

Workers International to Rebuild the 4th International

BULLETIN

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PO Box 68375 London E7 7DT

email: info@workersinternational.org

Croatian trade unionists meet



Trade unionists at a “Workers Against Plant Closures” Conference organised 24 & 25 November in Zagreb by the Trotskyist “Radnicka borba”. (Full report starts page 2)

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Croatia:

Workers against plant closures

Report of a trade union conference organised in Zagreb by the Trotskyist “Radnicka borba” group

The trade union conference “Workers against plant closures” was far more successful than the organisers had hoped. The great majority of speakers and audience were workers involved in day-to-day struggles in their workplaces.

Over the course of two days they presented the problems they face at work and had a lively debate on links between workplaces, social relations, the position of capital, the state and its institutions, and their demands in the trade union sphere and for society as a whole.

The discussion was not at all abstract; it dealt with concrete, practical proposals. It was only a shame there was not enough time to discuss each topic more thoroughly.

As a final outcome to the conference, there was unanimous agreement on the following objectives: A joint statement, the exchange of contacts and the establishment of a network to co-ordinate activity, and work towards a joint workers’ movement.

A representative of the organisers introduced the conference by emphasising the need to raise struggles in individual plants up the level of society as a whole and create a powerful workers’ and social movement. He explained that this was the task facing the conference.

There followed a report by **Lukica BUCAT** of the “Dalmacijavino” independent union (a drinks company in Split). He gave a brief history of the company, strikes, and the deplorable situation at this company which has a promising future but is crushed by the problems of workers’ shareholdings.

Denis GETO of the technical section of the HEP Technos (Croat EDF) union talked critically about the situation in the union, describing how it does not involve office staff in its activity, but mainly the operatives, and emphasising the need for unity and common action in the face of the tendency to fragmentation within the union in the run-up to privatisation. Several speakers in the discussion emphasised that now we have met up, we cannot remain just at the level of discussion, but must take a step forward in building a joint movement. They also emphasised the need for decisive action to prevent the privatisation of public property.

Zeljko LUKSIC of the Croat railway workers’ union described the situation on the railways, which are being prepared for privatisation, with this state enterprise being abandoned and broken up. He went on to raise some general and essential questions

which provoked a lively discussion. Luksic stated that we have to go forward to a social change, which cannot be done without the workers taking power. The first step in that direction, he said, would be to build a workers’ party made up not of professional politicians but workers themselves, i.e. based on the unions. In relation to the Labourites in Lesar (a kind of left social-democratic party with 5 or 6 MPs) he stated, as a former regional leader, that they are not in any way a workers’ party but “a populist outfit set up by a loud-mouth”.

An interesting discussion ensued on the relationship between the parliamentary struggle and activity “on the street”, in which broad agreement on the need to combine the two prevailed. There were proposals for conference participants to consider creating a new party or association on a working class platform, but in the discussion that followed they concluded that they should first create a movement and then see how best to set about this in light of how that developed.

The conference resumed the next day with **Tonci DRPIC**, who briefly outlined the unique history of the “Jadrnkamen” workers on the Dalmatian island of Bratch, who have quarried stone father to son right up to the present. They used to quarry and transport the stone virtually with their bare hands, using a few simple tools.

The firm had prospered greatly in Yugoslavia, until Oresar and his crooks emptied out the funds and forced the workers into a life-and-death struggle. He gave notice of new struggles. The firm is currently legally in liquidation, but some workers have been re-hired and a certain level of activity goes on, while half of them have been sacked and carry on the struggle, centred around their union. Drpic said the Jadrankamen workers will never give their business up.

The other participants in the conference were unanimous in offering their support and urgent solidarity to the Jadrankamen comrades.

Bojan KOVACIC of the Zagreb petroleum distribution firm “Dioki” described how his firm had been destroyed in the course of the privatisation of the national oil company INA, with the notorious trial of Jezic and Sanader (the former Croat prime minister up to his neck in corruption, recently sentenced to ten years in prison). He explained all the things they had got up to, buying regional newspapers like *Novi list* and *The Voice of Slavonia*, selling land to

third parties, then leasing it back, and so on. Kovacic concluded by saying that “Dioki” probably could not be saved, but the workers would fight for their unpaid wages and redundancy money.

Analysing trade unionism in Croatia, **Sinisa MILICIC** of the regional industrial trade union emphasised that nothing in the field of social relations has changed since Frederick Engels wrote his *Condition of the Working Class in England*; the main difference is that nowadays we have i-pods and mobile phones.

Citing examples of trade union organisation in the early 20th century in Varazdin region, he insisted on the need to learn from history and re-establish genuine trade unionism. He finished with a quip: He had come to the conference thinking that he could sum up his speech in a single sentence: “the outlook for trade unionism in Croatia is hopeless!”. But after the conference he has changed his mind: “Despite everything there are ways forward”.

