

The Balkan War

Once again European cities are being bombed. Once again displaced persons are on the move. This has never ceased to be the lot of people in Africa and Asia but one of the claims of Western capitalism was that it had at least established peace and prosperity in Europe. Now full-scale war has returned to Europe. The illusion that permanent peace and prosperity is possible under capitalism has been shattered.

The NATO bombing raids on Yugoslavia are aimed not just at direct military targets but at the industrial infrastructure of power stations, fuel depots, factories, chemical plants, roads, railways and bridges which serve civilian purposes as well as supplying the Serbian military machine. All this represents the destruction of useful wealth. As Socialists have always said, war means social regression.

But is it sometimes necessary? Although we are not pacifists (we would countenance fighting should a pro-capitalist minority take up arms to try to prevent the democratic establishment of socialism) we say there is no such thing as a "just war". Wars are fought over markets, investment outlets, raw material sources and trade routes and strategic points to control them.

The present Balkan War is no different. It is a continuation of the process that started in 1991 when Slovenia declared its independence from Yugoslavia, in which the stake has been: who shall control the territories of the former Yugoslavia—Serbia or the West, in particular Germany?

When "communism" (in reality state capitalism) collapsed, the NATO powers had a choice. Let the Serbian ruling class continue to maintain order and stability in the area so that trading and profit-making there could continue normally. Or apply the principle of "national self-determination" in the hope that a collection of smaller, more "ethnically pure" states would provide greater stability.

Reunited Germany, with its historic enemy Russia on its knees, was able to revive its ambitions in Eastern and Central Europe and it led the way in working for the break-up of Yugoslavia so that it, rather than Serbia, could dominate the area. First Slovenia, then Croatia, then Bosnia, then Macedonia broke away or rather were broken away. The result, however, has not been stability. Quite the reverse, with only a NATO army of occupation maintaining a fragile peace in Bosnia and eastern Croatia.

And now Kosovo. Serbia claims that it is fighting to retain Kosovo because this is the cradle of "Serbian civilisation", but there is more at stake than the bones of Prince Lazar. As retired Canadian Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, who commanded UN troops in Bosnia during the siege of Sarajevo, has pointed out: "Quite frankly, they want the northern half of Kosovo. That's where the mines and natural resources are" (*Times Colonist*, Victoria, 26 March). There has been speculation in the media that this may be the compromise that will emerge once the killings and bombings have stopped: the partition of Kosovo with Serbian forces controlling an ethnically-cleansed north and a NATO army of occupation looking after the impoverished refugees in the south.

Faced with this latest manifestation of capitalist barbarity and cynicism we once again place on record our abhorrence of all war and call upon workers everywhere to unite to bring the war-prone capitalist system to a speedy end.

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