

THE
**Final
Straw**
A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW



The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

You can send us letters at:

The Final Straw Radio
PO Box 6004
Asheville, NC 28816
USA

Email us at:

thefinalstrawradio@riseup.net
or **thefinalstrawradio@protonmail.com**

To hear our past shows for free, visit:
<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org>



**ECOLOGICAL
UPRISING, ANTI-
FASCISM
&
ANARCHIST
ORGANIZING IN
SERBIA**

The Final Straw Radio
Dec 19, 2021

Marko: Yes, but I think Serbia is not a little bully. Our culture is impacting all other ex-Yugoslavian little states. They view us as a little imperialist state. But this is very hard to say in the leftist scene here. It's problematic when you say this, you are totally not right because other states are protected by Western countries, imperialist states. But it's not all black and white.

TFSR: You start where you're at geographically and because you have a shared history with a lot of people that are in Montenegro, or Slovenia, Croatia, or Bosnia and Herzegovina. There's a shared past of a period when people had an imagination that we didn't think about our ethnicity, the particular accent that we had, and the religion that we practiced, we were just all together. And I wonder how things like the Balkan Anarchist Book Fair that was going on for a few years that seemed to move between different places – was that a good project for building more solidarity between different scenes in different places?

Marko: Yes, for sure. I was in pretty much at most of these book fairs. This is something that helps our scene in general. Of course, there are some divisions, and some misunderstandings are always there. But I think is something good to have, although it wasn't happening last year. When you mentioned Bosnia, I can say that right now it has a pretty strong anti-fascist group that is very important for us, because in World War II, resistance against Nazi occupation started from Bosnia. And it's also someplace where you have the most diversity in terms of national identity, religion. They have a pretty pure revolutionary line, which is very interesting to see. They were very wounded by these wars. In terms of building a strong movement, they don't have too much financial support, but there is probably something that we can learn from them. Because I see that they are rising from nothing there and there is a big future in Bosnia, we'll see.

TFSR: That's inspiring. Cool, thank you so much. It was really nice to meet you.

Marko: It was very nice to meet you, too.

TFSR: That's like people have difficulty promoting anti-capitalist politics because they get painted with the same brush and Titoist Yugoslavia?

Marko: Yeah. Even if you're using terms like anti-capitalism, they see something wrong. Then after Tito, you have ex-Yugoslav countries split into two sides, the Western countries and the eastern bloc that are like using an anti-imperialist idea to advocate their own capitalism. And then you have countries that are okay with capitalism, but they promote socialism in some cases, but they're with these western countries. And then, in Serbia, the biggest problem is that people would rather accept this anti-imperialist agenda of the current politicians because they believe that they are anti-capitalist but actually they are not. They're capitalists because imperialism is always here, whether it's Western or not. People are struggling to choose a position, they're confused. They view politics very polarized, either you're Western or anti-imperialist. Which is a problem of maturity. They are not politically mature yet.

Then, from the Western side we have too many Western-funded NGOs which gives other people from the Eastern countries a right to say, "we don't want that". It makes sense. But in the west-oriented ex-Yugoslavian countries, Croatia and Slovenia, there are some pretty good anarchist organizations, especially in Slovenia, that are active for a long time. They're doing really well. But, for example, I have a lot of friends in Croatia from the punk scene. I know a lot of people there. And they are pretty much into this like reformist ideas, lifestylism, which is not good enough for the struggle. In Montenegro, it's very bad. You have an anti-fascist movement, but it's pretty much national liberation oriented, it's not oriented to the liberation of the working class. And then Macedonia has some groups that are okay. Mostly, I'm focused on Serbia, so I can talk much more about the Serbian struggle. The biggest issue is that people who are influencing others by social media are much more focused on anti-imperialist struggle, which I think at the moment is not the right way because they're not oriented against capitalism. Rather, it seems that they protect state capitalism and the status quo as fighters of the anti-imperialist country.

