

Demonstrators in Australia denounce NATO bombing

Richard Phillips
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Almost a thousand people rallied in Sydney last Sunday against the NATO assault on Yugoslavia. The rally, including many Yugoslav workers and their families, assembled at Hyde Park fountain and marched through the city to Circular Quay. Members of the Greek and Macedonian community, pacifist groups and a small delegation from The Greens also attended.

Many demonstrators wore target emblems and waved Yugoslav flags. They also held placards and banners denouncing the US President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair as war criminals and calling for an end to the bombing. Marchers chanted “US out, NATO out, Stop the bombing now!”

The protest was called by “Australians for Peace in Yugoslavia”, a loose coalition of the Stalinist Communist Party of Australia, the Progressive Labor Party, the International Socialist Organisation, People for Nuclear Disarmament, the Australian Anti-Bases Coalition and the Serbian National Federation. Speeches by Denis Doherty from the CPA and Paul Matters, secretary of the South Coast Trades and Labour Council were characterised by their utter hollowness.

Matters, a union official well-known for his shameful defense of BHP, Australia's biggest corporation, and its job destruction program, declared the war against Yugoslavia was driven by the demands of international capital. The union official began his speech by citing Rosa Luxemburg. But for all their declamations against capitalism, Doherty and Matters failed to differentiate themselves from Serbian nationalism.

Those interviewed by the *World Socialist Web Site* voiced their deep concerns over the NATO settlement and attempted to grapple with the long-term problems facing the Yugoslav people. Many bitterly attacked the mass media's distortion of the war.

Michael Neilson, a construction worker, said: “I've always been suspicious of NATO's intentions. At first when the media blasted us with all the propaganda about refugees I wasn't exactly sure. Now, after 10 weeks it's clear that the US has no intention of negotiating a peace deal. They want to take over the whole country. If there were going to be a genuine peace agreement it could have been negotiated weeks ago.

“No country could agree to the Rambouillet agreement—it was an ultimatum and completely unreasonable. Yes, there was a war going on in Kosovo but the US used this to further its own interests, take over the whole region and test out the latest military technology. This all seems to follow a pattern—from Vietnam, Iraq and now Yugoslavia—the big powers bully the small and weaker countries.

“As for Tony Blair and the British Labour government, I'm not shocked by their actions. This is a pseudo-Labour government, just like Labor here. They don't represent the working class and neither do the trade union leaders. I am very sceptical about these organisations. I come from a coal mining family in the Hunter Valley and I've seen what they've done up there. Hundreds of jobs were gotten rid of and the unions did not lift a finger.”

Milo Milosevic, a pensioner, was so worried about the situation in Yugoslavia that he had could barely explain his feelings.

“I have just been in contact with my relatives in Belgrade and they have told me that there is no peace. The bombing just goes on and on every day. I have been listening to the Yugoslav news, to SBS television and I am so angry, that I don't know what to say.

“It seems there is nothing we can do while Clinton, Albright, Cook, Blair and all these people are still in

power. They have to be removed. Everything they say is a lie—they don't want peace—all they want to do is take over our country. I know what happened during the Second World War—all the pain and suffering—but NATO is worse than the Nazis. They want to be the policemen for the whole world; they want to smash down anything and everything that stands in their way.

“The television and the newspapers talk about a peace agreement but they are bombing the Yugoslav people every day and every night. My relatives tell me they don't know how they are going to survive. They just live from day to day and are thankful that they are alive at the end of it.

“I don't know what we can do. What can a small country like Yugoslavia do against the weapons and military power that NATO has? People talk about taking Clinton, Albright and Blair to the tribunal in The Hague on war crimes but what will this do? They run these organisations for themselves. They seem to have all the power and I don't know what we can do. I am very upset by this. We have to find new ways of dealing with this situation or everyone will be finished.”

Toma Milencovic, who immigrated to Australia as a young worker in 1957, said: “Everything the media says is a lie. When NATO bombs villages, bridges, schools or hospitals the media don't report it, or if they do, they just lie.

“Last week NATO planes bombed Varvarin in Serbia, the town where I originally came from. It was Sunday, a clear day and the pilots knew exactly what they were doing. There were many people in the town and on the bridge—in fact it was market day and Trinity day, a religious festival, so it was very busy. The local church was over 300 years old and yet the NATO pilots came in and bombed the church and the bridge.

“Some people were fishing under the bridge. They were killed when the bridge collapsed on them, then the pilots came back because they knew there would be rescue workers and they bombed again. There were many killed and hundreds wounded but when they showed this on television it was little more than a few seconds and was immediately followed by pictures of Albanian refugees. This was to try and minimise what NATO had done.

“The media try to create an awful picture of the Serbian people to the public, they try to say we are

carrying out ethnic cleansing. Yet nothing is said about what happened in the Krajina when the Croatian army, with the help of NATO, forced hundreds of thousands of Serbs out of this area. This was real ethnic cleansing. Serbian people are very angry with this and no matter what happens they will never forget.

“We are a democratic people and believe in freedom and democracy for everybody. We don't hate Albanians. What is never explained is that there has been a war in Kosovo. The KLA has been terrorising and murdering government officials and the police. Can you imagine what would be the response of the media if a terrorist group murdered a policeman in Australia?

“The new agreement Milosevic has made with NATO is no good. Everyone that I know is against it and they are against Milosevic for signing it. Why, after so much suffering, destruction and loss of life, has Milosevic just accepted this? As far as I am concerned, we should fight NATO to the end. Let them try and finish us off. We will be proud to the end and we will never let anyone take over our country. The Serbian people will never accept being put under the control of NATO.

“This is a terrible tragedy and it is going to get worse. NATO wants to take control of everything. They already have troops all over the Balkans—in Bosnia, Macedonia and Croatia. I am very worried about what is going to happen. I hate to say this, but I fear that there is going to be a civil war in Serbia and it will go on for a long time.

“Who knows what the US and NATO will do next? They began encouraging the KLA and Albanians after the war in Bosnia. What will they do next? Maybe they will start making trouble in Cyprus or further east.”



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