



Serbia: the revolution and its enemies

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All genuine revolutionary communists around the world were inspired by the courage of the miners, of the demonstrators who stormed the parliament, the TV station and police stations in various towns and cities. It was this determination and courage? not the opposition politicians ? who secured a first important victory of the Serbian revolution.

But the revolution is far from having completed its work. The old apparatus of the Milosevic regime, thousands of managers, police chiefs, generals and state officials are still at their posts.

In many enterprises workers still face the old managers who desperately cling onto their power and plunder. Indeed ?due to the deal struck between the new president Vojislav Kostunica and Milosevic and the generals, the old regime still holds important bastions of power and privilege.

That is why workers committees in the mines and the factories are waging a determined struggle to oust these parasites, expose their corruption and take control themselves.

The London Financial Times?often an acute observer of the class struggle from the other side of the barricades? notes the spread of "Strike committees, workers' committees, lock-ins and lock-outs". On 11 October it observed that that "Yugoslavia was yesterday awash with reports of workers revolting against their Milosevic-era managers and taking over the directors' suites.?"

It further observed that: ?workers took full advantage of Yugoslavia's social ownership traditions in which, under socialism, ownership rights were shared between the state, trade unions and workers' representatives. With Milosevic's rule crumbling, the workers have taken the communist rhetoric literally and taken charge of their enterprises."

The London Guardian (October 11) also noted apprehensively that, ?company directors are being escorted from their desks by strike committees determined to build a new country from the ground up,"

Workers are 100 times right to wage this campaign and to ignore Kostunica?s complaints and calls to go back to work and leave things to him. To stop the economic sabotage planned by the remnants of the old regime and to block the arrival of new capitalist owners and managers workers must establish full, democratic workers self-management and place the liberated factories, offices and mines under armed workers guards.

What Kostunica, Zoran Djindjic and the other DOS leaders want is to steal the fruits of the revolution from those who made it, the workers and the youth. They want to erect a pro-Western capitalist state. They cannot be trusted?even with the struggle to oust Milosevic?s cronies.

Over the last decade they supported Milosevic?s wars in Bosnia, Kosovo etc. Most of them betrayed the mass mobilisations against Milosevic between 1996-8.They will betray again if they get the chance.

Today in their eagerness to demobilise the masses they are compromising with the generals of the old regime, planning

a transitional government to include not only all major bourgeois forces in Serbia: the nakedly pro-imperialist party of Djindjic, the party of the chauvinist adventurer Draskovic. But also Milosevic and his wife's SPS and JUL and the Radical Party of the sinister fascist Seselj.

Three things unite these politicians: chauvinism, pro-capitalism and an unbounded lust for power. The democratic rights, so recently won, are not safe in their hands. Everything that unites them is directed against the economic well-being and rights of ordinary people.

The apparatus of the Milosevic regime has not been smashed. The war criminals, the torturers still hold key positions. Only Milosevic and a few of his cronies have retired to their villas.

What is needed is mass action to remove each and every one of these hangmen and bring them to popular justice. As long as they control the guns and the tanks then a counterrevolution is possible.

But even if Kostunica's government succeeds in consolidating itself? thanks to economic aid from the US and West European imperialism? this will not be a victory for the working people and youth of Serbia. A new capitalist elite will set out to drive through and complete the subordination of Serbia to the multinational corporations and the dictates of the IMF. .

For this reason we have to fight this government now, while it still weak and the forces of the workers and students are still mobilised and at their strongest. That is why we must continue the revolution, why we must burst through the limits set by Kostunica, Djindjic and the West European and US governments.

Why Does Kostunica want to bring the revolution to an end?

Because this new regime plans to continue the old regime's destruction of workers' jobs, social services and democratic rights. In the short run the lifting of sanctions and the promised EU aid may well put more goods in the shops and ease the worst hardship of recent years. They are doing this to consolidate the new regime. But these 'gifts' will come at a high price. The experience of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union over the last decade shows this. In 1998, one in five people in post-communist Europe were living below the poverty line--a decade before the number was only one in fifty.

The new regime?and its EU and IMF backers? have plans to seize the factories, mines, offices.. This means handing them over to Serb businessmen?who in many cases will be merely agents for 'European' and North American multinational corporations.

They will introduce market forces (fees and charges) into schools, universities and hospitals and even privatise some. The result as elsewhere will be a staggering rise in social inequality.

This process of 'economic reform' will be presented as the necessary destruction of an old discredited bureaucratic regime. But the capitalist owners and managers who will replace the old Milosevic cronies will 'rationalise' the economy ?i.e. they will close down everything which will not make a profit for them. Large numbers will lose their jobs. Those who do not will be made to work harder, faster, more dangerously.

For all their democratic rhetoric the new regime will not grant free access to the media. The state and the private media capitalists will ensure that the voices of rank and file workers and student protesters are drowned out by those of the rich and the powerful. Nor will they solve the national antagonisms that led to war after war in the 1990s. Kostunica espouses the same reactionary programme of a Greater Serbia, though he pledges to use 'democratic means'. Djindjic has already gone further and threatened that Serbian police and troops will re-enter Kosovo before the end of the year and police the borders with Albania. With such policies new wars are inevitable.

