

Letter to the WSWS by P. Harris, a supporter of the US-NATO bombing of Serbia

8 April 1999

Dear editor,

Concerning the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia, I find myself in the unusual position of total disagreement with your editorial stance. Not withstanding the fact that many of your articles on a variety of issues are infected by a kind of low-grade conspiracy fever, I am generally in at least 75 percent agreement with your issues, analyses and positions. In this case, however, I feel that that you have taken the approach of discarding the baby with the bath water.

It is of course true that the United States, Britain and France are imperialist nations. And it is equally true that they are full of hypocrisy and false piety on almost every foreign policy issue you can name, from the Kurds to the Timorese, from Iraq to Israel to Grenada to Panama. But this does not negate the fact that they are surely doing the right thing by (finally!) attacking Milosevic's Serbia to stop his regime's and the Serb nation's crimes against humanity in Kosovo. In fact, it is precisely because they are imperialists and hypocrites that the NATO powers bent over backwards for years, right up until March 24, to avoid any conflict with Milosevic, whom they stupidly believed could be used to serve their interests in the region.

As I write this (March 30) it is perfectly clear to the entire world that the Serb regime has long planned the "ethnic cleansing" of the Kosovar Albanians that is currently underway on an accelerated schedule, after having been conducted in a slower, piecemeal fashion for the last twelve months. Although in the absence of a rapid ground offensive against the Serbs there is little prospect of immediate relief for the Albanians, in the long term there is no way other than military force to save them and to put a permanent halt to Serb aggression against its neighbors. And of necessity, if the Serb government persists in the face of aerial bombardment of strictly military targets, those attacks

should and no doubt will be broadened to include economic targets and civilian infrastructure as well--power plants, factories, government ministries, etc.

Milosevic began his rise to power by embracing and legitimizing the strong strain of mystical, fanatical nationalism that had been suppressed during the decades of Tito's rule in Yugoslavia. His 1989 speech to the Kosovo Serbs on this issue was quickly followed by a number of far-reaching acts that, within four years, led to the destruction of the Yugoslav federation.

These acts included stripping the Kosovo region of the official autonomy status that it had been granted under Tito; large scale elimination of government resources for Albanian schools and cultural institutions; mass firing of Albanians from both government and non-government positions; and, ultimately, the suppression by violence of Albanian attempts to maintain their cultural autonomy and identity. All of this was done, it is assumed, to raise Milosevic's own popularity in the Serb Republic, where he quickly replaced his friend and mentor, Ivan Stambolic, as party head and president of the Republic.

At the same time, Milosevic appropriated for the Serb Republic the votes in the council of the Yugoslav Federation that had up to then been wielded by Kosovo and Vojvodina autonomous regions. This gave Serbia disproportionate power, which in turn alarmed the other republics (especially Slovenia and Croatia) in the Federation, and was a main trigger of the federal breakup.

In the wars that followed in Bosnia and Croatia, the Serb Republic gave active support to the local Serb forces on the ground. Although this support was not made public at the time, and was not obvious to many (including me) outside the region, it has since been documented as a fact of those wars. Karadzic, the

Bosnian Serb leader and infamous war criminal, was Milosevic's proxy in Bosnia, as were the notorious Arkan and other militia leaders responsible for much of the butchery.

Now we come to Kosovo, where during the intervening decade the Albanian community had conducted a campaign of political struggle, using the tools of passive resistance to preserve its cultural identity. This campaign was still going on in the face of vicious and unrelenting Serb oppression when, in 1997, the UCK (KLA) emerged in Kosovo, advocating a turn to arms as the only path to freedom for the 90 percent of Kosovo's citizens who are Albanian.

The response of the Serbian police and military was brutal and indiscriminate, and by March of 1998 had become an outright campaign of "ethnic cleansing," in which villages were shelled and burned, the civilians massacred and forced to flee. This campaign continued without interruption until October, when it was somewhat slowed after Milosevic agreed to a force reduction and the imposition of 1400 unarmed OSCE monitors in Kosovo.

Things were relatively--and only relatively--quiet over the winter, but by the time the Rambouillet negotiations began in February, Milosevic had already systematically and blatantly violated the force limitations and was positioning ever more troops in or near Kosovo. These forces had resumed the campaign of violence against the Albanians, as always under the guise of fighting the UCK "terrorists," and as always involving the deliberate and methodical execution of men of military age, the random slaughter of women, children and the elderly, and the systematic destruction of homes and villages.

Having threatened Serbia with air strikes if the violence continued and if the Albanians agreed to the proposed pact, NATO found itself backed into a corner when Milosevic stepped up the violence as the Rambouillet deal collapsed, lacking only Milosevic's signature. After several more days of diplomatic hemming and hawing, the NATO countries finally took the plunge and initiated bombing on the night of March 24, local time.

No amount of disgust at the hypocrisy, stupidity, venality, or other shortcomings of the United States and the other leading imperialist countries can outweigh the concern we must have for the oppressed Albanian

people of Kosovo. No amount of argument that the people of Serbia do not know what Milosevic is doing can negate the fact that it is being done, being done in their name, being done by their husbands and sons and brothers. And no amount of dubious "sovereignty" can relieve civilization's obligation to stop these crimes against humanity.

Finally, what is the alternative? Try more weeks and months of "negotiations" while the genocide continues? Just give up and say it doesn't matter? As the Serbs appear determined no matter what to pursue the greatest terror against a European population since the Germans took that road under Hitler, all this will no doubt end with a pariah Serb state reduced to its smallest geographical extent since the end of Ottoman control of the Balkans. Unfortunately, like the Germans under Hitler, the Serbs under Milosevic only respond to violence. Like the Germans, the Serbs in Serbia have enjoyed years of complete safety and isolation from the violence of all the wars their leader started, while around them those wars burned out of control. As we used to say when protesting the war in Vietnam, it is time to bring the war home.

P. Harris



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