wishes of the USA (in this case, once again in relation to their collusion with India in unilaterally violating the nuclear non-proliferation pact), as if that were a decisive factor in determining the future course of world history. If anything, this policy had far more to do with US determination to tie the hands of Pakistan, with its ambivalent attitude to Islamic fundamentalism, than with India's rivalry with China; it is after all towards Pakistan that the Indian H-bombs are facing.

But even leaving that issue aside, your faith in the power of the USA to shape the world according to its own interests is hopelessly anachronistic and touchingly naïve in the current epoch, and is belied in front of our very eyes, day after day, from Ukraine to Afghanistan to Iraq to Latin America. The USA may well want to find some means of curbing China's growth, but for all the reasons I've already mentioned, any hope of promoting India to the extent that it threatens to eclipse China is doomed.

(Incidentally, you also disregard the evolution of the Chinese economy. Increasingly, China's economy is shifting its former

dependence on the export of cheap goods to the growth of a potentially enormous internal domestic market.)

Independent India was born amid a bloodbath of communal genocide. It was plagued from the beginning with caste atrocities and domination over the sub-continent's patchwork of national minority cultures and languages. There is simply no basis for your assumption that the medieval barbarities of India's caste heritage are now coming to an end. The very survival of a bigoted communal rabble like the BJP – let alone its current ascendancy – gives the lie to that illusion. The BJP is the shamelessly blatant political voice of Hindu communal supremacy over the Muslim and other minority religions; of perpetuation of an upper-caste apartheid system of “untouchability”; and of brutal imposition of the dominant minority Hindi language over the regional cultures.

Narendra Modi personally is the man who, as chief minister of Gujarat, presided over the communal slaughter of thousands of Muslim men, women and children, and who this very day is ramming the Hindi language down the throats of the vast non-Hindi speaking majority. I'm afraid the myth that he represents some kind of modernising technocratic enlightenment is, frankly, laughable.

In a society where every day women are raped, hanged from trees and burned alive over dowry disputes, what do you make of the recent public pronouncements by BJP ministers that rape is “sometimes right, sometimes wrong” and that “these incidents happen accidentally”? Is this evidence that “India is evolving”?

Under Modi, the last vestigial traces of the old policies of the Nehru dynasty are being stamped out. Modi is the face of reaction in India today – the traditional ideology of India's brutal ruling class and castes, now openly feeding the voracious appetites of the global corporations, and triumphally stamping out the last vestiges of the long-discarded policies of the Nehru dynasty, which had made at least token concessions to planning, protection and secularism – albeit hypocritically and corruptly administered.

You advocate an “effectively regulated” market economy; but who is to administer regulation over the tiny handful of rampantly predatory multinational corporations, incomparably richer and more powerful than any state, that exploit the world’s resources and populations?

You defend the provision of health care, food subsidies and education for their potential role in improving productivity, but haven’t you noticed that welfare measures of any kind – health care, subsidies, housing, education, unemployment and disability benefits – are being destroyed worldwide? And don’t you feel uneasy at finding yourself actually advocating the wholesale demolition of workers’ rights to even minimal employment security in a country where hundreds of millions of people are already unemployed or chronically underemployed? And even defending it, on the very dubious grounds that it will allegedly help provide employment? Even if this turns out to be marginally correct, any jobs that it does create will be at starvation rates of pay and under daily threat of instant termination.

I hope that you will use your stay in India, as I did for many years, to talk to people at all levels, stay with workers’ families, sleep on floors and roofs, shower with buckets of cold water, contend with rats and mosquitos, languish under power cuts, witness first-hand the hardships and struggles of ordinary people, and look at life from their standpoint too, as well as those of well-fed business economists.

And do travel outside India’s “Silicon Valley” to get a more rounded picture of the real Indian society; although even Bangalore suffers from more fundamental problems than mere “conservatism in women’s dress codes”.

I am reading Luce’s book (Edward Luce: In Spite of the Gods: The Rise of Modern India), and will give you a fair and balanced appraisal of it once I have finished it. But I have to warn you that so far my impressions are not favourable.

Roger Silverman, June 2014[/threecolumns]

On some lessons of the French municipal elections (March 2014)

[threecolumns]By *Balazs Nagy*, April 2014

The entire French press is unanimous. Whether left or right in their traditional political colouration – the difference is actually pretty superficial – they compare the so-called socialist party's resounding discomfiture in the municipal elections to Napoleons historic disaster on the Berezina River in Russia in 1812, the prelude to his ultimate defeat. For once the accuracy of their judgement is beyond dispute. So our first response is above all to see what we can learn. Its a perfectly straightforward and normal thing to do, although our conclusions differ noticeably from everyone else's.

