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/

Workers' Front Croatia: An interview with DIMITRIJE BIRAC

[threecolumns]

'Yes, we want to abolish capitalism'

One of the founders of Workers' Front says: "Our final goal and the character of the party are anti-capitalist, and our current aim is to show that all the problems we talk about, such as unemployment and the collapse in production, are consequences of the socio-economic system, and not of the success of failure of this or that economic policy".

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We have meetings where we discuss uniting the workers movement, and in that sense we are in touch with trade unionists like Zeljko Luksic of HZ (Croatian Railways), Zvonko Segvic of Brodosplit shipyard, and trade unionists in the power and chemical sector independent union (EKN) and the "Feniks" Post Office union.

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

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

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

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

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

The origins of the crisis lie in the system itself.

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

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

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

If you postulate that it is more essential to satisfy the

needs of capital arising from private appropriation than those of society, then society finds itself removed from all control over work as a whole, over the value created, and then we have a spontaneous process which society cannot control.

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

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

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

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

Q: What do you propose?

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

We propose to raise the relative wage, or to put it another way, the part of the wealth the worker creates which comes back to that person, to lower the retirement age, and increase pensions and the minimum wage, to cap the spread between minimum and maximum wages at a ratio of 1:4, to place banks under social control and other steps to develop society, not

profits.

We should put a stop to privatisation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Croatia: Programmatic Principles of the Workers' Front

[threecolumns] See also the Invitation to a conference in Zagreb

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

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

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

Unlike the existing political parties, our organization will

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

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

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

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

A fundamental characteristic of capitalism is the irreconcilable difference between the two basic classes: capitalists, holding monopoly over the means of production, such as banks, companies, factories, chain stores, hotels etc., and making profit through the work of others, and workers, i.e. all those who rent their labour to survive.

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

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

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

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

Since the aforementioned is in severe conflict with the principles of the capitalist system, as well as with the interests of the ruling class and political elite, the realization of these goals is possible only with the abolition of capitalism.

3. **Although recently founded,** the Workers' Front does not

> start from scratch. The rich history that inspires and teaches us is a hundred-year-old history of the international trade union and workers' political movement. It is precisely the persistent and devoted struggle of workers organized into trade unions and parties during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that won us the political and material rights we still enjoy today but which have been increasingly under attack, including an eight-hour day, universal suffrage and social protection.

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

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

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

We will strive for reforms of current trade unions as well as for transfer of as much influence as possible to the mass of trade union members and their democratization, for the rejection of the current bureaucratic rigidity and accommodationist politics now carried out by the leadership of

the biggest labour unions, so they can become one of the most important tools in the workers' struggle.

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

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

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

All the oppressed share the same interests, which can only be realized in unity and solidarity with others. The Workers' Front supports the creation of a strong and coordinated European workers' movement and close connections between all the oppressed in the world. Consequently, the Workers' Front solidarises with all nationally oppressed peoples whose lands are occupied and their language and cultural rights denied.

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

[/threecolumns]

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,

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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]

Out Now! Issue 10 of the Journal

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Solidarity between workers of Serbia and Croatia

A simple solidarity motion will make big waves. More than 20 years after the Vukovar war, where in 1991 the Milosevic regime razed to its very foundations a peaceful working class

Slavonian town where Serbs and Croats lived together, Serbian and Croatian workers are stretching a hand out to each other as workers across the frontier. In a Serbia still hostage to its own nationalism and where privatisation is a mafia-infested as it is in Croatia, the working class has so far had no political or trade union channel through which to express itself. So it has provided itself with a sort of duly-registered citizens' associations in several Voïvodine towns, through which workers have fought through the courts to have mafioso privatisations declared invalid. Here and there they have won. These are not political bodies. Nevertheless, they are the only living and real form of organisation workers have in many towns, and they tend to join together in federations. The existing political parties are too rotten and the trade unions too divided and discredited, and so workers have been forced to find something else on an ad hoc basis. In this struggle they are supported by two students from Belgrade, working on their own account, who have set up a "Movement for Freedom". This also supports attempts to organise by small farmers who have also been completely plundered. As soon as the appeal for solidarity with the Jadrankamen workers in Brac in Croatia was launched, two organisations, "Equality" in Zrenjanin and "Solidarity" in Subotica, where Serb and Hungarian workers are closely mixed together, announced their support. Below is the latter's statement, published in the Croatian Trotskyist journal "Radnicka Borba".

Radoslav Pavlovic
Workers International

Workers' protest in Subotica

"To the workers of Jadrenkamen:

Dear comrades,

We have received your news and your appeal for solidarity to which we cannot remain indifferent. Our citizens' association

was born in a struggle on the part of existing and former workers at the “Sever” plant in Subotica to assert our rights. At present we are involved in a struggle to keep this plant going. It used to employ 6000 workers, but now there are only 450. Privatisation has meant that its assets have been pillaged and it has been systematically destroyed, and we want it to be declared invalid. They have smashed the plant up under the watchful gaze of local and national politicians who have collaborated with the owners to make impressive financial gains. Using the same recipe they have destroyed 30 perfectly viable firms in Subotica and the whole of industry in Serbia.
That is why one of our objectives is the re-industrialisation of the economy. As your placards say, we too want to work and have control over that work. Your struggle and ours are not isolated cases.
As you can see, workers all over Serbia and Croatia are rising against mafioso privatisation to defend the right to work, to an education, to social security and insurance in old age. The working class of Europe and Latin America is already on its feet. We witness the heroic struggle of the Spanish miners. Over the last few days the workers at the “Viomihaniki Metalleutiki” factory in northern Greece have occupied the plant and manage it themselves.
The maintenance and functioning of society depend uniquely on the working class. It is high time that workers once again became conscious of the power they represent. We should not suffer in silence, but struggle determinedly and unite our struggles. Don’t let them use national borders to divide us. Whether at home or abroad the capitalist is the common enemy of those of us who live by our own labour. Only by struggling together can we overcome existing obstacles and save ourselves from capitalist barbarism.
Dear comrades in struggle , we send you greetings from Subotica in the hope that we can work together and confident that together we will win.

OCCUPY – DEFEND – PRODUCE! (*)

“Solidarnost” Citizens’ Association, Subotica, 14 July 2012.

President: Vanja DRAGOJLOVIC

(*) This slogan was picked up from Croatian workers. It is tending to become a recognition sign of workers’ struggles