

**WAR**

**IN THE  
BALKANS**



**THE *SOCIALIST*  
SOLUTION**

***a workerspower pamphlet***

**50p**

# **WAR IN THE BALKANS**

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Note: Throughout the pamphlet we adopt the Albanian name for Kosova, not the Serb name, Kosovo. This expresses our support for the right of Kosova to self-determination.

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# A Balkan tragedy

The Balkans are being torn apart by two wars. The first, waged by NATO with laser-guided missiles from over 700 fighter planes, is designed to bomb Serbia into submission. The second is being mercilessly fought by Serbian army and militia against the Kosovar Albanians with the aim of driving them from their homeland; in a word, genocide.

After three weeks no NATO aircrew or ground troops have died in action; meanwhile the body count of Kosovars butchered by Serb paramilitaries and of Serbs pounded by western bombs rises daily. Who is to blame for this carnage and how can a just solution be imposed on this devastation?

During the last decade the Balkans have been ripped apart by imperial diplomacy and the national chauvinism of local rulers. The dismemberment of empires and federations has unleashed waves of justified uprisings against national oppression and brutal backlashes of despotic regimes keen to incite pogroms against national minorities.

So it was during the first decade of this century. The "Great Powers" of the pre-First World War years arrogantly rearranged borders and shamelessly transferred whole peoples from the rule of one state to another.

Their creations – miniature states with national minorities trapped within them and sections of their ethnic group excluded from them – became at various times aggressive and expansionist powers despite, or rather because of their small size and economic weakness.

Now these same great powers, today known less grandly by acronyms (NATO, OSCE, UN), at one moment urge some peoples to independence (Slovenia and Croatia) and at others proclaim that "international borders are inviolable" in the case of other nationalities (Bosnian Muslims, Kosovar

Albanians). Devoid of any genuine democratic purpose, today's Great Powers have been guided by only two considerations: first, to fast-track the more developed of the ex-Stalinist states of the Balkans to capitalism so that western multinationals can seize the choice markets, industrial assets and raw materials; and secondly, to impose law and order in the region while it passes through the vale of tears of mass unemployment, impoverishment and cultural degradation.

For most of this decade Slobodan Milosevic was the man with whom the west could do business. At the end of all the human suffering during the wars of Yugoslav succession (Serbia versus Slovenia, Croatia against Serbia, Serbia and Croatia for the division of Bosnia) the United States, Britain, France and Germany rewarded those most to blame for the suffering – Croatia's Franjo Tudjman and Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic. Having enshrined in the 1995 Dayton Accords Milosevic's 1992-3 wholesale ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, it was scarcely any surprise that Milosevic should seek a final solution to the problem of the ethnic Albanians in Kosova.

The timing of this move, beginning in early 1998 was related to events in Kosova and in Serbia. Three years of peace saw the growth of powerful anti-Milosevic movements in Serbia, on the streets of Belgrade and the breakdown of the Albanian Kosovars' patience with their oppression and the growth of the KLA.

Milosevic knew that if both these forces grew beyond a certain point his days were numbered. As in 1989, 1991 and 1992, he played the card of nationalist war to smash his "enemies within" and force a new and advantageous deal with imperialism.

Serbia's ruthless campaign to drive out, not merely oppress, the provinces' Albanians predates NATO's war, at least to the autumn of last year. Now it has reached a crescendo. The sight of between 600,000 to one million Kosovars flooding across the borders of their own countries, the mounting evidence of a genocidal killing of thousands of young men, the reports by women of systematic rape – the vile "methods" of Milosevic and Arkan witnessed before in Bosnia – rightly enrage workers around the world.

Those political and moral eunuchs who in the name of opposing NATO try to minimise and cover up these crimes – who refer to these reports as "imperialist propaganda" are corrupting the democratic and class consciousness of the international working class; in a word they are performing the historic role of Stalinism.

But revulsion against the genocidal ethnic cleansers should not blind us to both the complicity of NATO and the EU in the previous careers of Milosevic and the rest, their practical support in 1995 for ethnic cleansing against the Serb population of the Krajina and Slavonia, nor their cowardly aerial bombardment of the civil infrastructure of Serbia. The "democratic" rulers of the USA, France and Britain are themselves "serial genocidists" (in Algeria, Africa, Vietnam and Cambodia) or they have colluded in genocide (Rwanda).

In short they are wholesale oppressors and exploiters of peoples around the world. There is no way – given their institutional chauvinism and racism – that the imperialist states can play the role of defenders of democracy or protectors against genocide. Their pretences to do so are a disgusting sham.

Those "NATO socialists" – like Ken Livingstone and Vanessa Redgrave – who claim this role for it, are, whatever their subjective intentions, actually complicit in the murder of Serbian workers and alibis for the past and future crimes of imperialism against the Kosovars.

While the Serbs are vilified by the west's governments there have been no shortage of advocates or apologists for the Serbs on the British left. Partly this is based on the simpletons guide to politics: where the imperialists put a minus we put a plus.

The enemy of our enemy must be our friend. Some like Tony Benn, Bruce Kent, Tam Dalyell and the crypto and not so crypto – Stalinists of the Committee for Peace in the Balkans urge us to remember that the Serbs were "our" allies in the Second World War, that they are a "valiant" and "Christian" people.

Are they referring to the "crusade" being waged by the "Yugoslav" interior ministry police or Arkan's "tigres" perhaps? To a displaced patriotism for "socialist Yugoslavia" these gentlemen add more than a dash of Christian chauvinism (or to give it its proper name, Islamophobia). They can scarcely bring themselves to mention the sufferings of the Kosovars let alone acknowledge the scale of Milosevic's crimes. Their silence on these crimes, their eagerness for a bloc with Serb chauvinist forces who shut down or threaten those who dare to mention them, makes them complicit in genocide and for that they deserve to be branded with infamy.

Other socialists who should know better, draw from the correct need to oppose "our own" imperialism the false conclusion that it is best to say as little as possible about the scale and ferocity of the ethnic cleansing directed against the Kosovars.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) falls in behind Benn and the Stalinists and refuses to support the Kosovars struggle against genocide because the KLA calls for NATO intervention.

To the Kosovars in their agony it offers abstract sermons on the need to "put nationalism aside" and unite with the Serbs against their rulers. As on so many occasions in the past the SWP obscures the distinction, emphasised by Lenin and Trotsky, between the nationalism of the oppressor and that of the oppressed.

The world working class movement must make its independent voice heard now. Never was the lack of a workers' International more painfully felt than over the last years. All working class and socialist organisation worth the name should actively oppose the air attacks on Serbia and Montenegro and any entry by NATO troops into Kosova.

These actions have proved worse than useless from the point of view of protecting the Kosovars. For all these reasons it is in the direct interest of the oppressed and exploited world wide that the imperialist powers – the greatest and most dangerous force for reaction in the world – suffer a heavy defeat.

Such is the case now and each and every time they attempt to impose their will by blockades, bombs and ground forces. This is true even if their enemy (the Serbs in this case) has given the pretext for this attack by an arch-reactionary struggle against a progressive force which the imperialists appear to be supporting for the best of "democratic" reasons.

The world workers' movement should also recog-



nise the right of the Kosovars to full independence. In every country they should put the greatest pressure on their governments to do this. They should call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Serb forces from Kosova and support the struggle of the KLA and other Kosovar forces to achieve this, as long as the occupation lasts.

They have the right to acquire arms and supplies from whoever is willing to give them and also the right to take any military advantage they can from the NATO bombing. The Kosovar resistance fighters are waging a progressive struggle that deserves, indeed demands, the practical material support of all progressive forces.

Of course it is not inconceivable that imperialism could actually launch a full scale ground war against Serbia. Then not only the retention of Kosova but the independent existence of Serbia and Montenegro would be at stake.

In this case the KLA would likely subordinate themselves to this reactionary goal and to the imperialist forces carrying it out. If this were to happen then the workers' movement would have to withdraw its support for the KLA.

But at the moment the defence of the independence of Serbia does not begin in Kosova. Indeed the workers of Serbia could best fend off the imperialist attack and intervention in the Balkans by forcing the withdrawal of all Yugoslav troops and police from Kosova.

The most likely outcome however – with or without some Nato ground incursions – is another

Dayton, perhaps brokered by the Russians and the Germans via the United Nations. This could create Apartheid-style protectorates in the poorest parts of Kosova to which the refugees, disarmed and disorganised are herded from Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro.

Nato and Russian troops would not only "protect" them but ensure the marginalisation if not destruction of the KLA. Such "autonomy" would be presented as a great step forward and all the other questions such as the refugees return to their own cities and villages, as in the Dayton Agreement, be left to future negotiations – that is, until the first of never.

An imperialist peace – like an imperialist war – will not solve, or not solve for long, the terrible problems of the Balkans. If tragedy is not to succeed tragedy then the chains of oppression must be shattered.

It can only be shattered by a proletarian revolution which spreads across the region uniting Serb, Croat, Albanian workers and peasants in building a Socialist Federation of the Balkans.

But only those workers who transcend nationalism by supporting the oppressed against the oppressor, who never identify an entire people with its rulers and oppressors, who seek in the workers of other nations their best friends and allies – only such people will be able to create a new future for this part of Europe. ■

London, 16 April 1999

# NATO on the warpath

At the end of April the largest summit meeting in American history will take place in Washington as presidents and prime ministers from 42 nations gather to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The government has told 90,000 federal workers to stay home as the streets will become choked by limousines ferrying 1,700 foreign leaders and dignitaries from gala to gala.

A recent article in the New York Times imagined the scene with biting irony:

"Images of shattered towns and burning buildings will be fresh in the world's mind as the glasses clink at the White House, toasts are exchanged and President Bill Clinton proclaims a new 'strategic concept' for NATO. The ethnic Albanians of Kosovo will be 'the uninformed guests at the summit,' said Richard Haass, director of the Brookings Institution, and the spectre of hungry and homeless refugees could haunt the glittering state dinners."

Judged on past performances it seems unlikely that the ladies and gentlemen will let these images spoil their appetites. But their stomachs may yet be unsettled by another vision, that of defeat and humiliation. Ivo Daalder, until recently senior staff member on European issues on the US National Security Council, has argued:

"It may be that NATO's first major engagement turns out to be a failure. And that forces you to ask: What is NATO for? What good is NATO if it can't deal with a tinpot dictator in the middle of Europe? Its new mission is to ensure security outside its borders. Having defined that mission as fundamental, it is now losing this war and calling into question its own existence."

In the first three weeks of its war NATO has launched over 6000 sorties and 1700 bombing

raids. Hundreds of sites have been devastated in the attempt to "degrade" Serbia's military might. Their "smart bombs" are still dim-witted and brutal enough to hit residential areas, passenger trains and a convoy of fleeing Kosovan refugees. Over 100 Serb civilians are dead and many injured, and a similar number of Kosovars have been blown to pieces by NATO planes.

US diplomats and White House officials know that the future of NATO depends on the outcome in Kosovo. At the 50th anniversary celebrations Bill Clinton will outline a new strategic concept for NATO. He will call for NATO to fight outside its members' borders, in places such as the Middle East or South Asia, in order to defend their own interests. This will not be a declaration of intent for discussion, but a statement of NATO's active post-cold war strategy. The present war in the Balkans is its first and crucial test.

NATO was formed in 1948 as an alliance of the United States and European powers. It promised a pact of strength that would guarantee peace against a supposedly "bellicose" USSR. But it has waited until now, with the USSR gone and the Cold War won, to launch its first war in Europe. Even the most vociferous warmongers generally regard the aggression as illegal in international law, with NATO having by-passed and thus further discredited the supposed prime instrument of international peace - the United Nations.

At the heart of NATO's New Strategic Concept is the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF). The CJTF was floated by the Americans in 1993, endorsed at the Brussels Summit in 1994, and described by NATO Defence Ministers in June 1994 as the creation of "multinational and multibomber formations established for specific conflict scenarios."



In July 1997, NATO made a "commitment to the wider stability of the Euro-Atlantic area" and "the streamlining of the military command structure to enable it to undertake crisis management and peacekeeping operations".

The Danish foreign minister recently outlined the tasks which the CJTF might be called upon to deal with: "historically based mistrust and friction between ethnic, religious or national groupings, aggressive nationalism, social disruption and uncertainty in light of fundamental economic reforms, illegal migration, drug trafficking and organised crime, and environmental and ecological threats."

NATO is first and foremost the global military arm of American political and economic power. Its command structure and top personnel remain dominated by the United States. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the US redefined its foreign policy objectives. The path was open for imperialism to tighten its grip on semi-colonial states in the "second" and third world that had achieved a measure of economic and political independence during the Cold War years. The United States and its European allies have arrogated to themselves the role of "world policeman". The reactionary consequences have been demonstrated in the 1990s in Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Sudan and Afghanistan and in Bosnia with the implementation of the reactionary 1995 Dayton Accords.

The purpose of every one of these interventions is to ensure that the rulers of these weak states – whether long term semi colonies or former degenerate workers' states in the process of restoring capitalism – carry out the political and economic dictates of imperialism. Today that means complete subordination to the profit-making of North American, western European and Japanese multinationals. The US government is pledged to tear down every trade and investment barrier in the path of US multinationals. It is determined to guarantee access to oil and raw material reserves, especially in the Middle East and Central Asian republics of the ex-USSR. The political, economic and military agencies (the United Nations, the IMF and World Bank, NATO) exist to enforce compliance or deal with the dire consequences of economic impoverishment and to weaken or destroy Russian influence and control over its ex-"Empire".

The current war against Serbia is the fourth US-led attack on a sovereign state in the 1990s. These are justified in the name of democracy and the need to strike against tyranny. But if this was their real

concern, Israel, Indonesia and Turkey at the very least would have seen bombs rain down on them decades ago. Israel has brutalised successive generations of Palestinians, stolen their homeland, expelled countless thousands from their homes, denied their national identity and refused their right to return. The reaction of the US and NATO? To arm Israel, support its economy with billions of dollars, and to collude with its security forces against Arab states and the opponents of Israel living around the world. They have passed over in silence the constant mockery and defiance with which Israel has greeted each and every resolution of the United Nations against this tyranny.

