

**Call for participation in the
Second Euromediterranean
“Workers’ Economy” Gathering,
factory of Viome, Thessaloniki, Greece
28-29-30 October 2016**

The global "Workers' Economy" gathering was held for the first time in 2007 in Argentina and brought together workers of recuperated enterprises and work collectives, political and social activists, trade unionists and academics. Since then, the global meetings take place every two years and constitute spaces of encounter, discussion and reflection on the challenges faced by workers in their efforts to defend their means of subsistence through self-management, against the onslaught of globalized capitalism.

In various Latin American countries, the brutal neoliberal restructuring of the economy in the 1990s resulted in a rapid deindustrialisation and a surge in unemployment, which, in combination with the absence of welfare structures and the generalised attack on the working classes, brought about conditions of social unrest. An integral part of the popular counterattack against the widespread collapse was the "recuperation", that is, the occupation and self-management by the workers themselves, of abandoned and bankrupt companies in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela and Mexico.

In recent years, the conditions that triggered the movement of workplace recuperations in Latin America are gradually spreading throughout Europe and the rest of the world, in the throes of the global capitalist crisis. Starting from the European periphery and using the sovereign debt as a pretext, a series of "structural adjustment" programs, rearrange social relations in favour of the economic powers, intensify the plundering of the savings and small property of the lower classes, promote the private appropriation of social and public assets and the speculation at the expense of nature, devalue labour power, abolish labour, social and democratic rights, dismantle the productive fabric and condemn a growing "surplus population" to unemployment and precarity.

Hence, the occupation and recuperation of factories and enterprises that capital discards is a reasonable response and an act of resistance on behalf of European and Mediterranean workers, primarily as a way of preserving their jobs and livelihoods, but also in the long term as an instrument of social transformation and of the creation of a new economy free from exploitation, oriented towards social needs.

The "Workers Economy" Gathering in Europe

The first regional meeting in Europe took place in 2014 at the herb-processing factory of Fralib near Marseille –at that moment occupied and later recuperated by its workers. Attendants included workers of occupied factories from Italy, France and Greece who were then taking the first steps towards self-management, trade unions, university researchers and activists who support workers' self-management. Today, two years later, these projects have been consolidated and new experiences have emerged in Bosnia, Turkey and Croatia.

The Second Euromediterranean "Workers Economy" Meeting" will take place in Greece, in Thessaloniki, at the recuperated factory of Viome, for a host of reasons. On the one hand, Greece has for six years now been an experiment in the implementation of neoliberal austerity policies; these are the exact same policies that triggered the systemic crisis and are now marketed as a "solution", while having already driven a great part of the population to poverty and unemployment. On the other hand, Greece has also been a laboratory of social experimentation and creative resistances grounded in solidarity and social self-initiative. Furthermore, the Greek population, trapped between the imperialist wars in the Middle East and the inhuman immigration policy of the EU, is called to respond with scant resources to the human tragedy of refugees and migrants fleeing from the horrors of armed conflict.

At the same time, the emblematic struggle of the Viome workers, despite being socially consolidated and productively successful, is threatened by an auction and liquidation process and attacked on a daily basis by the political and economic establishment, despite all the promises and pronouncements of series of governments.

The challenges of the worker's economy

From Argentina and Brazil to Turkey and Kurdistan, despite any cultural and social differences, occupied factories and work collectives represent an act of resistance against the depreciation of labour power and the destruction of productive structures, a response to unemployment and marginalisation; at the same time they help flesh out a proposal for the construction of a different economy, alternative to the capitalist mode: a workers' economy. This is a form of activity based on self-management and aims to defend the interests of those who live off their work. Such experiences may include recuperated factories, certain worker cooperatives, solidarity clinics, forms of collaborative economy and other struggles for self-organization of work and self-management of the economy.

The vibrant movements that accompany and support these endeavours challenge the dominance of the market's "invisible hand", and unambiguously put forth the questions: What are we producing? How are we producing it? For whom are we producing it? Through horizontal processes, the entire society can become a participant in the production and distribution of the wealth that society itself produces. Thus, direct democracy, workers' and social control and self-management cease to be abstract concepts, and become instruments of recovering our dignity, preserving our livelihoods and creating different social and economic relations.

However, this peculiar condition of coexisting with capitalism but also calling it into question through everyday practice presents a series of questions and challenges. The issues addressed by the Second Euromediterranean "Workers' Economy" gathering, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Global capitalist crisis, austerity, devaluation of labour power and popular resistances:** analysis from a workers' economy perspective. The meaning and role of self-management in a changing global context.
- **Self-managed work, recuperated enterprises and work collectives:** Problems, opportunities and challenges in their operation within the market. Repression, co-optation and demands towards the state. Convergence and divergence with the traditional cooperative movement.
- **Self-managed distribution and alternative trade networks:** A space of resistance and organization.
- **Self-managed production:** Dealing with administrative, productive, technological and legal challenges, in conditions of absence of financing and technical expertise. The role of sharing and networking.
- **Overcoming marginality and empowering self-managed workers over and within the economy:** Cooperation, solidarity, sustainability and productive efficiency.
- **"Fortress Europe", "labour mobility" and North/South relations:** Overcoming borders and building new bonds in the Euromediterranean space.
- **Challenges for the 21st century labour movement:** Union bureaucratization, precarity, self-employment, unemployment, and informalisation. Responses on behalf of self-managed labour and new forms of unionism.
- **Overcoming race, gender and social inequalities** and addressing the issue of social reproduction in self-managed endeavours.