The final session summarised decisions to make sure that they are put into practice. An *ad hoc* group

drafted the resolution. The conference concluded by deciding to establish joint working class co-ordination between those present, and to prepare a further conference in the near future. Those present committed themselves to getting as many as possible of their workmates to attend, as well as many more trade unionists from various sectors.

The trade unionists asked “Radnicka borba” to organise this next conference and maintain co-ordination in the intervening period. They also tasked them with editing the final version of the resolution, submitting it to participants for ratification, then circulating it widely around trade unionists and publishing it in the press.

All agreed that they hoped the conference would become a regular event so as to broaden its impact, increase the level of participation and transform this initiative into a powerful movement.

V.K. *Radnicka borba* website, 3 Dec. 2012 (R. Pavlovic provided a French translation of these two texts. The version printed here is translated on from the French.)

Statement adopted at the trade union conference “Workers Against Plant Closures” held in Zagreb, 24 and 25 Nov. 2012

WE trade unionists representing workers at JADRANKAMEN, CROATIAN RAILWAYS (HZ), DIOKI, CROATIAN ELECTRICITY GRID (HEP), DALMACIJAVINO and REGIONAL INDUSTRIAL UNION, agree the following points after two days of discussion at a conference:

The working class in Croatia is confronted with numerous problems:

- **Firms decaying**
- **Workers have no influence on management**
- **Workers have no influence at board level**
- **Wage cuts**
- **Non-payment of wages**
- **Casualisation and job losses**
- **Wages not adequate to live off decently**
- **Other rights denied to workers**

All the problems workers raise are basically the same everywhere, whichever firm or institution they work for.

Taking account of this alarming situation, the participants commit themselves to act together to defend workers, their jobs, and public property.

We will act for the fullest solidarity in workers’ struggles and offer concrete mutual support to workers irrespective of their workplace, industry or trade union affiliation. We invite all trade unions to link up with us.

What we seek in this solidarity is to replace the current fragmentation of the union movement with genuine class-struggle trade unionism.

■ **Against privatisation and the junking of public property!**

■ **Cancel the privatisation of the national oil company INA and all the other illegal privatisations!**

■ **Against the parachuting of cronies of the ruling party into management, which breeds incompetence!**

■ **Workers’ management of firms to be established in law and the organisation of workers’ shareholdings to be legally regulated in order to strengthen its position!**

■ **An end to the complaisant attitude adopted by the current political authorities towards big capital to the detriment of the citizens of the Republic of Croatia. We demand a stop to the pillage and junking of the country’s natural resources which belong to all citizens of the Republic.**

■ **Current employment and bankruptcy laws designed in favour of capital and to the detriment of workers must be changed!**

We call on everyone with a grievance – workers, farmers, the unemployed, pensioners, students – to link up with this initiative with a view to fighting back and changing the current state of society.

Lukica Bucat, “Dalmacijavino” independent union, **Tonci Drpic**, “Jadrankamen” independent union, **Denis Geto**, “HEP-TECHNOS” professional union, **Bojan Kovacic**, Member, “Dioki” Defence Committee, **Zeljko Luksic**, Croatian Railway union, **Sinisa Milicic**, Regional industrial union

Rebuilding the Fourth International

Stand against slanders!

Letter to the leadership of the Parti ouvrier indépendant from Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, 26 November 2012

Dear Comrades,

We are writing to you in the spirit of the ideas and political tradition of the Fourth International to ask you to make a stand against gross and unworthy slander on the part of your political associate, Pavlusco Imsirovic. The Fourth International has had to fight such methods throughout its history.

On 11 September 2012 in the course of a response timed at 10.23am to an article published on the website of the group "Radnicka Borba" in Croatia, Imsirovic uttered a number of slanders against our comrades Radoslav Pavlovic and Balazs Nagy (Michel Varga).

First, Imsirovic attempted to portray Radoslav Pavlovic as a petty-bourgeois parasite and exploiter owning a private business and a string of production facilities. This statement has a serious class element and is intended to smear Radoslav Pavlovic's image even before a political discussion starts. In fact for a number of years now Radoslav Pavlovic, a highly-skilled craftman, has lived in modest circumstances and earned his living as an instructor training apprentices. He has made many sacrifices of time and money in the interests of the proletarian revolution.

Pavlusco Imsirovic goes on to state that Radoslav Pavlovic acted as a police provocateur within the Paris section of the clandestine Yugoslav Trotskyist group in the early 1970s and acted under the guidance of his "political police mentor" Balazs Nagy (Michel Varga).

The assertion that Balazs Nagy was an agent of various state security services is an old canard circulated by the then leaders of the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste against Balazs Nagy and his supporters in the early 1970s in order to justify the violence inflicted on them by PCI stewards when political differences arose.

Imsirovic goes on to refer to Radoslav Pavlovic's involvement in "a typical European 'leftist' provocative campaign 'Aid for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Alija Izetbegovic'". This is how he is pleased to describe the 'Workers' Aid for Bosnia' campaign which brought material and medical aid to the multi-cultural miners of Tuzla and their families besieged by Serb nationalist fanatics practising genocide. All political demands of this working class and trade union based campaign arose at the suggestion of the workers of Tuzla. Imsirovic's deliberation dis-

tortion of the very name of the campaign is a downright lie.

