

How the WRP joined the NATO camp

# Imperialist war in the Balkans and the decay of the petty-bourgeois left

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Fifty years after the end of World War II, the great powers are once again embarked on a violent redivision of the world. This is the significance of the intervention by the United States and Western Europe into the four-year-old conflict caused by the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The NATO occupation of Bosnia marks more than a military turning point in the Balkan war. This, the first major coordinated military action by the imperialist powers since the breakup of the Soviet Union, is the working out of their so-called new world order. It bears a remarkable resemblance to the old world order—the era of wars and revolutions which erupted with the emergence of imperialism at the beginning of the century. As in the period preceding the First World War, the Balkans have become an arena of intense conflict between the major powers for economic, political and military dominance.

The Pax Americana in Bosnia is aimed at completing the process of ethnic partition which has already cost the lives of more than 200,000 people and turned millions more into refugees. By spearheading the introduction of imperialist troops into the Balkans for the first time since the defeat of Hitler's armies, the US is assuring the eruption of new and wider conflicts. The Clinton administration used military force, both US warplanes and Washington's proxy armies in the region, to create the conditions for this settlement. American air strikes last September involved 3,200 sorties, more than one ton of bombs and the firing of cruise missiles from US warships in the Adriatic. Towns and villages throughout Bosnia were targeted and many hundreds of civilians were killed and wounded.

The immediate aim of these bombings was to inflict overwhelming damage on the telecommunications and transportation links of the Bosnian Serb army, allowing the regular army of Croatia, together with Bosnian Moslem and Croat forces, to overrun Serb regions in northwest Bosnia. This ground offensive killed and wounded thousands and turned another 125,000 people into refugees. They joined the quarter of a million Serb civilians who last August were driven out of the Krajina by the Croatian army, in an operation backed by the United States.

In the space of two months the US oversaw the most massive acts of ethnic cleansing to occur in the entire course of the Bosnian civil war. Thus the stage was set for the US-brokered talks in Dayton, Ohio.

After years of blocking European-initiated settlements on the grounds that they rewarded "ethnic cleansing" and failed to preserve an independent and multi-ethnic Bosnia, Washington unilaterally imposed its own carveup. Muscling its European allies aside, the US has dictated internal borders separating Bosnia into Moslem, Serb and Croat enclaves and even drafted a new constitution for the former Yugoslav republic. To enforce this division, and evict those ethnic populations who find themselves on the wrong side of the new borders, 60,000 NATO troops are being sent to Bosnia. Clinton administration spokesmen have

sanctioned the use of overwhelming force against anyone who opposes the US plan.

Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, Croatia's Franjo Tudjman and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic were brought to the US Air Force base in Dayton to ratify the settlement. After denouncing Milosevic for the last three years as the equivalent of a Balkan Hitler, Washington embraced him in Dayton as a stalwart for peace. Milosevic bears a principal responsibility for the Bosnian war, having consolidated his power by fomenting Serb chauvinism and encouraging the most fanatical communalist elements among the Bosnian Serbs. In Dayton, however, he handed back Serb-held territory in exchange for promised economic concessions to Belgrade.

Tudjman came to the talks as the war's principal victor. Thanks to extensive US aid in driving out the Serbs, he largely succeeded in his goal of creating an ethnically homogeneous Croatia. He also seized control of a large swath of Bosnian territory, turning it into a de facto Croatian province.

For years, Washington based its intervention in the Balkans on its supposed defense of an independent and multi-ethnic Bosnia. The fictitious character of the Bosnian regime's independence was demonstrated by a negotiating team controlled lock, stock and barrel by the US government. Its chief consultant was Richard Perle, the undersecretary of defense in charge of nuclear arms policy in the Reagan administration. Another American, Chris Spiro, the former head of the Democratic Party of New Hampshire, participated directly in the talks as a Bosnian representative. He joined Muhamed Sacirbey, a US citizen who is serving as Bosnia's foreign minister under a special State Department dispensation. The makeup of the Bosnian delegation, like every other aspect of the Dayton talks, revealed the essential character of the so-called peace agreement. It is a classic imperialist carveup.

Twenty years after the end of the Vietnam War, American imperialism is headed for another debacle. Washington's bullying diplomacy in Bosnia has already created unprecedented US-European tensions, bringing the NATO alliance to the point of a split. This intervention is the latest in a long line of military actions undertaken by the United States over the past 15 years. Washington has repeatedly resorted to armed force in pursuing US global interests, all the while proclaiming its actions a defense of peace, democracy and human rights.

Since 1980 the world has witnessed the invasions of Grenada and Panama, the bombing of Libya, the CIA-directed dirty wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador, military occupations in Lebanon, Somalia and Haiti and, of course, the war in the Persian Gulf. Far greater eruptions of American militarism are in the offing. Contained within the ongoing campaign of anti-Chinese propaganda, as well as the protracted trade conflicts with Japan, are the seeds of future wars in Asia.

Having lost the economic hegemony which it acquired following the Second World War, US imperialism with ever greater frequency falls back on its residual military might to achieve its aims. The moribund bureaucracies which dominate the workers movement in the United States and all over the world have neither the ability nor the inclination to oppose any actions by the imperialists. They are primarily responsible for politically disorienting the masses of workers, creating a crisis of social consciousness of such proportions that the vast majority of people are blinded to the catastrophic dangers inherent in these developments.

### **Bosnia and the left**

For a broad social layer which became politically radicalized in the 1960s and early 1970s, the events in Bosnia have been the occasion for a sharp lurch to the right. Many of those who were active in the old protest movements against the military interventions and oppressive actions of imperialism have today helped prepare its entry into the Bosnian war. In an earlier period, some of them joined organizations with revolutionary-sounding names and adopted pseudo-Marxist phraseology, while others became pacifists and liberal humanitarians. They denounced the most egregious crimes of imperialism, while advocating such remedies as student power, women's liberation and various forms of nationalism. They all failed to base their politics on the class struggle and shared a profound skepticism toward the revolutionary role of the working class. Now they have been swept along by powerful class forces which they themselves do not comprehend.

Liberal pundits such as Anthony Lewis, atoning for their opposition to the war in Vietnam, have written column after column demanding that Washington and the other imperialist powers carry out military strikes. They argued that in the post-Cold War era imperialist policy must be driven by a moral imperative—in this case, to punish the Serbs. Figures like the author Susan Sontag and the actress Vanessa Redgrave have made pilgrimages to Sarajevo to support imperialist intervention, much as they and those like them, in an earlier period, made visits to Hanoi or Beirut to oppose it. They do not even stop to consider the significance of their own evolution.

Others have found in Bosnia the opportunity to complete a protracted turn to the right. In the United States, Tim Wohlforth, who broke with the Trotskyist movement more than two decades ago, announced his support for US military action in Bosnia in an article entitled "Give War a Chance." Addressing himself to a wide layer of former antiwar protesters who are now supporting imperialist intervention, he declared: "We must put on our marching shoes, unfurl our banners and raise our fists in the air, demanding military action when it is morally required." Adriano Sofri, the former leader of the Italian radical group Lotta Continua, called for immediate military action against the Serbs. "I would bomb them, just bomb them," he told the press.

Nowhere has the question of Bosnia provoked such an intense political catharsis as in Germany. In 1945, after its complicity in the most horrific crimes in human history, the German petty bourgeoisie took off its swastikas and adopted the posture of pacifism. A mass protest movement built along these lines survived well into the 1980s and is continued to this day in the form of the Green party. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification, however, the lineup of political and class forces has shifted dramatically. The German bourgeoisie, its political and economic power substantially strengthened, is once again venturing onto the world stage. The former protesters have been swept along in the wake of German capital. Yesterday's Green party flower children are disavowing pacifism and demonstrating their loyalty to the German nation by

advocating NATO air strikes and calling for the military to retrace the World War II path of the Wehrmacht in the Balkans. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the former firebrand of student protest in 1968, has emerged as an advocate of a "humanitarian" imperialist intervention, while Jurgen Habermas, leading figure in the Frankfurt School, announced that "with trembling hand" he was compelled to back military action. On an international scale, the same people who protested against imperialist aggression in an earlier period now support ethnochauvinist warfare, NATO bombing raids and US occupation, all in the name of human rights and national self-determination.

The term "left," if applied uncritically to describe these elements, serves to obscure rather than clarify, because it fails to take into account their evolution. It would perhaps be more accurate to refer to this social and political tendency as the camp of petty-bourgeois ex-radicals.

