

# PROLETARIAN RESISTANCE AGAINST THE WAR



## YUGOSLAVIA 1999

INTERNATIONALIST COMMUNIST GROUP ★ CLASS WAR

Comrades,  
*The present material is no one's property, it is part of the experience accumulated by a class, which lives and struggles to abolish its own salaried condition and hence all classes and all exploitation.*  
*Use then this material, spread it, discuss it, reproduce it, translate it...*  
*We address our warmest communist salute, our unconditional support to all proletarians who struggle to affirm our worldwide and autonomous class interests, against capitalism, against its State, against the pseudo-workers' parties and trade-unions, which perpetuate its survival.*  
*Let us contribute to the organization of our class as a worldwide force for the abolition of all classes, for the destruction of the world of commodity, for communism, for the human community.*

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★ CLASS WAR'S PRESENTATION ★

WE PRESENT HERE A TEXT FROM THE INTERNATIONALIST COMMUNIST GROUP'S REVIEW in French *Communisme* n°51, May 2001 (that we quickly translated in English), devoted to the Balkan war of 1999 (that is exactly a quarter of a century ago), or more precisely to its umpteenth chapter: Kosovo and the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia, as well as the proletarian resistance to this war.

We focus here mainly on the proletariat's struggle against the dictatorship of the economy in the Balkans, and the development of the war against this struggle. The text also analyzes the ideology that is striving to camouflage the real reasons for this war in the eyes of the proletariat, and highlight some elements of the proletarian reaction to it.

Today, once again, we are facing the war and all the possible attacks of the bourgeoisie against proletariat that it brings. Although war is inherent to capital, although the real function of every single war has always been to serve capital and crush the subversive class, it seems that we are closer and closer to a generalized conflict of a global scale, a new World War whose modalities are becoming tangible.

According to our more or less weak forces, all of us express our resistance to this yet another capitalist war. All of us call for proletarian mobilization against the war on both sides, regardless of in which region of the world it is being waged. We claim one and only proletarian response to capitalist war, i.e. revolutionary defeatism consciously organized and structured to bring down our own bourgeoisie and therefore the world bourgeoisie as a whole. All of us uphold the flag of proletarian internationalism, that of proletarian revolution.

But all of us also experience the isolation, the weakness of our forces, face to face to the bourgeois propaganda, face to face to the warmongers disguised in “anarchists” or “communists”, face to face to the inactivity of the proletariat or its false consciousness expressed in its “will” either to defend the “homeland”, or to praise the return to “peace” (which is nothing else than the other face of everyday capitalist war) as the previous situation of “normal” exploitation.

While talking about internationalism, this means to grasp and to develop the international dimension of the proletariat as a class. Capital and its social relations expressing themselves in different wars are a worldwide reality. Communism as a proletarian project and a process opposed to the capital is a universal movement and internationalism is a decisive element in the practice of the proletariat.

The proletariat has no homeland. It has to stand in opposition to the nationalism of its “own” bourgeoisie, against its direct exploiters and thus develop internationalist practice. We consider that our task is to participate, encourage and develop this tendency as a united community of struggle against global capital – a community on which the international and internationalist organization of the proletariat stands.

May the elements of yesterday’s struggle, developed here, be of use to present struggles (Ukraine, Gaza...) and to the preparation of future struggles: the transformation of capitalist war and peace into world social revolution!

★ CLASS WAR – MAY 2024 ★

POST-SCRIPTUM: We would like also to insist here once again on the ICG organization itself. We consider their decades long activity and their contribution to the programmatical reappropriation by the proletarian community of struggle to be particularly important and very close to our positions. It is also important to make a point, that the historical ICG does not exist anymore. As any militant organization in the history of the movement, despite all its strengths, it was not immune to internal contradictions. Eventually, couple of years ago these contradictions led to its dissolution as an organization keeping its militant continuity. Several ex-militants (in a literal sense), forming so-called Kilombo collective, keep talking and signing their materials in ICG’s name but, in reality, have completely hijacked the programmatical content of the group in favor of vulgar, idealist and conspiracy-theory prone ideological fantasy: outrageous and obsessive reduction of capitalist social relations into various “tantric” incantations such as the denunciation of the “New World Order”, the “Great Reset”, the production of “fake money”, the “plandemics”, the “financial aristocracy”, the “plutocracy”, the “Bilderberg Club”... and finally the “super-riches”... We have to warn our comrades of this falsification.

