

Opening speech at the 2nd Congress of the TUI Pensioners

Dear colleagues,

On the occasion of our 2nd Congress, we welcome all fellow delegates who take part in the Congress and we send a warm, class and combative greetings to all pensioners and retired people in the five continents who are a huge force with accumulated positive and negative experience in the course of life and of our struggle.

Five years ago, in Barcelona, Spain, we organized the founding congress of the TUI Pensioners according to a decision of the WFTU. This initiative, taken for the first time in the action of the world movement, is being ratified by life, and today we are in Bogota, Colombia, and we are holding our second congress, having a legacy of the action of this period from the pensioners' movement around the world.

Throughout the years, the TUI Pensioners under the shield of the WFTU has developed its action throughout particular difficulties stemming from the dramatic effects brought upon the working class, the pensioners and the population by the severity of the capitalist crisis.

Today we can say that despite these difficulties, we are on the right track and that we have taken steps based on the decisions of the 17th Congress of the WFTU. We are aware that we have a long way to go before we meet the demands of our time and create a movement that responds to the real needs of retired people.

We really have the opportunity for our global organization to become the shield to defend the rights of pensioners around the world, against governments, against yellow trade unions and the compromised leaders of the global pro-employer and pro-government trade unionism, overcoming weaknesses of subjective and objective character that will be mentioned in detail in the speech of our c. Secretary.

Dear colleagues and co-workers,

In the course of our action, we take into account a number of important social, economic and political factors and developments in the world that affect our action.

Key features of the latest developments in the world are:

The strengthening of China in relation to the US and the Eurozone, based on their shares in the World Gross Product. This is the main reason why China's competition with the US is sharpening, while the USA still hold the first place, despite the tendency to reduce its share.

The slowdown in the growth rate of the international capitalist economy over the past three years, with no imperialist center expected to act as a pioneer in increasing its growth rate.

The amount of the over-accumulated capital and its inability to control its deprivation in a satisfactory way by bourgeois governments in all imperialist centers.

The accentuation of the basic contradiction, the intensification of the tendency to absolute and relative impoverishment of the working class first and foremost in the more developed capitalist economies, the increasing degree of exploitation and exacerbation of all social contrasts.

The effect of anomalous development among the different member states of transnational imperialist alliances. This fact, combined with the increase in the divergence of interests between the bourgeois classes of these states, within the exploitative system, increases the uncertainty about the coherence of these alliances.

Similarly, the forecasts for the EU's slow and feeble recovery are focused on its comparatively lower productivity than the US and on the consequences of tight monetary and restrictive fiscal policy, which in their turn restrain the pace of new investments.

The difficulty in managing the over-indebtedness of states and international banking groups, as well as the large deficits in state balances, continue to cause "headaches" to state and transnational staffs.

Class inequalities on a global scale are constantly expanding. The unequal distribution of world wealth was further widened after the international synchronized capitalist crisis. According to the annual survey on the world wealth of various capitalist organizations and houses, 90% of the population owns about 10% of the wealth, with the poorest 75% owning less than 3% of wealth. Indeed, out of 10% of the population that owns 90% of wealth, only 1% owns almost 50% of wealth. At the same time, 71% of the world's population lives with less than the equivalent of \$10 a day. These figures are becoming more and more grim over time for the popular strata.

The results of these class inequalities are also reflected in the lack of access to clean water for 780 million people, the lack of access to sanitation facilities for 2.5 billion people and the lack of access to electricity for 1.3 billion people.

It is important for the organization and the prospect of our struggle to look more closely at a number of aspects of the global capitalist economy.

The US continues to hold the first position in terms of its contribution to the World Gross Product, but notes a downward trend. A slight deceleration in US economic growth is projected, with the main obstacle being the shrinking of exports, which is related to the appreciation of the international dollar exchange rate and the slowdown of the international trade.

There is also a declining trend in the share of the Eurozone and a simultaneous increasing trend in the share of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa).

China holds the 2nd place in terms of its contribution to the World Gross Product. Its growth rate remains high, although it has declined significantly and is at its lowest point of the last twenty years, with a tendency for a further decline. This fact raises a general concern in the centers of international capitalism, due to the large potential impact on the global capitalist economy of a significant decline in the growth rate of the Chinese economy. These fears derive from its large

share of the international market (a large share of international trade and money investment in foreign bonds).

The intervention of bourgeois policy to significantly curb capital depreciation actually delays entering into a phase of dynamic capitalist recovery and increases the dead ends of the bourgeois political system. The emerging strengthening of protectionism policy mainly in the US will negatively affect the growth of international trade, which is already moving at a relatively low pace. At the same time, intra-imperialist antagonisms and contrasts intensify.