Imsirovic's assertion that this campaign "collapsed lamentably, having been denounced as a dirty and insane political provocation on the part of the USA and Europe's secret services" is straightforward wishful thinking.

These slanders against Radoslav Pavlovic and Balazs Nagy revive a campaign of vilification which was raised against them and others in the course of a political struggle in the early 1970s. It was a slanderous and destructive campaign at the time.

Unfortunately, others such as the late T.G.Healy seized on this method and developed a vile campaign of slander and character-assassination against Joseph Hansen and the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party (US) as an agent both of the Soviet GPU and the US security services.

We invite you to agree with us that it is high time to end this method. Slandering political opponents as police agents and provocateurs is deeply destructive and demoralising. Slanders are a syphilis in the workers' movement. To resort to slanders and unjustifiable character-assassination in political debate is to expose the weakness of one's own political positions and goes hand-in-hand with sectarian destruction of the workers' movement.

It was practised by the treacherous leaders of the Socialist International against Lenin and the Bolsheviks (indeed, that is another campaign of slanders that has recently revived). It was practised to an exceptional degree by the Stalinist leaders against all honest revolutionaries as everyone now knows very well.

The slanders and insinuations against Radoslav Pavlovic and Balazs Nagy have no basis in fact.

Workers' Aid to Bosnia was a working-class initiative supported and sustained by working class organisations, trade unions and political parties across Europe. If we cannot persuade you that the initiative was politically correct, can we at least urge you and your supporters to call it by its proper name?

We appeal to you to acknowledge these points and rein in comrades of yours like Pavlusko Imsirovic when they indulge in politically backward diatribes of this sort.

Yours fraternally,
Bob Archer
Secretary, WIRFI

France

Hollande reneges on his promises

BALAZS NAGY warns of the dangers lurking in the French socialist government's haste to embrace "competivity"

No-one who has to work for a living should ever forget the outrageous way French President Hollande and his Socialist Party have behaved. In a few short months they have openly turned their backs on all their promises to defend the social gains working people have made and lined up with the bourgeoisie's – in particular the European bourgeoisie's – offensive against them.

Their proposals for this brutal offensive go even further than their right-wing predecessors in smashing up these gains outright. The more flexible tactics Hollande has adopted have the same effect as those of the right, but are deployed over a broader socio-economic field. So what are they concretely?

We all know that under ex-President Sarkozy the classic right-wing leaders of the French bourgeoisie started a fundamental, frontal attack on these social gains. They were even in the forefront of this offensive at a European level, fighting alongside the German bourgeoisie to shore up a European capitalism shaken to its very foundations and already in a sorry pass which the current crisis exposed and made even worse.

We also all know that these bourgeois leaders have used this crisis as a "weapon of mass destruction" – genuine this time, but with the false, lying promise that it will provide a way out – to imposed a succession of "austerity plans" (as they call this destructive offensive) on one European country after another.

In this context, ex-President Sarkozy and his people had already started drastic steps to relieve the burden on the bourgeoisie of the system of social benefits. They dreamed up a so-called "social" Value Added Tax (VAT) as an alternative way of financing this, this time at the expense of the working majority. And so a generous hand-out to the capitalists became a new burden for workers.

Condemning

Now one of the main reasons why François Hollande and the Socialist Party won the election was that they spent the whole campaign condemning these measures and opposing austerity in general. Hollande presented his policies as a struggle against austerity plans and even against finance capital in general. He promised a new turn based on economic growth as – in his words – an alternative to austerity. Before the ballot he regularly expounded this policy in order to gain workers' support against sceptical bourgeois critics. He announced that his first big job would be to

convince Merkel of the need to re-negotiate the ill-famed European Budgetary Treaty so as to promote European growth instead of austerity.

Working people in Europe wanted to believe him. In the way of things, any hope offered to millions of crushed and disorientated people, in the absence of any real hope of their own, will dim their foresight and lull their vigilance. In any case, this fairly modest hope was inspired and fed by the much more realistic one of getting rid of that officious aide de camp of the bourgeois offensive, Nicholas Sarkozy. Only a very few people noticed and pointed out how at the same time Hollande and his party clearly stated that the country's debts would have to be paid back in full. That, however, was an unmistakable sign that he is an obedient tool of international finance. Hollande even promised – unprompted – to bring the country's budget deficit below 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – by next year.

Swallowed

In a triumph of hope over experience, the great mass swallowed this and paid no heed to the warnings. That, too, is in the nature of things at the moment, imbued as they still are with the historic retreat and the current defeats the working class is suffering. Let us recall what we – the Workers International – wrote on the very eve of Hollande's victory in May 2012:

"It would mean taking the path of wage cuts, speed-up and deteriorating working conditions, the extension of casual working ... everything that would help reduce costs and restore and increase that famous competitiveness that is now so glorified, with a heavy nationalistic flavour ... the current offensive against the working class would become a method and a means to get economic growth." (*Back to Mass Poverty*, Workers International pamphlet, p.34).

