

What will be left of Yugoslavia after the bombing?

The Editorial Board
13 April 1999

One of the most grisly atrocities carried out by NATO bombers to date occurred shortly before noon (local time) on Monday, when attack planes fired missiles at a passenger train traversing a bridge at the Serbian location of Grdelicka Klisura, 180 miles south of Belgrade. As of this writing ten corpses have been recovered from the wreckage, and another 16 passengers are reported injured.

The train was scheduled to run from Belgrade to Salonika in Greece, and the dead and injured included foreign passengers, including Greek journalists. A railway official said a young girl was among the dead, some of whom were dismembered or burned beyond recognition.

The train had not completely left the bridge over the Juzna Morava River when an electricity cable supplying its power was cut by a missile fired from a NATO plane at a road bridge over the track. "The plane then returned and hit the train," said an official from the Yugoslav Army's press center.

Two passenger cars plunged from the bridge into the river at the bottom of a ravine. CNN reporter Brent Sadler described the carnage, in a 30-second live dispatch, as a scene of "blood amid the debris."

"Show this to Clinton," said one onlooker, pointing to burned clothes and human remains. "What will NATO's explanation be now? Or have they now switched to civilian targets only," he said with a shaking voice.

Clinton's answer came a few hours later, when he addressed US Air Force personnel at the Barksdale base in Louisiana, whose B-52 bombers have been active in the bombing campaign in Yugoslavia. Clinton told his audience that their involvement in the NATO air strikes represented "America at its best."

With the connivance of a docile media, which refuses to give an objective account of civilian casualties, the United States is targeting factories, residential areas, schools and similar facilities in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. The aim of this massive air assault is to intimidate the Serb people and break their will to resist. Nothing approaching the NATO air war has been seen in Europe since the Second World War.

As the bombing campaign has proceeded, the frequency of attacks on civilian targets has increased and the level of civilian casualties has risen. It is impossible to accept the claims of US and NATO officials that this is merely accidental. In the first days of the war, Washington and its European allies held back from attacking civilian targets out of concern for public opinion in the West. But as it became clear that the media campaign to demonize the Serbs had achieved considerable success, they felt their hands had been freed to intensify the drive to terrorize the population.

The passenger train was only one in a long list of industrial and civilian targets hit by NATO bombs and missiles over the past several days. These include:

- The second strike in the past four days on the Zastavka industrial complex in Kragujevac, 45 miles southwest of Belgrade, which produces

the Yugo automobile. Last week NATO jets hit the plant despite the fact that the workers had surrounded the factory in an attempt to ward off a bomb assault. That attack injured 124 people. An additional 36 workers were injured in Monday's strike. Some 38,000 workers have been left without a job or livelihood as a result of the damage to the industrial complex.

- NATO warplanes bombed an industrial complex in the central Serbian town of Krusevac, razing to the ground the town's heating plant and the 14 Oktobar factory, a leading manufacturer of building machines in the Balkans. The destruction of these facilities, less than a mile from the center of Krusevac, left 6,000 workers jobless and resulted in an unspecified number of civilian casualties.

- In the industrial town of Pancevo, across the Danube River from Belgrade, one of Yugoslavia's biggest oil refineries was demolished by NATO jets.

- A NATO missile struck a residential area in Serbia's second largest city, Novi Sad. Two of the city's three bridges over the Danube were destroyed in the first two weeks of the air war.

- Twelve civilians died from a bomb that landed in the center of the town of Cuprija on Thursday night, leaving 400 families homeless.

- More than twenty civilian buildings were damaged by a NATO missile fired early Sunday into the village of Turekovac, west of Leskovac.

- NATO aircraft bombed civilian targets in the environs of Kraljevo, central Serbia, Saturday night. The village school in Bogutovac was destroyed, after being hit by six missiles. NATO bombs also damaged schools in the villages of Raska, Lincevi, Tavnik and Lozno.

- Over 50 cruise missiles hit the Kosovan capital of Pristina Saturday night. Shatina airport outside of the city came under renewed attack on Sunday. The region southeast of the capital was also targeted, with cluster bombs striking the southern Kosovan municipality of Lipljani.

- A three-year-old girl was one of three people killed in the Saturday night bombing of the village of Mirovac in northern Kosovo. A total of ten missiles were fired on the region.

- Two more radio relay stations were hit by cruise missiles over the weekend.

Since the beginning of the air war on March 24, 300 civilians have been killed and 3,000 injured by the NATO assault, according to Yugoslav officials. But these figures are bound to rise rapidly, as NATO steps up its

attack on cities, towns and industrial facilities. Appearing on NBC TV's "Meet the Press" on Sunday, US General Wesley Clark, the NATO supreme commander, said the massive air campaign, now employing 700 planes, is "on track and being intensified."

Over the past several days the Pentagon has announced the dispatch of an additional 82 planes to Europe, and Britain has sent its aircraft carrier HMS *Invincible* to join the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* in the Adriatic Sea.