# PROLETARIAN RESISTANCE AGAINST THE WAR

– *Yugoslavia 1999* –

ETHNIC OR RELIGIOUS RIVALRIES alone cannot explain the process that led to NATO's military intervention in the Balkans, and in particular to the latest wave of bombing raids against Yugoslavia and Kosovo. Nor is analysis of the various bourgeois contradictions sufficient to fully grasp this war dynamic. Not only we must take into account the fact that the destruction of a part of capital that can no longer be valorized is only a moment in the war, a provisional resolution of the general devalorization, but above all, war is often an effective means of subjugating proletarians to the interests of the bourgeoisie and making them to accept the perpetuation of the capitalist order.<sup>1</sup>

Every war is first and foremost a war against the proletariat. It is, in fact, the highest moment in the negation of the proletariat and its social project – communism. When proletarians are forced (willingly or unwillingly) to abandon their already miserable lives in peacetime to join an army at war, when they are forced to become direct assassins of other proletarians and cannon fodder in the service of the interests

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<sup>1</sup> Many bourgeois fractions are clearly aware of this fact, and there is no shortage of examples in history where two warring bourgeois camps agree on how to crush the proletariat. It should not be forgotten that the transformation of civil war into imperialist war is one of the capitalists' main objectives. However, as war worsens the living conditions of the proletariat, its results are not always as expected. Sometimes, the bourgeoisie achieves exactly the opposite of what it expected: revolutionary defeatism, fraternization, breakup of the fronts. In other words, war can also turn into social revolution. Governments and military staffs have long been aware of this danger, and try to weigh up the benefits and risks of each war effort.

of a bourgeois camp, they leave their class terrain, they abandon the uncompromising defense of their own interests. One of the highest degrees of bourgeois civilization is then reached: the proletarian, forgetting what he really is – an exploited! – wears a uniform, grabs a gun and goes to the front bellowing foul patriotic songs. This society, oozing misery at one pole and accumulating wealth at the other, is never as strong as when it manages to send a worker to kill his fellow human beings in the name of the fatherland, of God, of “socialism”... or, as it has been the case since the so-called Second World War, to defend democracy and human rights.

The war in Kosovo is no exception. The need to deny the proletariat and its historical project, and the imperative need to transform the social struggle that had been developing in the Balkans in recent years into an inter-imperialist war, were the central objectives of NATO’s “intervention”, regardless of the awareness of this or that particular protagonists.

The need to crush an active proletariat that did not readily accept the dictates of the economy largely explains the war in the Balkans.

## 1/ THE BALKANS: A SOCIAL POWDER KEG

Instead of getting bogged down in the narrow perceptions of journalists and other political commentators (including those of the so-called left or ultra-left) who see in this war only “personal conflicts” or denounce the “imperialism” of certain countries, let’s open up our horizon of analysis in time and space. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Balkans have been a risk zone for the bourgeoisie. Social instability is endemic, and it is regularly expressed in high levels of tension that frequently lead to major explosions. Without going back too far in time, let’s recall that in 1989, the fall of the Conducator Ceausescu in Romania followed the uprising of a significant part of the proletariat in this region. The accumulation of contradictions between the megalomaniac dreams of a bourgeoisie that wanted to create the “new man” and the appalling misery in which the real man, the proletarian, was struggling, could only put an end, after several major upheavals in the ‘70s, to 40 years of Stalinist rule. With contradictions having sharpened even further since then, as global competition has intensified, it’s hardly surprising that social confrontation in this country resumed in January 1999. Even if the situation now seems somewhat calmer, the

contradictions that triggered these events have yet to be resolved, undoubtedly presaging further social upheaval in the years to come.

Still in the Balkan peninsula, Albania is another source of concern. In unison, the “international community”, i.e. the bourgeoisie in its various guises (UN, WEU, NATO...), was appalled by the attack on the State in Albania by armed proletarians. The world bourgeoisie had to intervene promptly to compensate for the inability of its local faction to impose social order. Under the guise of humanitarian aid, “Operation Alba” was mounted with various regional troops backed by the USA, France and Great Britain, to put an end to the process of State dissolution that had begun in Albania. The disarmament of the insurgent proletarians in exchange for food and money was the first step towards the social stabilization that all bourgeois factions, despite their deadly competition with each other, desired so fervently. As well as in Romania, the situation in Albania today is far from being calm, although proletarian action and struggle now seem to have given way to capitalist law of the jungle. Investors are still not rushing to the country’s gates, and they are carefully avoiding doing business until the proletarians won’t firstly, return the weapons they had looted from the national army barracks and, secondly, will go back to work.

As for the third hotbed of tension, the former Yugoslavia, for more than ten years it constituted a pole of chronic social instability, where strikes, demonstrations, occupations, sabotage... made up the daily bread of the worker. When Tito died in 1980, the local bourgeoisie, with the help of the IMF, tried in vain to make the Yugoslav economic area more competitive. Austerity plans followed one another at an exceptional pace, provoking an ever-deeper rejection of the new conditions of exploitation by the workers. The war succeeded in putting an end to these conflicts, consummating what the division by ethnic group had begun. It drove proletarians – who were previously striking together – to hate and kill each other because they were suddenly declared “Serbs”, “Bosnians”, “Croats”, “Muslims” or “Christians”. However, it was not easy to impose this appalling slaughter, and in some places, workers continued to resist the dissolution of our class into rival bourgeois camps. Sarajevo, Vukovar and other cities were annihilated by all the armies present on the ground. The proletariat was to be crushed and disappear from the scene. The global bourgeoisie, through NATO, the WEU (Western European Union) and the UN, completed this process of dissolution of our class by intervening militarily

to define “ethnically pure” reserves where proletarians were crammed under conditions where their survival depended directly on their passivity and submission to the existing social order. The motto of the “men in blue” was food for social peace. While these proletarians had been living and struggling together in this part of the world for generations, the intervention of the “blue helmets” in the name of democracy and human rights enabled the bourgeoisie to terrorize our class, to subject it to its needs for valorization and to bring it back to work in even more appalling conditions than those that prevailed before the outbreak of war.

