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Forms and
Methods of
Labour
Struggle
in Croatia
1990-2014**



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INTRODUCTION

The process of restauration of capitalist relations, which arguably began already during a nominally socialist social system, entered a new phase with the disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation. The spheres of ideology and institutionalized policy were henceforth shaped solely by various versions of capitalist socio-economic relations. The institution of social property was abolished along with a series of labour-related institutions of the system of self-management; social assets were nationalized and a comprehensive mass privatization was initiated.¹ Social, economic and political configu-

1 More on the initial phase of this process in: Ribnikar, Ivan: Ukidanje društvenog vlasništva (uopće i prvenstveno u Sloveniji), *Društvena istraživanja* no. 1, 1993, pp. 31–49; and Kalogjera, Dražen: Privatizacija u stabilizaciji i razvoju hrvatskog gospodarstva, *Društvena istraživanja* no. 1, 1993, pp. 51–86.

rations radically changed. As Željko Rohatinski, the future Governor of the Croatian National Bank pointed out at the very beginning of the privatization process:

“... the transformation of the property status of existing social capital, which is now beginning in the Republic of Croatia, will, due to its content and range, significantly determine the future structure of both the Croatian economy and political power in the very long term.”²

In the first ten years of the so-called transition, unemployment levels rose from 8 % in 1990 to 19.6 % in 1999, that is to 29.4 % if we take into account those who while employed received no wages. In the same period, the rate of unionized workers declined from 90% to 50 %, while membership in the largest trade union confederation dropped by half.³

The analysis presented here seeks to detect some of the lines of continuity and discontinuity of workers' struggles since the period preceding the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the present. As indicators of these phenomena, we analyse certain methods and practices of workers' organizing, observed in terms of the frequency of their occurrence. In addition to the frequency of occurrence, we analyse the phenomena with respect to the form they acquired in certain periods, their quantitative and qualitative traits and the trajectory of their historical development. The following phenomena were observed: the occupation of companies as a method of workers' struggle, the appearance of so-called Headquarters for the Defense of Companies, and the engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in workers' struggles. Special attention

2 Cited in Kalogjera, 1993, p. 53.

3 Kokanović, Marina: The Cost of Nationalism: Croatian labour, 1990-1999, in: Crowley, Stephen and Ost, David (ed.): *Workers after Workers' States* (Labor and Politics in Postcommunist Eastern Europe), Boston, 2001, pp. 141-157.

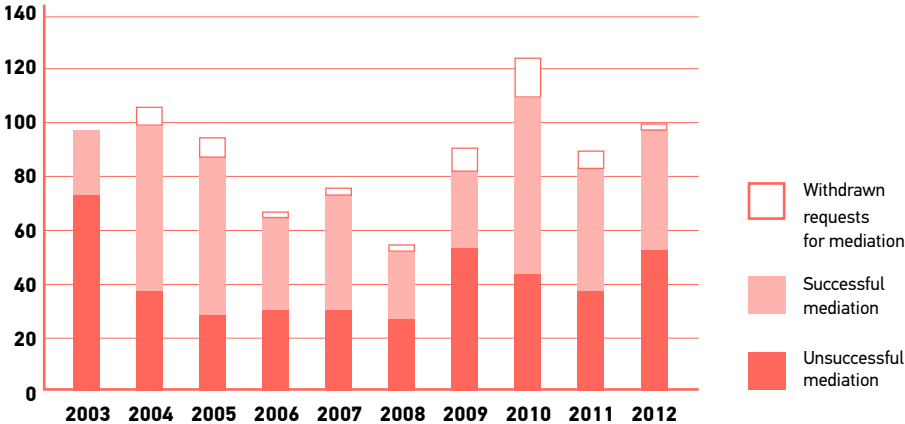
will be given to a detailed analysis of two strikes organized in 2013: the strike in the national airline company Croatia Airlines and the strike in the sector of humanitarian demining.

In order to present, at least to some extent, the broader context in which these particular struggles took place, we will provide an outline of the quantitative dynamics of industrial conflict for the period 2003-2013 on the basis of mediation statistics kept by the Croatian Independent Service for Social Partnership. These statistics allow us to determine the overall number of strikes in the given period due to the fact that every legally conducted strike had to go through mediation proceedings, which were officially recorded by the mentioned agency. The underlying assumption behind this method is that every unsuccessful mediation automatically resulted in a strike⁴. However, it is necessary to take note of the fact that taking this automatism as given can lead to a certain degree of error in the results. In other words, we must keep in mind that the aforementioned automatism did not fully apply in practice, i.e. that not all unsuccessful mediations necessarily resulted in a strike. On the other hand, these mediation statistics do not take into account so-called “wildcat” strikes. Bearing in mind these problems, we suggest that the provided data be taken with a grain of salt in terms of the absolute numbers presented and be instead read as an indicator of trends.

4 Insights gained in conversation with Mario Iveković (active in unions since 1994, first as a union representative of the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia for the City of Zagreb from 1995 to 1999, afterwards as president of the New Union, from 2002) and Tomislav Kiš (active in unions since 1980, general secretary of the New Union since 2002). Interview conducted by the authors, October 7, 2013.

Figure 1 Mediation statistics for the period 2003-2012 measured by success rate, obtained from the data of Independent Service for Social Partnership (white – withdrawal of request for mediation; light red – successful mediation; dark red – unsuccessful mediation).

Mediation statistics measured by success rate (2003 - 2012)





THE OCCUPATION OF COMPANIES AS A METHOD OF WORKERS' STRUGGLES

When assessing the importance of individual cases of company occupations by the workers (but also the overall dynamics of the application of this method of struggle), it is necessary to take into account both the period in which such actions took place and the historical legacy of socialist self-management. The entire decade of the 1990s was permeated with strong nationalist resentments inextricably linked to a form of anti-communism characterized by its deep hostility towards organizations, institutions and practices established in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and thus perceived as part of the Yugoslav socialist project. While the issues of the evolution of the hegemony of this ideological framework, its accompanying rhetoric and reception, would require a more nuanced approach than can be offered here, it is nonetheless possible to (roughly) identify two distinct periods in its evolution: 1) the war years (1991–1995), marked by the total ideological domination of nationalism; and 2) the second half of the 1990s, marked by its gradual weakening. The change of government in 2000, when a coalition led by the Social Democrats ended the ten-year rule by the conservative Croatian Democratic Union (CDU; HDZ – Hrvatska demokratska zajednica), represented a sort of breaking point in the dominant ideological formation. In the following years, liberalism to a certain extent mitigated and transformed the nationalist component, while nationalist anti-communism had to concede part of the ideological terrain to its liberal counterpart. This ideological climate had important consequences for workers' struggles. To evoke, for example, the practice of self-management in the 1990s (especially up to 1995) and thereby challenge the incontestable management prerogatives of the new owners of companies, let alone take control of company premises or some segment of the production process,

meant to risk accusations for anti-Croat activity and siding with the enemy, and hence to accept the possibility of punishment proportionate to these charges.

An illustrative example of this scenario is the struggle of the workers of *Slobodna Dalmacija*, a daily newspaper established in 1943 by Dalmatian partisans. Having refused to function as a propaganda organ for the nationalist regime, *Slobodna Dalmacija* became the target of brutal disciplining. As part of the disciplining campaign, among other things, “protest marches” against the ostensibly “anti-Croat” position of the newspaper were organized. One of the functions of these marches was certainly to legitimize retribution against the newspaper in the name of “the will of the people”. However, these endeavors sometimes resulted in effects opposite to those intended. One such example was the attempt to stage a protest in front of the newspapers building by mobilizing the workers of the Split industrial zone and providing them with false information on the location and purpose of the protest. But these efforts led to a debacle: having found out in time about the real protest destination, most of those who had gathered quickly abandoned the protest. Parallel to these actions, the government confiscated company assets and installed a new management. The workers responded by going on strike. As a consequence, *Slobodna Dalmacija* failed, for the first time in its 50 year history, to appear on the newsstands.⁵

The strike of the *Slobodna Dalmacija* workers included several elements of the earlier observed method: the rejection of the decision on the transfer of ownership and the installment of a new management, but also the establishment of the so-called workers’ watch. A brief comment on the strike and the events preceding it by Viktor Ivančić, a Croatian journalist best known as a former editor-in-chief of the satirical anti-regime weekly *Feral Tribune*, and

5 Srdan Kaić: *Okupacija u sedam slika*, *Feral Tribune*, no. 673.

himself a participant in the strike, provides insights into the character and course of action and the atmosphere in which it took place.

“... the strike in Slobodna Dalmacija, held in March 1993, was led by the union, although it was not primarily socially motivated; rather, it was a response to political and state repression, an attempt to maintain the independent position of the paper and an editorial policy which would not be subject to political directives.”

