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Former Yugoslavia

New resistance network

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On September 12-13, 2009 a Forum of Resistances took place in Sarajevo, on the initiative of DOSTA. The DOSTA movement was started by young people in Sarajevo who had organized two radical demonstrations protesting against the inertia of the government in the face of criminality and the assassination of a teenager by petty criminals. The participants who were invited to the Forum of Resistances came from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia, as well as from France, Greece and Poland. Activists in Croatia, involved at the same time in a demonstration against the government, sent a message of sympathy.

Lucien Perpette: Can you indicate the reasons for becoming involved and participating in the Forum?

Rastko Mocnik: In recent years, there have been demonstrations of students and young people in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb and Ljubljana. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, these young people have established a resistance network which covers the whole country – quite an exploit in this republic, which is torn apart by nationalist politics. In April-May 2009, students occupied several faculties in the big cities of Croatia [1]. In the Faculty of Arts of Zagreb, capital of the country, the “blockade”, during which the students organized an alternative university, lasted more than a month. In Ljubljana, in autumn 2007, young global justice campaigners took part in the big trade-union demonstration against the neoliberal policies of the government and for a wages policy indexed on the evolution of profits [2] At that time, the economy was experiencing considerable growth, whereas wages were stagnating. In addition, young people are among the groups in society who are most affected by the neo-liberal restoration of peripheral capitalism: sociologists speak about “discriminatory flexibilisation of young people”. In Slovenia, 37.2 per cent of the jobs occupied by young people between 14 and 29 years old were precarious in 2001 (as against 10.1 per cent for those aged 30 and above) [3]. The situation is particularly unfavourable for university graduates of the Universities: in Slovenia, the demand for jobs requiring a university degree is almost double of that of the number of jobs on offer.

The youth of ex-Yugoslavia have responded to the deterioration of their situation by a growing politicization. In Ljubljana, last April, young people organized an antifascist demonstration on the anniversary of the foundation of the antifascist front in 1941: this very successful demonstration targeted local neo-fascism as well as the attempts at historical revisionism which are being conducted in Slovenia by the bourgeois political establishment.

The revolt of youth in Greece opened new perspectives for questions that concern the whole of Europe. In ex-Yugoslavia, there is a strong convergence between movements: they defend the gains of the socialist Welfare State and demand their reintroduction, as in Croatia where the slogan of the students still remains: “Free Education for All!”

The exchange of information and points of view between those involved in these initiatives was thus an event not to be missed. Especially since the problems which they confront cannot be dealt with within the framework of one only country.

Lucien Perpette: What do you think of the emergence and the activities of the movement DOSTA in Sarajevo?

Rastko Mocnik: This movement is impressive: whereas at the beginning, it seemed to be just a quasi spontaneous movement of street riots, it was very quickly organized into a network which links together the most important cities in the country. At this point in time, it is probably the only politicized network which breaks through the barriers imposed by nationalist politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although it is recent and composed of young people of whom the

majority did not have any previous political experience, it is a politically mature movement, and one which thinks in a strategic way: their demands are radical (re-establishment of the social state), but they have succeeded in avoiding any kind of adventurous extremism.

Lucien Perpette: What is your opinion of the various speakers and the ideas that they put forward in the meeting?

Rastko Mocnik: I was surprised both by the anti-capitalist radicalism of the participants and by the high intellectual level of the discussions. The liberal ideological hegemony that is churned out daily by the mass media obviously does not have much influence on young people. The isolation of the countries of former Yugoslavia has given rise to a thirst for ideas and theoretical conceptions. And the daily scandal of a life that is wretched and of injustices is finally starting to produce its language of resistance. These young people have access to the power of electronic technologies and are competent in making use of them. They are subjected to a scandalous degree of poverty in their material existence, they are exploited, they are deprived of access to public life, but they have found the means of emancipating themselves intellectually, ideologically. It is really impressive.

Lucien Perpette: The programme was pretty intense, because it contained videos and speeches. What do you think of this process?

Rastko Mocnik: Thanks to the passion that the participants brought into their contributions, the intensity of the meeting was completely tolerable. We should take notice of the ability of these movements to document their activities and subsequently make them more widely known. Video has proved to be a very practical, economic medium, which functions on several levels (the combination of visual information and language, an impact that is simultaneously emotional and intellectual). There is there a strong potential for mobilization. These groups publish, online and in paper form, many small journals of a fairly high level. In this way they publish documents which cannot be distributed by the privatized and commercialized mainstream media; they are frequently written by academics or other specialists. We can also observe an interesting linguistic phenomenon: whereas the nationalist policies of the ruling classes are seeking to break up the surface of the former "Serbo-Croatian" language, the practical effects of these attempts are the opposite of their intentions, because they do not prevent people from understanding each other, but on the contrary enrich the stock of vocabulary and the syntactic combinations of a language which now, while no longer claiming to be a "national language", is nevertheless still useful - or perhaps, even more useful - for the peoples of ex-Yugoslavia to start to understand each other.

