

Anti-NATO forces in Serbia mark 10th year since bombing of Yugoslavia

By Heather Cottin

Belgrade, March 24 — Hundreds of representatives met in Belgrade on March 23-24 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the U.S.-led 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia and the heroic resistance of its people and military during NATO's aggressive and illegal war. Participants came from many European countries, including Bulgaria, Belgium, Russia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Britain, Spain, Portugal and Serbia, as well as Palestine, Angola, Brazil, Venezuela and the United States.

In 1999, thousands of courageous students rallied at huge rock concerts on bridges the U.S. and its NATO allies were bombing in Belgrade. Wearing shirts emblazoned with bull's-eyes, they protested the criminal NATO violation of Yugoslavia's sovereignty, proclaiming themselves "NATO targets."

The Belgrade Forum met to "remember the defense of the county" that coincided with NATO's first step of Western military expansion into the former socialist countries. The U.S.-led NATO assault killed over 2,000 civilians and bombed chemical and water treatment plants, resulting in permanent destruction of the country's ecology. The Pentagon used bombs and shells with depleted uranium in Kosovo and the rest of Serbia 10 years ago. Now cancer rates there have skyrocketed to over 300 percent above prior rates.

Speakers at the two-day conference said the U.S.-NATO war—allegedly to "liberate" Kosovo—was designed to build Camp Bondsteel, now the largest U.S. military base in southeastern Europe. The U.S.-NATO plan was to transform the Balkans into a launching pad for further military expansion into Eastern Europe and Southwest Asia, which has happened.

Ivan Dimitrov from Bulgaria, one of the speakers at the Belgrade Forum, apologized to Serbs for his nation's role as the military base from which the U.S. launched many of the aerial attacks during the 78-day war on Yugoslavia. Belgrade, he said, is unique, a city that was bombed by both the Nazis and by NATO. He continued, "The capitalist system is the focus of all the evil in the world."

In the Yugoslavia of 1989, some 20 million people of many nationalities lived in six republics. Some 70 percent of the country's productive capacity was publicly owned.

Since Yugoslavia's breakup, everything has been privatized. The factories are closing. The fancy Benetton, Gap, Ann Taylor and computer stores have few customers. Unemployment is in double digits. In Kosovo, a former province of Serbia that NATO has turned into an abject colony, unemployment is 70 percent.

Protests of NATO 'celebration' planned

Most speakers at the Belgrade Forum condemned the world capitalist press for suppressing the truth about what NATO began in Yugoslavia, but noted that this spring marked a new beginning for a worldwide fightback against NATO militarism and the putrefying capitalist system it protects.

The most pro-capitalist, rightist and subservient politicians in Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Poland, Bulgaria and other “new” NATO member-states came into office after establishing their loyalty to the West and to neoliberal policies supporting “globalization.” That is, they backed U.S. and European Union imperialist investment and control, turning their countries into Western colonies to defend their own narrow interests.

The workers in Eastern Europe, robbed of free health care, education, the guarantee of jobs and culture, face double-digit unemployment. Now the U.S. and NATO look to the working-class and former youth of Eastern Europe’s “new” NATO members for cannon fodder for its colonial adventures. These youths’ job is to kill and die for NATO in Afghanistan, while NATO military expenditures strain the budgets of these poorer member nations.

The 60th anniversary of NATO in early April has become the focus of protest all over Europe and also in Canada, beginning now. In Montreal, Rome, Brussels and Belgrade people are gathering to say no to NATO expansion, with major protests planned for April 2-4 in and around Strasbourg, France

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