



**THE
BALKAN
FORUM:
SITUATIONS,
STRUGGLES,
STRATEGIES**

THE 6th SUBVERSIVE FESTIVAL:
THE UTOPIA OF DEMOCRACY
7-18 May 2013, Zagreb

The Second Balkan Forum
In cooperation with
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung
Zagreb Youth Theatre, 12-14 May 2013

PUBLISHER: Bijeli val Organization
Ilica 203a, Zagreb
DIRECTOR: Nikola Devčić
EDITORS: Vedrana Bibić, Andrea Milat,
Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks
COPY EDITOR: Peter Geoghegan
DESIGN: Ruta
PRINT RUN: 500
PRINTED BY: Tiskara Zelina

ISBN 978-953-56086-8-4.

CIP zapis dostupan u računalnome
katalogu Nacionalne i sveučilišne
knjižnice u Zagrebu pod brojem
891954.


**ROSA
LUXEMBURG
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Supported by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung
Southeast Europe with funds of
the German Federal Ministry for
Economic Cooperation and
Development.

Not for sale.

Zagreb, 2014

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PREFACE:

Towards Another Balkans!

The first Balkan Forum took place within the Subversive Festival in Zagreb, in May 2012, and gathered up to 40 progressive organizations and movements from across the post-socialist states of the region. It was for the first time since the collapse of state socialist regimes and Yugoslavia, that progressive leftist forces – from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria and Romania – came together to discuss and imagine a common future for their region.

The Forum identified the neuralgic spots of the widespread crisis of both neoliberal economic order and representative democracy and, finally, defined possible strategies of resistance and political action in Southeast Europe. The first Balkan Forum prioritised the following issues: social justice, resistance to the neoliberal agenda, the struggle for the commons, economic relations, deindustrialization and workers' struggles and, finally, the crisis of electoral democracy and the need for deep democratization of Balkan societies.

This is how the Balkan Forum came into being as an informal platform for mutual cooperation that can generate concrete social, economic and political proposals. Six working groups were established and presented their reports at the second Balkan Forum, held at the Subversive Festival in May 2013, where more than 50 organizations, movements and groups took part in self-organised panels and plenary sessions. The working groups concentrated

on the following topics: democratization and participation, workers' struggles, the commons, economic alternatives, sexual and class equality, and media and the public sphere.

Four working groups dealing with the commons, democratization and participation, workers' struggles and economic alternatives continued their work in 2013 and 2014 and prepared their reports that we present in this volume. Up to 35 activists took part in drafting these reports with the goal to provide a critical examination of the situation in the region in all its varieties, to map and evaluate the existing social and political struggles and, finally, to suggest alternative social, economic and political strategies.

In order to avoid the old curse of 'one step forward, two steps back', we strongly believe that these reports provide a valuable resource for existing and future social and political movements sharing the goal of progressive anti-capitalist transformation of the Balkan societies towards profound democratization and social equality. At the same time, these reports invite a productive continuation of discussions and disagreements on the Left, across the Balkans and elsewhere in Europe. Without a unified Balkan left, we believe, there is no viable future for the Balkans. The activities of the Balkan Forum are among first steps in that direction.

In solidarity!

Vedrana Bibić, Andrea Milat, Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks,
Coordinators of the Balkan Forum

The Struggle for the Commons in the Balkans

THE COMMONS WORKING GROUP: Danijela Majstorović, Georgi Medarov, Dubravka Sekulić, Vladimir Simović, Tomislav Tomašević and Danijela Dolenc (coordinator)

This paper was prepared for the 2nd Balkan Forum that took place on May 12-14, 2013 at the Subversive Forum in Zagreb. The forum aimed to open space for social movements in the region to discuss common strategies of resistance and viable alternatives to the current social, political and economic model. Our Working Group analysed the potential of the commons both as discourse and as praxis in forwarding these alternatives.

In this paper we first offer a brief theoretical introduction into the concept of the commons, advancing a critical political approach to their understanding. In the second part of the paper we relate the concept of the commons to an outline of key features of the political economy of post-socialism in the Balkans, while in the third part we present some existing social movements and examples of popular resistance in the region that could be related to the concept of the commons. We conclude by suggesting ways in which the commons could be advanced as a political project for the Left in the Balkans.

CONCEPTS, HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

The commons is becoming a key theoretical concept used by the Left as many authors recognise its unifying potential for many ongoing struggles that challenge the current political and economic system. The term 'commons' has historically been used to denote natural commons like land and pastures that were used in common. This was the case in England until around the 16th century when the process of enclosure started. Linked to Marx's concept of primitive accumulation, enclosure was fundamental in the formation of capitalist relations because it concomitantly secured the landless labour class and the initial accumulation of capital. However, Harvey (2003) argues that this process of enclosure happens continuously in capitalism, describing it as 'accumulation by dispossession', essentially capturing an ongoing process in which the logic of capital extends to ever new domains of society. This can take the form of land grabs and enclosures of previously community owned resources or privatization of formerly public services such as health and education.

In the Balkans, as a European periphery, it may be argued that accumulation by dispossession has been the driving force of expanding capitalist relations, pushing struggles for the commons to the centre of political mobilisation. The current politics of austerity and the accompanying drive for privatization and commodification are jeopardizing public governance both of natural resources such as water and land, and of publicly managed services such as education, healthcare or the media. Today, across the Balkans many social spheres are exposed to demands for privatization and pressured into demonstrating their short-term economic value, while private ownership is invariably presented as a superior solution. It is against these circumstances that various social movements have

emerged across the region, and it is in this context that we aim to develop the commons movement as a political force which questions the fundamentals of current economic relations and proposes progressive alternatives to the status quo.

The concept of commons was introduced to mainstream social science by Elinor Ostrom. From the early 1970s she studied hundreds of cases where local communities managed natural common pool resources, like forests and fisheries, without the interference of either market or state. She wanted to contest Hardin's (1968) infamous concept of the 'tragedy of the commons' which claimed that the only way to avoid the destruction of natural commons was through government regulation or privatisation. Ostrom (1990) showed that there were many cases where communities succeeded in sustainably managing commons without state regulation or private property regime. However, her work only entered the mainstream when she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2009, for challenging 'the conventional wisdom that common property is poorly managed and should be either regulated by central authorities or privatised' (Nobel Prize Committee, 2009). More recently, she expanded her theory from natural to social commons, like knowledge, providing social movements with new arguments that oppose privatisation and experiment with social innovations.

Notwithstanding that, it needs to be noted that Ostrom envisioned the commons as complementary to the existence of markets and states, and that she did not take on a structural critique of capitalist relations. She relied on rational choice institutionalism, analysing individual agency and successful overcoming of dilemmas of collective action, which is an approach incapable of recognising macro-structural drivers like accumulation by dispossession, which systematically encroach on the commons all

over the world. In that sense, we need to build on the legacy of Ostrom's work, but in the direction which will affirm the values of radical democracy, material sustainability and egalitarianism without forgetting to critically examine capitalism as a site of exploitation and domination. We propose to develop the theory of the commons by securing its link with the Marxian insistence that capitalism be analysed as a mode of production (Dolenec and Žitko, 2013).

The commons have been defined in many ways, but for us it is important to define them as a political concept. Following Harvey (2013), the commons are 'about how we develop a common purpose'. Contemporary debates have found it useful to distinguish between environmental commons, natural physical wealth that humans inherited, and social commons, knowledge, culture and other immaterial wealth that humans created (Ostrom i Hess 2007, Hardt 2012, Harvey 2012 and others). While the struggles around natural commons are based in the deep awareness of material constraints to human life on this planet, the digital commons movement tends to disregard these constraints, and is often less critical of the underlying structural fundamentals of capitalist relations. Similarly, Hardt (2012) notices the different logic between social movements that fight for environmental and those that fight for social justice. The anti-capitalist movements for social justice, which put forward claims that do not have scarcity constraints are as a result more autonomist and long-term oriented to radically change the system. Conversely, environmental movements are engaged in commons which are limited, which makes them more state-oriented in order to regulate their use and more short-term oriented because of urgency of environmental threats like climate change.

A commonality among all these movements is that they oppose property relations, since both material and

immaterial commons are destroyed by capitalist property relations. The potential for uniting these types of movements seem particularly fruitful in the Balkans, where currently both types of social movements are growing and there is a need to establish a common platform for action.

A minimal common denominator around current commons movements is that they are critical of neoliberal capitalism and representative democracy. Localising this to our region, new democracies in the Balkans were seen as inept and prejudiced, having ‘remarkably few legal, political, and civic skills’ and there was an almost ‘evangelic belief’ in imposing democracy from above (Knaus and Martin 2003), as a much needed ‘noble experiment’ (Denitch 1996: 60). In effect the political transformation was accompanied with the restoration of capitalist relations which has not been subjected to serious criticism. No government to our knowledge has been held responsible for the toxic recipe of liberalisation and privatization that contributed to de-industrialisation, high unemployment rates and increasing poverty across the region. A through analysis of the political economy of post-communist societies in the Balkans must subject the economic policies of the last two decades to serious criticism, which is why this platform is all the more important.

A RADICAL CRITICAL CONCEPTION OF THE COMMONS

Sometimes the commons are defined as a new sphere that will supplement market and state to buffer both market and state failures. Many initiatives in the commons movement look towards reducing the reach of markets into various social domains, but they are not propos-

ing to transform the underlying logic of capitalism (Dole-
nec 2012). We propose to advance those strands in the
commons movement that reject this conception of the
commons as a kind of 'third way' (Mattei 2012, De Ange-
lis 2012), refusing to blunt 'their revolutionary potential
and legitimate claims for a radical egalitarian redistribu-
tion of resources' (Mattei 2012:42). Similarly, while
sometimes commons are seen as leading to autonomist
efforts far removed from the state, for us the transforma-
tion of the state is part of the solution; its power must be
grasped to be used in the socialist project of expanding
the commons.

It is in direct confrontation with the state that we
transform public goods to commons. For Helfrich and
Bollier (2012) the distinction between these concepts is
not in the property regime, but in the fact of effective so-
cial control. According to them, public goods are those re-
sources which are effectively controlled by the state and
not by the people which means that they are usually for
the benefit of state elites and not for the people. Harvey
(2012) distinguishes between public goods and commons,
similarly but differently, through the medium of political
action. For example, public space is the space of political
power exercised by the state and not necessarily accessi-
ble to all, like homeless people for example. It becomes a
common space through political action that contests this
space like in Varšavska street in Zagreb, Picin Park in Ban-
ja Luka, Peti Park in Belgrade, or Syntagma Square. For
Harvey, the commons are inherently political and they
are always contested.

De Angelis (2012) warns that capitalism can use the
'commons fix' for its further growth, focusing our atten-
tion on the need to use the commons to create a social ba-
sis for alternative ways of articulating social production.
Commons are, in this conception, a vehicle for claiming
ownership over conditions needed for life (social and bio-

logical) and its reproduction. Therefore, we have two tasks: to defend commons from new enclosures and to create new commons as they become a crucial terrain of struggle. According to De Angelis, 'whether the avenue ahead is one of commons cooptation or emancipation is not a given'. Therefore, one should always take a critical position towards the commons and not romanticise them. Communities as commons can be non-democratic and oppressive so we should not use the commons universally as normative, but rather as an analytical, critical and political concept. Harvey (2012), for example, warns how sometimes enclosure of commons by the state could be in common interest, like in the cases of enclosure of Amazonian rainforest by the state to protect it. It is always the question of who will benefit from commons. We should examine commons critically case by case and use it as concept for uniting common struggles but not as a panacea.

BALKANS AS THE EUROPEAN PERIPHERY

The post-socialist Balkan states share a common trajectory from socialist to capitalist societies on the European periphery. In the late 1980s socialist countries began the transformation to capitalism and, unlike the ongoing attack on the public sector in Western European countries, in our region capital started to spread to all spheres of society, permeating at the same time both productive and public service sector.

The last decade of the 20th century in Balkans was marked by the dismantling of the socialist heritage, privatisation and implementation of market reforms. The immediate effects have been a dramatic fall in production, rise of unemployment, rapid impoverishment of a large part of population and the enormous enrichment of

a small privileged elite. After a steep decline the level of GDP Slovenia was the first to reach a level of GDP achieved in 1989 (in 1998). However, some countries such as Serbia and Macedonia are still way below the 1989 level and there is no indication that they will be able to reach this level in near future. Slovenia's more favourable position is influenced by stronger trade unions, gradual privatization and slower deindustrialization in comparison to other post-socialist countries – banks, public service sector and some parts of infrastructure in this country were not privatised and a low rate of local currency allowed competitiveness of domestic goods in the international market. In the period between 1991 and 2004 Slovenia was not in a better position in comparison to the other post-socialist countries because of its skills in adopting to capitalism but because it has preserved some socialist elements (Krašovec 2013).