At the time, Slobodna Dalmacija was, besides Novi list from Rijeka, the only remaining independent daily in Croatia. The company underwent the transfer of ownership under the so-called “Marković law” [this law gave priority to privatization by insiders – employees and managers] so that it was the employees themselves who purchased the company shares. The state (that is, the ruling CDU) then annulled the transfer of ownership – unlike the ones conducted in Novi list, or, say, Rovinj Tobacco Factory – and imposed a new administration. Most journalists did not want to accept the enforced changes since it was clear that the aim of this violent measure was to radically change the editorial policy of the paper in such a way that it unconditionally obey the authorities. Therefore, under trade union leadership, we went on strike. This was in fact the last act of resistance in the struggle for independence which had been going on almost uninterrupted for two years. We decided at a workers’ meeting that the workers were in no way obliged by any decision made by the new management.

The main effect of the strike was that the newspaper was not published from 8th to 13th March. Throughout that time, a number of workers was constantly present on the premises of Slobodna Dalmacija, organizing rotations of duty and the workers’ watch. However, the strikers did not ban the ‘unwelcomed guests’ from entering the company nor did they engage in any sort of

violence; hence, the newly appointed CEO and the board members freely accessed the company premises along with members of the fifth column – a group of journalists, editors and graphic workers who remained loyal to the CDU and the new management, and who, confined to a single room, tried to prepare the “strike-breaker” edition of the daily.

It was the fifth columnists who resorted to violence – among them were people carrying guns, wearing military camouflage uniforms, who were responsible for several incidents of threatening the strikers with guns. The ruling party chose from among them the new editor-in-chief, they took control of the printing works with the help of an armed escort and after a few days managed to publish their newspapers – a miserable collection of pamphlets printed on a few pages. All of this time they enjoyed the strong support and protection of the police, the secret services and, of course, the local political authorities. Finally, the union leadership called off the strike – abruptly and with no explanation. Although it was clear that the strike would not be able to accomplish the ultimate goal of preserving the newspaper’s independence – because the government showed strong determination to use all available means to subdue SD – many journalists were embittered by this union decision since they felt that the time to surrender had not yet come; or, at least, that they should have continued to protest and express their disobedience. Most of them, however, returned to work. The day after the strike ended, I handed in my resignation along with two of my colleagues, Predrag Lucić and Boris Dežulović, with whom I had edited *Feral Tribune*, and left the newspapers for good.⁶

A case-study analysis of the various individual struggles which have taken place in the past twenty years, as well as their comprehensive synthesis – regarding various aspects, such as changes

6 Viktor Ivančić in personal correspondence with the authors.

in the economic and political context, the evolution of organizing structures etc. – which would then allow us to draw conclusions on the respective starting points, quantitative dynamics and results of the practicing of the observed method of struggle, remains yet to be done.

For now, the following can be stated: according to the collected data, throughout the entire period from 1991 to 2013, only in 1991, 1992 and 1994 there was no registered activity that could be characterized as a case of workers' occupation of work places. The method used in the gathering of the data to identify instances of work place occupation amounts to a descriptive framework which includes the following elements: the organizing of a workers' watch; the organizing of all-day presence on company premises during the action; the taking of physical control over company premises (or one of its segments); the taking of control over the production process and business operations; denying the owner access to goods and equipment (e.g. preventing the owner from taking goods or machines out of the company). To be identified as an instance of workers' occupation of work places, an action did not have to contain every listed element.

The following map marks the sites where at least one incident of workers' occupation of work places was recorded. The list of toponyms represents the minimum of such activities as determined by the current research.

Figure 2 

HEADQUARTERS FOR THE DEFENSE OF COMPANIES



So-called Headquarters for the defense of companies⁷ appeared for the first time as an organizing form in 1998 in the fertilizer company Petrokemija in the small town of Kutina. The initiative for its establishment came from Petrokemija's largest trade union which represents approximately three-quarters of all workers in the company. Their plan was accepted by other minority trade unions in the company as well as the War Veterans Association (more than half of the factory workforce took part in the 1991–1995 war), who were in turn evenly represented in the Headquarter (HQ). This alliance was established with the aim of preventing the company's privatization, i.e. maintaining the majority of shares of the company in state ownership. By grounding its work (among other things) on active communication with all workers, the HQ managed to gain both legitimacy and active support for its actions – a survey conducted on approximately two-thirds of the workforce revealed that 99.7% of the surveyed workers supported the HQ's activities. Mobilization activities conducted by the HQ were not restricted to company premises – a clear indicator of this is a protest organized in August 1998 under the slogan “We won't give up Petrokemija, we won't give up Kutina”, which gathered between seven and ten thousand people, that is two-thirds of the overall population of Kutina. Not long after the protest, the government agreed to sign a contract stipulating that the company remain in majority state ownership and that the workers obtain three representatives in the Supervisory Board and a guaranteed right to paid strikes in the case of breach of contract. The HQ was reactivated on several occasions, namely in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2009, over issues relating to gas prices and gas supply.

7 Other terms used to describe this phenomenon are “Crisis Headquarters” and “Coordination”.

In 2013 the HQ was once again activated in response to the government's announcement of its intention to privatize the company.⁸

The success of the Kutina workers inspired the establishment of a number of headquarters in other companies, making it a widespread method of workers' organizing. This led to a response by the Croatian Employer's Association (CEA). Already in 1999, in reaction to, as they put it, "the possible rise in social tensions, announced by the headquarters for the defense of companies", the CEA declared: "a state of full combat readiness of all our bodies, both regional and of our branch associations".⁹

In December 1999, the workers of Badel, a large Croatian alcoholic beverages company, began a seventy-day occupation of factory and administration buildings (from December 8, 1999 to February 21, 2000) with the aim of preventing the factory's relocation to Čitluk, a small town in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The workers gained legitimacy for their action by electing members of the Headquarters for the Defense of Badel, the body in charge of the whole operation, at a workers' meeting.

In 2003, when Ivo Brzica, an entrepreneur from Osijek, attempted to acquire a majority share of the agricultural conglomerate Valpovo, workers organized fierce resistance. In a referendum, they voted against Brzica's offer to take over the company and organized an around-the-clock night watch in the conglomerate. When the guards of the private security company Borbaš arrived to take over the conglomerate, the workers greeted them with wooden batons,

8 To obtain a more detailed description of the establishment and activity of the Headquarters for the Defense of Petrokemija, see: Lončar, Jovica: Petnaest godina borbe, *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Croatian edition), 15.3.2013; and Grdešić, Marko: Uspon i pad stožera za obranu kompanija u Hrvatskoj, *Revija za sociologiju*, vol. 38, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 55-67.

9 Published on the website of Croatian RadioTelevision. Available at: <http://www.hrt.hr/arhiv/99/02/09/KRV.html> (last visited on February 1, 2014).

water canons and gas pistols. During the clash, in which ten persons were injured (three security guards and seven workers), one of the workers sounded a siren – a signal to other workers to come and defend the company – and before long two hundred workers surrounded the factory and prevented the takeover. In the end, the state indemnified Brzica and the workers became the majority owners of the company.

A currently ongoing struggle for preserving a company and establishing workers' ownership under the ESOP model (employee stock ownership plan) is taking place in RIZ-Transmitters – a Zagreb company, majority owned by the State Agency for State Property Management. The struggle is led by the united forces of trade unions, workers' councils and the war veterans association. At a workers' meeting held on July 4, 2012, 95 % of the workers who attended the meeting signed a document prohibiting the CEO from entering the factory premises due to the harmful impact of his managerial decisions on the company. Marina Glokević, the company's union representative, summed up the simple logic behind this "radical" action: "No, that was not legal, but we fought the best we could and all along we've been warning the institutions to help us, because there are things happening in our company which are leading it towards liquidation."

The management responded by taking over the company with the help of armed guards and making a list of "suspended" workers. But events soon took another turn. Having obtained the majority of votes in the Supervisory Board – the body that appoints and recalls the board of directors – the workers ousted the management. A petition to introduce ESOP as the preferred future form of the company's ownership structure was signed by 95 % of the workers. The workers consider the ESOP model a form of protection from "unwanted takeovers" by those who wish to "shut down production", but also a form of emancipation – "the only way we

can stop being wage workers”. Although the workers have not yet accomplished this goal, recent events, such as the ousting of the management and the fact that the state owes RIZ Trasmitterses 103 million HRK (approx. 14 million euros), has opened more room for negotiations with the government.¹⁰

Although the HQs differ in the level of their organizing skills, militancy and success, most of them can – entirely or partially – be subsumed under the definition provided by Marko Grdešić, a doctoral student in Political Sciences researching labour-related issues:

“[The headquarters’ activities constitute] a form of unofficial, non-institutional and often illegal workers’ action; workers’ struggles for the survival of their companies on the market and the preservation of their jobs; actions often triggered by workers’ strong emotional commitment, their attachment to their company and their subjective perception of violations of social justice; actions often lead without the consent or against the will of the existing trade unions, i.e. wildcat actions including public protests and appeals to political institutions on the local and national level; actions including attempts to build coalitions with other social actors and the media; actions including the establishment of workers’ control over companies’ business operations and sometimes even the taking of physical control over factories.”¹¹

We should, however, add one more element to these characteristics: the HQs represent one of the forms of building a unified front from the bottom-up. This front represents a tactical maneuver

10 For a detailed description of developments in RIZ-Trasmitterses, see interview with Marina Glokević and Davor Franković: U Hrvatskoj je nužna reindustrijalizacija, Slobodni Filozofski, 2013. Available at: <http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/search/label/Davor%20Frankovi%C4%87?max-results=20> (last visited on February 1, 2014).

