

## **DIMOS KOUMPOURIS**

Good morning, dear Quim, .

I received your letter some time ago.

However I have opted to delay (based on the date of 07/15/18) my answer in order to be able to offer you more detailed account of the present moment in our country now that a program of mobilizations and struggles waged by the retirees´ has been completed. Further activities – we have called them “a 2018 marathon”, will be completed by the end of the year.

I believe that in the assessments that form the record of these six months of action we may find some useful elements and conclusions that can be generalized and some of them that can be used in the frame of our global action.

A. Our estimates for this period are as follows:

As concerns to the Retiree´ s movement in Greece, since the beginning of 2018 we have defined our action and our program of struggles as a continuation of the successful mobilizations that were taken during the previous period.

To achieve these goals, we have worked on the basis of a good planning and coordination of the forces of the Retiree´ s movement attached to all the boxes and funds that pay pensions: private, public and professional.

The main objective that we have proposed for this course is to create the conditions for the combative mass movement of retirees through a marathon of struggling mobilizations to prevent the application of the destructive Law 4387/16 (named Law Katrougalos) that will be applied from 01/01/209 in what it means a new attack on our retirement income through the recalculation process and the so-called personal difference; by eliminating family benefits, as well as reductions by changing the tax scale .

We must also emphasize two decisive points such as health

problems and auctions.

After this first phase of the struggle we can say that all our actions, local, regional and pan-hellenic, as well as concentrations and representations, which were prepared through regional meetings of the Board of Directors of our unions, have been successful. In almost all the capitals of the provinces, in the regions and in Attica mass and combative mobilizations took place, which continue at the present moment based on the mentioned problems.

Along these combative demonstrations throughout the country, the participation of retirees surpasses all previous figures, but we can not say that it has reached the levels that are currently required.

Our chances to reach our main goal are based in the provisions of Law 4387/16 to be applied at the end of the year, thus we try to take the advantage as measures against retirement will not be applied until that moment.

Overall, our action in this period has been marked by militant demonstrations in which thousands of retirees from everywhere in the country took active part. So far, more than 80 meetings have been held. We have highlighted all our main problems: pensions, social security, medical care, housing auctions, as well as a long range of local problems.

Through the constant development of these actions waged by a considerable group of retirees a stable combative relationship has been achieved with the unions and with other related struggles; we can say that they have a stable participation in them, they raise their heads with optimism, they offer a fighting answer to the logic of fear expressed with the phrase "it will not change anything".

However, we have not achieved yet the mass participation that is still required, but the retirement movement is a movement with potential and perspective because its problems intensify every time, giving us the chance to perform a better work. It is no by coincidence that the press refers to this point that "the Retiree's movement and their action has created important problems in the government due to the indignation of retirees, and the effervescence that exists for what they have been subjected to date and are in an antithesis with what looms in the next stage".

The government is aware of this truth and, consequently, is trying to overcome this situation through its propaganda, while at the same time is studying the way to offer some minor concessions and limited benefits: just a handful of crumbs they consider enough as to create inactivity, disorientation and demobilization among the Retirees´ ranks while they design their new slaughter.

The government also knows fairly well that this action has revealed to a large extent his false propaganda that, supposedly, will satisfy retirees with equivalent measures and social benefits or that now with the next capitalist development and the so-called "clean exit", the sufferings will end and we will finally get a better life.

Through this propaganda, the government seeks to hide the new anti-pension and anti-popular measures scheduled for the coming years; a laws´ package that will be enforced for many more years if the workers and the popular movement does not overthrow this anti-worker policies dictated by the needs of the big capital and its constant greed for benefits.

Up to this moment all our action has helped, to a large extent, for retirees to be aware that new destructive measures are coming against them: those currently in full force and others recently approved. Through some of these, the government already applies new cuts to those who are currently entering retirement´s age.

We had results coming from our struggle. Under this pressure, we have forced the government to give up all retirees arbitrary cuts made in health. And this without the obligation to appeals, courts, or paperwork related to applications.

