The nationalization of SNS cost 3.8 billion Euros, with the state providing another 1.1 billion in loans and 5 billion in guarantees. The bank had come into problems because of its investments in real estate. ‘If the state hadn’t intervened, it was certain the bank would have gone bankrupt’, said the minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem (Labour Party) declared. Ultimately, this means that the state merely finances the bank: the government has no intentions of running the bank other than as a commercial enterprise. The new managing director will ‘earn’ half a million a year.

The political response to the economic crisis that broke out in 2008, that is more or less shared among the right-wing and center-left wing parties, is to prop up the same structures that caused the crisis in the first place. Dutch PM Mark Rutte (of the right-wing VVD party) declared the problems with the SNS bank as being down to ‘mismanagement’, as if the looming bankruptcy was not part of a systematic pattern. Already two other major Dutch banks have been nationalized in 2008, Fortis Nederland and ABN-AMRO. Another major bank, ING, also receives state support. How SNS came into financial problems is typical of the speculative bubble that burst in 2008. Before the crisis, SNS bought the real estate fund ‘Bouwfonds Property Finance’, becoming one of the major funders of the sector. The bank easily lent large sums to real estate companies as growth in the sector seemed limitless. After the beginning of the crisis, real estate profits declined and it became clear that at least part of this money would not come back. The SNS management chose to keep this information secret.

The intervention of the Dutch state in the banking sector shows the hollowness of rhetoric about ‘market mechanisms’. Left to themselves, these banks would be in serious problems, possibly even facing bankruptcy. But since they are considered ‘too big to fail’ they receive government support – meaning that, in the last instance, it is the Dutch taxpayers who decide to sustain the solvency of these banks. This guarantee allows these banks to borrow money against very low interest rates since lenders can be confident they will get their money back, regardless of the outcome of the watches. Stichting Onderzoek Multinationale Ondernemingen, calculated that this effectively means that the banks are receiving an indirect subsidy of between 4.1 and 12.3 billion Euros a year from the public purse. The story of SNS shows the problem to be larger than mere individuals and their ‘mismanagement’ of the bank’s finances. More fundamentally, the real estate sector being so profitable before 2008, it made good economic sense for SNS to give out large credits. As the real estate sector ran into problems, however, it was inevitable that part of this money would not, in fact, return.

Now that the SNS bank is nationalized and the Dutch people guarantee its stability, it should be us who determine the banks functioning: it should be the Dutch people who are compensated not the bank managers with their self-enriching bonuses – this should be our demand. That way, we may finally be able to put public finances to public use: the construction of affordable housing would be a good starting point.

Refugees in Amsterdam

‘Power undivided’

– Karolina Agnieszka Dobosz

Refugees in the Netherlands organized two protests against an absurd immigrant policy which makes them illegal and deprives them of basic rights. These refugees have been denied asylum status but are not able to go home, meaning that they are trapped in an impossible and unlivable situation without rights or services. In The Hague a protest directed at the government was held in front of the House of Representatives. That day, on March 13th, the parliament discussed the issue of refugees. The government remained adamant in its anti-immigrant policy. Ten days later a demonstration took place in Amsterdam - this time addressing Dutch society. Thousands of people and many different organizations joined the protest on the Museumplein.

This large manifestation for the rights of refugees was the result of many weeks of preparation and smaller actions. Until now, the refugees are staying in the so-called ‘Refugee Church’, a church building that was not used anymore. Several times, the refugees reached agreements with the owners to prolong their stay. The refugees, together with allies, have worked hard to make the building liveable and to keep it for their shelter.

However, the Dutch authorities refuse to change their policies. The refugees know that their power relies on self-organization and solidarity. The approach of the Dutch government is to try and break up the group with vague promises to ‘reconsider’ the status of some refugees while ignoring others. At the end of 2012 the refugees were ejected from the asylum center in Amsterdam Osdorp. They had to split into two groups, one staying in Amsterdam and the other going to The Hague.

The authorities in The Hague offered only help to individuals, not to the group. But the refugees know that they have to stand together to draw attention to their case. The determination of the refugees has put pressure on the government and created sympathy for their cause – but to win, the pressure needs to be increased.
Modern day slavery
Greece

Venezuela: between radicalising revolution and defending it

– Marijke Colle

What's going on?