Hardly have they got established in power, when President Hollande and his government have hastily broken their key commitments one by one. It is formally true that there is no austerity plan, but nor has Hollande insisted on re-negotiating the European Budgetary Treaty. As *Le Monde* (what Trotsky called: "the bourgeoisie made newspaper") remarked laconically: "The candidate rejected the European Budgetary Treaty. The President accepted it." (13 November 2012). Weeks of apparently insignificant little steps finally led to a situation where they got it adopted,



François Hollande

and even got their opponents inside their own party to swallow it, something Sarkozy in his wildest moments could never have dreamed of. But all summer the new government's worrying actions have been setting off alarm bells.

From the outset they relinquished any attempt at a thorough, regular and systematic critique of the economic catastrophe suffered under the previous government or of the bourgeois offensive in general, and they let the latter's representatives get away with outrageous arguments complete with insistent appeals for support for what capital wanted. They went on to develop numerous very cordial contacts with the various factions in the big bourgeoisie and its organisations.

Technocrat

Then, getting ready for a turn to so-called "competivity", which they said was essential and presented as somehow an alternative to austerity, they appointed a top big-business technocrat widely experienced in capitalist methods to work out a concrete plan to achieve it. Finally, faced with agitation on the part of young-hopeful capitalists ("start-ups") against the new government's rather timid attempts to tax the buying and selling of businesses, Hollande and his government quickly capitulated and abandoned this tax, all in the name of "growth".

Throughout the long summer weeks of preparation, Hollande and his government maintained a kind of ambiguous stance over their actual plans, leaving it to others to prepare the ground. The bourgeoisie and its economic spokespersons lost no time in launching a furious propaganda campaign and a deluge of articles and conferences demanding that the social advantages working people have won and their system of social protection should be radically taken apart.

At the same time a legion of eager economists and journalists worked flat out to explain vehemently the need for a "competivity shock". They were climbing over each other to press Hollande and his government, who hardly needed asking, to go that way, all the while habituating people to this brutal word "shock", familiarising them with this war-like term. The only people who remained silent in this deafening chorus were the trade union leaders and supposed left parties, who were caught like rabbits in the headlights ...

Competivity

The 5 November report on competitiveness fell like a thunderbolt on this carefully-prepared ground. It demanded that 30 billion euros of costs "which had previously been born by business" should "now be transferred to wage-earners", as *Le Monde* hastened to explain. What these "costs" actually represent is a significant portion of the amount of money for social protection which the capitalists pay pro-rata with wages.

After weeks of apparent hesitation, the government went into overdrive. The very next day, Prime Minister Ayrault announced a 20 billion euro cut in taxes on business spread over three years, on top of the hand-out of 30 billion asked for in the report! To make up the money for social expenditure which had just been donated to the bosses, the government decided to raise VAT by seven per cent and announced that it would be necessary also to cut public expenditure by another ten billion euros! Even the pro-bourgeois *Le Monde* was forced to comment cynically: "... there is a financial saving, public debt is attacked and the spirit of enterprise celebrated". The same newspaper emphasised: "... a turn as significant as the one brought about by François Mitterrand in 1983 when he replaced 'relaunch' with 'rigour'." The President of the Medef bosses' organisation, Parisot, crowed: "they listened to us!".

But the leaders of the trade union movement were incredibly relaxed. Force Ouvrière (FO) thought it was a "mistake", while, again according to *Le Monde*, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) criticised the reduction in labour costs because: "that's not the problem" (?) These shallow and ill-chosen comments show that we are dealing with much more than simple blindness on the part of trade union leaders.

This veritable cold shower was served up again at President Hollande's press conference the following

week. He announced an enormous cut of 60 billion euros over the next five years – 12 billion a year on all expenditure. Besides these bitter pills to swallow, he also drew attention to the considerable stakes involved in the negotiations between trade unions and employers' organisations. These started in early October and are expected to finish at the end of December. At the press conference, Hollande laid great emphasis on the need for these negotiations to culminate in "historic compromises".

Deplorable

The trade unions' response to this turn, which represents the actual smashing up of social provision, has been and remains deplorable. Despite its relative success, the demonstration the day after this revolting press conference looked actually inadequate to the task. It proved yet again that the leaderships of these organisations which cling to their usual panacea, of a one-off demonstration tolerated by authorities well used to this sort of thing, fall far short of what the times require. To say the least. And the cup is still far from full ...

Take these very trade union negotiations as an example. Hollande and his government see them as an essential complement to their outright neo-liberal (or social-democratic!) turn. They deliberately linked the negotiations to this turn as a necessary component playing a specific role in arrangements. Hollande has made it absolutely clear that in exchange for the hand-out of several billion to the capitalists, he expects them (and the unions!) to sign a veritable treaty of alliance going far beyond mere agreements or settlements. What is at stake is the inauguration of a new phase in intensified class collaboration. With a view to consolidating the so-called "partnership" between unions and capitalists, Hollande is currently demanding, as of right, two seats for trade union representatives on companies' management boards.