The same goes for the vile Indonesian regime that has butchered hundreds of thousands of the people of East Timor since its invasion in 1975. And Turkey's 30,000 killings of Kurds living in its country has been sanctioned by its NATO partners. One does not need to be a rocket scientist to understand NATO and the UN's alternate willingness and refusal to act. Turkey, Israel and Indonesia are regional allies of the US military and big business. Each and every abuse of human rights, case of torture and mass execution can be disregarded as a result.

One of the ironies of NATO's current war against Serbia is that President Milosevic was accepted by the US, France and Britain in the early 1990s as the strong man most likely to hold together the remnants of the ex-Yugoslav federation. The NATO alliance was not prepared to intervene against Milosevic's ethnic-cleansing of Kosova when it began in earnest in spring 1998. Why? Because Milosevic was a co-guarantor of the 1995 Dayton Accords, which was the foundation stone for NATO's "peace" in the Balkans. The Accords rewarded Serbia's ethnic-cleansing in Bosnia of Muslims with an effective partition of Bosnia and a denial of the democratic and national rights of the Bosnian Muslims. Indeed, NATO welcomed the first counter-offensives against the KLA in 1998, since NATO reviled the thought of Kosovan independence for fear that it would lead to an uprising of the ethnic Albanian minority in Macedonia. This could have, in turn, embroiled Turkey and Greece on opposite sides of a conflict between NATO "allies", but who in reality are bitter enemies.

NATO only threatened Serbia seriously last autumn when the KLA was beaten back by Serbia and the scale of Milosevic's ethnic-cleansing threatened to create a massive refugee "problem" for EU states. In October 1998, NATO threats of bombard-



ment against Belgrade forced Milosevic to withdraw some forces from Kosova. But the peace policy of the imperialist powers is based on preserving national oppression, on appeasing and using as its gendarmes the bigger nations (and the bigger oppressors). This policy – because of the accumulated wrongs and injustices it involves – only makes a war more bloody and savage when it comes.

At present there are 12,000 NATO troops in Macedonia; 8,000 more are assembling in Albania. More than \$1 billion has been spent by NATO in the first two weeks of this war. One Stealth bomber is worth more than Albania's annual GDP. For one-tenth of NATO's \$400 billion arms' budget, enough food and medicine could be provided to prevent the deaths of 30,000 children who every day succumb to malnutrition throughout the world.

The size and grotesque expense of the war machine is clear enough. But what are NATO's war aims in this current conflict? It is not, as we have seen, to end the tyranny of Milosevic over his people, since he has been their favoured broker for reactionary stability in the Balkans since 1990. From the start the war aims were to prevent Kosovan independence and curtail Serbian expansionism. Yet these objectives are constrained by the USA's unwillingness and inability to deploy ground troops in Europe to win a war against a heavily armed enemy. While willing to "share the burden" of policing a reactionary peace settlement, they are not prepared to accept the deaths of hundreds or thousands of troops. This is due to the lasting effect of the USA's defeat in Vietnam and the political legacy it has bequeathed; simply put, America's rulers fear the rekindling of a mass anti-war movement inside the USA.

This has left NATO with only one military strategy: bomb Milosevic back to the negotiating table. In the first week of the war this nearly led to disaster for NATO as Serbia declined to resist the aerial bombardment and instead launched a counter-offensive in Kosova against the ethnic Albanians whom NATO pretended to protect. In response the NATO aims broadened to include degrading the military capacity of Serbia to the point where it could not carry out its ground offensive against the Kosovan Albanians.

This too failed utterly as by the end of the second week of the war Serbian troops, special forces and armed Serbian civilians had expelled up to half a million Kosovars and forcibly displaced nearly as many again to inhospitable sites within Kosova. If the killing and terror stopped or slowed it was

because Milosevic had achieved his war aims, not because of NATO's attacks on Serbia.

With NATO already politically embarrassed and even discredited, with disunity within the alliance surfacing, and the bankruptcy of the military strategy so evident, NATO, led by British imperialism, broadened the war aims beyond Rambouillet. Now only the complete withdrawal of all Serbian troops from Kosova would suffice, together with the return of all the refugees and an unconditional acceptance of "international" troops inside Kosova. But despite ratcheting-up the rhetoric, NATO still lacks the political unity and military strategy to achieve these aims.

Therefore, as with Bosnia, a diplomatic agreement that recognises a significant part of what Serbia has already achieved militarily will be the most likely outcome. Partition of Kosova, possibly in the form of a confederation, is still the most likely outcome of NATO's incoherence, Serbian reactionary successes and Russian diplomacy. This will all take place at the expense of the just democratic rights of the Albanian Kosovars.

The Kosovan government in exile, the KLA and thousands of refugees have reacted to the savage genocide of the Serbs with a policy of reliance upon NATO. This is foolish and short-sighted. NATO's "humanitarian concern", unlike the genuine sympathy felt by hundreds of thousands of working class people in NATO countries, is cynical and synthetic. At the Rambouillet talks the Kosovar delegation signed up to the plan for NATO troops and their own disarmament, and signed away their justified democratic right to an independent state.

In the first place NATO launched an air assault on Serbia without even having a provisional military plan for the defence of the ethnic Albanians in Kosova. NATO refused to surrender arms for the KLA, they avoided operations against Serb units on the ground in Kosova, they failed to prepare for the scale of the mass expulsions into Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro.

NATO therefore is fully responsible for the hundreds, possibly thousands, of deaths that have and will continue to occur among the refugees as a result of lack of shelter, food, medicine and sanitation. To this must be added the wanton destruction of parts of Pristina, and in NATO's mouth, much of which will not be repaired because the west will not donate sufficient reconstruction aid.

Just as tragically for the Kosovars, NATO's operation against Serbia was effectively halted – for the moment at least – by the British working class and



progressive opposition to Milosevic under an avalanche of jingoism and hatred of "fifth columnists". Out of sight and hearing of this well-orchestrated campaign, a beleaguered few send reports out via the internet, but others are assassinated by order of the secret police.

Yet these were the Kosovars' best allies inside Serbia, at once organising protests against his regime and keeping alive a stream of information about the repression inside Kosova that contested the state-media lies of Milosevic himself. A future multi-ethnic Balkans depends upon the overthrow of Milosevic by the Serbian people, yet NATO has set back this cause.

Finally what can the Kosovars expect of their NATO allies when there are no more targets left to bomb in Serbia? NATO has set its face against Kosovan independence and will at best set up glorified refugee camps in parts of Kosova and call it a "protectorate". Kosovars be warned: Palestinians robbed of their homes and expelled from their homeland in 1948 are still living in refugee camps in the Gaza strip - they are as old as NATO and the UN! And what fate can Kosovar refugees hope for if they do manage to make their way to Europe or the USA?

Their governments' touching humanitarian concern was well revealed by their collusion in the forced expulsion of thousands of Kosovars from Macedonia after being violently separated from their families.

Make no mistake, once the political settlement is enforced upon the region, Kosovars in London, Paris, Washington and Berlin will be hounded as scroungers, stealers of jobs, deprived of meaningful benefits and their democratic rights.

It is not enough to ask for NATO's bombs to stop. Indeed, at some point they will diminish as the war aims of both sides are achieved. No, it is essential that in its air war over Serbia NATO is roundly beaten. NATO's war over the skies of Serbia is not about stopping ethnic cleansing in Kosova; this only accelerated with the start of the bombing.

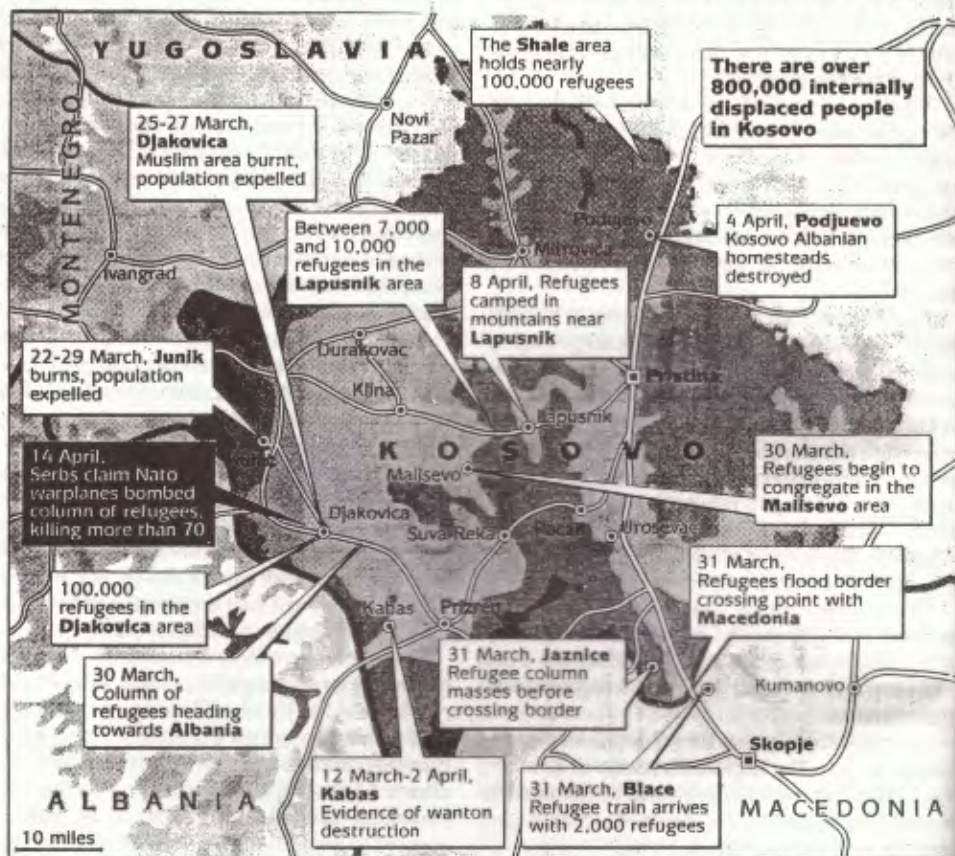
It is about reducing the relative political and military independence of a sovereign semi-colonial state and its ability to say no to imperialism. Socialists and democrats should welcome every F-111 shot down over Belgrade; they should rejoice in the political disarray at NATO's Brussels headquarters when their military and diplomatic offensives fall short of their stated aims.

Why? Not at all because we support the vile chauvinist Milosevic, but rather because NATO's defeat will allow the political straitjacket that has been imposed on Serbian society to be discarded and an independent opposition to re-emerge.

More, a defeat for NATO will open up deep divisions between NATO members and within the US political establishment, which even now are simmering. This will thereby strengthen the struggles of all the oppressed and exploited in the world. Immediately it will help the struggle of the Kurds against NATO member Turkey.

But it will also help every one who is resisting oppressive governments at present backed by the resources of the US State Department and Pentagon, as for example in Colombia. American and European imperialism will be wounded, forced to return to its lair to lick its wounds; this will embolden all those in these countries who are opposed to imperial military adventures. ■

# The results of Serbian ethnic cleansing





# Kosova's fight for freedom

The sight of hundreds of thousands of Kosovars arriving exhausted at border crossing posts has brought home the human misery of ethnic cleansing. The pattern of their testimony is similar: they are forced to leave their homes at gunpoint or face certain death at the hands of ski-masked Serb militia. Often they are robbed of their savings and deprived of their proof of Yugoslav citizenship; even the number plates on their cars and trucks are removed to destroy any official sign that connects them with their homeland. Their homes are ransacked at best, or razed to the ground.

The ethnic cleansing did not start in response to NATO's bombs. NATO's attack upon Serbia was a catalyst that speeded-up a process already well underway from at least the spring of 1998. Milosevic was determined to resist the justified democratic claims of the Albanian Kosovars for separation from the Yugoslav federation. From the late 1980s he sanctioned police repression of demonstrations and wholesale arrests of leading dissidents, together with "exemplary" murders to terrorise the population. But mere police operations were not enough when 90 per cent of the population do not want to be part of a state that they have been imprisoned within for most of the century. Hence, the "Serbification" and pacification of Kosova could only be assured by mass murder and expulsions – in a word genocide.

The origins of the Kosova national question do not lie simply with the co-existence in the Balkans of Albanians, Greeks and Southern Slavs. They lie in the carve up of the region by the imperialist "Great Powers" – in the 1878 Berlin Treaty and subsequent wars which drew and redrew the borders according to the interests of the world's most powerful capitalists.

At a conference of the "Great Powers" (Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Russia) held in London in 1913, Kosova was handed over to Serbia, which had been an independent state from 1878, after Russia's defeat of Turkey. Serbia's present claim on Kosova thus owes more to the collusion between Serbia and imperialism than anything else. However, Serbia seeks a more "historic" claim to Kosova than this; on their anti-NATO demonstrations Serb nationalists proclaim that "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia" on the basis that medieval Serb tribes ruled over this region until their defeat by the Ottoman Turks in 1389, at the Battle of Kosovo-Polje.

In turn, the Albanian-speaking people of the region have an even older "historic" claim. The Albanian nation, which also had its origins in the 19th century, is the product of the merging of peoples who spoke dialects derived from the language of the Illyrian tribes who inhabited the western Balkans from at least the second millennium BC. The ancient Illyrian kingdom based at Shkodár in the north of modern-day Albania, formed in the third century BC, was conquered by and incorporated into the Roman Empire in 168 BC. When the empire was divided in 395 AD, Illyria (including modern-day Kosova, or Dardania as it was designated by the Romans) fell within the eastern empire. Slavic tribes (Croats, Slovenes and Serbs) arrived in Illyria in the fifth and sixth centuries; only in the south (in Kosova and Albania) did the ethnic Illyrians survive. Independent feudal states were established in the region in the 12th and 13th centuries. Among the first of these was the feudal principality of Arbária, established at Kruja in 1190. In 1217 an independent Serb kingdom was established at Prizren, in modern Kosova, and during

the reign of Stefan Dusan (1346-55), it annexed Arbaria.