11 Grdešić: *Uspon i pad stožera za obranu kompanija u Hrvatskoj*, 2007, p.p. 55-56.

used to overcome divisions within union structures and include in the struggle other workers' organizations active in a company (for example the war veterans associations or small shareholders associations). Despite some attempts to build alliances with various social actors, the organizing structure of this front so far primarily involved actors on the level of a given individual company.

The tactic of building a unified bottom-up front can, in a somewhat different form, also be observed in the case of the organization of a mine clearance workers' strike in 2013. However, the current state and scope of research on the subject does not allow us to provide a more extensive account of the temporal and geographical spread of these forms of struggle. Nevertheless, it can be argued that, from a historical point of view, the organizing principle of a unified bottom-up front does not constitute an entirely new phenomenon. In fact, one such example can be found in the 1930s, in the activities of the Communist party of Yugoslavia (CPY). Since the communists were prohibited to legally establish their own trade union organizations, the CPY decided to enter into reformist trade unions and establish within them a revolutionary trade union opposition, the organ of a unified bottom-up front. In a circular letter sent to all local organizations and members of the CPY, the Central Committee described in detail this new course of action. In order to illustrate the tactical and operative elements of this method, it will be useful to quote and highlight some parts of the letter:

“All communists must enter the existing reformist trade unions and create there a revolutionary union opposition by organizing our supporters and all those opposed to the reformist leaders, and in order to strengthen this opposition attract and organize workers in those unions.(...)”

In addition to this main form of our trade union activity, we must establish in all places and companies various sports, cultural, esperanto and other organizations, and

through them also carry out our union activities. (...)

In the course of the years of the parallel existence of both revolutionary and reformist trade unions, the opinion was created that everyone involved in a reformist union is a reformist and that revolutionary workers have no business joining these unions. This opinion should be most resolutely suppressed because it will in the future represent one of the main obstacles to assembling and organizing revolutionary elements and reformist elements in reformist unions, and to our work with the working masses. (...)

By exploiting all possibilities of union work, we should produce workers' demands in companies, discuss them with all workers assembled in a unified front, underline these demands at all times and, when the time comes, call the workers out on strike to fight for these demands.

Our most active, devoted and energetic work in organizing and leading workers' struggles in companies and protecting even the smallest workers' interests, should stand against the sabotage and betrayal of the workers' struggles by reformist leaders. Concrete facts should be used in front of the workers in order to reveal to the most minute details their betrayal and sabotage of workers' interests, especially when it comes to such issues as collective bargaining, the organization of joint struggle of employed and unemployed workers, the organized and the unorganized; we should at all times put our demands against theirs, take the workers out of their influence and recruit them for our demands and platform (...)

All Workers in companies and organizations who embrace and fight for our platform of demands, opposed to the reformist ones, are to be considered as part of the revolutionary trade union opposition.”¹²

12 Cazi, Josip: S puta reformizma na put klasne borbe: Ujedinjeni radnički sindikalni savez Jugoslavije i rad komunista u njemu, Zagreb, 1929 – 1934, pp. 84–87.

In this example, despite all its historical particularities, it is possible to detect a set of elements in common with contemporary approaches to organizing a unified front, namely: using the infrastructure of the existing union organization, implementing activities not only limited to the union as organizing form, an inclusive stance towards all those who support the demands, the tactic of gaining legitimacy for the demands and the body governing the action by consulting the base.

Creating a broad unifying front on the level of individual companies proved, on a case-by-case basis, to be the best and often also the last available option for organizing workers' resistance in Croatia. However, the establishing of effective links with actors outside company boundaries has so far been achieved only by the first and most successful HQ at Petrokemija in Kutina. This is probably one of the main reasons, along with great courage and strategic maturity, that Petrokemija workers have been able to successfully conduct their struggle and fend off privatization for over 15 years. However, no HQ or any other actor succeeded in connecting workers' collectives on a national level or in attempts to create alliances based on broader social foundations. The recently intensifying and recurring threats of privatization of Kutina's Petrokemija underline the importance of types of organizing which in method and agenda go beyond (but do not ignore) the boundaries of individual companies and build alliances on the national and international level, as well as the paramount importance of adequate material infrastructure on which every organization relies for its activities and reproduction.



CONNECTING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR “THE COMMONS” AND WORKERS’ RIGHTS

The issue of the development and the role of civil society organizations (CSOs)¹³ in Croatia from the 1990s to the present, or even their relation to the very active civil society scene in Yugoslavia, has not yet been subject to any analysis that would, on the basis of substantial amounts of collected material, provide us with clearer insights into the dynamics of development of their organizational and programmatic aspects and allow us to fully place their activities in the relevant political or social context. It is therefore currently not possible to unequivocally determine the position of this segment of civil society towards the processes of privatization and the decline of workers’ rights in the period since Croatian independence. However, the evident lack of any clear definition of the category of economic rights in the available literature produced by CSOs and statements by several CSO activists regarding their organizations’ activities in the first ten to fifteen years after the break-up of Yugoslavia, suggest that the engagement of this segment of civil society with issues pertaining to conflicts between capital and labour has largely been non-existent. The reasons for this may be manifold: since CSOs generally advocated the values of liberal democracy, they tended to focus on subjects related to political democratization and human rights; the widespread and strong belief amongst many CSO activists in democracy-yet-to-be-attained, which, once achieved, would rectify the many deviations of the transition process automat-

13 The term “civil society organizations” here solely refers to registered non-governmental organizations, but does not include small shareholders associations and war veterans’ associations as special types of associations focused on promoting very specific interests. On the other hand, the term “civil society”, in accordance with its universally accepted categorization, also includes trade unions and movements.

ically, thus also solving most disputes pertaining to economic issues and rights, would have contributed to delegating issues relating to workers' struggles to a secondary position; the omission of workers' rights issues and the absence of anti-privatization discourse from their agenda may also have been based on realistic assessments of the given political moment and their own capacities. To these likely reasons one must add the fact that the focus of their activities was strongly shaped by acute problems and existential issues dictated by the war and post-war reality in Croatia. While all of these reasons seem plausible and deserving of further consideration, an adequate treatment of these issues would go beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, our intention is not to pass value judgments on the role of CSOs in the past 25 years or dwell on the "validity" of their actions, but rather to outline some development tendencies of CSOs in Croatia, especially in the context of (the lack of) joint action between CSOs, trade unions and social movements, and the conditions that influenced these tendencies.

In the general historical trajectory two distinct phases can be identified:

1. after Croatian independence CSOs have, due to various factors, generally not dealt with the relation between capital and have not established cooperations with trade unions on these issues (of course, both sides can be held responsible for this development);
2. in recent years this situation has changed to a certain extent, i.e. workers' rights are now slowly being recognized by CSOs as an important area of struggle; CSOs are now engaging in explicit criticism of the privatization agenda, as well as in the struggle for the protection of "the commons"; they are more readily supporting workers' actions and building broader alliances with the unions.

When assessing the role of civil society in the 1990s, one needs to especially take into account the context of radical nationalist atmosphere and war which undoubtedly and to a great extent set the agenda and areas of activities of both CSOs and unions. The war and post-war events led the CSOs to direct their activities towards humanitarian causes and later towards defending minority rights and dealing with the immediate war past, for which they were often branded “anti-state elements” by the right-wing media close to the CDU. It is thus not surprising that the domain of labour and labour-related rights was completely left to the unions, who partly supported the dominant ideology, but mostly kept clear of the privatization turmoil and issues such as ownership and property rights.

