Thousands demonstrate in Germany against NATO military strikes

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Demonstrations against the NATO military action in Yugoslavia took place in a number of German cities last Saturday. In Stuttgart a 3,000-strong demonstration, predominantly Serbs, marched through the city centre carrying placards denouncing the role of the German, European and Clinton governments in supporting the bombing in Yugoslavia. A total of 800,000 Serbs live today in the German republic.

In the southern German city of Nuremberg 1,500 took part in a five-hour rally in the city centre. In the capital city of Berlin up to 5,000 took part in a rally called by the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, successor to the ruling Stalinist party [SED] in the former German Democratic Republic [GDR--East Germany]), the only party in the German parliament to oppose the military aggression. Groups of Serb workers with their families and Yugoslavian youth took part in the rally, some of them bearing placards proclaiming "No to war in Kosovo" and "Unite Europe without weapons". Other placards at the demonstration denounced the German SPD and Green governing parties for their leading role in involving German military forces in their first active engagement since the Second World War.

The *WSWS* spoke to a 28-year-old worker from Belgrade who has lived and worked in Berlin since 1988, and attended the Berlin demonstration with three of his friends. He related that he is in daily contact with his father, living in a suburb of Belgrade, who was able to give some details of the bombing and devastation in the capital.

"The actions of the European and American governments in bombing Yugoslavia is terrible and reprehensible. I am very concerned for my family who are left in Belgrade. My father has reported of bombing not far from where he lives. There is a military air base not far away which has been extensively bombed. But not only military targets are being bombed. In the latest attacks civilian airports have also been hit. There has also been bombing in downtown Belgrade. A by-product of the latest bombings was that the electricity station near to where my father lives was hit and there was a power blackout in the neighbourhood.

"The aggressor powers have underestimated the situation if they think they can suppress the Serb people with missiles. The danger exists of the war developing into a conflict of ground troops, and then the war will spread to all of eastern Europe. After all, the Russians recently bombed Chechnya for six months without forcing the population to capitulate. There is a big danger of the conflict escalating to a new world war. The present strength of the Yugoslav army is half a million, but if need be the government could mobilise up to 2 million troops. I must say that I myself have no time for Milosevic. In the past I hated Milosevic, but in light of this offensive I am strongly behind the government. After all, it was democratically voted into power by the people. When necessary I am prepared to fight and I know that applies to most of my friends. What the European and American governments are doing is rotten through and through."

A Serb of gypsy descent who has lived with his wife and family in Germany for 27 years took part in the Berlin demonstration together with his wife and young child. He said, "I am in contact with friends and relatives and they have told me of the indiscriminate bombing which has taken place. In the town of Nis', for example, a hospital was hit. Luckily most of the patients had been evacuated. Yesterday a chemical factory near Belgrade was severely damaged and the bombs have even hit a church which was under protection as a 'valuable European monument'. There has also been bombing around the area of Kragujevac,

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which has a factory producing automobiles and munitions. Altogether 38,000 work there, and the entire work force have agreed to stay in the factory and work around the clock to demonstrate their defiance of the air strikes.

"The first question I ask myself is: why do the Europeans allow themselves to be provoked by the Americans? What has happened to democratic values? It is clear they have no more value anymore--everything is determined by big money and Coca-Cola. What about the court in The Hague, set up by the European powers to examine crimes against humanity in Yugoslavia? Why do they not have anything to say about the atrocities which are being carried out by the European and American governments in my country? I think the various governments have refused to examine the real causes of the conflicts in the region. All of the newspapers blame Serbia for the war, everyone speaks about the guilt of the Serbs. There is a famous Serb poet and he wrote that the only crime of the Serbs is to live in a country situated where it is--at a geographical crossroads intersecting with the opposed interests of a number of the Great Powers.

"With respect to Kosovo, let me make a comparison with the situation in Turkey today. There, a minority--the Kurds--is oppressed by the Turkish state which officially forbids, for example, the Kurdish language. A Kurdish book in Turkey is a crime. In Kosovo, on the other hand, the people have their own university which instructs in their own language; they have their own television, radio and 40 newspapers and publications which print material in their own language. Why do the Americans give unconditional support to Turkey which suppresses the Kurds and make war on the Serbs who have made considerable concessions to Kosovo?

"All we know is that over a period of time advanced modern weapons from America, from Germany and other countries were being delivered and smuggled into Kosovo and suddenly there was this big cry for independence. This region has been regarded as an integral part of Serbia for a long time and I think it was completely correct for Milosevic to reject the terms of the Rambouillet treaty, which would have meant giving up Kosovo and opening the door to unrest in the whole region.

"Let me make it clear I am completely opposed to Milosevic as a politician. He is no good for the people. He is surrounded by criminals and corruption. His son Marko, for example, owns the biggest disco in Yugoslavia--it is called 'Madonna' in Pozarevac. It is well known that he has extensive contacts with criminal elements. I am also opposed to nationalism. I have lived in this country, Germany, for 27 years and I know it is important to integrate, I regard myself as a loyal German citizen. But what is taking place now in Yugoslavia is the attempted genocide of a sovereign people. This is what the 'New World Order' looks like. I am no longer the youngest, but with respect to the war being waged by the Europeans and America, I say I am prepared to go home at once and fight for my country."

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