The economic, social and environmental catastrophe that is being created by the NATO war was outlined at a press conference held Monday in Ottawa by the Ad-Hoc Committee to Stop Canada's Participation in the War in Yugoslavia. Michel Chossudovsky, a professor of economics at the University of Ottawa, issued a summary of facts on the impact of the bombing campaign.

Citing Yugoslav sources, he said NATO has thus far flown nearly 3,000 attack sorties, "with 200 in one night alone against designated targets." It has dropped thousands of tons of explosives and launched 450 cruise missiles.

"The bombings have not only been directed against industrial plants, airports, electricity and telecommunications facilities, railways, bridges and fuel depots," he said, "they have also targeted schools, health clinics, day care centers, government buildings, churches, museums, monasteries and historical landmarks."

Highlighting the impact of the air war on Yugoslav workers, Chossudovsky reported: "Several thousand industrial facilities have been destroyed or damaged with the consequence of paralyzing the production of consumer goods. According to Yugoslav sources, 'By totally destroying business facilities across the country, 500,000 workers were left jobless, and 2,000,000 citizens without any source of income or possibility to ensure minimum living conditions.' Western estimates as to the destruction of property in Yugoslavia stand at more than US\$10 billion."

The press release notes that NATO air strikes have targeted small villages as well as large cities, and suggests that Yugoslav officials have deliberately underestimated the scale of civilian casualties.

NATO bombs have also, according to the press release, taken a devastating toll on hospitals and health care institutions. Thirteen of the country's major hospitals have been partially damaged or totally destroyed. Nor have schools been spared. More than 150 have been damaged or destroyed, leaving 800,000 students without instruction.

The US-led air war has further targeted historical and cultural landmarks. These include the Gracanica monastery, which dates back to the 14th century, the Pec Patriarchate (13th century), the Rakovica monastery and the Petrovaradin Fortress, all of which are on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Chossudovsky presents a horrific picture of the environmental damage, both short-term and long-term, being inflicted by the US and NATO. "Refineries and warehouses storing liquid raw materials and chemicals have been hit, causing environmental contamination. The latter have massively exposed the civilian population to the emission of poisonous gases."

He quotes the Serbian Minister for Environmental Protection, Branislav Blazic: "The aggressors were lying when they said they would hit only military targets and would observe international conventions, because they are using illegal weapons such as cluster bombs, attacking civilian targets and trying to provoke an environmental disaster."

An NBC TV report confirmed that NATO bombed the Galenika pharmaceutical complex, the largest medicine factory in Yugoslavia, located on the outskirts of Belgrade. The population was advised to wear gas masks to protect them from the dangerous emissions resulting from the explosion, but they do not, in fact, have such gas masks.

Besides atmospheric contamination, civilians are facing an erosion in the supply of clean drinking water. In Belgrade, in particular, the water supply is at risk following the bombing of the Zarkovo water facility.

In considering the savagery of the US-NATO air assault, and its systematic targeting of Yugoslav industry, it should be recalled that US imperialism has pursued a policy of deindustrialization in the countries that emerged from the collapse of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe and the breakup of the Soviet Union. It has been a deliberate aim of American policy to dismantle large sections of industry in these countries, so as to eliminate "excess capacity" and further the interests of American-based transnational corporations. Similar considerations play no small role in the military strategy of the US in Yugoslavia.

Those waging the war respond to the more horrific cases of "collateral damage" with perfunctory statements of regret, followed by assertions that the bombing is designed to cause the least possible injury to the general population. But as the toll of death and destruction mounts, it becomes increasingly clear that the aim of the US-led NATO bombing campaign is the decimation of the industrial and social infrastructure of Yugoslavia.

As the tragic precedent of Iraq demonstrates, the extent of the devastation will only become clear after the war has ended. In the years following the Persian Gulf War, some 1,000,000 Iraqi children have died as a result of military action and economic sanctions. How many hundreds of thousands of Yugoslavs will perish in the aftermath of a war that has largely destroyed the country's economic foundations?

The eruptions of killing and death in the Balkan peninsula over the past decade have occurred within the context of civil wars whose cause is to a great extent rooted in the economic policies imposed on Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s by the Western powers and imperialist financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. By the 1980s these policies had severely eroded the economic infrastructure which had for three decades after the Second World War enabled the Yugoslav people to live in peace. The resulting social crisis--rising unemployment, declining living standards--provided fertile ground for various capitalist powers, above all the United States, to encourage the growth of ethnic animosities, which were manipulated to further American and European designs in the region.

As terrible as the civil strife that has plagued the Balkans, far more horrific is the deliberate destruction of Yugoslavia, carried out in the pursuit of geo-political and economic interests that are kept concealed from the American and European people. All of the governments that are involved in this criminal enterprise will stand condemned before the bar of history.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact