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KOSOVA WAR

a historic turning-point

A letter
from
Serbia
by Radeslav
Pavlovic

THE defeat of Serbia by massive NATO air attacks has many immediate consequences, but one thing stands out: The relationship between Serbs and Albanians in Kosova will never again follow the pattern which has persisted for most of this century.

1912 at the beginning of the century, and 1999 at its end, mark out an epoch which has vanished for ever and whose difficult history was written in blood.

We simply do not know how the situation will develop either in Kosova or in Serbia. We have not yet even cleared out of the way the initial debris of this vast human earthquake. We do not know whether the Kosovan Serbs (or indeed all the Kosovan Albanians) will be able or willing to return home. We do not know what further shocks - and they are inevitable - will hit Serbia. We do not know whether the Albanian people of Kosova will enjoy the real independence they so dearly wanted and so dearly paid for. The only thing we know for sure is that the Kosovan Albanians will never again be under the heel of Serbia.

There has been a very obvious fault-line in the military field, but there is a deeper, more durable and more impor-



tant fault-line in political, social and moral life. War is the continuation of politics by other means, and the verdict of war is a verdict on a particular type of politics. Weapons have the final say, and wars provide an obvious fault-line, but underlying that are economics, society, history and politics, not to mention "mentalities" such as Serb prejudice, the distorted reflections of reality which nonetheless can become active and even bloody agencies.

Borne aloft by the white wings of the angels in medieval Serb monasteries, fed by misty and visionary metaphysics in the cloudy realms of national mythology, ten years later the "celes-

"The next Balkan war, if there is one, will be a civil war in Serbia itself. Some predicted it years ago, but now it is a living, tangible reality felt by the whole of Serb society from top to bottom, left to right."

tial people" have fallen to earth, realising that there is nothing in the fridge and no chance of a visa out. The angel has been slain by Arkan's knife: the face of the angel and the heart of an assassin.

It is a terrible shock. "Kosova is finished!". Should people be happy or sad? At all events it is a profound relief. No more Albanians. (People thought they were good for cutting firewood and baking good bread and delicious pastries). No more lucrative postings for Belgrade officials. No more booty for Serb policemen ransacking Albanian shops in Kosova. No more Deutsche Marks hidden in the long

Albanian Kosovars march in London in October 1998, calling for independence for Kosova. Whereas the Rambouillet agreement conceded a referendum after three years on independence, the present "settlement" does not even allow for that.

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Political struggle at the heart

THE fight for the freedom of Kosova is not over. One of the ways to assist this fight is to openly support and aid those in the Kosova Liberation Army who oppose its disarmament and disbanding - those who refuse to become NATO's slaves.

As a UN protectorate, Kosova remains a part of the Republic of Yugoslavia ruled from Serbia. It is occupied by NATO troops and virtually partitioned. It's the same old story of divide-and-rule that we have seen in

Palestine, Ireland, Kashmir, Kurdistan and Bosnia.

When the deal between NATO, Russia and the Milosevic-Seselj regime was ready, Thaci, the leader of the Kosovan provisional government, was notified, and accepted, that the occupation of Kosova by NATO made another armed force, the Kosova Liberation Army, superfluous.

But the KLA is not a homogeneous organisation. Every decision and every step it has taken has involved internal

conflict. Adem Demaci, leader of the socialist wing was defeated, but there is a large section of workers.

In the period of armed struggle against the fascist bands and the Serbian army it was necessary for us to give unconditional support to the KLA for a united and disciplined fight. We called on workers everywhere to give such support, whilst maintaining our own independent line.

Now Thaci and his group have become Clinton and Blair's representa-

tives, for which no doubt they will be adequately rewarded. But the struggle remains in front.

The true nature of the NATO bombing raids can now be seen by all. Fundamentally there was, and is, only one conflict. NATO, Russia's rulers, and Milosevic on one side - and the democratic aspirations of the peoples of the Balkans on the other.

