

The Slovenian Upheaval

By Gal Kirn [Interviewer: Krunoslav Stojaković], April 2013

For a long time, Slovenia was dealt as a success story of the transformation period. What is the background of the present protest wave?

This successful case of transition has been deconstructed in the last months. It is important to note that in the 1990s the economic transition to free market and representative democracy took place gradually, it is true to say that there has been a kind of «Keynesian» scheme behind the transference of the social wealth into the hands of the state first (from socialisation to etatization), it was only later that through internal knowledge and power struggles that the flourishing of tycoons and domestic capital influential groups were formed. However, the ideological consensus of the partnership and the conservation of the welfare state were radically undermined in years prior to the EU entrance. It was especially in the years after 2004 that the neoliberal reforms with a new wave of privatizations started: they targeted the health care system, the pension system, the educational system, the social aid programs, and surely the further flexibilization of labour force market that went at expense of workers. At few important historical moments (with the possible introduction of flat taxation like in the Baltic model) trade unions were successful in stopping the neoliberal reforms. In the last few years, due to the straightened economic crisis and stricter monetary and fiscal control from EU (austerity policies), Slovenian economy plunged into stagnation with higher unemployment (currently according to Eurostat around 13%). Both left-centre and right-centre government pursued a set of similar economic policies that are pushing working people into the position on the periphery (PIGS-S?) and attempt to dismantle the power of the trade unions, who have moved to a very defensive position. Severe economic situation, where people don't know how to pay their bills, which is accompanied by large corruption scandals in the major political personae can be seen as the major reasons for many people to take on the streets.

How would you describe the political goals of the protests? In the beginning it was more an expression of a general disenchantment with politics and political parties.

Yes, indeed, the people were enraged with the unresolved corruption and scandals of biggest politicians and tycoons, while they-people have to pay for the crisis. This sense of injustice and the search for human dignity, that is, the desire to leave

a dignified life with future, was central feeling to the critique that was launched to the whole political establishment. Now already famous political slogans «It is enough!», «It is over with them, they are done! [Gotov je, Gotovi so!]», «They are all crooks!», «We give the Parliament, but not the street!» are circulated and supported by most of the people, while the support for the government is on a historical low (12%). The first major political goal of the uprising was the overthrow of the corrupt political class. This has been partly already fulfilled: the mayor of Maribor resigned from the office due to the public pressure in December, a few other local politicians followed, while late in February Janez Janša's government got ousted in the Parliament with a new transitory coalition taking the task of bringing Slovenian economy from the crisis were formed. But the protests go on since the program of new coalition does not have a slightness difference from Janša's. Thus, the major political goal remains the overthrow of the political establishment and the development of more direct democratic and accountable political forms, which will bring back the legitimacy and popular support for the massive changes. This bring us to the second political goal of the uprising: more than 66% of people support a gradual but deep social change of the society, while more than a third supports a revolutionary change. In other words, people are talking about a transition towards democratic socialism (this was impossible few months ago, now in mainstream media), to the real social democratic regulation, which would re-impose social mechanisms for inter-generational and inter-class solidarity. Obviously, there are many groups and paths towards social changes, one cannot ignore the view that is more moralistic: we need more sincere politicians, who would follow the rule of law. This left-liberal-moralistic critique is a part of the protests and speaks about the betrayal of historical course of independence. However, it is not the strongest tendency.

Who are the main actors of the protests?

The political agenda is thus no longer defined and molded by existing institutions or parties. It is now also being shaped by people on the streets in numerous public performances, cultural events and political discussions of new popular councils, committees, and initiatives that take extremely seriously the search for the broadest possible democratic platform. These include: Protestival (cultural workers), the Committee for Direct Democracy, the Coordinating Committee for Cultural Slovenia, the General Assembly of all-Slovenian Uprising, and the Committee for Justice and Solidarity in Society, Women for different transition, Women Social Workers, Red Radical, Today is new Day... There are also other already existing cultural and political groups that have called for engagement in civil disobedience and formulating alternative politico-economic program: from the university trade unions, the student organization Iskra to Workers-Punks

University, the Federation of Anarchist Organizing, and TRS (Party for sustainable development). In Maribor they are developing new communal direct democratic committees that would participate strongly in local politics and the candidate for new mayor came out from the uprising.... There is much talk about forming a new political party on the Left, which would further promote the agenda of the protests and the social uprising. Also important, many weeklies (the section Revolt in Sobotna Priloga, Dnevnik, Mladina, etc.) and also daily newspapers have started publishing critical contributions, which foster a new sense of solidarity and cultivate critique.

Are there any indignations that the Slovenian movement can overlap to the neighbouring states?

This is obviously an important and strategic question. This has been already happening and in this respect I see the social uprising in Slovenia as only one in the mosaic of the struggles on the periphery of European Union: Bulgarian movement for democratic change, popular struggles in Greece, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Italy – all these struggles bring into light a logic underlying structural inequalities within EU: the periphery is rising and contribution to the re-invention of popular democracy and more social politics. There were few sparkles ignited already in Croatia in previous years, I cannot say much about the situation elsewhere at the moment. What is nevertheless important is that the periphery should beyond move autarchic trap and orient the political demand to the very centre: what and how to democratize the European institutions and to regulate financial capital that reigns free in the borderless Europe? How to make the socio-economic relations between North and South more equal? Obviously, this is not only the answer to be given by the peripheral uprisings, but the major question for anyone that wishes to continue a collective project of Europe.

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