

The pseudo-left and the plenums in Bosnia

Ognjen Markovic, Paul Mitchell
22 March 2014

Protests that erupted last month in Bosnia were the product of the rising anger of workers over disastrous unemployment levels and abysmal economic conditions caused by years of European Union and International Monetary Fund-dictated austerity measures. Unemployment has remained at around 40 percent (60 percent among young people) for years, the average monthly wage is €420 (\$570), and the minimum wage is less than half that. At the same time an elite has become super-rich and controls the political apparatus.

The protests originated in heavily working class Tuzla, Bosnia's third largest city, after the closure of four privatized bankrupt factories threw thousands out of a job without redundancy pay. By February 8, the protests had spread to other areas, including the capital Sarajevo, with many government offices set on fire. Several local governments resigned.

Following the protests, assemblies, or plenums, appeared first in Tuzla then in Sarajevo, Mostar and some smaller towns. According to the Edinburgh University-based "Europeanisation of Citizenship in the Successor States of the Former Yugoslavia" project, the Tuzla plenum was set up when "group of workers came together with several activists from various organisations—former members of the Students' Movement Tuzla, some of the workers from [bankrupt detergent company] DITA, activists from the political organization Lijevi [Left Party], public intellectuals and activists—to formulate the next steps."

Lijevi is a new pseudo-left party with a vaguely reformist programme. According to General Secretary Miroљub Radomirovic, interviewed on the web site of the French New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), its founders were all members of the multi-ethnic Social Democratic Party (SPD), successor to the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who left after it formed a coalition in 2010 with the ethnic Bosniak Party of Democratic Action founded by communalist Alija Izetbegovic.

"We first founded the NGO Revolt to criticize their broken promises. But gradually, the NGO lost its offensive and political aggression. So we decided to establish a true leftist party," Radomirovic added.

An example of how they work as an adjunct of the bourgeois state is provided by Radomirovic:

"We put pressure on the government to check all privatisation contracts in our township. If it turns out that these contracts were not met, they will be cancelled. There are also elements of prosecution if they have been destroyed..." In other words, if privatisations are carried out legally they are OK.

This and other Lijevi programmatic formulations became the basis of the plenum pronouncements. They refute the claims made by various pseudo-left organisations that the plenums represent the voice of the working class and constitute organs of self-government, and even soviets. It makes a mockery of the open letters signed by

political operators such as Tariq Ali and Slavoj Zizek calling on "the international community to recognize the civic plenums and assemblies as legitimate expressions of Bosnian citizens' political will."

One of the most rapturous declarations is a February 22 statement by Workers Struggle (Radnicka Borba), a Croatian party linked to the United Secretariat (USec), entitled, "The Exceptional Meaning of the Tuzla Plenum." The NPA is the USec's French section.

The United Secretariat arose from an opportunist tendency within the Fourth International, led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, that broke from Trotskyism in the 1950s, claiming that the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, the social democratic parties in the West, and the bourgeois national movements could all serve as vehicles for socialism provided sufficient pressure was applied to push them to the left. The Pabloites liquidated section after section of the Trotskyist movement around the world.

Having been wholly integrated into official bourgeois politics, the Pabloites now act as cheerleaders and apologists for military interventions and regime change operations of the major imperialist powers. They have proclaimed first the Transitional National Council in Libya and then the Local Coordinating Committees in Syria to be popular revolutionary bodies, dismissing all evidence of imperialist manipulation and legitimising the role of pro-Western stooges and facilitating civil war in both countries and the bombing of Tripoli.

In Ukraine, the Pabloites took the same approach to the "EuroMaidan" protests that brought to power a Western-backed regime of fascists and oligarchs.

The same dirty game is being played in Bosnia where, according to Workers Struggle, the plenum is "a new political institution" dominated by the working class that is supposedly overcoming ethnic divisions. What is being created, Workers Struggle writes, is the "embryo of a new government," a development that "represents the most important political event of recent decades, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in the whole region..."

The writer declares breathlessly that "the first time such a forum was organised at the scale of an entire city was in St. Petersburg in 1905."

To compare the Tuzla plenum with the 1905 St. Petersburg Soviet is to blind workers to reality and is historically false. Led by Leon Trotsky, the Soviet was a revolutionary body of world historic significance signifying an attempt by the working class to establish control of society. It was an instrument of dual power, taking over government functions, creating militias, organising strikes, passing resolutions, including the introduction of an eight-hour day and the cancellation of the foreign debt and preparing for an armed insurrection. The 1905 Revolution, which gave birth to the Soviet, was a dress rehearsal for the Russian Revolution in October 1917.

How does this organisation dedicated to the revolutionary overthrow

of capitalism compare with the Bosnia plenums? Have the plenum organisers set themselves the task of opposing the whole social order?