The main purpose of NATO's cyni-

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WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

THE KOSOVA WAR . . .

skirts of terrorised women. No more cars being driven back to Serbia with the number plates mysteriously missing. No more men being separated from their families to be dragged off to the collective slaughterhouse. No more Serb rule in Kosova. No more Apartheid. At last the Serbs have lost this ball and chain on their legs.

This is the end, not just of a page of history, but an entire volume. What follows will be a different book altogether.

It would be simplistic to reduce this historic turn just to the effects of the American bombs. The Albanian people have not got what they wanted. That is still far off, as they will quickly realise. But they are no longer lying down. Terribly hurt, they are starting to get back on their feet. What follows will be another story.

In any case the Atlantic alliance's bombs brutally interrupted and changed a long history. They suddenly accelerated it. Basically Serbia met the war without surprise. There was some muttering, but it was too late to change the given facts. Obviously everybody opposed the air attacks by those whose democratic record in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America left a lot to be desired to say the least.

That does not in any way contradict the sense of profound relief when the "technical-military accord" was signed. It was not just that there would be no more raids, no more anguish about the fate of loved ones at the front and in the rear, no more state of emergency and military rule, no more sealed coffins, no more sirens, no more hardly-visible bombers ready to hit who knows where, no more endless confirmation of the reports of pillage and massacre of the civilian Albanian population. Above all we would no longer be hostage to criminal and adventurous policies which cut off the slightest hope for the future.

This profound relief means they can never go backwards. Even if the NATO troops were to withdraw suddenly for some miraculous reason, even if the KLA remains militarily weaker than the Serb army.

It's not the Milosevic and his fascist allies of every hue do not want to, not that the Serb army has been weakened, but that every war has its driving force, and after ten years of Slobodan Milosevic in power with his four wars, each more bestial and absurd than the last, the moral driving force in Serbia is definitively broken.

"What else can he dream up to keep us in this terrible state?" people ask openly on the street. This is far from being a clear political balance-sheet, but it is a return in thought to ten years previously, a profound relief, immedi-

ately followed by other, equally profound, doubts: "Next time it will be here at home".

The next Balkan war, if there is one, will be a civil war in Serbia itself. Some predicted it years ago, but now it is a living, tangible reality felt by the whole of Serb society from top to bottom, left to right.

"Ten years is quite enough", they all say, still forgetting that most of them gave the Great Guide of the Serb Nation a more or less positive "yes" vote in 1989 when there was a mass rally of a million and a half people at Gazimestan in Kosova. The Serb president landed triumphantly in a helicopter, as if sent straight from heaven, and started threatening all of Yugoslavia: "either you do as we Serbs (the strongest and most numerous) say, or you will not exist".

Yugoslavia did in fact cease to exist shortly afterwards, and how! Now one of the last scraps, Kosova, has been detached. Even the Serb-Montenegrin federation only exists on paper.

The Serb president has at various times been supported by other political forces which are far from negligible: the presidents of other Yugoslav republics, the great powers and the Serbian opposition. But inevitably and unanimously the hefty bill for ten years of barbarism is handed to him alone. The anger of the Serbs is directed neither at the Albanians nor at NATO, which, at the end of the day, only did what it had said it would do, but at Milosevic, who tricked and manipulated them. Where there is pillage and attacks on civilians because you cannot lay hands on the fighters, where homes are burnt out and identity papers torn up, there is no place for a sacred national cause. And Serbia has found this to be the case for sure in the last two months.

"Who is to blame", the local reporter for Radio Free Europe asked an angry mother in Krusevac the day after the mass meetings of relatives of soldiers stationed in Kosova who had not heard any news of them since the start of the war.

"Him", she replied. "Him who?", the amateur journalist persisted (he was jailed for three days the next day and for all we know he is still in prison).

"Don't you see? HIM, Slobodan Milosevic!"

This mother with her thick peasant accent, who probably voted for Milosevic in the last elections, spoke from the heart of Serbia. She was heard all over the country, since we all spent two months hanging on to every word from this station in Prague which from midnight till five every morning broadcast a flood of reliable information from every side, including NATO and the



Kosovar Albanian refugees wind through the Albanian mountains en route to the border with Kosova. "The only thing we know for sure is that the Kosovar Albanians will never again be under the heel of Serbia"

"We do not know what further shocks - and they are inevitable - will hit Serbia. We do not know whether the Albanian people of Kosova will enjoy the real independence they so dearly wanted and so dearly paid for. The only thing we know for sure is that the Kosovan Albanians will never again be under the heel of Serbia."

