

Protests in London against US-NATO bombing

Vicky Short
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Two demonstrations of between four and five hundred people took place within a few hundred yards of each other on the streets of London last Saturday: one opposing the US-NATO bombings of Serbia, the other supporting NATO's actions.

"NATO murderers", "Stop killing innocent children", "Stop the bombings", "NATO: Nazi America Terrorist Organisation", chanted one. "NATO good luck", "NATO now or never", "Thank you NATO, we are with you", "Kill Serbs", chanted the other.

Serbians and Albanians, who only a few years ago were living together in harmony, had to be kept apart by police vans. This week there were violent clashes between the two groups.

A picket comprised mainly of Serbian people at Downing Street, the residence of Prime Minister Tony Blair, has been staged every day since the NATO bombing began. On Saturday, the picket was strengthened by busloads of protesters from around Britain. Car horns attached to frames on wheels, as well as hundreds of whistles, blared out all day, particularly when passing vehicles signalled their support.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to many of those present. The prevalent feeling on the Downing Street picket was one of disbelief at what was happening and anger at the one-sided accounts by the British media.

Mr. Lukic had come down from Birmingham with his children to protest against the NATO bombing. He has lived in England since the 1970s. "People are not being told the true story," he said. "I have never seen bigger lies in my life. Everybody's lying. People can't see what is behind it. I have two children. They were only seven and eight years old when we came to this country and they have grown up here, studied here, work here. Like me, they can't understand it. I've worked hard in this country and yet I feel like I've got nothing, like I am nobody because of what the media are doing. I meet a lot of ordinary people because I am a self-employed builder and I have no problem with them. It is

difficult to explain what is going on because people don't understand, but Serbian people don't deserve this."

"There were once 23 million people in Yugoslavia and now it is split into five or six countries. The tragedy is that every one of them is suffering, that's the problem. I have my brothers there, about 20 kilometres from Belgrade. I spoke to them a few days ago and they are all scared. The bombing is killing people, but they don't show anything on the media. Missiles don't always hit their targets. Besides, I don't know what targets they are looking for in Belgrade. It's horrible, I can't understand it, nobody can understand it."

Many demonstrators expressed their surprise and bewilderment, particularly at the participation of Britain in the bombing of their country, and the double standards employed by the Western powers. Many were older people, who had fought in the Second World War. Peter Girkinic, originally from the Krajina, where hundreds of thousands of Serbs were expelled from this region of Croatia in 1995, said: "I thought of England as a friendly country. It was always like the Holy Land for us Serbs. But now they are turning on us, so we are very disappointed. We never felt the same about America, but France and England we thought a lot of. My grandfather fought with them in the First World War and I was there in the Second World War, fighting with the Allies. And now this."

Mr. Gasic, from Shepherds Bush in London, broke in: "Did you see what happened last night in Belgrade? They bombed the Ministry next door to the maternity hospital. They only missed them by 10 yards. They could have been all dead! Vicious!"

"The only person who knows why they are doing this is Clinton. I think he is a murderer. Half a million people were expelled by the Croats in Krajina and they didn't say a word about it. Clinton and America helped the Croatian government to push half a million Serbs out of land where they had lived for 600 years and nobody took any notice. They are all in Serbia. And now Clinton is bombing them! A few of them went to Kosovo and they were killed."

When asked what he thought of the role of the Kosovo

Liberation Army in the conflict, Mr. Gasic said: "The KLA are the ones who've caused the biggest trouble. They are only a small group, but they are armed and supported by America. Every time you see them on TV they are holding brand new armaments."

Many protesters were extremely concerned that the present conflict in the Balkans might lead towards a new World War. Mr. Gasic said: "Last night we saw the Russian delegation from Parliament and they saw what is happening there. They are not going to accept it. And there are demonstrations against the bombings everywhere, in Italy, in Greece, in Macedonia, in Germany, everywhere. But you don't see that on television. CNN only show old women crying, who we are very sorry about. But they say, 'There you are, the Serbians are killing them.' It's all one-sided propaganda."

Some saw the cause of the war in terms of conflicts between America and Europe: "America wants to dominate all the world," said one. "They want trouble. Quite a lot of American workers are against all this, but they are keeping quiet. They are not organised and they don't know what is going on. But wherever Americans are, there is trouble. What are they doing in Yugoslavia? They live thousands of miles away."

"What Clinton is doing in Europe is to try and destabilise it. They don't want Europe united. They want to carry on the trouble in Europe because one day Europe might be against them."

Rasco Stepanovic added: "Because there is no Warsaw Pact, NATO wants to fill that vacuum, now it's their chance because they've already taken three countries from the Warsaw Pact into NATO, and Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and Macedonia are waiting to join. Then they will dominate the whole world. They are using these conflicts and intervene in the name of humanity, but they have a different agenda altogether. The tragedy is that there is no opposition anymore. Now we see so-called socialism, which god knows what it is, on its back. We see all these so-called left of centre governments, suddenly becoming more right wing than the right-wingers themselves. That is a new phenomenon and I don't know how long it's going to last."

Among the demonstrators there were a few British people who expressed their disgust with the actions of the Labour government. A woman who had come to show solidarity "from a human point of view" said that she had voted Labour at the last elections, but "never again". Another, Pat Turnbull, was even more critical: "To tell you the truth, I didn't expect very much of the Labour Party. All the same, I want to say that the fact that NATO's first air strikes on an independent country are under a Labour government is really quite a shame, quite a disgrace. The working class

after 20 years of defeats are at a very low ebb and that is why NATO feel they are almost free to do this kind of thing nowadays. Because they have managed to push the working class to such a low level of fighting, they think that they can get away with it. And at the moment they are, I am sorry to say."

The impact of the war has been to strengthen the hold of Serbian nationalism and the Milosevic regime. "If they take Kosovo, then we'll have to give them all of Yugoslavia" said a young girl, Miljana Miljkovic. "People don't realise that Kosovo is Serbia, they are in our land. And people don't know how it started. People here in England, maybe two or three weeks ago, didn't know where Serbia or Kosovo was, and now they are being told all these lies. It's nothing but propaganda against Serbian people."

Another woman said, "I don't support Milosevic in a lot of things, although I understand his point of view, but I definitely do support him now against NATO. I have been here in England for 30 years, so I only know what my family tells me. When the Albanians say we want Kosovo and call on NATO to help them take it, how do you expect him to act? However, I don't agree with what the government is doing when they create hatred amongst the people."

Up the road in Trafalgar Square, a demonstration made up mainly of Albanians, supporters of the KLA, was taking place. Those placards which were not advertising the KLA were virulently anti-Serbian and urged NATO to intensify the bombing. The only non-Albanian banner belonged to "Workers Aid for Kosovo", the organisation set up by the now defunct Workers Revolutionary Party led by Cliff Slaughter.

Also See:

Behind the war in the Balkans

A reply to a supporter of the US-NATO bombing of Serbia [8 April 1999]

The United States and the war in the Balkans: On the road to catastrophe [6 April 1999]

The NATO Attack on Yugoslavia [WSWS Full Coverage]



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