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Belgium

Belgium: First mass mobilisation against the federal government

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After eight months of negotiations and political theatre in Belgium, the new federal coalition (N-VA, MR, Les Engagés, CD&V and Vooruit), which ranges from the right to the social liberals via the Christian Democrats and is called 'Arizona' because of the political colours of the parties that make it up, finalised its government agreement at the end of January, with the blessing of the employers. Its programme constitutes a major anti-social offensive and is already meeting with significant resistance from the population.

Declaration of social war

This government and its attacks are part of a worldwide trend towards far right extremism. To maintain their sources of profit and accumulation, the ruling classes see no other option than to dispossess the workers, by force, from a series of social conquests. But for this inhumane policy to be acceptable, it needs scapegoats, even imaginary ones. Hence the incessant media and political attacks on unemployed workers, migrants and asylum seekers, Muslims, woke people, transgender people and so on.

'Arizona' is planning a wave of anti-social, sexist and racist measures on a scale that has not been seen for decades: 22 billion in savings on workers, both employed and unemployed, documented and undocumented, and a pitiful little capital gains tax to try and make up for it. Here are just a few examples of the measures: limiting unemployment benefit to two years; forcing the long-term sick back to work; reducing the number of places in reception centres for asylum seekers by a third, but doubling the number in closed centres; withdrawing social assistance for refugees for five years; attacking retirement pensions, with particular effects on women, and cracking down on trade unions and mutual societies. All the while increasing the defence budget...

Social resistance is getting organised

The response to this declaration of social war was swift. On Thursday 13 February, 100,000 people marched through the streets of Brussels in response to a call from the common trade union front. A multitude of sectors (trade unions, feminists, anti-fascists, ecologists, among many others) mobilised against the attacks of the new federal government. This remarkable turnout represented a real acceleration in social tension.

This first showdown marks the start of a real action plan. The union leaderships have announced a general strike for 31 March. This will be a decisive stage in the balance of power, but before that, we are calling for mobilisation to continue, sector by sector: postal workers at bpost have been on a militant strike for a week now; railway workers, Audi subcontractors and teachers have already announced strikes and actions that are the embers of a broader mobilisation. It will be crucial for the feminist strike on 8 March to be part of this fight against 'Arizona', showing the harmful impact of the measures on women; the same goes for the actions on 21 March, International Day Against Racism, which will be an opportunity to denounce the murderous migration policy of the new government. The general strike on 31 March will be effective if it is supported by a broad popular mobilisation from below, going beyond a simple 24-hour work stoppage. The challenge over the next few weeks is to ensure that the protest movement continues to spread, with a clear objective: the fall of the De Wever government.

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