

# 1917

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International"

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*Defend Yugoslavia Against NATO's Attack!*

## Balkan Quagmire

NATO's terror bombing of Yugoslavia is the largest-scale military operation in Europe since World War II. Modeled on the 1991 U.S.-led "Operation Desert Storm," NATO's attempt to batter the Serbian dominated Yugoslav republic into submission is an assertion of the Western imperialists' "right" to impose their will on any country on earth. Hundreds of Yugoslav civilians have already been killed and thousands more wounded. While Pentagon

public-relations hacks have repeatedly proclaimed their determination to protect Kosovo's persecuted Albanians, and promised that the imperialists' "smart bombs" would only be used on strictly "military targets," Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, has been devastated by NATO's "humanitarian" bombers. Bridges, factories, radio and television installations, as well as fuel depots and power-generating facilities in Serbia, have been knocked out.

With U.S. planes spearheading the aerial attack, Bill Clinton continues to deny plans for an invasion of Yugoslavia. Meanwhile preparations for a full-scale NATO ground assault go forward inexorably. If NATO attacks the Yugoslav army on the ground, the conflict could rapidly spread throughout the entire region. If enough of the invaders end up being sent home in body bags, it could ignite serious popular opposition within the imperialist heartlands.

Reprinted below are two political statements by the International Bolshevik Tendency opposing the criminal aggression against Yugoslavia. The first, dated 30 March, is supplemented by a 26 April update which explains why, after the remnants of the Kosovo Liberation Army signed on as NATO auxiliaries, Marxists no longer raise "Independence for Kosovo" as an immediate demand.

30 March—On 24 March NATO launched a massive aerial assault on dozens of targets across Yugoslavia. Socialists and class-conscious workers around the world must oppose this criminal aggression through every possible means. NATO's murderous onslaught, which comes after years of economic embargo, is intended to force Slobodan Milosevic to sign the Rambouillet "peace" accord, thereby surrendering Yugoslav sovereignty over Kosovo (an ethnically Albanian province) and permitting NATO to garrison 28,000 soldiers there.

NATO's leaders justify their bombing campaign with hypocritical cant about the Serbian "human rights" abuses of Kosovo's persecuted Albanian majority. But imperialist outrage over such abuses is always extremely selective. It was not much in evidence in East Timor during the past quarter century as the Indonesian military brutally crushed all opposition. Nor has there been an outpouring of "humanitarian" concern over the fact that in an ongoing campaign against its own persecuted minority, Turkey (a full-fledged NATO member) has destroyed some 3,000 Kurdish villages and forced hundreds of thousands of Kurds to flee their homes. In fact, Turkey and Indonesia have both received substantial military aid and economic assistance from the U.S. and its allies over the years.

### Crocodile Tears & Geo-Political Calculations

The desperate Albanians in Kosovo who welcomed the imperialist assault on the Serbs will find out soon enough that NATO is no friend of the oppressed. The "humanitarian" crocodile tears shed over the plight of the Kosovars by Clinton, Blair, Schröder et al., are solely aimed at building support for NATO's campaign and boosting their own approval ratings. Bill Clinton came very close to making this explicit in his initial address to the American people explaining the attack, when he stressed the necessity to safeguard NATO's "credibility."

While the imperialists are fundamentally indifferent to the plight of the Kosovars, they are vitally interested in quelling, or at least controlling, ethnic conflicts in the Balkans which threaten to ignite a conflagration that could spread far beyond the borders of the former Yugoslav workers' state. To exert effective control, NATO must demonstrate a "credible" capacity to punish those who defy it. It was Milosevic's refusal to do as he was told, not his abuse of the Kosovars, that led NATO to attack.

The rulers of "Fortress Europe," who profess to be so horrified by Serbian "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo, are busy getting rid of thousands of refugees from an earlier round

of communal conflict in the region and tightening restrictions on those who remain. Their concerns about halting Serb pogroms are in part motivated by a desire to avoid a new influx of refugees. The NATO powers are willing to spend billions on bombing, but plead poverty when it comes to aiding the very people whose interests they supposedly hold so dear. Marxists demand that the borders be open to all Balkan refugees: *No deportations! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!*

The U.S.-led NATO attack on Yugoslavia is an assertion of the imperialists' "right" to bomb any country whose domestic policies they do not approve of. Some more sober imperialist observers, including the certified war criminal and former U.S. secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, are uneasy about the implications of such a precedent. They worry that doing away with even a pretense of respect for national sovereignty and "international law" could, in the end, further destabilize the imperialist world order.