German practice

Actually, the government would love to get this social-democratic demand accepted soon. Its effect would be to tie the unions to the company and its fate. Hollande dreams of following German practice in this field so as to limit and channel social movements. The government and the capitalists are haggling over this. Current negotiations show the latter's unyielding determination to impose what they want, which is first and foremost to get union agreement to casualisation and labour flexibility, as well as making it easier to sack workers. The unions, meanwhile, are insisting on an agreement about job-creation first. So for the time being they are resisting the attacks. But government pressure and the temptation of management sinecures are powerful levers, and the longer negotiations are dragged out behind closed doors, the

worse the outcome looks for workers. The agreement reached between unions and employers on 21 November in Italy over negotiating at company level bodes ill. "From now on", *Le Monde* reports, "individual company or regional agreements may replace (collective) national industrial agreements". This breaks up workers' unity in the face of the capitalists. Also, instead of rising in line with prices, wages will depend on the economic fortunes of the business (or of the sector). But all is not lost, as the biggest union, the CGIL, refused to sign up to this "agreement". Also in France, even if the CFDT is walking hand in hand with Hollande, the CGT, like the CGIL, is rather more inclined to hold back. And in the face of all of this – not to mention Europe as a whole – people say there is no class struggle !

Clearly, Hollande and his government have launched another, slightly different sort of attack, although essentially it is the same as everywhere else. But it looks even more vicious because it embraces all aspects of social life.

Contribution

In this respect, the cut announced in central government's contribution to local government bodies – a "mere" 1.8 billion euros for the moment – is very significant, since they are responsible for 70% of public investment, involving so far 45bn euros on schools, roads, etc. And the overall cuts will be felt all the more severely as local authorities sustain the lion's share of various forms of social provision.

The offensive is far from over. Indeed, it has barely started. But the government has already decided to speed up its arrangements so that everybody is faced with a fait accompli which forestalls any debate. In a sick sort of way Hollande can be quite proud of himself: he is well on the way to setting up the mechanism to dismantle social gains – and he has not even needed to use a "troika", like Schroeder did long since and like Cameron does now.

But the unions have not yet said their last word, and for that matter the Socialist Party is still united. Now, since the biggest bourgeois party (the UMP), lost the elections and its warring parts (the proto-fascist wing and the "moderate" classical bourgeois wing) are breaking apart, it has been possible to contain the contradictions with the Socialist Party. For the moment, Hollande has been able to get on top of and soothe hard-liners in the party. It has been hard, but he has done it. But the situation is explosive, and as it develops the internal contradictions within the party will stretch to breaking point. This party, too, will soon have to face up to an explosion of the contradiction between those who, perhaps under Beyrou, will take the field against working people and those who will wonder why their party still calls itself socialist.

November 2012

Greece

Pensioners' call for Europe-wide action

Extracts from the contribution of the Greek retired bank workers' representative I.A Mylonas to the meeting of the E.C. of the European Pensioners' Federation (FERPA), 12-13 November 2012 in Brussels.

"... There is a growing humanitarian crisis in Greece and pensioners are being pushed towards starvation. Our pensions have been reduced yet again (for the fifth time) while the prices of goods and services rise and income tax and taxes on housing are expanding. And so we alone – alongside working people – are paying for the criminal and scandalous behaviour of capitalist powers which led to the fraudulent and usurious debt. And I must report that in October yet another demonstrator died as a result of the police use of tear-gas.

On the other hand, those with big incomes and powerful business groups who are profiting from the crisis and committing fraud under the cover of the Troika and its political lackeys are left unscathed. The impoverishment and marginalisation of the majority of citizens, the dissolution of the social fabric and the collapse of the majority of sectors of economic activity have already already proceeded apace.

We are now convinced that this is not just a matter of creditors collecting the capital and interest on their loans, but – through the conditions of total collapse which they are provoking – of seizing or helping themselves to all sources of wealth and parts of the coun-

try's territories (e.g. the islands) within the framework of an economic occupation.

In fact, recent IMF figures show that, due to the application of the occupation Memoranda, in the last four years the Greek economy has gone backwards by 18.4%. They expect a further shrinkage of between 4.5% and 7% in 2013!

This colonial treatment of the citizens of a member country of the European Union is part of a plan which is being tested today on a guinea pig – Greece – before being subsequently rolled-out to other countries.

Consequently we must stand together to resist it, for example with:

1. Demonstrations at a European level (to be organised in co-operation with the ETUC, and a Euro-demonstration in Athens).

2. A symbolic human chain around the Commission building, the European Parliament, national parliaments, etc., alongside:

3. Enforcement of the institutional European framework for the protection of fundamental human rights (the Protocols) ...

Thank you for your attention"

Portugal

European dockers demonstrate against changes to labour laws

Hundreds of dockworkers from Belgium, Denmark, France and Spain joined Portuguese dockers in a demonstration in the Portuguese capital Lisbon on November 29, 2012.