01 May 19:00
International Worker's Day
Demonstration at Spuistraat. Meeting (20:00) at Brakke Grond, Nes 45.

07 May 20:00
Kraakspreekuur: host: Squatting information
Do you need legal advice on squatting or do you hate speculations on exploitation? Every Tuesday 20:00-21:30 (followed by a open bar). Prentuistraat 43, Free.

12 May 19:00
Borderline Reading Group: “Race, Nation, Class” by E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein.
We meet every other Sunday for a collective vegetarian dinner and to discuss a chapter of the book. This Sunday we will discuss a chapter of the book. This Sunday we will read the 10th Chapter, “From Class Struggle to Classless Struggle?” by Balibar. E-mail us at borderless@grenzeloos.org for more information and confirmation.

12 May
Spanish Indignados: Two years' of struggle
Information day organised by the 15-M Assembly in Amsterdam (details to be confirmed)

15 May 20:30 (Doors open 20:00)
Play: PRISON? Written and Performed by Charlie Ryder
In October 1993 Charlie Ryder took part in a demonstration to shut down the BNP headquarters in Welting, south-east London. This developed into a serious riot, he was arrested and after a two year wait was given a conditional discharge for 10 months. This is a true story which is creatively told using a variety of theatrical devices including puppetry, masks, physical theatre and dance.

27 May 20:00
Real World Economics: Why flexibility does not work
The Dutch government wants to go one step further by deregulating lay-offs. During this ongoing economic crisis, flexibility of the labour market is seen as a way to produce growth. Labour would become cheaper and economic growth will follow. The claims of neoliberal economists and policy makers are challenged by reality and by critical social scientists.

Greece

Modern day slavery

Greek agriculture has depended on the cheap labor of documented and undocumented migrant workers for many years. On April 17, hundreds of migrant farm workers, mostly Bangladeshis, on a strawberry plantation in Nea Manolada, about 260km west of Athens, demanded wages they had not been paid for six months. According to workers, they were promised 22 euros per day.

At least one of their supervisors opened fire with a shotgun, wounding almost all of them. The workers later took to violence to protect themselves. After the shooting, the three foremen disappeared. In addition to the exploitation of migrant workers and the many cases of state violence against undocumented workers, a government spokesperson hypocritically denounced the shooting as “foreign to Greek ethics”. One of the country’s main labor unions, GSEE, accuses the government of failing to properly investigate conditions at Manolada. The criminal act in Manolada ... shows the tragic results of labor exploitation, combined with a lack of control [by the government labor inspectorate],” a GSEE statement said. “In Manolada, and particularly in the strawberry plantations, a sort of state within a state has been created. The neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party condemned the shooting while at the same time calling for the deportation of migrants. The shooting of migrant workers represents a serious escalation in the upsurge of violence against migrants to which Golden Dawn contributes in words and deeds.

Such violence is ignored, even tolerated, by the Greek and European governments and weakens the popular resistance against the austerity agenda.

In the Netherlands, the LiDL supermarkets are among the stores selling strawberries from Manolada.

– Antonio Carmona

Bookreview

Understanding oppressions

Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism
Cinzia Arruzza

Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism

The marriage of Marxism and Feminism was celebrated and condemned. Cinzia Arruzza describes the growth of the workers movement and of the feminist movement. She describes how the complex relations between the two evolved. She takes into account the historical context of those struggles but is not afraid of criticizing the Marxist, the feminist and also the psychoanalytical projects. For instance, on the difficulties encountered by Alexandra Kollontai in the Bolshevik Party, she showed that the successful revolution did not automatically abolish the very conscious criteria neither in society as a whole, nor at the level of the political organisations nor in the personal lives of women. Right in her historical part, the book focuses on current examples and problems such as the dominant position of white males in the U.S. working class whereby the fight against racism by male Afro-Americans in the US is carried out without any concern for the specific oppression of black women in the black community.

We have analysed the specific oppression of women in a way that does not find a way to overcome it. What is more, women activists have internalised the traditional gender roles. Women activists are afraid of taking initiatives on their own because, even unconsciously, man continue to discriminate women and undermine women’s self-confidence.

Her conclusion is that activists should be aware of these internalised social structures in order to overcome them. It is the complex totality of different oppressions that should be analysed in order to combine the different struggles against all of them.

Her conclusion is: “The point is not whether class comes before gender or gender comes before class.”