Mario Iveković, an experienced union organizer and president of the New Union, comments on this period in the following way:

“A general attitude in those years was that there was nothing wrong with privatization. At best, some resistance was shown concerning the model of implemented privatizations, and there were also demands to hold off privatization until the end of war, but in general the unions were told that the question of ownership was not something they should be dealing with. During the first years, there was a general lack of understanding of what these processes actually implied. The most organized resistance was in fact led by small shareholder associations which started to form in individual companies and rely on unions, but were in fact not recognized or supported by wider union structures.”¹⁴

According to Iveković, in 1997/1998, approximately 100 small shareholder associations operated inside the Coordination

14 Interview with Mario Iveković conducted by the authors on the premises of New Union, October 7, 2013.

of the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia, headed at that time by Iveković himself. However, when they came up with the idea to establish an umbrella organization of small shareholders which would continue to cooperate with the unions, but operate independently, UATUC gave no further support to this project.

Generally, unions and CSOs tended to fight their own particular battles, with little interest for each other's activities. Just as the CSOs failed to include labour issues in the domain of human rights they were dealing with, trade unions in this period generally did not engage in any activities outside the strict boundaries of labour-related disputes. One of rare joint actions of unions and CSOs, marginally connected to the activities of both actors, was their cooperation on the prevention of the of eviction from the singles' hotel Sahara in Zagreb in 1997. After the company Končar had been privatized, the new owners attempted to sell part of the company's real estate portfolio, including the so-called Sahara hotel, which was inhabited by Končar workers who had no other housing. The new owners initiated a series of attempts to evict these workers from the premises, all of which were successfully delayed on a month-to-month basis by the joint media pressure from the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights and the Zagreb office of UATUC.

In 1999, a first extensive coordination of organizations of the entire civil society took place in the form of the get-out-to-vote campaign Glas 99 (Vote 99), directed towards the parliamentary elections set for January 2000. This campaign advocated "fair elections" in the context of almost a decade of CDU rule and the many controversies regarding earlier election results. The campaign was led by the Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (CCFFE) which comprised various organized social groups (women, environmental activists, the youth, pensioners etc.) who conducted their own theme-based campaigns, which the CCFFE integrated into one joint campaign. Upon joining the coalition, the organizations agreed on

certain campaign rules which included the principle of impartiality in the elections. Despite this, the not always openly acknowledged goal of the campaign was in fact the removal of the CDU from power. In public appearances, the coalition stressed the universal principle of the changeability of government as the focus of their campaign, as well as the development of civil society, the strengthening of parliamentary democracy and the establishment of rule of law and a tolerant society as the goals of their activities.¹⁵

Some unions and union confederations publicly supported the campaign and to a certain extent participated in its activities, particularly by providing the support of their distribution networks¹⁶. However, immediately before the elections, the unions broke rank by openly siding with the opposition, signing a social agreement with its leading party – the Social Democrats. From that moment on, the cooperation between the unions and CSOs mostly was reduced to the participation of the union confederations in the education programs organized by individual CSOs (one of the most concrete examples of this participation was the education program MIRamiDa – Partnership for Cooperation between Trade Unions and CSOs organized by the Centre for Peace Studies from 2000 to 2002) or occasional collaboration on topics of mutual interest such as gender quotas (for example the collaboration of the women's sections of union confederations with CSOs from the Women's Network Croatia).

A part of the civil society scene, having at that point recognized the need to connect with workers and trade unions, established in the beginning of the 2000s a series of successive, informal alterglobalist initiatives. Their origin can be traced back to activities

15 Gazivoda, Tin: Uloga civilnog društva u drugoj demokratskoj tranziciji u Hrvatskoj: 1990. – 2000. (doctoral thesis), Zagreb, 2012, pp. 227–244.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 239.

conducted by the organization Attack back in 1998, which later developed into the Initiative Against Economic Globalization (2000), then transformed into the initiative Another World is Possible (2002) and finally reached its peak with the initiative No More Wars (2003), a broad mobilization against the war in Iraq.¹⁷

Besides anarchist collectives, these initiatives also included CSOs such as Green Action or Multimedia institute/MaMa, gathered around an openly critical stance towards capitalism, the commodification of public goods and education, the role of the global IMF and World Bank, and growing militarization and poverty. Individuals from various other CSOs, the public sphere and the unions also participated. Still, the cooperation with unions remained informal and was based on contacts with individuals from the union scene who were willing to individually participate in education programs and actions organized by the initiative.

However, judging by the accounts of activists who were members of these or other similar initiatives, it we can conclude that the cooperation of this part of the activist scene with the unions, including expressions of solidarity with workers' struggles, was still to a large extent affected by mutual distrust and skepticism. While activists from the civil society scene indeed took part in union actions such as the May Day protests, they maintained a strong distrust towards unions leaders. This remained a persistent limiting factor in any type of cooperation with the unions.¹⁸ On the side of the workers, things were very similar. Marked by experiences of outside manipulation and politically orchestrated destructive interference,

17 Šimleša, Dražen: Četvrti svjetski rat, Pokret u Hrvatskoj, Što čitaš, Zagreb, 2006. Available at:http://www.elektronickeknjige.com/simlesa_drazen/cetvrti_svjetski_rat/index_page_000.htm (last visited on February 1 2014).

18 The widespread tendency among activists to identify union organizing on the ground with the activities of the union confederations and the decisions of their leadership can often be a barrier to connecting and cooperating with trade unions in general.

and by now used to not be able to count on any significant support in their struggles against factory closures and for the survival of their jobs, workers often demonstrated skepticism towards civil society activists when these would arrive to support them, since they often found it difficult to grasp the motives behind this support. However, even in instances when civil society activist support for their protests and strikes was greeted by the workers without distrust, such solidarization did not go beyond one-off declarative or humanitarian support, nor did it produce wider implications. If we put aside the lack of mutual trust, which, after all, develops with continuity of joint action on topics of mutual interest, what was fundamentally missing in this cooperation, on both the workers' and the activists' side, was a sense of strategic thinking and organizational coherence, necessary for the creation of the conditions for such continuity. In other words, what was missing was the strategic recognition of the potential of mutual cooperation, its proper direction and the working on its development, primarily by seeking ways to put to use the existing union logistics and infrastructure and develop cooperation with alterglobalist groups and their logistics. In the words of Dražen Šimleša, a sociologist and activist involved in the alterglobalist movement:

“What is particularly characteristic for Croatia is the so-called “dialogue of the deaf” between the unions, peasants and the civil society scene. While in almost all of the countries where the movement had some success these groups formed the backbone of the movement and established mutual cooperation, in Croatia, save for a few joint seminars, conferences and the like, there was no significant cooperation between these social actors, which speaks volumes about the actors themselves. At the end of 2001, the Independent Trade Unions of Croatia (UTUC) organized a protest “For the Globalization of Dignity and Well-Being” in front of the IMF building under

the slogan “Say no to the IMF and World Bank chains”. There were, however, some attempts on the part of anarchist groups to help striking workers in the clothing factory NIK and the transport company Croatiabus, for example when the collective Food Not Bombs supplied food to the workers or when activists organized a public lecture with the workers of PPK Vapovo. Although these encounters were filled with hope, mutual respect and the workers’ gratitude, they had no visible continuation. The cooperation hit another rift [in 2005] when all union confederations (save for UTUC) accepted the shameful decision of Ivo Sanader’s government to ban all public gatherings within 100 meters from parliament and government buildings. In this context, we should certainly commend the civil scene initiative ‘Matija Gubec’ – which also included people from UTUC – for organizing protests against the decision to ban demonstrations under the windows of the rulers.”¹⁹

In 2006, an informal initiative of CSOs, closely linked to Multimedia Institute/MaMa, was launched against favoring big business and the management of public space in manners contrary to public interest. The initiative opposed the construction of a shopping mall and garage which would devastate a part of Zagreb’s pedestrian zone. Three years later, the initiative was formalized as a CSO under the name Right to the City. In cooperation with Green Action and local Greens, Right to the City has since organized various campaigns all over Croatia, bringing into focus the problem of usurpations of public space by big business with the support and assistance of political structures. Tomislav Medak, one of the members of MaMa, describes the development of the activist core around the organization:

19 Šimleša, 2006.

Although we had been fairly involved in the alterglobalist movement, both the genealogy and the continuity of our specific interest in public goods and labour-related issues originates rather from these two focal points of our activities:

1. the issue of free software and the connected issue of organizing cooperative production of public goods, historically and ideologically linked also to the experiences of self-management, even if our interest primarily concerned technology, collective production and the struggle against the processes of enclosure introduced by intellectual property rights;
2. the problem of the lack of resources necessary for work in the cultural sector that led to collaboration with other organizations and initiatives on the establishment of the project Operation: City, which connected actors from the independent cultural sector with the youth and the Greens, and later to Right to the City and our engagement with broader issues of public goods. All these activities originated from the need for improving the working conditions in the independent cultural sector.²⁰

It is important to note that after 2010, in addition to popularizing the struggle for public goods, these CSOs started to increasingly approach the field of labour activism, primarily by supporting workers' actions and collaborating with trade unions, as will be discussed later.

