

British cabinet minister accuses Labour MPs opposed to NATO bombing of "appeasing" fascism

Julie Hyland
22 April 1999

Clare Short, International Development Secretary in the Labour government, has denounced MPs from her own party as "equivalent to the people who appeased Hitler".

Her outburst was directed against 13 Labour MPs critical of the NATO bombardment of Serbia who had tried to force a vote in the House of Commons debate on Kosovo on Monday evening. The dissident Labour MPs were seeking to register their opposition to the war, but the attempt, led by Tony Benn and Tam Dalyell, fell far short of the 40 members needed to bring on a vote.

Short said that she was "ashamed" that such people were members of the Labour Party. She likened them to pro-Nazi sympathisers in the Second World War. "There were people then who thought Hitler was a good thing, there were people who opposed action being taken against Hitler," she said.

Her remarks are not the first time the Labour government has sought to cloak NATO aggression with the garb of "anti-fascism". Such imagery has been essential in attempting to maintain shaky public support behind the war drive. In an interview with *Newsweek* magazine a fortnight ago, Prime Minister Tony Blair claimed that his government's policy was motivated by the lessons of the Nazi holocaust. His generation had learnt the cost of attempting to "appease dictators", he claimed.

Both Blair and Short's comments are based on flagrant historical falsification. It was not the British establishment's attempts to "appease" Hitler that enabled the Nazi dictatorship to carry out genocide, but their active support for Hitler before the war.

During a previous Commons debate on the Balkans,

Benn read from documents taken from the captured German Foreign Office at the end of the Second World War. One recorded an exchange between Hitler and Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary, prior to the outbreak of war. Halifax told the dictator: "Herr Chancellor, on behalf of the British Government, I congratulate you on crushing communism in Germany and standing as a bulwark against Russia".

The British ruling class welcomed the victory of fascism in Germany as a pre-emptive strike against a socialist movement of the European working class. Moreover, they saw it as a means for overthrowing the Soviet Union. Only when the Nazi dictatorship's expansion began to threaten the British Empire did the ruling class decide, reluctantly, to move against it. Even so, despite their knowledge of the "Final Solution", Jewish refugees attempting to flee Germany and Eastern Europe were barred from entry to Britain.

No military or economic grounds exist for Blair's comparison between 1930s Germany (a country seeking to violently establish its own world *Reich*, or empire) with present day Serbia, a small and impoverished land.

The only country whose national sovereignty is being violated in today's war is Serbia. When Milosevic refused to agree to a virtual take-over of the country by US-led NATO troops, the current bombardment began.

Previously, when Milosevic's clampdown on internal dissent was aimed at facilitating the imposition of IMF economic diktats against a hostile population, the democratic rights of the Balkan peoples counted for nothing within the British establishment. In the Dayton Accord for Bosnia, the Western governments dropped any action against the "war criminal" Milosevic, in

return for his aid in enabling them to carve out spheres of imperialist influence within the country based on its partition along ethnic lines.

The Blair government's concern for "humanitarian principles" is based solely on the cold calculation of its foreign policy interests. The British ruling class fears that the expansion of the European Union--under German hegemony--and the launch of the euro will lead to its isolation on the continent. Britain's enthusiastic participation in the action against Serbia, under US leadership, is an attempt to use its not insignificant military advantages to make up for its economic and political weakness.

In this respect, Blair could be compared with the cowardly, ineffectual child who allies himself with the playground bully. The price of Blair's "reflected glory" is being paid by the defenceless civilians sheltering in Yugoslavia's devastated cities, or the refugee convoys trying to escape to safety, or the tens of thousands forcibly detained on the border to Montenegro in conditions of utter degradation.

For weeks, the British government claimed that its actions were motivated by concern for the Kosovar Albanians. On Tuesday, it revealed the extent of its magnanimity--announcing it would grant immediate asylum to just 126 Kosovar women and children.

Short's outburst must serve as a warning to all critically minded people. Only last week, senior Labour officials were involved in a "whispering" campaign against BBC World Affairs editor John Simpson. Complaining that his news reports from Serbia were too "critical" of the NATO action, they let it be known that they considered him to be Milosevic's "stooge". Following NATO's attack on the refugee convey--which caught it in a web of lies and disinformation--Blair's senior press adviser, Alistair Campbell, was seconded to NATO to prevent any further "public relations disasters".

Such blatant attempts to censor the press are now being followed by denouncing the parliamentary opponents of the war as virtual supporters of fascism.

Despite government claims to the contrary, there is mounting evidence that NATO is preparing the invasion of Serbia using ground troops. One unnamed military official was quoted recently saying its objective would be "to strangle Serbia". Short's remarks are part of preparing public opinion for this eventuality

by poisoning the political atmosphere to prevent the possibility of free and critical discussion.

See Also:

Behind the attacks on veteran journalist John Simpson:

British government criticises BBC for its war coverage
[20 April 1999]

British Labour's elder statesman embraces NATO bombing of Serbia
[9 April 1999]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact