

Rallies in Australian cities denounce NATO attack

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Thousands of people, predominantly from the Serbian community, demonstrated outside US consulates in major Australian cities on Sunday, venting their outrage at the NATO attack on Yugoslavia. Eight thousand rallied in Sydney and 6,000 in Melbourne. Smaller rallies were held in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Hobart.

In Sydney, 2,000 demonstrators also marched to the Opera House, where Prime Minister John Howard was addressing a celebration of Greek national day. Greek and Serbian protesters denounced the Australian government's support for the US-led operation.

The atmosphere at the Sydney rally was one of deeply-felt emotions. Many people present had family, relatives or friends living in areas being bombed. Young demonstrators clashed with riot police and security guards in an attempt to gain entrance to the US consulate. The American flag was hauled from its pole and burnt. Shop windows and a car window outside the consulate building were smashed. Two police were reportedly injured.

Although no-one was arrested during the protest, the Howard government and the police now plan to use media footage to identify and prosecute individual demonstrators in an attempt to intimidate opponents of the NATO onslaught.

A sea of Serbian flags coloured the crowd, as well as Montenegrin, Macedonian and Greek flags. Applause and chanting of "Serbia" followed when the crowd was told of Yugoslav government claims that its forces had shot down nine NATO aircraft. The rally was organised by the "Movement for the Protection of Kosovo and Metohija" whose speaker was Ilija Glisic, a well-known figure in Sydney's Serbian community and the head of the Serbian National Federation.

The dominant theme of placards and banners was a

comparison of the present bombings with the Nazi attack on Yugoslavia in 1941, when the *Luftwaffe* bombed Belgrade as the United States is doing today. People carried photos of President Clinton defaced with a Hitler moustache and American flags with swastikas upon them. Banners labeled NATO as the "Nazi American Terrorist Organisation".

Other banners denounced the hypocrisy of NATO claims to be motivated by humanitarian concerns, pointing to the support of the US and European powers for Turkey's suppression of the Kurds and the 1995 Croatian military operation that led to tens of thousands of Krajina Serbs being expelled from their homes.

An old man carried a sign explaining he had saved the lives of 15 American airmen during World War II, with photocopies of a newspaper story about his reception as a hero at a reunion in the US. Now US jets, along with German planes, were dropping bombs on his grandchildren. The sign ended "Shame on you America".

Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party in Australia distributed several thousand copies of the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board comment, "Whom will the United States bomb next?" and a Serbo-Croatian translation of the statement, "NATO bombing of Serbia: the 'New World Order' takes shape".

The intensity of feeling at the rally was shown in comments by Dragan, a man in his early thirties whose family are Bosnian Serbs.

He said: "Clinton can say whatever he likes about Milosevic but he is only trying to make him into a puppet who will do whatever the Americans want. They [the US and NATO] are breaking up every state in the Balkans, small states they can easily manipulate. That is why they are attacking Serbia. To break it up. What will come next? There are ethnic minorities in

every country in the region. There is Macedonia with a large Albanian population, there are 2.5 million Turkish people in Bulgaria."

As he spoke others gathered around. An older man said Serbia was being targeted because of a conspiracy against Orthodox Christians. When asked how he explained the US attack on Iraq, a mainly Muslim country, discussion re-focussed on the political motives of the great powers.

A woman interjected to say: "NATO is making a provocation in the Balkans. They are using religion and nationality to make trouble so they can move in and get more power over everybody."

Another woman, who came as a refugee to Australia in 1995, wanted to speak about the tragedy of her family--Serbs from Sarajevo who had been forced to flee from their homes during the Bosnian war, only to be re-settled in Kosovo. She broke into tears while explaining she had not heard from her relatives for weeks.

These sentiments were not rare in the crowd. Many were able to point to episodes and examples of great power intrigue and manipulation of ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. Often they spoke with regret that the relative ethnic harmony of Yugoslavia had been plunged into national hatreds and intolerance.

It was therefore all the more striking that demonstrators made widespread use of the banners and symbols of the Serb nationalist Chetnik forces of World War II. Hundreds, especially among the younger people, wore the distinctive Chetnik caps with the military symbols of the old Serbian monarchy. Other carried Serb flags with royalist emblems. Some youth even carried the black flag and skull symbol of the more notorious Chetnik units. Also noticeable were the icons and crosses of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church.

The Chetniks were the political representatives of the Serbian ruling class. Following the 1941 Nazi invasion and dismemberment of Yugoslavia, they sought not to end imperialist domination, but to replace German control with British and restore the Serbian monarchy. On numerous occasions, Chetnik units directly collaborated with the Nazis against the Yugoslav partisan movement.

Over the last decade, the stirring up of ethnic animosities by small cliques of ex-Stalinist bureaucrats,

capitalist entrepreneurs and adventurers in Belgrade, Sarejevo, Zagreb and elsewhere has led directly to the break-up of Yugoslavia, the military intervention of the major powers in the Balkans and the present NATO bombing of Serbia. The promotion of Serbian and other forms of nationalism will not resolve but only intensify the crisis of the working class in the region.



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