TFSR: Little bullies are still bullies, right? Even if they're not the big ones.

Serbia has been rocked by recent, mass blockades in the streets to challenge changes to the Law of Expropriation which would allow the state to take farm lands and other private property to open space for constructing mega projects and extraction like the proposed Rio Tinto lithium and jadarite mine in the Jadar Valley. This is building off of earlier ecological protests in 2021 against the building of private mini hydroelectric power plants along rivers in Stara Planina (aka the Balkan mountain range) threatening access to and health of drinking water. These protest in December forced the 12-year ruling right-neoliberal SNS Party to backtrack and modify plans for the Expropriation and public Referendum laws and put an undefined pause on Rio Tinto's mine.

For the hour, we speak with Marko about those protests, the influence of western NGOs in politics, the Linglong Tire Factory scandal, labor and solidarity organizing with the Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative of which hes a member and which is a part of the Internatioal Workers Association IWA-AIT and challenges faced by leftist anti-authoritarian organizers in former Yugoslavia. He also speaks about his experience of the covid pandemic in Serbia, the politics of anti-lockdown protests, anti-vaxers and the far right in general around Serbia, the impact of US-born neo-nazi Rob Rundo of the Rise Above Movement and Media2Rise who has returned to Serbia despite being deported to Bosnia and has been organizing fight clubs, international ties and solidarity between various fascistic groups around Belgrade.

Search for this interview title at <https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/> to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself with whatever name, gender pronouns, political identity, or affiliation that you'd like for the audience? And tell us about where you're based.

Marko: Okay, I'm Marko, from the Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative, IWA section, International Workers Association. I am from Belgrade, Serbia. And I have lived here pretty much all of my life.

TFSR: I do want to ask about the Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative. But first, just because it's universal, how has the pandemic been in Serbia? Have you had vaccines available and accessible? Has the government imposed lockdowns? Is there much in the way of either right-wing anti-vaccine movement or left-wing social mutual aid projects to fill in where the health infrastructure hasn't?

Marko: At the beginning of the crisis, of course, our government is a bit similar to Trump, it reacted as if it is something not so serious. We even had doctors who were approaching this problem as not serious. They saw it as something not so dangerous. But when it came, it was pretty much panic, as I guess, the whole world was more or less in panic. Even in our structures, or some imaginary free society, we will have the same difficulties to handle all these situations. I think it is a challenging situation for humanity. Also, it is a populist government that likes to be connected with the West but also with the East policies. And the only good thing about the government is that we got all vaccines from all over the world, even much more than some other Western countries in Europe. It happened that at one point, even people from Western Europe were coming here to get vaccinated. On the other hand, here, people are not used to getting vaccinated. In this sense, it's pretty bad.

We have also these conscious anti-vax people. In the beginning, we had a lockdown. We had a state of emergency. It was pretty tough because the state apparatus could practice all these authoritarian principles in the highest manners. But on the other hand, [an emergency response] was something that was needed, but it's different when the state does it and it looks pretty bad. In April, we had the first lockdown which lasted till May in 2020. In June, we already started to open up little by little, and then these protests came up with the far right-wing people that are anti-vaxxers. But the thing with this is that this just started as the anti-vax protest. Other people protested against police repression. And a lot of

Marko: Also, when he was expelled from Serbia for the first time in March this year, all these groups stopped their networking, they're still active, but not so much as when he was here. They split again, even if they're together, they're a much smaller amount of people.

TFSR: The far-right seems to really need one individual to focus on. And when that collapses, their focus on status and having a pinnacle or a leader seems to break down into little groups then competing to be the big dog.

Marko: Exactly. This was a perfect example of it. When Rundo was there, you could see their political potential, their will to act. But after this, you don't see that. They are doing a lot of stuff, but they are not focused as they were when Rundo was active here.

TFSR: I wonder if you have any insights or want to say some words about the state of the left in the former Yugoslavia, and some challenges that you've seen, and what you see as possibilities?

