

Yugoslavia: Whose bloody war?

Andrew Flood

1993

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| NEW GERMANY | 3 |
| MASS RAPES | 4 |
| NEW WORLD ORDER | 5 |
| PEACE | 5 |

The war in what was Yugoslavia continues to drag on, with an ever increasing toll of people terrorized from their homes, killed or imprisoned. Most ordinary people are disgusted at the failure of the EC to do anything about it. Yet is EC or UN involvement any sort of answer or would it just make the situation worse.

The breakup of Yugoslavia has been attributed to many sources from the absurd to the racist (Slavs can't deal with democracy). In fact the drive for independence and Serbia's reaction against it were fuelled by a number of concrete factors. Croatia with a relatively high GNP in Yugoslavia, wanted independence so it would not have to subsidise its poorer neighbour, Serbia. Naturally Serbia was opposed to Croatian independence for the same reasons and so there was an economic basis for the ethnic tensions that arose. The leaders of the Communist Party exploited these ethnic tension to serve their own ends when the Leninist economy started to collapse in the late '80's.

One noticeable feature of the various republics is how they are all dominated politically by those who once ruled Yugoslavia together. Although some senior ex-communist party members are in the governments of all the eastern European countries but in Yugoslavia they are virtually unchallenged. Fuelling ethnic prejudices and finding scapegoats helped them to remain in control of Croatia and Bosnia in particular, but also played a significant part in Serbia. The roots of this strategy to retain power date back to the start of the collapse of Leninism in Yugoslavia with the strike waves of 1987-89.

We do not oppose the recognition of Croatia and the other republics. Anarchists want to get rid of all national borders but this must be because this is what is wanted by the population. It is hard to be sure that before the war most Croatians or Bosnians wanted the break up of Yugoslavia. However given the ferocity of the war it is likely that most want nothing to do with Serbia now. The divisions that now exist between the workers of the different republics will not be overcome through forced integration under Serbia. The seeds of hatred that are now being sown will be reaped as usual by the bosses, in the form of higher profits. It is opposition to these same bosses that will unite workers of all the republics.

NEW GERMANY

Even the mainstream media admits European bosses and in particular German ones played a prominent role in encouraging the break up of the federation. To German bosses, Croatia and Bosnia promise new markets and sources of cheap labour. They are also providing a useful mechanism for the German ruling class to argue for a return to a more aggressive foreign policy. Intervention in Croatia offers the promise of rehabilitating a more aggressive strain of German imperialism, which has been forced to lie dormant since the second world war. German's strongarming of the EC to recognise Croatia's independence provides an example of how dominant a united Germany is now likely to be. Until June of 1991 both Britain and the US blocked recognition of any secession from Yugoslavia.

The fact that the European bosses took sides early on is reflected in the media coverage of the war. The cause of the war is presented solely in terms of Serbian aggression against a series of otherwise peaceful republics. In fact right from the start of the conflict the Croatia was organising "ethnic cleansing" in the area it controlled, and trying to snatch control of areas it did not. The comparative success of Serbia has much to do with its control over the existing army and

munitions. There is little to suggest that if any of the other republics had similar resources that they too would not have played the same role.

The fact that part of the Croatian forces are composed of an independent militia (HOS) that has adopted the name and uniform of the World War II Nazi collaborators who committed horrific atrocities is seldom commented on. The deliberate killing by Bosnian forces of two French UN soldiers is also something many papers have not reported on. The Bosnians also had admitted shelling the UN building in Sarajevo in the hope that the Serbians would be blamed. A couple of reports of Croatian murder of Serb civilians have been carried but overall the impression created is one of poor Croatia (and now Bosnia) being ravaged by fascist/communist/non-European Serbia.

MASS RAPES

More recently horror stories have emerged of Serbian forces using rape as an instrument of terror in Bosnia. This organised and horrific use of rape as a weapon has not been seen in Europe since World War two. The Bosnian government claimed 14,000 have been raped (Guardian 11/1/93). In the West the bosses only concern is to use this as another propaganda weapon in building support for UN/EC intervention in Yugoslavia. However statements by feminist and pacifist groups based in both Zagreb and Belgrade have condemned this as such propaganda has as its aim

“not the protection of women’s rights and well-being, but the use of women for war propaganda and the intensification of ethnic and nationalist hatred. Women’s suffering is being turned into an excuse for possible escalation of military action.”