### Self-Determination for Kosovo! Down With the Pogromists!

Kosovo's Albanian majority, who, prior to the current wave of pogroms, constituted 90 percent of the population, have been brutally oppressed by their Serb overlords since

*continued on page 10*

#### Correction

Most of the text of the 29 July 1955 letter from James P. Cannon to Myra Tanner Weiss reprinted in 1917 No. 20 was in fact previously published in Cannon's book *The First Ten Years of American Communism*

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#### 1917

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## Balkan Quagmire...

*continued from page 2*

Milosevic revoked Kosovo's autonomous status within the Serbian Republic a decade ago. Schools, universities, libraries, and radio and television stations that provided services in Albanian were shut down and Albanians were systematically excluded from all public-sector jobs. This compelled the Kosovars to improvise their own parallel civil administration and organize rudimentary educational and healthcare services for themselves. In recent years Serbian authorities attempted to strengthen their hold on Kosovo by shipping in thousands of Serb refugees (themselves victims of earlier "ethnic cleansing" drives in Croatia and Bosnia).

Claiming to combat "terrorism," the Serbian police ruthlessly suppressed every attempt to organize peaceful protests by the Albanian population. This ultimately left the armed-struggle guerrillaism of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) as the only apparent option. The absence of any visible opposition within Serbia to Milosevic's chauvinism helped cement the grip of the KLA nationalists over the Kosovars. The KLA, for its part, would be extremely hostile to any Albanians who saw in Serbian workers a potential class ally, rather than simply a communal enemy.

We call for the defense of Yugoslavia (including Kosovo) against NATO forces, but we do not defend the "territorial integrity" of the existing Serbian state. We adamantly oppose the renewed wave of murderous "ethnic cleansing" being carried out by Milosevic against Kosovo's Albanian citizens in the wake of NATO's attack. The Kosovars have every right to forcibly resist their Serb oppressors and to determine their own future. All communities (including members of Kosovo's Serb minority) have the right to self-defense against communalist pogroms.

The Kosovo Liberation Army is made up of people who are just as committed to a program of national exclusiveness as Milosevic and his ilk. The KLA is determined to gain independence from the Serbs and only signed the Rambouillet agreement (which specifies that Kosovo remain nominally part of Serbia for three years) as a maneu-

### Kosovo Liberation Army soldiers



REUTERS

ver. They hoped that Serb intransigence would lead NATO to attack.

While we offer no political support to the bourgeois-nationalist KLA, we nonetheless side with them militarily in their struggle for freedom from their Serb oppressors. If, in the course of the present conflict, the KLA should become subordinated to, or begin to operate essentially as an auxiliary of, the NATO aggressors, our attitude would change to one of favoring the victory of the Yugoslav army over both the imperialists and their auxiliaries.

The U.S. (which is orchestrating the assault on Yugoslavia) has been reluctant to start redrawing borders in the region and has not been promoting an independent Kosovo. The German bourgeoisie appears more open to the possibility. This is not the first time that American and German policies have diverged—in 1991 Germany defied the U.S. and gave Croatia, its traditional regional client, a green light to secede from Yugoslavia.

Under the auspices of NATO, the U.S. intends to continue playing a significant role in European affairs. There are some tensions, but for the most part, the major players in the European Union (EU) are happy to have American participation in ensuring "stability" (i.e., imperialist dominance), as they expand the EU and deepen their economic penetration of Eastern Europe.

### Cracks in the Imperialist Consensus

The Greek and Italian governments have already indicated that they favor stopping the bombing and attempting to reopen negotiations with Milosevic. The U.S. administration is well aware that popular support for the campaign is shallow and could quickly evaporate if the American military begins to suffer serious casualties. This is why Clinton took the unusual step of announcing in advance that, whatever the outcome of the bombardment, NATO would not be sending ground troops into Kosovo. While such declarations are subject to change, at this point a substantial section of the American bourgeoisie has serious reservations about the wisdom of stepping into the Balkan quagmire.

This was reflected in the fact that the U.S. Senate only endorsed Clinton's decision to start bombing by a vote of 58 to 41. The liberals have signed on, but among the Republican right there is a reluctance to get involved in what they see as a European problem. There is a growing isolationist sentiment among a sector of the American bourgeoisie which occasionally finds expression in complaints about underwriting NATO's occupation of Bosnia (which is all that is preserving "peace" there). It is also reflected in opposition to funding the United Nations, the IMF and the World Bank.