Marko: I wanted to share some knowledge about the context here because Serbia was part of ex-Yugoslav National Federation, and those were socialist countries with an authoritarian leader, but at that period, despite that, the sense of unity and nationalism... There was no nationalism at the time, you couldn't be nationalist, which is like a big thing today. In terms of equality and equity it was a pretty high standard. But also, under the Titoist regime, people didn't follow the USSR side, he split and wanted to make his own socialist country, he didn't believe in a real communist idea in those areas in Serbia and the Balkans because people are not so educated, and they believe it's easier for people to believe in some imaginary personality icon, than in being organized themselves under communist principles. He understood this. He made it all his own way but the problem is he couldn't do it alone. So, the US government some Western countries also supported him. There were a lot of problems in terms of how this ideology will survive. In the end, it split because of nationalism, it was not strong. When Tito died, everybody was thinking that maybe Tito was supporting only Serbs or only Croats, and nationalist tensions emerged in this area. People generalize communist ideas and something bad that produced a very bad reputation and it is not an accepted idea anymore. Something that people don't believe, they were betrayed.

Marko: He was on the run from all these charges from the US, and then he went to South America. He was active there and in a couple of countries in Europe. I'm sure about Ukraine, and I think Bulgaria. This is something that contradicts the narrative here. We weren't aware for maybe eight months that he was here. Actually, there was some funny graffiti of his US Nazi group, Rise Above Movement.

So he made some graffiti with their faces. I have a lot of friends from the US who live here. The graffiti has that Rise Above website, so we checked up and we saw something strange and then we saw him, we were not sure who he was. At one moment, we saw an American antiantifa graffiti. An antifa group from Berlin destroyed it and he repainted it the next day and recorded himself. This is something very important for American far-right groups to show that they can do graffiti because graffiti here is not forbidden like in the US. There are no strict laws, you can get some minor offense for that. To me, he seems like a total no-show guy. I cannot talk explicitly about what we all know here about his movements but he is a very funny guy.

Even if he's here now, I don't think he can be active anymore. You mentioned at the beginning of this year, he was expelled from Serbia to Bosnia. And now there is new information that he is here. Even if he is here, he can not go out because he is forbidden here. So his activism is not impacting too much. I'm following all these Nazi groups that are active in Serbia. He's not active. He is active in producing t-shirts, and in the sense is dangerous, he's bothering a lot of people. After all, he's a symbol of fascism today, because he's a very charismatic person that impacts a lot of people, has this closing company, but right now, many more other groups are more dangerous. He's totally passive. I think he doesn't know yet that his career is done. The biggest thing he can do is this public showing off, like "I can do this, media follows me, I'm very famous". Of course, you can do this for some time, but then you have to be really underground if you're willing to do these kinds of activities. But we'll see, I cannot predict.

His important role here was that he united these different groups of Belgrade nationalists, which involve four or five different Nazi groups, and they are doing Mladic graffiti, war criminals graffiti. These groups are more dangerous here and have much bigger political potential. Lately, we are concerned much more with those.

TFSR: Well, definitely connecting them up and sharing tools between the groups is a scary proposition for anyone.

people that are not anti-vaxxers came out to protest against police repression. We cannot say that it was an anti-vax protest, there was just a minority in the beginning. At one moment, the leftist groups and anarchist groups took over the protests, a lot of far-right people were defending the police. They wanted to say "We are antivaccine but don't attack our police", and para-police and fascist forces were trying to make a group that is protecting the police. But at one moment, some anarchist groups started to throw things at the police and everybody accepted this, and the far-right groups were defeated in a way. I see this protest as our victory because we were able to organize in real action. It was direct action and we practiced organizing there. Later, there were a lot of events under this far-right protest, but not as you see in France or other countries, even in the Balkans. In Croatia, Slovenia, there are a lot of big anti-vaxxer protests. With anti-vaxxers we have here, the scene is big but poorly organized. The far-right groups are not organized in an anti-vaccine way. In this sense, we didn't have a problem.