They marched from Lisbon town hall to the parliament building against proposed changes to the labour laws of the country's ports.

"Dockers from Portuguese ports are firm and will fight and insist on justice, the right to work, the right to dignified working conditions, and fight for a profession with a future," said Vitor Dias, the head of the Stevedores' Union of Central and Southern Portugal.

Days before, the parliament had given final ap-

proval to the country' 2013 budget, which imposes more spending cuts on the debt-stricken people.

The centre-right coalition government says the new budget will help Portugal meet the conditions imposed by its creditors, including the European Central Bank (ECB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Union (EU), who are keeping an eye on Portugal's implementation of spending cuts and reforms required in return for the 78-billion-euro (\$102 billion) rescue package the country received in 2011.

Creditors agreed to relax Portugal's deficit targets for 2012 and 2013 as a reward to the country for pushing through reforms.

Namibia

Report from the TCL Workers Committee

DIDHARD MPARO reports on the latest developments in the campaign by former TCL workers to recover their stolen pension funds

13 December 2012:

At the last meeting, on 29 August 2012, the workers at Oshakati decided that should the court delay to conclude the matter of our stolen pension, we would descend on Windhoek by 6th November.

When our committee returned to Windhoek they visited the registrar of the High Court's office and our attorney, but they indicated that the situation remained the same, that is there was no date for hearing yet. We went on the radio and informed the workers nationally that they should proceed to Windhoek as decided.

By the 6th November, workers from Rundu and Owamboland came to Windhoek and slept at my house. We informed the municipality that our people would sleep at the Kudu in the centre of the city, but they informed us that they would not allow it.

On 6 November 2012 the committee left early in the morning to see the Chief of City of Windhoek. He was not in his office, and while we were waiting, the City Police went to my house. They obtained my contact telephone number and called me. We immediately went back to my house to hear what was amiss. They told us somebody phoned them there are many old people at this address and we are intending to establish a party. We told the Police that we are looking for our stolen pension money which was stolen by the government. They said they understood and left.

While we were still at my house the Chief of City Police phoned me and told me to meet him at his office at 14H00, regarding the letter requesting that the members should sleep at the Kudu. At 14H00 we met the Chief.

Declined

He told us that the Chief of City of Windhoek requested him to deliver a message that our request was declined. We asked him why we were allowed to sleep there in 2010 and 2011 and where this law is coming from. He told us that it was illegal. We told him that Kudu is our mother's place and Wednesday we all will be in Town and will be marching from the Kudu and stop there and we will sleep there. Unless you give us another place. He threatened that he will arrest us and put us in goal. We told him that he is welcome to do just that.

On 7 November 2012 early in the morning we gathered at the Kudu and were ready to march. At 09H00 three police officers came to us and told us that we cannot march. The Namibia National Teachers' Union



Didhard Mparo

(Nantu) and the teachers also wanted to march and it was messy. We told them it is ok but we want to march on Friday and they agreed. Until 15H30 the police officers saw us at the Kudu. They came and briefly talked to us and told us to vacate the place at 17H00. After 17h00 they will act as police officers. We told them that we know what they want to do and told them to do it now as 17H00 is too far. You are afraid to arrest people who stole our money but you are instead coming to us. They were embarrassed and left us.

At 16H00 the Chief of City Police Abraham Kanime came to us. He called the committee and said to us. I only saw now that there are senior citizens among you. Let us work together I cannot quarrel with elderly people and now I understand your problem. He told us that he availed 4 kombi's to take us back to our place where we stay and will again collect us to talk to him at his office. He wants to hear more of our problems and he will assist us to see where our case got stuck. He promised to accompany us to the High Court, Advocate and Prime Minister. He lied to us. We boarded the kombi's and went home. The next day he sent one kombi to fetch the committee and we met at his office. We asked him what he said the previous day he denied everything he promised. We told him that we are returning to the Kudu because then our problems will only be addressed. He told us that we will be imprisoned then we told him that he is welcome to do

what he wants to do.

On 12 November 2012 we decided to take our rugs and go back to Kudu. At 11h00 the Namibian Police called me whether we can meet at 15H00 and we agreed. We met at 15h00 with deputy commissioner Sylvanus. He also said he understood our problem, he didn't know our problem in the first place that it was reported with the police. He promised to peruse the file and revert back to us at a later stage. On Tuesday we went to our lawyer and she promised that she will file a correction with the High Court and then the Advocate will determine the amount claimed.

As the Court is going into recession we will wait until January 2013. When the court reopens in January we will invite the Government Attorney and give him the amount. The law is quite clear he must respond within 20 days. If he accepts our offer we will not go back to court but if they refuse to accept then we will go back to court. I don't believe that we will go to court as everybody is scared. The cabinet delegated two deputy ministers in 2009 to us to resolve the is-

sue. They did nothing. The police tried to intimidate us but we saw that they were also afraid.

We decided to go home. The deputy commissioner met us on 17 November 2012 at the Wanaheda Police Station. He said we had a strong case. Our court is strong. We will get our money.

