

A letter and reply on Kosovo

Tony Robson
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To the WSWs Editorial Board,

Gentlemen, are the Democrats any better? Report please about Clinton's war against Serbia, about the ethnic cleansing of Christians in Kosovo, about the demolished churches and monasteries. It is not about Protestant sacral objects, not about synagogues. Mr. Kerry is sleeping well.

LJ

Dear LJ,

The *World Socialist Web Site* has an unequivocal political line on the two issues that you raise: 1) the nature of the Democratic Party and 2) the character of NATO's military intervention and occupation of Kosovo.

Permit me to quote from just one of the many articles that have recently appeared on the WSWs: "The overwhelming consensus of the American political and corporate elite—Democratic and Republican—is that the war in Iraq must be continued and repression of the Iraqi people intensified. It is a misnomer to call this illegal and predatory enterprise 'Bush's war'. Both parties are committed to a policy of using military force to establish the global hegemony of US imperialism.

"For all the mud-slinging between Kerry and Bush, the Democrats represent no genuine alternative for working people, and this applies to jobs, health care, education, housing and defence of democratic rights, no less than militarism and war. The Iraq war is a bipartisan undertaking of the two-party system—the long standing instrument of the American ruling elite to insure its political monopoly and deprive the working class of any means for effecting fundamental change."(One year since the US invasion of Iraq, Statement by the WSWs Editorial Board and Socialist Equality Party, March 19)

The grassroots support that initially developed around the candidacy of Howard Dean for the Democratic presidential nomination expressed the mounting opposition to the war in Iraq. Even though Dean does not represent a genuine threat to the profit system he had opposed the war and was critical of the Democrats bi-partisan approach to social policy within the US. The political establishment and mass media moved very quickly to discredit his campaign and ensure that the nomination went to a candidate who had endorsed the war in Iraq from day one. This experience provides an object lesson in how the two-party system cannot provide an outlet for the groundswell of opposition that is developing towards imperialist war abroad and social inequality at home.

The Socialist Equality Party is standing in the US presidential elections to provide a socialist alternative for the working class. For a more in-depth explanation I would encourage you to read the coverage of the conference recently held at Ann Arbor on 13-14 March entitled, "The 2004 US Election: the Case for a Socialist Alternative."

We also have provided extensive political coverage on the Balkans. The military bombardment of Yugoslavia was no more about preventing ethnic cleansing than the invasion of Iraq was about disarming the country of weapons of mass destruction. In both instances these fabrications served as a pretext for violating international law and waging a war of unprovoked aggression.

The Clinton administration's bombardment of Kosovo was the antecedent to the latest US-led military aggression against Iraq. The US exerted its influence through NATO to wage the war, bypassing the UN

Security Council. Military action was launched despite the fact that Serbia posed no threat to any member state, thereby flouting NATO's defensive jurisdiction.

The Rambouillet agreement was not aimed at mediating a peaceful settlement between the Yugoslav government and the separatists in Kosovo. Rather, it was an ultimatum to Yugoslavia to surrender its national sovereignty, as spelt out in Appendix B.

There followed a 78-day aerial bombardment of the country of 11 million people by an alliance that controls half the world's GDP and accounts for half the world's military spending.

This was justified on the grounds that it was necessary to forestall a humanitarian disaster and to protect the Kosovo Albanian population from genocide. Not only were the figures originally circulated to bolster this claim subsequently proven false, but it has also been well documented that the major exodus of Kosovo Albanians took place after NATO bombs began to fall. This act of military aggression led to the deaths of 500 military personnel and 2,000 civilians, while 6,000 were injured according to Belgrade sources.

As you suggest, the US—and all the imperialist powers for that matter—have a completely hypocritical approach towards ethnic cleansing. Under the noses of KFOR troops, some 250,000 non-Albanians, mainly Serb but also Roma, Turks, Gorani, Bosnians, Croats and Jews, have been forced to flee the province due to ethnic hatred directed towards them. This is the direct product of the alliance that was formed between the US and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), whose goal of an independent Kosovo was based upon ethnic exclusivity and driving out all non-Kosovo Albanians.

We have written extensively on the ties between the US, and to a lesser degree Germany and the UK, with the KLA. The US switched its position from defining the KLA as a terrorist organisation involved in narcotics trafficking, to hailing it as a liberation movement. This was to clear the way for its training and arming of the KLA as a US proxy force. In the 1999 conflict, the KLA served as an auxiliary on the ground to the aerial bombardment carried out by NATO.

In the aftermath of the bombings, the US ensured that the KLA remained a force in the land by installing it as a reserve army—the Kosovo Protection Force—which is funded by the United Nations Mission In Kosovo (UNMIK).

The latest wave of communal violence in the province has resulted in a level of ethnic cleansing that is on a par with anything witnessed in the Balkans since the initial break-up of the former Yugoslavia. In the capital, Pristina, the last remaining Serbs have been evacuated. Seven Serb villages were destroyed and 30 Serbian Orthodox churches were burnt-out or razed to the ground, as Serbs were forced to flee the few remaining enclaves. While their ethnic identity has not been disclosed, the violence claimed the lives of 30 people and injured around 800. Of the 4,366 or so people displaced, 300 are Kosovo Albanian, and Serbs accounted for at least 3,600 of them. This latest wave of ethnic conflict saw attacks on Islamic places of worship within Serbia proper, as mosques in Belgrade and Novi Sad were set upon by angry mobs. Such acts of bigotry are an affront to all those who defend the freedom of people to worship the

religion of their choice.