Albanian camps on the frontier.

Next day a big shot from Nis turned up specially in Krusevac to calm the more rebellious spirits down and to sweet-talk a thousand deserters into returning to the "front" He was met by five thousand people. "They nearly lynched him", the mother said, "and today I'm sorry we didn't". The general started soft-spoken, there was pandemonium. He threatened them with courts-martial, and it got worse. In the end he ran off, saying:

"Well if you want to go back to Kosova, you can, and if you don't, just stay at home."

That woman's crystal-clear voice (she just had the one son) like many other expresses an unshakeable determination which has gone beyond fear, a different Serbia which is arising, different from the petit-bourgeois opposition politicians who have started to stir a little after a long deathly silence and far more dangerous. These farmers own their own homes and land and equipment. They spent a fortune on the party they put on when their sons were called up. This is an old tradition which has become somewhat surreal in a country on the edge of famine that has been waging wars that were lost before they started. The usual entertainment is seven sheep and seven pigs roast on the spit for five hundred guests. This woman had nothing left, and she has nothing at all if her son came back from Kosova in a galvanised iron coffin. She was staring into the abyss. And it was highly symbolic: for three or four decisive days the whole of Serbia was staring into the same terrifying abyss.

Slobodan Milosevic and his wife have become the most isolated and hated couple, not only abroad but in Serbia itself. An empty void is forming around them. Some of their closest supporters are starting to edge away, because their previously lucrative friendship is becoming a dangerous association.

But just because they are isolated that does not make them impotent, a defenceless couple ready to give up. Far from it. If Milosevic did not resign in the winter of 1996-1997 when 400,000 demonstrators execrated his name every night, he never will. You can trust his perfidy, cunning and boundless cyni-

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Bosnia Solidarity Campaign banner calling for justice over the massacre at Srebrenica in the Bosnian war. It was carried on a London march in solidarity with the people of Kosova. The march took place in October 1998.



a historic turning-point

“The need to set up a third political bloc, truly democratic, anti-nationalist and social, with the active support of workers and with no fear of the working class has long since been on the agenda in Serb political life. However, the forces are still weak, petit-bourgeois democrats are more numerous and more influential, there are more leaders than party members, so nothing is certain.”

cism to mark his inevitable downfall with a blood-letting worthy of Nero.

If he can no longer prolong his hold on power, he is still strong enough to set the city on fire or open the dikes and let in the floodwaters. He can survive the first attempts to unseat him by using the military police in war and the police, the special units and the remote-controlled paramilitary gangs in peacetime. The political assassination of the editor and director of an opposition newspaper, Slavko Curuvija, by contract killers at the start of the war was a clear warning to the democratic opposition. There

“And so Serb Stalinism has written a new, surreal and yet truthful page: threats against the fifteen fascist ministers who wanted to leave and break the alliance with ‘The Yugoslav Left’ (the third party in government, led by Milosevic’s wife). The Serb bureaucracy was reduced politically to the smallest share. Yesterday it asked Seselj to share power voluntarily, today it demands it by force. You do not just join and leave the Milosevic family when you feel like it!”

was neither the time nor the desire to indulge in show trials, nor even to use the methods of Pinochet, filling up football stadiums. They were going to proceed “Venezuelan” style, where the victim is simply swallowed by the night. There are crowds of criminals and killers for hire, and prices have fallen to 100 or 200 Deutsche marks a head. Watch yourselves!

The warning had its effect during the war. Several editors and journalists under threat went to Montenegro or abroad. For three or four weeks nobody dared to say a word.

