

# The rightward gallop of the Bosnian pseudo-left

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The protests that erupted two months ago in Bosnia were an expression of working class anger over disastrous unemployment levels and abysmal economic conditions caused by years of European Union- and International Monetary Fund-dictated austerity measures.

The protests originated in heavily working class Tuzla, Bosnia's third largest city, and spread to other areas, including the capital, Sarajevo. Many government offices were set on fire and several local governments resigned.

Following the protests, assemblies, or plenums, appeared, first in Tuzla, then in Sarajevo, Mostar and some smaller towns. They were dominated politically by a number of pseudo-left groups and individuals who claimed that the plenums represented the voice of the working class and constituted organs of self-government, even soviets.

Chief among these is a group called Lijeви (the Lefts). Its web site has a three-sentence introduction entitled "Who are Lijeви?" which describes the organization as "a new political movement ... calling on all people with an open mind and progressive ideas, who refuse to sink into apathy and pessimism, to join us..." The brief statement declares, "There is no alternative to action," and speaks of "democratic socialism, secularism, feminism, anti-fascism and sustainable development."

Lijeви was officially formed in April 2012. One of its leaders, Emin Eminagic, speaking of student protests that broke out after the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, has explained that they "gave birth to a group of young people who started thinking politically and trying to create a better future for the country." He continues: "[T]here is [now] a political party which was formed by former student activists, called Lijeви, which uses plenums as decision-making mechanisms in their

base organisations."

Eminagic has an MA in Nationalism Studies from Central European University in Budapest and did an internship at the Centre for Security Studies, a Sarajevo-based think tank led by Bosnian Foreign Ministry officials and financed by, among others, NATO, USAID, the European Commission and various European governments.

Lijeви has its origins in organisations such as Dosta! (Enough!) and the Unified Organization for Socialism and Democracy (JOSD). The latter defined as its mission "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 September 2009, Dosta and JOSD organized a "Resistance Forum" that hosted figures such as Francois Sabado and Lucien Perpette, leading members of the Pabloite United Secretariat (USec). The USec broke from Trotskyism in the 1950s. Attributing a revolutionary role to the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, the social democratic parties in the West, and the various bourgeois national movements around the world, it liquidated section after section of the Fourth International.

Between 2010 and 2012, JOSD organized three "left-oriented" festivals in Sarajevo. It did so in conjunction with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, the think tank of the Left Party (Die Linke) in Germany, a bourgeois party fully committed to private property, the market economy and the capitalist state. Called AntiFest, the festivals provided a platform for various international pseudo-lefts. In March 2014, Lijeви hosted Olivier Besancenot, the leader of the French Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). He, in turn, praised the city of

Tuzla as “the unknown capital of the Europe of workers and peoples.”

The lack of principles and demoralisation of this Dosta and JOSD layer are evident in their political evolution. One former JOSD leader, Salmedin Mesihovic, a history professor at Sarajevo University, recently penned an article declaring, “If you are into sadomasochism, create or be one of the creators of a [political] party among the South Slavs, i.e., the western Balkaners.” The most vocal Dosta leader, Demir Mahmutcehajic, is now a local MP of the Social Democratic Party, the successor to the Stalinist League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Especially indicative is the evolution of journalist Vuk Bacanovic, a long-time leading member of JOSD and chief columnist on the Lijevi web site. Once upon a time, Bacanovic railed against inequality, peppering his writings with revolutionary-sounding language and quotes from Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

However, by 2012, as JOSD was shedding its skin and mutating into Lijevi, Bacanovic was bemoaning the “several dozen Trotskyist internationals [engaged] in internecine warfare” and noting that “contemporary revolutionary movements seem to completely pass them by, or, even worse, are being bypassed by them.”

In a March 20, 2014 article entitled “What are the plenums doing wrong?” Bacanovic writes that the Sarajevo plenum is dominated by “non-governmental sector employees” and that this “repels people.” He then criticizes as “partially utopian” or “unreal” demands for various social benefits, declaring, “Instead of short-term solutions like generous social benefits, the only present way to prosperity is ... through creating opportunities for work. Concretely, what could be demanded is that 20 percent of the budget at all governmental levels continuously go to ... development banks and industrial funds” run by the “professional investment houses.”

In other words, more public money for the banks, and social benefits only to the extent that the capitalists can afford them. Wealth redistribution, mentioned for good measure, is postponed indefinitely.

Bacanovic concludes, “This then is primary, and then we can talk of progressive taxes, workers’ participation, self-management, new democratic socialism and other progressive policies. Plenums ... are the most progressive social phenomenon... and exactly

because of that they must grow, first of all by realizing that they cannot overnight (and in the end, ever) replace lawmaking and executive power.”

The pseudo-left of JOSD/Lijevi treat with contempt major historical issues and associate with forces with longstanding counterrevolutionary records. They have rapidly ended up abandoning their limited reformist agenda.

Their social base is the middle class: university professors and post-grad youth aiming for academic and similar careers, journalists, lawyers and other professionals. The social outlook of this layer is not a striving for a complete overhaul of capitalist society for the benefit of the oppressed majority, but rather a grasping for their own social advancement and a more equitable income distribution within the richest 10 percent of the population.

The construction of a genuinely revolutionary party is possible only on the basis of firm historical principles and the theoretical conquests achieved through generations of class struggle. As opposed to various pseudo-lefts, only the International Committee of the Fourth International, which publishes the *World Socialist Web Site*, is guided by such a perspective and grounded in such principles.

As part of the struggle to increase our influence in the former Yugoslavia, we are pleased to announce that we will be re-establishing our Serbo-Croatian page on the WSWs in the near future. We are confident it will serve as a beacon for the most advanced layers of workers and youth in the region.



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