First of all it is important to emphasise that elections change absolutely nothing in the fundamentals of the capitalist social system or, therefore, in the overall situation. This view is sharply opposed to the popular belief carefully fostered by the usual politicians and organisations of the left. Even if elections do change that systems form or shape, they move within the framework it imposes and are an integral part of it. Whether municipal, parliamentary or European, they are just part of how the (most democratic!) system in place functions, while remaining profoundly bound to the way it moves and works.

How true this is has been more than adequately demonstrated, and two major and opposed schools of thought on the matter were in evidence during the elections. One body of opinion –

an extremely heterogeneous one (especially if you include the right wingers) – traditionally asserts that elections really can bring about effective changes in the system. It has to be said, regretfully, that even a party such as the Front de Gauche (Left Front) and its component parts – which we see as actually standing on the side of working people, and as such on our side too – remains a prisoner to these blinkered electoral (parliamentary) politics. Its leaders, in effect, leave us to suppose mistakenly, or even themselves assert, that a strong showing (and all the more so outright victory) at the polls would enable them radically to change the capitalist social system.

Abstentions are a kind of vote

In contrast to these shallow parliamentary politics, another large and growing section of the population regularly and deliberately abstain. Although municipal elections supposedly affect people more directly, these latest ones saw record abstention levels of 36.6 per cent, particularly among young people.

Most bourgeois politicians and commentators get onto their moral high horse over this. They have the nerve to impugn such peoples republican credentials, and the audacity to accuse them of helping the right wing. Here or there, the reproach is added that they make it impossible for the Left Front and/or its component parts to make consistent progress, and so change the system.

These abstentions, however, express a definite verdict on the existing capitalist system as a whole, fundamentally rejecting it and repudiating the absurd belief that voting can change the system. In this sense, they are right and we defend them against those republican paragons of (questionable) virtue, even though we think that abstaining is negative and sterile and therefore inadequate.

An accurate map showing the percentage of voters who abstained in the recent French municipal elections would clearly show another France living on the periphery of the cities in the proletarian banlieues. It is working-class France, including the unemployed, suffering under savage austerity. The bourgeois press was so bold as to reveal a tiny corner of its extent and significance. In Paris red belt there were 58.6 per cent abstentions in Ivry, 56.8 in Stains, 56.7 in Vitry-sur-Seine; then 56.7 per cent in Vaux-en-Velin in the outer suburbs of Lyon and 55.5 per cent in the disaster-stricken working-class town of Roubaix in the North. The figure is the same for Trappes in the outer suburbs of Paris, the biggest victims of galloping inequality. Bourgeois journalists and all the petit-bourgeois milieu editorialise about this in the abstract – wringing their hands over the losses suffered by the middle class! The working class and its fate simply disappear from these peoples preoccupations. This arises from a deliberate desire to minimise this dangerous class's importance, even to the point of denying its existence. So you can bet they will never draw up any such map because it would cast rather a pall over their chatter and somewhat upset their peace of mind.

On the importance of elections

Elections cannot change the capitalist system (as we can see in the daily more severe blows it inflicts on us), but political organisations would be making an unpardonable error if they concluded that there is no point in elections. In the first place, they are important because they quite faithfully reflect each partys impact and influence, providing a pretty accurate graphic image (including abstentions) of the level and nature of the populations political consciousness.

This political thermometer marked a general defeat for Hollande and his government and, in passing, wiped out all the myth-making that had gone before about municipal elections being all about strictly local issues: all those who in 2012

had expected this government to protect them against the attacks of capital, this time around voted against his party or abstained. That message is clear. In this sense the bourgeois way the newspaper Le Monde explains what this vote means is deliberately misleading. They write that Hollande is now paying the bill for a poor start to his tenure because it was not sustained by a clear and clearly-articulated project. (Editorial on 1 April 2014). But the obviously bourgeois nature of his project was exactly what working people did understand and voted against. Nevertheless, in its usual convoluted way, the newspaper does express the bourgeois innermost concerns and its insistence that greater determination should be shown in serving that class. Their complaint expresses these requirements and their preferred response, which is to take matters directly in hand via their own traditional parties. In this they are encouraged by Hollande's own bourgeois proclivities. That explains the significance of the heightened profile of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) and the Democratic Movement (MoDem), parties which express the bourgeois desire to press ahead with the destruction of social gains. We can be quite sure that Hollande will do everything he can to satisfy these expectations and will (if possible) become even more hostile to what working people want.