### **Behind the turn to imperialism**

Representatives of this tendency give revulsion over Serbian atrocities as the reason for their swing into the imperialist camp. This is hardly a satisfying explanation for such a sweeping political realignment. There is no question that the Serb nationalist forces have carried out the most widespread atrocities. But Croat army troops and militias are guilty of similar outrages against Serbs in Croatia and both Serbs and Moslems in Bosnia. Moslem forces have launched such attacks on Serbs and Croats in Bosnia. All of these nationalist factions are led by political scoundrels, ex-Stalinist bureaucrats and communalist politicians attempting to carve out states based on the reactionary principle of ethnicity. In the final analysis, all of them function as the agents of one or another imperialist faction seeking a new redivision of the Balkans.

If one were to accept the claim that a political approach to the former Yugoslavia must involve choosing sides between contending nationalist factions, based on the relative brutality of the actions taken against them, then one could make a compelling case for the Serbs of Krajina, expelled en masse from their homeland. Yet the suffering of the Krajina Serbs has evoked no sympathy whatsoever from those who demanded "humanitarian" intervention in Bosnia. On the contrary, not a few of them hailed the anti-Serb offensive as a victory for Croatian "self-determination." Behind their morality campaign, they have seized on Bosnia as an opportunity to align their politics with those of imperialism. This is not a matter of the political evolution of individuals, but rather the outcome of deep-going social processes.

### **The collapse of Stalinism**

Great events have produced this stampede into the camp of imperialism. The collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracies in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has removed an essential prop for those who engaged in protest politics in a previous period. This social layer based its leftism not on the independent struggle of the working class, but on the apparent strength of Stalinism. It long ago abandoned revolutionary socialist politics and grew increasingly cynical over the prospects for a genuinely progressive transformation of society. Thus, it readily accepted the claims of the bourgeoisie that the USSR's dissolution represented the end of any socialist alternative.

The relationship of this section of the petty bourgeoisie to the working class has, moreover, been fundamentally altered by the decay of the old

Stalinist, social democratic and trade union bureaucracies, which constituted the official labor movements in country after country. The workers movement no longer provides the petty-bourgeois left with the same sources of employment or paths to political influence. Moreover, welfare state systems which tied its fate at least partially to the well-being of the working class are being systematically dismantled.

The representatives of this layer have undergone a definite social evolution. Many came initially from privileged upper middle class families. Over time, they have been drawn back by personal, social and cultural ties to their old milieu. Their way of life, their income level, their social connections link them more closely to the wealthy upper middle class and the bourgeoisie itself than to the broad masses of working people, from whom they are ever more distant and alienated.

This shift is part of a social polarization that has widened over the past two decades. For the working class and growing sections of middle class people, sweeping changes in the forms of capitalist production have meant the "downsizing" of jobs, living standards and social conditions. But a section of the former radicals have found comfortable berths as university professors, union bureaucrats, parliamentary politicians or in similar pursuits, and have seen their own share of the wealth increase. Others less fortunate bitterly regret their previous political activities and blame them for blocking their elevation to a more privileged financial status. This provides an even more powerful impulse to make amends. Bosnia became a way for this layer to announce its return to the official consensus of bourgeois politics.

### **The WRP: from "revolutionary morality" to imperialist morality**

The most shameless expression of this general turn to pro-imperialist politics is to be found in the British Workers Revolutionary Party led by Cliff Slaughter. It is 10 years since an internal crisis erupted in the WRP, culminating in its split from the International Committee of the Fourth International in February 1986. A decade after severing its formal ties with Trotskyism, Slaughter's WRP has placed itself squarely in the camp of imperialism. For the past three years this party's principal political activity has been organizing aid convoys to the Bosnian city of Tuzla through its pseudohumanitarian front, "Workers Aid for Bosnia." It has used these convoys to agitate for the "opening of the northern route," a militarily strategic corridor, which has been the focus of a triangular struggle between Serb, Croat and Moslem forces.

Now the WRP's efforts are to find fulfillment. The US Army is preparing to send tens of thousands of soldiers and tanks down this route and into Tuzla, where it will set up its headquarters. Slaughter and Co. have every right to demand that their next "aid" convoy be given a place of honor in NATO's baggage train. The WRP's political interventions have helped pave the way for this imperialist occupation.

In the months leading up to the NATO intervention, the WRP sponsored a "Nonstop picket for Bosnia" on Downing Street. While London's Whitehall has seen its share of protests, this is perhaps the first time an organization identifying itself as part of the left has taken to the streets to denounce a British prime minister for failure to take military action.

When Croatia carried out its US-backed invasion of Krajina, the WRP responded in what can only be described as a pogromist manner. An article published in the August 12 issue of its newspaper Workers Press hailed the Croatian military's mass expulsion of Serb civilians in terms indistinguishable from those used by Croat right-wing extremists.

The article applauded "the Croatian army's smashing of the Serb Chetnik gangster statelet in the ... Krajina." It enthusiastically described how "Croatia celebrated its triumph in Knin, the Krajina Serb Őcapital"

and proclaimed the Bosnian people's "gratitude for the Croat soldiers' bold victory."

The Croatian army carried out its offensive with direct and substantial backing from Washington and Bonn. Germany bankrolled the right-wing regime of Franjo Tudjman in turning his force of Ustashe thugs into one of the most well-equipped armies in all of Europe. High-ranking US military officers, including the former army chief of staff, were brought in under the cover of a private corporation, licensed by the US State Department, to organize the offensive. None of this dampened the WRP's joy over Croatia's "bold victory."

When NATO bombing began a month later, the WRP voiced support. Citing Bosnian praise for the NATO intervention, Workers Press wrote: "We have every sympathy with this understandable, natural response. We have none whatsoever for the whingeing [sic] Őlefts', Christian pacifists and Stalinists who have rushed into print to protest on behalf of poor General Mladic and his men, after refusing to do anything for Bosnia or its people in three and a half years of war."

The WRP's reservations about the US bombing of Serb towns and villages were strictly tactical: "If NATO airpower was really being used on the side of the Bosnians ... military logic would mean that Bosnian forces be allowed to follow up on the ground." The WRP's concerns proved ill-founded. As events quickly proved, the NATO bombing was employed as air cover for the actions taken "on the ground" by the Croatian and Bosnian armies—the overrunning of most of northwest Bosnia.

The reactionary political line and provocative practices of this party have thus established its position as a bit player in the government and media campaign promoting US-NATO intervention in the Balkans on the pretext of defending Bosnia.

The split which took place in 1985-86 in the International Committee foreshadowed the broad international regroupment of the middle class left with imperialism. Confronted with a raging crisis inside the WRP, Cliff Slaughter explicitly rejected any attempt to deal with the political roots of the party's degeneration. Instead he insisted that all of its problems were the result of the monstrous behavior of one man, Gerry Healy, and declared that the real issue was one of "revolutionary morality." In this way, Slaughter worked deliberately to refound the WRP on the basis of reactionary, subjectivist politics and middle class hysteria.

"Revolutionary morality" became the battle cry of those who felt that they had wasted their lives in the attempt to build a revolutionary party in the working class and had been cheated by history. They didn't want to deal with questions of program, perspective and theory; they just wanted a villain they could blame for all their troubles. Who could be bothered with politics and a class analysis when confronting a supposed monster like Healy? Slaughter proved a master at cultivating and manipulating these demoralized sentiments.

On the basis of such a method, it is impossible to prepare the working class for the great struggles which it confronts. Petty-bourgeois moralism only serves to hand the working class over to imperialism. Karl Marx's great achievement, based on a philosophical revolution, was to introduce the method of historical materialism, raising politics above the level of moralizing and revealing the class struggle to be the motor force of history. The WRP, like broad sections of the left, has abandoned even the pretense of a historical materialist and class standpoint.

The moods which seized the WRP in the mid-1980s have found an unmistakable echo in the approach taken by most middle class ex-radicals to the Bosnian crisis. Disdainful of a scientific and historical approach to the complex questions surrounding Yugoslavia's breakup, they too sought villains to hate and readily accepted those proffered by the bourgeois media—the Serbs. This "revolutionary morality" has revealed itself to be the morality of NATO, the US State Department and the British Foreign Office.

## Attila Hoare

The WRP based its Bosnian intervention on a line elaborated by Attila Hoare, a Croat nationalist student at Cambridge University. Hoare developed the thesis that the struggle in the former Yugoslavia centered on the right of Croatia and Bosnia to "national self-determination." The realization of this "right," he said, was bound up with the development of "modern, industrialized Yugoslav capitalism."