The other thing that you asked about, the mutual aid, we had a solidarity kitchen and it's still going. It is a leftist initiative that was made for people who are homeless and hungry people. During the pandemic, these groups organized mutual aid actions, bringing food to the elderly who couldn't go out. And that was during the whole pandemic, even with lockdowns, those people were pretty busy with this and they're still active in different struggles. But all of them are connected either with minority groups, elders, and even the last one was with some workers, like those at Linglong Factory, I don't know if you've heard of it. It was a big scandal that the government accepted a Chinese policy that made a big company that is making tires for cars. And they have Vietnamese workers there in very bad working conditions, some of them are forced to work like complete convicts that were brought there to work. This solidarity kitchen also contributed to the struggle against the repression of these people.

TFSR: To clarify that, is it that there were people from Vietnam, that got certain visas that allowed them to work for this company on Serbian soil in a "free trade" compound? It's basically an off-site Chinese manufacture that employs imprisoned Vietnamese people in Serbia?

Marko: Yeah, but those visas are not actually working visas, they are just travel visas. If you're from Vietnam, you need a visa to stay in Serbia. I think it is not even a visa, they took their passports, they didn't even have

visas. The Chinese company stole their passports so they cannot go home. It was a big scandal. The government didn't react at all, it was pretending that this is normal.

TFSR: That's terrible. That must be so scary for those people, even if you get out of that place, then unless you happen to speak Serbo-Croatian or maybe English, or German, some other language that's in the region is a general economic language, where do you go?

Let's talk a little bit more about the labor organizing work that you've been doing there. You mentioned that you were involved in the Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative in Serbia. Can you talk about the work that you all do? What are some of the campaigns going on? We've had guests in the past who have affiliated with other networks, like Anarquismo or the Federation of Anarchist Internationals, but I've never talked to someone from the IWA-AIT. Could you tell me more about that as well?

Marko: With ASI, IWA-AIT member organization, I recently joined, but I participated in actions for a long time. A lot of people from there were my friends from the past. ASI gained full membership in IWA-AIT in 2004. But it was originally established in 1999 or 2000, I'm not sure. ASI was very active as an anarcho-syndicalist movement concerning the workers' problems, but also, it was active in university blockades, which is one of the things that is actually where maybe 80% of the left scene in Serbia originated from. It was three students blockades in which ASI introduced direct democracy principles. In this sense, ASI was very important.

I was involved with some ASI members and other people in a political scandal before I was a member. We were arrested. It was a solidarity event for an arrested guy from Greece, Thodoros Iliopoulos, arrested for an uprising when Alexis Grigoropolous was killed. We got arrested for international terrorism and they were trying to charge us for 15 years or something in prison, but these charges failed. They accused us of attacking the Greek embassy but it was politically instrumentalized action and they didn't have any proof that we did it. All these claims failed and everybody was released. After that, I was from time to time active in organizing with those comrades, but just last year I joined the organization.

TFSR: One of the things that you mentioned that ASI is doing is to help to coordinate campaigns to get people's stolen wages back.

in English, which is unimaginable here because nationalists are generally pro-Cyrillic, anti-Western. It's unimaginable how he made it.

Also, the guy who brought him here is one of the guys who is also a Western-oriented Nazi who lived in Sweden and the US for a short time. I think he brought Rundo here and they have clothing companies, both of them. They have pretty much their security, their income, and their activism through different clothing companies. But not only that, they introduced these "antiantifa" slogans, not only to right-wing groups but now they are accepted even in some football fan groups. We have two biggest football fan groups in Serbia, which is Partisan and Red Star. Now they have started wearing these T-shirts, which is totally bizarre. I'm telling you about this for you to imagine the impact they have. I cannot say that they made many street actions except graffiti but only the distribution of brands has a big impact.