There is an imminent risk of more extensive, more generalized imperialist warfare. The possibility of rearrangements shattering the coherence of imperialist alliances, such as NATO, also increases.

At present, nuclear weapons are of great importance. The nuclear-weapon states are the USA, Russia, China, India, Britain, France, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea.

Yet, even between these nuclear powers, there are huge differences, as the US and Russia have major potential. In addition to these two countries, with thousands of ready-to-launch nuclear caps, only Britain and France have nuclear weapons ready for use, and maybe even Israel.

Russia is potentially the only military force that can respond to the United States if it is hit by nuclear damage, causing disastrous effects. This risk is considered to be a deterrent to the use of nuclear weapons. However, it has been historically proved that in the event of an intensification of intra-imperialist competition and its escalation into a warlike conflict, the capitalist states are not reluctant even to the use of such weapons.

It is also important to have a rapid military response. NATO attaches great importance to the establishment of rapid intervention teams, which, of course, in order to be able to carry out their work, they need modern means of support, such as aircraft carriers or strategic bombers, and new territories for geopolitical support, using political - military alliances and bases abroad.

Each bourgeoisie seeks to increase its power through political-military alliances. NATO continues to be the strongest political-military alliance, despite the intensification of internal contradictions and the emerging tendency of a self-governing EU military mechanism.

Similar plans to strengthen its presence have been prepared by NATO and the US in the Pacific region (with the "Pivot to Asia" strategy), but also in other regions.

Concerning the areas of actual or potential military controversy, the SE Mediterranean, SE Asia, North Africa and the Arctic Circle stand out without excluding other hotspots or "flammable" areas such as the Caucasus, the Persian Gulf, the Aden area and the Balkans.

In addition to NATO, however, other political-military alliances (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Collective Security Treaty Organization etc.) have emerged and although they are even more "loose" and less developed than NATO they have the same class character, in other words, they are alliances of capitalist states.

At the same time, in a number of regions, such as Latin America and Africa, political-economic alliances linked, inter alia, with specific political-military alliances - are being formed, in partnership for example with the EU. Separate states in Latin America (such as Colombia, Peru, Chile, Mexico) and elsewhere (such as Australia) are also part of NATO's overall "partnership" plans.

In recent years, there is an increase of the mercenary armies, in other words the private military operations which, with various pretenses, undertake missions in dozens of warring regions representing the interests of capitalist states.

The subject of military controversy is:

The control of energy deposits and transport routes for energy resources (e.g. petroleum, natural gas etc.).

The control of land and sea freight corridors (e.g. the silk road, Mediterranean sea, Bosphorus, Horn of Africa etc.).

The control of underground wealth in the Arctic zone, mineral wealth, rare earths, and water reserves.

The utilization of space for military purposes.

The competition for market shares, in which war means are used not only to gain new market shares, but also to reduce the share of competitors.

In these circumstances, the action of the so-called "Islamic terrorist" groups is a component part of the imperialist war in the 21st century.

Of course, alongside the fierce competition for monopoly profits, there are also efforts to achieve compromise, agreements, temporary suspension of any widespread confrontation and even the redeployment of alliances, as evidenced by recent developments within the Euro-Atlantic "camp" itself.

Dear colleagues and co-workers,

From the elements mentioned above, it becomes clear that the situation in the world is no good at all, as governments want to present it, as a new capitalist crisis is imminent. Governments at the helm of capitalist countries, regardless of how they define themselves, right, liberal, centrist, socialist, left, play a key role in this chessboard as a subordinate servant of the interests of the bourgeoisie and the imperialists.

At the altar of capitalist profit and during the period of the capitalist crisis, labor, retirement and popular rights are sacrificed, such as salaries, pensions, rights to social security, health, medicines, education, collective labor agreements, decent working hours, ownership of a house etc., as authoritarianism and the suppression of struggles intensify, as fascist forces are being strengthened.

In their propaganda, governments with the support of the media, the press and the yellow trade unions, using a mixture of lies and half-truths, try to blackmail, confuse and subdue the peoples, disorientate the struggles of the retired people and the popular strata and draw them to support capitalist development as a way out, while it is actually the cause of our crises and misery, in order to ensure that the working class and the working people will support the profitability of the corporate groups and all future anti-popular anti-labor measures, imposed additionally to those imposed so far that have destroyed our lives. They are unscrupulous, using even false anti-historic arguments, reaching up to the point of equating fascism with communism.