After a major rally that took place on March 8 in Athens and the pressure we have exerted, we basically forced the Deputy Minister of Labor in his statement to admit that no requests are needed to pay the arbitrary cuts made to supplementary and primary pensions. He pledged to return the withholdings on the solidarity contributions to which they were withheld; he also promised that when the government approved the public finances, after the fourth evaluation, he would pay these sums retroactively. It also undertook to reimburse beneficiaries for the difference in complementary pensions that were also arbitrarily withheld. These commitments have materialized.

This advantage has helped to avoid disorienting retirees so they are not going to the insurance fund offices, to the courts, not paying lawyers and not believing that their problems will be solved with a simple request.

Through our struggle we still have to make clear to everyone the role played by the main opposition party, New Democracy, along with other parties that have agreed with these policies, which have voted together in favor of the memorandums despite their opposing appearances. They also have huge and similar responsibilities, and have not committed to abolishing the least of what has been done so far.

Our struggles are measurable, the voice of the retirement movement sounds strong enough to be taken into account by the rulers. If we participated in bigger numbers we would be able to reject more measures and change the current situation for the better. This is what's must be done.

We are constantly working on this path and in the orientation of the struggle. After the summer holidays, we will start a more dynamic way aimed to add greater strength to all of our further actions.

We have also succeeded in materializing our entire plan and participating in the actions that the labor movement developed in several ways. Through these actions of the class-conscious movement, the debate over the overthrow of the right to strike, the expansion of auctions, the abolition of Collective Agreements and other rights of the Working Class were at the core of the debate. The "surprise" tactic of the government did not succeed. Its attempt to blindly approve the Union Law without the opposition of organized forces and based on the support of other forces (GSEE : General Confederation of Workers) and ADEDY (Confederation of Public Employees' Unions), the attempt to make the anti-worker content seem "harmless" thanks to the government's planned propaganda did not pass: "it is for the strengthening of democracy in the unions, to facilitate the active participation of the workers against the union aristocracy , or that has a varied bill more positive than negative, etc. "

What do we have before us for the next stage?

A few days ago, Parliament voted on the Pre-requisite Evaluation

Rooms the cuts and new anti-popular measures that are coming. This new moves only comes to confirm that all we have previously states is nothing but the truth.

Immediately in the year 2018-2019 we enter in a harsh period of the new cuts included in the mortal law against Social Security 4387/16. Our already looted retirements are in the process of cutting back on the "personal difference" that is already being applied to new retirees since May 2016, and which will be extended in 2019 to the oldest. New reductions will be made in the complementary ones, but also by the change in the tax scale that will reduce the tax-free rate from 9,000 to 5,600 Euros per yearly income, which will start next year, as well as the deduction of family subsidies. This means that to the cuts we have sustained so far we will also have a new deduction of 3 to 4 pension payments per year.

Based on the law that will be applied in the medium term and recently approved by Parliament with the Eurogroup's agreement for the years 2019-2022, a decrease of 18.5 billion Euros and of further 2.5 million Euros is established along with pension's cuts and 6 billion of the taxes that they steal. For the year 2019, 3.9 billion of the primary pensions and 232 million Euros of the Welfare will be added to these cuts. New reduction of the Social Allocation of Retirees (EKAS) subsidy (Non-contributory Retirement Pension) from the 220 Euros initially given in also in the government's agenda: it has now been reduced to 35 Euros; in 2019 it will be reduced to 12 Euros and at the end of 2019 it will be completely abolished. From the reduction of tax-free income a further 1.p million € will be collected by the state. Any increase in pensions by the end of the year 2022 will be forbidden. The primary surplus of 3.5% billion will increase gradually to 5.19%.

Auctions are currently taking place even for a debt of 500 Euros to the state.

Those who in the previous stage cultivated illusions that, supposedly, the government plans to not apply those harsh measures, etc. deliberately lied to the population in order to attain a deeper disorienting among workers and retirees.

In a recent interview given by the Prime Minister to the German Die Welt he leaves no room for illusions, as he took oaths of loyalty and guarantees to the European Union and to lenders that workers'

rights, trampled on in recent years, are considered by the government as something "past forgotten". He also made a clear confession concerning the 2015 referendum, "that was nothing more than a vote for the reform program". On the question of whether the government would increase pensions after his "program" he responded negatively, stating that "the pension reform was hard. To this we owe fiscal consolidation. (...) We will not allow a coming back to the past in this aspect! "

In addition, all the anti-popular measures and also those aimed against retirements recently decided in the Parliament were discussed and previously decided by the Eurogroup.