The process of restoration of capitalism was almost always followed by lowering taxes, such as taxes on corporate profits, or the introduction of a flat tax rate, under the pretext of liberalizing the economy and attracting foreign investors. But even when investors came, it was often because of cheap labour, low taxes and low environmental standards, as well as subsidies that post-socialist countries offered to these foreign investors. Foreign direct investment almost never enabled serious development of the real sector; usually investments were oriented towards services, agriculture, light industry, production of semi-finished goods or assembly lines.

The devastation of local industry during last two decades further burdened state budgets. As productivity was falling, unemployment and the proportion of socially vulnerable people was rising. This tendency means both lower budget revenues from taxation of wages and the increasing pressure on social welfare which is on the verge of collapse. The transformation from a socialist to a

capitalist mode of production means that the profit stands as the centre of the economy and the measure of economic success is GDP growth. However, neither of these two measures tells us much about wellbeing of the population – a high percentage of the GDP growth can be accompanied with an increase in inequality, unemployment, degradation of social and environmental standards. Similarly, high profitability can come at the expense of a drastic reduction in wages and taxes and thus an erosion of social services.

In a situation where industry is almost destroyed, the public sector is still relatively large and the credit debt constantly grows, neoliberal-oriented governments are again turning to privatization in order to reduce budget deficits. Different natural resources such as mines, forests, water springs or parts of urban areas are being put up for sale. Exploitation of natural resources often lacks appropriate ecological standards. That is why the costs of remediation of environmental damage may exceed budget revenue. At the same time, in the context of the dominance of neoliberal ideology, the public sector is under constant pressure. It is usually emphasized that this sector of the economy is parasitic in the sense that it only spends budget money. The solution proposed is that the public services should be exposed to market relations in order to be more efficient. The state is, therefore, withdrawing from its role as provider of goods and services and, guided by neoliberal instructions, it appears only as a framework for the establishment of ‘a favourable economic climate’, in which the market would decide on production and distribution.

Apart from privatization of public services utilities, we are also witnessing commodification of non-privatized goods. Here it is useful to recall Marx’s emphasis according to which commodity production can never be production for human needs. In other words, the whole

logic on which our societies are based today prevents a truly socially-oriented production. Through the imperative of economic efficiency ever new segments of the public sector are being commodified and exposed to market exchanges. The fact that companies which remain state-owned – both those engaged in the production of services and those engaged in the production of goods – are often misused by political parties further complicates the problem. This form of exploitation of public property is not rare, but is, in a manner of self-imposed orientalism, usually attributed to some variant of Balkan backwardness. Actually it is capitalism that legitimates greed and creates ‘institutionalised cynicism’ (Streeck 2010) whereby we are all disposed to apply, avoid or circumvent rules for individual benefit. This is why capitalist relations are blind to ideas of the public good or the public interest, and why the claim that further advancement of market relations will reduce corruption is a fable myth.

In the Balkans, natural commons were dispossessed mostly through physical space in cities and in attractive real-estate locations where financial capital was invested to maintain the profit rate acquired from primitive accumulation. Cities became the physical space both for the accumulation of new capital and its rent, and for the materialisation of surplus capital in the real-estate market. The global financial crisis hit hard on this region that was deindustrialised and dependant on financial services and real-estate market. There is strong pressure for further privatisation of public services like health, education, social services, water supply, waste disposal, and even some conventional core state services like defence and police. These measures are intended to reduce budgetary deficits and since monetary policy is impotent, economic growth can be only be assured by new dispossession, mostly through lowering of workers’ wages and through destruction and privatisation of natural commons which

are now under unprecedented pressure. Harvey (2011) explains how capitalism in crises needs a 'spatial fix' so surplus capital can finally be invested in physical space where it can secure a satisfying profit rate so surplus labour (the unemployed) can be put back in the production process. These structural problems cannot be solved from the European periphery. Nevertheless, we can still contest austerity measures which are a self-destructing social mechanism. We can advocate redistribution from rich to poor, demand change in monetary policy, progressive taxation, economic regionalisation, socialisation of rents from natural resources and Green-Keynesian industrialisation together with democratic economies that are labour-intensive, capital-saving, create big social value and reduce ecological footprint.

A common struggle in the Balkans is possible if we focus on the *common ground* in existing struggles. It is necessary to connect struggles in the region that oppose privatisation of commons and public goods like water, forests, agricultural land, factories, healthcare, education, urban public spaces, public transport and other infrastructure.

EXISTING COMMONS STRUGGLES IN THE BALKANS

Since 2006 social movements for free higher education have appeared in several countries in the Balkans: from Slovenia and Croatia to Serbia. Initiatives like the protest movement 'Independent Student Initiative' that emerged in Zagreb in 2008 had an impact not only in Croatia but in the region more broadly. In Fraser's (2003) terms, the movement did not focus narrowly on furthering particular interests and rights, but advanced a transformative approach, offering a scourging critique both of

the capitalist economy and of the limits of representative democracy (Dolenec and Doolan 2012). Though this movement did not explicitly couch itself in the language of the commons, it initiated a radical critique of the political economy of capitalism, and affirmed principles of direct democracy, participation and solidarity which lie at the heart of commons struggles.

In Serbia the largest mobilizations on the topic of commons happened at Belgrade University. Insufficient budget funds and exposing faculties to market competition caused a drastic increase in tuition fees that prevented members of poorer strata of society access to higher education. However, the problem is not only in the direct charging for education, but also in the whole process of commodification in which knowledge is standardized and directed towards the needs of the market. In this situation education loses emancipatory potential and it is being used only for creating an army of qualified and highly adaptive labour power i.e. for producing a highly qualified workforce that is fully subordinated to the demands of capital (Stojanović, Vesić and Simović 2013). Unfortunately, the student movement in Serbia predominantly questioned high tuition fees and demanded reform framed within the Bologna process. What was often left unremarked upon in these students' struggles was, on the one hand, the structure that determines the commodification of education and, on the other, that this process is not an isolated phenomenon, but a rule which is being implemented at all levels of society. In the fall of 2011, for the first time after a long period of internal conflicts, major trade unions in Serbia gathered in a protest where workers demanded withdrawal of two legislative proposals concerning public utilities and the introduction of public-private partnership. Though these proposals were soon adopted by the Serbian Parliament, tens of thousands of protesting workers indicate an awareness about the negative effects of these laws.

The 'Right to the City' Initiative in Zagreb, which started in mid-2006, was an important engine of civic resistance in the city for over 5 years. Its activities were directed against the usurpation of public space by private interests, most notably in the fight for Varšavska Street in downtown Zagreb. Though that particular struggle was lost to the cosy liaison between Zagreb's mayor and a private investor, this protest movement has successfully advanced the agenda of the urban commons in Croatia. It introduced several critical issues into the public agenda such as citizen participation in urban planning and sustainable urbanisation, while at the same time exposing narrow economic interests and crony deals that jeopardize the public interest. A similar initiative centred around defending the urban commons emerged in Belgrade, called the 'Initiative for the Protection of Peti Park'. It emerged in the summer of 2005 after citizens of a Belgrade neighbourhood organised to resist a development project that would have replaced a city park with a multi-storey building. This resistance lasted for three years and it was successful in forcing the city government to protect the city park.

Furthermore, while the most obvious connection between recent struggles for the hill Srđ (in Dubrovnik, Croatia) and the space of 'Beko' factory (Belgrade, Serbia) are the architects doing the development projects, closer inspection unfolds not only more similarities, but focuses analysis on ways in which urban struggles for commons take place in the region. *Beko* (Belgrade Confection) used to be the largest textile factory in Belgrade, with one of the production complexes situated in the historical centre of the city at the foot of Kalemegdan fortress. Since the mid-1960s it was planned for the factory to be removed and for the park to be extended. The project aimed at connecting the foot of the fortress and the bank of the river Danube. However, the factory stayed where it

was, and after the 2000s it went into bankruptcy after which the property of the factory in the city centre was sold to a Greek developer in 2007. The Greek developer started changing the urban plan in order to build a closed mix-use complex consisting of a hotel, shopping mall, housing and sport facilities. It was only in 2011 that this transformation reached the media, thanks to a group of, mostly retired, professionals who protested mainly on the grounds of the height allowed by the new plan and the fact that it would ruin the landmark view of Belgrade fortress. The initiative also stressed that the proposed location should be a park as it was planned and that planning of such an important site should be done in a more participatory manner. Although this issue carry the potential for uniting a broader coalition of actors who would address issues related to the future of the city and public/common space, little had actually happened. In the next step, one of the most famous architecture bureaus in the world – Zaha Hadid Architects – was hired to design a new master plan. The plan was passed by the City, but it also successfully diverted the public debate from the questions of spatial justice and program planned for the site to the questions of aesthetics of the proposed project. The public debate showed the inability of both officials, but also of society to define the public interest for the site, and the future development of the City more broadly. An even more controversial Emirati-funded development project called ‘Belgrade Waterfront’, that would completely alter the urban landscape of the Sava riverbank, has been aggressively promoted by the Serbian government.

Srđ is a plateau on a hill above Dubrovnik, overlooking the Old Town, and it became the focus of a civic initiative ‘Srđ is Ours’. While not entirely owned by the city, the plateau in question is almost the only free space where Dubrovnik can spread and build the much-needed public amenities. Regardless of that, the city has been,

not so quietly, supporting the plans for a Golf Resort that would enclose most of Srđ. Golf is here, following the common practices in the world, just an excuse for extensive real-estate development – in this specific case of luxurious residential villas. Although the County had rejected the master plan for development in 2010, the support for the project by the political strata has been increasing, often stressing the fact that this project will open many possibilities for employment for the local population, while undermining the investment the city needs to make in order to extend the infrastructure to the sites in question. Like in the case of *Beko*, in order to try to divert attention from the nature of this investment to aesthetics, Zaha Hadid Architects were hired to design concept villas for the resort. However, the project never managed to stir the discussion away from the true nature of this project – enclosure of potential commons for Dubrovnik. The well-organized initiative ‘Srđ is Ours’, supported by a national alliance of other activist alliances, successfully communicated what the Golf on Srđ would do to the city and the importance of getting involved, even managing to secure a local referendum. While the vast majority of people voted against the project, the problematic Croatian Law on Referendum does not make the vote binding for the Municipality. Although it seemed that the battle for Srđ had been lost, the transformation of the part of activist initiative ‘Srđ is Ours’ into the independent list ‘Srđ is the City’ for the local elections in 2013 shows how it is possible to build the political platform by using the concept of the commons.

The actors that produce and reproduce the urban built environment are the most likely agents for social change today. The circumstances surrounding Srđ, and struggles focused on social and spatial justice more generally, show the possibility of the struggle for commons to become a platform for larger political articulation. In or-

der for that to happen, it was necessary for those involved to use the commons paradigm as a critical tool in order to understand both national and transnational forces driving privatization of Srđ and to position their struggle into a broader narrative. The Platform 'Srđ is Ours' built its strength upon the work and articulation developed in the Right to the City initiative in Zagreb, and more specifically on issues surrounding Cvjetni trg and Varšavska street, and pushed the struggle against the enclosure of commons, not only for Dubrovnik, but also for the whole Croatia a step further into the political sphere.

A larger coalition in which the struggles against privatization of the public/common goods are connected to unions on the one side, and environmental struggles on the other – thus forming a broad network of allies – in the longer run has the potential to redefine the political scene in Croatia. Unfortunately, in Serbia such tendencies are still weak. While the scale of the land grab, especially in Belgrade, had been disclosed by media on various occasions, this has not produced strong public reactions. Activism is isolated to issues of labour addressing the dispossession of workers due to privatizations and deindustrialization that followed. The struggle against enclosure of public space, such as various struggles for public green open spaces (Peti Park and Zvezdara Forest in Belgrade, Aerodrom in Kragujevac) did not address the political arena beyond their particular demands, but only on the grounds of reclaiming the space to its immediate users. A true understanding of deep connections among the various anti-privatization struggles still needs to happen.

When discussing the potential of the commons, the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina is particularly perplexing since it is a *de facto* divided society where ethno-nationalist politics, assisted by fear, uncertainty and neo-colonial international community politics (Majstorović 2007,

2013), have resulted in little consensus over who did what in the past to maintain the state of negative peace (Galtung 1996). The country lives in a kind of perpetual transition and state of emergency (Agamben 2005, Pandolfi 2010) while the lack of commonality and understanding of the commons in the aforementioned sense have greatly impeded the processes of anti-capitalist struggle and similar movements in the region. However, non-traditional models such as informal classrooms, like *The Public Classroom-The Commons in June 2012*, organized by the non-governmental organization 'Centar Grad' in Tuzla, and the series of lectures organized by the Language, Ideology and Power group of intellectuals, students and activists at the Banja Luka University (Majstorović 2013) offer hope. These initiatives became a way of regionally and transnationally connecting intellectuals, students and activists protecting the commons by insisting on politics of memory, antifascism, commonality and solidarity under galloping capitalism. The protests that erupted across Bosnia-Herzegovina in February 2014, as well as the establishment of the plenums, citizens' assemblies, in many cities show a huge political potential of the struggles centred around the questions of social justice and solidarity.