The strength of the fascists (barely) conceals their bourgeoisie character

The considerable advance made by the National Front (FN) is almost entirely due to its demagogic propaganda which appears to defend the interests of workers and working people. But watch out! This tactic of appearing to defend working people is a well-established and well-known trick used by all extreme-right parties. In the 1920s Hitler developed the same stratagem, presenting himself as a defender of working people. He went so far as to call his party socialist, merely adding

the adjective national. As for Mussolini, he came straight out of the Italian Socialist Party. As with all fascists, social demagogy was their most important weapon, and this is what the National Front has picked up on. But how demagogic this political line is, is revealed clearly by the fact that it does not attack the whole bourgeoisie and its social system. It only sets its sights on one of its political lines, the one currently in the foreground: Europe. It advocates a different line, i.e. the withdrawal into nationalism represented by the other, minority, section of the European bourgeoisie. So the FN attacks the bourgeoisies majority (European) policy, but not the bourgeoisie as a class which exploits other classes, nor its capitalist system. Far from it, it vigorously attacks immigrant workers, in other words the majority of the working class, and carries on alarmingly about workers gains, denouncing various benefits. It has derived great advantages not just from this lying demagogy, which continues to conceal its avowedly bourgeois nature, but also the fact that no single party has yet unmasked it as a bourgeois party. Normally, criticisms merely affect its anti-European stance and its racist and nationalist phobias, without touching on the bourgeois basis on which they grow like excrescences.

Why is the Left Front marking time?

Elections are also an opportunity for all those united around shared political aims to rally together so as to further extend their ranks. This is particularly true of all those who wish, on the basis of a programme, to make a step forward towards freeing working people from the yoke of the capitalist system. So the elections offered the Left Front a chance to develop. So how to explain that, despite the terrible crisis of capitalism and the fact that workers rejected this society, the Left Front did not just fall a long way back from its spectacular results in the presidential elections, but was clearly overtaken by all bourgeois parties, including the FN and the UMP?

This absurd situation is a consequence of the Left Fronts political ambiguity. While it makes it clear that it thoroughly opposes the French and European bourgeoisies recent austerity policies, it does not come out clearly against the capitalist system as such. It stays vague and enigmatic on this cardinal point which really does require some straight talking. This obscurity is revealed in the lack of a clearly working-class programme directed against capitalism as the social system at the root of all austerity. This lack of a programme and the fact they are locked into the normal bourgeois election framework have condemned them to limp along far behind the others. In short, their position does not measure up to the situation. How can you expect the Left Front to unmask the National Front as a bourgeois party if they equivocate over their own objectives? The municipal elections show that, under these conditions, the Left Front is condemned to mark time while the National Front has made considerable progress, including among discontented workers.

So the main lesson of the elections is obvious. They show ever more clearly that, instead of looking for scapegoats, the main task facing our Left Front is to make an objective assessment of its activity as a whole, above all its political programme,

Balazs Nagy, April 2014[/threecolumns]

**New Valls government: A
government of anti-working**

class struggle

[threecolumns]By *Balazs Nagy*, April 2014

The recent local government elections and the formation of a new government are a good opportunity, indeed a direct incentive, to say more about the mean, twisted and nasty way the Hollande team running the country think. Their politico-social reasoning is very simple, not to say simplistic. It is what you might call classical social-democratic thinking of a kind well-known over the last hundred years or more.

Resolute defenders of decadent capitalism

The main thing that really marks these people out, among all those who claim to be on the side of working people, is that they present capitalism as an eternal system whose existence you just have to accept. So according to this disgrace to the name of socialist, everything we do is necessarily limited and determined by the framework of capitalism and its general rules. But as a consolation to working people, according to this conception, the capitalist system can be put right, amended and improved, and our job is to contribute to that. This cheapskate philosophy which has long been selling the mission of liberating the working class for a mess of pottage still had some limited validity when, in return for this sell-out, the bourgeoisie was still able to concede various actual reforms. But imperialism is the period of capitalisms decline – something which social democrats obstinately deny – in which, because it is exhausted, this system is organically unable to concede the slightest reform.