But revolutionary socialists put little value on the "historic" nature of rival nations' claims on land. The only national rights we recognise are of peoples to self-determination. It is the Kosovar Albanian people's right to self-determination that is being systematically denied by Serb rule in Kosova. The chains that bind the Kosovarsto national oppression were forged much more recently, in the 19th century, and strengthened in the late 20th century with the fall of Titoism.

When Kosova was handed over from the Ottoman empire to Serbia and Montenegro in 1913 the Albanians fought massively against their new occupiers. Only after several battles, massive imperialist pressure and even the intervention of Ottoman forces against them were the Albanians forced to give in. From the start the bourgeois Serbian regime suppressed them ruthlessly and started a policy of colonialisation. So after 1913 more than half a million ethnic Albanians emigrated from Kosova to Turkey and elsewhere to escape Serbian rule, and by 1940 at least 18,000 Serb families had been settled by the Belgrade regime on their vacated lands. During World War II, Kosova was integrated into a "Greater Albania" under Italian control when the Serb-dominated kingdom of Yugoslavia (formed as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1921 and renamed Yugoslavia in 1929) was occupied by Nazi Germany in 1941. The ethnic Albanians of Kosova (the Kosovars) supported the Communist Party-led partisans of Albania and Yugoslavia, both of whom operated in the area, against the Nazi occupation forces and the reactionary Serbian monarchist-nationalists (the Chetniks). In October 1944 Kosova was liberated by the Stalinist-led partisans of the Yugoslavian National Liberation Army.

In 1945 the Yugoslav Stalinists, led by Josef Broz Tito, reneged on an agreement made with Albania to allow the Kosovars to decide whether they should join Serbia or Albania. A Kosovar uprising in the winter of 1944-45 was brutally suppressed by Tito. Kosova was thus once more denied its right to national self-determination; it was forcibly incorporated into the republic of Serbia (under the Serb name Kosova).

Only in 1963 was Kosova made an autonomous province of Serbia but by then another 195,000 ethnic Albanians had been coerced by the Serbian authorities into emigrating to Turkey in the decade running up to this "autonomy". Kosova was treated

as a Serbian colony, its mines providing raw materials for Serbian industry. Despite a period of industrialisation Kosova remained a backward hinterland of Yugoslavia. The average income of the Kosovars in relation to the Yugoslav average declined. While Kosova's average per capita income was 47% of Yugoslavia's in 1947, this declined to 45% in 1952, 32% in 1974 and finally 28% in 1990. Following serious rioting by Kosovars in 1980 Tito increased federal funding to Kosova. In 1988 a new Yugoslav constitution gave the Kosova provincial assembly the right to elect its own representatives to the Chamber of Republics and Provinces of the Yugoslav federal legislature. They gained control over the judiciary, security and planning. But socially, Kosova continued to deteriorate with starvation in the northern mines and unemployment reaching 50 per cent by the early 1980s. As one Belgrade journalist put it: "When I was a kid I thought Siptar [pejorative term for an Albanian] was an occupation, essentially just another way of saying manual labourer."

In 1981 protests against falling living standards and discrimination were suppressed. Led by Kosovar students from the new university in Pristina, they were put down by the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army at a cost of more than 300 lives. The 7000 young Kosovars subsequently arrested were given jail terms of six years or more. Thus the myth spread today by, for example the *Morning Star*, that Tito's Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic paradise, is just that - a myth. Nevertheless, it was the breakup of Yugoslavia that fuelled Serb racism and ultimately led to the current genocidal strategy of the Serb leadership.

Milosevic became Serbian Communist Party leader in 1987 and set about purging the party of any pro-Albanian elements. He whipped up nationalist sentiment against the Kosovars. This hysterical mobilisation of Serbs led to Kosovar resistance; a miners' strike in 1988, followed by a half a million strong protest march in Pristina. Twenty-four Kosovar protesters were also dead by the Yugoslav security forces in February 1989. In March Milosevic forced through change in the Kosovan assembly to make Kosova grant its autonomy: delegates were "interviewed" one by one by Serbian secret police, the party was purged prior to the vote and civil war was threatened if Milosevic did not get his way.

On 5 July 5, 1990, the sole Albanian-language daily newspaper *Rilindja* was formed, as were all TV and radio broadcasts in Albanian. In the follow-



ing months, some 115,000 ethnic Albanians were driven from their workplaces and Serbs installed in their jobs. At Pristina University, 800 Kosovar lecturers were sacked, ending teaching in the Albanian language and forcing all but 500 of the 23,000 Kosovar students to terminate their studies. Kosovar secondary school teachers were forced to work without pay; otherwise the schools would have had to close. All Kosovars working in state hospitals were fired.

Unemployment among ethnic Albanians in Kosova soared to nearly 80%. In September 1991, Serbian police and paramilitaries unsuccessfully tried to block a referendum on independence for Kosova, organised by the deposed Kosova provincial government. Ninety per cent of the eligible voters turned out, and 98 per cent voted in favour of independence. In elections held despite Serbian authorities' opposition, on 24 May 1992, the Kosovar writer Ibrahim Rugova was elected president of the independent Republic of Kosova. A Kosova parliament elected at the same time, and also declared illegal by Serbia, attempted to set up a parallel administration.

The years of the "parallel peace" saw thousands of university students, and up to 250,000 school students, educated in a parallel, underground education system. Parallel health services, sports leagues and cultural bodies grew up. At the same time many of the unemployed received rudimentary benefits from Rugova's LDK government, mainly financed by donations from the 400,000 strong Albanian-American community in the USA. This was not mass civil disobedience – it was a policy of living with the oppressor that, for the moment, suited both Milosevic and the most conservative elements within the Kosovar community.

Rugova's logic, accepted by many Kosovars, was that Kosova had no powerful allies. Albania was being destroyed by poverty, while the USA had drawn a line in the sand in newly-independent Macedonia, with the 1992 deployment of US troops in Macedonia saying don't cross. Kosova was on the wrong side of that line and would have to avoid provoking Serbia until things changed.

The parallel peace suited Milosevic because he had other fish to fry: during the 1991-2 war against Croatia and the 1992-5 war to dismember multi-ethnic Bosnia, Milosevic relied on Rugova to keep peace in Kosova. The peace also suited the Kosova small bourgeoisie: the landed families and merchants who headed the traditional Muslim society

and enforced their power through clan loyalty. They were entrusted with administering the peace and gained materially in return.

Three events unlocked the situation: the 1995 Dayton Accords, the 1996 student uprising for the reopening of the Albanian-language universities and the 1997 revolution in Albania.

The 1995 Dayton Accords spelled doom for Rugova's strategy. Here NATO and the UN brokered a reactionary deal that rewarded Serb nationalism with the ethnically cleansed Republika Srpska and rewarded Milosevic with a new prestige as peace-broker in the region. It was in the years after Dayton that the Serbophile reactionary politicians like Britain's former foreign secretary Douglas Hurd queued up to become advisers to the Milosevic regime. In return for pacifying the Bosnian Serbs, Milosevic was given a free hand in Kosova.

Meanwhile a generation of youth that had grown up under the heel of the Serb police went onto the streets to demand education rights – and were met with bullets and clubs.

Finally the revolution that overthrew the bourgeois Sali Berisha regime in Albania opened that country's arsenals to the masses and removed the pro-US regime whose refusal to support Kosovan independence had been a powerful block on the movement. Despite the fact that Albania's new government also refused to countenance independence for Kosova, the masses now had arms in hand and Albania became a more hospitable place for the armed mass resistance to Serb rule in Kosova.

In March 1998 Rugova was re-elected as "President of the Republic of Kosova" in an informal, illegal (for Serbia) consultation. Rugova and his clan are the biggest land owners in Kosova and its biggest bourgeois family. Their ties and interests lie with the Albanian landed clans and with imperialism. While it is probable that Rugova is today under house arrest in Pristina, and that his "accords" with Milosevic are made under duress, it is true that Serbia aims to destroy the power and negotiating strength of the KLA and so restore the prior influence of Rugova who could undoubtedly be made to sign up to a pro-imperialist peace plan that involved partition of Kosova or fake "autonomy" as part of Serbia.

Since 1997 the main force resisting Serbian rule in Kosova has been the Kosovan Liberation Army (KLA). The origins of the KLA lie, on the one side, in a small network of former Hoxa-hite Albanian



Stalinists in Kosova and among Albanian emigrants in Western Europe and the USA. The most important of the KLA founding groups came from the Kosova Peoples' Movement (LPK) and several splits from them. The LPK was a Maoist-Hoxhaist underground organisation which developed into a petty-bourgeois nationalist group. They organised fund raising and laid down the guerrilla strategy for the national liberation struggle. However, the KLA is not itself a Maoist movement. Rather it is an heterogeneous petit-bourgeois national liberation movement that since 1997 has drawn in all shades of political opposition to Serbia. The US emigré milieu formed the most right-wing pro-imperialist part of the KLA and was the main conduit for the pressure of the US upon the KLA delegation at Rambouillet. At Rambouillet and since it is this layer that has been in the ascendancy.

The rejectionist wing of the KLA is led by Adam Demaci who spent 20 years in Tito's prisons. He refused to attend the Rambouillet talks since they excluded independence in advance. He resigned in protest at the Kosovan delegation's signing of the Rambouillet treaty. Demaci criticises NATO for refusing to countenance Kosovan independence, but at the same time seeks the assistance of NATO. Nevertheless, Demaci has written since the attacks that the NATO attacks hurt Albanians as much as Serbia and that both people must act against imperialism. He also calls for an independent Kosova with full rights for the Serbian minority and in the past Demaci supported the right of self-determination for Krajina, the majority Serbian area of Croatia which was ethnically cleansed by Croatian armed forces in 1995. There is also another left wing Kosovan party, the LKCK, which is a left wing split from the LPK. They proclaim they are "Marxist-Leninist" and have some influence inside the KLA. They demand land reform in Kosova and campaign for the nationalisation of the mines and industry. They look to Serbian workers for support.

The KLA is a heterogeneous petit-bourgeois guerrilla organisation in which the pro-imperialist wing is in the political ascendancy. But it is not, as its detractors claim, a creation of the CIA or merely now a catspaw of NATO. The KLA's critics – and they include British Stalinists as well as Serb nationalists – like to portray it in the same terms as the Mujahedin in Afghanistan or the Nicaraguan contras, funded by drug money from Albania.

If it has received arms from Germany is this a crime? If so then greater crimes were committed by the Serbian guerrillas in the Second World War

when they welcomed Winston Churchill's imperialist planes bombing Chetnik positions, when they took their money and operated with their officers on the ground. If drugs money has made the KLA uniforms and AK 47s then that too is entirely legitimate since they would be an otherwise ineffective fighting force if they had to rely solely upon the financial aid from impoverished Kosovar villagers. But the KLA leadership is completely wrong to support the NATO bombing of Serbia and urge its ground troops to invade. This can only serve to strengthen imperialism in the Balkans, hasten capitalist restoration at the expense of their Serbian brothers and sisters, and will lead to a denial of the Kosovan right to self-determination.

After the 1995 Dayton agreements over Bosnia-Herzegovina, many Kosovars concluded that the peaceful road to independence was a dead end. More and more concluded that Albanians would only be heard by the "international community" when they took up arms. The KLA grew quickly as Serb paramilitaries increased their actions against Kosovar Albanians. In May 1997 around 300 members of KLA launched several attacks on Serbian police. At the same time Rugova called the KLA a Serbian provocation.

The KLA grew substantially during spring 1998. They were also able to arm themselves as a result of the flow of weapons that occurred after the breakdown in the Albanian state from February 1997 onwards. In several weeks an organisation of 300 grew to a movement of 30,000. At this time many right wing forces, as well as Rugova followers, also joined the KLA. Before the main revolution it was fighting a classic guerrilla struggle with solid roots in a number of villages and townships, militarily, all the elements of Albanian peasant society struggling against Serbian oppression.

Socialists give the KLA critical support in their fight against oppression and for self-determination.

Support because the Kosovars have shown repeatedly they want to have their own state and the exercise of this right does not involve the oppression of another people. The KLA is fighting a just war of national liberation.

Yet our support is critical – in the KLA's methods, aims and ideology. From the mass student demos of 1996-7 to the guerrilla war of 1998-9 was not an inevitable development of the struggle. Indeed, the guerrilla struggle dictated the separation of the vanguard fighters from the towns where the Kosovar working class lived. Mass strikes, arming of the people, local councils and workers control



should have been the primary weapons of struggle. In the end we have been proved tragically correct. As the Serb police moved through Pristina and the major towns of Kosova after 26 March 1999, the KLA was on the defensive, in the countryside. As well as being functionally disastrous, the strategy of guerrillaism was also politically disastrous. Rejecting mass urban struggle meant that, without outside help, in terms of modern heavy weapons and communications, the KLA could never go on the offensive. Thus it threw all hopes of offensive liberation struggle onto an intervention by the USA, provoked by the worsening "security situation" in the Balkans.

The KLA should break its political subordination to NATO. NATO will not back independence nor give the KLA the arms they need to fight for it effectively. In addition, and decisively, the KLA leadership, and still more so Rugova have never sought to mobilise the small but important Kosova working class as the central political force to rock the Serbian state. Despite their material weak conditions because of the mass sackings the Kosovar working class is organised in the independent trade union movement BSBK which is critical of Rugova. The northern mining working class has repeatedly shown its willingness to strike and protest but the KLA has embarked on a guerrilla struggle which on its own cannot drive Serbia from Kosova. Since the NATO bombing it has been forced onto the defensive by the Serbs but is seeking to protect the hundreds of thousands in hiding in the mountains. The KLA is now recruiting rapidly from the refugee camps of Albania and Macedonia.