Direct democracy and the creation of social resistance on the street by grassroots citizens' associations or no-leadership movements in the last year in major Bosnian and Herzegovinian cities have also given way to expressing the political in non-traditional ways, going beyond nationalist options on offer by parliamentary parties in the country. Citizens' protest walks in Banja Luka under the slogan '(the?) Park is ours' between May and September 2012 became the first act of collective will against the authorities triggered by the destruction of the Picin park, a favorite hangout of Banjalukans, after the developer Milo Radišić received permits to demolish it in

order to build a complex containing businesses and residences without public notice. At the first demonstration, in late May, a thousand people marched and although the number of 'walkers' dissipated in the following months, it was the largest protest to take place in Banja Luka after the 1992-1995 war. Activists from a dozen local organizations gathered 6,000 signatures on a petition against the construction project asking for evidence about the procedure that led to the sale of the park land, and for documentation of the official decision-making process that led to it and delivered them to the city government. In July 2012, once again proving the links between repressive state apparatus and capital, police brutally reacted against Željko Vulić who was beaten for protecting his own property against the planned development. In July 2013, the construction company ordered the destruction of a part of the road that Vulić family uses as the only access to their home and he practically lost the battle against the President of the Republika Srpska entity, Milorad Dodik, his oligarchy and family-friends' network. The city authorities did nothing to help his case while state owned media either barely reported on it or constantly held the official side, claiming its apparent legality.

Finally, triggered by the death of the three-month old Belmina Ibrišević from Gračanica, a baby that needed to travel abroad for urgent medical treatment, but couldn't leave the state because she was not allocated an ID number and could therefore not get a passport, showed that citizens protests in front of state institutions of BiH in Sarajevo were more than the sum of its parts. Starting as protests demanding that the Parliament immediately adopt the law on citizen IDs on the national level, it became an act of collective criticism of the dysfunctionality of the Dayton peace accords and ethnic-based violence it legitimated. All of these struggles, and especially mass protests in Winter and Spring 2014 linked up in the strug-

gle for the common good, are good examples of debunking and openly challenging the power of dominant political elites in the country and their accumulated wealth and a good sign that, almost twenty years after the war, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is changing.

In Bulgaria, the first serious resistance against commodification of the commons happened in 2007, when the so-called Socialist party introduced principles of new public management into the public high school system. Teachers and schools were forced to compete with each other. There was a massive strike against the reform which lasted over a month, but in the end it was not successful. Currently, these reforms are being deepened through new legislative amendments that enable the redistribution of public money to private schools, legitimated, once again, with the rhetoric of competition, efficiency, individual choice and 'money follows the student' arguments, as funding is made dependent on the number of pupils. At the same time, an identical regime is being introduced in the media sector where the government is designing ways of transferring funding from public to private media. Principles of new public management have also been imposed in the healthcare sector, pushing it into a serious crisis. All this has led to the closing down of tens of schools and hospitals in rural regions. Currently, there are attempts to privatize the public railroad company, but this was met with strong workers' resistance, leading to a wave of strikes in 2011. Similarly, there has been strong resistance against the commodification of digital commons. Attempts to close down torrent sites and to limit file sharing were met with a series of protests. ACTA was opposed by thousands of people marching in the streets in early 2012, forcing the government to back down on its support for the trade agreement. In the protests of early 2013, tens of thousands of people marched around the country against high electricity bills

and demanded the nationalization of utility companies. Over time, however, the protests became wider and rather ambivalent and the spontaneous movement against the political system did not bring tangible results.

In Bulgaria social mobilizations around the commons were strongest within the environmental movement. There have been a few attempts to liberalize genetically-modified (GM) food production, but all were met with nation-wide resistance and mobilization, forcing the government to back down and effectively limiting the attempted commercialization of the genetic heritage of humanity. Mobilization against the privatization of nature parks has been going on since 2006 and it succeeded in protecting them as commons. Moreover, since 2012 the movements were not only maintaining a reactive stance against commodification, but articulating positive proposals and initiatives for new progressive management of the commons. This has taken the form of a new food cooperative movement, inspired by the ideas of community-supported agriculture and Via Campesina's concept of food sovereignty. After 1999 state land was transferred to municipalities, which in turn often engaged in lucrative sales to private investors. After 2005 regulation regarding buying land was liberalised, further incentivising enclosures of rural and urban space. Environmental groups mobilized against the destruction of protected land in 2007, and again more recently, in 2012, when demonstrations were organised against the Forestry Act. The legislation had been amended in favour of a private investor who wanted to enclose parts of what used to be publicly accessible land in Pirin. As a result of the protests, the Act was vetoed and amended.

In conclusion, like elsewhere in the region, in Bulgaria processes of accumulation by dispossession in the 1990s were not met with serious opposition. Only after 2006 there have been wider mobilizations. The ones that

were more successful were against the enclosures of digital commons, against GM, and against privatization of natural parks. Effective workers' mobilizations proved to be more difficult to organize. The protests in early 2013 against high electricity bills were not able to articulate clear demands. A serious challenge faced by all of those movements is that they find it hard to articulate an adequate language for understanding the political economy of enclosures of the commons since 1989. Instead they often became caught up within liberal ideological clichés of fighting against corruption, against monopolies, for more transparency and so on.

COMMONING THE STRUGGLE

Today the public sector is probably the most important field of our struggle, though this struggle is not without contradictions. The public sector employs a large number of workers who can lose jobs if reforms driven by the logic of austerity measures continue. However, the capacity for mobilization is even greater, because privatization and reduction of the public sector affects much wider population. Bonding the interests of workers with those of beneficiaries of services seems to be a key to building a broader and more efficient movement for the defence of the public sector. This potential movement should not forget that a political strategy based only on 'fighting the cuts' risks giving the impression that it is simply the scale of state expenditure that is in contest, rendering invisible the underlying logic of commodification and the new reality that public services themselves have become a site of accumulation that is crucial for the continuing expansion of international capital (Huws 2012). Therefore we must extend our demand to the issue of how and by whom public sector should be managed.

With all its flaws, the trade union movement in the public sector, student mobilizations, struggles for urban commons and natural resources like the ones we described should be seen as sparks that could trigger a broader struggle. Awareness of the need to protect the commons across the region is currently low, so any attempt of shaking these sleepy societies into action are more than welcome. However, the creation of a broader movement that will truly be able to shake the foundations of the dominant system is hard. In an impoverished society with high unemployment and rising poverty people are focused on short-term survival. Privatization and the creation of a 'favourable business climate' which attracts foreign capital as opposed to reproduction of the current situation then, at best, seems as the lesser of two evils. Therefore the need for systemic change in society is probably the most important argument in which left-wing groups and individuals have to convince the wider part of the population.

The movement established on a line of defence and taking over of commons could have considerable potential. It could encompass and articulate the issues which currently fail to initiate mobilizations, even though they attract public attention. Here we can include the issue of privatization of agriculture, mineral resources, forests and water, a range of environmental issues, as well as the privatization and commercialization of public services – from kindergartens to universities, from water supply systems to garbage and electricity. A true understanding of the deep connections among these various struggles for the commons still needs to happen in the region of the Balkans, which is where the political conception of the commons comes into play – as a demand for developing alternative ways of social production, taking effective social control over resources and conditions needed for life and human emancipation. Our political action should

be directed at defending the commons from new enclosures and creating new commons, while always being reminded that they should foster human emancipation.

In building effective political alliances, it is important to link regional struggles with global struggles for global commons like the Internet, genetic resources, science, atmosphere, oceans, biodiversity and others. It is also tactically important to join forces with Keynesians and oppose austerity measures which are destroying the welfare state and social reproduction, and which could lead to authoritarian reversals. This includes policy advocacy that tries to stop current trends imposed by the state through legislation and policy making from health to education and urban planning. It is not wise to dogmatically give up on state power so social movements should when possible directly engage into or support democratic progressive and radical left political organisations that compete for state power. Also, it is important to be aware of neoliberal attempts to solve the current multiple crises with what had caused them in the first place, namely more market solutions. This happens for instance in proposing to impose carbon trading schemes as a policy for climate change mitigation, which effectively means privatizing the atmosphere to protect it from pollution.

We need to demonstrate how the Left is not just good at criticising structural forces but that it can offer proposals for an alternative political and economic system. We should directly encourage collective production and consumption on the local level through workers cooperatives, community gardens, communal energy production and consumption systems, consumer/food and agricultural cooperatives, digital and material tools and resources libraries. This social experimentation on the local level and in cyberspace should include experimentation with radical democratic practices that could be reproduced on a larger scale. Finally, the commons seem a

more productive concept for common struggle in the Balkans than public goods. Public goods are a narrower concept than the commons and they rely on the state. The commons imply *real* social control over state-owned resources by the people rather than relying on representational democracy.

We need to engage both in an act of commoning between green and left movements, and across national borders. Common tactics as commons themselves should be diverse to be successful. Sometimes we have to construct new commons as autonomous zones of physical and social reproduction which will logistically strengthen our struggles. Sometimes we have to experiment and innovate commons in order to demonstrate alternatives to the current system. Sometimes we have to directly defend existing commons that are under threat of privatisation and commodification because it will be difficult to re-communise them later. Sometimes we have to expand existing commons in order to enlarge the commons sphere towards the state and market. Sometimes we have to transform current public goods into commons through expanding social control to ensure that they are for the benefit of people. Sometimes we have to lobby the state to support new and existing commons practices through policy and legal changes. Sometimes we have to engage in a battle for state power to make at least part of the political sphere a commons. In other words, what we need are diverse and innovative tactics by social movements which are coordinated within a common platform.

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Mapping Workers' Struggles: The Position of Workers in Post-Socialist Balkans

WORKING GROUP ON WORKERS' STRUGGLES: Mersiha Beširović, Heiko Bolldorf, Maja Breznik, Stipe Ćurković, Petre Damo, Robert Fai, Marko Grdešić, Mario Iveković, Jovica Lončar, Branislav Markuš, Tibor T. Meszmann, Davor Rakić Kićo, Jasna Petrović, Milenko Srećković, Romana Zidar and Jovica Lončar (coordinator)*

INTRODUCTION

The discussion of the group had several general goals, both aspiring and concrete: sharing information, connecting union activists with other civil society organization activists, and members of the academia, finding overlaps in knowledge, connecting theory and practice, searching for a common vocabulary, inclusive solidarity-based identities and agendas, locating national and sectorial similarities and differences and searching for tentative strategies which can be effective in a variety of settings. The group agreed that any prescriptions that are

* This report was prepared by the "Mapping workers' struggles" group during its sessions on 10-11 May, 2013 at the Balkan Forum in Zagreb.

to be made should be articulated in an organic way: they should not be formed from above but in interaction with those who are most familiar with the daily struggles that are being fought. Small but firm, doable, emancipatory steps have priority.

The present context for workers' struggles is very unfavourable: aggressive neoliberalism, privatization by all means, outsourcing to boost competitiveness as a main tool of capitalist 'development', rising inequality, employment insecurity, a race to the bottom in work and social standards, and a strong and aggressive stance of economic and a majority of political elites. While unemployment, and more generally, precarity continues to grow, those who work under contracts are facing constantly worsening working conditions and insecurity.

Workers, if not organized, are atomized, individualized and vulnerable. The group thus recognizes the importance of developing strong workers' organizations, as they are instrumental in developing solidarity and fighting for the common interest.

TRADE UNIONS

Squeezed between increasing precarity and the neoliberal demands of business elites and their allies on various political levels, trade unions face a slow, but imminent dead end. Today, unions face a definite challenge in staying afloat. Membership is decreasing across the region. Challenges are manifold, and often different in different national, regional and sectorial environments. Privatization, austerity measures, increasingly unregulated capital-labour relations all pose challenges for unions. Furthermore, all these issues consume union resources and energy, presenting unions with daily trade-offs in the battles they choose to fight. Some battles require resourc-

es and a large membership base. Others require legal expertise which only large bureaucracies have. Complex legislative regulation of, for example, strikes makes activism difficult. It is difficult for unions to meet such manifold and often conflicting demands.

The deficits of the union movement in the region are numerous. The group discussed union failures and strategic miscalculations in detail. Union corruption and a bureaucratic and complacent attitude are key among them. Unions across the former Yugoslavia have also neglected their territorial organization and opted instead to focus on a sectorial approach. However, a territorial approach can be more advantageous in connecting unions to local labour markets or in reaching out or opening up to the unemployed and those without stable employment. Instead of a heavy-handed top-down approach, unionists need to ask members and non-members what their problems are and customize union services accordingly. Collective bargaining and legal services at national, branch and company level are important but are not the only service that unions should offer. More innovative approaches at the territorial level are required.