In the spring of 2009, a wave of student occupations occurred in faculties all over Croatia, launching into public space a broad debate on the commercialization of education. The students'

20 Tomislav Medak in personal correspondence with the authors.

demand for a publicly financed higher education was supported by a range of trade unions and CSOs who recognized their protest method – faculty occupations – as a legitimate form of resistance to the galloping tendency of commercialization of education. A more serious alliance with the unions was not accomplished during the action, primarily due to the unwillingness of union confederations to recognize the struggle for quality higher education accessible to all as their own area of interest and include it on the list of demands for material rights of academic staff and other members they represented. Having faced constraints in their attempts to establish cooperation with trade union confederations, the student initiative for free education turned in the following months to direct work with workers’ collectives and field-based local unions, supported workers’ actions, both by physical presence and sending letters of support. These student groups sought to expand their struggle for social and political rights beyond the struggle for education as a public good to encompass issues such as workers’ rights and the struggle against the privatization of companies and other public goods, seeing all of these phenomena as interlinked moments in a broader social context and struggle. This tendency gained visibility, articulation and momentum during the second wave of faculty occupations in autumn 2009 when the banner “Students support the workers” occupied a central place on the building of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. Furthermore, the alternative education program, organized by the students themselves during the occupation, included, in addition to education-related issues, a lecture and discussion on the shipbuilding industry as one of the most prosperous Croatian industries, as well as a lecture on the struggle of the Petrokemija workers as one of the few successful struggles against company privatizations.

The students’ attempts to connect with workers’ collectives continued in the form of the Working Group for Spreading Direct

Democracy – one of the working groups of the Plenum (the general assembly and main body during the occupation of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb), gathering activists from several Croatian cities – which published by the end of the year the booklet “Workers and Workers’ Rights” in cooperation with the Petrokemija branch of the Autonomous Trade Union in the Power Industry, Chemistry and Non–Metal Industry. Among other things, the booklet featured a transcript of the lecture of Željko Klaus, the main union representative in Petrokemija, held at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb during the autumn 2009 faculty occupation. The publication was later distributed to workers and peasants during protests or strikes, whose actions the students continued to follow and support by writing letters of support²¹, organizing public lectures, movie screenings or field visits to local groups from Rijeka, Split and Zagreb (for example, the students supported workers from many companies such as Salonit, Željezara Split, Uzor, Monter, Pevec, Poljoprerada, Jadrankamen, 3. maj, Dioki, Kamensko...).

Although the Working Group for Spreading Direct Democracy had its share of success during its almost three year period of activities, the group soon met with the constraints typical for informal and ad hoc work carried out with utterly limited, almost non-existent, financial resources. The main problem the group had to face proved to be the impossibility to maintain continuity of collaboration with workers’ collectives and trade unions, which could then lead to timely preparation of more purposeful support to workers’ actions, since such continuity largely would have depended on the consolidation of infrastructure, which in the given situation was impossible for students to achieve without engaging in some form of institutionalization.

21 Letters of support and other materials available on the websiste of the Plenum of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences: <http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/search/label/podr%C5%A1ka?max-results=20> (last visited on February 1 2014).

An event that set the course for further development of the group was the students' participation in a campaign organized in support of the workers of the textile factory Kamensko. In September 2010, faced with the willful destruction of their factory and jobs by the owners, who were eager to freely dispose over the company's valuable land and real estate, a group of some 20 workers of this former textile giant started a hunger strike in front of the factory demanding the payment of their due wages, at that point several months late. With no help from the unions and no media attention, the workers spent the nights in the nearby park before the students, having found out about the strike, arrived to support them. Soon, the media and the union structures joined in on the action, the workers ended their hunger strike, began a legal strike and, with the organizing support of students and CSOs, organized protest marches across the city as well as various other activities that remained for a long time in the center of media attention.

The CSOs that joined in on the campaign – the Human Rights House, Right to the City and Green Action – had previously not dealt with labour-related issues, but in the case of Kamensko labour issues overlapped with at least two issues usually at the center of their interest, namely, the question of relations between the social function of space and the interests of speculative capital, and the fact that Kamensko represented a typical case of the destruction or collapse of a “female industry”, a familiar scenario which has left thousands of women and their families in Croatia without any means of subsistence. After thorough research conducted by several CSOs and journalists, the issue of real estate speculation with the company's buildings, the working space and thus a resource to which the livelihood of approximately 400 women is inextricably connected, turned out to be the most promising entry points to tackle this subject in public, since it revealed, in the words of Croatian investigative journalist Ilko Ćimić “a [criminal] collusion of politics, the media

and big business” which, however, to this day remains without legal consequences.

Due to the fact that government officials and big business enjoy strong legal protection, the campaign has not (yet) achieved the desired goal – to obtain in court the workers’ due salaries and punish those responsible for destroying the factory. But it has nevertheless yielded several important effects for the development of the activist scene in a broader sense. An immediate result of the campaign was certainly the new involvement of CSOs in a workers’ action. CSOs now included the perspective of capital/labour relations into their topic of interests, adding them to their earlier preoccupations such as women’s rights and public goods issues. Moreover, the support of the CSOs did not remain merely declarative, as is/was often the case, but involved a substantial amount of research, legal, organizing and activist work which helped to raise the organizational level and public visibility of the workers’ activities. These contributions included the aforementioned marches across the city, but also extended to assisting in the filing criminal charges and the creating of media pressure.

From a long-term perspective, however, the most important effect produced by the campaign was most certainly the fact that the CSOs now had stepped into the field of labour activism. In the following years, this advancement continued to develop on two levels. Firstly, in the form of new organizations primarily focused on labour issues. Secondly, by opening communication channels between unions and CSOs that do not primarily deal with labour issues. Concerning the first development, participants in the Working Group for Spreading Direct Democracy were, among others, involved in the the establishment of two CSOs dealing with both theoretical and practical issues pertaining to workers’ struggles and rights: the Center for labour Studies and the Organization for Workers’ Initiative and Democratization (OWID). As for the second development, i.e. the involvement of already existing CSOs in labour issues, it is

worth noting that the Center for Peace Studies (CPS) introduced in 2012 into its education program a new course, entitled “Economic democracy and workers’ rights”, developed in cooperation with OWID. In addition, CPS has initiated a research project on the issue of migrant labour, until recently a mostly neglected aspect of social and economic life in Croatia.

In 2013, CSO’s support of worker’ actions was further intensified along with their cooperation with unions. Nineteen CSOs publicly expressed their support to a large-scale May Day protest organized by all five union confederations. Subsequently, the Presidency of UATUC adopted organizational and action guidelines in July 2013 which include cooperation with other union confederations and CSOs “in actions of mutual interest undertaken on transparent grounds”²².

Approximately two months after stating their support for the May Day protest, three CSOs and two union confederations organized a joint panel entitled “Extending Cooperation: Unions and CSOs” where they discussed various topics considered important enough to require joint efforts towards wider social mobilization. Among some of the discussed topics were the issue of government plans for the monetization of Croatian Highways and the privatization of public utility services in Zagreb, which later brought together a coalition of CSOs, trade unions and trade union confederations in the struggle for protecting these resources. Another important joint initiative of trade unions and CSOs was the establishment of the Women’s Front for labour and Social Rights, a coalition consisting of the women’s sections of three union confederations and a dozen of mainly women’s CSOs, brought together for the purpose of analyzing and reacting to recent changes in labour, pension and social legislation, all of which have been leading to an increasingly deteriorating social status of women.

22 Sindikalna akcija, official newspapers of UATUC, no. 422, July 15, 2013.



TOWARDS OVERCOMING CRAFT UNIONISM: LESSONS LEARNED FROM UNION ORGANIZING IN CROATIA AIRLINES

There are six unions operating in the national airline company Croatia Airlines – five craft unions, organizing and representing, respectively, the cabin crew, pilots, aeromechanics, ground staff and engineers, and one general union – Novi sindikat (the New Union). While the reasons for forming five different craft unions in a single company were not driven by any sort of mutual animosity but by the logic of protecting specific interests of workers in different professions, in practice this meant that Croatia Airlines had until 2009 five different collective agreements with extremely varying levels of rights. However, a change of circumstances forced this practice to change in 2009 when, with the aim of destabilizing the unions, management decided to make use of a section of the labour Act which stipulated that an employer may conclude a collective agreement only with the representatives of all unions active in the company, demanding of the unions to better come to an internal agreement or management would call for the intervention of the Economic and Social Council in order to determine the membership numbers of each union, which would in turn determine the representatives of which unions are entitled to enter the collective bargaining committee in what proportion. Faced with this decision, the union representatives of the Cabin Crew Union (CCU) contacted the New Union, which encouraged the unions to reach an agreement on the number of representatives in the collective bargaining committee. Soon the New Union itself entered the bargaining committee as a representative of CCU and for the next three years engaged in collective bargaining as the sixth union in Croatia Airlines. In 2013, with the entering into force of the new Law on Representativeness – this law generally impeded or completely anni-

hilated the possibility of unions with low membership to operate in a company or industry – neither the New Union as a general union, nor the craft unions of pilots, engineers and aeromechanics, met the representativeness criteria required by the new law and had therefore to once again conclude a mutual agreement in order to participate in collective bargaining.