But now the mutterings in the masses are gradually restoring their courage. Voices are raised. One of the first was Vuk Obradovic, leader of the Social Democratic party, who they say is backed by some bankers. This party is small and has not yet been used up. He called on Milosevic to resign right in the middle of the war. This former officer of the Federal Army kept on good terms with the army and pointed the finger at the President. It was risky, but only a few weeks later it started to bring political dividends. He has become a front-rank oppositionist. Several of them are cooking up an opposition democratic front, Djindjic, Djukanovic (Montenegro), Panic (former federal prime-minister), Obradovic, Vesna Pesic. Will they get anywhere, bearing in mind their political inconsistency and the fact that they have to a certain extent been used up.

None of this really fills workers with any enthusiasm, but quite a few of them say that what is important is getting rid of Milosevic, and after that we will see how it goes with this lot.

Basically their programme amounts to opening the doors wide to western democracy and foreign capital and getting on with privatisation as a basis for “honest” capitalism. They promise freedom of the press and free trade unions. They urgently demand fresh elections.

If there are early elections, their chances look pretty good. As long as there are elections, as long as Milosevic gives in, as long as the masses take to the streets to demand elections ... This is a bourgeois bloc in a country without a bourgeoisie. Hence their organic weakness, their need to translate what the governments of the western powers want into the Serb language, very flexibly, as you can imagine.

The need to set up a third political bloc, truly democratic, anti-nationalist and social, with the active support of workers and with no fear of the working class has long since been on the agenda in Serb political life. However, the forces are still weak, petit-bourgeois democrats are more numerous and more influential, there are more leaders than party members, so nothing is certain.

In this situation, the air war from abroad becomes internal political war, a



A Macedonian soldier leads Kosovar refugees into Macedonia. They had spent a freezing night in a forest on the border. Only pressure from UN refugee officials enabled them to enter

war of nerves in a minefield where the slightest movement counts. The democrats or pseudo-democrats still have to face the bureaucratic apparatus which will defend itself tooth and nail even without Milosevic. Then there are Seselj and the various fascists scattered about the place. After their expeditions to Croatia, Bosnia and Kosova they are eking out their war booty, regaling themselves with made-up tales of heroism (they practically never fought except against unarmed civilians) and whetting their knives. If there are fresh elections, Seselj will lose as many votes as Milosevic, if not more. His confused electorate, which hoped for radical changes, is already scattered, but his nucleus of faithful supporters will rally all the more firmly around him. Milosevic will not let him leave the government because he does not want to bear responsibility for the defeat on his own. He needs Seselj more than ever to keep his majority in parliament and avoid new elections. Seselj would like to leave the sinking ship, but he is nothing without Milosevic and the state apparatus, and the surrounding sea is getting rough. When the radical ministers resigned because they had votes against Milosevic signing the agreement and “capitulating” to NATO, the President of the Republic (Milan Milutinovic) called them to order, saying the state of emergency which was still in force imposed the “obligation to work” on the farmer, the teacher and ... the minister!

Perhaps Seselj had his arm twisted in the wings. Everybody knows who is in command and what his state of mind is. And so Serb Stalinism has written a new, surreal and yet truthful page:

threats against the fifteen fascist ministers who wanted to leave and break the alliance with “The Yugoslav Left” (the third party in government, led by Milosevic’s wife). The Serb bureaucracy was reduced politically to the smallest share. Yesterday it asked Seselj to share power voluntarily, today it demands it by force. You do not just join and leave the Milosevic family when you feel like it!

If Seselj himself has gone downhill after this war, you should not forget that massive poverty is the social dunghill on which Serb fascism grows. There are more unemployed than there are workers, and a million of them have been “technically” unemployed for years (in the metallurgical industries), staying at home and receiving a pittance. Since the bombing at least two or three hundred thousand workers are unemployed because their factories have gone. The government proposes to send them out into the countryside, more to keep them under control than to make them work. It is Pol Pot without the Maoist ideology. Towns are getting dangerous for the authorities.

This was proved during the war. The towns in the south provided most of those conscripted to serve in Kosova and suffered serious damage. Cacak, Uzice, Kraljevo, Krusevac, Nis, Leskovac and Aleksinac were on the point of open revolt. In many cases their mayors belong to the opposition, and they were the scene of courageous initiatives like the civic parliament in Cacek. The military police have a warrant out for the mayor there because he publicly denounced local army officers who moved a military factory into a civilian area. NATO bombed both.