Lucien Perpette: Differences emerged in the small commission charged with writing the final declaration. Can you comment on the evolution of the ideas within the commission?

Rastko Mocnik: It was an extremely instructive episode. A written discourse, being more formalized and decontextualised than oral communication, is consequently more inclined to stereotypes and ideological "presuppositions". Consequently, the first version of the final declaration which the commission had proposed was crawling with liberal stereotypes, with expressions of the "legitimate language" of the periphery of South-eastern Europe. It provoked a sharp debate which sometimes became harder. The commission withdrew to propose a new version. In so far as I could follow the approach that was taken, it seemed to me that its members made, in a few minutes, progress for which they would have required several years if they had been isolated.

Lucien Perpette: DOSTA is fundamentally antinationalist. Does this factor enable it to win over Bosnian society (in the sense of all its citizens, whatever their "nationality", religion, etc.) and how can DOSTA contribute to that? Do you think that it would be necessary to continue to organize Forums of Resistances, where should they be held and who might participate in them?

Rastko Mocnik: DOSTA is a great beginning. It is the product of the self-organization of a growing number of young people, a remarkable step forward even if we did not take account of the extremely unfavourable conditions which determine any political activity in Bosnia-Herzegovina. What will become of it in the future remains to be seen: it is to be hoped that the movement has already sufficiently transformed the political scene to open up space for left initiatives. What is certain however, is that neither DOSTA nor any other movement in ex- Yugoslavia or in the Balkans can do anything at all important within the limits of the national states, nor by its own forces alone. The very weakness of these new juridical-political constructions is a chance for broader, regional movements which could put on the agenda real problems which concern the peoples of the Balkans: the neo-colonial policies of the EU, predatory local coalitions and their complicity with transnational capital, the increasing exploitation of the masses and the very question of the legitimacy of the restoration of capitalism in the post-socialist world. That is why it is necessary to maintain and strengthen contacts between the movements of resistance, to start to synchronize activities, even to start to form a united front. From this point of view, of course, it would be necessary to involve the movements of the entire post-socialist sphere - although, in fact, this criterion is becoming increasingly inoperative: we should rather speak about the new European periphery. The socialist past then acquires a new value: as the historical experience of the peripheral Welfare State, with its specific political dynamics, and also with conquests that should not be forgotten.

Lucien Perpette: How do we move from democratic, citizens' demands to social demands which call into question the neo-liberal capitalist logic?

Rastko Mocnik: In Yugoslavia, we could observe, in a relatively short period of time, the perilous "development" which transformed the Yugoslav people (which was politically constituted in the antifascist struggle and the socialist revolution) first of all into nations (sanctioned as the body of citizens of the Federal Republics by the Constitution of 1974) and finally into identity-defined ethnic communities, the social support of the new states or, rather, of the present juridical-political constructions. This development was propelled by class struggles which up until now have not really been analyzed, but whose result was the transformation of the dominant groups of the socialist system into a new bourgeoisie with its different fractions - economic (the new owners of the means of production), political and cultural (the old bureaucracy of the cultural apparatuses, generator of nationalist ideology). The common platform of these three fractions of the new ruling class was the ideology of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, with its traditional components (human rights, the rule of law, the hegemony of juridical ideology, etc). This ideology has served to legitimate privatizations and denationalizations - thus the expropriation from the people of the wealth which they created under socialism. Thus democratic bourgeois ideology democratic has discredited itself - which is, besides, a dangerous circumstance in these times of growing poverty and sharpening social tensions. The pseudo-democratic and "national" bourgeois ideology did enormous damage during the post Yugoslav wars. Most of the post-Yugoslav politico-juridical constructions were constituted by ethnic cleansing: starting with Slovenia where the expulsion of the "non-indigenous" was done in an administrative way, with the computer, not with the rifle as elsewhere [4]. The bourgeois "democratic" and citizens' ideology does not mean very much in these conditions. Juridical-political constructions which are legitimated by nationalism and liberal "democracy" began by expropriating their populations of the wealth which they had produced in the past [5]; they continue to play the role of facilitators of the exploitation of their peoples and territories by transnational capital. Consequently, any political movement defending the interests of the working classes must start by questioning both liberal "democracy" and nationalist pretensions.