The rule of a tiny exploiting elite requires the fomenting of national hatreds to divert the working class from fighting its real enemies. The last thing they want is for the working class and the students to participate directly in politics, to defend their own direct interests.

We must not give them any support. We must not recognise Kostunica's presidency and even less a transitional government of technocrats.

What should be the goals of an ongoing revolution?

Workers should maintain and extend the occupations of the factories, offices and mines, driving out the old managers-bureaucrats and new owners. We need to create real workers' self-management exercised by regularly elected and instantly recallable councils of representatives.

For the immediate expropriation of the entire Milosevic clan and all their corrupt cronies! Re-nationalise all the sold-off big enterprises, under workers' control!

For an emergency plan drawn up by the working class! Milosevic's corrupt regime and NATO have ruined the country. Now is the time to reorganise the economy and to rebuild the country.

For an international workers' campaign to force the NATO powers to pay full and immediate compensation to Serbia for the destruction of its bridges, factories, road and rail communications. They must be forced to hand over billions of dollars with no strings to finance the rebuilding of Serbia, Montenegro and Kosova.

Resist all restrictions on democratic rights! For full freedom of assembly, the right to demonstrate, to organise unions and to publish! Down with all state censorship! Employees of papers, state radio and TV and the mass protest movement must put all media under their protection and control!

Disarm the local police! Arm the people! For armed defence of demonstrations! Soldiers should distribute their weapons to organised self-defence units of the masses! For a workers' militia to defeat the troops loyal to Milosevic and the armed gangs of fascists and reactionaries!

Put Milosevic and all leading figures of the police and army in front of a workers' tribunal where both Serbian, and Kosovar delegates should judge them! Find all those who are guilty of instigating war crimes in Bosnia and in Kosova in the past and put them on trial!

Instead of recognising and supporting a Kostunica government, and its plans for an IMF dictatorship over the economy and a Nato-style millionaires' democracy, Serbian workers must demand immediate elections to a sovereign Constituent Assembly. These elections should be under the control of action councils elected in mass meetings! If it seems certain Kostunica simply presses on with parliamentary elections in December then workers should fight for majority which will transform the parliament itself into a sovereign constituent assembly.

This assembly should debate the fundamental questions about basis of the state itself. Which class should rule? What form of property should dominate the means of production? private or social? What form of state is needed: a parliamentary/presidential republic with bureaucratic-military police apparatus or one based on workers councils and a workers militia?

Independence for Kosovo and Montenegro or a free federation? Within such an assembly workers delegates should fight for a government that consistently interests of the proletariat and its allies not those of the capitalist class and the imperialist powers.

A revolutionary workers government would face the united hostility of the followers of Kostunica and Milosevic, the sabotage and repression of the army and police high command. But the October days which swept away Milosevic showed that the rank and file of the army, the police can be won to breaking ranks and joining the working people.

The armed forces will do so the more readily if the workers are organised in their own militia and armed. A workers government would have to complete the smashing of the state of the bureaucrats and the bourgeoisie and aid the workers and the peasants to take full and undivided power into their own hands

It would have to move forwards to socialism. Only a socialist society where the working class takes the decisions and not a privileged bureaucratic caste - as it was the case under Tito and the Stalinist countries - can ensure real democracy and a way out of the economic misery. Only a democratically planned economy can guarantee the rational allocation of the limited resource's of the country in the interests of the people. Only the extension of the socialist revolution to the whole of the Balkans and indeed eastern and western Europe can defend its gains and ensure the peaceful and fraternal living together of the people in Europe.

Ending the tragedy of national conflict

The only lasting solution for the Serbian people? and all the peoples of the Balkans? is an international solution, a solution where the Serbian workers, peasants, students unite with the workers and students of other countries in solidarity and co-operation.

All the people?s of former Yugoslavia have suffered from the fomenting of national hatreds which the corrupt bureaucrats and their successors ?the Milosevics, the Tudjmans used to grab power and keep it. No nationalities as a whole can be held guilty for this horror?not the Serbs, not the Croats, not the Bosnians, not the Kosovar Albanians.

All suffered mass ethnic cleansing and pogroms. Only if every people?and first of all the working class? settles accounts with those who have committed these atrocities in its name can peace be permanently restored to the Balkans. Those responsible must be exposed and punished if history is not to repeat itself.

But the big criminals are not only to be found in Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo and Pristina. They are to be found in Washington, London, Paris and Berlin. The self-proclaimed ?civilised? and ?democratic? western politicians actively encouraged the break up of Yugoslavia and fuelled the ethnic conflict with weapons and aid. Then they imposed savage sanctions on Serbia and bombed its cities.

Using Milosevic as their main agent they imposed the reactionary Dayton peace accords in Bosnia that fixed the borders created by mass ethnic cleansing ?of Muslims in eastern Bosnia, of Serbs in the Krajina. Now Blair, Chirac, Clinton and co pose as friends of ?democratic Serbia? and sickeningly ?welcome it back into civilised Europe?.

We say ?as we said throughout the wars?Nato and UN forces get out of Kosova, Bosnia, Macedonia! Purging the remains of the Milosevic dictatorship is the job of the workers in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosova, not that of the Western powers

In a region where national and linguistic minorities exist or recently existed in nearly all areas? the attempt to create ethnically ?pure? states could only lead to a reactionary nightmare. It is in the vital interests of Serbs?no less than all other peoples? to defend the rights of minorities. Only on this basis can the displaced Serbs from Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo return to their homes.

But this requires and equal recognition of the right to return of Bosnians, Croats and Kosovar minorities to their homes too. To overcome the divisive and reactionary menace of Greater Serbian chauvinism and its mirror images the project of creating a ?historic Croatia?, a ?Greater Albania?, by driving out minorities? it is crucial for the Serbian workers and youth movement to support the right of national self-determination for all national minorities inside Yugoslavia (Hungarians, Moslems in Sanjak etc).

Only if the Serb working people renounce the forcible retention of areas where other ethnic groups are a majority within Serbia will it be possible for majority Serb areas in other states to exercise their free choice of which state to belong to. But even more important if forcible retention is renounced most of the reasons for separation will disappear too. The basis will be laid for a lasting peace between all the different peoples and the isolation and elimination of the nationalist fireraisers.

Today?difficult as it may be ? this means the unconditional and immediate recognition of the republic of Kosova! It means an end the repression and expulsion of the Albanian minority in Serbia. On this basis it means reaching out to the Kosovar workers and with them putting an end to the ethnic cleansing of Serbs, Roma etc, from Kosova and

allowing the Serb population to return with a full guarantee of their rights.

Only the basis of this free recognition of the national rights of ALL minority peoples, can the struggle for unity begin again. This struggle must culminate not merely in a restored Yugoslavia. This state?even in its post-1945 form? always had the intrinsic problem of being a homeland only for the Slav peoples . What is needed is a socialist federation of the whole Balkans. But to achieve this first of all the workers of all nationalities must unite and restore active international brotherhood and sisterhood.

Solving the crisis of working class leadership

The fight for all these necessary solutions is only possible if the working class in Serbia takes over the leadership of the revolution and unites with the workers in other countries.

But we have to recognise that today there is a tremendous obstacle to such working class leadership in Serbia. The workers don?t have political party, a political leadership of their own which stands for their interests.

The Serbian Socialist Party was and is an instrument for exploiting the working class in the interest of a gang of bureaucratic parasites. These ?leaders of the working class? looted the country on a grand scale. They systematically poisoned the workers with national chauvinism. They allied themselves with open and disguised fascists. In a term used in Russia they constituted a ?red-brown block?.

Of course the working class has trade unions but these too failed to pursue a policy of class independence. The leaderships of the independent unions have fallen in behind Kostunica just as the ?traditional? unions slavishly backed Milosevic. This was and is a disastrous strategy. It will only help Kostunica, Draskovic, Djindjic, the managers and bureaucrats and the imperialists.

Though the independent unions were instrumental in bringing about the general strike their leaderships proved unable and unwilling to act as a political leadership? independent that is of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois pro-imperialist forces. ASNS (the independent unions tied to Djindjic's Democratic Party and DOS), as well as Nezavisnost, backed Kostunica politically: the first with open enthusiasm, the other as a ?lesser evil?.

The official trade unions leadership took an even worse position. They tried to sit out the revolution in silence. Under the pressure of the workers and many of their members who supported the strikes and demonstrations against the regime, the leaders of the Federation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia were obliged to call for "democratic procedures in order to establish the precise and complete election results", trying to hide themselves behind a wall of diplomatic phrases.

The rank and file workers, the millions in and outside these unions deserve and need a better leadership than this. Such a leadership - a revolutionary mass party of the Serbian working class - needs to be built now out of the unions and a political struggle against the backers of the old regime and the new bourgeois government inside the unions

In preparation for the upcoming parliamentary elections the independent unions and any base units of the FTUY who have kicked out the pro- Milosevic bureaucrats should urgently call workers assemblies in the factories, workers districts etc. and argue for the immediate the formation of a workers' party to field candidates as well as for a united independent trade unions federation, serving the interests of its members, not those of the state, the bosses, or the bureaucrats.

Those existing parties which claim to represent the interests of the working class (SDU etc.) should immediately break with the bourgeois parties in the DOS.

But since the tasks facing the working class today are revolutionary ones?i.e. ones that cannot be achieved without a revolution such a programme cannot triumph within the ranks of the organised working class if there is no revolutionary organisation today to fight for it.

Only a revolutionary organisation, part of an international party can assemble and train the cadres needed for revolutionary struggle. Founding it, building it is the vital first step today in Serbia.

The heroic young people and workers who mobilised to defeat Milosevic urgently need to hear the authentic, unfalsified programme of Marxism, as it developed by Lenin, Trotsky, Rakovsky in the early 20th century. They need it as the basis to develop their own weapons against rampant capitalist restoration.

This is the goal which we revolutionary Marxists of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International are fighting for. We appeal to those workers and youth who agree with either as a whole or on major aspects to contact us as soon as possible.

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