Before the bombs fell on Serbia, the Serbian government called them "terrorists"; now they call them the advanced ground troops for a NATO invasion of Serbia. Many on the left have been happy to repeat this claim. Less than a year ago the USA agreed with Belgrade and derided the KLA in much the same terms as Serbia. Robert Gelbard, America's special envoy to Bosnia, denounced the KLA as "terrorists". So did Christopher Hill, America's chief negotiator and architect of the Rambouillet agreement. US Secretary of State Madelein Albright threatened to cut off the KLA from all the support given by the Albanian immigrants in the West and to station imperialist troops at the borders to stop cross-border logistical supplies if they did not sign up to the October 1998 peace deal. None of these fools of the petty-bourgeois left - who serve as foreign agencies of Belgrade - can answer the simple

question: If the KLA is a tool of imperialism why do these most powerful and modern states not arm the KLA with high-tech, sophisticated weapons so that they can defend themselves against Serbian tanks, artillery and aircraft? Why does NATO not arm them even now when they are bombing Serbia despite repeatedly appeals from the KLA? The reason is simple. While the KLA leadership would like to become NATO's ground troops in exchange for their support, imperialism has no interest in them. Because of their mass character and their struggle for Kosova's independence imperialism can't trust them and therefore will not give them more than tactical support in exceptional situations. As Marxists we develop our tactics not out of the wishes of a leadership but from the objective character of the struggle and the relation between the fighting masses and the organisations which represent them.

The KLA have been criticised for having a policy of killing Serbian civilians. The Yugoslav authorities have claimed that the KLA have carried out massacres and executions of Serbs in three villages between April and September last year, numbering several dozen in total. If the KLA are guilty of mass slaughter of Serb villagers fuelled by ethnic hatred then it must be denounced and the KLA leadership must make it clear that it will punish such actions, and renounce them as any kind of policy. The workers' movement must never "turn a blind eye" to reactionary and self-defeating chauvinist crimes even when they are committed by oppressed communities themselves. This is self-defeating for the Kosovars because they will never finally establish their national freedom in peace and security without the goodwill of the great majority of the workers and farmers of Serbia and Montenegro. Therefore their correct treatment of the Serb minority in Kosova, those innocent of atrocities against their Albanian Kosovar neighbours, is a medium and long term weapon against the likes of Milosevic, Seselj and Draskovic. For only the Serbian democratic youth, the poor farmers and above all the workers can kick out these fomenters of national hatreds and punish them as they so richly deserve.

However, an examination of the available evidence does not support the charge that "killing Serb civilians has been part of the KLA's guerrilla strategy". (Socialist Workers Party, *Stop The War* April 1999). If we take the source most hostile to the KLA, the Serb government, we find, on their website (<<http://www.serbia-info>>) a list of 200



atrocities committed between 14.10.98 and 25.2.99. Of these 41% are straightforward military attacks on police. A further 20% were attacks on people of Muslim origin. This is explained both by the existence of collaborators among Kosovar Albanians, and by political infighting within the Kosovar resistance. A photo of six bodies on the website is captioned: "Six Albanians loyal to Serbia". The KLA has accused the 12,000 strong Gorani community of Muslim Slavs, who generally support the LDK, of being collaborators with the Serb secret police. Of the remaining 40 per cent of attacks, three or four patterns emerge. Grenade attacks on cafes in Pristina, roadblock hijackings, resulting in either the beating or shooting of Serb civilians, raids on Serb houses to get weapons, and a variety of other offences. We may speculate that some of these were ethnically motivated revenge attacks. Likewise we may speculate that some were the dirty work of Serb undercover forces. In the entire list of attacks there is not one allegation of rape.

What is true is that with the 10 per cent Kosovo Serb population armed to the teeth – like Northern Ireland's Loyalists or West Bank Jewish settlers – clashes with them and killing of them was inevitable once the guerrilla struggle began. The website does not log how many roadblocks, killings and beatings were meted out by Serb forces in that period – but it surely numbered thousands, not hundreds. Of the 45 Kosovar civilians massacred by Serb police at Recak on 16 January 1999 the website only shows a picture of some Belgrade pathologists, with the caption: "Pathologists on Recak – there was no massacre".

The conclusion is that, even if we take the lying mouthpiece of the Serb regime's own figures there is no evidence of ethnic cleansing or attacks on civilians *per se* as the strategy of the KLA.

The KLA are neither "terrorists", Albanian contras, drug barons or crazy killers fuelled by ethnic hatred. They are a legitimate politico-military force rooted in the Albanian villages of Kosova that arose to defend them against the Serb paramilitaries who regularly terrorised them in the 1990s. They have grown into a substantial guerrilla fighting force but one that is outnumbered, under-armed and crippled by a false strategy that sidelines the mass political struggle of the working class in favour of armed actions in rural areas.

What faces the KLA, and the hundreds of thousands of Kosovars who look to them today, is a sharp crisis of leadership. During the Rambouillet talks and again since the beginning of NATO's

bombing the political representatives of the KLA formed a new government *in exile* to take the place of Rugova's LDK (and lay claim to its substantial foreign deposits). The new government is an alliance of the KLA, the United Democratic Movement and – in a subordinated position – the LDK, with the KLA's Hashim Thaci named as prime minister. When the provisional government was formed, Adem Demaci walked out, claiming correctly that to sign the Rambouillet agreement was to accept NATO's plan to force Kosovars to accept a statelet within Yugoslavia instead of national independence.

Revolutionary socialist opposition to Rambouillet and the Provisional Government of Kosova must go further than Demaci's criticisms. The "sign Rambouillet and wait for NATO" strategy has proved a disaster. But even if the dearest wishes of the KLA leaders were fulfilled – with a NATO ground war and an autonomous protectorate – that would create a roadblock even to national independence. NATO has made it very clear that it wants Rambouillet, not independence for Kosova. This "victory" will involve Kosova being forced back either into a federation ruled by the man NATO calls a "war criminal" or into an imperialist protectorate where decisions are done in Washington and Brussels, not in Pristina.

And in the "safe haven" Kosova, crawling with NATO troops, what are the Kosovar population expect. All the Kurds in northern Iraq: there a UN safe haven allowed the most reactionary parties of the Kurdish bourgeoisie to enforce conservative social rules, to take over government alliances with the Iraqi government, but slouch back and does nothing while Islamist guerrilla leaders of the Worker Communist Party of Iraq whose crime was to organise lunch, dancing, clinics and festivals on International Women's Day.

In short the Rambouillet safe haven will be a hell hole: conservatism will rule. The proletarian and peasant mass movements to control the land and the factories and the mines will be made impossible by the presence of NATO troops and the virtual disarmament of the KLA or its incorporation as a tamed Kosovar militia force.

Today Kosovar villages see demonstrations with placards saying "We love NATO" and "NATO – Now or Never". We urge these to break with NATO. Only when it was demonstrated will it even contemplate a ground war. It will never arm you enough to beat the Serb militia on your own because the Serbs also want the Serb occupation



forces is the force that will impose the next social order on Kosovo. In the unlikely event that NATO is forced into all out war on the ground, the only outcome will be a reactionary protectorate, not

national self-determination: the road to socialism will be blocked within Kosovo and the road to a socialist federation of all the peoples and nationalities of the Balkans will be blocked as well. ■

## Yugoslavian federation, 1945-91



# The break up of Yugoslavia

Imperialism has played, and continues to play a destructive and reactionary role in the Balkans and in the break up of former Yugoslavia. But no revolutionary socialist can neglect to point the finger of blame at Stalinism too. For forty years the "Communist" rulers of Yugoslavia, under the leadership of Tito, held the country in a bureaucratic vice. The working class were excluded from political power and economic decision making. Stalinist policies fuelled national hatreds and helped fuel the murderous wars that have tormented the region throughout the 1990s. And rival nationalist bureaucracies built up power bases from which, after the death of Tito, they launched attacks on each other. They prepared the battleground. They are anti-working class criminals.

Yugoslavia, after the Tito-Stalin split, experienced decades of the "market socialism" and economic decentralisation that Gorbachev vainly tried to introduce in Russia from 1985 onwards. Indeed Yugoslavia was the pioneer of "market socialism". The Yugoslav economic stagnation and breakdown, which became critical in the mid-1980s, was a crisis of this system *in extremis*, rather than of the old Soviet model of "command planning".

Heavily in debt to western financial institutions, Yugoslavia witnessed a deep economic crisis in 1985. The debt totalled one third of the nation's gross material production. Between 1979 and 1984 real earnings fell by 30 per cent. At the same time inflation spiralled up to 200 per cent by 1988. Mass unemployment meant further misery for the impoverished masses.

The Yugoslav federation had become virtually a confederation after 1974, though with Tito as final arbiter. The bureaucracies of each republic were able to thwart and obstruct any centrally decided

measures which harmed them. Tito's system could not survive its death because no bonapartist arbiter could replace him. Indeed, a cumbersome revolving "collective presidency" was his legacy. This was a recipe for complete paralysis. Yugoslavia, like many "third world" countries, had been lured into heavy debt by the western banks throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. In the mid-1980s the IMF decided it was pay-back time. The monetarist recipe for Yugoslavia – as everywhere else – was austerity and "economic reform" (i.e. privatisations, closures, opening to western trade). Thus, when the internal bureaucracy was pressured by the IMF to adopt such a package of "reforms", this led to waves of mass strikes and demonstrations by industrial workers both in 1987 and 1989. The response of the Serbian bureaucracy was to play the nationalist card.

The rise to power of Gorbachev in the USSR, and the loosening of the policies of Glasnost and Perestroika in 1987 had its influence in Yugoslavia too. In Croatia and Slovenia, existing dissident movements came into the open demanding democratisation. Within Serbia itself, democratisation manifested itself primarily as militant demands by the Albanian minority for full republican status within the Yugoslav federation. The response amongst Serbs was the famous memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences issued, it is not written by the father of the Serbian nationalist revival, Dobrica Cosic.

Cosic had specialised in presenting the Serbs as the victims of genocide, a historical and self-pitying rhetoric which obscured the real genocide carried out against Serbs by the Nazis and the Croatian Ustaše regime in the Second World War with the largely economically uneducated movement of Serbs



out of Kosova. "The Serb is the new Jew, the Jew at the end of the twentieth century", Cosic repeated again and again. Cosic was only the foremost of a whole wave of nationalist writers who presented the Serbs as the victims of a conspiracy to rob them of their historic lands, of their statehood and eventually of their very existence as a nation.

But the only hard evidence they offered was the autonomy of the provinces of Vojvodina, which had large Hungarian and Romanian minorities, and Kosova, which had a huge Albanian majority. They also blamed Serbia's economic backwardness relative to Slovenia and Croatia on an anti-Serb alliance between all the other federal states, Vojvodina and Kosova.

The upsurge of nationalism amongst the Serb intelligentsia was skilfully utilised by a former bank official and then party chief in Belgrade, Slobodan Milosevic. Beginning in 1986, he rose to power in the League of Communists of Serbia, stabbing in the back his former patron Stambolic and his clique. After a famous visit to Kosova, where the Serb nationalists had started to organise mass demonstrations by bussing in Serbs from Serbia proper, Milosevic realised that these demagogic mobilisations, with the implied (and sometimes actual) threats of street violence against his opponents, were the way to oust the old Titoite bureaucrats, grown fat on the plunder of the collective property. He used demagogic calls for an "anti-bureaucratic revolution" against them. He was able also to criticise the federal liberalisation programme – although he did support economic liberalisation, albeit at a slower pace.

To the demands of the autonomous provinces for republican status in 1990 he responded with measures that abolished the provinces' existing limited autonomy in all but name. When pressure mounted to hold multi-party elections in December 1990, he called a snap election with tight control of the media. The League of Communists was renamed the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and, shamelessly using nationalist demagogy, took 194 of the 250 seats in the Skuptsina (parliament). But the opposition, tied to the IMF policies which would lead to mass unemployment, could not reach beyond the white collar and intellectual strata who valued "democracy" above social security and jobs because they assumed theirs were safe. Through iron control over the media, thuggish police methods, and an astute playing off of extreme nationalist and liberal democratic forces within the opposition, Milosevic ensured that no

effective electoral rivals emerged. Whenever discontent with the regime reached boiling point and spilled over onto the streets, Milosevic stepped up or initiated a crisis which enabled him to play the national-chauvinist card. And since all the major forces in the opposition, whether on the fascist right (the Radical Party of Vojeslav Seselj) or the supposedly pluralist "left" (the Serbian Renewal Movement of Vuk Draskovic), also banged the nationalist drum, chauvinism began to poison large swathes of Serbian society.

Milosevic's resistance to a multi-party political system in Serbia and at a federal level stopped the latter re-legitimising itself by national elections. The federal government thus had no mandate for its economic reforms. In a tit-for-tat action the other republican leaders refused to sanction Serbian repression in Kosova. Deepening divisions along these lines led to the collapse of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in January 1990 and, over the next 12 months, the federation too, as the republics declared sovereignty and forced the withdrawal of the federal army – because of its predominantly Serbian character.

In Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, what in the rest of East and Central Europe developed into an anti-bureaucratic democratic revolution was transformed, or rather subsumed, into struggles for national independence and/or the extension of dominance over other nationalities. In Serbia mass strike waves by workers resisting the first attempts at restorationist reforms were headed off by Milosevic's national chauvinist course.