Women in Black against War, SOS Hotline (Belgrade anti-war group and victims phone helpline).

“We fear that the raped women could be used in political propaganda with the aim of spreading hatred and revenge, thus leading to further violence against women and to further victimization of survivors”.

Women from: “Independent Alliance of Women of Croatia”, “Autonomous Women’s House”, “Informative-documentary Center for Women”, “Antiwar Campaign Croatia”, “Zagreb Women’s Lobby” and “Center for the Support to Women Victims of War and Raped Women” in November 1992.

Indeed the idea of the U.S. army coming to the rescue is something of a tasteless joke given the record of this army in all the wars it has been involved in, most recently the Gulf War where a large proportion of U.S. women soldiers claimed to have been raped by other U.S. troops. The bosses in all the western countries see rape as a minor crime, the sentences their courts hand out class rape alongside shoplifting rather than more serious crimes. Over the last decade most of the western governments have been trying to roll back the limited gains won by women. Are we now to believe these governments have any interest in protecting women in any of the former Yugoslav republics.

NEW WORLD ORDER

The problem with any EC or UN intervention in the region is that it would be acting in the interests of those powers that control the UN and the EC. They would attempt to impose a solution which favoured them, not one which would bring lasting peace. The slaughter of the Gulf War, when 200,000 Iraqis were killed, should be enough of a warning of the possible consequences of UN intervention. The hypocrisy of the governments who claim they are there to keep the peace is exposed when it comes to refugees. Thousands of people from all the republics have been forced to flee their homes. Many of these are trying to leave the country yet the governments of Europe are keeping most of them out. Ireland has only taken in 200!

Calling for UN/EC intervention in the region will not bring peace one day closer. It will, however, provide the imperialist powers with support next time they want to go in somewhere else. Ever since the defeats inflicted on US imperialism in Vietnam it has been less keen to go in elsewhere. Bush referred to the successful US attack on tiny Grenada as having “kicked the Vietnam syndrome”. At the moment the west is using Somalia and Yugoslavia as corner stones of its new world order and this is being accepted by those who previously opposed US involvement in Central America.

The cold war served the west well as it enabled it to unite most of its own population against the common enemy of “communism”. It seemed unlikely that the west could use the threat of third world dictators like Saddam Hussein, or the Serbians in a similar fashion. Yet it seems to be working even better than the cold war. “Liberal imperialism” is coming back into fashion in a big way. Those who support western intervention in Somalia or Yugoslavia to-day will be unable to oppose such intervention elsewhere tomorrow. EC/UN intervention in Bosnia is every bit as much about the creation of a new world order as was the slaughter of the Gulf war.

PEACE

Peace in what was Yugoslavia can only come from one of two sources. The first is the most unwelcome in which the war is played out to its bloody end, such a peace is likely to be very short lived. The second is if the people of the republics force an end to the war. Already strong peace movements have emerged in Serbia, what is needed is a peace movement that can build strikes and mass demonstrations which either overthrow the current regimes or scare them into calling off the war.

This needs to be a movement which spreads across all the republics. It must recognise the right of any republic to secede from the federation where it has been democratically established this is what the population wish. The rights of the minorities in each republic must also be respected, and such a movement needs to physically defend any minorities that are there from “ethnic cleansing” operations.

Sizable peace movements do exist and demonstrations have occurred in Belgrade and Sarajevo, numbering tens if not hundreds of thousands. On April 6th a large anti-war demonstration was fired on in Sarajevo.

Our role in the rest of Europe should be to campaign against any imperialist intervention through the EC or UN and to demand the withdrawal of what forces have been deployed. We should also support any movement in the region which campaigns against the war and encourage

it along more militant lines. Finally and quite concretely we must fight for the doors to be opened to all refugees from any of the republics.

War is a regular and integral part of capitalism as ruling classes fight it out for access to raw materials, resources etc. There will be no lasting peace anywhere until the conditions are created for such a peace by abolishing capitalism. Otherwise we face a future full of Yugoslavias. On a world scale there have only been a handful of days “of peace” since the end of World War 11.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Andrew Flood
Yugoslavia: Whose bloody war?
1993

Retrieved on 10th October 2021 from struggle.ws
Published in *Workers Solidarity* No. 38 – Spring 1993.

theanarchistlibrary.org