The plenums, which are dwindling in size, are dominated by members of the pseudo-left, particularly Lijevi, who have killed popular enthusiasm by using them as a tool for pressuring the authorities to carry out an agenda that echoes US calls for constitutional and administrative reforms in Bosnia.

Over the recent period, the US, for both financial and geopolitical reasons, has grown increasingly dissatisfied with the intransigence of local politicians and the European Union's failure to bring about a more unified less costly state, faster accession to the EU and NATO, further social cuts and a reduction in the influence of Russia in the region. It financed a group of experts, who put together 188 recommendations to restructure the FBiH, which were accepted for debate in the Bosnian Parliament last year.

The video footage of the ninth Tuzla plenum shows this. Discussion is limited to a predetermined agenda, in line with general rules first articulated by Tuzla University Professor Nedžad Ibrahimovic that impose a ban on political parties. The draft under discussion is limited to "practical" demands directed at local authorities.

The starting moderator is Lijevi central committee member Gordan Isajbegovic. Another moderator is Damir Arsenijevic, described by the *New York Times* as "a psychoanalyst who has studied and lectured in Britain" and who "participated in Occupy protests in Oakland, Calif."

Various guests are introduced, who all hide their ideological and political positions and identify themselves only by name. Drazen Crnomat declares, "I hope that plenums ... are going to change this Dayton paradigm"—a reference to the US-brokered 1995 Dayton Agreement, which ended the almost four-year war in Bosnia waged by the West under the guise of humanitarian intervention and the defence of self-determination. Academia.edu lists "Critical Theory" and "Frankfurt School" among Crnomat's "research interests." He has written articles calling for change to the Dayton constitution that go back only to 2011.

Vuk Bacanovic, the next speaker, is also linked to Lijevi. Like Isajbegovic, he was a member of the Unified Organization for Socialism and Democracy (JOSD), a Bosnian group whose stated aim is "to unite individuals of various anti-capitalist convictions (Marxists, anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, Trotskyists, situationists, left-communists, euro-communists, adherents of democratic socialism and others) in a single organization..."

In 2012, JOSD organized a "left-oriented festival", AntiFest, with the help of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (South-East Europe), associated with the Left Party in Germany. It undertakes a wide range of projects funded by the German Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Development and Cooperation. Panel speakers at AntiFest included several members of Lijevi, one of whom, Emin Eminagic, has a February 6 article on the Foundation web site "Yours, mine, ours—We're all in this together now!" about the Tuzla protests.

The minutes of the seventh Sarajevo plenum held on February 28 declare the plenums to be a means of working with the state apparatus by facilitating "new form of communication between citizens and the institutions ... where citizens ... can express their dissatisfaction with the government, air and discuss opinions on social problems..."

The demands made at the plenum were a plea to the local government to urgently convene the local parliament, and an appeal to the authorities to "finally put the interests of society above party and private" interests and "provide adequate space for work" to the Sarajevo plenum.

In their deliberations about how the plenums are overcoming ethnic divisions in Bosnia, the Pabloites avoid any mention of their own criminal role in fomenting them in the first place.

The dismemberment of Yugoslavia beginning in the early 1990s provided NATO and the US with an opportunity to project their military power well beyond their traditional boundaries. This was based on carving out a series of ethnically based mini-states completely dependent on Western finance capital and the transnational corporations.

Ex-Stalinist bureaucrats Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Franjo Tudjman in Croatia joined with communalist politicians such as Alija Izetbegovic in Bosnia to deliberately stoke up ethnic chauvinism and block Yugoslav workers from conducting a united struggle against the social crisis created by the bureaucracy's own pro-capitalist economic policies.

For Marxists, the crisis demanded a struggle for the unification of the working class throughout the region on the basis of the strategic demand for a socialist federation of the Balkans. Instead, the pseudo-left groups hailed the formation of independent states of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as the historic realization of national self-determination and emancipation for the people of the Balkans. They lined up behind Western vilification of the Serbs and US-NATO "humanitarian" intervention in the Balkans on the pretext of defending Bosnia.

In 1993, at the height of the Bosnian War, the Pabloites (*Socialist Outlook* in the UK and the Revolutionary Communist League in France) helped organize Workers Aid to Bosnia alongside Cliff Slaughter's Workers Revolutionary Party. While the WRP raised the slogan "Open the Northern Route," a militarily strategic corridor to Tuzla that was the focus of a triangular struggle between Serb, Croat and Moslem forces, Socialist Outlook raised the demand to "Open Tuzla Airport", which had been closed by Serb shelling. Both demands were directed at pressuring the imperialist powers to intervene.

The "Road to Tuzla" was the first occasion the Pabloites called for military intervention. It was a defining moment in their evolution from a middle class radical movement and assimilation into bourgeois politics. With the entire Dayton project breaking down, they step forward to micro-manage the situation in the interests of European and US imperialism. The plenums are not instruments for galvanising working class opposition, but a means to control and subordinate it to a reform agenda dictated by Washington.



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