Hoare's last major contribution to the WRP's pseudotheoretical justifications for its operations in the former Yugoslavia was a reply issued in the summer of 1994 to the International Committee of the Fourth International's statement *Marxism, Opportunism & the Balkan Crisis*. This IC statement exposed the reactionary politics of the WRP in the context of a historical examination of the national question and its particular development in the Balkans.

In his reply, Hoare expanded on his chauvinist theory of history, describing the partisan struggle against the Nazis and their local collaborators as a fight for "the individual liberation of each Yugoslav nation" ... from each other. He proclaimed as the main achievement of the Tito regime the creation of a state apparatus in which "Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians and Macedonians could now fill bureaucratic posts at both the republican and federal level. This was what gave substance to the republics established by the revolution; it also allowed these new bureaucracies to crystallize into new bourgeoisies over the course of the next 45 years."

According to this thesis, the historic contribution of the Yugoslav revolution was the "crystallization" of a Croatian bourgeoisie under the leadership of Franjo Tudjman! Hoare concluded his reply with an overview of the Yugoslav and world situation: "In Bosnia the working class has been largely physically destroyed; in Serbia and Croatia we have virtually no workers opposition; in Western Europe the workers movement is greatly demoralized, with many of its leaders and groups supporting imperialism in the Balkans. We are still at the stage of trying to rebuild working class internationalism through rallying support for the Bosnian national-liberation struggle. It is highly likely, if not probable, that we shall not get past this stage. Yet to be honest about the position we are in, and to develop our strategy accordingly, is worth infinitely more than any amount of sectarian ranting."

This sums up the outlook of the broad spectrum of the left as it renounces any pretense of basing its politics on the working class and the struggle for socialism: the working class is defeated; socialism is off of the historic agenda and there is nothing more to be done than line up with one or another ethnocommunist movement. Hoare has gone on to contribute his nationalist tracts to other anti-Marxist organizations, including the motley alliance of revisionists and state capitalists in the US which publishes the misnamed journal *Against the Current*.

Since Hoare's departure, the WRP has done nothing to deepen its conception of the "right to self-determination." Objective events, however, have further illustrated the reactionary character of this demand in the present epoch. Croatia's realization of its "national self-determination" has found expression in the expulsion of a quarter of a million people from their land, with the full support of the WRP.

Slaughter has made no attempt to square his attitude toward Bosnia with the perspective of Marxism or with a historical materialist analysis of the rise and fall of Yugoslavia. The WRP contents itself with the conceptions and terminology of imperialist diplomacy, proclaiming its defense of "multi-ethnic" Bosnia against "Serb aggression," without bothering to spell out the origins of either the one or the other.

## Bosnia and the disintegration of Yugoslavia

Bosnia's origins as a formally independent state are bound up with Yugoslavia's dissolution. The WRP has repeatedly declared its support for this development, hailing the formation of independent states of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as victories for "national liberation movements" and part of the "great revolutions which swept Europe in the period 1989-91." It is indifferent to the lessons drawn by the Marxist movement on the development of the national question in the Balkans, a region in which imperialist powers have repeatedly sought to manipulate conflicts between small nations in order to assert their own dominance. This policy gave rise to the term "Balkanization." Today, as imperialism intervenes once again by instigating and exploiting the conflicts between Croat, Moslem and Serb, the WRP paints Balkanization in the rosy colors of "national liberation."

The historic problem of the national question in the Balkans is the overlapping of territorial boundaries and ethnic populations. As a result of the region's subjugation by rival empires—Ottoman Turkish and Austro-Hungarian—and the movement of populations, both forced and voluntary, various peoples, most particularly the Serbs, found themselves divided by a number of different state borders. The Marxist movement sought to answer this problem by fighting for the unification of the working class throughout the region on the basis of the strategic demand for a socialist federation of the Balkans. Slaughter and the WRP have dismissed this program as "irrelevant" to the "real struggle" in the former Yugoslavia. Instead, they have promoted Bosnian Moslem and Croat nationalism against Serb nationalism.

On the eve of the Balkan wars which preceded World War I, Leon Trotsky spelled out the economic and political necessity for breaking down the patchwork of statelets in the Balkan peninsula in order to establish a viable state. He warned, in words which seem prophetic more than 80 years later, that this would be achieved "either from above, by expanding one Balkan state, whichever proves strongest, at the expense of weaker ones—this is the road of wars of extermination and oppression of weak nations, a road that consolidates monarchism and militarism; or from below, through the peoples themselves coming together—this is the road of revolution, the road that means overthrowing the Balkan dynasties."

After the Second World War the Tito regime attempted to overcome these divisions through a complex constitutional arrangement aimed at assuring security to Yugoslavia's various national minorities. The Bosnian war is the end result of this arrangement's disintegration under the combined impact of a deep economic and social crisis and the intervention of foreign capitalist powers.

### The international context

The development of Yugoslavia's crisis can be understood only within its historical and international context. In the decades following the Second World War, the regime founded by Josip Broz (Marshall Tito) played a pivotal role in the conflict between the Soviet bloc and Western imperialism. In 1944, as the war was drawing to a close, Churchill and Stalin met to divide up spheres of influence in the Balkans. According to the crude formula proposed by Stalin, influence in Yugoslavia would be split "50-50" between East and West. After initial conflicts with

imperialism over Trieste and the Greek civil war and the subsequent break with Stalin in 1948, Tito adapted his regime to the framework imposed by this deal between Stalinism and imperialism.

With the Truman Doctrine of 1947, Washington took over the failing British empire's interests in the Balkans and forged a special relationship with Yugoslavia. Despite the Tito regime's socialist pretensions, Washington provided it with military aid, economic assistance, trade and credit. In return, Yugoslavia became a key factor in NATO's containment strategy toward the Soviet bloc, particularly in the Mediterranean. Tito was a principal sponsor of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries, which promoted the posture of neutrality in the conflict between the imperialist powers and the Soviet Union, particularly for the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This standpoint suited the interests of bourgeois nationalist regimes like those of Nehru, Nasser and Sukharno, which were seeking to improve their bargaining position by playing Moscow off against Washington.

The Tito regime was a master at this international balancing act. It used its unique geopolitical position to obtain favorable economic relations with the West, the Soviet bloc and the so-called developing countries. This in turn played a substantial role in the initial successes of Yugoslavia's system of "market socialism." At the same time, however, it made the Tito regime extremely vulnerable to the sweeping changes in international relations which began in the 1980s.

The turn of the Eastern European and Soviet Stalinist bureaucracies toward capitalist restoration spelled the end of US imperialism's special relationship with the Yugoslav state. It no longer needed the regime in Belgrade as a military bulwark against the Soviet Union. Washington began to view the federal Yugoslav state as an obstacle to completing the privatization of the country's economy for the benefit of the multinational banks and corporations. In a bid to speed up the process of capitalist economic "reform," the US and the other major powers threw their support to those who claimed to be dismantling the old Titoist structure, many of them by promoting ethnocommunalism. Among them was Slobodan Milosevic, a longtime favorite of the American foreign policy establishment, who sought to consolidate his own political grip by backing the retrograde nationalist demand for a "Greater Serbia."

German imperialism, anxious to flex its political muscles after reunification, promoted secessionism in Slovenia and Croatia and rushed to extend full recognition once these republics broke with the Yugoslav federation in 1991. The Kohl government dismissed warnings that the Croatian regime's abuse of its Serb minority and the failure of either regime to negotiate an agreement with the rest of Yugoslavia would result in civil war. Bonn insisted that the "right to self-determination"—a formula which it had invoked to justify Germany's own reunification—overrode all other issues.

While both the US and the other Western European powers initially opposed recognition, they ultimately bowed to Germany's position. The US was attempting to shift the costs of economic development in Eastern Europe onto German capitalism and was not in a position unilaterally to dictate political terms in the region. The Western European powers were preoccupied with the completion of the Maastricht treaty on economic union and with tying the newly reunified Germany to all-European institutions. Recognition for Croatia and Slovenia in the end became a bargaining chip in the final negotiations on Maastricht.

After initially opposing recognition of the first two secessionist republics, Washington aggressively promoted the independence of Bosnia, seeing it as a means of regaining the initiative in the unfolding Balkan crisis. Once again there were warnings that secession by this republic, where the Serbs constituted an even larger minority and where the Yugoslav army maintained the bulk of its troops and military assets, would provoke civil war. Once again they were ignored, as each of the imperialist powers pursued its own interests.

From the outset, the different states seeking to found themselves on the ruins of Yugoslavia have conducted their affairs with the essential aim of drawing support from one or another of these powers. These external interventions accelerated and intensified the crisis of the Yugoslav state and contributed greatly to the savagery of the civil wars which attended its dissolution.