In addition, trade union strategy still tends to be based on notions of 'social partnership' and assumptions derived from it. The fundamental shift in class power, both in the region and globally, in the past decades have not produced adequate responses in union strategy or the perception of their role *vis-à-vis* the state and capital. These new and detrimental conditions for working class organizations will have to be reflected and acted upon in a manner adequate to the challenges unions today are facing, if the decline of their social relevance as active protagonists is to be halted, let alone reversed. Narrowly sectorial and particularistic modes of thought and action will have to be abandoned in favour of a return to a class-based perspective in the broadest sense possible.

Although unions often face criticism, it is important not to overlook what they have done well in the past. Especially it is important to recognize the importance of unions in keeping collective agreements as the basis of workers' rights. Moreover their present choices and actions, especially in the right direction, need greater publicity, discussion and social support.

OTHER WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS

Yet, worker struggles are not necessarily only union centred. This is especially evident in the case of 'yellow' unions which act in tandem with management or political elites against the interest of workers. Similarly, trade unions at higher levels are often alienated from their base. Nevertheless, in principle, alternative worker organizations can also operate parallel to socially responsible but overburdened trade unions. Irrespective of whether socially responsive unions are active or not in a given space, workers' struggles have to include the broadest array of self-organization, including civil organizations capable of collective action.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in civil society organizations (CSO) created and run by worker activists, including inclusive organizations which aim to empower and support workers to express their voice. These organizations typically bring together workers, irrespective of whether they have a signed work contract or not. There is a remarkable trend in the use of social space and experimentation, discovery of possibilities for collective action and self-help. Although experiences are still segmented and remain at the local level, these experiences in public presence and action, creating inclusive social spaces are valuable and informative. Although there are important initiatives in the region, the capaci-

ties of these are still underdeveloped or unrecognized. They know relatively little of each other's work, a state that should change in the future.

There are also worker initiatives and actions operating within loose grassroots organizations. In their race to the bottom, plants and companies increasingly desire to employ fully alienated, individualized, flexible employees deprived of their human character and social responsibilities. Consequently, there is not much space for workers in these plants to self-organize. In case they do manage to form organizations for action, these actions should be considered as the expression of the voice of workers struggling for autonomy and human dignity, in conflict with the interests of capital and its repressive machinery. Such conflicts come to the fore on plant or workplace levels, but they either remain stifled or condemned in business-financed media so it is important to counteract a mainstream media pressure by giving alternative social visions of reality.

HISTORY, EXPERIENCE SHARING AND EDUCATION

More generally, it is important that we do not forget the history of workers' struggle, first of all in the region, but also most broadly. These are important as they give inspiration, encouragement, and provide us with a legacy we can build upon, and inform our present and future action.

Future labour activism should be built on the conscious knowledge and awareness of the history of past workers' struggles. If there is going to be a future it will be built on the past, its social roots. One of the goals of the discussion was to highlight the existence of an alternative history of labour resistance and activism: the posi-

tive examples that can be built on. Some elements in the history of socialism also provide a foundation that can be built on. Workers under socialism had a sense of confidence, a feeling of a shared collective fate, and a usable reference to a state-sponsored worker identity. These aspects are now gone. Even so, the past twenty or so years have witnessed several effective episodes of labour activism that could be the starting point. It is important to build the collective memory of this “subterranean” history, and not to allow cultural amnesia to always force us to start over from scratch.

In this respect, efforts could be made to start building the institutional foundations of collective memory. Gathering data and documentation regarding workers’ struggles or other phenomena of interest to unions and workers is weak to non-existent. Such efforts to collect data and make it publicly available could be linked to a more coherent attempt at what could be called “ideological” work, or as it was called under socialism, “ideational-theoretical” work. This refers to the construction of new identities and ideologies, which can form the solidarity basis of a revived labour movement. An effective forum which was mentioned by the group were film groups which provide a way for unionists to meet with ordinary workers, members of the academia and others, exchange information, build social ties and a sense of common fate. This would also allow for work on the discourses necessary to fight neoliberalism. Alternative terminology in framing worker struggles is necessary. Words used recently in public discourse, such as ‘employees’ or ‘citizens’ should be demystified while more stress should be put on various communities of workers and class identities.

The group discussed the potential of the struggle against “corruption” as a way to make worker struggles legitimate. This language offers an entry-point but is also

problematic given its lack of political charge. Building new languages and discourses is an important way of fighting the idea that “there is no alternative.”

Unions face not only the problem of limited or shrinking organizational capacities, but also negative portrayals in the media and perceptions of “being part of the system.” The group discussed the issue of union corruption at length. This led to an interesting discussion on the relative merit of establishing new unions or reforming existing unions; some have launched an idea of a Balkan confederation. Is it better to form new organizations and circumvent the existing ones since they are corrupt and ineffective? Or should we work through existing organizations and make use of existing infrastructure? Such debates will no doubt resurface in various forums. What was clearly agreed on was the need for international and trans-national action: the neoliberal offensive can be more successfully fought if cross-border cooperation is stronger.

Yet, the largest advances can be made through a re-discovery of education. This means learning from others, teaching others and building a sense of solidarity and equivalence of fate with those who are in vulnerable and precarious positions. It is crucial to create space for sharing experience, organize public discussions and debates, film club sessions, all in order to fortify and develop inclusive social identities and common interests. In case a collective action or a crucial struggle appears it is important to reflect on these events in an inclusive manner, and if possible, take some form of action. For example when workers in company A strike, unions in company B should explain to their workers that what is really at stake is the jobs and benefits of workers in company B. A solidarity-based logic means a lessened emphasis on competition either between individuals or groups and a renewed emphasis on cooperation.

Education means an interactive sharing of information and experience and overcoming particularism, sectarianism and envy. Such education would be better fostered if mass media was more labour-friendly: for example, if an established daily newspaper was consciously struggling against neoliberalism. But, as this is an unrealistic desire, advances can be made in a capillary way as well: establishment of blog entries, in starting on-line documentation centres, media and collective action observatories and research centres. In such a way, a slow build-up of a network on the bases of trust and solidarity may happen.

POLITICIZATION OF THE UNIONS

Furthermore, a common theme in the discussion was the need for unions to reach out to other actors in society.

On the level of ideology, unions on various levels should not be afraid to counter neoliberal discourse. They should reassert themselves as social actors and struggle over interpretations of reality. Another step is building a wider social front, through building an inclusive interactive community among unions, various civil society organizations and academia. It should be noted that for the most part of the transition period there was not much interest in labour questions among CSOs and academia which made the burden for the unions even heavier. In recent years this situation is increasingly changing as the awareness among CSO activists and parts of academia is growing stronger in the direction of labour issues. In that respect it becomes possible to envision what the next steps could look like. The triangle described above could be expanded into a wider solidarity-based network with four or five nodes. Unions are increasingly aware of the need to reach out to other social actors if they are to stay

afloat or score victories. Such unions would rebuild their social legitimacy through horizontal linkages with other actors in society. An example from Croatia which was discussed by the group can be mentioned: volunteer work by social activists in trade unions, which has been to the mutual satisfaction of both sides.

The segmentation of society in isolated groups and sectors was located by the group as a key problem. There is a need to break out of the ideology and practice of isolation of individuals, groups, and organizations. Mutual suspicion, sectarianism and disinterest in the struggles of others is a significant problem. Unions, civil society organizations and social groups, in particular, suffer from these problems, when they could build links and be more effective together. Naturally, this requires patience, a slow building of trust and careful inter-organizational diplomacy. But several successful practices in the region, the example of trade union women's groups cooperating and acting closely with the national umbrella feminist organization is a most recent and successful one, show that it is both possible and effective. Without such a wider struggle, even those very successful unions may find themselves in a situation where they win victory after victory but end up losing the war.

The political activation of unions is a complex issue. Unions and workers have had bad experiences with union involvement in politics since they often become mere appendages of political parties. The politicization of unions requires a tactical maturity that only some unions and other civil organizations have managed to demonstrate. The use of the existing institutional framework of "social dialogue" is a case in point: if unions rely solely on this mechanism they will most likely be on the defensive. In theory, social dialogue does offer unions "a foot in the door." If they can skilfully combine it with campaigns which take place on the streets or outside of political in-

stitutions they have a higher chance of success. However, as capital and its representatives at present are unscrupulously aggressive, we do not see that even the basic requirements of social partnership are fulfilled.

Admittedly, this is difficult since it stretches the resources of unions, which are thin to begin with. However, the market system provides certain entry points that can be turned against it. For example, consumerism gives us powers as consumers. We can ask questions regarding the products we buy and consume: where do they come from, who produced them, and did those who produced them have decent work conditions or union protection? This line of thinking in which the system is turned against itself – as in “jiu-jitsu” where the force of the opponent is used against him – deserves more attention.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize once again that any suggestions for further action need to be discussed with the protagonists who work on the ground. Solutions should not be asserted in a top-down manner. Instead, the goal should be to support those small-scale initiatives which have already proven successful. This path may appear to be the longer path, but it is more organic. Instead of telling workers what to do, the motivation behind such an approach would be to support those capabilities that local agents have already manifested and build-up such capacities over time. This also concerns a slow construction of a solidary front aimed against neoliberalism, which should include unions, other CSOs, social movements, sympathetic members of the academia and other intellectuals.

Economic Alternatives for the Balkans

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The global economic crisis, which began with the collapse of the U.S. real estate market in 2007-2008, was reflected unevenly in the Balkans, but had similar end results. Growth in the region prior to the crisis had been founded on the inflow of foreign capital, which was financed by the overvaluation of domestic currencies, so that borrowing would be cheaper. This resulted in the domestic economies becoming progressively less competitive, due to the technological gap with the developed countries. The weakening of the competitiveness and the purchasing power of the Balkan countries was covered for some time by further borrowing, leading to the even greater unsustainability of the rising debt. The results were similar everywhere: the privatisation of state and public property, often at prices below market value, for the purpose of filling the budget or further concessions to strategic investors; the growth of a comprador bourgeoisie and the mafia, with a resulting and disastrous corruptive influence on state apparatus; socialisation of private debt and budget cuts, de-industrialisation and the destruction of the welfare state, the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a very small number of

people drawn from the already mentioned comprador bourgeoisie, alongside the impoverishment of the rest of the population, and the deepening economic and political dependence of the Balkan countries and the strengthening of repressive governments.¹

Today it is quite clear that the welfare state as it existed roughly three decades after the Second World War in America, Western Europe and the Balkans no longer exists. On the other hand, the volatility of economic cycles as well as income inequality have increased dramatically. Extensive research by Stockhammer² indicates that the main reasons for an increase in global income inequality are financialisation, globalization and the retreat of the welfare state. The problem arises in connection to the unemployment of workers with lower qualifications³ but also youth unemployment and long term unemployment. All these trends are visible in the Balkans. The economic crisis, which in many countries of the Balkans has continued since 2008, thus represents a constant pressure on workers and the budgets of ordinary citizens of these crisis-hit countries. That deepens the crisis, because aggregate demand fails to achieve growth. On the other hand, pressures also increase on the environment, which is being irreversibly plundered, making the sustainability of the prevailing socio-economic model even more questionable over the long term.

1 Friedman, J. and Schady N. (2009), 'How Many More Infants Are Likely to Die in Africa as a Result of Global Financial Crisis', The World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 5023, August 2009, i.

2 Živković, A. (2011), 'Bankrot Evropske Unije: ili kako izaći iz Evrodeintegracije', *Zarez*, XIII/322, str. 28-30

3 Stockhammer, E. (2013), 'Why have wage shares fallen? A panel analysis of the determinants of functional income distribution', Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 5, Geneva: International Labour Office.

**BANKS AS THE CAUSE
OF THE DEEPENING OF THE CRISIS**

The banking sector represents a particular problem and the main instrument for conducting unsustainable economic, and thus social and political, trends in the Balkan countries. Banking operations in the region proved to be extremely socially irresponsible and require serious thinking about alternatives. Foreign banks that control the largest share in the financial markets of the Balkan countries entered into the region during the process of privatisation expecting a high rate of profit. A key factor in the entry of foreign banks into the market were high interest rates, and the expectation of credit expansion.⁴ Unfortunately the dominant banking trends were visible even in the few remaining domestic banks in the region. Domestic banks, though they represent only a marginal share in the overall financial market, imitated the profit-oriented policies of the major foreign-owned banks and additionally contributed to the crisis. Thus, the region found itself in a situation without any real banking alternative that would focus on investment for development in the real sector, strengthening competitiveness and production, and thus creating new jobs.