Organization and call for participation

This meeting is conceived as part of wider social processes aimed at social change on the basis of equality, solidarity, freedom and self-management. Reflecting the organization of recuperated and collaborative enterprises, the meeting is organized through horizontal processes by a network of European and Mediterranean recuperated enterprises and workers' cooperatives, as well as their allies, and funded through resources of the social and labour movements themselves, through individual or collective contributions. Direct or indirect financial support from governmental or intergovernmental organizations is avoided.

While the phenomenon that primarily concerns the gathering is the occupation of the means of production and their management by the workers themselves, we also extend an invitation to a number of other experiences that fall within the “Workers’ Economy” and share organizational framework or political imperatives with the recuperated enterprises, such as self-managed work collectives. Likewise, we welcome the contribution of experiences of solidarity structures and alternative economy networks. We also extend an invitation to members of social and political organizations, collectives and trade unions that uphold workers’ and social control and self-management as a central political imperative and support the workers in their struggle, as well as to thinkers who study and promote these activities. Finally, we invite workers who have chosen other routes of defending their means of subsistence beyond self-management (such as co-management), for a level and honest discussion and exchange of experiences.

Methodology and structure of the meeting

The global and regional “Worker’s Economy” meetings have developed a methodology for debate and dialogue that aims to facilitate participation and promote a thorough discussion of the central thematic axes. The thematic areas outlined above are an instrument of orientation and in no way limit the scope of the issues to be discussed. Given the variety of participants –workers, members of social and political movements, academics– we propose three methods of discussion, in addition to a host of informative, entertainment and cultural activities:

1. Central panels: In these discussions, participants will give presentations and analyses selected by the international steering group along the main thematic axes. Speakers from Greece and abroad that participate in workplaces, movements and schools of thought related to the workers’ economy will have the

opportunity to express their views. The central panels serve as triggers to debate. At each central panel there will be time both for presentations and for questions or comments from the audience. Being the central spaces of the gathering, these panels will not overlap with other activities.

2. Workshops: Workshops are spaces of debate on specific practical issues and will run concurrently. They will combine analysis, presentations of work experiences and open dialogue. Each individual or collective involved in the meeting has the opportunity to suggest topics for workshops, as long as they are practically oriented.

3. Working commissions: These are open spaces without predefined presenters in order to discuss the various issues emerging at the gathering. Working commissions will permit in-depth discussion of specific aspects of the issues presented in the central panels and workshops.

The gathering will also provide the space and time for an assembly meeting where workers of recuperated workplaces will have the chance to advance towards specific joint decisions on issues that may be ripe, based on the discussion advanced in Workshops and Working Commissions and the preparation that may have been done by the euroemediterranean network.

We encourage collectives or individuals who want to participate in the central panels to send a summary of their presentation, which may be related to the issues raised above, but certainly not limited to these.

We also invite everyone interested to send proposals for the organization of workshops. The proposals should address practical issues of self-management and recuperation, and be oriented to the exchange of experiences and debate.

Deadlines and logistics

Summaries submission: Proposals for presentations or for workshop organisation should be sent in Greek, English, Italian, Spanish or Serbocroat to the email address submissions@euromedworkerseconomy.net and should not exceed 300 words. Deadline for summaries submission is 31 August 2016.

Venue: The meeting will take place on 28, 29 and 30 October 2016 at the Viome factory, which is situated 10km south of the centre of Thessaloniki, near the airport.

Access and registration: The meeting is free and open to all. Further information about registration and directions to the venue will be provided soon.

Interpreting: Wireless simultaneous interpreting of the central panels will be provided between Greek and English, while wired simultaneous interpreting will

be provided for other languages, such as French, Italian, Spanish, Turkish and Serbocroatian, according to needs. In the Workshops and Working Commissions interpreters will be allocated according to the composition of the attendants.

Travel: There will be a small solidarity fund to cover transportation costs to and from the meeting; priority will be given to workers of recuperated workplaces and especially those from low-income countries.

Accommodation: The organizers aim to provide accommodation to all attendants who require it, either in homes or in specially arranged areas within the factory. They can also recommend hotels and hostels at discounted rates to those who prefer to arrange their accommodation themselves. For matters of accommodation and travel write to the address logistics@euromedworkerseconomy.net before 30 September 2016.

Food and drink: Delicious and affordable food served by self-managed kitchen collectives will be available twice a day at the venue. Drinks and beverages will also be available.

Solidarity fair: Stalls showcasing the products and activities of local and international collaborative and solidarity projects will be present throughout the duration of the event. If you want to reserve a stall, send a brief presentation of your organization and of your requirements to logistics@euromedworkerseconomy.net.

Video projections: A carefully curated selection of films regarding self-management and workplace recuperation will be shown at the venue. If you want your film included, send (via a file transfer service) a high-quality copy, along with a brief description and English subtitles to films@euromedworkerseconomy.net.

Other activities: On Friday and Saturday night there will be music and theatre performance from local and international artists at the factory.

For any further questions regarding the Second Euromediterranean “Workers’ Economy” Gathering, write to info@euromedworkerseconomy.net.