

# A reply to a supporter of the Kosovo Liberation Army

27 July 2002

*The following letter was sent in response to the article The Milosevic trial: More questions raised over Racak , published May 8, 2002. by Paul Mitchell. It is followed by a reply from the author.*

Why must you continuously dismiss the Kosovar national movement as a Western plot against the Serbs as if the Kosovar-Albanians had no legitimate national and historical grievances against centuries of Serbian occupation... the WSWs is in very serious danger of becoming irrelevant on international issues relating to national liberation struggles.

On the one hand the WSWs defends the Palestinian national movement, while on the other hand condemns the Kosovar-Albanian national movement... of course critical analysis needs to be made of the legitimacy of any movement which claims to represent the national interests of an entire people... but I think the WSWs has very clearly missed the boat on the issues in Kosova (the Albanian spelling). Yes it's true German, US, and British special forces were involved in clandestine training of the KLA and the provisioning of the KLA with intelligence and air support... is that dissimilar from the Palestinians receiving millions in dollars in aid from the European Union and the weapons and intelligence support from Iran and Syria? Of course it isn't... that's war.

We decide, as individuals, and as a class, who is defending the established order and who is challenging it, who's argument represents a turn towards democracy and away from repression and authoritarianism... once that calculation is made it becomes a question of logistics and practicality... the Palestinian national struggle is just as legitimate whether they receive weapons from Iran, Libya, or the boogey-man... the same holds true in Kosova, especially since Milosevic spent the entire decade of the 1990s unsuccessfully trying to annex Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia (indirectly), and then Kosova.

If Milosevic had been President a little longer we might have been able to witness a brutal crackdown on separatists in Montenegro as well!!!! I agree with WSWs that Sharon is a war criminal for Sabra and Shatila, and so is Milosevic for Omarska concentration camp at the very least!!! Go to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) website... read the indictments!! Read what happened to people in concentration camps simply because they were Bosnian Muslims or Croats or belonged to the "wrong" political party, read what happened to Bosnian women who were in some cases gang-raped everyday for three years by Serbian army soldiers...

The WSWs obviously doesn't understand the political landscape on the ground in Kosova and is content to stick to topical political personalities and convenient conspiracy theories... Perhaps you should re-read Trotsky's writings on the national question in Ukraine amongst others, including his writings on the self-determination of the various peoples of Spain... perhaps you should talk to your own ICFI people in Quebec who are separatist nationalists (and rightfully so)...

get it right, or don't bother. It doesn't help anyone when a group which claims to lead the international working class is completely out to lunch and inconsistent.

GM,  
Ottawa, Canada

It is clear from your letter that you see the demand for self-determination as a timeless principle of Marxism. However, it is your misrepresentation of the Marxist position on self-determination and not our inconsistency on this issue that lie at the heart of our differences.

You attempt to make your remarks sound more reasonable by saying, "of course critical analysis needs to be made of the legitimacy of any movement which claims to represent the national interests of an entire people," but this is precisely what is missing from your letter.

You dismiss the arming and training of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) by the United States and German governments as being of little consequence in estimating its political character and justify this by reference to what is, in fact, the greatest weakness of the PLO—its inability to wage a struggle independently of the intrigues of the Arab regimes and European Union. Having said this, by equating the two organisations on this simplistic basis, any serious analysis of their different origins and history is ignored.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has advanced a clear critique of the PLO, but unlike the KLA it grew out of a popular and secular nationalist movement against imperialism and the bourgeois Arab regimes. The KLA from its inception was based on ethnic exclusivity and has accommodated itself to imperialism in the most naked manner. It is one of the retrograde nationalist movements that became the vehicles for capitalist restoration in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Your indifference to the way the Western powers have used these nationalist movements to mount political intrigues to further their own geo-political interests, causing wars that have cost tens of thousands of lives, is particularly reckless given the history of the Balkans.

That history has provided rich lessons for the Marxist movement. Svetozar Markovic, the founder of the Serbian socialist movement, advanced the concept of a socialist federation of the Balkans in the 1870s. The first congress of Balkan Social Democratic parties in 1910 called for a Balkan federation "to free ourselves from particularism and narrowness; to abolish frontiers that divide peoples who are in part identical in language and culture, in part economically bound together; finally to sweep away forms of foreign domination both direct and indirect that deprive the people of their right to determine their destiny for themselves."

Incidentally, this quote is from Trotsky's *The Balkan Wars*, which you conveniently forget amongst your references to his writings on self-determination. Trotsky elaborated on this perspective—aimed as it

was on overcoming national divisions, rather than glorifying them, in *The Balkan Question and Social Democracy*: “The only way out of the national and state chaos and bloody confusion of Balkan life is a union of all the peoples of the peninsula in a single economic and political entity, on the basis of national autonomy of the constituent parts. Only within the framework of a single Balkan state can the Serbs of Macedonia, the Sandjak, Serbia and Montenegro be united in a single national-cultural community, enjoying at the same time the advantages of a Balkan common market. Only the united Balkan peoples can give a real rebuff to the shameless pretensions of tsarism and European imperialism.”