In order to understand the dynamics of union work in Croatia Airlines, it is necessary to take into account several factors that largely influence this dynamics. First, before making any judgments on the level of success of union action in this company, it is necessary to point out that bad management and irresponsible employer's behavior, repeatedly publicly criticized by the unions, has negatively affected the company for years, motivated by the very common practice of transferring public money to private pockets while at the same time preparing the company for privatization. Like with many other state-owned companies, the management of Croatia Airlines is appointed according to the dictates of political party interests – regardless of the political option in power at a given time – which has made the conditions for struggle unfavorable and any sort of success significantly harder to accomplish since the state has means of skillfully adapting to union pressure and countering it with forms of pressure of its own. This power relation can be best illustrated in practice on the example of the decision of the Court of Arbitration on the minimum services which are not to be interrupted during any CA strike²³, which effectively required more workers to work during the strike than in times of the regular functioning of the company. This decision practically deprived the workers of their constitutional right to strike, which gains even more weight if

23 According to the Croatian Labour Act, services that cannot be interrupted during a strike include only those whose interruption could endanger the lives, safety or health of others, or whose continuation is necessary for continuing work operations directly after the ending of the strike.

we take into account the fact that the collective bargaining process in this company is repeated on an annual basis, forcing workers to regularly utilize the strike in defense of their interests during negotiations. The upshot being that in the last five years negotiations were only once completed without a strike.

When considering the question of coordination of activities between the unions in CA, it is necessary to note that the development of concrete cooperation in the past four years took place on two different levels: first, by connecting craft unions (primarily the Cabin Crew Union, CCU) with a general union (the New Union) and, second, by generally strengthening cooperation between existing craft unions. A good illustration of the first development and at the same time an example that contributes to a much needed debate on the strategies for fighting the expanding practice of temporary agency employment, is an action undertaken by agency workers and trade unions in 2012. The action was preceded by a warning strike by which the cabin crew put forward ten demands, including the banning of temporary agency employment in collective agreements. The strike ended without the fulfillment of this demand, after which the management (via a temporary employment agency) offered agency contracts to a group of cabin crew members who had previously worked on multiple fixed-term contracts for the company. Jelena Križan, a member of CCU, describes this experience in the following way:

“There were eleven of us working on that post for five years and we all knew our rights well. The contract we received was utterly disgraceful: they changed our job descriptions and lowered our wages. Since the law stipulates that no agency employee working on the same position as the workers directly employed by the user can be given lower wages, the management changed our job description so that we were no longer employed as “cabin crew members” but as “cabin crew

members in times of temporary expansion of the workload”. Upon receiving this news, we contacted the union which had supported us throughout and they said that the decision was invalid because the company did not prescribe that job description in the systematization of job positions [as required by Croatian labour legislation]. However, since we hadn’t noticed this earlier, the company promptly changed the systematization of job positions within two hours and added this job position with a corresponding wage, lower than the minimum wage in CA.”²⁴

The workers were requested to sign a contract of intent which bound them, under the penalty of 10.000 HRK (approx. 1300 euros), to not work for six months for any other client but CA – however, without any contractual guarantee that CA would hire them in the first place or at what point in time. Initially, the workers refused to sign these contracts with the agency, but discovered in the meantime that Croatia Airlines had hired 50 new seasonal workers via the agency for temporary employment. Having consulted the union, 10 out of 11 workers signed the contracts, while the unions involved arranged the transfer of agency workers from the Cabin Crew Union to the New Union, since it disposed of a better legal and activist infrastructure, in order to initiate a collective bargaining process with the agency – the first attempt of this kind in Croatia. The demand put forward by these agency workers, joined by 50 newly hired colleagues, was simple – they asked for the same rights as those enjoyed by the employees of Croatia Airlines, to be guaranteed by a collective agreement. After the agency ignored several calls for the beginning of collective bargaining under the pretext that they had no power to engage in collective bargaining, the union threat-

24 Jelena Križan during the public lecture “Nepokoreni rad” organized by Antifascist Youth Zagreb, November 16, 2013. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFZsEjKr-BHM> (last visited on February 1, 2014).

ened with a strike and demanded mediation. Continuous pressure exerted by the unions and workers finally succeeded in forcing the agency to retreat and sign a contract granting agency workers the same rights as those the workers directly employed by Croatia Airlines enjoy. In the wake of the strike held the following year (2013), a ban on agency employment in the company was at last included in the collective agreement.

The experiences gained in this action offer us two important insights. First, that an action undertaken by unprotected workers has less room for maneuver without the support of protected workers which can sometimes play a pivotal role in the success of the action. Second, the seemingly trivial and often underestimated fact that the success and quality of union organizing to a large extent depend on the scope of available union resources. A lack of adequate resources is a severely limiting factor, especially in the case of small craft unions which mostly do not dispose of the means for further expansion or any substantial upgrading of their infrastructure.

Where several small craft unions coexist in a single company, mutual cooperation and association is of paramount importance to prevent the plausibility of application and success of ‘divide and conquer’ tactics by management. Cooperation between the unions in CA began to take shape already during the 2012 warning strike, when the four unions active in the company began to act in coordination. But the most important results so far in this regard have been accomplished during the 8-day strike in May 2013, when the cabin crew and pilot staff acted in coordinated solidarity.

A complicating circumstance that highly influenced the dynamics and media reception of the strike, primarily caused by drastic cuts to the material rights of the cabin and pilot crew, was the fact that many members of the cabin crew had taken extended sick leave at the beginning of the month of the strike. Although the labour in-

spection declared the sick leaves justified, management nevertheless initiated procedure for the dismissal of 42 workers, among them a union representative, despite knowing that the findings of the labour inspection highly increased the probability that the dismissals would be pronounced illegal in court. Cynically counting on the slowness of the courts, internal correspondence – later leaked into the public – revealed that management was planning to offer the dismissed workers less paid jobs in the form of employment via a temporary employment agency, in order to “decrease the financial vulnerability of CA” after losing in court. In the following days, management engaged in harsher rhetorics, initiating a veritable witch-hunt on their workers, which government largely supported, siding publicly and unequivocally with management in its attempt to cancel the work contracts of those who had taken sick leaves. The Minister of labour declared the strike illegal before it even began, while the Minister of Maritime Affairs, Transport and Infrastructure stated that management would simply replace part of the cabin crew. At a time when the government announced a whole series of restructuring plans in key state companies, the possibility of unions “mining” this project caught the full attention of the political class. The demonstration of power went so far that government even helped the management of CA to recover around 75 % of their air traffic during the strike by renting planes and staff from other airline providers, despite the fact that the alleged lack of money had been management’s main argument for not maintaining the level of workers’ material rights. The coordination of unions in CA recognized that these attempts in fact represented a direct assault on union organizing and started to rally support for the cabin crew staff among broader layers of civil society. The New Union called upon the public to show solidarity with the cabin crew staff by sending letters of support to CCU or protest letters to the management of CA, the prime minister, the Minister of Labour and the Pension System, the Minister of Mari-

time Affairs, Transport and Infrastructure, and finally by organizing protests and solidarity strikes.