We do not believe this bullshit. The workers decided they will return on 20 January 2013 if this bullshit remains.

Our people went back to their respective places, but we will continue the struggle.

We are the leaders of the workers of Namibia. Because of us the GIPF (government pension scheme) workers got half courage and the teachers full courage. We are not scared of these "botshotsos" (street criminals) and we have marched for the past four years.

I am meeting at 16h00 today with the leader of the teachers. We are going to go to South Africa, Europe to fight our case nationally and internationally. We are going to unite with the South African workers. We will now see who is the most powerful.

United in their demand

MILDRED FORD reports on Namibian teachers' struggles for better salaries and working conditions

3 December 2012.

It may be hard to understand the militancy of teachers in Namibia. The simple reason is that they have been reduced to a low income group. Some of them are squatting in squalid conditions and their future looks bleak, especially in the prospects of losing their pensions.

The most important issue at this point in time is to make an evaluation of the strike, the strengths and weaknesses, the challenges that were brought with it and the way forward.

Strengths:

At the start of the struggle, the teachers came out in great numbers. They were united in their demand for better salaries and working conditions. The strike started in Windhoek and gained strength and momentum in all the 13 regions.

As a by-product, their impressive actions also motivated and drew great support from the other professions in the social sphere, the nurses and further momentum was given when the theft of the GIPF, the pension of all the government workers, was made known to the workers.

What is heartening, immediately, is that without proper organisation, all the teachers rose in unison, joining the common cause in support of the demands and facing the difficulties.

We have two trade unions, NANTU (Namibia National Teachers Union) and TUN (Teachers Union of Namibia).

NANTU has 15000 members and is affiliated to the Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), which is also affiliated to the ruling party, SWAPO.

TUN has 7000 members and not affiliated to any political party.

Despite having two unions and the vast distances between the different places, the teachers of Namibia stood together through their anger.

Weaknesses:

The great success of the first few days could however not be sustained due to the spontaneity of the action and the lack of proper planning and the absence of a definite program. But nonetheless, the teachers have made their point nationally and internationally and gained support from parents and international trade union organisations.

Challenges:

The two existing trade unions were in disarray and couldn't cope. The spontaneous leadership that arose lacked experience and guidance, a definite plan of action, a program and financial resources.

Nonetheless, this gave impetus to the rise of new potential leaders.

The other challenge was the confusion that was caused by the employer through the media, private and state-owned.

One of the suspended NANTU and interim teachers' committee members had been secretly called and persuaded to call off the strike, without consulting with the teachers, which he then broadcasted through the state-owned media and the other media followed suit.

The members who rushed to the National Broadcaster were given minimal time (thirty seconds). They unequivocally stated the statement was without their knowledge and mandate and that the strike would continue.

Threats were also transmitted through the newspapers and instances of intimidation were reported. Threats of "no work no pay" were also made by the regional director of the south, who said at a meeting with teachers that if he had a say, he would deduct 2 months' salary from the teachers.

The way forward:

We are now at the crossroads of our struggle. The schools are about to close and we are facing the new school year in January 2013.

An 8% increment was announced for the civil servants (which includes teachers) and shortly thereafter a rise of 36% was announced for the ministers and parliamentarians. It must be kept in mind that the

teachers demanded 40%.

The 8% for civil servants, the 36% for the ministers, etc. and the stolen GIPF pension fund monies have given new rise to anger and resolution to further the struggle for better pay, working conditions and the recovery of their pension fund money.

Teachers at a meeting in Rehoboth were adamant that no school will open in January 2013. Their anger was fuelled by the amount stolen from their pension fund which stands at N\$10 billion. That is what is now known. The full extent is not known. The arrogance of the Government was shown when the day on which the board was dismissed they still approved 4 loans.

In Windhoek, teachers detained NANTU leader Haingura for making an agreement without their mandate. In the north, teachers threatened NANTU officials. This is the new anger sweeping through the nation.

One of our main concerns and tasks is to get our representation firmly established:

On the question of recognised union representation, we should be resolute on the following:

- 1. Nothing less than international (European) standards.**
- 2. Tribal organisations that pass as trade unions are out.**
- 3. Political affiliation is out.**
- 4. We must jealously guard the independence of our union.**

The rising class struggle in Namibia

A report on recent developments by AMILCAR BEUKES

In the past few years, the Namibian nation has become extremely volatile. Actual strikes and looming strikes have actively dominated the topical news arenas. Increasing criticism of the judiciary, especially in the housing sector was also highlighted in the news. Judges were implicated in the ever-present GIPF pension theft saga. Aggressively visual placards displayed dismay over corrupt judges and judicial officers in general. Threats of violence have at times been leveled against banking officials, the deputy-sheriff and the High Court of Namibia's Registrar regarding corrupt practices in the repossession of homes.