Now the present crisis has brutally revealed that this decline has got to the point where not only have reforms become impossible for this moribund system, but in order to survive it needs to attack and destroy previous reforms. This need is what explains its general offensive against existing reforms

and its intransigent determination to fight that right through to the end.

But social democrats are incorrigible; they have not abandoned their grotesque fantasies, but adapted them precisely to the many-faceted requirements of this offensive on the part of a bourgeoisie with its back to the wall. For all Hollande's solemn oaths – and this sheds some light on the social democrats consummate duplicity – they then told us all the fibs about the need on the one hand to swell the coffers of international capital by paying back the debt, and on the other to help our own impoverished capitalist with yet more billions. Against all the evidence they still maintain the lie that thanks to this aid the grateful bourgeoisie will do everything it can to secure the well-being of working people. Even a few weeks ago Hollande was still handing out dozens of billions in line with this plan, but he and his ilk were the only ones (like all self-respecting social democrats) who still believed the incredible dream that in exchange the bourgeoisie would give unemployed people work. (Through these outrageous deceptions they hoped to justify making savings by drastically cutting expenditure on health, education, all welfare benefits, wages, right to a job and so forth, to the point of threatening their very existence.) Alongside this savage demolition of genuine previous reforms – and to show that they are true reformists carrying out actual reforms – they have flooded the country with a wave of so-called societal reforms – at the margins of and even outside of social and economic life – such as same-sex marriage, electrical cars and so forth. The main function of these pretend reforms has invariably been to distract attention from the activity of destroying previous reforms.

The local government elections brought a stinging defeat to those who, in their arrogant and pretentious duplicity, thought that working people had swallowed this hogwash hook, line and sinker. They were sincerely and profoundly surprised

when they saw the results. But to go from there to imagining that Hollande and co would revise their policies and adapt them to what working people want would be an absurd illusion. Far from it!

A build-up of losses and other miseries threaten workers.

The new government is not just a body committed carrying on Hollande and co.s bourgeois policy of robbing working people. In view of the preceding governments alleged dawdling in getting on with the job and also the bourgeoisies growing appetite, not to say bulimia, it is going to toughen up considerably. After 26 March, the employers body Medef trumpeted: A more ambitious trajectory than the 50 billion cut already announced is now absolutely imperative, (Le Monde, 30-31 March 2014). Then the headline on the same newspapers editorial of 1 April spelled out what the government has to do: Hold course! No wobbling, get on with it! And then Hollande's road map made it clear: The only responsible outcome is to set afoot and then roll out reforms aiming at securing an economic recovery. We all know the terrible reality hiding behind these anodyne words. The self-proclaimed leaders of the bourgeoisie in Brussels have also jumped at the chance to insist on greater rigour from the French government. And the commercial treaty being prepared between Europe and the US has up its sleeve further blows which will make any hopes of an economic recovery by France, already pretty well compromised, even more precarious.

Hollande reacted swiftly, obeying not indeed the wishes of the disappointed voters but the requirements of his real, bourgeois, bosses. He quickly established a new government team tightly organised around his closest social-democratic partners. His new prime minister, Valls, is ready-made to epitomise it, with his even more pronounced right-wing political orientation and aggressive character. It is no accident that he has long wanted to rid his party's name of the adjective socialist. So right from the start this team

presents itself as an advanced detachment of a bourgeois attack formation. The odd reassuring and soothing phrase where required do not alter this truth. We shall have occasion later on to comment in greater detail on this new governments anti-worker offensive, the first elements of which, aiming to dismantle the social security system, we have just seen.

There certainly is a change, not to say a turn. Here is an end to the procrastination and shilly-shallying which, however much they suit Hollande's innate weakness, have become intolerable to the bourgeoisie and seem contrary to the nature of the new government. The presence of people with a left aura like Hamon and Montebourg has nothing to do with any real left. Much more, it signifies the end of equivocation or misunderstanding surrounding these careerists reputations. Indeed, if there is a real left in this party, apart from the usual fake-left loud-mouths like Lienemann and co., now would be the time to say so in opposition to the deployment of definite measures and attacks against workers gains. Above all, now is the time for all organisations who speak and act in workers interests to rally round the Left Front to prepare together a broad united front of all working people against the redoubled attacks by capital and its new government.

Balazs Nagy, April 2014[/threecolumns]