TFSR: That's cultural intervention.

Just to say a few words about Rundo. This was the founder of the Rise Above Movement. He was facing federal charges for crossing state lines in the US to engage in violence on the West coast in 2017 in the Battle of Berkeley, as well as in, I don't know if he was in Anaheim, but a few other spots around Southern California. And those charges had been dismissed in a federal court. But in the meantime, he went into international exile and someone from Bellingcat thinktank had been able to track him down to Belgrade and get him deported to Bosnia beginning of this year, supposedly for three years. But then Bellingcat just did another expose where they said, "Actually, he's still in Belgrade. We found these videos of him and these promo photos from his clothing line that show graffiti and we can see him working out on his balcony". The Federal Court has rescinded the dismissal of his case. He now could be extradited to the US to face charges. A bunch of the other Rise Above people are in prison right now for fighting in Charlottesville in 2017. It's really interesting to hear about how the trash from the US got brought to Serbia and is polluting the scene in Serbia. But also networking the far right in these ways, also the Patriot Front group that just did a march in Washington DC and then I guess got attacked or something. One thing that Rob Rundo does is runs Media2Rise, it's his media company and they were videographing the march, they do the video for far-right groups like Patriot Front. There's this really clear international connection.

another is Belgrade Nationalists, and Zentropa Srbija [Central Europe, Serbia]. Kormilo started their activism back in 1916, or something. And they are affiliated with Italian Nazi movements, the CasaPound squat. A lot of Italians come to visit them. But in later years, they're mostly doing some humanitarian work, trying to be socially accepted and introduce their work to young people who want to fight for Kosovo.

TFSR: They're like autonomous nationalists inspired by Ezra Pound, right?

Marko: Something like that. Zentropa evolved from Kormilo. It's a new group that has some people from the old group. For example, Gajinovic, these people are pretty much lifestyle, which is also interesting for Serbia, they have introduced a lifestylist nationalist thing, like alt-right. They're using a lot of ideas from the leftist scene, they even admire Makhno and sometimes Marx. But they're a far-right group.

TFSR: Are they third positionist, you would say? Like they draw in some of the social elements of those?

Marko: Something like NAM. I don't know if you have it in the US. I know there was National Anarchist Movement. I think something like that. When I read those ideologists, it was actually the same. It's something new here and it's very exciting for the younger population because they have stickers etc. This is also bizarre, most of these stickers are Western, they have like this "Boer Lives Matter", like South African nationalism. Nobody knows about South Africa, especially in this scene, you know. Even "Kyle Was Right" and so on, about Kyle Rittenhouse.

So, now we'll talk about the famous far-right guy from the US, Rundo. He also is responsible for getting into the scene. But it's interesting if we are mentioning Rundo, that he was able to connect all these groups because of his charisma. Some of these groups are totally un-connectable because a lot of pro-Kosovo groups are more into Russian side of imperialism, they even advocate uniting Serbia with Russia. Rundo is coming from the West, he went to Ukraine, participating in joint actions with Azov Battalion, some fight clubs, which is totally opposite. He was fighting a lot of those people from the far right in the front in the war against the Ukrainian people for the Russian side. But he was able to connect them. That was something very interesting. People started to paint graffiti