They strive to hide that the situation in general in the capitalist world is not good, that it is explosive and that new unfavorable developments are at hand.

Taking into account this dramatic situation for the peoples of the whole world, we can, together with the working class and the popular strata, become the subversive force, to strengthen our action, our organization and our struggles, to put a barrier to this Armageddon and to relieve society of the suffering of capitalist exploitation.

Only by our struggle and aiming at a massive participation never seen before we can rule these measures out and impose the terms and conditions so that we and our children can live better in accordance with the wealth we produce which now ends up to a handful of capitalists. With decent pensions, social benefits, exclusively public health, medicines, social security, housing, heating, clean water, protection against natural disasters. And those demands should also apply to our children and to our grandchildren, so that they can work on fixed decent working hours, under Collective Labor Agreements covering their real needs, with annual rest leave, and not in slavery-like conditions imposed by the profitability of capital. We oppose to the involvement of our countries in imperialist plans, to the risks of war in a number of regions in the world that are part of plans for new interventions, attachments, country partitions, border modifications, use of nuclear weapons.

We must give the battle to strengthen our struggle with the workers' popular movement for the great problems of the people and their solution, in the prospect of gaining the wealth we produce and using it to serve our own needs.

In our action we should take into account the tactics of our opponents in order to reveal the lies and extortions of the governments. We should not underestimate their insidious tactics and certain measures, as they say, to relieve extreme poverty, that aim to create false hopes to the people that the capitalist crisis has led to live by begging, as a result of the barbaric policies they apply to meet the needs of capital.

We do not compromise and will not subordinate our needs to the demands of the capital. The billions that have been stolen from our funds on behalf of corporate group bankers for their bloody growth are our own money, they derive from our hard work. We did not borrow them from any local or foreign borrower, nor from the bloody International Monetary Fund, we owe them to no

one. We will not live with the so-called compensating crumbs, we claim what has been stolen from us. We are in stark contrast to the capitalist development for the few and we will continue the struggle until we take into our own hands everything we produce.

We won't tolerate any government measures, we must finish with the illusions, complacency, indifference, disappointment. We are in an unscrupulous class war with the bourgeoisie, and with those who serve it, with the governments and the yellow trade unions that in exchange for a huge amount of money, they align with the strategic goals of capital, to hinder the organized expression of dissatisfaction among the retired, workers and other popular strata, to obstruct the development of class struggle and the strengthening of our alliance in front of the next imminent attack.

Be aware that they will not stop taking measures against us, if we bend our head or if we accept the argument that "nothing can be done".

The way to strengthen our common struggle with our children, with the labor movement, is the necessity that needs to be fulfilled. There is no way back.

Dear colleagues and co-workers,

The cornerstone of our struggle will be the construction of a strong, massive, combative movement of pensioners alongside the labor and popular movement in every country of the world.

To accomplish this goal, we need to be more determined, to give all our strength, to overcome our own weaknesses and to give a solution to what we can (because we cannot surely solve everything), in order to create a movement with these characteristics.

Dear colleagues and co-workers,

Today, on the occasion of our 2nd congress with the participation of representatives from pensioners' organizations from all over the world, we have the opportunity through our experience over the years, to discuss and to evaluate as objectively as possible our action, weighing the positive and the negative experience, so that we can come up with useful conclusions for our course in the future. Let's bring to our congress the experience from the countries we live in, the problems and the demands we have to promote and claim.

We must get to know even better the situation and the conditions in which the forces exploited by capitalism live and develop.

We know that the unfair exploitative system is neither invincible nor eternal, it has untamable contrasts that it can't overcome. It is in the hands of the working class and the people in general to bring it down with their struggle, the objective conditions are now mature.

We also know that no conquest of the working class has been granted, that is the result of a cruel, inexorable, and bloody class struggle.

We will follow this path consistently to defend our lives, the lives of our children and the people who suffer from the brutal, barbaric, anti-labor, anti-popular policies that are consistently applied by all the governments that serve the exploitative system.

We claim what has been stolen from us, as it is ours, we have paid for it with the blood of our life and we owe it to no lender. We will not legitimize in our conscience that it has been taken away from us.

We struggle and claim all the wealth that we have produced and the one our children produce, so that it serves the needs of those who produce it and that it does not turn into profits and powers for the needs of capitalists. This is our one-way street and on this road and we will continue with consistency until the working class has written on its flag the abolition of exploitation of man by man.

Dimos Koumpouris

President of Pensioners Member of the pensioners and Retired

TUI of the WFTU