As a result, more than 20 unions sent CCU their letters of support; all union confederations condemned the statements of the ministers, the prime minister and management; approximately 20 CSOs from various fields sent a joint letter of support to the cabin crew and supported their cause in public appearances; various organizations and individuals from abroad expressed their international solidarity. Since at that time the workers in clothing company DTR also went on strike, cabin crew came to visit DTR workers during one of their daily marches and they expressed mutual solidarity. However, one of the most important aspects of this display of organized solidarity with the CA workers was undoubtedly the organization of solidarity strikes (three were initially announced, two of which were actually followed through). Especially in light of the fact that Croatia had previously known only one solidarity strike, held in 2009 and declared illegal. Which certainly did not encourage unions to use this tool more frequently, whose main advantage is that it allows strikes to be legally organized for reasons other than disputes over wages or collective agreements.²⁵

It is symptomatic and by no means surprising that the workers who engaged in solidarity strikes with CA came from two state-owned companies that also face immanent privatization – the Zagreb public utility company Zagrebački Holding and the Railroad Engineer Trade Union of Croatia (RETUC) operating within Croatian Railways. The support of the latter is particularly interesting, since the workers of this union were at the time leading their own struggle for union participation in the process of the company's restructuring and were forbidden to organize a strike of their own

25 According to the Labour Act, mediation is not required for engaging in a solidarity strike. The sole limitation for a solidarity strike is that it can only begin two days after the beginning of the strike in support of which it is being organized.

not long before they announced their solidarity strike with the CA workers. In comment to their solidarity strike, RETUC published the following message on their website:

“Today, at 12:00, as a sign of solidarity with the pilots and cabin crew in CA, the railroad engineers “grounded” all trains in Croatia – 104 passenger trains, 26 freight trains and 42 railway station maneuvers. The “airspace” of Croatian Railways completely deserted until 14:00. Chaos on the “railway sky” will continue until later in the evening when we expect traffic normalization. We apologize to all passengers of Croatian Railways, but we could not just stand aside and watch what they are doing to the hard-working and honest workers of CA, the very same workers on whose skills, knowledge and ability the safety and comfort of every passenger depends.”²⁶

Interestingly, despite officially being a solidarity strike in favor of CA workers and not on their own behalf, the pressure exerted allowed RETUC nevertheless to reach, already the following day, an agreement with Croatian Railways on all disputed issues motivating their originally planned strike. RETUC thus had no more reason to announce any further strike actions in Croatian Railways.

The results and impacts of the CA strike are important on several levels. In the context of the struggle for collective agreements and jobs, the strike resulted in the signing of a guarantee stipulating that the 42 workers of CA threatened with dismissal would not be dismissed after all. Furthermore, while the newly signed collective agreement did not entirely maintain workers’ material rights at the earlier level, these were not cut to the extent management had planned before the strike and subsequent events took place. However, even more important than the immediate results of the strike

26 Official website of RETUC, published on May 16, 2013. Available at: http://www.ssh.hr/opsirnije.php?subaction=showfull&id=1368711863&archive=&start_from=&ucat=6 (last visited on February 1, 2014).

was the accomplishment of coordination and solidarity support between pilots and cabin staff unions. This greatly contributed to avoiding the trap of isolated individual action suggested by the very craft-based logic of union organizing, which, as in many previous cases, could have entirely determined the course of action and led to fragmentation and “every-man-for-himself” tactics, given that pilots’ material rights and jobs were not endangered to the same degree as those of the cabin crew.

With the organization of these solidarity strikes, unionism in Croatia had found, for a brief moment, a common path, clearly demonstrating the potential strength and possible scope of union action, even when triggered by seemingly small-scale events such as those in CA. The most important lesson for future action to be drawn from this experience is to acknowledge solidarity strikes as a tool that can serve the purpose of expressing solidarity with others, while at the same time helping to achieve one’s own particular goals. Finally, an important – if not necessary – element of any future union action should be the involvement of sympathetic civil society organizations, whose media shrewdness can undoubtedly influence public perception in favor of union action. In the of the CA workers strike, the latter also benefited from the media activities of Academic Solidarity, a trade union gathering members of academia, who had also announced a solidarity strike and actively participated in the media campaign by commenting on the situation in CA in favor of the workers.²⁷ This example of bridging the usual divide between sectors on the one hand, and sympathetic elements of academia and CSOs and the unions on the other, should be guiding experience for any future union action.

27 In the end, the solidarity strike of Academic Solidarity did not take place due to the termination of the strike in Croatia Airlines.

Nevertheless, every further step in the direction of strengthening union coordination in Croatia Airlines will undoubtedly be influenced by the limitations arising from the craft-based character of most of the unions active in the company. Namely, the very logic of the collective bargaining process in practice almost automatically eliminates the likelihood of particular craft-bound actors standing in solidarity with others once their particular demands are met. Since this type of unionism is inherently focused on particular interests, it is in contradiction with the very essence of a unionism based on joint action, the expansion of the union base and capacity-building, all of which would open up possibilities for creating real alliances based on a joint platform. It is thus plausible to assume that the ability to overcome the limitations of craft unionism will decisively determine the future level of material rights in CA and perhaps even the likelihood of success in preventing the company's privatization.



ORGANIZING FROM THE BOTTOM-UP: THE CASE OF THE HUMANITARIAN DEMINERS' STRIKE

Humanitarian demining should undoubtedly be a sector of utmost importance for Croatia. According to the data of the Croatian Mine Action Center, in the beginning of 2014, i.e. 18 years after the end of the war, only one third of the areas suspected to contain mines have been demined: 633.3 square kilometers in 12 counties and approximately 90 towns and municipalities are assumed to be still contaminated by land mines.²⁸ If we compare these assessments to those from January 2013, when the hazardous area was estimated at 684.5 m²²⁹, the striking conclusion is that the mined area has been reduced by merely 51 km² in a year. This allows us to draw two conclusions: first, that demining operations in Croatia will not end by 2019, as was predicted by the National Mine Action Strategy; and second, that this issue is obviously not highly placed on the list of priorities of the Croatian government, especially if we add the fact that it has invested only 44 % of the funds predicted by the mentioned strategic plan for the past year.

The nature of humanitarian demining in Croatia does not make it a likely candidate for market solutions: due to its one-off character, as an economic activity it would hardly be a suitable choice of investment from the perspective of long-term profitability calculations. Its driving rationale is social, not economic. Nevertheless, the government decided to open the sector to private firms in the early 2000s. These then started to compete with the single state-

28 Mine Situation in the Republic of Croatia, Government's Office for Demining, January 2014. Available at: <http://www.mine.vlada.hr/clanak.asp?pageID=36&subID=44&lang=hr> (last visited on February 7, 2014.).

29 Nema novca za čišćenje Hrvatske od ratnih mina, Novi list, March 2, 2013. Available at http://www.mine.vlada.hr/iz_medija_opsirno.asp?nID=6&lang=hr (last visited on January 7, 2014).

owned company for funding, mainly drawn from the state budget. As a consequence, to the already existing problem of insufficient funding, a new one was added, since employers now attempted to make their companies more competitive and profitable by lowering the cost of labour and increasing efficiency.³⁰ However, the introduction of the profit logic into an activity with structurally limited funding sources does not only put pressure on workers' means of subsistence, but also increases security risks, both for the deminers themselves and for future users of the demined areas. For example, the demand to demine greater areas in less time led to the creation of a new method for inspecting suspicious areas based on random sampling. Due to the questionable reliability of this method, the increase in the rate of mine accidents in (ostensibly) demined areas in the future is a very likely prospect.

Before the beginning of collective bargaining in February 2013, the sector of humanitarian demining comprised 36 firms (of which only one state-owned) and approximately 500 deminers. The majority of companies were members of the Croatian Employers' Association and thus had the right to participate in collective bargaining. Among a multitude of private companies with different ownership structures, there were several smaller firms founded and managed by the workers themselves participating in the collective bargaining. A fact which would later prove to be an extremely beneficial circumstance. While the level of workers' material rights greatly varied from one company to another, all companies shared the

30 Opening the sector of humanitarian demining to private firms was justified by a World Bank directive, which stipulated the establishing of market competition as a condition for obtaining loans for demining projects. However, between 1998 and 2012 World Bank loans covered only 7% of the overall amount of 4.1 billion dollars allocated for demining activities, while the state and state-owned companies covered approximately 75% of the costs. Data obtained from: *Financiranje aktivnosti razminiranja u RH*. Available at: <http://www.rtl.hr/vijesti/novosti/2008-protiv-mina/930922/financiranje-aktivnosti-razminiranja-u-rh/>, (last visited on January 7, 2014).

tendency to further erode workers' rights. This by itself strengthened the employers' position in their attempt to further decrease these rights, increase efficiency and profitability, and represent this process as an indisputable necessity resulting from the large competition crowding the sector. Since in such circumstances union organizing at the level of several individual companies hardly yielded results, the only viable strategy for maintaining security standards and preventing further competitive lowering of wages was to fight for universal material standards and rights on the level of the sector as a whole. However, this sort of levelling, supposed to result in equalizing the positions of all workers, could not be won without strong organization. In this respect, the fairly low numbers of unionized workers in private demining firms (mainly due to workers' fear of losing their jobs if entering a union) posed a significant obstacle to the establishing and strengthening of such organization. The tendency of division between workers from private and state companies proved to be an additional hindrance, caused by the somewhat better status of state-employed deminers. The same holds for the widespread strategic myopia and inability of workers to think outside the framework of their particular companies and connect with others on the basis of solidarity.