The U.S. rulers are mindful of the painful lessons learned in Lebanon in 1983, and Somalia a decade later, when the world's only superpower was forced to cut and run as soon as Marines and Rangers started coming home in body bags. If NATO's punishing air attacks do not compel Milosevic to relent, the next move may be to upgrade the KLA's military capacity in an attempt to "Albanianize" the conflict. But, in the short run at least, the KLA is not likely to be a match for Milosevic's army, even after it has been "degraded" by NATO's bombardment.

The small-fry NATO gangsters (Canada, Belgium, Holland, etc.) have provided a few planes and bombs, as well as a full complement of sanctimonious prattle about the importance of preventing violence and preserving "peace." Britain's Tony Blair, who has made a more substantial con-



REUTERS

### 'Collateral damage' from NATO's bombs

tribution of lethal weaponry, has also provided plenty of pious sermonizing to justify the Labour Party's role as the chief executive of British imperialism. He is enthusiastically backed by the Tories, the Liberal Democrats and the vast majority of his own members of parliament, including many on the so-called left, like Ken Livingstone. Labour's dissidents, led by veteran peacenik Tony Benn, are complaining that the bombing commenced without the blessing of the United Nations. Meanwhile, the British press, which has been full of comparisons between Milosevic and Hitler, is openly advocating that NATO send in ground troops to fight the Serbs.

The German media is also campaigning for launching a ground offensive and is busy preparing public opinion for the inevitable casualties. Germany's ruling Social Democrat/Green coalition fulsomely backs the NATO campaign, the first operational mission for the German military since 1945. The SPD, whose leaders are openly discussing the possibility of sending soldiers to fight the Serbs, has long supported German imperial ambitions. After supporting NATO's bombing of the Bosnian Serbs in 1995, and the subsequent dispatch of German "peacekeepers" to Bosnia, the former pacifists of the Green Party have also become comfortable with their new, bellicose stance.

### Balkan Powder Keg

Many bourgeois analysts are concerned that NATO's bombing campaign, intended to stabilize the situation, may instead widen the conflict and draw in other powers in the region. A likely flash point is Macedonia, presently home to some 10,000 NATO troops who are slated to march into Kosovo when, and if, Milosevic is forced to capitulate and

sign the Rambouillet deal.

But so far Belgrade has responded to NATO's assault by redoubling its "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo, concentrating particularly on areas where the KLA is strongest. The tens of thousands of refugees from Kosovo who are pouring into Macedonia join a large Albanian population with their own grievances about their treatment at the hands of the country's Slavic majority. It is not difficult to imagine how this could produce an explosion.

Upheaval in Macedonia would have major repercussions throughout the region. The Bulgarians regard Macedonia as merely a Bulgarian dialect, and consider Macedonia a prime candidate for inclusion in "Greater Bulgaria." This would, of course, be unacceptable to Greece, Serbia, and Albania (which, if it were stronger, would like to unite the Albanians of western Macedonia, along with those of Montenegro and Kosovo into a "Greater Albania").

Several million Macedonians live in northern Greece, a regional superpower which has had strained relations with Macedonia in recent years. Greek intervention would inevitably be met by a countermove from Turkey. And, not too far in the background, is Russia, a bankrupt former "superpower" whose impotent protests NATO has simply ignored. Although hobbled, Russia remains an important factor in Europe and the world, and NATO's attack on its traditional Balkan ally has fueled the resurgence of Great Russian xenophobia.

### Nationalism & Counterrevolution

The roots of the current round of Balkan conflicts lie in the victory of capitalist counterrevolution and the destruc-



P.PARROT/SYGMA

**Albanian Kosovar refugees at the Macedonian border**

tion of the deformed Yugoslav workers' state created after World War II by Josip Broz Tito's peasant-based Stalinist partisans. In the 1950s and 60s, the Yugoslav federation enjoyed considerable economic growth, which provided the basis for rising living standards for its citizens. During this period, Tito's Yugoslav League of Communists (LCY) was largely successful in defusing the bitter national antagonisms which had bedeviled the region for centuries.

After a break with Stalin in 1948, the Titoists sought to secure their position through a combination of maneuvers with Western imperialism, experiments with market "reforms" and foreign investment, and a policy of economic decentralization that was promoted as "workers' self-management." These measures undermined the Yugoslav workers' state by increasing imperialist influence in the economy, generating a layer of wealthy entrepreneurs with connections to elements of the ruling LCY bureaucracy and encouraging centrifugal tendencies in the economy which led, in turn, to a revival of national antagonisms.