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KOSOVA WAR: a historic turning-point

“Serb fascism is much better organised and armed than its friends in western Europe. It is going downhill, but will still be able to find thousands of volunteers among the Serbs of Krajina, Bosnia and Kosova. They will loudly call for revenge for Serbia, but before trying to take their revenge on the well-armed HVO or the KLA, they will practise on the democratic and working-class movement of Serbia, who themselves are disarmed.”

Made up of local non-party democrats and independent trade-unionists, this parliament publicly called on NATO to stop bombing and on Milosevic to stop ethnic cleansing. The municipal council in Subotica, led by the Hungarian mayor Joseph Kasa (it is a multi-ethnic city in the far north, near Hungary) passed a similar resolution. Three times in three days the Cacek parliament was banned from holding a public meeting . . . by the oral command of the interior minister. Heavy and punitive fines were inflicted by drumhead methods and then there were arrests. The state of emergency opens the door wide to official abuse of power.

It really does seem that popular and democratic forces have the initiative and that the authorities are on the defensive. It can come down hard on these local initiatives, but not in the way it would like. They run the risk of starting an avalanche.

In this daily war of nerves immedi-

ately before and after the accords were signed, nothing is certain. There is political initiative on one side and armed defence on the other. Milosevic is locked up in his fortress, but he does not dream of giving himself up. The popular, and mostly working-class, opposition, has the overwhelming advantage in numbers, but lacks both a political programme and arms. A meeting of three hundred democrats can easily be broken up by three armed fascists. Some years ago at Pancevo a democratic meeting was suddenly disrupted by an unarmed ultra nationalist who had the courage to confront the hostile crowd. They shouted “democracy” at him and he replied “show your democracy up your arse” and calmly walked off.

Such little tests reveal the real relationship of forces in the class struggle. Democratic pacifists imagine they can gain democracy through a ballot box guarded by armed fascists.

Nothing is settled in advance, however. Serb fascism is much better organised and armed than its friends in western Europe. It is going downhill, but will still be able to find thousands of volunteers among the Serbs of Krajina, Bosnia and Kosova. They will loudly call for revenge for Serbia, but before trying to take their revenge on the well-armed HVO or the KLA, they will practise on the democratic and working-class movement of Serbia, who themselves are disarmed. On the eve of such conflicts, tactical questions are a matter of life and death. The nascent working-class movement, particularly its gathering in an independent trade-union, lacks an independent party. During the war “Nezavisnost” was quite confused and divided. It will have to make up for several wasted years in a few months, a difficult but not impossible task. On our own we cannot do it. With international help from the workers’ movement, perhaps. With a bit of guts and intelligence, certainly.

Today, the decisive front in this war is where you would least expect it: on the shattered bridges between the different peoples of the former Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav war started at the top and quite often from abroad, i.e. from Belgrade. Serbia was and remains the keystone in the whole vault of Balkan politics. Having supported Milosevic for years, the great powers have today put a price on his head, but they have not the slightest intention of rebuilding the bridges. Imperialist contempt and self-interest call us barbaric peoples who have been tearing each other apart for centuries, incapable of living together without their military presence and without their leadership in the social reconstruction of these countries. They have imposed a peace which is a continuation of a concealed war. They promise credits which are slow to come and when they do arrive they are immediately ravaged by the local political Mafia which is devoted to them body, soul and political ideology. The social



KLA soldiers hand in weapons - it is by no means certain that all are doing so.

democrats are with them. Their programme calls for collaboration between capital and labour, but in practice they are always on the side of capital. In the current capitalist ideology which NATO exports under armed protection, peace and progress are summarily identified with western democracy - bourgeois parliamentarism reduced to the rule of cronies. The flaws in this system, well-known in western Europe, become real caricatures in Eastern Europe, where there is no native bourgeoisie or democratic tradition, nor an organised workers’ movement. Here democracy is a parliament of monkeys watched over vigilantly by Mafia interests.

