

May Day rallies hit IMF austerity, Yugoslavia bombing

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May Day rallies held throughout the world over the weekend saw millions of workers participate beneath banners demanding an end to IMF-imposed austerity measures and, especially in Europe, opposing NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia.

In Greece, demonstrators burnt the US flag and an effigy of President Bill Clinton outside the US embassy in Athens. Some 10,000 workers participated in the protest. Opposition to NATO bombing was echoed in marches in Moldova, Ukraine and Russia, where over half a million workers participated.

In Bulgaria, the opposition Socialist Party (the former ruling Stalinist party) headed demonstrations against the government's plans to allow NATO to use Bulgarian air space in the bombing of Yugoslavia. They claimed this would drag Bulgaria into an illegal war. A half dozen US and NATO bombs and missiles have already hit Bulgarian territory, in one case landing in the suburbs of the capital city, Sofia.

In Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, calls were made for the resignation of President Vaclav Havel for his support of the NATO bombings. Hundreds of anarchists also clashed with right-wing skinheads in Prague, and dozens were arrested when police riot squads moved in on horseback, wielding truncheons and throwing smoke bombs against the demonstrators.

In Berlin, over 130 demonstrators were arrested and 150 police injured in clashes. Over 5,000 police were mobilized against May Day demonstrators with riot police using tear gas, water cannon and clubs to break up the march. In Spain marches demanded an end to NATO's bombing and called for the closing down of NATO bases on Spanish soil. In southern Turkey, 47 demonstrators were detained by police in what the government called an "illegal demonstration."

In Nazareth, thousands of Arab and Jewish demonstrators marched in opposition to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. They called for the resumption of peace negotiations and an end to racism and religious division.

Elsewhere May Day demonstrations were tied more directly to immediate economic struggles of the working class. In Zagreb, the capital of the former Yugoslav republic of Croatia, thousands of trade union members marched in defiance of President Tudjman's opposition to any demonstrations on the traditional workers' holiday. In South Korea 25,000 marched against the government's plans for mass layoffs and demands were raised to mobilize workers in a general strike.

In Nicaragua striking transport workers joined thousands in the capital Managua despite President Aleman's threat to arrest, sue and jail the strikers. University students joined demonstrations with at least two people dying in clashes, and the army was ordered to guard key electric, water and telephone facilities as well as the country's main airport.

Marches throughout Latin America condemned IMF-imposed privatization of state assets. Hundreds of thousands marched in Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile and Bolivia. At least 10 people were beaten by police in Honduras when hundreds of pro- and anti-government demonstrators clashed in the capital city, Tegucigalpa.

Tens of thousands marched in Uruguay, while more than a million demonstrated in Ecuador. Argentinean workers joined workers from Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay on the Uruguay-Brazil border in a show of international solidarity. In Mexico hundreds of thousands marched in a country where less than a third of its 36 million workers have full-time employment,

and where the workers' share of the GDP has dropped from 40 percent to 30 percent in the last five years.

In Brazil the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso faced demonstrators despite lifting the minimum wage to \$US82 a month in an effort to avert growing social tensions among the country's 85 million-strong work force, the largest in Latin America. Over 90,000 workers marched through the industrial center of San Paulo. Brazil is the most economically unequal country in the world, exceeding even the United States. The richest 10 percent in Brazil reap nearly half the country's income while the poorest 40 percent earn just 9 percent of the total.



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