### **The contradictions of the Titoist state**

The state form which collapsed in Yugoslavia was the product of the Communist Party-led partisan victory over Nazi occupation and local reactionary forces at the end of the Second World War. Under the leadership of Tito, the Yugoslav CP developed new state structures with the aim of overcoming the petty nationalisms which had repeatedly plunged the Balkans into fratricidal warfare. The bitter experience with national chauvinism in the Second World War resulted in substantial popular support for the Tito regime's call for "Brotherhood and Unity" in a single Yugoslavia, which guaranteed equality for all of its peoples.

Modeled on the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy and based on an acceptance of the national divisions which imperialism had imposed in the Balkans, the Tito regime proved unable to fulfill this promise. While it sought to establish a modicum of national independence by balancing between Washington and Moscow, it came under increasing economic and political pressure from Western capitalism. Internally, this state sought to control the eruption of national strife through a federal structure made up of six constituent republics and two autonomous provinces. Extensive guarantees for the rights of minorities within each of these territories were written into the country's constitution and enforced by the central government.

In practice, the regime's bureaucratic character combined with the region's legacy of economic backwardness to generate powerful centrifugal tendencies. The ruling bureaucracies in each of the republics functioned increasingly as separate economic entities, developing their industries and infrastructures in an irrationally autarkic fashion in order to strengthen their own power and privileges. In the end, each of the republics established wider economic links with foreign capitalism than with each other.

The central state under Tito drew its power from its control of a national army and its mediation of conflicts between the different republics, particularly Croatia and Serbia. It alternately repressed expressions of nationalism in one republic and then in the other, with the result of encouraging separatist tendencies in both. All-Yugoslav nationalism, which had animated the partisan struggle of the Second World War, became a hollow dogma.

The Tito regime made no real attempt to unite Yugoslavia's separate peoples. Extraordinarily, it never established a single national university, drawing students from the different republics. Croat youth went to Zagreb and Serbs to Belgrade. The bureaucracy's failure to combat particularism was no accident. Its greatest fear was the emergence of a united struggle of the working class cutting across republican boundaries. Tito used the full weight of his considerable security apparatus to quash any such movement.

### **The role of IMF austerity**

Yugoslavia's breakdown was accelerated by a succession of austerity

programs dictated by the foreign banks and the International Monetary Fund from the end of the 1970s onward. The aim was to extract payments on the country's ballooning foreign debt by slashing domestic consumption. The IMF measures had a devastating impact. By the mid-1980s unemployment reached depression levels, while inflation and wage controls sent real incomes plummeting to their lowest level in two decades. The result was growing social polarization throughout Yugoslavia between those with access to hard currency and those without, as well as between the wealthier republics—Slovenia and Croatia—and the rest of the country.

Slovene and Croatian party leaders and bureaucrats argued in the language of Reagan and Thatcher for a kind of Yugoslav "trickle down" economy. They demanded that firms in Croatia and Slovenia be allowed to keep all of the income from their more extensive export economies rather than contributing a portion to the development of the less advanced areas to the south. They charged that taxation for this purpose amounted to a form of "national exploitation." With increasing access to foreign capital from Austria and Germany, they were able to defy the demands of the central government in Belgrade.

Having previously encouraged economic decentralization, the IMF now demanded that the central government assume greater powers to impose strict fiscal and monetary discipline over the different republics. Deprived of any means of ameliorating the social crisis, the Belgrade government took on the role of a collection agency for the foreign banks. The bureaucracies in the different republics saw no interest in supporting this central government and instead sought to increase their economic and political autonomy.

### **A prerevolutionary situation**

As Susan Woodward, the author of the insightful study of Yugoslavia's disintegration, *Balkan Tragedy*, notes:

"By 1985-86 the preconditions of a revolutionary situation were apparent. The increasing rate of unemployment was above 20 percent in all republics except Slovenia and Croatia. Inflation was at 50 percent a year and climbing. The household savings of approximately 80 percent of the population were depleted. Western currencies such as the Deutschmark and the US dollar were given preference in domestic exchange. Allocation decisions increasingly became stark questions of survival. Attempts to alleviate the pressures made inflation worse and undermined economic management. This economic polarization led to social polarization" (Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* [Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995], p. 73).

The working class of Yugoslavia proved unable to take advantage of this prerevolutionary situation by putting forward its own independent political alternative to the rotting bureaucratic state. Instead, the ruling bureaucrats, joining forces with extreme nationalist and outright fascist opposition and emigre groups, were able to channel this prerevolutionary situation into a fratricidal struggle to carve out new ethnically homogeneous territories.

It was not for a lack of working class struggle. In response to the first round of IMF austerity programs, work stoppages rose by 80 percent from 1982 to 1983. By 1987 the government officially reported 1,570 strikes involving 365,000 workers. And in 1988 the number of strikes rose to 2,000. By the fall of 1988—less than three years before the outbreak of war—mass delegations of workers from Croatia, Vojvodina and Serbia were taking their protests for the first time in the postwar period to the steps of the federal parliament in Belgrade.

Nor did the overwhelming majority of the population throw its support to national particularism. Repeated demonstrations against the drive to war expressed broad opposition to Yugoslavia's dismemberment. What the working class lacked, however, was a perspective and a leadership capable of uniting it in an independent struggle against the alliance of ex-Stalinist bureaucracies and communalist politicians. Substantial sections of workers and, in particular, the youth were disoriented as a result of the destructive policies of Stalinism and the attempt of the Yugoslav bureaucracy, like its counterparts throughout Eastern Europe, to identify its own rule and privileges with "socialism."

Yugoslavia has provided one of the sharpest manifestations of the crisis of leadership confronting the working class on a world scale. The bureaucracies which have dominated the workers movement—Stalinist, social democratic and trade union—either opposed from their origins or long ago rejected the struggle for the international unity of the working class against capitalism. All of them have adopted policies based on nationalism and support for the profit system. Given this political vacuum, the emerging bourgeoisie was able to divert the immense discontent with the social conditions prevailing in Yugoslavia into right-wing and chauvinist channels.

Figures who in another period would have been shunned as criminals and psychopaths were elevated to the status of national heroes and political leaders. Unemployed youth, school graduates without any prospect of finding work and other oppressed layers, rather than finding a revolutionary road, were recruited to slaughter one another in ethnically-based armies and militias. The type of fratricidal civil war taking place in the former Yugoslavia did not fall from the sky. It is the price paid by the Yugoslav working class for the absence of a revolutionary leadership and perspective. This is what makes so reactionary the attempts by the WRP and other self-proclaimed "socialists" to dress up this retrograde development as a struggle for "national self-determination."

Slovenia was the first of the Yugoslav republics to take the road of national separatism. It claimed independence for the old republic on the basis of the right of self-determination of the Slovene ethnic nation. Croatia followed Slovenia's example. In Croatia, however, the matter was more complex. The republic contained a Serb minority which, before Yugoslavia's breakup, amounted to 12.2 percent of the population. This minority suddenly found itself dragged, against its will, into a newly independent Croatia. The last time this had happened, in World War II, the Serbs of Croatia had been herded into concentration camps and slaughtered by the hundreds of thousands.

The Tito-era constitution of the Croatian republic had sought to overcome Serb fears by declaring the republic to be a community of "the Croatian people in brotherly unity with the Serbs of Croatia." The document drafted by the nationalist politicians led by Tudjman, however, proclaimed an independent Croatia to be the state of the Croatian nation, linking citizenship to ethnicity and relegating Serbs to a status of inferiority in a country they had inhabited for several hundred years.

The Tudjman regime accompanied the resurgence of ethnic nationalism with discrimination against the Serbs. It revived the symbols of the World War II-era Ustashe regime and sought to rehabilitate its politics. In response, Serb nationalist elements asserted their own right to self-determination, also guaranteed under the Yugoslav constitution. They demanded a break with Croatia and unity with Serbia. War was the inevitable result.

In Bosnia the rise of ethnic nationalism posed the gravest threat. Here there was no ethnic majority and the three constituent populations were largely intermingled. The Moslems constituted a bare plurality with less than 40 percent of the population, while the Serbs accounted for more than 30 percent and the Croats 17 percent.

Here as well ethnic nationalist parties gained the upper hand. To understand this, one has to consider the political context—the

disintegration of Yugoslavia, the rise of virulent nationalist movements in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, and, above all, the absence of revolutionary leadership in the working class. Three parties—the Moslem SDA of Izetbegovic, the Croat HDZ and the Serb SDS—together won 80 percent of the votes in the 1990 elections, each gaining a share of votes roughly equivalent to the population of the ethnic communities they claimed to represent. Each of these parties appealed for votes on the basis of ethnic identity and all of them were explicitly anticommunist. Moreover, all three directed their ethnocommunist appeals across the old republican borders.

The SDS sought to carve out Serb enclaves in both Croatia and Bosnia, resurrecting the old demand for the unification of the Serbs in one state. The HDZ, which calls itself the "Party of all Croats in the World," took control of western Herzegovina, making no secret that its goal was annexation to Croatia. Finally, Izetbegovic's SDA sought support in the Sandzak area of Serbia and Montenegro, insisting that its Moslem population be united with that of Bosnia. Despite the obvious conflict between their different nationalist projects, these three parties formed a grand coalition, excluding from the government all parties which appealed in any way across ethnic lines.

The Bosnian Serb and Croat nationalists supported Bosnia's partition and the unification of their own ethnic territories respectively with Serbia and Croatia. The Moslem nationalists, however, could look to no such patron outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina. They, therefore, insisted on the sanctity of the borders of the old republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Holding the plurality, they could still hope to dominate the territory. This was the basis of the SDA's supposed support for multi-ethnicity.

## **Bosnia's independence**

In October 1991 the Moslem SDA and the Croat HDZ united to push through a resolution declaring Bosnia-Herzegovina an independent state. This was not a reaction to some mass movement for Bosnian national independence. None existed. The SDA had at first opposed independence. Izetbegovic lobbied Western European leaders to deny recognition to Croatia out of fear that it would provoke civil war in Bosnia. After Slovenia and Croatia went ahead with secession, however, the SDA decided to follow suit, hoping to win imperialist backing for its own nationalist project. As for the HDZ, it saw the move merely as a transition to partition and unification with Croatia.

The Serb SDS responded to the declaration of independence by walking out of the government, denouncing the measure as a violation of the constitution's demand for consensus between the three groups on any such decision. On February 29-March 1, 1992 the Moslem-Croat bloc staged its referendum on independence, hastily called in an attempt to win recognition from the EC. Fully one-third of the population, the majority of the Serbs, boycotted the vote.

Despite previous assurances that the Western powers would consider a referendum legitimate only if it attracted the participation of all three communities, Western Europe and the United States granted formal recognition. By then the civil war between Serbs, Croats and Moslems was already well under way. Bosnian Serb army units from the old Yugoslav People's Army represented the most powerful military force in Bosnia, backed by extreme nationalist militias and criminal gangs from Serbia. Croatia also sent regular army units into Bosnia which operated alongside fascist and nationalist militias. The principal fire of both of these forces was directed against the Moslem civilian population, which bore the overwhelming share of the casualties in the Bosnian conflict.

The fighting force of the Moslem-dominated Bosnian government was

initially drawn from the gangster elements of Sarajevo. Their defense of the city was inextricably bound up with their control of its lucrative black markets.

As the fighting continued, with each side attempting to carve out defensible territories, the Izetbegovic government increasingly joined its claim to represent all of Bosnia with steps aimed at carving out a Moslem enclave. By 1993, SDA politicians and Moslem militias were largely abandoning the pretense of Bosnian national identity and openly working to create a Moslem state. Non-Moslems were expelled from villages and towns, while government officials publicly denounced intermarriage and sought the introduction of religious instruction in school. In 1994 the Izetbegovic regime effectively accepted partition and the status of a Moslem state, by joining in a federation with the Bosnian Croats, brokered by Washington, in which the Croats claimed full national rights. This is the reality of the "multi-ethnic" Bosnian state which the WRP claims socialists are obliged to defend.

Large sections of the population in Bosnia, as throughout the former Yugoslavia, oppose ethnic nationalism. The SDS no more represents all Serbs than the SDA does all Moslems or the HDZ all Croats. As late as July 1991, more than 50,000 people marched in Sarajevo against war and in support of a united Yugoslavia. There are many reports of Serbs, Croats and Moslems protecting one another against the ethnic militias and armies ravaging Bosnia. Yet the WRP equates these genuine sentiments of the masses with the cynical calculations of the Croat and Moslem nationalist politicians and misrepresents them as support for "Bosnian self-determination." It thereby helps poison the political atmosphere and block any attempt to unite the working people of Bosnia and the Balkans as a whole across ethnic lines.

## **The Krajina offensive and "multi-ethnicity"**

The real content of the WRP's "multi-ethnic" politics found expression in a statement issued by its front organization Workers Aid for Bosnia in the midst of the NATO bombing campaign. Extolling the "growing movement in defense of multi-cultural society and the right of all people to live together in peace," the WRP declared, "This movement was recently given a tremendous boost by the defeat of the Chetniks in Croatia."

According to the WRP, the "right of all people to live together in peace" was "given a tremendous boost" by a military operation in which nearly 200,000 people—the Serbs of the Krajina—were sent fleeing in terror from the Croatian army. Such is the logic of a party which has rejected Marxism in favor of ethnic chauvinism and imperialist politics.

The UN issued a report recently on this "boost" for multicultural society. It cited the ongoing discovery of corpses of Serb civilians in the Krajina region two months after the cessation of last August's military actions. Among the dead was a 90-year-old woman. These were the people too old, sick or weak to escape.

The report states: "Evidence of atrocities, an average of six corpses per day, continues to emerge ... the corpses, some fresh, some decomposed, are mainly of old men. Many have been shot in the back of the head or had throats slit, others have been mutilated.... Serbian homes and lands continue to be torched and looted."

The report continues: "The crimes have been committed by the Croatian army, the Croatian police and Croatian civilians. There have been no observed attempts to stop it and the indications point to a scorched-earth policy."

The Guardian newspaper cites a similar report issued by European Union monitors in Croatia. It states: "It is unclear whether the EU intends

to make its findings public. Croatia is seen as a potential partner and is expected to join the Council of Europe next year."

One European diplomat stated, "I think that at the end of the day, there's enough of an understanding with Croatia to let sleeping dogs lie. It does leave a bad taste in peoples' mouths, but if one of the prices of a peaceful settlement will be closer relations between the EU, Croatia and the others, then so be it."

The US State Department has worked to cover up the Zagreb regime's responsibility for these atrocities, carried out with the sanction of imperialism.

### **The WRP hails Croatia**

Following the lead of the EU and the US State Department, the WRP has dismissed all reports of atrocities against Serb civilians. It has attacked those who equate the Croatian regime's ethnic cleansing operations with the crimes of the Serb forces in Bosnia.

Last May, following a previous Croat offensive which forced 15,000 Serb civilians to flee their homes in Western Slavonia, Workers Press denounced those making "hasty allegations of Croat atrocities." In that operation hundreds were killed in tank, artillery and aerial bombardments, their bodies thrown into mass graves. Thousands more were arrested and those who sought to remain were subjected to terror at the hands of marauding Croat militiamen.

There is ample evidence of Croatian atrocities against Serbs in Croatia and against both Moslems and Serbs in Bosnia. By dismissing allegations of Croatian crimes out of hand, the WRP brands itself as a political accomplice in these murderous acts. In the September 23, 1995 issue of Workers Press the WRP went so far as to excuse atrocities in advance, publishing an article on the Moslem-Croat offensive in northwest Bosnia which stated:

"We hope that the Bosnia and Herzegovina armed forces can keep the moral high ground as well as their military gains, by preventing reprisals and atrocities from their side. But we will not give any ground to those morally bankrupt 'Lefts' and Stalinists waiting to pounce on such lapses as proof that 'all sides do it.'"

Many such "lapses" had already taken place by the time the article was printed. Bosnian Moslem officers have made no secret of their order to summarily execute Serb prisoners of war. Serb civilians have been subjected to massacres in the towns and villages which have been overrun.

Thus the WRP's outrage over ethnic cleansing and other atrocities, like that of the bourgeois politicians and media, is guided by political expediency. It is highly selective and enormously cynical. It has nothing to do with defending the working masses of the region. Rather, it is calculated to boost one nationalist clique over another and provide a pretext for imperialist intervention.

### **Trotsky and selective outrage**

Leon Trotsky, a war correspondent during the Balkan wars of 1912-13, passionately condemned Russia's bourgeois press and liberals like Miliukov for taking precisely such a position. They protested loudly against Turkish atrocities, while hushing up or denying the outrages committed by Serbian and Bulgarian troops against Moslem civilians.

While Trotsky recognized a progressive element in the war waged by the Serbs and Bulgarians to break the grip of the Ottoman empire over the

Balkans, he denounced this selective outrage over atrocities. He insisted that the liberals' exposure of Turkish atrocities stemmed "not from the general principles of culture and humanity but from naked calculations of imperialist greed."

He added: "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 defenseless people is condemned by history to rot and become worm-eaten while it is still alive."

The WRP and its leader Cliff Slaughter are just such worm-eaten figures. Convinced that there is no possibility of a socialist solution to the crisis, they are driven to express their hatred of the working class. The imperialist-inspired campaign on Bosnia provided them with just such an opportunity. They were swept up by it and transformed into nothing more than a minor instrument of imperialist policy.

Even if, for the sake of argument, one accepted the WRP's false claims that the Serbs bore exclusive responsibility for atrocities and that the war itself was caused solely by Serb aggression—this would not alter the reactionary character of the WRP's intervention. Even under these conditions, socialists could not ally themselves with the bourgeois regimes of Tudjman and Izetbegovic. There are, moreover, no conditions that could justify the WRP's support for imperialist intervention. Such a policy represents a renunciation of principled politics, an abandonment of the independent standpoint of the working class, and a moral and political capitulation to the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Marxists have never based their attitude toward war on such issues as who fired the first shot or which side was responsible for the greatest atrocities. Military aggression has always been understood as merely one link in a complex chain of events. Wars are not accidental. They are prepared by the social, economic and political developments which precede them.

In World War I, there was never any doubt that Germany provoked the conflict. The ruling classes of France, Britain and Russia, however, used German aggression against "little Belgium" to promote their own war aims. Socialists opposed not only Germany, but all the imperialist powers. Under Lenin's leadership, they fought for the international unification of the working class to turn imperialist war into civil war; i.e., the revolutionary mobilization of the working class of every country against its "own" bourgeoisie.

In 1914 the Serbian socialists opposed their own government, even though Serbia had been invaded by the Austria-Hungarian empire and faced foreign subjugation. They placed no confidence in the reactionary objectives of the Serbian state and recognized that the war in the Balkans was part of a global struggle in which rival imperialist interests were at play.

In World War II, the aggression and atrocities carried out by Nazi Germany were even more overwhelming. Within the working class there existed a deep hatred for the Nazi regime. Yet the Marxists of the Fourth International fought, against the Stalinists and Social Democrats, to distinguish the opposition of the working class to Hitler from collaboration with imperialism. They insisted that the struggle against fascism was the task of the working class and could not be entrusted to any section of the imperialists. On this basis they refused to support any bourgeois governments, including the regime in Czechoslovakia and others which faced destruction at the hands of German imperialism.

The WRP has broken with this basic Marxist attitude to the problem of war. At the end of the twentieth century, a century traumatized by war and genocide, the WRP would have people believe that imperialism can play a progressive role. What possible facts can be advanced to justify the assumption that the solution to the horrors of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia lies in the victory of one or another nationalist clique or in the intervention of the imperialist powers? The WRP does not bother to address this question. It simply echoes the American and European ruling classes and

their portrayal of the great powers as agents of peace.

### **The continuation of politics by other means**

Marxists have long cited the perceptive thesis of Clausewitz that war is merely the continuation of politics by other means. They judge the character of a given conflict not on the basis of moral revulsion over the crimes carried out by one or another of the combatants or superficial impressions over which side represents the "aggressor." Rather they seek to make a scientific analysis of the social forces underlying the conflict, the class nature of the contending regimes and the class significance of the politics which have preceded the war and determined its general form.

What are the politics which are pursued through NATO air strikes, massacres and forced expulsions of whole populations in the former Yugoslavia? Within the former republics, the present political leaderships consist of narrow cliques of ex-Stalinist bureaucrats, anticommunist politicians and aspiring capitalists who are seeking to expand their own power and wealth and obtain a more advantageous relationship with foreign capital by promoting ethnic nationalism and separatism. As for the foreign powers, each is pursuing, behind a smokescreen of moral posturing, its own definite interests in the Balkans. The scramble for economic, political and military influence in the region is part of an increasingly bitter inter-imperialist struggle for domination of world markets.

A major aim of Washington's intervention is the preservation of its dominant position in a NATO alliance which has lost its *raison d'être* following the Warsaw Pact's dissolution. Having fallen behind Germany in the drive to exploit the newly opened markets to the east, American capitalism seeks to use its supremacy within NATO to assure itself a continued grip over European affairs. Moreover, by unleashing its bombers and cruise missiles on the Bosnian Serbs, the US has set an example for the smaller nations of the world: this is the fate awaiting those who defy American dictates.

US military actions are driven by definite geopolitical considerations. These were spelled out in a Pentagon document which first came to light in 1992. Charting strategic policy in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, the document stated that Washington's main concern was to maintain its military predominance and prevent the emergence of any potential rivals, either global or regional. Among the latter it cited the danger of an expanded Serb state, potentially in alliance with Russia.

In a lead editorial announcing its support for Clinton's Bosnian intervention, the Wall Street Journal made no secret of these strategic considerations. "Bosnia," it wrote, "is properly seen as a training run for how we react if, or when, Russia uses ethnic excuses to lunge at one of its neighbors—a Baltic port, for example."

### **Germany intervenes**

Germany has played a leading role in the Yugoslav crisis since well before the outbreak of armed conflict. Its economic and political weight enhanced by reunification, it has chosen the Balkans as the arena to openly pursue *Weltpolitik* for the first time in 50 years. It provided political and economic support for the separatist political movements which emerged in Slovenia and Croatia, promoting the independence of these ministates in order to bring them back under the wing of German imperialism.

Bosnia has provided Germany with the pretext for abolishing its constitutional ban on using military forces abroad, thereby shedding the pacifist pretensions of the postwar period. The government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl sent German Tornado warplanes to support the NATO air strikes. Their entry into the conflict came on the fifty-sixth anniversary of the German blitzkrieg against Poland.

French and British imperialism entered the Balkans with the two largest UN troop contingents to assert their own military power within the newly unified Europe. In both countries, sharp divisions have emerged in the ruling class over whether to orient towards Serbia or Croatia. Both, however, view Germany's renewed strength with apprehension and are attempting to demonstrate in Bosnia that they can handle Europe's military problems. France has combined its "peace-keeping" function in Bosnia with the ostentatious testing of nuclear weapons in the South Pacific.

A spokesman for the Paris-based Institut Français des Relations Internationales recently spelled out the militarist calculations of the French bourgeoisie, stressing "the important role that the French nuclear weapon can play in helping to reinforce German security at a time when the US's presence and guarantee in Europe cannot be relied on to last indefinitely." Against what threat such nuclear weapons are required the author does not bother to say. France's missiles may be aimed at Moscow, Washington, Berlin or all three.

Finally there is the role of Russia. Having subordinated itself to imperialist foreign policy, the capitalist restorationist regime of Boris Yeltsin finds itself excluded from the Balkan carveup and threatened by the extension of the NATO alliance to Russia's very borders. American officials dismissed Yeltsin's denunciations of the NATO bombings in Bosnia and his warning of a "return to two armed camps that are at war with one another" as a matter of domestic politics. One could just as easily attribute the US decision to intervene to Clinton's concerns over the 1996 election campaign. Such motives, however, can only be secondary.

Russia has played a decisive role in Balkan affairs for centuries, both before and after the October 1917 Revolution. Whatever the fate of Boris Yeltsin, history and geography—the Dardanelles outlet from the Black Sea, for example—dictate that it will continue to assert its interests in the region, including by military means.

Global tensions have broken to the surface in the conflicts arising from the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. The present conflagration, just as the Balkan wars of more than 80 years ago, can emerge as the antechamber of a world imperialist war. Once again the world is being redivided, beginning in the Balkans.

### **Bosnia and Spain**

The WRP has made its central demand the lifting of the UN arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia. In recent months it has attempted to equate the war in Bosnia with the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, comparing the official ban on arms shipments to Bosnia with the nonintervention pact signed by the British and French governments in 1936. In its August 12 article, Workers Press made an odd reference to Spain in the course of an attack on Britain's Defense Secretary Michael Portillo. The WRP criticized Portillo for calling the Krajina offensive an example of "ethnic cleansing."

"Ironically," it stated, "if it hadn't been for the British and French governments' arms embargo against Republican Spain during the Civil War, Portillo's father might not have had to leave his home as a refugee."

There are definite and very reactionary political conceptions behind this remark, which has the character of a moral appeal to a right-wing Tory minister. The attempt to equate the Spanish Civil War with the Bosnian

conflict is fraudulent. In Spain, war broke out as the result of an attempt of the bourgeoisie to suppress a proletarian revolution by means of fascist reaction. In Bosnia, war resulted from the disintegration of the state of Yugoslavia and the strivings of rival nationalist cliques to carve out successor states by fomenting nationalism and winning the aid of the imperialist powers.

But more is involved here than a historically flawed analogy. The WRP is implying that the crucial issue in the defeat of the Spanish revolution and the triumph of Franco was a lack of arms on the loyalist side resulting from the nonintervention pact. One can search the writings of Trotsky in vain for a statement attributing the fascist victory in Spain to the failure of the British and French to provide the Spanish Republican government with arms.

This was, in fact, the line put forward at the time by the Kremlin regime and its satellite "Communist" parties around the world. It served two interconnected purposes: to cover for the Comintern and the Spanish Communist Party and their role in crushing the revolutionary movement of the Spanish working class; and to further the foreign policy of the Kremlin, which at that time was focused on securing a "collective security" agreement with Britain and France against Germany. To this day the Stalinists and their apologists maintain that British and French "nonintervention" was the major factor in the victory of Franco.

Trotsky heaped scorn on those centrists who echoed the Stalinist line and promoted illusions in the "democracies" coming to the aid of the Spanish revolution. He took it as a matter of course that British and French imperialism would do everything in their power to ensure the victory of the Spanish bourgeoisie and fascist reaction. The Fourth International fought not for the lifting of arms embargoes, but against the treacherous policy of the Kremlin-backed popular front, which subordinated the working class to the bourgeoisie by means of an alliance between the workers parties and the capitalist state. The FI fought for a revolutionary policy of defeating fascism by mobilizing the working class for the overthrow of the capitalist state and the carrying out of radical social measures. The key issues, Trotsky insisted, were not military, but political.

The WRP's Bosnia campaign has never advanced an independent policy for the workers of the former Yugoslavia, nor proposed any social measures. Rather it insists that the working class has been destroyed and the class struggle has ceased. Its policy is that of uncritical support for Bosnia's bourgeois government, while appealing to the imperialist "democracies" to give it military support.

The WRP's invocation of Spain has a definite political purpose: reviving popular front politics, only in an even more debased form. It is aimed at rallying support for imperialist intervention in the Balkans and promoting the illusion that the British bourgeoisie—and most particularly its Laborite representatives—can be won to the cause of "democracy."

### **Alibis for Tudjman**

One of the most sinister features of the WRP's attitude toward the former Yugoslavia is its sympathy for Croatia's right-wing strongman, Franjo Tudjman. In its August 12 article hailing the Croat offensive in the Krajina, Workers Press declared that despite their "gratitude" to Croatia for the recent expulsion of Serbs from the Krajina, "most Bosnians (and many Croats) remain distrustful of Croatia's President Tudjman." Workers Press sought to allay these suspicions. Referring to a well-publicized incident in London in which Tudjman, asked of his plans for Bosnia, drew a map on the back of a menu showing how the territory would be carved up between his regime and that of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia, the WRP

declared, "there are doubts on the significance of this."

No one who has studied Tudjman's political trajectory has any such doubts. He has repeatedly declared his support for a "Greater Croatia" through the annexation of Bosnian territory. Even his American patrons complain that his pathological hatred for Moslems has made it more difficult for Washington to impose its settlement. The ethnic carveup envisioned by Tudjman is already a de facto reality in Herzegovina, where Croat troops and fascist militias like the HOS and Black Legion slaughtered and expelled Serbs and Moslems in order to set up an ethnically homogeneous statelet of Herzeg-Bosnia. Residents of this ostensibly Bosnian territory use Croatian currency, obey Croatian laws and even voted for legislative representatives in the recent Croatian elections.

Workers Press went on to state: "It is the lines drawn by the British and other imperialist statesmen on maps in Geneva that have proved more dangerous for Bosnia!... Behind nationalist gangsters like Karadzic and Milosevic, the biggest enemies of the Bosnian people (and ultimately of Croats and Serbs) are the great powers intent on carving up the Balkans."

The WRP found the maps drawn in Washington and Bonn—backed up by Croat offensives, NATO air raids and US occupation—more to its liking. Tudjman is not on its list of enemies. Slaughter and the WRP have developed a peculiar affinity for this particular nationalist gangster.

Tudjman became Croatia's president thanks largely to generous financial backing from right-wing nationalist and Ustashe exile groups. In his election campaign he called for "reconciliation" with Ustashe and the freeing of Croatia from what he termed the "Jasenovac complex," named for the concentration camp run by the fascist regime of Ante Pavelic during World War II. More than 700,000 Serbs and 30,000 Jews were slaughtered by the Croat fascists at this camp, the only one in Europe not run directly by the Nazis. He described the Ustashe regime itself as "an expression of the historical aspirations of the Croatian people."

Tudjman's appeal was analogous to a candidate in Germany running on the promise to reconcile Germans with the positive contributions of Nazism and help rid them of their complex over Auschwitz. Tudjman rose to prominence within Croatian nationalist circles by insisting that the Serb death toll was greatly exaggerated and that "only" 70,000 were exterminated at the Jasenovac camp. He likewise denied that 6 million Jews were put to death in the Nazi Holocaust, claiming that a "mere" 900,000 were slaughtered.

### **Tudjman's "Wilderness"**

His major work, *Wilderness*, published in Zagreb in 1989, is a rabidly anti-Semitic tract which blames the Jews for the Holocaust, while justifying Hitler's "final solution." Thus he writes:

"Whenever a movement, people, state, alliance, or ideology faces an adversary that threatens its survival or the establishment of its supremacy, everything possible will be done, and all means available used, to subdue or destroy the opponent. In such confrontations, nothing but the risk of self-destruction precludes a resort to genocide."

And on the Nazi regime: "The idea of the world mission of the German 'Herrenvolk,' seen as the highest race, was also based on the assumption of a 'final solution' of the Jewish question, meaning that Jews were meant to disappear definitively from German and European history. An explanation of this should be sought—in addition to historical roots—in the fact that German imperialism, for geopolitical reasons, was primarily directed towards the domination of Europe. As such, Hitler's 'New European order' could be justified by the need both to remove Jews (more or less undesirable in all European countries) as well as to correct the

Versailles (French-English) wrong." He goes on to note with approval an early Nazi scheme to send the Jews of Europe to Madagascar, declaring that "gradual extermination" was later made necessary by the protracted military campaign in Russia.

He cites the Old Testament to prove that for the Jews "genocidal violence is a natural apparition, in line with man and his social nature.... Violence is not only permissible, it is advisable; moreover it is in accord with mighty Jehovah's words; it is to be used whenever necessary for the revival or renewal of the kingdom of the chosen people." Finally he makes the outrageous claim that the Ustashe concentration camp at Jasenovac, where tens of thousands of Jews were exterminated, was run by the Jews themselves.

The WRP makes political alibis for this man and hails his military victories. It has denounced those within its own ranks who have dared question this orientation. This support for Tudjman is not merely some sick platonic infatuation on the part of Cliff Slaughter. The WRP's sympathy for the Croatian right has found expression in definite practical activities.

### **Workers Aid for Bosnia**

In 1993 the WRP acknowledged that it developed its Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign, consisting of truck convoys to the Bosnian city of Tuzla, in direct collaboration with the Croatian regime. As Dot Gibson, the central organizer of the convoys, stated, the party coordinated the campaign through meetings with "representatives of the Croatian foreign ministry and ... the Bosnia Herzegovina government, where we discussed opening of aid routes."

She revealed that "the Croatian foreign ministry proposed that we go from Zagreb to Zupanja, in order to travel out of Croatia and to go to Tuzla through the northern corridor" (Workers Press, November 6, 1993). The Croatian foreign ministry suggested this "northern corridor" to further its own military objectives, now realized in the overrunning of the Krajina. Domination of the northern corridor by the Bosnian Serbs allowed the resupply of the Krajina region, and ending Serb control was, therefore, a key military objective of the Zagreb regime. When the WRP was unable to send its trucks by this route, Gibson addressed a direct appeal to Gojko Susak, Croatia's defense minister. This man is a former Canadian pizza magnate who returned to his homeland in the late 1980s and used his fortune to bankroll Tudjman's election and pursue his twin obsessions: anticommunism and the pursuit of a "Greater Croatia." He is well known as the leader of the most fascistic wing of Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Union, based in the Croat enclave of Herzegovina.