It was Stalin and not Trotsky who in the 1920s became the champion of national exclusivism in the Balkans. Frustrated by the difficult task of winning the working class to the programme of international socialism, the Stalin faction in the Bolshevik party and Communist International adopted the policy of “socialism in one country” and the formation of “united fronts” with bourgeois nationalist parties. When the leader of the Yugoslav Communist Party, Sima Markovich, disagreed, Stalin wrote, “I think that Semich’s reluctance to accept this formula is due to an underestimation of the inherent strength of the national movement and a failure to understand the profoundly popular and profoundly revolutionary character of the national movement. This lack of understanding and this underestimation constitute a grave danger, for, in practice, they imply an underestimation of the might latent, for instance, in the movement of the Croats for national emancipation.”

The result of this policy was a catastrophe and led to the strengthening of various ethnic separatist movements such as the Croatian Nationalist Peasant Party and the collapse of the Yugoslav Communist Party.

During the Second World War, Tito and the Communist Party-led partisan movement showed that the call for a socialist federation retained its validity and appeal in the fight against Nazi occupation and Western domination. However, this perspective was soon abandoned in favour of pan-Yugoslav nationalism. The prospect that backward Yugoslavia could pursue a self-contained socialist development in a divided Balkan region was flawed from the start, as the Fourth International recognised. It posed the question, “The alternatives facing Yugoslavia, let alone the Tito regime, are to capitulate either to Washington or to the Kremlin—or to strike out on an independent road. This road can be only that of an Independent Workers and Peasant Socialist Yugoslavia, as the first step towards a Socialist Federation of the Balkan Nations. It can be achieved only through an appeal to and unity with the international working class.”

As the Communist Party adapted to imperialism, economic problems increased. An emerging layer of capitalists, gangsters and ex-Stalinist bureaucrats saw national separatism as the best way to break working class resistance, restore capitalism and protect their class interests. They were aided and abetted by the Western powers that saw in Yugoslavia’s break-up a chance once again to advance their own strategic and economic interests. Kosovo became the justification—under the cloak of humanitarian intervention—for the re-establishment of military-led colonialism.

Far from the Kosovar Albanians determining their own future, Kosovo has become a NATO protectorate subordinated to the economic programmes of Western banks. Some 200,000 Serbs, Roma and other minorities have been driven out and 1,035 are still missing according to the Red Cross, lending Kosovo the shameful distinction of being one of the most “ethnically pure” regions in Europe. The

Kosovan government is causing further instability in the region by trying to absorb borderlands in Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro in pursuit of its goal of a Greater Albania. Poverty and unemployment is so high that Kosovars flock to work at Camp Bondsteel—one of the largest military bases built by the US since the Vietnam War.

The perspective of socialist federation is also at the heart of our perspective for the Middle East. The WSWs is opposed to the Zionist state because it was established on religious and ethnic exclusivism and the expulsion of the native population. Its creation was backed by the US in order to establish a satellite state in the Middle East. But our alternative is not support for either Palestinian or even pan-Arab nationalism, but unifying the Jewish, Palestinian and Arab working class through establishing the United Socialist States of the Middle East.

As for your insulting claim that our comrades in Canada are supporters of Quebec nationalism, one need only read the statement, For working class unity against Chrétien and Bouchard: Workers should oppose both federalist and separatist camps in Canada’s constitutional dispute. This explains that Quebec separatism is a trap for the working class and calls for the international unity of the working class against globally-organised capital.

Finally, even the writings you cite from Trotsky in no way support your own retrogressive politics. In his *National Question in Catalonia* Trotsky asks, “Are the workers and peasants of the various parties of Spain interested in the economic dismemberment of Spain? Not at all. That is why to identify the decisive struggle for the right to self-determination with propaganda for separatism means to accomplish a fatal task. Our task is for Hispanic federation with the indispensable maintenance of economic unity.”

He considered it “monstrous” to accept the “Balkanisation of the Spanish peninsula”.

In his writings on the Ukraine in 1939 Trotsky again was concerned how to fight for the political independence and education of a working class facing the twin threats of Stalinism and fascism. Whilst recognising that the nationalisations carried out in border territory occupied by the Red Army had a progressive content Trotsky considered the advantages were outweighed by the “illusion of replacing the proletarian revolution by bureaucratic manoeuvres.” He called for an Independent Soviet Ukraine, in which the working class expropriated the capitalists and overthrew the Stalinist bureaucracy—and not the creation of an ethnically pure capitalist enclave run by a pro-Western puppet regime.

Paul Mitchell



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