In this period we have concluded our first round of demonstrations with good results. These are the basis for us to give more momentum to the battle since the beginning of autumn, and to continue with greater determination our marathon of struggles.

Through our presence on all fronts of action, through the works developed by our unions and also through our personal debates aimed to highlight our potential for this coming year, we may prevent the application of new measures and take advantage of the fact that these will apply to end of the year.

Our main demands are: we claim what has been taken from us, that the new measures are not applied: cuts due to personal differences, family subsidies, and contributory and non-contributory retirement benefits. No new tax burden.

We also strive for the recapitalizations of our Social Security funds as well as our demand on health at central and local level. Stop auctions!

We are waging a decisive battle to make retired people aware that there is no other way than the road of struggle to stop and reverse the anti-worker policies of the EU-Capital Government. We can avoid the application of the measures through a massive participation in the struggle. We can develop this momentum and have positive results.

An important role in this process will be the construction of a strong, massive and combative retirement movement, together with the workers' and people's movement. This is guaranteed above all by the good functioning of a union of first level and its constant action among retirees in their area with its constant and permanent daily action together with retirees through various actions.

We may also consider as greatly needed regular and extraordinary meetings of the Board of Directors and with the participation of all its members.

Constant contact of the union with its members will be carried out regularly and in many ways through conferences, informative conferences about all the problems in the local, pan-hellenic and regional areas as well as on the action carried away.

Through these actions we must take advantage on the fact that other people also have availability for various obligations and activities. Many of our unions have developed a series of activities for culture and leisure, without losing their compass fighter, more on the contrary, by improving and strengthen it through these facts.

Our continuous and objective duty lies on the organization of the whole retiree's movement and the coming of great masses of workers to the union. This must be a key objective and a clear criterion in how to proceed must be applied.

Lately, we have had mixed results, sometime positive by doubling voters in a number of unions, but also negative ones in those other unions when we have experimented a decrease. This has nothing to do with objective difficulties, but with the work of our unions, based on the obligations that we have as a Federation. In any case we follow and help them in general matters and especially in their elections.

Through our general demand framework, our main goal for this year is to fight until Law 4387/16 is canceled. It may be fairly clear that:

We do not claim subsidies and dividends because we have not paid for them, but for retirements, health and social rights to keep a dignified life.

The billions of Euros that have been cut and torn from our funds for the benefit of the banks, of the business groups for their blood-stained development, is our money, and therefore a product of our work.

There must not be any tolerance to government measures. We must put an end to illusions, complacency, indifference, disappointment.

We must escape from the easy solutions that are being voiced by the forces attached to the system, appeals to the courts and so on...

We claim our demands based on our real needs and on the wealth that we retirees have produced and that by force all the governments that serve capital have torn us off for their own needs and their own profit. On this basis, we demand: the total performance of contributory and non-contributory pensions, of the Social Solidarity Allocation for Retirement (EKAΣ), of the dividends, and of the single payment. Also we claim for the restoration of the 13th and 14th pay and everything else that has been taken from us. There should be no minimum pension below 600 Euros, a figure nowadays established in 360 Euros.

Immediate primary and secondary pensions, single payments, dividends must be paid immediately, giving self-employed pensioners the opportunity to receive a pension on the basis of the contributions they have paid regardless of the amount they owe to their social security.

We demand the provision of public health system and free health care service to all without limitations and conditions, immediate strengthening of the public infrastructure with both human and material resources, to completely forbid private sector action in the health industry.

Stop the auctions

Eliminate all laws that go against Social Security, against the people, and the imposition of more taxes.

Refund of the huge account of money taken from Social Security.

No house in the hands of bankers. Now, under the new law, the State can seize workers and retirees' homes for a debt of only 500

Euros.

The government and its allies will not stop taking measures against us while we bow our heads and continue with the logic that nothing can be done.

Through this and other actions we have highlighted that our current problems are caused by the action of the imperialists, by the risk of war in our region, and by the responsibilities of the government. The thirst of the trans-national groups of greater profits intensifies the search and the struggle for new markets, engenders antagonisms and contrasts, conflicts and wars.

