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Slovenia

# The revolt spreads

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## **Description:**

Slovenia, a country of two million inhabitants which was once the jewel in the crown of Yugoslavia's industrial economy, and the first Republic to separate from Yugoslavia and become a member of the European Union and the Euro zone, is experiencing a serious social and political crisis which could have significant repercussions for the future of other countries where capitalism has been restored.

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The revolt of the Slovene population has antecedents and the trade union organisations have already played a major role in opposing the different attempts to erode the social conquests of the post war period. A 30,000 strong demonstration organised by the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS) helped defeat the flat tax proposal of the first government led by conservative Janez Janaa. This tax would have inevitably favoured the wealthy.

Another trade union demonstration, this time 70,000 strong, succeeded in having the minimum wage fixed at 763 Euros, an exception in eastern Europe, where this minimum, when applied in other countries, is in the area of 300-400 Euros.

But as in many other European countries, this opposition and these social movements have no political reflection organised in parties. The voters only have the choice between multiple political factions which in past elections agreed on distributing the various ministerial posts among themselves and aligning on the same neoliberal policies as other European governments.

In 2012, wishing to strictly apply the austerity measures inspired by the European Commission reduction of public spending and attacks on social security, a higher pension age, cuts in the civil service the Janaa government provoked popular anger.

On November 17, 2012 a demonstration of several tens of thousands took place in the country's capital, Ljubljana, to oppose these measures. On January 23, 2013, at the initiative of the union presidents Banimir `trukelj (SVIZ) and Dunaan Semoli (ZSSS), 100,000 people stopped work in the civil service. Other workers also went on strike, notably the metalworkers in the SKEI union.

On the same day, nearly 25,000 people demonstrated in various Slovenian cities. It should also be noted that the spontaneous demonstrations began in several cities, first in Maribor, an industrial town in the north east of the country. The resignation of the town's mayor on grounds of corruption was obtained. The demonstrations spread to the capital, Ljubljana, where youth confronted the police. A veritable revolt against the "tycoons", nouveaux riches with dubiously acquired wealth, has spread.

Corruption is moreover a hidden evil which is rotting the life of society. The fact that it is hidden and that it is not possible to highlight it and punish it is also a powerful motive in the anger of the population. This sentiment has concentrated around the figure of prime minister Janaa (Slovene Democratic Union, SDS), returned at the head of a coalition government in February 2012, who before the commission investigating his case was unable to plausibly explain the origin of a sum of 210,000 Euros, which led his allies in the government to demand his resignation. But although his government no longer has a majority in Parliament, Janaa still refuses to through in the sponge, despite a poll carried out for the daily newspaper "Delo" showing that 80% of Slovenes want him to go.

The mayor of Ljubljana and head of the current main opposition party, Zoran Jankovic, a "centre left" businessman, is also accused of malpractice by the intermediary of his two sons, having not fulfilled his legal obligation to disclose an increase in his bank account of 2.4 million Euros!

The existence of the government is hanging by a thread, despite the fact the prime minister refuses to resign. Upon the announcement of a protest demonstration planned for February 8, Janaa announced that he will organise a demonstration in his support on the same day, so we are not yet finished with the refusal of the right to recognise its disqualification.

*This report was written on February 2, 2013*

## Slovenia: Interview with Luka Mesec, coordinator of the DPU

### **What are the main causes of the current political crisis and the rise of mass discontent?**

It is a political and economic crisis, a crisis of the neoliberal mode of accumulation. All the main political parties in Slovenia, right and left, accept neoliberalism. The right has imposed itself brutally, in the manner of Thatcher or Reagan, and the so-called left approves it in general, being at best reticent. This is the source of the current protests. Two years ago, the people demanded the departure of the "third way" government led by the social democrat Borut Pahor, now they demand the departure of the right wing "democratic" government, of Janez Janaa, installed a year ago.

The immediate reason for the discontent is the brutal reduction in the public sector budget, which has led to layoffs and the reduction of wages (by 8% last spring and now 5%) with the aim of preparing privatisations (telecommunications, railways, oil and so on), as well as the creation of a "dustbin bank" which has spent four billion Euros with a view to guaranteeing claims (including those of the private banks) and again a billion to recapitalise the public banks (which could also be sold off cheaply). Beyond this the government cannot conduct the social dialogue and tries to limit (indeed suppress) referendum by popular initiative. Finally we can add the corruption and clientelism of the Slovene élites.

All this leads to an escalation of protest, which is undoubtedly the most significant in twenty years. These movements have enormous popular support, according to the polls as much as 76% (whereas the government's support is at 16%). 30% of the population is even convinced that the situation could only be resolved by revolutionary action. In short, people are disappointed by the neoliberal policies imposed by the élites and want a clear alternative.

### **Some journalists present the consensus of all the social actors as one of the solutions to the crisis. What is your opinion?**

The self-styled government of national unity is the strategy of the dominant class, a sort of coalition which should transcend "ideological differences" so as to realise "essential reforms" in areas like pensions, public sector cuts, privatisation, labour market flexibility and so on. It is probable that this will be the next step of the Slovene bourgeoisie, because the governments of the right and the so called left have fallen into disrepute. But as it is our nightmare, we try to resist with all our strength to show that it is not "ideological differences" which are tearing society apart, but the class struggle. We are currently living through a class struggle, between capital and labour, which is coming towards its climax. The moment where the workers take things in hand is not far off.

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*Extracts from an interview with Luka Mesec, coordinator of the collective Delavsko-punkerske univerze (University of workers and punks) made up of students, activists and researchers present since 1998 at the University of Ljubljana. This interview was carried out by Radnicka Borba (Workers' Struggle, observer organisation of the Fourth International in Croatia) on January 21, 2013 in Ljubljana. The original, in Serbo-Croat, is available [jere](#).*