

Washington march protests NATO bombing of Yugoslavia

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Several thousand people marched to the Pentagon last Saturday to protest the continued US bombing of Yugoslavia. The demonstrators assembled near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall in Washington, DC and marched across Memorial Bridge to the headquarters of the US Department of Defense.

The demonstration was called by a number of peace, anti-war and Serbian-American groups several weeks ago, but took place one day after the announcement of the agreement by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to bow to NATO's terms for calling off the bombing. This announcement undoubtedly cut attendance at the protest, and many of the announced speakers, including three US congressmen, failed to show up.

By far the largest attendance was from the Serbian-American community. Hundreds wore buttons proclaiming "Proud to be a Serb," carried Serbian flags or hand-lettered placards with slogans in Serbo-Croatian. Several men wore T-shirts identifying themselves as Serbian-American veterans of the US military, and members of a Serbian-American branch of the American Legion. At least four Serbian-Americans were among the dozens of speakers who addressed the crowd either before or after the march.

Mila Lazarevich-Nolan, representing United Serbs of America, branded the US-NATO military action a "war of deception, like Vietnam." She said that the Clinton administration was seeking to "dismember a sovereign country in order to establish an American hegemony in the Balkans." Its goal was not peace, but capitulation. Ultimately, she warned, what remains of Serbia and Yugoslavia would face "dissolution backed by the full force of military occupation."

Another Serbian speaker, playwright Nadia Tasic, denounced the "US criminal government" and said its goal was the colonization of the former Yugoslavia. "Our children will remember America as invisible monsters

who tried to kill them from the sky," she said. "We are not an instant culture like the US. We remember things for centuries. We will hate America for decades." She said that the US bombing had destroyed more of the country's infrastructure in two months than the Nazis had destroyed in four years.

The various political groups which co-sponsored and organized the demonstration, led by Workers World Party, a pro-Stalinist organization which supports the Milosevic government and portrays it as "socialist," made no effort to present an alternative to the Serb nationalist perspective of many of those in attendance. Only one or two speakers referred to the plight of the Albanian refugees and only one criticized the policies of Milosevic.

The political confusion which prevailed at the march was expressed symbolically at the rally which began it, where one group of Serb veterans milled about a large Vietnam War-era POW-MIA flag, while a few steps away a group of radicals set fire to an American flag. Ten feet from this scene a middle-aged woman carried a placard for the presidential campaign of extreme-right-wing Republican Patrick Buchanan.

The march organizers had agreed to have two liberal black Democratic congresswomen, Cynthia McKinney of Georgia and Barbara Lee of California, and one of the most right-wing Republicans, Ron Paul of Texas, address the rally. None of them actually attended or spoke. But one religious pacifist speaker, Thomas Fleming, hailed the prospect of uniting left and right against the bombing of Yugoslavia, which he described as "NATO killing Christians."

Taken as a whole, the speeches of the various radicals who came to the platform demonstrated the continuing political decay of the organized middle class "left" in the United States. Not a single speaker of the half dozen or so from Workers World and its associated groups sought to address the audience seriously, examine political issues

carefully, or educate anyone. Not one identified himself as a socialist, and only one was introduced as a member of Workers World. Instead, they posed as representatives of various identity groups—blacks, women, gays, Asian-Americans, etc.—and shouted a few demagogic phrases.

Only one speaker actually examined the historical issues underlying the war in the Balkans, former Attorney General Ramsey Clark. He said that Yugoslavia had been founded on the idea that all people of southern Slav descent could live together in peace, and he said that in the period 1945-1989 the region had enjoyed the greatest peace and prosperity in its history.

He denounced US support for ethnic cleansing against the Serbs in the Krajina region of Croatia, citing the recent book by US diplomat Richard Holbrooke which boasts of the expulsion of the Krajina Serbs. He said that US and European support for the breakaway of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia, combined with the policies of the International Monetary Fund, had produced a disaster in the region.

Clark was particularly critical of the 1995 Dayton Accords in Bosnia, which he said imposed an ethnic segregation worse than Jim Crow or apartheid, dividing the country into Serb, Croat and Muslim enclaves that were completely separated. While the United States seemed to be determined that the peoples of the region should not live together, Clark said, there was no alternative but the establishment of a new type of federation in the Balkans.

A delegation of members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party attended the demonstration, campaigning with socialist literature, including a leaflet on the agreement announced last week in Belgrade. SEP supporters sold more than 100 copies of a pamphlet version of the statement on the war issued by the *World Socialist Web Site*, "Why is NATO at war with Yugoslavia? World power, oil & gold."



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