Instead of investing in production and jobs, the deficiencies of legislative regulation and the policies of central banks allowed for the emergence of very risky loan products to citizens. The risk created by these loan products came into the full light of day only with the outbreak of the crisis. One of the most drastic examples of risky banking products was the long-term (particularly

4 Orsi, C. (2009), 'Knowledge-based Society, Peer Production and the Common Good', *Capital & Class*, 33: 31-51.

the residential property) loan indexed to the Swiss franc.⁵ In Croatia alone, loans pegged to the Swiss Frank CHF (launched in 2004, but withdrawn from the market in 2008) covered over 40 % of long-term lending by 2012. The sudden appreciation of the CHF exchange rate since 2009 resulted in an increase in monthly installments, which affected about 125,000 households in Croatia. The increase in value of CHF peaked in summer 2011, which put the value of CHF on average at 50 percent above the level of the exchange rate in the years when these loans were raised. Local research clearly shows that for the greatest number of indebted citizens (35 %) somewhere between 50 and 75 percent of monthly income is spent on servicing this loan, while 32 percent of respondents spend over 75% of monthly income for the same purpose. For a third of respondents, the payment exceeded their monthly income at least once during the period of the servicing of their debt. The rate grew between one and two thousand kuna for a majority of respondents; for people who have a mortgage in CHF the spending rate on all loans in CHF increased by 2012 by 50.94 percent.⁶

The final and perhaps most important problem is the structural problem of the neoliberal concept of economic governance. As this model is the basis for post-socialist transition in the Balkan countries, its contradictions have been fully exposed only with the onset of the crisis.

5 Kraft, E. (2003), *Strane banke u Hrvatskoj: iz druge perspektive*. Zagreb: HNB; Četković, P. (2011), 'Credit Growth and Instability in Balkan Countries: The Role of Foreign Banks', *Research on Money and Finance* (27)

6 Placements associated with CHF are primarily spread from Austria and Germany, in 2004; it has particularly increased in Hungary and Poland. Structure of investments related to CHF shows that in Europe in 2007, 70% of placements related to CHF were concerning housing loans. Brown, M., Peter, M. and Wehrmüller, S. (2009) 'Swiss Franc Lending in Europe', Zurich: Swiss National Bank, p. 6

According to the classic capitalist business model, workers do not participate either in the management of the company or in the ownership structures of the company, and certainly not in the distribution of profits that the company generates. It is believed that they are freely exchanging their capacity to work for a wage. Thus, for instance, despite the growing economic crisis in the U.S., the average chief executive officer (CEO) of U.S. financial institutions had 520 times the income of the average employee in these same institutions in 2008.⁷

However, even in traditional countries in the “capitalist West” emergent issues raised by the new economic crisis have shaken the faith in this traditional concept of a typical capitalist enterprise, because the system has proved that even the owners (shareholders) do not participate directly in the decision-making process. It became clear that the undemocratic model of appointment of directors and management leads to unexpected consequences. Studies show that such a model often results in bringing irresponsible, incompetent, and sometimes even socio-pathological individuals at the highest managerial positions in companies.⁸ The economic model that aims only to increase profits for shareholders directly stimulates the progression of people who are prepared to offer shareholders a profit regardless of the means. It is quite clear that such a system, based on ignoring all social and ethical norms, inevitably creates social and economic chaos. The unsustainability of the capitalist economic model is evidenced by continuously generated economic

7 Rodik, P. (2012), *Kreditna zaduženost i pad životnog standarda*, Zagreb: Franak Association, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/112998630/Istra%C5%BEivanje-kreditnih-du%C5%BEnika> [Accessed on 30 July 2014]

8 ‘Corporate Democracy is a Myth’, *The Ichan Report*, www.ichan-report.com/report/2008/06/corporate-democ.html Accessed on 30 July 2014]

and political inequality with increasing elimination of basic human and labor rights, already fully reflected in the transition countries of the Balkans, especially in times of crisis. The problem of the capitalist model is not just of a transient or technical nature, but is a consequence of the deep internal contradictions of the capitalist system that is based on deep -rooted inequality, which inevitably tends towards socio – economic collapse.

ALTERNATIVES – NEW AND OLD MODELS OF GETTING OUT OF THE CRISIS

In the Balkan region, after the withdrawal of foreign capital and the destructive intervention of foreign creditor institutions, there has been an increase in resistance to government measures across the region and the public affirmation of a “really existing” alternative or alternative movements. An especially heated battle is being fought in the private sector, where de-industrialisation facilitates various forms of employee resistance like employee ownership, self-management, or the coalescence of worker protests.⁹ However, resistance is also developing outside the private sector, in the public sector and in the struggle for the commons. It includes a variety of initiatives: trade union struggle for the defense of the welfare state;¹⁰ student struggle against commercialisation of ed-

9 Babiak, P., and Hare, R. D. (2007), *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopats Go to Work*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

10 For the former Yugoslav region, see Nebojsa Popov, ed. (2011), *Mesto pod suncem: Radničke borbe u Srbiji danas*, Belgrade: Official Gazette; Pokret za slobodu (2011), *Deindustrijalizacija i radnički otpor: borbe i inicijative za očuvanje radnih mesta u periodu tranzicije*, Belgrade: Movement for Freedom; ‘Deindustrijalizacija Zagreba: kontekst i učinci’, *H-Alter*, 15 November 2012, <http://www.h-alter.org/vijesti/hrvatska/deindustrijalizacija-zagreba-kontekst-i-ucinci> [Accessed 30 July 2014]

ucation,¹¹ social struggle for the preservation of public spaces,¹² or the struggle for the rights of oppressed groups in the re-traditionalised periphery. While these struggles had before been isolated, the logic of an all-embracing crisis has forced the resistance to increasing political generalisation, where the highest level of struggle was expressed on the streets rather than the workplaces, which in turn also strengthened the workers' struggle, in a process that Gal Kim called the "birth of the people".¹³ In the Balkans, the culmination of the movement was without a doubt the threat that the movement would actually assume political power with the break-through of SYRIZA in the Greek elections in summer 2012 which opened up the possibility of a left government. At the centre of the economic programme of SYRIZA was the invitation to the official conference for the cancellation of the debt of the European South and massive investments in the real economy like under the Marshall Plan.¹⁴

Despite the similarities in the crisis tendencies in the Balkans, similar modes of resistance, a similar cultural-historical heritage, and new forms of grassroots cooperation facilitated by new technologies, especially communications, the fact is that the role of the world market had an atomising effect on trade between the region's countries or has even encouraged intra-regional conflict. Slovenia is the only former Yugoslav republic that has investments and outsourced production in the rest of the

11 See Bernard, S. and Unkovski-Korica, V., 'Crashing The Yugo: FIAT's turn in the Driver's Seat', *Inchiesta*, 15.01.2012, <http://www.inchiestaonline.it/osservatorio-internazionale/serbia-crashing-the-yugo/> [Accessed on 30 July 2014]

12 Kurepa, T. et al. (2007), *Borba za znanje: studentski protest – student protests in 2006*, Belgrade: CAD.

13 Jadžić, M. (2011) 'Prostor, urbanizam, politika u postsocijalističkom gradu', *Jugolink*, no. 1, p. 70-84.

14 Kim, G. 'O ustaničkom pokretu u Sloveniji: mase prave povijest', 19 decembar 2012, www.marks21.info. [Accessed on 30 July 2014]

region, and it managed to do this only at the expense of its own workforce, and in response to the crisis. All other countries have a balanced trade, which is largely focused on the EU, either directly as is the case with Croatia or indirectly via the free trade agreement, CEFTA.¹⁵

In considering options on the way forward in the Balkans, the question is raised of whether we can learn how to exit the crisis by looking at Latin America today. The grassroots radicalisation of the politics there, beginning with the Argentine uprising in the early 2000s, and its experiments with self-management and the refusal to repay foreign debts, up to the present struggle for the unity of the continent, led by Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, the leading left governments established after the popular uprisings against the right-wing coup attempts in Venezuela in 2002, and then in Bolivia and Ecuador 2006.¹⁶ The idea of regional unity and institutions that would accomplish this goal are varied and complex. The dynamo is the ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for the peoples of our America), an association that brings together the most radical countries of the continent, and which provides for the creation of a common currency and closer economic cooperation, and Banco del Sur (Bank South), which opened the way for a common fiscal instrument in the region, which the European Central Bank, for instance, is not. The idea is for ALBA to create, within regional trade alliances, such as MERCOSUR, the climate for regional cooperation against the U.S. zone of free trade, and thus, by protecting the region from the stronger economies, to create a larger market.

15 Alexis Tsipras, public speech in London, 16 June 2013, <http://left.gr/news/syriza-london-public-talk-alexis-tsipras> [Accessed on 30 July 2014]

16 Živković, A. (2014), 'Evropska integracija pre evropske integracije: o poreklu sadašnjih dužničkih kriza u bivšoj Jugoslaviji', in Čurković, S. and Kostanić, M., eds, *Kriza eurointegracija – lijeve perspektive s periferije*, Zagreb: Center for Labor Studies.

At the same time, the Banco del Sur is the agent of counter-cyclical measures that protect the region from speculative attacks and provide monetary sovereignty, fighting against the outflow of capital due to the growing share of Western banks in the regional financial structure, and investing in the economy and inter-regional infrastructure projects with the aim of full employment and the reduction of regional disparities.¹⁷ Such a project would, in the concrete situation in the Balkans, pave the way for new emancipatory practices. But unlike Latin America, where the existence of oil and other strategic resources which were required by a growing Chinese industry allowed for the funding of social reforms and “oil diplomacy” without a frontal attack on the private ownership of the means of production, in the Balkans it seems that a programme for the redistribution of wealth would be impossible without direct confrontation with big business (capital). Moreover, the link between market competition and regional tensions in the Balkans is even sharper. This means that every crisis in the Balkans is potentially hotter, and at the same time transition towards regional cooperation and economic recovery is all the more difficult because of the need to include the national question in the allocation of scarce resources.

ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY AS A POSSIBLE EXIT ROUTE

This is why economic democracy appears like a politically realistic concept, which does not require the overthrow

¹⁷ Katz, C. ‘Latin America’s New ‘Left’ Governments’, *International Socialism Journal*, 27 June 2005, <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=124> [Accessed on 30 July 2014] and Katz, C., ‘Our Chavez’, *International Viewpoint*, 22 March 2013, <http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article 2929> [Accessed on 30 July 2014]

of capitalism or a sudden revolutionary “event”, but rather the expansion of the area of freedom and political power of workers as employees within the framework of the capitalist mode of production. In this sense, economic democracy, if it is based on workers’ power and autonomy, can be interpreted as a counter to the concepts of democracy of small private owners, which prevailed in the eighties and nineties, during the high tide of neoliberalism. Today, when the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism is loosened, – because of the theoretical inability to predict and interpret the crisis and the economic and social devastation caused by the way in which the crisis was handled – a view of the economy from the perspective of the market and the consumer is no longer dominant.

The consumer’s view was one of the ways of rationalising and legitimising the privatisation of public institutions and services – in the place of the rigid, and in relation to the needs of the users of public services, insensitive, heartless bureaucracy, privatization was promised to bring entrepreneurial spirit to these institutions and manufacture new managers, who would no longer work with bureaucratic inertia but a desire for profit, and enable “consumers” of public services (patients, students, the poor, pensioners) greater choice and greater “value for money”.

We can immediately notice a certain *non sequitur* in the above line of argument. While it is admittedly true that many public institutions tend toward bureaucratic heartlessness and detachment from the real needs and wishes of its customers, which was the reason for so much criticism from the left and right in the sixties and seventies, it does not follow that privatisation is the automatic cure. That would be the case if we took as the main reason for the alienation of these institutions their ownership by the state, while, in fact – if we leave aside the rather superficial and shallow “argument” of the state as

“bad manager” – we are dealing with a much deeper and more complex problem, which we can, for now, only sketch. Specifically, public institutions, as well as private firms, are an integral part of capitalist society as a whole and are thus more similar and more connected with the private sector than is assumed in the simplified propaganda for privatisation, which is dominated by a Manichean view of the public and the private.

Public institution and social welfare are not immune to the general context of capitalism, although they do not enter the market and are not organized as capitalist companies. The reason why these institutions, although they are sometimes portrayed as unnecessary and economically irrational “squanderers of public resources”, are important for the smooth functioning of capitalism is their role in the reproduction of the labor force. The general capitalist social context reduces human development to the reproduction of labor power as a commodity. This is the origin of the specific type of alienation of many public welfare institutions – they are not bureaucratically incompetent or corrupt due to their management or due to a lack of entrepreneurial spirit, but because of their economic purpose. This means that their goal is not and, at least in capitalism, should not be, autonomous social development, which is based on social needs, but “expanded reproduction” of labour, which is dictated by the general socio-economic imperative of maximizing profits through the exploitation of labour. Although using different methods – the former bureaucratic planning, which is based on statistical approximations, and the second “hit and miss” market strategies – public institutions and private companies are similar in their indifference to human needs. With neoliberal privatisations of the social institutions it is becoming increasingly obvious that a change of legal status from public to private does not change much regarding this structural alienation from

real human needs. However, privatisations changed something else – working conditions and the mode of delivery of social services. What “in theory” should lead to greater sovereignty and consumer satisfaction (which is, if we judge by the results of the effect of large privatisation wave in Europe in the eighties and nineties of the 20th century, at the very least a questionable assertion), leads in practice to a deterioration of working conditions for workers in the public sector, to their de-professionalisation and proletarianisation, increases in the pace and intensity of work, its precariousness etc. Ideological propaganda about consumer democracy in the heroic era of neoliberalism were actually camouflage for an attack on workers’ rights in the public sector. The democracy of small private owners as well as consumers, at least in the context of neoliberal capitalism, stands in direct opposition to economic democracy or workers’ democracy.