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Resolution of the Forum of Resistances of Sarajevo

The organizations and participants in the Forum of Resistances which was held in Sarajevo on 12 and 13 September, 2009 adopted the following resolution:

1. It is a fact that the world is today at a turning point, due to the failure of the neoliberal economic, political, social and cultural system. This failure postulates new solutions which would make it possible to overcome and solve the problems resulting from the crisis of the modern world.
2. This global crisis manifests itself particularly at the regional and local level; it is very obvious in the Balkans, in other words in South-Eastern Europe. The failure of the neoliberal model has further worsened the situation in these societies and in their leading political and economic circles.
3. Under cover of the fight for the self-determination of populations at the national, ethnic, religious and social level, the sole objective of the oligarchic cliques and elites is to maintain themselves in power indefinitely. They are up to their necks in the magma of corruption, they are incompetent, they have no perspectives and they bask in self-satisfaction.
4. The oligarchic cliques and elites exploit the national and religious sentiments of ordinary citizens in order to maintain themselves in power and to continue to govern following anti-progressive and anti-humanist models.
5. Over the last two decades these oligarchic cliques have demonstrated that they were represented in power by extremely mediocre individuals (the "mediocracy"). It is obvious that these mediocratic elites maintain themselves in power thanks to the interventions and the support of elements foreign to the Balkans. It is a question of the interests of multinational institutions, companies and banks and of the stabilization forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.
6. The result of all the factors mentioned above has led South-Eastern Europe into a dead end. The working class has seen all its rights taken away from it and is becoming dependent on the "god" of the neo-liberal market. A great many critical thinkers have been manipulated by the ruling class. Intellectual activity is no longer valued and is almost reduced to a form of bureaucracy or to sterile thinking. Today scientific and educational work has completely regressed.
7. The present crisis of capitalism is similar to the crisis of 1929 and is a very fertile ground for the propagation of chauvinist, nationalist, fascist and fundamentalist movements.
8. As a regroupment of different organizations and individuals, the Forum of Resistances is ready to unite all the "genuine", uncompromised, progressive, democratic and left movements into a united front. The formation of a Forum of Resistances is the first step towards the fusion of all these forces.
9. The Forum of Resistances proposes the formation of a united front with the organized movements, with the trade unions, but is opposed to any form of non-respect of the interests of the working class. The Forum of Resistances commits itself to fighting for the dignity of the living conditions of the workers.
10. The Forum of Resistances also intends to orient its activities in defence of ecological interests.
11. It is important to enrich and develop new forms of participatory democracy, in particular in the spheres of the economy, as in the other fields of social life, through which the workers and citizens can limit the powers of the bourgeoisie and the political elites. The Forum of Resistances will work for the development of the class struggle,

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activism and solidarity within the working class. Particular attention must be paid to avoiding all misuse of participatory democracy against the interests of the working class.

12. The Forum of Resistances establishes the “Coordinating Committee for South-Eastern Europe” (CCSEE).

13. 13. The Coordinating Committee for South-Eastern Europe is open to collaboration with left, progressive and democratic organizations in the countries of South-Eastern Europe. It will represent the principal network and be the “mother” organization for the above-mentioned organizations and their activities.

14. The Forum of Resistances takes note of the fact that in the territories of ex-Yugoslavia there does not exist any left party which defends the interests of the working class.

[1] see Lucien Perpette, “On the way back in Croatia and Slovenia”, *International Viewpoint* 413, June 2009

[2] see Lucien Perpette, Chris Den Hond, “Impressive mobilisation at the edge of capitalist Europe”, *International Viewpoint* 396, January 2008

[3] For reference, here are the figures for the rates of unemployment in the post-Yugoslav Republics in 2009: Kosovo 45 per cent (the highest rate of unemployment in Europe); Macedonia 31.9 per cent; Bosnia-Herzegovina 24.1 per cent (official figure; estimates give a figure of 40.4 per cent); Serbia 18.8 per cent; Croatia 14.2 per cent; Montenegro 10.48 per cent; Slovenia 8.4 per cent.

[4] At the end of February 1992, the Slovenian authorities withdrew, without warning the people concerned, the right of residence of more than 25,000 citizens of the other Republics of the former Yugoslav federation. These people found themselves, overnight and without being aware of it, in the situation of being “undocumented”. In October 2009, the consequences of this act, which has twice been declared illegal and anti-constitutional by the Constitutional Court, have still not been eliminated

[5] See Catherine Samary, *Yugoslavie: de la décomposition aux enjeux européens*, Editions du Cygne, Paris 2008.