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Bosnia

The Exceptional Meaning of the Tuzla Plenum

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The following is an article by â€˜Radnicka Borbaâ€™ (Workers' Struggle) and first appeared on their website. It was translated into English by the blog [Bosnia-Herzegovina Protest Files](#).

The most significant gain to date of the workers' uprising in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the foundation and daily activities of the Tuzla Plenum. It's natural that in the town where the uprising began, where from the very beginning the strength of the movements' working base was most clearly expressed – which had gathered around it the students, the unemployed and pensioners – would be the first to introduce into the life of the country a new political form in the service of the oppressed.

Unlike all other governments' and parliaments, which by their very nature are necessarily bureaucratized, corrupt and represent a tool in the hands of politicians allied with tycoons and capitalists of all stripes, the Plenum is a body of the very people it represents and of their interests. For this reason, the Tuzla Plenum represents the most important political event of recent decades, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in the whole region. The layer of petty-bourgeois â€˜analysts' and â€˜journalists,' who are limited by the horizon of their â€˜national colours' and identities, can let rip their hyena-like laughter as much as they want when hearing these observations. The meaning of the Plenum isn't temporary, nor does it represent a one-off episode. However the movement develops in the following weeks and months, no one will be able to erase its existence from the memory of the working class. Whenever in the coming years workers and other oppressed groups – not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and beyond – find themselves, in their own struggles, before the question of how best to organize themselves, the way shown by Tuzla's workers will stand before them.

The plenum mode of organizing workers and allied groups has been around since the beginnings of the modern workers' movement. The first time such a forum was organized at the scale of an entire city was in St. Petersburg in 1905. In our region, in recent decades, the plenum form of organizing can be seen in the student movement – from the meetings held during the occupation of the university in Belgrade, to the plenums that were created during the blockade of universities in Croatia. However, it is precisely in Tuzla that the whole story was raised to a new and immeasurably higher level. The workers of failed enterprises in Tuzla, in cooperation with activists involved in organizing the uprising, convened a plenum at the scale of the entire town, in order to define the demands with which they will present before the Parliament of the Tuzla Canton. The extraordinary significance of the Tuzla Plenum flows from three things. First, the working-class is dominant within the Plenum, the only class that is able due to its strength and social role to put forward the framework for the creation of a new society (as opposed to the student population, which till now has been the only one represented in the organization of plenums). Besides, this Plenum doesn't represent the interests of a narrow group, but is open to the broadest masses. Finally, it seeks to realize the interests of the people in the entire city, and with its decisions has openly involved itself in the political life of the country, demanding the formation of a new government.

The Plenum has finally found the recipe in practice that would respond to the question of how the oppressed can organize outside of participation in parliaments, without appealing to corrupt governments and asking for the mercy of the ruling classes. It represents a consistent expression of understanding for how the oppressed can't rely on existing institutions and political parties, but need to self-organize and through struggle protect their interests. The Plenum, thus, isn't an organization or an informal group, or a body that should only have a consultative and temporary character. The Tuzla Plenum is a new political institution. Just as presidents, ministers, governments, parliaments exist – which serve the elite, create corruption, crime, and the impoverishment of the people – so too, on the other hand, there is the plenum, which expresses the interests of the ordinary person, and which by the way it functions prevents the abuse of power, acting as the fighting body of the movement.

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The development of the uprising in Bosnia, which would truly bring about considerable and decisive change in social and political life must include the country-wide spread of the plenums, their strengthening, networking and the creation of a joint government based on the plenary system. Parallel to this, in every place and neighbourhood local plenums should be organized, which would send delegates to the plenum for the whole city – it's only in this way that it will be possible to create a democratic and effective functioning of the plenary system. The solution cannot be based on replacing people in current governments, nor simply banning their renomination (though this can be used). The conditions in Bosnia aren't a result of corrupt politicians and greedy capitalists, but are a product of the existing economic and political system that will continue to produce such individuals as long as these systems exist. The only alternative – all power to the plenums!

At moments when the plenums pass through their natural birth pangs, and when they're only beginning to be built, it's natural that it wouldn't be fully aware of its importance and unmeasured political power. There will be many of those – some of whom will participate in its work – who will wrongly insist on its temporary and frivolous character, and it's possible that occasionally a majority of its participants – unaware of their own power and significance – will seek 'real' answers again within the framework of existing institutions and models. There will be those, as well, who will insist on its form, not on its content, who will want to transform some particular experiences and settings [of the plenums] into a fixed dogma. The plenum shouldn't be a slave to any forms, rather its rules and manner of functioning should be determined and changed according to their efficiency and the current context of the work being done (obviously, never losing sight of its directly democratic and class character).

On the other hand, all the forces seeking to preserve the current order, will want to immediately wipe the plenums' off the face of the planet and to return everything to 'normalcy' – in the embrace of the old institutions that protect their interests. It's therefore important to vigilantly protect the Plenum as the focal point and backbone of the movement. Workers, the unemployed, students and pensioners of Tuzla, be conscious of the fact that you are the embryo of a new government that is emerging from the people and demand that this government arise from the Plenum! Let the new government of the Tuzla Canton be chosen, accountable to, and at any movement replaceable by the Plenum. Let the government of the plenum forever prevent the return of the old order of things and begin building a new society!

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