By the late 1980s the federal system and the authority of the central government had largely disintegrated. Milosevic, who was to play a key role in the destruction of the Yugoslav deformed workers' state, had originally consolidated his position at the head of the LCY bureaucracy in Serbia by fanning the flames of Serb chauvinism. His decision, in 1990, after revoking Kosovo's autonomous status, to declare a state of emergency in the province triggered a series of inter-ethnic conflicts which ripped the Yugoslav federation apart.

Croatia and Slovenia seceded in 1991 and a bloody three-cornered communal war between Serbs, Muslims and Croats erupted in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This conflict raged until 1995, when, through a combination of NATO air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs, bribes and economic

pressure, the Dayton "peace" accord was signed, and 30,000 NATO "peacekeepers" arrived to enforce it. Today Bosnia is little more than a NATO protectorate where compliant puppet regimes perch unsteadily on thousands of imperialist bayonets.

### **For a Socialist Federation of the Balkans!**

The task of ridding the region of Milosevic and the other nationalist demagogues and despots belongs to the workers and oppressed peoples of the Balkans. Political and military interventions in the region by the capitalist Great Powers have always served reactionary ends, and this one is no exception. Only a socialist federation of the Balkans, forged in struggle against the various imperialists, their allies and vassals, can provide the basis for an equitable resolution of the competing national claims and guarantee a secure future for the many peoples of the region.

If they are to avoid being led to the slaughterhouse in the future, working people in the imperialist countries must learn to oppose the criminal ventures of their "own" rulers. Class-conscious workers in Europe and North America will cheer every time Serb gunners shoot a NATO pirate out of the sky. With every act of solidarity they undertake on behalf of NATO's victims, workers in the imperialist countries strike a blow for their own liberation.

The history of national conflicts and ethnic antagonisms during the past decade demonstrates that the competing national aspirations of the peoples of the Balkans cannot be equitably resolved under capitalism. Only revolutionary internationalism provides a viable alternative to the murderous credo of national exclusiveness.

The task of forging a revolutionary leadership for the workers of the Balkans, based on the Trotskyist program of

class unity across national lines, is not an easy one—yet there is no alternative. The bitter truth is that the more remote such a prospect appears, the more bloody and barbaric the conflicts will be. The struggle for a Socialist Federation of the Balkans is not utopian—it is the only historically progressive answer to the irrationality of national exclusivity and revanchism.

**Defend Yugoslavia! Defeat NATO Aggression!  
No to “Ethnic Cleansing”—Independence for Kosovo!  
Imperialists Out of the Balkans!**

## ***KLA Becomes NATO’s Proxy***

26 April—Prior to the commencement of NATO’s attack on Yugoslavia last month, the Serbian leadership claimed that it would only take their police and military a week to ten days to mop up the Kosovo Liberation Army “terrorists,” who controlled almost half of the predominantly Albanian province. As soon as NATO’s bombs began to fall, the Serbs launched a military drive to smash KLA strongholds and depopulate their “base areas.” The result was an exodus of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians who poured across the borders into Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. NATO publicists, and the imperialist media, downplayed the Serbs’ military campaign against the KLA, and depicted the torrent of refugees as a diabolical and unforeseeable tactic devised by Milosevic to embarrass the great powers.

For their part, the Serbs suggested that Kosovo’s Albanians were fleeing NATO’s bombs and noted that some tens of thousands of Serbs had also fled the region. NATO did bomb Pristina, Kosovo’s capital, and a desire not to end up as “collateral damage” doubtless motivated some of the refugees. But the flood of ethnic Albanians was primarily the result of the Yugoslav army’s previously advertised offensive against the KLA. Similar forced population transfers were used by U.S. forces in Vietnam in the 1960s and the Salvadoran military in the 1980s in their drive against leftist insurgents.

The KLA has been regarded by the imperialists as an unsavory bunch of thugs heavily involved in the heroin trade and connected to dangerous Islamic fundamentalists. At points during the negotiations leading up to the Rambouillet “peace” settlement, the KLA assumed a non-compliant posture. This is hardly surprising, as the deal called for KLA units to be disarmed, while NATO’s army of occupation set about constructing a new, suitably tractable, political regime for the region. In the end, the KLA delegation signed the Rambouillet contract hoping that Belgrade’s refusal to cede Kosovo to NATO would lead to an imperialist assault.