The opportunity to create a more solid base for struggle arose when it became clear that the collective bargaining negotiations would fail and that a strike was the only remaining means for exerting pressure on employers. At that point, the three unions active in the demining sector started to consolidate, coordinate and intensify their activities in most parts of the country (mined areas are geographically scattered and often far apart, which poses additional difficulties from an organizing perspective). The unions organized preparatory field visits and engaged in direct communication with workers in order to include them in the decision-making process and the planning of future activities, but also to additionally train

union representatives in companies, who in turn took responsibility for encouraging and maintaining dialogue with their colleagues, activate them in unions and communicate their proposals, instructions and general mood to the union professionals.

When they estimated that a sufficiently large number of workers was willing to support the strike, the coordination of unions decided that, due to the scatteredness of miners's workplaces, the strike should be focused on Zagreb and held in one of the capital's squares. There they would set up a tent where workers from all over the country could gather until the unions would reach an agreement with the Croatian Employers' Association. Special communication and information circles had been established before the strike, consisting of the strike committee (including the main union representatives and union officials) and the extended striking committee (including local union representatives from several companies, each of which was in charge of communicating relevant information to a maximum of 10 colleagues from their respective company). Once formulated, the demands were communicated to the rank and file for confirmation (14.000 HRK [approx. 1860 euros] of gross wages for a working month and 5000 HRK [approx. 660 euros] for a non-working month). Also, the rules of conduct during the strike were agreed upon, as was the regime of daily protest marches from the square where the tent would be set up to Zagreb's main square. The strikers registered every person that came to camp, which allowed them to make a list of those in need of accommodation and collect information on how many people from each company had joined the strike.

The first strike of the demining workers began in June 2013 and included deminers from 23 of 27 companies which were members of Croatian Employers' Association (CEA), as well as the workers from several other firms who joined their colleagues in a solidarity strike, since they had no legal right to a regular strike

because their employers did not participate in the collective bargaining process. The strike lasted for 13 days and included almost daily meetings of the striking committee with the representatives of CEA. After every meeting with the employers, the striking committee held another meeting with their base, stationed in the camp, where they discussed and voted on every new offer by the employers, in accordance with the previously established procedures of decision-making. The daily participation of the rank and file in the decision-making process had decisive consequences. On one occasion, rank and file workers rejected by overwhelming majority an offer by the employers which had found advocates even in the leadership of one of the union confederations. The lesson is clear: once group coherence had been created and strengthened by daily participation in democratic processes and once the level of awareness of the strength of the collective has been raised, the level of influence of higher union structures, usually prone to compromise, over the rank and file, had decreased significantly.

This leads us to reflecting the role the base camp played in the creation of this cohesion. The camp was as a place where workers from different companies spent time together, exchanged work experiences, and upheld the fighting morale, while the unions were provided the opportunity to directly communicate with the workers and educate their base. The work invested in the empowerment of and trust-building within the collective bore fruit when the employers decided to increase pressure on the workers. The decisive element in overcoming the fear of sanctions and motivating workers to persevere in maintaining the strike, proved to be the high level of trust workers placed in the judgment of their union representatives. This trust grew out of the respect workers had come to feel for the huge amount of work the unions had put into every aspect of the organizing and negotiation process, but also – and primarily – out of confidence in the loyalty of union representatives to the base.

Also, a significant contribution to dissipating the fear from employer retaliation came from the workers of workers' owned companies, who offered their colleagues in potential danger of losing their jobs the option of employment in their companies. The presence of these workers in the camp motivated others to reflect on the current organization of work in their own companies and how it should change in the future. In addition to a consolidated and disciplined base, the devoted work of union representative and the support of the union professionals, who guided and advised workers instead of giving them orders, another important factor influencing the outcome of the strike was the logistic support provided by war veteran associations, which donated food and accommodation to workers who did not stay in the camp overnight. This reduced the overall cost of the strike, but certainly also influenced the general atmosphere among workers and the final result of the action.

Estimating the impacts of the strike, we can state that its preparation and the circumstances of its implementation significantly shaped the workers' consciousness with regard to their general position. They soon realized that they were not fighting merely for bigger wages, but primarily for equal starting positions and the consolidation of their position within the industry, both indispensable for any kind of future collective resistance. Workers also understood that the main cause of many of their grievances and problems lay in the fact that private employers, whose main goal was to generate profit, were allowed to operate in an industry of vital strategic and social importance. That the workers indeed experienced a shift in their perception of collective interest is evidenced by the perseverance and solidarity displayed by workers from several private companies, who, despite having at that time already achieved better conditions than workers from other firms, recognized the importance of participating in the strike and persisted in the struggle for a joint collective agreement. As a result, a collective agreement stipu-

lating increased material rights was won. Furthermore, a ministerial decision soon followed, extending the provisions of the collective agreement to the sector as a whole – a remarkable result at a time when workers' rights are being systematically cut under the pretext of a reigning economic crisis. Yet, the most permanent achievement of this action surely lies in the significant extension of the base of unionized workers, thus increasing their capacities for future action.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The actions analyzed in this paper were generally initiated and organized at the lower levels of union structure, while their goals and methods were mostly shaped by experiences and grievances at the level of individual companies. Important advances towards the creation of a wider front were accomplished in the organization of the Petrokemija workers' struggle and the demining workers strike, but also by the recently growing willingness of CSOs to engage with work and worker related issues. These efforts at building a unified front from the bottom-up counter both the structural fragmentation of the union scene, inherent in the ubiquity of craft-based organizing and the grouping of unions around five union confederations, and the general absence of serious top-down initiatives towards the creation of such a front. An inspection of the activities organized or initiated by the union confederations leaves the impression of sporadic and strategically often un(der)elaborated actions. We will, nevertheless, shortly list some of the more prominent of these actions. While by no means a representative illustration of the overall activities of the confederations, these examples do point to experiences from which more serious initiatives towards the overcoming of fragmentation could have arisen. As such, they surely contain valuable lessons for the future and deserve more thorough analytical engagement than can be provided in this short overview.

In 1993, the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (UATUC), with the support of the Croatian Trade Unions Associations (CTUA), organized a symbolic 4–hours general warning strike. More than 80 percent of UATUC members and more than 90 percent of CTUA members participated in the strike.

Another protest was organized in 1998 in Zagreb, and brought together around 10.000 workers from all over the country. The protest was supposed to take place on Zagreb's main square, but

this was prevented by the police who had employed 12.000 highly armed and highly equipped members of the regular and special police force, members of the military police, firemen, and elite army combat units from all over the country.³¹

From the perspective of the development of action unity and the overcoming of fragmentation, the greatest long-term potential probably lay in the Solidarity Network organized in Zagreb in 1999. After UATUC had decided on a meeting of their county representatives to establish this network, Mario Iveković, at the time UATUC's union representative for the City of Zagreb, had the chance to continue bringing together union representatives and workers from several companies with the goal of coordination and joint action; a goal he had already been working towards on his own initiative, but which expected to now be able to pursue within the institutional framework and with the backing of the UATUC. However, after having made some initial steps towards the building of the organizational structure of the Solidarity Network, Iveković got dismissed from UATUC due to conflict with the then leadership of the confederation, which led to the suspension of all further activities.

The most recent promising initiative with the potential for unifying the fragmented union scene was a campaign for a referendum on the draft of a new labour law in 2010. Croatian law stipulates that a referendum can be initiated by citizens if they manage to gather the signatures of 10% of registered voters in support of it within a time frame of two weeks (i.e. over 450.000 signatures). Despite these extremely forbidding requirements, the unions managed, through the strong activation and commitment of the lower levels of union structures, to gather more than 800.000 signatures – almost twice as many as the legally required minimum. Despite this

31 Đikić, Ivica; Lasić, Igor; Markušić, Sanja: Trk Maršalu Titu, Feral Tribune no. 649; Grković, Vjeran: Dobro došli u plavi pakao, Feral Tribune no. 651.

immense mobilization and the strong public support behind it, the referendum was never held. The leading officials of the union confederations decided to use the results of the campaign as a leverage and engage in negotiations with the government, while excluding all other actors from the process – from the union organizers who had organized and implemented the collection of signatures to the citizens who had signed the demand for a referendum. The union confederations finally agreed to a series of compromises and withdrew their demand for a referendum, receiving in return merely a temporary withdrawal of the proposed labour law from the legislative procedure. In other words, the potential acquired and built by the far-reaching mobilization and the legitimacy gained through the sheer number of collected signatures, which could have served as a solid base for the building of a wider front and the organizing of new actions – were permanently lost.

While the ultimate results of these earlier initiatives are far from encouraging, they at the same time point to real potentials and promising strategies, which could be tapped and utilized in the future to overcome the fragmentation of the union scene, its relative isolation from potential allies and, ultimately, the current weakness of labour vis-a-vis capital and the state. However, for this happen, experience has shown, bottom-up initiatives and the strengthening of the rank and file *within* unions, as well as the deepening of cooperation and coordination with actors *outside* them, will be indispensable.

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