Recent discussion of economic democracy is therefore a welcome refreshment since returning to the question of democracy and workers’ autonomy in the debate in which consumer perspectives have (too) long dominated. But even the consumer perspective is not irrelevant, it is just that the way in which it presents itself in neoliberal ideology (and economic theory) is wrong. In fact, worker and consumer democracy are inextricably linked and their theory, to be adequate, must necessarily address the structural separation of workers from consumers and vice versa, and one of the main problems of the capitalist mode of the economy – production for profit, not for human needs. So, regardless of whether there are workers’ councils and whether the workers themselves control production, they are still separated from consumers and communicate with them only through the mediation of the market. Therefore, one of the great challenges of political strategy, based on economic democracy, is how to bring production and consumption

closer and how to find new ways of synchronising social production with social needs and of replacing, over the long term, the capitalist market.

The deep economic and social crisis that the existing socio-economic system created suggests the need for questioning the basic assumptions of the model of “democratic capitalism.” The question arises of how compatible the concepts of democracy and capitalism in fact are, i.e., whether democracy is possible under the conditions of an economic system that is based on the preferential value of capital in relation to the value of work, and (consequently) the concept of private ownership which excludes workers from ownership and decision-making, and is focused on the increase in profit of capital owners alone. Many companies, basing themselves on the principles of increasing employee satisfaction and improvement of the working environment, are trying to introduce profit-sharing incentives to motivate workers. Although still incomplete, these measures represent the first step in the direction of democratization of companies, because they open the possibility of participation of employees in the realised profit of the company, although not yet in the ownership structure and decision-making process.

EMPLOYEES AND CONSUMERS OWN(ED) COMPANIES

The most famous example of this model is originally an American model of employee buyouts – ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan), which is widespread in other market economies. In the Balkan post-socialist countries, there are examples of successfully implemented ESOP models of employee shareholding, which have saved the companies from deliberate destruction or hostile takeovers and ensured recapitalisation and job preservation

(Uljanik Pula, Zagreb Kraš). The most famous Serbian attempt to introduce employee shareholding in a company is Jugoremedija, while the most famous Croatian example is an employee shareholding company ITAS Prvomajska, which is also an example that is not carried out by a model of gradual buyouts according to ESOP, but through the bankruptcy process with realignment where workers become exclusive business owners. Despite the positive developments when applying ESOP, the control component of such models for employee shareholding which would give employees a say in making business decisions is still relatively negligible.¹⁸ However, this very fact encourages the further development of the model through the introduction of other systems of democratic control of the company.

Besides the afore-mentioned models of employee shareholding, there are other forms of business organisations where there are attempts to distribute management rights and democratic ownership structures to a large number of company employees. The traditional form that is often used in doing so is the concept of co-operatives. Coops set democratic management as one of the key goals. However, the cooperative system in the Balkans post-transitional context is not a very popular model, especially in the business circles of the region, where the mere mention of cooperative system provokes deep suspicion. Thus the Balkan transition society is not in step with European and world experiences in the usage of the cooperative model of self-organisation of producers and consumers. The ideas of economic democracy started in the early cooperative socialist movement and remains alive until this day. These ideas developed consistently through various forms of democratic cooperative enter-

18 Marshall, W. and Rochon, L. (2009), 'Financing Economic Development in Latin America: the Banco del Sur', *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics*, 32 (2), 185-198.

prises over a period of 150 years. Therefore workers' and consumers' cooperatives remain a particularly interesting form of cooperative businesses.

They represent one of the earliest forms of self-organisation of workers from the era of the First Industrial Revolution, representing an alternative to the classical capitalist 'work for wages' approach. By the standards of the International Cooperative Alliance, one of the goals of workers' cooperatives is "the creation and maintenance of employment with the creation of wealth in order to improve the life quality of members (cooperatives), to protect the dignity of work, allow self-management and encourage the development of local communities." Despite the fact that there are different approaches to self-organisation of workers' cooperatives, many of them tend to introduce more democratic forms of participation of the employees in the company management. But aside from the democratic encouragement of participation of workers in the decision-making process, these businesses are focused on increasing the quality of life for all members of the local community, not only focusing on making profits for the few owners of the capital. This approach shows an extreme resistance to the adverse effects of global economic crisis. Indicators from Spain show that in times of the worst economic crisis, the Spanish working cooperatives increased the number of their employees by 7.2% in the last quarter of 2011.¹⁹ That is the reason why so many workers' coops successfully operate and grow within the capitalist system and market economy. The most famous example is the Basque federation of workers' cooperative Mondragon, which employs over 90,000 employees and operates with annual revenue of over 14 billion EUR. The trend of establishing workers'

19 Menke, J. D. and Buxton, D. C. (2010), 'The Origin and History of the ESOP and Its Future Role as a Business Succession Tool', *Journal of Financial Service Professionals*, May 2010.

cooperatives is particularly present in the Mediterranean countries (Italy, France); Anglo Saxon countries (USA, Canada, UK) and countries of Latin America, with emphasis on Venezuela and Bolivia, where workers' cooperatives are part of official government policy.

The second most common form of organizing cooperative business represents cooperative enterprises that are owned by its consumers. These companies are owned by their clients. The particular goal of this form of democratic enterprise is to increase the quality of services, while reducing the cost of services and goods offered by the company. According to the International Cooperative Alliance, more than 100 million people work in the consumer cooperatives, which is 20% more employees than in the multinational companies. The oldest and largest consumer cooperative in the world is the British system – The Co-operative Group, which offers a wide range of services and employs over 120,000 workers and the ownership structure makes over 7 million UK customers of this enterprise. In the Netherlands, housing cooperatives own 40% of the total housing stock. In Switzerland, New Zealand and Singapore consumer cooperatives generate over 50% of sales through their own home ware retailers.²⁰ It is very important to note that the hybrid form of consumers'-workers' (employees') management is very common in the case of consumer cooperatives. In such a management model, all beneficiaries (including employees) participate in the democratic strategic decision-making and profit-sharing, while daily business operational decisions are made by the employees themselves.

20 Kelly, N., 'Spanish co-operatives see an increase in Employment of up to 31%', *The Co-operative News*, 2012.

**DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE WORK
PROCESS AND THE RESPONSIBILITY
TOWARDS COMMUNITY**

Many enterprises owned by employees and consumers implement other forms of humanisation of the working process with the attempts to diminish the division of labour. Many democratic enterprises, regardless of the legal form of registration, apply the rotation of employees to various jobs (Suma Whole foods) or rotation of workers within the same production facility (Mondragon).

However it must be emphasised that the democratic management of enterprises should not be reduced merely to the cooperative form of business registration. Britain's biggest retail chain company John Lewis Partnership, with over 70,000 employees, is registered as a classic holding company, owned by a trust for all the employees, while working for the company. The largest employees' owned enterprise in the United States is also a supermarket chain company Publix, which employs more than 120,000 of employees, and is also registered as a joint stock company.

The relatively new concept of social entrepreneurship is especially notable in this respect. Some European countries have already adopted specific legislation with an adequate form for the registration of social enterprises (e.g. Italian law on social cooperatives from 1991, or British registration form CIC – Community Interest Company of the 2005).²¹ Social enterprises are businesses that are structured not only to maximise profit but also to achieve economic, social and the environmental objectives that benefit the community within which they op-

21 International Co-operative Alliance, 'Statistical Information on the Co-operative Movement', 2012

erate. Examples of such enterprises exist throughout the world and generally show that such economic structures are significantly more resistant to the effects of the economic crisis. Because they are not only profit-driven, they operate successfully in situations in which traditional structured companies had difficulty. The first significant social enterprises in the post-socialist countries in the Balkans are in Slovenia and Croatia. The leading group of social enterprises in Croatia is represented by Act Group, a consortium of seven social enterprises, mainly cooperatives operating in Međimurje County, while the leading Slovenian social entrepreneurs is gathered in the Slovenian Social Entrepreneurship Forum. The importance of social entrepreneurship is recognised by the EU²² which already has over 2 million social enterprises that employ over 11 million people. The modest Croatian and Slovenian attempts in this direction, as well as the European experience, certainly point to social entrepreneurship as a concept through which the Balkans' untapped economic resources can be put back into the function of corporate social responsibility in the region.

In the field of financial services, one of the alternatives to short-term oriented and socially irresponsible banking are ethical banks (social banks). Instead of a single bottom-line logic, which takes into account only financial profitability, these banks take into account the triple bottom-line logic in which, besides profit, social and environmental consequences of business are taken into account.²³ These forms of financial institutions are

22 Petričević, Teodor, 'O društvenoj ekonomiji i društvenom poduzetništvu', in *Poduzetništvo u službi zajednice: Zbornik tekstova o društvenom poduzetništvu*, Zagreb: Nacionalna zaklada za razvoj civilnog društva.

23 See 'Social Economy', http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/social-economy/index_en.htm [Accessed on 30 July 2014]

increasingly the main source of financing for democratic enterprises and social entrepreneurship. Classic commercial banks finance projects under the assumption of creating their own profits. By doing social business through commercial banks, part of the social capital of the company ends in the profit-oriented commercial banks. To avoid this, there is a trend of establishing ethical banks that are inherently social enterprises. The model offers the possibility of ownership and management rights to its customers (depositors) with the most favorable financing terms, and by doing so covers only their real costs and risks. Companies financed under these conditions are competitive in the market and more sensitive to the needs of their clients. In addition, the ethical banks often finance and develop projects that are useful to society. Profits from such projects are reinvested in new communal projects. That usually helps social/ethical banks to improve their business and to expand their capacities even in the periods of economic depressions. Examples of ethical banks in Europe are: Triodos and Robobank in the Netherlands, the Caja Laboral Popular in Spain Cooperativa, Banca Etica in Italy and many other ethical and alternative banks assembled in the alliances of European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks (FEBE). The first post-socialist Balkan initiatives for the establishment of these banks already exist in Croatia and Slovenia. Only the future will show whether they will be successful under the conditions of “Comprador Capitalism” that prevails in the region.

MACROECONOMIC MEASURES THAT SUPPORT DEMOCRATIC ECONOMY

Models of economic democracy should be combined with macro-economic regulation to ensure their complemen-

tarily and institutional sustainability. Potential solutions can be found in three main measures, although they should be combined with others to make their effects complete.²⁴ These are: a minimum guaranteed social income, reduction of working time and the write-off of debts.

The minimum guaranteed social income appears as a measure that corresponds to the negative socio-economic effects of modern capitalism expressed through two moments. The first concerns the great instability of the economic developments that causes unemployment, unequal distribution of income and the precariousness of workers. The unequal distribution of income, combined with the increasing dependence on the financial markets, either through the realisation of capital income today or through pensions, which are entrusted to pension funds that invest in the equity markets, means that aggregate demand cannot continually increase, as was the case in mass production (Fordism). This has negative implications on economic growth that in the current framework serves as an inseparable component of development, but also as the basis of legitimacy of the prevailing economic and political systems. Another element of the explanation concerns the dependence of people on income from work due to the existence of the underlying security or, in the Marxist terms, exploitation. In this context, the minimum guaranteed social income has a dimension of justice, not only because it provides the material basis for life, but also because today, due to the nature of production, which is primarily intangible and based on knowledge, it serves as a monetary award of socially recognised work which consists of our very existence.²⁵ A

24 De Clerck, F. (2009), 'Ethical banking', in Zsolnai, L. (ed.), *Ethical Prospects – Economy, Society, and Environment*, Berlin, Heidelberg and New York: Springer, 209-227.

25 Orsi, C. (2009), 'Knowledge-based Society, Peer Production and the Common Good', *Capital & Class*, 33: 31-51.

minimal guaranteed social income has several characteristics, which can be subdivided into the following: it is guaranteed to everyone and it does not serve as a substitute on the social protection measures which should exist. Besides, it is compatible with other initiatives aimed at radical change of the system, as is the reduction of working hours.