Marko: This was something that was actually announced, I think, by the Polish section last year or two years ago. For different contexts, different places the idea work differently. We have a lot of trouble organizing, motivating people to organize on their workplaces but this action was pretty successful. We made some announcements on social media that we are doing these actions, helping people to get their wages back and a lot of people contacted us. We were surprised, really a lot of people. We managed to deal with a lot of these problems, not all, we are still working on some, but a lot of these problems are actually very easy to solve. Usually, we contact the owner, we just contact with the letter, seriously written, with all kinds of threats. Of course, there is a legal way but we also say that we are going to picket in front of their stores, or whatever, but most people who contacted us are restaurants, the service industry. Those problems are very easy to solve. It's looked funny how owners tried to avoid always, they didn't answer and in the end, they would say, "No, we were answering, we wanted to pay this worker, but she quit and didn't call us." But we record the whole thing. They admit in the end, when they say they want to pay the worker back and we always return to this working place with the workers so that they cannot get manipulated. We see that they are ready to pay the back wages, the owners agree that they will pay the salary, they really want to avoid our threats. Each time we had success, and this success is mainly because we have these threats that we are going to protest in front of their stores. In the past, ASI did such protests, and it was successful. Before this last event that Polish comrades announced, we had experiences doing this. We are pretty sure that we can manage to convince the owner to pay the salaries in this way, and we've improved in our writing, how to write a good message to the owners. We have to protest less often these days.

TFSR: That sounds like my experience here in the US of Solidarity Unions, not necessarily labor formations, but you'll go to a landlord, you'll go to a boss, and say, "Do you want to be embarrassed publicly? Because we know that you did this, and you're going to lose friends, you're going to lose customers." It's amazing how much embarrassment it can actually do, and it's also so poignant how when someone is isolated, either as a worker who hasn't gotten their wages, or that worker going to the workplace afterwards, when the boss is, "Oh, yeah, just show up, we'll give you the money." That's so good that you make sure they're not isolated because they can be intimidated so easily.

Marko: Exactly. This is our focus. But in terms of a sense of business, I used to live in the US in 1998-99. But it's pretty much different because Serbia doesn't have capitalist history. It was a very long period when we were socialist. So the owners are not sure... In the US, I know "the customer is always right" but here, it is not like that. In these terms, the US has much bigger potential in these protests. It's easier to convince the owner. I know there are some other problems for sure. But in this sense, even in syndicalism, the US has much better potential than Serbia.

TFSR: I hope that people in the audience in the US hear that.

Marko: Also in Chicago, there is one section that is about to be accepted by IWA. I hope that will be soon.

TFSR: Is that the IWW?

Marko: No, not an association, just some section group.

TFSR: Oh, cool.

Marko: IWW is a separate association. But this is a group that is going to be a full member of the IWA.

TFSR: In November and December of 2021, we've seen tens of thousands of people taking the streets to block traffic and cities across Serbia. Can you talk about the ecological uprising? What's inspiring it, who's participating and what the limits are, and what's happening now?

Marko: In this ecological uprising, in the beginning, there were several problematic cases. For example, micro electric river dams being built that are destroying the streams, smaller rivers [in the Balkan Mountains, Stara Planina]. And the first initiatives were established on those struggles. And then later, mining companies came up. In the beginning, it was small organizations, local organizations. They united and made bigger organizations and alliances. They're usually NGOs but there are different organizations. These groups and their motivations can be hard to understand. Here, a lot of people from the left have trouble recognizing those struggles as worker struggles, because it's an environmental thing. But also, a confusing thing with this last struggle was that the government wanted

TFSR: Can we stick to that for just a moment? Because it's interesting, the Leviathan movement is an interesting thing. Being an animal rights organization that is distinctly anti-human immigration? It seems like maybe they have this idea that there's a Pure Serbia, where humans and animals and plants, it's like the ecological fascist crossover.

Marko: You can say that. You are right, when you say these groups are anti-immigrant, they're pretty much active in marching and hunting immigrants around the city. They have an idea of animals, pure race, things like that. They were even going to some minority groups like Roma groups, taking their dogs with a pretext of them not being treated well.

TFSR: Do they participate in the anti-vax movement also?

Marko: The Leviathan group was in coalition with one of the most famous anti-vax parties, but as themselves, they don't talk too much about it. There are other far-right groups. Leviathan is no longer in this coalition. The grandfather or the leader of the group was a famous internationalist partisan, he participated in the Spanish Civil War. He was a member of the German Communist Party and Yugoslavian Communist Party. He was also a publisher, before World War II he owned bookstores all around Serbia. With the privatization, his grandchild got it all back. All these companies were appropriated by the state and were used for the public good in the socialist era. But after socialism, they had to give it back so this guy has a lot of money.