In November 1988 *Workers Power* wrote:

"... the Serbian Communist Party has embarked on a pogromist crusade to end the partial autonomy of both Kosova and Vojvodina. At its forefront has been Serbian party leader Slobodan Milosevic... [who] has authorised a series of anti-Albanian and Greater Serbian demonstrations in Kosova, Montenegro, Vojvodina and Macedonia. He is campaigning for Kosova and Vojvodina to be brought back under direct Serbian control on the road to building a Greater Serbia within Yugoslavia. His politics are quasi-fascist."

This proved prescient. Within a matter of a few years Milosevic's chauvinism inflamed rival nationalisms in Croatia and Bosnia – rivalries which effectively destroyed the Yugoslav Federation and started the wars between and within its successor states. Milosevic's preventative counter-revolution and its rapid imitation by Franjo Tudjman in Croatia (albeit with an overt anti-communist coloration)



aborted the unfolding of a political revolutionary crisis in the former Yugoslavia. Instead, the masses were lined up behind the nationalist leaders and used as cannon fodder in the wars of the Yugoslav succession. While the "war" with Slovenia proved to be a farce, the following wars were tragedies. Most importantly, they opened the door to direct imperialist involvement in the Balkans. Once again the rival imperialists saw the opportunity to use the Balkan nations for their own purposes.

The newly strengthened and assertive German imperialism, supported by Austria, had a different perspective to the US and to its major European partners. With historic links and aspirations in Slovenia and Croatia, Germany encouraged Croat and Slovene separatism. Surprisingly they armed the Croats, hoping to cut away these economically advanced regions and to bring them into a relationship with the German-led Europe as semi-colonies.

In contrast, up to June 1991, the US and its British shield-bearer tried hard to preserve the federation and blocked recognition of the seceding republics. So too did French imperialism, fearful of seeing the new German giant flexing its muscles soon after unification. But the tide of development was on the side of German strategy. The Serbian Stalinist bureaucracy was not so intransigent and obdurate because it was defending the workers' historic gains, but because its survival in Serbia now depended on its espousal of the most extreme Serbian nationalist claims and objectives.

The war between Serbia and Croatia ensured that Croatia became independent of Yugoslavia. But it left unresolved the problem of control of the Serbian enclaves in Croatia and Bosnia. Milosevic's credibility hinged on his ability to impose Serbian control of these enclaves. And war was the only way in which this could be achieved. The war with Croatia, therefore, was the prelude to the savage conflict in Bosnia. Milosevic's goal was always the expansion of Serbia and the consolidation of its power. To win, he had to do more than just fight. He had to clear whole areas of their existing populations so as to ensure total Serbian domination over them. The grim and criminal process of ethnic cleansing began.

Milosevic's characteristic obduracy eventually convinced the US-Franco-British bloc that their unitary-state strategy was bankrupt and that there was no alternative to supporting the division of Yugoslavia. They adopted the German plan to ensure the completion of the restoration process,

first in Slovenia and then in a larger and economically viable Croatia. This meant sealing off backward Serbia and awaiting the effects of economic crisis which they trusted would eventually bring the downfall of Milosevic and the installation of a more pliable regime. They hoped to get a "democratic" fast-track restorationist regime that will do imperialism's bidding. The Serbs' major crime in the imperialists' eyes was not that of the horrors committed by the Chetnik butchers or the army bombardments. It was their control over the rump of the Federal army, which enabled them to seize most of the Muslim-dominated buffer zone that the US and EC imperialists hoped to place between Croatia and Serbia.

The break up of the Yugoslav Federation made a terrible war in Bosnia virtually certain, since it was a republic where each of the three main nationalities was a "minority" vis-a-vis the other two. The only force that could have prevented it was the Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian proletariat.

Indeed, in the years 1989-91, the vanguard elements of the working class, together with the progressive intelligentsia and youth tried to do just this in the form of peace movements in all three countries. The final and tragic attempt was the great demonstration of 1991 in Sarajevo. What this revealed was that reaction alone, no matter how brazenly it pretends to act against the chauvinist warmongers, is too limited and reactive. To stop war it was necessary to drive the warmongers into retreat.

Revolutionaries were needed in all three republics to remove the Milosevic, Tudjman and Izetbegovic's (the leader of the Muslim party in Bosnia), its aim could only have been achieved by ensuring a voluntary and equal separation with full rights for all minorities and the introduction of a planned economy, but more importantly, the democratic control of the working class.

Instead, the restorationist strategy merged into war. All three Serb, Croat and Bosnian Muslim-segregationist and nationalist settlements or enclaves were established to be incorporated. The Bosnian Muslim leader Ali Izetbegovic's aim was to create a state in the Bosnian state in an alliance with the Croat nationalists, backed by imperialist, internationalist diplomatic recognition to the republic. This plan also included the Serb minority against their wishes, and so threatened their own national premises.

But again, the imperialists' strategy towards ensuring the restoration by the break



up of Yugoslavia, a turn by the Croatian government against the Bosnian Muslims in order to carve out a "historic Croatia", and a ferocious campaign of ethnic cleansing of Muslims in eastern Bosnia by the "Yugoslav Army" and Serbian irregulars transformed the conflict into a reactionary war of annihilation against the Muslim people of Bosnia by the Serbs and Croats. By August 1992 there were 50,000 dead and 2 million refugees. Where the working class was strongest – in cities like Tuzla and Sarajevo – multi-ethnic militia fought the pogromists in an alliance with the Bosnian army.

Milosevic's objective of a Greater Serbia meshed with Tudjman's project for a "historic" Croatia. Indeed there is considerable evidence that the Bosnian War was a joint effort, once fighting had ceased in Slavonia and Krajina. This clashed with imperialism's plans to stabilise the Balkans since they saw beyond this a further war in Kosova and maybe in Macedonia too. This held the danger of Greek, Bulgarian and even Turkish intervention a real pan-Balkan war involving Nato allies on opposite sides.

Between 1991 and the end of 1994 the number killed in Croatia and Bosnia was anything between 200,000 and 400,000 people, with 2.7 million people turned into refugees. Late in the war the uselessness of the United Nations Protection Force (Unprofor) was demonstrated in the UN "safe haven" of Srebrenica. When the Serbs attacked, the Dutch Unprofor "protectors" pressured the Bosnian forces to surrender and then withdrew allowing the city to fall. Thirty thousand women, old men and children made their way by bus and on foot to Tuzla. But some 10,000 young men were rounded up and "disappeared".

Then the Serb forces under Ratko Mladic started an intensified bombardment of the besieged capital of Bosnia, Sarajevo. The prospect of its fall finally persuaded the US and the EU to undertake some (thoroughly useless) bombing of Serb artillery sites. They scored a direct hit on some tents and one armoured car! What really ended the war was a massive Croatian offensive on the Krajina and a simultaneous, co-ordinated offensive by the Bosnian forces. Milosevic and the Bosnian Serbs – for the first time in a position of strategic weakness were now willing to consider the western plans for partition that a series of international figures such as David Owen had submitted over the past three years.

The Bosnian war ended with the cease-fire of 10 October 1995 and the Dayton peace accords on 20

December. Sonorous pledges to a "united and sovereign Bosnia" were made; freedom of movement for civilians, a reversal of "ethnic cleansing" and return of refugees to their homes were promised. In fact only about 250,000 of the 2.5 million displaced Bosnians have returned to their homes. The largest groups of displaced population are the Bosniaks of Eastern Bosnia, the Serbs of Krajina and the Croats of northern Bosnia stand a chance of being allowed to resettle.

Two entities were recognised at Dayton: the Republica Srpska and the Bosnian Muslim-Croat Federation (formed under US pressure in Washington in March 1994). But the two parts of the federation are not one state. The federation's army, trained and equipped by the Americans, is strictly divided into three Muslim and two Croat divisions. In Mostar, despite repeated attempts, Croat chauvinists will not allow freedom of movement for Muslims.

The International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague has only managed to indict 74 people, an eighth and try one. The Republica Srpska has a president but behind the scenes Karadzic still has considerable power. Their only substantive concession has been withdrawal from the Serb suburb of Sarajevo in February 1996, but true to their principle that Serbs can only live under a Serb government they emptied these districts of their entire Serb population. As one historian observed:

"The Dayton agreement stopped the war before any of the three warring parties had achieved their political goals. It recognised the nationalist goals of all three governing parties, legitimised the ethnic principle of rule and completed the aim of the war to change the geographical distribution of the population to make national control over territory irreversible."

Only one of the direct parties to the war – the Bosnian Muslims under Alija Izetbegovic – actually signed Dayton. The Croats of Herzeg-Bosna and the Serbs of the Republica Srpska both refused to sign. They were "signed for" by Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic. The minimal carrying through of Dayton on the Bosnian Serb and Croat sides is totally dependent on Milosevic and Tudjman. Hence imperialism's tacit support for Milosevic at Dayton will last as long as both are needed to implement Dayton.

The post-war situation in Serbia was a dire one. There was 60% unemployment and inflation was running at 50% per month. The gross external debt was \$9bn. There were 700,000 war refugees from

Krajina, Slavonia and Bosnia. Milosevic's old slogan "All Serbs in One State" was coming true but in a way the Serb population had never dreamed of. In Milosevic's ten years of power the average income had more than halved in real terms.

The local elections held on 17 November 1996 were won by the opposition coalition Zajedno (Together) in Belgrade and fourteen other towns – among them Nis, the second city in Serbia. Protests were initiated by the students of Belgrade and the masses responded.

There were daily demonstrations of up to 200,000 in Belgrade and in Nis and other major towns. But according to western commentators "noticeable was the absence from the streets of Serbia's workers, of organised labour".

The reasons for this were clear. Zajedno was a coalition of human rights activists, reactionary anti-communist nationalists and advocates of fast track restoration. Such a programme cannot win the organic support of all the students, let alone draw in the Serbian working class.

But at the same time it was clear that Milosevic could no longer mobilise the workers against the opposition either. On 24 December the Serbian Socialist Party tried to stage a rival rally at the same time and in the same place as Zajedno.

It had boasted that 500,000 would turn out. In the event only 40,000 showed up. An OSCE mission of investigation agreed to by Milosevic found in favour of the opposition in 14 out of the 25 results

challenged. Milosevic pledged 1997 as "a year of reforms" that would take Serbia towards a market economy and see "huge investments".

Promise of foreign investments, however, came at a price. In his last months as Britain's foreign secretary, Malcolm Rifkind persuaded Milosevic to accept the Zajedno leaders into the government. Vojislav Seselj was made deputy president and Vuk Draskovic appointed deputy prime minister. Even Zoran Djindjic – who is linked with Radovan Karadzic, the bloody butcher of Bosnia – has been brought into Milosevic's inner circle.

The shoring up of the Serbian government was necessary to head off workers' strikes and demonstrations over wages, jobs and conditions. Inevitably, however, it brought war with Kosova closer. In spring 1998 the Yugoslav Army moved into Kosova to flush out the KLA units.

After some initial setbacks, the war took a turn in late summer through to the cease-fire in October 1998, with the Serbian forces going on an ethnic cleansing offensive to clear out the north and east of Kosova – where the mineral-rich mining towns and all the major cities are.

In January 1999, Milosevic, now accompanied by all the nationalist oppositionists as well as the major generalists from the Bosnian war, the notorious fascist Jovanovic and the destroyer of Srebrenica, Ratko Mladic, was ready to restart the war. This time, his aim was to drive the Albanian majority out of Kosova once and for all. ■



# Imperialism and Balkanisation

Serious historians as well as hack tabloid journalists frequently portray the Balkan wars of the 1990s as the product of "ancient ethnic hatreds". This is not merely an ignorant explanation of today's conflicts. It is a self-serving lie. It conceals the guilt of both the imperialist powers and the Stalinist and post-Stalinist rulers of ex-Yugoslavia for the bloodbath that has engulfed the region.

The "ethnic hatreds" that have been unleashed in the 1990s were manufactured by rival national leaders in Yugoslavia - notably Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Franjo Tudjman in Croatia - for the purposes of their own aggrandisement as that country broke up under the pressure of the economic crisis of the Stalinist regime in the late 1980s. The new nationalisms and chauvinisms were manipulated by imperialism as it sought to benefit from the break up of Yugoslavia.

The "success" of the nationalists has been to ensure that the twentieth century ends as it began - with the Balkans turned into a gigantic killing field. That they have been able to wreak such havoc on the region is a direct result of the failure of both the bourgeois-democratic and proletarian revolution in the Balkans and the conversion of the various states into the playthings of the Great Powers. The Balkan peoples have suffered untold misery as a result: two Balkan wars before 1914; two world wars in which the Balkans were a site of slaughter; forty years of brutal Stalinist dictatorship under Tito; and now, the "wars of the Yugoslav succession", culminating in a massive imperialist intervention, a genocidal attack on the ethnic Albanian Kosovars by Serbia and the potential for the Balkan powder keg to shower its sparks well beyond former Yugoslavia.

In the nineteenth century, the antiquated and backward Ottoman Empire - which had ruled for

four centuries in the Balkans - began to crumble under the impact of the rise of the capitalist industrial powers in Europe, principally France, Germany and Britain. This led to the renewal of the national aspirations of the major peoples of the Balkans. However, in trying to achieve the nationalist ideal of homogenous populations in clearly defined territories, they faced the problem not only of the old rulers (the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires) but also of the ethnic diversity of a large part of the settled inhabitants of the Balkans.

Even the largest of the Balkan peoples, the Serbs, Croats, Bulgarians and Greeks, could not hope to achieve their objectives by their own efforts. The various national dynasties, therefore, looked to the Great Powers - Austria, Russia, Germany, France and later Britain - to support them. The price for such support was that the destiny of the entire region and its peoples was, fundamentally, shaped according to the balance of power between the rival imperialist powers. The region came to be dominated by the imperialist system within which each of the powers operated via chosen "historic" Balkan states and in turn these states oppressed the national minorities within their boundaries. A hierarchy of oppression and exploitation was constructed ultimately to suit the needs of imperialism. This system repeatedly fomented national hatreds and gave its name to imperialism's policy of divide and rule - Balkanisation.