The violence in Kosovo only abated following the additional deployment of some 2,000 NATO troops, joining the 17,500 KFOR troops already stationed in the province. UN and KFOR personnel were rounded upon by those Kosovo Albanians involved in the pogrom for merely evacuating the Serbs to safety.

Even representatives among the NATO powers have been forced to concede the violence was of an orchestrated and predominantly one-sided character. Chris Patten, European Commissioner for External Affairs, visited the province following the violence. He told the European Parliament: “There is little doubt that although there may have been an initial trigger for the violence, it quickly became organised. I also have no doubt that elements within the main Albanian political parties were involved...there needs to be an investigation of the role played by the Kosovo police service (KPS) in the disturbances. There were reports that some members of the KPS did their duty well, but there have also been reports of KPS members either taking no action to prevent these attacks or worse still, participating in them.”

Patten’s assessment has been corroborated by statements from KFOR commanders in charge of the different sectors of the protectorate.

The Kosovo Albanian nationalist politicians—whether deemed extremist or moderate—have worked to prevent any meaningful return of non-Albanian refugees since 1999. They have used the issue as a bargaining counter with the NATO powers in return for granting full independence. They were slow to condemn the attacks and only did so once it looked as if the attacks on UN and KFOR personnel might cause them to fall from grace with their powerful overlords. However, the message of none-too-subtle bribery was unmistakable—more of the same is inevitable unless the Western powers accelerate the moves towards Kosovo national sovereignty. The ex-KLA commander-in-chief and leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Hacim Thaci, blamed the Serbs for provoking the trouble and was only concerned that it would hand Belgrade a propaganda coup. Ibrahim Rugova, of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and President of the Kosovo assembly, stated that the only solution was “formal recognition of the independence of Kosovo”.

In the mass media, these latest events have either been neglected or misrepresented as a spontaneous development or “inter-ethnic” clashes. The reason is not hard to fathom. They constitute a refutation of the official justification for NATO intervention and the establishment of the protectorate. Rather than preventing a humanitarian disaster, it has precipitated one and helped destabilise the entire region. This coincides with the unravelling of the lies about Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction—the official pretext for the US led invasion of that country—and the occupation forces becoming bogged down in another quagmire.

One of the most striking features of the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia was the support this criminal enterprise was given by the liberal establishment and various middle class groups on the “left” of politics. It was argued that this was a benign intervention, that the military might of the major powers could be harnessed as a force for good in the world. It was not an imperialist war, the argument went, because the Balkans was of no geo-strategic importance to the major powers. Unlike the Middle East, it possessed no oil or energy reserves.

We rejected this crude attack on a Marxist analysis of the war. The dissolution of the USSR drastically altered the post-war relations between the European powers and America. It created a vacuum that the US had to ensure none of its competitors would fill. This is being done by driving home the advantage of its military predominance and projecting it eastwards, under the auspices of NATO. This process continues today with new countries in eastern and south-eastern Europe being drawn into its sphere of influence through the extension of the military alliance. The European powers joined the military action to stake their own claim to

spoils in the new markets opening up following the collapse of the Stalinist regimes.

While Kosovo and the Balkan Peninsula do not float above a sea of oil, they occupy a critical position as a transit route for transporting the largely untapped oil resources of the Caspian Sea to the markets in the West. There are a number of transport corridors and oil pipelines that are in the process of development to serve this function. We have written on one of the largest—the AMBO pipeline—that will transport Caspian Sea oil from the Bulgarian port of Burgas to the Albanian port of Vlore. The establishment of NATO protectorates is part of the militarization of these trans-Balkan energy corridors. The US opened up its largest military base since the Vietnam War in Kosovo, Camp Bondsteel. For a more thorough analysis of the WSWS on the Balkans War, I would recommend: “After the Slaughter: Political lessons of the Balkan war” (David North, 14 June 1999) and “World Power, oil and gold: Why is NATO really at war with Yugoslavia?” (Statement of the WSWS Editorial Board, 24 May 1999).

In conclusion, the WSWS and International Committee of the Fourth International consistently oppose all forms of nationalism and religious bigotry and uphold the principles of working class internationalism. The KLA no more represents the interests of the ordinary Kosovo Albanians than the Serb nationalists represent the Serb population. If the bitter experiences of the break-up of Yugoslavia teach us one thing, it is how popular social grievances can be deflected down the dead end of nationalism. The Western powers have created a social nightmare in Kosovo for the minorities as well as for the vast majority of Kosovo Albanians. Carl Bildt, former Prime Minister and UN special envoy to Kosovo described the situation as follows: “In many respects, Kosovo looks like a Palestine in Europe. More than 70 percent of the population is below the age of 30, unemployment is above 50 percent, the economy is moribund, even immigration has become more difficult.”

According to other sources more than half the province’s two million population live below the poverty line. The present cycle of ethnic violence will only be brought to an end when the issues of poverty, unemployment, lack of housing and basic amenities are imbued with the call for social equality for all. This program had a rich tradition in the Balkans but was undermined through the betrayals of Stalinism and Titoism. I encourage you to study these historical lessons.

Fraternally,
Tony Robson



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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