TFSR: Did he get that big communist publishing money?

Marko: Yeah. [laughs] And he claimed he never saw his grandfather as a communist. He has a very strong stance against communism. The other thing, his family is a very famous Jewish family, and he's also a Jewish guy who claimed that he's not Jewish, he was baptized in Orthodox Church, and he changed his beliefs. This is maybe something psychological, which all Nazi people have in common.

TFSR: Thanks for going with that. You were gonna say about other groups that are causing problems?

Marko: Yeah, there is a group called Kormilo Srbija [Serbian Helming],

grade and tons of other places were shut down for hours at a time. It seems like quite a victory for pushing back the appropriation law, but is Rio Tinto still hovering as an option?

Marko: To make it clear, the blocking of the streets was only two weeks. It was two weeks' weekends. It was not two months, but before that, there were different protests in the streets. In the end, the government saw it as a danger because they saw their target groups are involved also in this protests, not only, as they thought, the western and liberal citizens but there are also working-class people. And they have the vocabulary of the working class when they are talking to the people. They saw it as a danger because elections are coming in April. They stopped it immediately. There is still potential that something will come up. People aren't stopping. Some organizations stopped, but still, a lot of people are protesting. We will see what will happen at the end.

TFSR: Fingers crossed.

Could you talk a bit about the work of resisting the far right in Serbia? What sorts of formations are around? And what sort of problems do they make?

Marko: We have a couple of pretty problematic groups. We have a lot of small groups that don't have big political danger, but they are still dangerous in terms of attracting people. We also have this organization that was running for elections and they now they accepted some new strategies to introduce the far right, like animal liberation, etc. That is something new here in Serbia because it's a more traditionalist country, which is used to engage in socially accepted struggles, but now these far-right groups introduce Western ideas, because I saw it in the West, here I've never seen it before. One of the dangerous groups is Leviathan/ Levijatan, which is an animal protection and a Nazi group that has lots of opportunities to go on state media. They have opened doors to state media and they use it well. They have pretty bad language, they have a mafia style of talking. Some of these groups are connected to the mafia, historically, it was also like that, all Nazi groups were connected with the mafia and with some social struggles. They are introducing this mafia language, which is interesting to some kids, how they talk, how to be tough, which is dangerous in a way. On the other hand, they have an intellectual limitation and they will fall apart pretty soon, even though they have existed for five or six years.

to introduce neoliberal capitalism, because the government was about to announce a new law for the appropriation of private property, which is not abolishing private property, but expropriation by the state in order to give the land to bigger private companies. So they wanted to appropriate smaller farms from people so they can give that to the mining companies. In this sense, I think the struggles are really anti-capitalist. A lot of people were organizing because of the environment. But I think we should recognize those struggles and be in solidarity with those people because they're also anti-capitalist struggles.

TFSR: Just to step back a little bit. The hydroelectric dams that were being proposed on some of the rivers would have flooded people's farmlands, would have damaged the water tables, would have forced villages to move probably. What was that power production for, was that for domestic use, or was that for export to another country?

Marko: That was small private companies that are making small river dams that destroy the whole water infrastructure in terms of drinking water, but also the biodiversity, animal and plants. A lot of these dams were also going to be built in protected areas for biodiversity [noted in the Red Book published by Biologia Serbica journal from the University of Novi Sad]. But because corruption is very big, this is nothing for them, the government never mentions this.

TFSR: You may not know this, but in the US we have a thing called Eminent Domain where the government comes in and appropriates people's private property or the apartment building where people live, gives them a "fair payment" and then gives it over for the development of another capitalist project. That sounds like what you mention.