In 1908, the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote:

"The Balkan Peninsula . . . is divided between six independent states: Greece, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, together with the Austro-Hungarian provinces of Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the six independent states, each



of which has its own dynasty, army, currency and customs system, there live many nations and races, divided into separate fragments: Greeks, Turks, Romanians, Bulgars, Serbs, Albanians, Jews, Armenians, Gypsies . . . The frontiers between the dwarf states of the Balkan Peninsula were not drawn in accordance with national conditions or national demands, but as a result of wars, diplomatic intrigues, and dynastic interests. The Great Powers - in the first place Russia and Austria - have always had a direct interest in setting the Balkan peoples and states against each other and then, when they have weakened one another, subjecting them to their economic and political influence."

As early as 1878 Austria took control of the Turkish province of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Congress of Berlin ratified this move and as Trotsky noted:

"The states that today occupy the Balkan Peninsula were manufactured by European diplomacy around the table at the Congress of Berlin in 1879. There it was that all the measures were taken to convert the national diversity of the Balkans into a regular melée of petty states."

War was inevitable. The development of capitalist relations, slow and uneven as it was in the Balkans, was creating the objective need for an all-Balkan political and economic entity. Austria-Hungary wanted to fill the vacuum created by Turkey's demise but, since the Crimean War of the 1850s, this was beyond the Habsburgs' capacity. Moreover, France, Britain and Russia (the Triple Entente) would not tolerate such an extension of Austria-Hungary's imperial power.

The crumbling Ottoman edifice was bound to lead to attempts by Balkan nationalities to construct independent states out of the debris. But, as Trotsky foresaw in 1910, if successful revolution from below did not provide the impetus for the creation of a Balkan Federation then:

"State unity of the Balkan peninsula can be achieved from above, by expanding one Balkan state, which ever proves strongest, at the expense of the weaker ones - this is the road of wars of extermination and oppression of weak nations, a road that consolidates monarchism and militarism."

Two years later, in the autumn of 1912, Trotsky's prognosis was vindicated. Turkey was in an advanced state of collapse. Meanwhile, the Balkan states, each with their own territorial and national ambitions in the peninsula, had made preparations for war with Turkey. The Balkan League (Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Greece) was formed in

May 1912 to co-ordinate their attack on Turkey and agree a division of spoils.

Serbia wanted to enlarge its territory to include as much of its people as possible. Although carried through by war Trotsky understood that, "at bottom, this striving is irresistible, historically progressive".

But, under the rule of a reactionary monarchy, there was also a darker side to Serbia's strivings. Its own drive east to the Adriatic Coast brought it into conflict with the Albanians of that area. In addition, Serbia was quite prepared to drive its borders south into Macedonia and incorporate, by force if necessary, non-Serbs in the process; either that or drive such peoples out altogether in an early version of ethnic cleansing.

Between October and December 1912, the Balkan League countries inflicted a major defeat on Turkey. While Austria-Hungary and the Triple Entente shed no tears, they wanted to ensure that Serbia would be deprived of an Adriatic coastline. They feared it becoming a strong regional power that could threaten their interests. Under the threat of war, Serbia was forced to recognise the creation of the new buffer state of Albania. Imperialism had succeeded in further "Balkanising" the region.

Trotsky recognised that the causes of the war against Turkey were lodged in the preceding decades of imperialist manipulation and the denial of national rights. He supported the struggles and welcomed the successes of the Balkan League. But he was acutely aware that the petty tyrants and oligarchs who ran these small states were driven by more than just the legitimate desire to unite the "nation". The roots of the second Balkan war, from late June 1913, lay in the conflict of these oligarchies against each other.

Bulgaria and Serbia recognised that conflict between themselves was necessary to divide Macedonia. Greece, too, wanted to extend its northern borders at Macedonia's expense. Meanwhile, Romania entered the fray against Bulgaria for some of its disputed territory. In the ensuing war, Bulgaria was badly beaten, so much so that Turkey was able to regain land lost in the first war.

This second war cemented the "friendship" between Greece and Serbia that has lasted to this day, as both conspired to deny Macedonian statehood and ethnicity. Serbia also gained Kosova, which, then as now, had an Albanian majority. Some 500,000 people, mostly Turks and Albanian Muslims, were driven from their homes. Fearful atrocities were committed by the Bulgarians, Greeks and



Serbians against Albanian, Turkish and Muslim Slav populations in order to clear them from the territories they wished to claim.

Thus, the national struggles descended into terrible wars of conquest and annexation, shaped, above all, by the aspirations of imperialism. Trotsky noted:

"... the difficult conditions in the clutches of which the Balkan peoples are struggling have been determined not by the ethnographic map of the peninsular, or at least not directly by this - but by the self-seeking activity of European diplomacy, which has cut up the Balkans in such a way as to ensure that the separate, artificially isolated parts may by mutual conflict neutralise and paralyse each other. European diplomacy has acted and is still acting, moreover, not just from outside. It has established here, on this soil soaked with blood and tears, its own commission agencies and relay stations, in the persons of the Balkan dynasties and their political tools. On this chessboard kings and ministers are not so much players as principal pieces - the real players look down upon the board from above, and if the game takes a turn unfavourable to themselves they raise a mailed fist threateningly over the board."

Trotsky, working as a journalist in the Balkans during both wars, talked to many left wing socialists and workers in Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania. While there was a genuine desire for national unity, there was also a recognition by the class conscious vanguard that their class interests ran counter to that of their rulers. As one Bulgarian engineer remarked bitterly to Trotsky:

"Our miserable rulers only want to gather the strength to try once more a bloody settlement of accounts with our neighbours. But we think that what is needed is to settle accounts with those in each country who are to blame for our woes, and with our combined forces to build a new order in the Balkans."

Here was the antidote to the poisonous nationalism that meant war and misery. Here was the voice of working class internationalism. It was a voice that found organised expression in the revolutionary Social Democrats of Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. These internationalists denounced the anti-Muslim atrocities of their rulers, fought against the annexationist ambitions of the rival dynasties and, on the outbreak of war, heroically voted against war credits to finance the carnage.

They recognised that the bourgeoisie, tied to the

apron strings of the rival imperialists, could not resolve the national question in a progressive manner. The outcome of the two Balkan wars proved them right. Trotsky summed up the results of these wars:

"It must be said, therefore, about the new boundary lines in the Balkan Peninsular, regardless of how long they may last, that they have been drawn across the living bodies of nations that have been lacerated, bled white, and exhausted. Not one of these Balkan nations has succeeded in gathering together all its scattered fragments. And, at the same time, every one of the Balkan states... now includes within its borders a compact minority that is hostile to it."

This was as true for Serbia as anyone. Serbia had gained most; it had doubled the size of its territory and, while the Serbs living within the Turkish empire had been liberated, there were still Serbs living under Habsburg rule in Bosnia, Croatia and southern Hungary.

To this unstable and still oppressive settlement Trotsky argued that:

"The only way out of the national and state chaos and the bloody confusion of Balkan life is a union of all the peoples of the peninsular in a single economic and political entity, on the basis of national autonomy of the constituent parts. Only within the framework of a single Balkan state can the Serbs of Macedonia, the Sanjak, Serbia, and Montenegro be united in a single national cultural community, enjoying at the same time the advantages of a Balkan common market."

For that goal to be realised it was necessary to overthrow the emerging national bourgeoisie and landowning classes who, by their wars, were seeking to broaden the scope of their own class dictatorship and find a place as a subaltern regional power under the tutelage of one or other of the main imperialist nations. Only the working class could resolve the legacy of national hatreds that had been created by the regional bourgeoisie and its imperialist backers. Trotsky argued:

"Accordingly, the task of creating normal conditions of national and state existence in the Balkans falls, with all its historical weight, upon the shoulders of the Balkan proletariat... The social democratic parties in Bulgaria and Serbia, the most mature representatives of the labour movement in the Balkans, are fighting tirelessly on two fronts: against their own dynastic chauvinistic cliques and against the imperialist plans of Tsarism and the Europe of the stock exchanges. A federal republic in



the Balkans, as the positive programme of this struggle, has become the banner of the entire conscious proletariat without distinction of race, nationality or state frontiers."

For Trotsky, the road of the federal republic, was "the road of revolution, the road that means overthrowing the Balkan dynasties." Until then, Trotsky was aware that the national antagonism fostered by imperialism would not go away. On the contrary as he said:

"The Eastern Question burns still, discharging poison like a frightful ulcer, in the body of capitalist Europe."

That ulcer burst in July 1914. Austria-Hungary was desperate to arrest its own decline as a front line power and falsely blamed Serbia for being behind the assassination of the heir to the Habsburg throne while he was on a visit to Bosnia. Austria, egged on by Germany, declared war on Serbia.

Germany was searching for a pretext to launch a war in Europe which would enable it to repartition the colonial possessions of Russia, Turkey and France, possessions it had long coveted. The first imperialist world war had begun. Tragically, its outcome in the Balkans, unlike in Russia, was not a victorious proletarian revolution, despite heroic revolutionary struggles exploding in the area. Instead, the Balkans were once again organised to suit the needs of the imperialist victors in 1918.

Serbia was repaid for siding with the Triple Entente, by the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In the years that followed, it strove to subordinate all of the other Slav areas, as well as those populated by Albanians, Hungarians, Bosnian Muslims and others. The constant turmoil eventually led, in 1929, to a coup d'état and royal dictatorship, under Alexander I, which renamed the region under Serb control, Yugoslavia (South Slav). It was the antithesis of the federal republic. It was a prison house of nations, in which nationalist hatreds and rivalries were kept alive.

In the second world war, Germany attempted, once again, to resolve the Balkan question from above - by extending the Nazi dictatorship over the entire region. At the end of the war, and with Germany defeated - by Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Armed Forces in Bulgaria - the question of the state form of the Balkans was once again on the agenda.

The regional Stalinist leaders - Tito, Dimitrov in Bulgaria and Enver Hoxha in Albania - all considered a federation of the Balkans to be the logical answer. Stalin had other ideas.

His overriding concern was the preservation of his own bureaucratic rule and his hegemony over the countries directly liberated by his army. He was a counter-revolutionary, not a liberator. Fearing the combined strength of a Balkan Federation - and its potential rivalry with the USSR - he adopted a policy that was virtually identical to that of the Tsarist diplomats and the "Europe of the stock exchanges". He wanted to maintain Balkanisation - divide and rule. Thus, while Yugoslavia was to become a federation - supposedly satisfying the national aspirations of its peoples - Bulgaria and Albania were to remain separate altogether.

Yugoslavia itself, under Tito - both before and after his split with Stalin - replicated the oppressive Stalinist regime of the USSR within its own borders. Workers' democracy was crushed, national rights existed at a formal level but were in reality subordinated to the needs of the central bureaucracy. Serb domination of that bureaucracy remained. The country was developed - or, as in the case of Kosovo, underdeveloped - according to the economic needs of the bureaucracy. The state was guarded by a Serb dominated police, army and secret police. Only the Bonapartist rule of Tito was able to preserve this regime from blowing apart.

Nationalist rivalries did not disappear under Tito. They were kept alive by the bureaucracy's policy of starving poorer regions of investment and resources, by its maintenance of the old Serb domination of the state machine and by the practical denial of national rights by the Stalinist regime. But these rivalries were, so to speak, frozen. The death of Tito, the economic crisis of the Stalinist states in the late 1980s and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 defrosted them. This time the dynasties who sought to use nationalism to divert the working class from its collective, international interests and mobilise them under the banner of chauvinism and national hatred, were the Stalinist bureaucrats in the constituent countries of Yugoslavia. Foremost among them was Slobodan Milosevic who, in 1988, emerged as the key leader of the Serbian Communist Party having made his name by organising pogroms of the Albanians of Kosovo.

The socialist federation remains today, as it was in Trotsky's day, the only progressive long term solution to the national question of the Balkans. But this time the task of the revolutionary socialists is not the overthrow of kings, but the overthrow of the post-Communist regimes who, like the kings before them, have soaked the lands they rule over in the blood of the masses. ■



# The British left gets it wrong

As the NATO bombs rain down on Serbian cities and refugee convoys alike, the movement in Britain against the war has been small. Although millions of people feel a deep distaste for Clinton and Blair's bombing raids, only a few thousands have taken part in marches and protests against NATO.

The main reason for this is the support given to the war by the leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions, even by "left-wing" figures like Ken Livingstone. They point to the plight of the Kosovar Albanians, backed up with appalling TV images of empty cities, squalid refugee camps and burning villages, and say simply: "something must be done".

But across the population, including the working class, many still mistrust the motives of the warmongers in Washington and Westminster. NATO's real war aims and indiscriminate actions have obviously not helped the Kosovars one jot. As the conflict deepens, the possibility exists to rally a powerful movement of opposition to the war.

But there is another problem. The main political forces in the anti-war movement are led by dissident Labour MP Tony Benn, the Communist Party and its daily newspaper the Morning Star and the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). Although each of these opposes the NATO bombings without reservation, they are unable to answer the arguments of the pro-bombing lobby with any coherence. The reason? Each of them refuses even to acknowledge the scale of the horror to which the Kosovars have been subjected by Milosevic. They refuse to call for Kosovan independence altogether. Some of them slander the Kosovan forces, all deny that the Kosovar Albanians are victims of genocide.

There is absolutely no reason why opponents of the NATO bombings should do this. If "the first casualty of war is the truth", then the anti-war

movement must be founded on a determination to acknowledge the whole truth. Standing four square with the Kosovan victims of genocide is a basic duty of all socialists and democrats. It is essential to combine the fight against NATO with support for the Kosovars' struggle against genocide and for national independence.