For us, all this means nothing but increasing political tensions in our region. The wars that are being waged, the problems built around the nuclear power in the Korean peninsula, among others, are direct results of a conflict between the interests of the US, China, Russia, the European Union and Germany to share the markets and acquire new resources of wealth. In this deadly game there are also regional powers that aim to acquire new prey in order to satisfy the interests of their own business groups. In our own country a new agreement has been signed on the Suda military base in Crete playing with fire, putting an immediate threat to peace. On this basis and as a part of this war-mongers development the planning and supply for the bombing of Syria was carried out.

The so-called FYROM issue (former Socialist Republic of Macedonia, one of the constituent parts of the former Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia) is also managed on this military base following the path marked by the USA and NATO, inciting nationalism and the nomenclature of the two countries, carefully concealing the fact that the people of the region suffer from the aspirations of the imperialists, who do not hesitate to dismember states, peoples, and to change the border with bloody wars if this means a new advance towards its interests. Based on this, the new agreement was also dictated by the imperialists.

We are struggling against the action of the nationalist forces that like to talk about patriotism and organize demonstrations, as well as against the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie that supposedly opposes them with the only request of how to name the neighboring country, hiding the ambitions of the imperialists whose goal is the neighboring country to strengthen the bloody criminal alliance of NATO.

Patriotism means fighting against all this, with the working class and the people joined together against the local and foreign imperialists from all countries, against the bourgeoisie and the governments that serve them.

**B. Regarding the evaluation drawn from the personal action of each one of us in the TUI of the WFTU, I have the following opinion:**

In our presentation at our Second Congress there must be a reference of our personal activity through the tasks derived from the responsibilities that each one of us has been entrusted with. Essentially, the personal action is concentrated in the central people of our organization.

This evaluation must take into account the objective and subjective difficulties and weaknesses in order to reach conclusions about where we should assume the burden of our work for the next period.

On this basis, let's take a brief look at the following problems.

**Positives**

A. The important fact of establishing our ITU at the Barcelona Congress. For the first time in History, the class-conscious movement of pensioners and retirees has provided for itself its own global organization.

During all these years, in the collective leadership elected by the delegates attending the Congress there was good cooperation and it worked within the framework of the decisions of the Congress of the WFTU.

The cooperation among its first members was stable and got along without major problems. We exchange opinions on all important issues. Several visits and meetings took place in several countries, mainly by the general secretary and some by the president. The meetings took place at a regional and continental level focused on Africa, America, Europe and Asia. Our organization took active part in the XVII Congress of the WFTU.

Our efforts have been constant to expand our organization. However, we have to say that the responsible coordinators have not responded in their functions based on our capabilities.

The secretary general had positive interventions in the ILO

In our important initiatives, we highlight our actions for October 1, Day of the Third Age, which we really turn into a day of retirees' struggle worldwide. This has helped to develop the movement of retirees in several countries, together with the workers movement. There is a series of actions taken worldwide by retired people, and many materials for this purpose, announcements, posters that came out of our TUI.

We have worked to enrich our claims to reflect the broad demands of retirees around the whole world.

Efforts have been made to improve our finances, but we continue to have significant problems.

### **Objective difficulties:**

Objective difficulties mainly include differences in languages and long distances.

### **Subjective weaknesses:**

A higher degree aimed to more collective cooperation among our elected members has not been obtained yet.

Our technical secretariat did not work and failed to provide us with the ever asked data we need in order to comply our task.

We have a response problem coming from several of our members that up to this moment don't comply with their responsibilities and their duties; we also lack a technical mechanism necessary to help our coordination. Several other weaknesses in the functioning of the coordinators of the Continents must be overcome in the near future.

In the meantime, and we have to write it down in the negative, we did not succeed and we did not manage to have a meeting with all

our elected members.

There is a serious problem with the finances of our organizations, without finances we are unable to act.

Finally, at the beginning of October, I will have made my proposal for our Second Congress, translated into the conference languages (Spanish-English-French).

With comradeship greetings

Dimos Koumpouris  
Athens 10.7.18