In her letter, dated January 10, 1994, Gibson called upon Susak to order "the HVO forces [the Croat nationalist militia in Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose leaders are indicted war criminals] to clear the way" for the WRP's "humanitarian aid convoy" to Tuzla. This constituted a direct appeal to the Croatian regime to launch an offensive against the Bosnian Serbs. It predated by one year the deal forged by the US State Department with Zagreb to carry out just such an attack.

Now Tuzla is to become the headquarters of the American army. It is hardly a coincidence that the WRP and the US military both chose this city as the focus of their activities. The WRP's orientation to Tuzla arose as a byproduct of its relations with the Croat regime, US imperialism's principal agent in the region. Will the WRP now wage a campaign for the working class to resist US occupation and fight for the expulsion of imperialist forces? No one should hold his breath. Even if it chose to pay lip service to such a slogan, it would be meaningless. The entire content of the WRP's political intervention over the past three years has been to

prepare the way for the US tanks rolling into Tuzla.

### **Slaughter's "real solution"**

The WRP's uncritical support for Croatian chauvinism apparently provoked misgivings even in the reactionary political milieu which it inhabits. The Workers Press carried a prominent editorial entitled "A real political solution for Balkan peoples." Slaughter later announced, in response to internal criticism of this editorial, that the piece was "largely based on notes written by me." This claim to the authorship of the WRP's right-wing line is an exceedingly rare occurrence for the party's secretary. Anyone familiar with Slaughter's modus operandi knows that he normally works behind the scenes, letting others do his dirty work, while he preserves an air of political ambiguity.

Now Slaughter is claiming personal responsibility for the WRP's line. To whom is this announcement directed? Certainly not to the working class. He wants it known in ruling class circles that, in time of war, Cliff Slaughter can be counted on. Slaughter endorsed Workers Press's view of the Krajina offensive declaring: "There is no doubt that the military offensive of Tudjman's Croatian forces has created a more favorable military situation for the fight of Bosnia." He added, however, that "it is of even greater importance to recognize that in the final analysis there are no military solutions to the crisis in the Balkans. The only solution is a political one."

Certainly Clinton and Kohl would both accept that "in the final analysis" the military offensive which they sponsored in Krajina and the NATO air assault in Bosnia are merely means to a definite political end: an agreement which divides the Balkans into new spheres of influence. It was to this end that the Clinton administration sequestered Milosevic, Tudjman and Izetbegovic at Wright-Patterson Air Force base in Dayton, Ohio.

The Workers Press editorial goes on to state that this solution "involves the establishment of political independence on the part of the working class in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Serbia and in Croatia." That is, the independence of the working class is to emerge not in united opposition to, but as a byproduct of, the carveup of Yugoslavia into ethnically-based statelets. This "independence," to be achieved with the support of NATO, would chain the working class to the separatist projects of ruling cliques of ex-Stalinist bureaucrats and bourgeois nationalists in each of the former Yugoslav republics.

### **"Lining up with the British ruling class"**

Having advanced this reactionary political solution, Slaughter reiterates the WRP's support for the ongoing military actions on the part of Croatia and its foreign backers. Declaring the necessity to "take sides in the war in the Balkans," he claims that failure to do so would mean "lining up with the British ruling class." Slaughter found himself lined up with this ruling class when British warplanes joined the NATO bombardment of the Bosnian Serbs. He not only supported this imperialist intervention, he and the WRP had publicly demanded it.

The editorial cites as a "break in the situation in Britain" the holding of "two large demonstrations in defense of Bosnia" and the "nonstop picket" on Downing Street. The political purpose of these protests was to demand that Britain and the other imperialist powers take military action against the Serbs. Slaughter continues, "Unlike many on the left who are content

to invoke empty abstractions such as 'Only the working class can resolve the crisis' we have set out a definite and concrete line of advance on the crisis in the former Yugoslavia."

The conception that the working class alone "can resolve the crisis" is the whole strategic orientation of the Marxist movement—that war and reaction cannot be defeated outside of the struggle to achieve the political independence and unity of the working class in order to put an end to capitalism. For Slaughter this perspective has become an "empty abstraction." His WRP supports more "concrete" methods involving Croatian troops and NATO bombers.

### The political logic of the WRP's line

In splitting with the International Committee a decade ago, Slaughter and his supporters refused to examine the political issues at stake or make a critical evaluation of the WRP's own record. They sought to suppress any such analysis by attributing the party's crisis entirely to the actions of one man, Gerry Healy. While Slaughter rejected a political analysis, there is a clear political logic to the subsequent leap by the WRP into the camp of imperialism. A definite line of continuity exists between the degeneration of the WRP in the 1970s and 1980s and its support for NATO in 1995.

In the period preceding the split, the WRP's politics were dominated by an opportunist adaptation to various bourgeois nationalist movements and regimes, particularly in the Middle East. The glorification of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Libyan regime of Col. Gaddafi and others—as well as the mercenary relations which the WRP leadership pursued with them—laid the basis for a shift in the party's class axis and an opportunist orientation on many other questions.

The WRP endowed these movements with a revolutionary potential which they never possessed, while writing off the independent struggle of the working class. It effectively repudiated the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution, which established that, in the epoch of imperialism, the national question can be resolved only within the framework of the socialist revolution of the international proletariat.

Slaughter's Bosnian adventure is essentially a continuation of this perspective, albeit a more advanced expression of the same disease. The intervening decade has seen a qualitative degeneration both of the national movements and the WRP itself. In an earlier period, the PLO and similar movements sought to imbue their demand for "the right to national self-determination" with a certain anti-imperialist content, and declared this right could be won only through armed struggle.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, these movements cast aside their revolutionary pretensions and established themselves as junior partners and outright police agencies in the imposition of imperialist settlements.

New movements, which in no way embody the universalist and anti-imperialist strivings which characterized the revolutionary nationalist movements in an earlier period, have emerged as champions of the "right to self-determination." From the former Yugoslavia, to Quebec, to India, these movements base themselves on ethnic or linguistic divisions, seeking to win the support of imperialism in carving out new states for the benefit of local bourgeois cliques.

The WRP has attached itself to just such movements, applying a previous political position which has been overtaken by events. There is nothing inherently progressive about the demand for national self-determination in the Balkans or anywhere else. Where it is invoked as a byproduct of the inability of the old leaderships in the workers movement to find a way out of the crisis created by capitalism, it is reactionary. This

is most certainly the case in the former Yugoslavia. Even in the 1970s, when the WRP began its opportunist adaptation to the nationalist movements in the Middle East, the slogan of self-determination served as a cover for an adaptation to a section of the bourgeoisie. Now it has become a means to align this party's practice directly with the needs of imperialism.

### Shachtman and Slaughter

In its May 1994 statement *Marxism, Opportunism & the Balkan Crisis*, the International Committee warned that given the WRP's support for imperialism and the nationalist forces in the Balkans, it could well play a similar role in Britain itself. The statement said of the WRP: "At some point in the future, it may well become part of a bourgeois coalition government of national salvation."

In its reply to this document, the WRP dismissed the IC's warning as "bizarre." Little more than a year later, Slaughter and his followers are providing direct support to a classic imperialist carveup of the Balkans, in which the fate of the peoples of this region is viewed as so much small change. Everything in the WRP's policy has made it complicit in a plan which will have tragic consequences for years to come.

Ten years after his own break with the Fourth International, Max Shachtman publicly supported US imperialism's war against Korea. This marked his definitive entry into the camp of imperialism, from which he never looked back. The tendency which Shachtman led evolved along extreme anticommunist lines, producing a host of advisers for the US State Department and the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. Ultimately, Shachtmanism spawned the principal ideological pointmen of the Reagan administration. With his Bosnian campaign, Slaughter has embarked on a similar path.

Just as Shachtman's politics of petty-bourgeois moralism led him to support "democracy" against Stalinism in Korea 45 years ago, so Slaughter's policy of "revolutionary morality" has led him, together with an entire layer of the petty-bourgeois left, to rally behind NATO in the Balkans. The movement to the right by this tendency is the harbinger of immense social struggles. It represents a clearing of the decks for revolutionary confrontation between the bourgeoisie and proletariat all over the world.

The dividing line between Marxism on the one hand and the politically diseased offspring of petty-bourgeois radicalism and protest politics on the other has never been more stark. The International Committee will spare no effort in exposing the significance of this political evolution and thereby further the development of a genuinely socialist and internationalist leadership in the working class. It is crucial that the working class assimilate the lessons of the Yugoslav crisis. A new international party must be built capable of making an appeal to the class interests of all those exploited by capitalism, and in this way overcoming the attempts to divide them along national, ethnic, racial or religious lines. Only the International Committee of the Fourth International undertakes this task.



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