NATO's "mistaken" ethnic cleansing

Ari Weinstein
12 August 1999

Recently, two articles have appeared on the Kosovo situation, within a day of one another, on the front pages of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. To those who view the mainstream media as little more than the mouthpiece of the political and economic elite, the propagandistic deceptions contained within these two articles should not be a surprise at all; to those who see these newspapers as unbiased and legitimate news sources, the content of these two articles must seem inexplicable and tragic.

The Wednesday, August 4 edition of the *Washington Post* includes on its front cover the headline "NATO Losing Kosovo Battle." Beneath this bold print headline is the subtitle "As Serbs Continue to Flee, Vision for Multi-Ethnic Society Fades." The writer of the article, Peter Finn, reports on the indisputable reality that Serbs and Gypsies have been fleeing Kosovo en masse ever since the arrival of NATO "peacekeepers." Finn writes simply that "Less than 25 percent of Kosovo's prewar Serbian population of 200,000 remains, and more flee every day." For more corroborating evidence of this chilling trend, he cites the figure that "In the Kosovo capital of Pristina, for instance, the prewar Serbian population of 40,000 has fallen to fewer than 1,000, and homes of Serbs across the city have been commandeered by ethnic Albanians." At another point in the article, Finn reports on the specific developments that have transpired since NATO occupied the province. "Every day since NATO-led peacekeeping troops assumed authority in this Serbian province, a Serb or Gypsy has been killed, tortured, beaten, kidnapped or threatened, according to tallies by NATO, human rights groups and Serbian officials. Serb- and Gypsy-owned homes have been burned, looted or seized; state-owned or private Serbian businesses have been occupied and their operators expelled; Serbian Orthodox holy places have been bombed or desecrated—and all the while, more Serbs have fled."

This atrocious turn of events, we are told, is nobody's fault. It is simply never mentioned that the proportion of non-Albanians who have fled the province since the start of the bombing campaign is far greater than the percentage of Kosovar Albanians who left their homes in Kosovo during the height of the bombing and the on-the-ground civil war between the KLA and the Serb forces. The explanation offered by the author of this article for the enormously "successful" ethnic cleansing campaign going on right now is essentially that these atrocities are going on despite NATO's best efforts to stop them. That is, NATO is remarkably incompetent in pursuit of its noble aims.

Mr. Finn makes it clear that he is fully in service of the imperialist powers who launched the bombing slaughter by asserting: "The ideal of a multi-ethnic Kosovo—a place in which Serbs, ethnic Albanians and Gypsies can live together, an ideal NATO went to war to achieve—is on the verge of collapse." There you have it: NATO is a humanitarian organization which fights for the highest and most just ideals. That NATO miserably failed to achieve ethnic harmony in Kosovo is attributed to operational failures and tactical mishaps, not to the inherent and overwhelming moral contradictions of the military mission in the first place. The various pseudo-lefts which supported this war (*Tikkun* magazine, Bogdan Denitch, *New Leader* magazine, Bernie Sanders) all have egg on their faces now; my guess is that they will ignore the problems of Kosovo in the future, because the outcome there has made an absolute mockery of their "humanitarian" rationale for supporting the war.

The August 5 *New York Times* has a front-page story on the same topic. Entitled "Despite the G.I.'s, Kosovo Town is purged of Serbs," this article describes how Zitinje, a town with an ethnically mixed population before the NATO occupation, has been ethnically

© World Socialist Web Site

cleansed of all its Serbs since the occupation began two months ago. Quoted in the story is an American Lieutenant, who claims that "We did everything we could to get the Serbs to stay, but they really wanted to go." One wonders what this individual means by "did everything we could." The encouragement, rhetorical or otherwise, that was offered by the NATO troops was obviously insufficient to counter the reasonable fears of the Serbs that they were going to be terrorized or killed by the KLA. The Lieutenant, one Ryan Leigh, describes how a month ago the Serbs and Gypsies from the KLA-controlled town of Urosevac were intentionally intimidated in a campaign that saw many of their houses get looted and burned. The article does not point out that NATO has entered into an elaborate power-sharing bargain with the KLA thugs who are responsible for so much death and misery in Kosovo. Apparently, NATO is happy to let the KLA run amok insofar as that group's brutal score-settling activities do not seriously impinge on NATO's colonial domination of the province.

What is to be made of this latest tragic turn of events? For one, serious analysts of current affairs must recognize that, by and large, political and economic outcomes are not random—they are planned by the elite policymakers in the Western world. Sure, certain tactical aspects of a major policy operation might not go as expected for the policy-planners, but the fundamental geopolitical objectives they pursue usually meet with overwhelming success. More importantly, this whole sordid Kosovo affair makes it apparent that the capitalist states not only are indifferent to human rights, but that such rights are usually an annoying obstacle to their criminal plans for world domination.

To make clear where they stand on foreign policy issues, from Iraq to Serbia to Haiti to Somalia, workers, students, and principled intellectuals should now raise their voices to say simply and in unison: "No US foreign military interventions ever, under any pretext! Bring all US troops stationed overseas home now!" Only mass action by the international working class and by allied progressive elements can expose the criminal actions of US imperialism and present as an alternative an egalitarian, pacifistic, and genuinely humanitarian vision of how foreign policy should be conducted.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site