Note from the editor: [aging, pensions and the crisis]

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Aging, pensions and the crisis
A well-deserved retirement was the ideal of the generation that has built up Europe after the Second World War. Not only no more war, but also a welfare state that takes care of the citizens with fair sharing and a strong human touch. The primacy of economic and market reasoning has washed away a lot of these ideals; nowadays you have to count and calculate. The bill for the worldwide disastrous financial speculation is paid by Greek pensioners and workers, not to talk about citizens of Romania and other countries that are less in the picture but as strongly struck by the effects of the economic crisis. How to reverse this dominance?

For quite some time I have been intrigued by the right to laziness, as promoted by Paul Lafargue in his essay The Right to be Lazy (1883). Lafargue, a French journalist, was Karl Marx’s son-in-law. He polemicized in his essay heavily against then-contemporary liberal, conservative, Christian and even socialist ideas of work: A strange delusion possesses the working classes of the nations where capitalist civilization holds its sway. This delusion drags in its train the individual and social woes which for two centuries have tortured sad humanity. This delusion is the love of work, the furious passion for work, pushed even to the exhaustion of the vital force of the individual and his progeny. Instead of opposing this mental aberration, the priests, the economists and the moralists have cast a sacred halo over work. Blind and finite men, they have wished to be wiser than their God; weak and contemptible men, they have presumed to rehabilitate what their God had cursed. I, who do not profess to be a Christian, an economist or a moralist, I appeal from their judgment to that of their God; from the preachings of their religious, economics or free thought ethics, to the frightful consequences of work in capitalist society.

This brings me to this issue of CLR-News. In the austerity agenda that should lead to growth and to more work, work, work a prominent place is given to the reform of our pension systems. Citizens in Europe are getting older, and
instead of being pleased about the positive impact of improved hygiene, health care and nutrition we are forced to see this as a problem. So no well-deserved retirement any more but according to not only the neoliberal ideologists ‘we must earn our bread by the sweat of our brow’ in the extra years that our welfare state has brought us. And if you have to step out that is your problem, not a societal accountability. The European Commission has recently joined the chorus with a White Paper that deposits the account with the individual. EU citizens have to work longer, and have to settle their old age insurance individually (with products on the financial market). In this issue we want to plea for the revival of the (different types of) apportionment systems. Not only because these systems diminish the individual risks, but also because systems based on solidarity belong to the heart of the welfare state. If there is to be any social Europe, than it is a Europe that is not grounded on the slogan ‘every man for himself and god for us all’.

This issue is in fact an introductory and a showcase of the current pension debate. And it is a reconciliation because we have not yet reported on a study that was carried out by some colleagues in the summer of 2011. Therefore, you will find in this issue some excerpts from the EFBWW-study on pensions in the construction industry and the EFBWW conclusions based on the study. But, before that, we have three contributions that deal with the EC’s White Paper. First of all, Josef Wöss from the Austrian Labour Chamber who has criticized in the past the assumptions applied by the EC. In the following short contribution I introduce the most important notions formulated in the White Paper together with the criticism of the ETUC. And, in the third contribution, the authors of the EFBWW-study, Ernst-Ludwig Laux and Joachim Reus, have resumed their comments on the EC proposal. Although it is an extended book review we have included Jörn Janssen’s contribution in the Discussion section. The radical ideas formulated by Friot gear directly in the pension debate.

In the spring issue of CLR-News we signalled the launch of a proposal for a Monti II clause. In the meantime this proposal has led to a ‘yellow’ card, a new procedure introduced by the Lisbon Treaty whereby the national parliaments have the power to review proposed legislation and issue a ‘reasoned opinion’ if they consider that a draft EU legislative act does not comply with the subsidiarity princi-
ple (Protocol No 2 of the Lisbon Treaty). If a third of national Parliaments/Parliamentary Chambers issue ‘reasoned opinions’ (or a quarter in the case of draft legislation concerning the area of freedom, security and justice), the issuing EU institution has to review its draft legislative act. 19 out of the total of 54 votes allocated to national Parliaments had adopted by the end of May a reasoned opinion stating that this draft act does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity. As this represents more than a third of the votes, the ‘yellow card’ procedure has come into effect. The European Commission must review the draft, but may decide to maintain, amend or withdraw it. We keep you posted.

Alongside of the subject articles and the discussion contribution we have the report of the recent AGM of CLR and a report of a seminar organised by the EFBWW on the practical experiences with the posting of workers in the frame of the cross-border provision of services. You will also find four reviews of books that are worthwhile reading. Enjoy the issue and come back to us if necessary or desired.