Marko: It's kind of like this, but when I compare Chilean appropriation, I can see this. Because in Chile, you have something similar was happening and at the end of the 70's, when they announced a whole package of new agricultural laws, they announced the appropriation law, which was announced not for appropriating and distributing property to everybody. It was an appropriation for the distribution to private companies, that now own the whole drinking water. All these multinational companies own water sources in Chile. This is something that I recognize here also with this new law and probably what's in the US, it might be something similar.

TFSR: Yeah. You were saying there was resistance from a lot of local farmers to the micro dams and then to the wider Law of Expropriation. That was coming on the books. Can you talk about some of the mining initiatives that have been especially bringing a bunch of people into the streets, because of the pollution that would be coming alongside them?

Marko: This last one was about Rio Tinto, it's one of the biggest companies in the world owned by Australia and maybe Canada. They have a history of making a mess in a lot of countries. Probably somewhere, they didn't make a mess, but in the end, those are the ones who get profit, not the people. Even some Western countries like France didn't allow them to mine and here, the government allows those companies to mine because it sees opportunities. Not only opportunities in the sense of making some money out of it, but the whole infrastructure, then invest in infrastructures. They are building roads, they paid for big roads in advance. They didn't even get permits to build on this mine, but they already invested in building roads. I think the government also sees opportunities in this sense.

There were a lot of people bothered by it in the last struggle. A lot of people came out. And there were threatening the government that people would block the streets. Of course, the government didn't bother, they were even laughing. But when they blocked the streets, the government changed their mind. The problem with our government is that much of their support base are working class, often not the people we see in ecological protests. And they saw that a lot of working-class people were out in the protests, so they had to change the policy. They froze the law, but they didn't totally stop it. Probably, they will start it back up. But right now something is happening, I don't know in which direction it will go. They announced plans for a real reorganization of this area in which the mining industry was supposed to be built but just yesterday or the day before, they put down this plan of reorganization. We shall see.

Pretty much a lot of leftist people in some sense are not aware of the importance of this struggle. A lot of leftist people see it as a middle-class struggle and this is a symptom of the 90's because, in the 90s, people were betrayed by the new government after the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević. Everybody was expecting something to happen when we overthrew socialist populism but actually, liberals came and privatized everything. There is a lot of this fear in the leftist scene that NGOs are

instrumentalized by Western countries and are taking over the narrative with these environmentalist ideas, Green ideas. Here in Europe, there are a lot of Green parties, the German Green party has their affiliations here also. I even know some people in organizations that are running for the campaign and they are directly affiliated with the German Green Party. They claim they are left also, but the German Green Party was in coalition with different far-right groups. In this sense, there is a lot of fear that people who came out will be instrumentalized for the parties again. But in reality, it's not like that, because a couple of times, even some of those people who are members or leaders of these parties showed up in those protests, and they were boo'd out. So I cannot say that this makes sense.

TFSR: I don't know how much that theory that the Western EU liberal establishment is trying to control is a product of the ruling party, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Aren't they also saying that the protests are a product of...

Marko: Yes, but those two narratives are compatible. The opinion of some of the leftist people is almost the same as the ruling party's view. In this sense, it's problematic. But I think also, that even if there is a narrative like that, even if it's true that some Green Parties or some Western establishment want to use this protest, we shouldn't recognize that as their struggle. It is our struggle, and we should fight and take it, not pacify ourselves with this idea.

TFSR: There was another law alongside the Expropriation Law. That was another point of contention that the government seemed to back down on, that concerned popular intercession in the process. Wasn't there a public mandate?

Marko: That was a referendum. The problem with this Law of Referendum is when this referendum is legal, and when it is not? If there are only 100 people, they can make a referendum, it doesn't matter if other people are boycotting the referendum. And that is a problem. But the biggest problem is the idea to pass the Appropriation Law. I think this is an introduction to the neoliberal economy.

TFSR: Again, tens of thousands of people in the streets, the government laughed and said, "this isn't going to happen". But in fact, Bel-