Reducing working hours should provide benefits to the environment, people and economy. In short, people would thus change their consumption habits and work more from home, which means a smaller ecological imprint and greater environmental benefit. The measure would affect the arrangement of working hours among those who currently are employed and those who are not, and would also change the family arrangement of 'paid' and 'unpaid' working hours, which brings more equality in society. The economy would experience an increase in workers' productivity, who would be oriented towards having less debt through loans for consumerist purposes, and the state budget would endure less pressure, due to the high external and public debt, which is currently a big issue.²⁶ These measures significantly alter the pillars of the capitalist system. If the system is characterised by the domination of private property and exchange based on the market, as well as the 'indirect' forcing of workers to work for a salary, then, clearly, the measures introduced above create a more humane system. This allows greater voluntary production for people's own needs and the needs of others, or the production of common goods, which are not governed by any market or governmental control. But today it is necessary to do even more than that, due to the imminent collapse because of the constant increase of exploitation of national resources, expressed through a concept called environmental foot-

26 Vercellone, C. (ed) (2007), *Kognitivni kapitalizam: Znanje i financije u postfordističkom razdoblju*, Zagreb: Politička kultura.

print, pre-programmed.²⁷ Additional measures, concerning the social level, include a radical shift in fiscal (progressive taxation, cap and share among similar programs for income redistribution and penalising excessive exploitation of natural resources) and monetary policy (with full banking reserves that will restore the social control over the creation of money).

Finally, in order for the Balkan countries to manage to throw off the burden of underdevelopment and overthrow debt bondage, the “real existing” alternative movements in the Balkans can only survive by rejecting the logic of competition and networking on an equal basis. In economic policy that must include, as a key process, the progressive overcoming of both the state and market models. It is necessary to work towards a socially-planned economy, in which the starting assumption is that we are social beings who depend on wider processes. In this sense, it is necessary to recognize and accept that the goal by which success should be measured is the creation of public property, which could be defined as “the right of ownership of those affected by the usage of given economic resources, proportional to the degree to which they are affected by the same.”²⁸ On this assumption it is possible to develop a wider plan for the economy, in which the political and economic factors, and therefore democracy, are the essential preconditions. Precisely the requirement to refuse to pay the debt and to systematically undermine the influence of the international market on the regional economy through fiscal and monetary union, capital controls and international taxation of fi-

27 Fumagalli, A. (2000), ‘Ten Propositions on Basic Income’, <http://www.bin-italia.org/article.php?id=1293> [Accessed on 30 July 2014]

28 NEF (The New Economics Foundation) (2010), *21 Hours: Why a Shorter Working Week Can Help Us All To Flourish in the 21st Century*, London: New Economics Foundation.

nancial transactions, with full employment, would be the first necessary steps towards the gradual elimination of the competitive logic of the capitalist world market and the creation of a truly free association of producers worldwide.

The development of the above mentioned components plus an active support for the development of democratic, social and environmentally responsible businesses are extremely important factors in the development of society. They ensure that development occurs according to principles which ensure a fair distribution of created value and its orientation to the projects of the utmost importance to the community. The common thread that links the thought behind these alternatives or “new” approaches to economic organisation can be defined as a systematic attempt at overhauling the relationship of labour and capital within the company.²⁹ This is an attempt to change the power relations and expand the steering rights from the current narrow group of corporate shareholders, the owners of capital, to the wider circle of those who participate in the creation of surplus value through the production process, like the employees, customers, consumers, and members of the wider community. It should be mentioned that changes in the economic relations, aimed at ensuring full economic participation, also open up the possibility of achieving full political participation.³⁰ That is why this process plays a more important role than just an economic role, because it is at the same time contributing to the democratisation of social relationships more generally, starting from the democratisation of production relations.

29 Meadows, D., Randers, J. and D. Meadows, D. (2004), *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*, London: Earthscan

30 See review articles in *Historical Materialism* 15 (2007) 173–232.

Between institutional and non-institutional forms of democratic organizing: Towards Revolutionary Change

THE DEMOCRATISATION AND PARTICIPATION WORKING
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INTRODUCTION

We build upon conclusions of The First Balkan Forum – held in Zagreb (2012) during the Subversive Forum – that there can be no real democracy in the political, social or economic spheres if there is no workers’ control over the means of production at the workplace. Within this framework, the group tried to envisage the institutional and non-institutional methods of action and organisational forms that would be central to the processes of fundamental change of social and power relations.

Participation is an ambiguous term: on the one hand, it is used by the governments, indicating the supposed willingness to engage “interested public” in formulating amendments, or performing a consultation role, which actually only slightly tackles inequality and often results in the situation in which the exploited participate in

their own exploitation. On the other hand, it can also mark a more just and equal participation in work, discussions, and decision-making processes. It is an internal part of direct democratic practices, which predominantly work in non-institutional forms of organization. Related to this, the concept of democratisation should be pushed beyond mere representative democracy. Participation and democratisation can thus be defined as the political process of revolutionary change, which would achieve the workers' control of the means of production and reproduction, their socialisation leading to the abolishment of capitalist command.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

The end of socialism brought an ideological cliché that real democracy in post-socialist countries started only after 1989. This cliché rests on the presupposition that capitalism, the so called "free market society", is inherently linked to democracy, while socialism presupposes anti-democratic or totalitarian rule. In fact, "democratic transition" in ex Yugoslav countries was accompanied by bloody wars, that is, ethnic cleansing and segregation. General discussion about the specific contexts of each state shows that the 1990s brought a massive transfer of social and state assets, a wave of privatisation, which among other things resulted in the dispersal of the working class, dismembering of the trade unions, rising class differences, and poverty and social exclusion. The process of neoliberal transition and primitive accumulation of capital also entailed the recomposing of labour and the emergence and expansion of a cognitive proletariat with new difficulties of political mobilization. If the traditional revolutionary agent, the working class, is dwindling there's less and less hope for concrete direct democratic

actions like the occupation of factories, their self-management etc. In the whole Balkan region there was a long sequence of defeat and demise for the Left, and it was only in recent years, with popular uprisings and protests, that a new sense of solidarity and political forms emerged.

Slovenia used to be taken as the positive example of a gradual transition into post-socialist society, however, getting closer to the EU and Eurozone entrance, the more brutal class stratification, poverty and neo-liberal agenda were implemented. Several recent governments, from centre-left or right-wing, followed the main direction that launched the second and more thorough wave of privatisation that affected the dismantling of welfare state (health, pension, educational system) and the transfer of state owned companies. In light of the recent economic crisis, both domestic policies and dictates from abroad demanded more austerity and privatization of everything that was not yet labelled “private property”. It was during 2012 that the so-called fairy tale of successful transition ended. The level of indebtedness and unemployment (13%, and much more in youth) started growing dramatically, while the web of social services and solidarities started shaking.

It was in late 2012 that the city of Maribor saw mass demonstrations that demanded impeachment of the municipal establishment and a corrupt mayor. This was a small spark in late November, but spread all across the country. Slovenia encountered the first major revolt since its independence, which happened without the organizational help of established institutions (party, trade union, church...). The mass protests created new organizational platforms ranging from liberal-left and more national populist currents (demanding more decent, more moral leaders) to anti-capitalist, communist, anarchist and ecologist elements. The series of protests toppled

both the mayor of Maribor and the right-wing government of Janez Janša, which seemed to open a new horizon also in formal representative democratic politics. However, the new transitory government continued with the old policies, while the new mayor of Maribor – coming from the independent, activist circles – does not have enough support in the municipal council.

The most recent development saw the formation of the Initiative for Democratic Socialism (IDS) organized by some members of the Workers-Punks University, that joined forces with Sustainable Development Party (TRS) and Democratic Party of work (DSD) and formed the ‘United Left’ which presented its list at the 2014 European Parliament elections.

Kosovo: Forcefully subjected to all sorts of neoliberal social and political experiments, Kosovo became arguably the poorest country in Europe, with 48% unemployment rate, and around 20-26% of people living with less than 1 euro per day. Following the spectacular rise in the price of electricity (a similar parallel, yet with different consequences, can be drawn with Bulgaria, where popular demonstrations forced the government to resign), protests involving thousands of people were organised by grass-root activists. The protests began in Pristine and then spread to eight cities in the country. Taking into account the political and ideological conjuncture of the Republic of Kosovo, that is to say, a country that is directly subjected to economic and political neo-imperialist interventions of EU, USA as well as Turkey, the recent protests mark a new political awareness and revolt. A minimal, but important goal was achieved: the already-announced electricity price hikes were cancelled. However, even though the electricity rise sparked these protests, they were not reduced only to that.

On this note, one should add that the ‘normalisation of relations’ signed by the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia has been praised by almost everyone as a ‘historical agreement’. And indeed it is historic – but apparently for completely different reasons than those the EU and other bureaucrats praise it for. From the EU’s view and perception of the Balkans, everything that is not an outburst of our primitive ethnic passions is indeed a historic achievement. Peace is almost considered a state of exception. In this regard, the mere fact that the Kosovo and Serbian Prime Ministers have met is a major victory over the backward tendencies keeping the Balkans as it is, in the permanent state of pre-war explosion. The struggle against the multiethnic conception of the Republic of Kosovo, as well as the struggle against the “historic agreement” signed in April 19th (and its ratification by the Kosovo Parliament), would be the struggle for the re-politicisation of the Albanian-Serbian question. To summarise the essence of the agreement, we would argue that if it were implemented, the effect would be twofold:

- 1) it will create a parallel or autonomous ‘province’ within the borders of the Republic of Kosovo. This will be an ethnic ‘province’, with executive and (up to a point) legislative competences of the “Association of Serbian Municipalities.” The closest comparison (albeit not totally accurate) would be that of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- 2) It will deem necessary ethnically based solutions for the rest of the region. By dividing the country along the ethnic lines, in the name of the ‘co-existence between different cultures, religions and ethnicities’, it makes it impossible to prevent further division of the country, which will lead to changes in the borders of (at least) a few neighbouring countries. Taking all this into account, the agreement between *Thaçi* and *Dačić* is indeed historical, precisely be-

cause it negates the emancipatory potential, and promotes the existing state of affairs, that of an ethnically divided country and so forth. Its historical importance relies on another missed chance for the true liberating and emancipatory potential in this region.

The material basis of this ruling ideology has rendered political parties, trade unions and other “classic” forms of political organisation impotent (or, at least temporarily impotent) and new forms of political organizations (outside direct state control) are becoming a political imperative. However, this shows the limit of “spontaneous” organisations. These forms of popular dissatisfaction or/and revolt have to be organised in some more structured ways. Otherwise, they remain “spontaneous” and apart from a temporary panic in the corridors of the government, nothing emancipatory can come out of them. Therefore, from the experience of the on-going demonstrations, the direct action has to be at least minimally structured.

Serbia: After parliamentary elections in March 2014, the Serbian government is now firmly in hands of the Serbian Progressive Party, a reformed far right-wing party tending toward populist right both politically and economically. In all important aspects, it continues with the same politics as the previous government, and even aims at radical neoliberal reforms and privatisations. Such policies are largely created and drafted by the European Union, within the so-called Euro-Atlantic integrations, and the IMF. The peoples’ backs were broken several times during the last 30 years, first through the economic crisis in the mid-1980s, and after there was a surge in nationalism, the disintegration of the country, wars and the beginning of privatization practices. After the change of government in 2000 there was a complete destruction of industry which

had survived NATO bombings and a ten-year robbery, which is estimated to have cost at least \$100bn.

Workers' unions are particularly weak, with very few possibilities for mobilization, as they were shamelessly lied to and cheated many times by now. Other social forces, such as the populist non-parliamentary right, are mainly pacified and disoriented. This also applies to sympathizers of political parties which used to constitute the ruling coalition. The youth of civil (liberal) orientation has been integrated into the NGO sector and EU-sponsored institutions, which are being created, or in the already existing institutions of the center. The left is practically nonexistent, and is reduced to a small heterogeneous movement. One part of this movement is getting closer to the NGO sector, which is a consequence of project financing on behalf of international foundations trying to implement their own agenda, usually with open support for Euro-Atlantic integrations. The potential for the creation of an autonomous workers' movement exists, and one part of activists in Serbia are engaged in this. The precondition is the creation of a serious direct-democratic organization, which would be the driving force of the movement; as well as a direct-democratic infrastructure through which the movement would act.

Albania: Since the early 1990s Albania has gone through a continuous process of neoliberal reforms, whose impacts have been not only socio-economical, but also political. Through mass privatizations, deterioration of working conditions, restructuring of the economic structure, massive unemployment and the dispersion of the working class, Albania is faced not only with imminent economic problems, but also with societal and grass-root political demobilization. On the other hand, educational reforms aim at breaking student self-organization, through raising fees, and more generally transforming the univer-

sity into a neoliberal structure which breeds individualistic economical competition, and thwarts solidarity in every aspect. In this quasi-atomized society, most people feel discouraged to self-organize, and instead look at more practical forms of collective survival, which in most cases has to do with the revival of pre-modern, or tribal forms of organization. So what we have instead of workers' –students' –or more general popular organizations, are micro-tribal entities, which live in urban areas, but through political clientele, and hierarchic self-organization, manage to survive and distribute some kind of means of subsistence.