Unless this is done, working class people who reluctantly support the bombings "to help the Kosovars" will be offered no alternative way of opposing the greatest genocide on mainland Europe since the end of the second world war. By abandoning the Kosovars, the British left shows not only a disgraceful willingness to turn a blind eye to the most savage oppression when it wishes, but also a complete inability to answer the distorted message of the pro-NATO politicians with clear internationalist answers.

## *Tony Benn and the Morning Star*

Benn stands out as one of the only MPs who has spoken out again and again against the war. When Baghdad was bombed last year and during the current air strikes it is his voice we hear on radio and TV programmes calling for an immediate end to the bombing and rejecting NATO's justifications for its action.

Yet since the onset of this conflict Benn has said nothing about the plight of the Kosovars. When confronted with the argument that the Serbian forces are oppressing the Kosovars, he either ignores it or claims that the mass depopulation of Kosova has only begun since and as a result of the NATO bombings. He has even suggested that the Kosovars might be fleeing the NATO bombings and not the Serb forces that are driving them from their homes and killing them.



you are mistaken. However horrible the events of our factory closure, they are not the same. We are much smaller than the mining industry. Our communities have not yet been destroyed. To compare the two is wrong. It is an insult to the miners."

Nobody would ever raise such an argument unless they were opposed to action. Which, in the case of the defence of the Kosovars, is precisely the case for the SWP. Their argument is not motivated by a desire to preserve the memory of the unique horror of the Holocaust, but to play down the genocide that is happening in Europe now.

The SWP quotes the Russian revolutionary and enemy of Stalinism, Leon Trotsky, in support of its stance. But he had a different approach when, as a war reporter, he covered the Balkan wars in 1912-13. He wrote of those who covered up the genocide of Albanians and other Muslims in the Balkans:

"Did not the facts, undeniable and irrefutable, force you to come to the conclusion that the Bulgars in Macedonia, the Serbs in Old Serbia, in their national endeavour to correct data in the ethnographical statistics that are not quite favourable to them, are engaged quite simply in systematic extermination of the Muslim population in the villages, towns and districts ... An individual, a group, a party or a class that is capable of 'objectively' picking its nose while it watches men drunk with blood and incited from above, massacring defenceless people is condemned by history to rot and become worm eaten while it is still alive."

#### *Should we support independence for Kosova?*

"Towards the end of Tito's rule he granted Kosovan Albanians certain national rights. Milosevic reversed this as he drove to succeed Tito." (Stop the War, p20)

These are practically the only sentences in the whole of the Stop the War pamphlet which acknowledge the real national oppression of the Kosovars within Serbia. Not a single article in Socialist Worker since the beginning of the war has detailed the Kosovars' current or recent oppression.

Yet all Albanian language newspapers, and television and radio stations are banned; unemployment among Kosovan Albanians stands at 80 per cent; their average income is just 28 per cent of the already breadline Yugoslav average; all education in Albanian is banned; hundreds of Kosovar activists rot in jails.

No wonder a 1991 referendum returned a 98 per cent vote for independence on a 90 per cent turnout.

Why do Socialist Worker and Stop the War remain silent on these facts? Because they are hostile to the Kosovars' legitimate fight for independence.

They write:

"Serbians have to support the right of Kosovan Albanians to self determination, to decide their own future, and Kosovan Albanians have to be for harmony with Serbians and for an end to ethnic tensions." (p22)

Socialists support the right of all nations to self determination, with only one proviso - that they do not oppress another nationality in the process. And the right to self determination, in this instance, can only mean independence. The Kosovars have "decided their own future" and, like it or not, it is outside of rump Yugoslavia. Anyone who tries to obstruct their right to independence is not "fighting nationalism" but supporting reactionary Serbian nationalism, the very nationalism that is trying to retain hold of an oppressed nation against the overwhelming will of its people.

An internationalist approach means supporting legitimate national rights. Only this could win Kosovar Albanians away from the nationalist politics of the KLA leadership and Serbian workers away from Milosevic's vile Serb chauvinism. The SWP used to recognise this. Their own John Rees, in his pamphlet *Socialism and war*, makes the point very well:

"As Lenin put it, those who wish to see a pure revolution without nationalist revolts in oppressed countries, will never live to see a revolution. Such revolts can manifest all sorts of religious and nationalist prejudices. But Lenin argued that the political complexion of the leaders of small nations - be they nationalist, fundamentalist, dictators or democrats - should not determine whether socialists in the major imperialist countries support them against imperialism." (*Socialism and war*, p19)

Exactly. But the SWP refuses to apply this to the Kosovars today, despite the fact that they are a small nation fighting for freedom against "Greater Serbia".

#### *What is the socialist solution to the national question in the Balkans?*

The SWP claims to stand in Trotsky's tradition by calling for a socialist federation of Balkan republics. This slogan was developed by Trotsky as a weapon against national oppression and nationalist ideas.

The Balkans are a patchwork of different and



The SWP says it is necessary to raise this point to counter NATO propaganda. But if this were its aim, it could easily point to numerous genocides and massacres in which the hypocritical NATO powers refused to act or even collaborated. Rwanda is a case in point. It could show up how the West has refused to help the Kosovars up until now, not just by turning away refugees, but by freezing KLA bank accounts, refusing to recognise Kosovo as a legitimate state and mounting a diplomatic offensive in the months leading up to the war to get the Kosovars to moderate their opposition to Milosevic and give up their arms.

Instead the SWP tries to rewrite history. Because NATO propaganda now stresses the scale of Milosevic's crimes, the SWP suddenly tries to play them down with spurious and cynical arguments.

The pre-war population of Kosovo was 1.9 million. Of these, 1.7 million were Kosovar Albanians. Over half a million have fled the country and a further 800,000 have been displaced within its borders in the first few weeks of April. Those who refused to leave their villages and cities have been shot. Thousands – especially men of military age – have been murdered.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, a genocide is "the deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, religious, political, or ethnic group." By herding them to the border and wiping out official records of their existence, Milosevic is attempting to drive the Kosovars off the map of Europe. His genocidal war against them may be in its early stages. But its intent is patently obvious.

But the SWP refuse to admit this. Instead, they focus on a comparison with Nazi Germany. Stop the War says Milosevic "is the Serbian version of Norman Tebbit rather than the Serbian Hitler" (p6), that "Hitler was the leader of the world's second largest industrial power when he smashed the German workers' movement and took over in 1933; Serbia is a minor country with a totally devastated economy which produces less than Tunisia" (p5) and that "the Nazis did not attempt to drive the Jews out of Europe but held them within Europe in order to murder them" (p9).

This is demagoguery of the worst kind. The racist Norman Tebbit demanded that Blacks and Asians assimilate into mainstream British culture (by cheering for the English cricket team, etc.). Milosevic denies Albanians any rights in Greater Serbia whatsoever and is forcibly driving them from their homes. To describe the perpetrator of the greatest forcible depopulation in post-war European history

as no worse than a racist Tory MP is to have lost touch completely with reality. Tebbit, vile racist that he is, never called for compulsory repatriation, let alone set about driving hundreds of thousands from their homes. To compare Milosevic's actions to those of Tebbit rather than Hitler is not just an insult, it is covering up the reality of Milosevic's crimes.

So eager is the SWP to play down what is happening, that it says:

"There are real fascists in Yugoslavia today, but they are not in power."

Even if this was true, it has no bearing on the need to back the Kosovars against the massacres. But it is not true. Milosevic's deputy president, Seselj, is a Serb fascist. He is a key member of the government. Moreover Milosevic's own politics have long been those of the "red/brown bloc" – the alliance of reactionary nationalist Stalinists and open fascists that has been a feature of decaying Stalinism.

What about the argument that Serbia is a minor country? It is a total red herring, a smoke screen to cover up the paucity of the SWP's "case". Rwandan Hutus massacred a million Tutsis in a country industrially much weaker than Serbia. Saddam Hussein gassed and murdered Kurds. Were these facts not worth recording and opposing with all our might?

But what about the Holocaust? The Kosovars have not been systematically exterminated, it is true. But before the Nazis could commence the unparalleled horror of the "Final Solution" in 1942, they first stripped the Jews of their democratic rights, their property and their jobs, (1933-35), then they herded them forcibly into ghettos and concentration camps, and finally shot, hanged and gassed them in their millions.

Milosevic carried out the first of these actions in 1988-89 and the second in 1998-99. Should we wait till he carries out the "final solution" before we are allowed to draw historical parallels?

A simple analogy exposes just how cynical and disturbing the SWP's argument is. If a company announced it was closing a small factory and one of its workers, on reading her redundancy notice, said: "It is just like what they did to the miners", how would a socialist respond? By saying: "Yes it is. They say we are uneconomic so they wreck our lives for profit. Like the miners, we should all fight together, and we should make sure it never happens again."

But, following the "logic" of the author of Stop the War a different argument would emerge: "No,

you are mistaken. However horrible the events of our factory closure, they are not the same. We are much smaller than the mining industry. Our communities have not yet been destroyed. To compare the two is wrong. It is an insult to the miners."

Nobody would ever raise such an argument unless they were opposed to action. Which, in the case of the defence of the Kosovars, is precisely the case for the SWP. Their argument is not motivated by a desire to preserve the memory of the unique horror of the Holocaust, but to play down the genocide that is happening in Europe now.

The SWP quotes the Russian revolutionary and enemy of Stalinism, Leon Trotsky, in support of its stance. But he had a different approach when, as a war reporter, he covered the Balkan wars in 1912-13. He wrote of those who covered up the genocide of Albanians and other Muslims in the Balkans:

"Did not the facts, undeniable and irrefutable, force you to come to the conclusion that the Bulgars in Macedonia, the Serbs in Old Serbia, in their national endeavour to correct data in the ethnographical statistics that are not quite favourable to them, are engaged quite simply in systematic extermination of the Muslim population in the villages, towns and districts ... An individual, a group, a party or a class that is capable of 'objectively' picking its nose while it watches men drunk with blood and incited from above, massacring defenceless people is condemned by history to rot and become worm eaten while it is still alive."

#### *Should we support independence for Kosova?*

"Towards the end of Tito's rule he granted Kosovan Albanians certain national rights. Milosevic reversed this as he drove to succeed Tito." (Stop the War, p20)

These are practically the only sentences in the whole of the Stop the War pamphlet which acknowledge the real national oppression of the Kosovars within Serbia. Not a single article in Socialist Worker since the beginning of the war has detailed the Kosovars' current or recent oppression.

Yet all Albanian language newspapers, and television and radio stations are banned; unemployment among Kosovan Albanians stands at 80 per cent; their average income is just 28 per cent of the already headline Yugoslav average; all education in Albanian is banned; hundreds of Kosovar activists rot in jails.

No wonder a 1991 referendum returned a 98 per cent vote for independence on a 90 per cent turnout.

"Why do Socialist Workers not Stop the War referendum on their facts? Because they are hostile to the Socialist" argument against independence."

The article:

"Serbia have to support the rights of Kosovan Albanians to self-determination, to decide their own future, and Kosovan Albanians have to be the foremost ally of Serbia and the socialist forces in Yugoslavia." (22)

The article supports the rights of all workers to self-determination, without reservation - that they do not oppress another national as a minority. And the rights to self-determination in the context can only mean independence. The Russian have "decided their own fate" and, therefore, it is outside of many "progressive" workers who tried to obstruct their right to self-determination - "fighting nationalism" - the underlying mechanism of their nationalism. It is not nationalism that is trying to oppress but the imperialist world against the revolutionary will of workers.

An internationalist approach means supporting legitimate national rights. The SWP could win Kosovan Albanians over to the revolutionary politics of the SWP, including self-determination workers and their Albanians in their countries. The SWP needs to recognise this. There are two lines here, in the popular imagination, which make the road very wide.

The SWP and its allies should to have a more revolutionary approach towards workers in oppressed countries, with workers' committees. Such results can represent all sorts of national and national oppression. The SWP suggest that the political oppression of the workers - be they national, international, national or democratic - should be a primary concern socialist in the main, revolutionary workers support their against oppression. (Socialist and war, p25)

Finally, the SWP recommend that the article Kosovars' rights should be written that they are a small nation against the world against "Greater Serbia".

What is the socialist response to the national question in the Balkans?

The SWP demonstrate their opposition by calling for a socialist revolution in the Balkans. This slogan was developed by the SWP in support against national oppression and imperialism.

The Balkan area, between Bulgaria and



intermixed nationalities, each of which can only develop, on the basis of capitalism, at the expense of one another. Different nationalist leaders constantly seek to grab land from other nationalities and do deals with different big nation states in pursuit of their aims. The usefulness of Trotsky's slogan is that it cuts with the grain of the oppressed peoples' desire for national sovereignty while challenging divisive nationalists and cynical imperialist powers.

But the slogan does not replace the slogan for the right of self determination. Quite the opposite. A socialist federation has to be voluntary and include the right to break away from the federation, otherwise it simply becomes a prison-house of nations, like the old USSR.

For the SWP, however, the Kosovars must abandon their right to independence because that can only mean subordinating their struggle to that of the imperialists. Alex Callinicos argues that:

"The Kosovan Albanians have the right to self determination, just like all the other peoples of the Balkans. But that does not mean that socialists should support the KLA. Nationalist movements which allow themselves to become subordinated to the designs of the Great Powers cease to be independent political forces. All the signs are that the KLA is becoming an instrument of NATO." (Socialist Worker, 17.4.99, emphasis in original)

But the KLA is clearly not yet reduced to merely "an instrument of NATO", which is exactly why socialists must now rally support for its fight rather than abandon it to the malicious and deceitful clutches of the imperialist powers. This was the whole meaning of Trotsky's slogan.

As it is, the SWP are left with no solution to the crisis in the Balkans because no mass force has independently taken up their slogan of a socialist federation. The KLA cannot be supported, say the SWP, so the right to independence must wait until a socialist mass force can arrive at the head of a new struggle. In the meantime, Kosovars' illusions in NATO grow daily as they are the only force on the planet who seem to be helping them fight the Serb merchants of death.