In the course of the above, the media dynamically distorted most of the events and true content of the news, which is to be expected in any capitalist system across the globe. Nevertheless, the reported news at least signposted some valuable half-truths mentioned above. One of the most important distortions to date is the deliberate microscoping of the amount of money lost in the GIPF corruption so far since 1994. Adding the amounts reported in the daily newspapers, it is

clear to see that as much as N\$ 6.4 billion or more has been stolen. However, the arithmetic maintained by the same newspapers depict an amount of (only) N\$ 660 million stolen. The Committee of the Public Service fighting for the recovery of the stolen pensions have released documentary proof of N\$10 billion stolen by the former president and his relatives, judges and Government officials since 1994.

It goes without saying that the media plays an insidious and treacherous role in Namibia.

Pilots

Like the teachers, the biggest surprise in recent times was the often-thought-of-as-lethargic-when-it-comes-to-striking pilots, who nevertheless produced an absolutely determined strike. The strike was definitely unprecedented in terms of the notion that white-collar workers do not really strike. The teachers in Namibia have been dormant since Independence and this recent national teachers strike was never expected.

In August the national broadcasting corporation (NBC) headed what seems to be the trigger of all subsequent nationwide strikes. They held a successful strike and won a 12% increase. There are also looming nurses and police strikes, but the government has aggressively warned against those strikes.

In addition to the above, a systemic problem exist in Namibian policies and governmental activities regarding natural resources in Namibia and the distribution of access to rights to such resources. In a recent case in The High and Supreme Court of Namibia the following happened:

A metallurgist (a supposed BEE – “black economic empowerment” — individual) acquired sole rights (EPL License) to a vast stretch of uranium deposits in the western coastal area of Namibia. This individual then started negotiations to sell these licenses to foreign companies. The foreign companies involved in the negotiations were Canadian and Australian based companies. A seemingly disordered contractual negotiation ensued, prompting the Australian metals company to take the metallurgist to court. In the High Court the metallurgist was given a judgment in his favour.

Suspicious

The Australian Company appealed to the Supreme Court, where a very suspicious judgment was given in favour of the Australian company. The judgment in the Supreme Court went against conventional logic regarding business contracts. You can see the judgment online at *Metals Australia Ltd and Another v Amakutuwa and Others (SA 31/2009) [2010] NASC 13 (5 Nov 2010)*

The same judges in the mining case above took logic and racism to another level when they gave a spiritual judgment in case of *Father Petrus v the Roman Catholic Archdiocese*.

In this case the priest, Father Petrus, was accused of witchcraft and was therefore excommunicated from the Catholic Church. The court case made against the Father involved white priests and judges not believing that African evil spirits can be elevated to the respectable level of evil spirits of European origin.

Southern African evil spirits are commonly termed *tokoloshe*, which is the evil spirits (or demons) that the priests exorcise or destroy in Roman Catholicism to this day. It, however, seems from the judgment that only evil spirits of European origin are worthy of being destroyed by a Catholic Priest; any other spirits fall under the heading of witchcraft.

The important issue of of the mining case is that an individual was given rights to own Namibian natural resources to the tune of billions of dollars. He was given this on the tribal basis of being of the Ovambo hierarchy. He then wheeled-and-dealt with these rights to sell to the highest bidder. Through illogical

bullying in the Supreme Court, the South African judge who studied in Australia, and who regularly gives lectures in Australia, found in favour of the Australian company.

This judgment now means that through some shady business dealings, an individual who was the owner of billions of dollars’ worth of Namibian natural resources, now owes the Australian company a few million dollars in legal costs. Meanwhile the Australian Company basically became the owners of over 70 billion dollars’ worth of mineral rights in Namibia without paying a single cent.

Disdain

The significance of the court cases mentioned above is the fact that the courts are used in Namibia as the ultimate hatchet men and women in favour of white corporate businesses. It is for this reason that Namibians are increasingly showing their disdain for judges and lawyers. This also means that Namibia is wholly under attack from our judiciary which has displayed itself as the epicenter of corruption.

The latest attempt of meting out violence and threats is the judgment given against some of the striking teachers. Fortunately, the majority of teachers treated the court and its illegal judgments with the contempt they deserve.

The definition of irony is illuminated with the front page of one paper quoting the judge who claimed that the teachers’ strike was illegal, while page 2 of the same newspaper reported the judges involved in the pension theft of civil servants (teachers included).

We are entering the New Year with threats of strikes at various levels:

Labour contract workers at the Tsumeb mine are soliciting support from the mine workers to support their intended strike and picketing.

Solidarity

The teachers are continuing with their struggle nationally and internationally. They seek firstly unity with South African teachers and solidarity from international teacher’s organizations. They intend to go on a tour for this purpose.

The teachers are now spearheading the campaign to recover the stolen pension funds and seek to unite with mineworkers and others on the general pension atrocity in this country.

Cabin crews intend to ground aircraft of the national airliner by striking.

Other unrests are looming.

Namibia always ebbed and flowed with South Africa. The same processes here are taking place as in South Africa. The unions as presently organised are turning out to be direct instruments of the capitalists and tribalists. Unity between the two countries is the next step on the regional agenda.