Revolutionaries oppose Serbian “ethnic cleansing” and all other crimes against the Kosovo Albanians. The military struggle of the KLA against the Yugoslav army and police was a just one—and their aspiration to gain independence from their Serb oppressors was entirely supportable. The commencement of NATO’s campaign to “degrade” the Serb military did not *automatically* change this. Yet the configuration of forces made it highly likely that the ethnic Albanians’ struggle for freedom would soon be subsumed by the imperialist assault on Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav military effectively minimized casualties in their campaign against the KLA by avoiding close com-



**Kosovo Liberation Army recruitment poster**

bat and instead using tanks and artillery to first surround and then bombard villages held by the insurgents. Equipped only with light weapons, the KLA was unable to offer any effective resistance to Serb armor and was destroyed as an effective military force within a matter of weeks. As the Serb campaign against the KLA wound down, the flood of refugees abated. This was portrayed by the Western media as yet another fiendish and unpredictable trick by Milosevic. At the same time, Belgrade’s attempts to initiate diplomatic contacts with a view to ending NATO’s bombing were rebuffed.

Meanwhile the KLA remnants which regrouped in northern Albania sought a tighter relationship with NATO. In our 30 March statement (reprinted above) we anticipated such a possibility and qualified our support to the KLA accordingly:

“If, in the course of the present conflict, the KLA should become subordinated to, or begin to operate essentially as an auxiliary of, the NATO aggressors, our attitude would change to one of favoring the victory of the Yugoslav army over both the imperialists and their auxiliaries.”

It is possible to trace the course of this development through accounts published in the British press. The 12 April issue of the *Independent* reported:

“OSCE [Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe] officials believe that the KLA has changed its tactics: instead of trying to defend villages from the Serbs it is concentrating on hit-and-run guerrilla attacks against the Yugoslav army, while attempting to protect the huge numbers of displaced Albanians trapped in the hills. Al-



REUTERS

### Serb tanks on patrol in Pristina

though the West denies that it is arming the KLA, the rebel army acts as Nato's eyes and ears in Kosovo."

On the same day, another London paper, the *Daily Telegraph*, reported:

"America has started secret negotiations with the Kosovo Liberation Army about supplying it with specialist weapons to attack Serb ground forces in Kosovo that continue to evade Nato's air campaign. Frustrated at the lack of progress against Serbian tanks, artillery and armoured vehicles, Washington has started sounding out other trusted Nato partners about arming the KLA with wire-guided missiles. It comes after desperate pleas for help from the KLA by satellite phone to American military advisers. There has been a clear softening of stance by the State Department, which last year was willing to accept descriptions of the KLA as terrorist criminals but now appears to view it as an organisation it can do business with....The equipment being considered for shipment to Kosovo includes wire-guided anti-tank missiles, medium mortars and other weapons useful against armor."

A few days later, on 18 April, the *Sunday Telegraph* reported:

"Nato is now quietly drafting the KLA into its war against Slobodan Milosevic. It is even considering plans to train them and ease the arms embargo on Yugoslavia to supply them with weapons such as mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. From their remaining enclaves within Kosovo and reconnaissance missions staged from Albania, the rebels already use satellite and cellular telephones to provide Nato with details on Serbian targets."

On 22 April, Robert Fisk, one of Britain's better informed print journalists, wrote an article in the *Independent* under the headline: "Nato resorts to war by proxy." The KLA is today exactly that: a proxy for NATO. This relationship is a product of the crushing military setbacks suffered by the KLA on the one hand, and the failure of NATO's air strikes to deliver a quick and painless victory on the other.

Military defense of Yugoslavia against imperialist attack does not negate the right of Kosovo's Albanians to resist Serb oppression, nor, on the level of principle, their right to separate from Serbia. The Kosovo Albanians are entitled to determine their own future, like every other people. But the right to self-determination cannot be exercised through NATO occupation. In subordinating itself to NATO, the KLA, which currently constitutes the only visible leadership of Kosovo's Albanian population, has been essentially transformed into an instrument of imperialist policy. The KLA still talks about achieving "independence," but it is in fact supporting NATO's drive to turn Kosovo into an imperialist protectorate on the Bosnian model.

We stand in the tradition of Vladimir Lenin who, in the midst of World I, asserted that: "To be in favour of an all-European war merely for the sake of restoring Poland is to be a nationalist of the worst sort..." ("The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up"). Lenin observed that Marxists do not regard the right of self-determination as a categorical imperative:

"The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a *small part* of the general-democratic (now: general-socialist) *world* movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected. It is possible that the republican movement in one country may be merely an instrument of the clerical or financial-monarchist intrigues of other countries; if so, we must *not* support this particular, concrete movement...."

—*Ibid.*

The KLA can no longer be considered as any kind of national liberation movement—it is today simply a cat's paw of imperialism. We have therefore dropped the call for "Independence for Kosovo" as an immediate, agitational, demand because in the present context it can only serve as a cover for the schemes of the imperialists. ■