In an atomized and quasi-tribalized society, forms of popular self-organization are hindered even institutionally. Although the Albanian constitution allows popular movements to call for a referendum, so far the only referendums which have taken place in these twenty years, were about the approval of the very constitution. To initiate a referendum from below, the organizers need to collect at least 50,000 signatures, which afterwards are to be certified by the Electoral Commission, whose practice reflects the appetites of the political and economical elites. No larger progressive movement exists in Albania at the moment.

Croatia: Dominant processes that marked the last two decades in Croatia have been deindustrialization, criminal activities involved in privatization processes, commercialization of education and health services, deterioration of workers' rights and the deepening of social and economic inequality. The resistance to those processes among academia, trade unions and different civil society groups was partial, weak and ineffectual.

Accession of the country to the European Union was presented by governments – centre-right and centre-left with an unconditional support of the mainstream media

– as the single-granted alternative. In the past few years there is a strong tendency of Croatian government (the coalition that has been in power since 2011 is formed by the Social-democrats, the Croatian People's party, the Party of Pensioners and a regional party) to privatize the remaining state-owned companies such as Croatian railways, Croatian electricity, Croatian airlines, etc. The government is preparing a new legislation on strategic investments, which, if implemented, will allow the sale of the remaining public assets, space and natural resources. Worker's rights will be further eroded with the near adoption of a new, very troublesome labour law, which is in line with the neoliberal policies of liberalization and deregulation of markets.

Economic and social situation became even worse since the economic recession started (2009-2014). There have been uprisings in a number of firms that are near or already have gone bankrupt; there is a high rate of unemployment (around 20% and more than 50% among the younger generations) and a great number of those not receiving salary for their work (a total of approx. 450,000 people) as well as other forms of poverty and social exclusion. Surveys inform us that the political context is determined by an acute loss of trust in politicians, parties, and political institutions. The public sees political actors, as immoral, or very susceptible to corruption.

Organized resistance against neoliberal capitalism in Croatia mainly arose from the student movement in 2009. Their contribution, based on direct democratic principles, significantly slowed down the process of commodification of knowledge and its consequences for the society. The student movement directly or indirectly influenced the development of different groups, initiatives and organizations on the left. These leftist groups opened the space for social struggle in different areas, especially those concerning economic inequality and workers' rights that have been neglected all these years.

**THE METHODS OF POLITICAL ACTIONS:
INSTITUTIONAL AND
NON-INSTITUTIONAL TYPES
OF ORGANIZING**

Organization and action, with regard to the different relations with the institutions of the system, can be divided into an institutional and a non-institutional model that strives for transformation. Types of organization falling under the **institutional model** are the following: radical left-wing political parties emerging from social movements, workers' unions and civil society organizations representing wider "new social movements" (green, feminist, peace etc.) dealing with public policy change. Types of organization belonging to the **non-institutional model** are: direct-democratic unions, social movements based on direct democratic governance model or direct-democratic ideological organizations.

Methods of the institutional models are: participation in parliamentary elections, referendum, participatory budgeting, participation in governance, action through the legal system, protests and even legal strikes. **Methods of action belonging to the non-institutional type** are: protests, wild strikes, occupations of government institution buildings and public spaces, occupations of the work place, general assemblies (in the work place, the local community, school...). It is important to mention that different types of institutional and non-institutional organizing can overlap in practice.

Institutional models

Left Party: our group holds generally an affirmative view of party organizing, but with some critical reservation.

Apart from criticizing bourgeois, right-wing (also, liberal and conservative) parties, which are at best reformists of the capitalist state, history also teaches us about the Communist Parties, which in certain historical sequences successfully contributed to the revolution (Yugoslavia, Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cuba, China, Albania). The critique of state socialism today should be quite clear about the problems of democratic centralism, Party internal purges and external repression of opposition. However, the last decade has seen the emergence of a new type of Left Party that moves away from the social-democratic, neoliberal Parties – especially, in the South America, in Venezuela, but also in Bolivia and Ecuador a new socialist orientation has been developing with a strong link between progressive movements and Left Parties.

The Left Party should not have a goal to remain in constant opposition or become reformist but to take over the state power. Also recently in respect of Euro-crisis, in the light of millions protesting on the streets in Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, and Greece nothing changed in terms of economic conditions. Thus, for example, the decision of Syriza to make a Left front of movements, different parties and groups expands the link between the movement and party. The critical question remains, how does the Left party – after taking state power—participate in the process of dissolving, altering or destroying the existing state apparatuses, and how does it remain accountable to its material base and movements? Apart from Greece, and the newly formed ‘United Left’ in Slovenia, it is too early to speak of other Left Parties in the region.

Participatory budgeting (PB): after the victory of the Workers’ Party in the municipal elections in Brazil, budgeting was implemented as innovative institutional arrangement from the perspective of economic democracy. Citizens both as individuals and through their civil socie-

ty organizations participate in all three phases of the local investment budgetary process: the definition of the citizens' preferences, the translation of these preferences into the investment budget, and the monitoring and control of its execution. In a positive light, we can see this as an attempt at a more just redistribution and widening participation, especially of the poor people in their right to the city.

However, there is a series of limitations in the idea of participatory budgeting: firstly, the inadequate financial resources of City Hall – there are only a few items of the budget that the participatory councils can decide upon, thus, the PB process cannot really control the whole circulation and investment process. Secondly, it is only concerned with the government budget in economies that are predominantly private. As an important example of the sort of limitations this yields concretely, PB in Porto Alegre produced a very limited number of income generating programs for the low-income population. Thirdly, the inherent weakness of this model is that it deals only with the standpoint of distribution. The process of distribution (which is already limited by the resources) is separated from the realm of production. At best it can improve conditions of urban life, but does not address the relations of exploitation. Thus, without the link to the realm of wages, proper economy, this approach is exposed to the good will of the city council. In Croatia, for example, this practice was imposed from above, with a mere consultative role.

Referendum is also an important institutional instrument of most democratic practices; it can be a very important political tool especially in times of economic crisis. However, it should be said that the rights of minorities and human rights should not be decided on referendums. Slovenia's frequent referendums and Croatia's re-

cent referendum on same sex marriage show the complexity of referendums in practice. Since June 2013, Croatia witnessed a strong backlash against LGBT rights and freedoms, initiated by an interconnected group of a handful of “civil initiatives” called “In the Name of the Family”, with close ties to the Catholic Church. This initiative collected enough citizens’ signatures to initiate a referendum on introducing a constitutional provision that defines marriage as a life bond achieved exclusively between a man and a woman. They collected roughly 750,000 signatures during a two-week period in May. Once it became clear they would collect far more signatures than necessary, a public debate about the essence of this referendum ensued. Namely, regarding the real intention of this initiative: to preemptively ban same-sex marriage (as constitutional provisions are extremely hard to change once introduced). Although only one third of the citizens turned out to vote at the referendum, more than 65 percent of voters casted their votes in favour of introducing a provision that regulates marriage as the union between a man and a woman into the Constitution, while 33,59 percent or 481,314 voters casted their votes against the inclusion of such a definition of marriage in the constitution. However, the best evidence of the manipulation of the referendum question and the complete vagueness of the “In the Name of the Family” initiatives can be seen in the fact that the initiators themselves drastically changed their position with respect to the content and effects of the proposed constitutional alteration. Namely, at the beginning of the process of collecting citizens’ signatures, the initiators of the referendum argued that the concrete constitutional change would not alter anything; as such a provision does not constitute discrimination, and only reaffirms the status quo. Such a claim implied that the proposed constitutional change would not limit the practical rights of same-sex communities

but will only reserve the existing institution of marriage for heterosexual communities in the long-term. Over time, the initiators gave up on this point of view. After the Ministry of Administration initiated the process of public debate regarding the draft proposal of the Civil Partnership Bill, the initiators harshly condemned the expansion of rights for same-sex couples, despite it being a commitment made by the Republic of Croatia according to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights.

On the one hand, the referendum campaign which prompted the unification of 87 civil society organizations, unions, ruling parties and the President of the Republic of Croatia against the introduction of the provision according to which marriage would be a community exclusively reserved for men and women to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, demonstrated that the Republic of Croatia has conscious, progressive citizens who are committed to human rights. However, on the other hand, it showed that there exist a large number of citizens that are unable to comprehend basic democratic values, such as the respect for the rights of minorities by the majority, and that not much progress has been made in reducing homophobia and transphobia in Croatian society.

For the region it would definitely be a step forward to include the right to a referendum (Kosovo does not have it), or at least make it easier to organize the process of collecting signatures (Croatia, Albania).

(Transition to non-institutional) Workers' Unions:

After World War II, the class compromise in the centre of capitalism between reformed unions and economic elites led to the creation of the welfare state in which the greatest part of the workers' movement was co-opted by the capitalist system, while its radical part remained isolated

and practically destroyed. Today, the ideology, politics, strategy and practice of workers' unions is founded in the ideology of social dialogue between the state, the employer and the worker, and it is closely tied to particular economic interests of the workers (wages and working conditions) within the nation-state. For this reason, it is necessary to revitalize the workers' movement in a way to frame it as a fighting organization of the working class which is a clear antagonist of the capitalist socio-economic formation. We consider that working class must also include the unemployed, precarious workers, the retired, the industrial proletariat, farmers, students and all others who are forced to sell their labour in order to survive. We believe that the revitalization of the workers' movement can be achieved through the creation of direct-democratic anti-capitalist unions, the formation of autonomous direct-democratic unions independent of union centres, as well as the radicalization of the existing unions through cooperation with anti-capitalist organizations.

Non-institutional models

Direct Democracy: is a principle of collective decision making in which everyone who is interested in the decision can participate, where everyone has the right to vote, and an equal right to participate in the discussion, where the horizontal structure is the base of the system. Delegates who do not have the right to negotiate or decide on behalf of the body they represent, and who are entrusted with the tasks, are responsible for the implementation of decisions. The basic principles on which direct democracy is founded on are horizontality, solidarity, openness, voluntariness, interchange ability, awareness and responsibility. Related to direct democracy is the

question of mobilization in the political and in the socio-economical sphere (workers' control etc.), where institutional hindrances are many. It is very common if we ask people about the possibility of their involvement, they would answer that the only thing they want is an honest and caring government, and a more human owner. We are in the midst of an ideological struggle, which the Right has been winning for some time. People do not believe in their capacities because they are told that either they lack technical competence, or are manipulated by political experts that exploit their grievances in the guise of collective identity. That is why before speaking about the result, we need to stress the necessity of mobilization as a precondition for any kind of mass movement or mass organization. We need to mobilize common people by breaking the neoliberal hegemony, offering them not only new and viable propositions, but also building some kind of emancipatory utopia, part of which is even the self-organizing, the self-ownership and the self-management of the political and the socio-economical sphere. On the other hand we need to mobilize people practically by rethinking the role of emancipatory vanguards, not in the sense of old-style Leninism, but in the sense of trying to connect ourselves as small groups with the general population at large, be part of them, and thus build common struggles together.

General Strike is the simultaneous strike of a large number of workers in the majority of the branches of the economy. This is a situation in which the entire society comes to a stand-still due to a giant strike. Even though the strike is a form of economic direct action, a general strike always has a distinct political character, as it expresses a fighting unity of the working class, setting demands on behalf of society towards the ruling class, such as the withdrawal of legislation and the abolishing of

planned austerity measures. Historically speaking, general strikes have achieved things such as the eight-hour working day, a right to union organizing, etc. Also, general strikes have been used to bring about political change (e.g. the general strike in Serbia in 2000 culminated in the toppling of the Milošević regime), and even revolutionary change (the revolution in Spain started with a general strike in 1936). Even if the general strike starts with small demands, it carries a moment of unpredictability, as there is no possibility of knowing in advance how long the general strike will last and how it will develop, especially if social movements participate as well.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From a more theoretical perspective our discussions could be summed up in two visions/models that can bring social and revolutionary change towards workers' management and control over the means of (re)production: 1) predominantly institutional (Left Parties, trade unions, referendum movements etc.) and 2) predominantly non-institutional, direct democratic mass union organization, autonomous spaces and affinity groups. The profound social transformation arrives only if there is cooperation between these forms.

A possible future for the Balkan political platform should have a set of minimal denominators, without imposing the forms of political actions. These denominators are, at first negative: anti-capitalist struggle (struggle against privatization of commons, of social wealth, of education, health and pension system, public services, etc.), anti-patriarchal, anti-nationalist, anti-fascist, anti-militarist etc. More positive political programmatic points include workers' control over the means of production and reproduction, movement towards a classless and stateless

society based on the principles of equality, justice, and emancipation and the destruction of forms of exploitation and domination.

A more concrete goal ahead for left movements should be the establishment of new anti-capitalist unions, in parallel with the radicalization of the official trade unions to work more in the area of education and youth mobilization to continue ideological and hegemonic struggles, and to struggle for meaningful democratization and participation in politics, society and economy. This should include the building of a true Balkan International to achieve common goals.



ISBN 978-953-56086-8-4



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