Equally, if socialists refuse to support the fight for Kosovan independence, Serbian workers will feel no counterweight to the propaganda of Milosevic. If socialists across the world were demanding the arming of the KLA and supported their struggle, while at the same time demanding NATO stops its bombardment of Serbia, then the Serbian workers would have to account for why their staunchest

defenders are also against Milosevic's main policy, ethnic cleansing.

#### *Should socialists fight for the defeat of NATO?*

Despite their coverage of the suffering of the Serbian population, the SWP are unable to answer this question. Nowhere in their publications do they call for the defeat of the NATO forces. "Stop the bombing" is as far as the SWP are prepared to go.

But to call on NATO to stop the bombing is not enough. While backing the Kosovars' own self-defence, socialists should also support the defeat of NATO in its war with Serbia. We should take heart at every military reverse, at the disarray in Brussels when military and diplomatic offensives are set back, at the divisions in the imperialists' camp which would emerge with a defeat.

This is important because many in the anti-war movement, like Tony Benn, believe that a peaceful imperialist intervention, preferably via the United Nations, is the only solution. It is not. A negotiated settlement would most likely consign the Kosovars to a meaningless protectorate where any rebellion would be put down by the very forces claiming to protect them.

It would allow Milosevic to stay in power and pose as a great "anti-imperialist" national leader, again with any progressive movement to unseat him facing local NATO forces should it challenge the big powers' strategic and economic interests.

A defeat for NATO, on the other hand, would drive the most reactionary force on the planet out of the Balkans. Workers in Serbia would be able once again to openly oppose Milosevic and restart the fight for wage rises, jobs and against privatisation – issues over which Milosevic and NATO are at one.

The oppressed Kurds would be more confident of challenging NATO member Turkey. And, yes, here in Britain too, workers would face a deflated, anxious and divided capitalist class in our struggles against racism, welfare cuts and factory closures. As John Rees again points out:

"If the peace movement does not reach out to these struggles [for better wages and conditions, democratic rights, etc.], if it restricts itself to simple demands for peace and does not broaden the struggle into a class struggle, it will deny itself of the best chance of stopping the war and of developing into a struggle to strike the power to wage war from our rulers' hands forever. This is why socialists are not pacifists . . . Where imperialist powers are involved in colonial wars we hope they are beaten." (Social-

ism and war, pp18-19)

*How can we build a mass anti-war movement?*

Unfortunately, the SWP has ignored its own advice and become indistinguishable from the pacifists in this war. The reason they give is that they want to build a mass movement around the most important demand of the day: "Stop the war".

This is why the Kosovars are ignored, why the defeat of NATO is not called for, why Milosevic's crimes are hushed up. The anti-war activists are often hostile to Kosova's independence, largely pacifists and many of them Stalinists with illusions in Milosevic.

So, the party line goes, keep our mouths shut, share platforms with Tony Benn and Bruce Kent of CND, and hand out the party cards at the end of each rally. This is not just deeply opportunist and an abandonment of international socialism. It is also going to fail.

British workers see hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees on their TVs every day. Some

now reluctantly support the air strikes because "at least something is being done". There is mounting scepticism about NATO's war aims. As the conflict gets worse, they may seek out the SWP or the wider anti-war movement for answers.

But when the reply comes that the Kosova Albanians are not facing genocide, that Milosevic is more like Norman Tebbit than Hitler, that the KLA are effectively NATO agents and that the Kosovars should not defend themselves with arms, they will shake their heads and conclude that the left are just as cynical and self-serving in their arguments as the government.

Most dangerous of all, those who rightly want to stop the suffering of the Kosovars could then end up in the arms of "NATO socialists" like Ken Livingstone, who calls for British and US ground forces to invade.

But there is another path to the masses. It means taking a principled, anti-imperialist, anti-nationalist path. It means telling the truth and opposing oppression wherever it raises its head. ■



# One solution – revolution

The working class movement worldwide must take a clear position on the crisis in Kosova. This must combine defence of the Kosovars against Serbian oppression and, in the event of a NATO use of force, a defence of Serbia against attack.

The world workers' movement should recognise the right of the Kosovars to full independence. For the last ten years, in every way possible – elections, mass peaceful resistance and finally by armed struggle – they have indicated that this is what they wish.

The Serb minority have the right to protection and the fear of reverse oppression. But they do not have the right to veto the self-determination of the overwhelming majority of the Kosovars. Since the political parties and military organisations which have the overwhelming confidence of the Kosovars have not only expressed this wish but declared Kosova independent and chosen a government the workers' movement should put the greatest possible pressure on all governments to recognise Kosova and its government.

They should call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Serb forces and irregular paramilitary formations from Kosova and the disarming of Serb civilian militia. They should collect money – for medicine, food and weapons – to support the struggle of the KLA and other Kosovar parties as long as the Serbian occupation lasts. The Kosovar resistance fighters have the right to acquire arms and supplies from whoever is willing to give them – including imperialist and Islamic governments. They also the right to take any military advantage they can from the NATO bombing.

The Kosovar resistance fighters are waging a progressive struggle that demands the practical material support of all progressive forces. Even so those forces should not give any support to NATO inter-

vention nor place any confidence in the negotiations and diplomacy conducted by "the international community", NATO, the European Union, the Contact Group, the OSCE and the United Nations represent just so many thieves' kitchens who will rob and despoil the workers and oppressed nations of the world the moment they entrust their fate to them.

Workers throughout the world should not be deceived into supporting the cowardly air wars against Serbia. On the contrary, by opposing the war, by seeking to bring about a massive wave of revulsion against it, by undermining the morale of the imperialist troops, by obstructing and sabotaging in every way possible the war effort, they must bring it to an end as soon as possible. In short, they must seek to bring about its failure and defeat. The humanitarian goals proclaimed by Clinton and Blair are only a smokescreen for the "world policeman" role that the United States and its European allies have arrogated to themselves since the collapse of the USSR. They are seeking to establish a unilateral right to use full-scale military force on anyone who opposes their economic or military-strategic interests.

The arch-reactionary consequences of this have been demonstrated in the Gulf War, in Somalia, in Haiti, and in Bosnia with the implementation of the reactionary Dayton Accords. Its most recent episodes were the US bombings in Sudan and Afghanistan. Nowhere have these "humanitarian" interventions aided the oppressed and persecuted peoples in whose name they were undertaken. The pretexts are in fact cynical charades.

Military resistance to these attacks by all these countries is fully justified and workers around the world should do all within their power to help bring about the defeat of imperialism in all such attacks.



Workers should not be fooled by the millionaire media which always presents the US, Britain, France and the rest as engaged in humanitarian missions or responding to "vicious terrorist attacks". The overwhelming military power of NATO forces many who resist it to adopt guerrilla or "terrorist" tactics. Messrs Blair, Schroeder, Jospin and D'Alema, despite heading parties still rooted in the European workers' movement are in reality thoroughgoing agents of imperialism. They are distinguished from their right-wing predecessors only in their covering up their masters' plans in hypocrisy and deceit.

Despite the foul nature of the Milosevic regime workers must oppose all forms of military attack on the territory of Serbia and Montenegro. Rump Yugoslavia is not an imperialist power for all of its colonialism and expansionism in Bosnia or Kosova. Economically, it remains a non-capitalist state, one where the nationalised property relations remaining from its forty years as bureaucratically degenerate workers' state still exist in a fragmented, dying condition. These remains – the self-managed factories and heavy industries – are under constant attack from the "post-Stalinist" bureaucratic caste which is trying to transform itself into a capitalist ruling class under the supervision of IMF programmes.

The regime of Milosevic was not and still is not fighting NATO to defend the remnants of the planned economy, either during its clashes with imperialism over Bosnia or now over Kosova. Therefore workers in other countries are not obliged to defend the state, as revolutionary Marxists (i.e. Trotskyists) advocated before 1989. Milosevic and the Serbian bureaucracy are no longer defending the planned property relations even as a basis of their own privileges. However workers within Serbia, aided by their class brothers and sisters worldwide, should defend the shattered remnants of the workers' state – in particular the collectively owned factories – against imperialist attack. But this will also mean a struggle against Milosevic and the Serbian bureaucracy. Workers must not only occupy their workplaces as they have done against the NATO bombing but seize control of them to prevent their privatisation or closure under any of the post-war plans.

In fact only by overthrowing Milosevic themselves can they use them as the basis for reversing the capitalist restoration process and planning the post-war reconstruction of the country. Such a political and social revolution is urgently needed in Serbia both for the sake of the national minorities

within Serbia and the adjacent states, who will never be safe or secure as long as the greater Serbian bureaucracy and its expansionist and genocidal projects exists but also for the Serb people itself. They have, in reality, gained absolutely nothing from Milosevic's wars of conquest except the driving of hundreds of thousands of Serbs from their ancestral homes. "All Serbs in one State" has meant not the reactionary utopia of resurrecting the Serbian empire of the fourteenth century but the Serbia of 1914 but packed with homeless refugees. By expansion, colonisation, ethnic cleansing either of Serbs, Albanian Kosovars, or Bosnian Muslims or Croats no peace or security for the peoples of the Balkans can be achieved.

The right to self-determination of all the Balkan peoples must be granted, including their right to secede and re-arrange their borders by democratic consent. They should form a federation not just of South Slav but of all Balkan peoples and in this way harmony and economic development can be secured. This will mean the return of all the expelled peoples to their homes, impartial justice meted to those who organised their expulsion. All of these peoples of former Yugoslavia have now suffered and have in their midst a minority of the criminals who carried it out.

They must be brought to justice – not before tribunals of imperialist justice in the Hague (let them arraign and try the Blairs and the Clintons, the Bushes and the Kissingers if they have time on their hands) – but before multi-ethnic juries of workers, peasants, youth and women who are free of any complicity in the crimes.

Workers in the west must demand billions in war reparations from the NATO powers for the horrific damage they have done to the bridges, factories, railway lines power stations, hospitals and houses of Serbia, Montenegro and Kosova. We must demand the immediate and unconditional lifting of all sanctions against rump Yugoslavia.

All these measures, like the bombing itself, hit not at Milosevic and his bureaucracy but at the Serbian workers and farmers – consolidating their support for Milosevic and their Serbian patriotism. Measures which destroy Serbian jobs and social security blind Serbian workers to the fact that their true friends and allies are the workers of the other Balkan states and of the EU and the United States as well. But to prove this to them we have to strike the hardest blows possible against our own ruling class and against the murderous policies of Blair and Clinton, Jospin and Schroeder, Aznar and D'Alema.



Who can lead the peoples of the Balkans out of the dreadful carnage which has marked the last decade of the twentieth century? Who can prevent NATO and the likes of Slobodan Milosevic from making certain that the national struggles of oppressed and oppressor continue for decades? Who can prevent the explosions of the Balkan powder keg from spreading to the whole of Europe? Who can overcome the Balkanisation of the peninsula which condemns it to economic backwardness and internecine rivalry?

Only the working class of all nations, regardless of nationality, language, culture or religion can do this. But to do it, it has to wrench itself from the stranglehold of the nationalists of all colours – those of the oppressed and the oppressor. There is only one ideology, only one party that can do this – revolutionary communism which proclaims the unity of the worlds' workers and the defence of all oppressed peoples.

As Lenin observed at the beginning of the century, only revolutionary communists can be "consistent democrats" because they wish to overcome all questions of national oppression which divide the workers of different countries. Imperialism turns its back even on bourgeois democratic solutions like the rights of nations to self-determination. The co-leader of the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky, also understood that all genuine popular struggles against national oppression can only fully realise their goals under the leadership of the working class and with the overthrow of capitalism.

What the workers of the Balkans need is a revolutionary communist party with deep roots in the working classes of all the Balkan countries and the national minorities centred on a programme for working class power. Such power will not be a return to the Stalinist dictatorships over the proletariat of the 1945-1989 period but one based on workers' councils such as made the Russian revolution of 1917 and nearly succeeded in making the political revolution in Hungary in 1956.

Such councils of workers, peasants and soldiers deputies, not only elected but also recallable by their workmates, can prevent both counterrevolution and bureaucracy. They can expropriate the new capitalists and the agencies of the multinationals and transform and modernise the old factories, farm and

mines into a democratically planned and collectively owned economy. All the peoples of the Balkans could thus unite – with the militant Greek proletariat too – to create a Socialist Federation of the Balkans on the road to a Socialist United States of Europe.

The League for a Revolutionary Communist International is fighting to build such parties across Europe. It is fighting too for a new revolutionary communist international. If we had such an international today then we could already have rendered massive assistance to the Kosovars against Milosevic, to the Serbs against NATO and brought the best elements of the Serbian and Kosovar workers together to achieve these aims and to go on to fight for the socialist revolution. The LRCI urges:

- Stop the NATO bombing now.
- Stop the genocide in Kosova.
- No to a ground war in Kosova or beyond.
- Victory to the Kosovar national liberation struggle.
- For elected refugee camp committees in Albania and Macedonia; for camp militia.
- Against forced deportations; for refugee control over medical and food supplies; for the uniting of all refugee families.
- Immediate and unconditional recognition of the independence of Kosova.
- Serbian troops out of Kosova.
- Arms with no strings to the KLA.
- Defeat the NATO attacks on Serbia and Montenegro.
- End the UN economic blockade of Serbia and Montenegro.
- Open the borders of the European Union to the Kosovar refugees
- Full social security, medical, educational entitlements and political rights for refugees.
- Down with the Dayton Accords - all imperialist troops out of the Balkans.
- Lift the UN blockade and sanctions against Serbia.
- For a republics of workers' councils in Kosova, in Serbia and in all the states of the Balkans.
- Halt and reverse the restoration of capitalism - for a democratic emergency plan.
- For a socialist federation of the Balkans. ■

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