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

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

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

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

Sefik Muminovic (55) and Dzemal Zahirovic (59) fought for Bosnian independence against Serbian and Croatian fascists. In poor health and with nothing at all to fall back on, they have made many attempts to find help from various institutions. Seeing their families languish in black decline, they have decided to end it all. They wrote a public letter in the hope

that their deaths would save their families.

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

They issued a public statement:

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

Muminovic fought in the 210th Brigade Sprecanski detatchment. 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/