Under the aegis of the UN the great imperialist powers have in fact created protectorates under their military, police and financial control. They manage the division and paralysis of Bosnia as sovereign masters, with no term set on their lease.

They will do the same in Kosova. The Albanians and Serbs will be disarmed and kept apart in permanent hostility. Despite the solemn declarations

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ry and openly rapacious part of world capital, the Mafia, and also against the colonial situation which exists under the imperialist protectorate.

As Rade Pavlovic’s article in this issue explains, the regroupment of the Serbian people is under way. Neither the Albanian Kosovars or the Serbian workers and socialists can find a solution alone.

A condition of any progress for both is a fight against the NATO protectorate and a fight against the Milosevic-Seselj Serbian regime. The heart of this fight

to the contrary by the UN, their respective quarters, towns and territories will in practice be divided. Both sides will be given over to their respective nationalists. Initiatives to create bridges of confidence between the different peoples in a democratic spirit but respecting national liberty and independence will be opposed. Necessarily such initiatives will follow the path trodden by the first Balkan socialists before 1914, but they will be opposed as an attempt to bring back Bolshevism. Kosova will no longer be Serbian, but that does not mean that the Albanians will have their independence.

The local Mafias and the political Mafias who are the best organised will profit from foreign credits and political and social chaos at home to become the best interpreters of what democratic imperialism wants.

Serbia is the keystone in the vault of the Balkan complex. If Milosevic falls, the Serb people can recover from the shock. Or rather, if the Serb people takes to the streets, Milosevic will fall. That does not mean that workers will have won. Any victory they might win would be stolen from them by those who tried to be Milosevic’s hangers-on (Djindjic, Panic, Draskovic, Djukanovic), but who today have found it prudent to seek support from western governments.

They say that having given the Serb people bombs, the west will give them financial credits and then democracy. In the small print it will point out that the privatisation of the major means of production and communication will be obligatory so that real democracy will be able to function. The unemployed will be left at the mercy of social security departments of town halls which do not even have the money to provide drinking water or clean the streets.

If hopes of democratic change and social amelioration are disappointed, if political paralysis sets in - and this is quite likely as coalitions will be very temporary, unstable and short of a majority - fascism could be presented with new opportunities. It will propose a dictatorship to combat chaos, just as it will propose war as a way of combating social and economic decadence.

Before arriving back in power - provided that it ever leaves it, which is not certain - it will have to re-temper its tool. It will have to prevent a new rise in the workers’ movement, by its very nature democratic, through the physical elimination of its democratic and trade-union activists.

It will be necessary in practice to conquer and hold political power simply to guarantee the basic minimum of democracy needed to defend the right to live.

Whether the working class, after the bitter experience of “self-management”, will dare to think and act in the direction of the conquest of power on its own account, remains to be seen in the conflict of living social forces.

25 June 1999

Political struggle at the heart

Continued from Page 1

cal fraud, its so-called “humanitarian” campaign was, and is, to defeat the Kosova freedom movement.

The people returned to bury the charred and mutilated bodies of their loved ones, killed by the Serb fascist bands in retaliation for the NATO bombing. Whereas billions of dollars were expended on the bombing raids, there is now a dangerous lack of money for the necessities of life for the thousands of homeless, wounded and bereaved people.

While thousands are in need of med-

ical treatment, Medics Sans Frontiers and other organisations must destroy out-dated and unsuitable medicines dumped on them by the super-rich international pharmaceutical industry.

No wonder the grief-stricken people carry out acts of vengeance. There is no guarantee for the safe return of the millions of refugees, and the safety of innocent Serbian workers and romanians, unless the Kosovars themselves have control over the reconstruction of life in every aspect - economic, social and political - against the most predato-

is now the political struggle.

A key element in this task is the international working class through its trade unions and organisations like Workers Aid for Kosova.

It is not simply sympathy and solidarity that is needed, but the reconstruction by the working class of its own international socialist party to take forward the fight against imperialism.

That is the aim and purpose of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International.