Ten years of social conflict were thus transformed into another ten years of bloody war.

In the end, Kosovo was only the umpteenth episode in this bloody carnage, in which the lessons learned from the Bosnian war were to be systematically applied. The expulsion of hundreds of thousands of proletarians designated as “Albanians” was to contribute to the re-drawing of the region into entities declared to be “homogenous”, comprising only “Serbs” or “Albanians”. Here, too, the proletarians were forced to abandon their common interests in order to blend into the national community and wear the uniforms of “Greater Serbia” or “Greater Albania”. With a proletariat destroyed by ten years of war, this new division should be a formality, a routine operation. And yet, while the hysteria of the Sacred Union was at its height, mutinies broke out again in the Yugoslav army. Allowing mutinies to develop would do no good, and was intimately at odds with the reason for the intervention of NATO troops in the Balkans (i.e. to impose social peace once and for all). As one of the resolutions issued by the G-8 at its Petersberg meeting on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1999, in the midst of the bombing, pointed out, NATO’s intervention was fully in line with a “comprehensive approach to economic development and stabilization of the region”.

The destabilization of the region is what NATO blamed on the Milosevic government, which found it more convenient to get rid of the overflow of mouths to feed by forcing emigration to neighboring/competitor countries. Neither the Republic of Macedonia nor Albania would ever be able to cope with such an influx of migrants, not to mention Greece, the region’s most important accumulation pole. The stability of the region was under threat, and the risk of an



exacerbation of social conflicts in the near future forced the bourgeoisie to impose its general interest: Serbia's internal problems had to be resolved in a different way to that envisaged by the Milosevic government. In fact, it was not the "ethnic cleansing" – or, more prosaically, the massacre of thousands of proletarians – that was blamed on the Belgrade government (the United States had accepted this for 10 years), but rather the additional factor of social destabilization that this "Great Serb" policy implied. This was a risk that the world bourgeoisie could not run in a social situation as degraded as that in the Balkans. Milosevic had to make way for a more conciliatory government, better able to pander to the general interests of the bourgeoisie, even if this meant not resolving the contradictions undermining Serbia, such as the bulky one million of refugees resulting from the wars lost in the former Yugoslavia, of whom the local bourgeoisie didn't know what to do. Sending them to colonize Kosovo, free of "Albanians", was Milosevic's solution to prevent the situation from blowing up in his face.

The aim of NATO's intervention was not only to get rid of Milosevic, the "destabilizer", but also to cover the region with a series of military bases to serve as footholds for future humanitarian operations in response to the social unrest that was bound to arise in the area in the years to come.

## 2/ MYTHS AND REALITIES OF THE WAR

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1999, the Secretary General of NATO, the Spanish socialist Javier Solana, officially put an end to 78 days of uninterrupted bombardment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). The politico-military objective of this air campaign could be summed up as follows: 1) to get the Yugoslav government to accept the agreements resulting from the Rambouillet Conference, 2) to limit the deployment of Yugoslav forces in the province of Kosovo and 3) "to interrupt the violent attacks perpetrated by Serbian armed forces and special forces and weaken their ability to prolong the humanitarian catastrophe".

### **The myth of the "humanitarian war"**

In mid-March 1999, the North American faction of the global bourgeoisie decided to bomb Serbia. Immediately, the media bombardment began as a prelude to the hostilities. If you follow the Anglo-Saxon media, you soon realize that the war is – as always – a gigantic

operation of intoxication, of “communication” as the disinformation experts say. More than a comedy, the Kosovo conflict looks like one of those bad Hollywood B-movies where the script and the actors are no thicker than a sheet of paper. All the tricks used are too big and predictable. By playing on the “misfortune of the Kosovar people”, the Pentagon’s scriptwriters aim to make the proletarians all over the world to accept a war that is not theirs.

It was William Cohen, US Secretary of Defense, who played the first scene in this manipulation, announcing to the American network CBS: “We’ve now seen about 100,000 military-aged men missing... They may have been murdered.” A few days later, with tempers sufficiently flared, doubt could give way to affirmation. The Secretary of State “for War Crimes” [sic!] announces with a tragic air (what a good comedian!) that “225,000 ethnic Albanian men between the ages of 14 and 59 were missing”. Every word being weighed, dissected and analyzed, “missing” is to be understood as “killed”. Raising the tension to a crescendo, other American military sources put the figure at an even more impressive “400,000 victims”. The word “genocide” appeared and became widespread. Comparisons abound, and today’s Kosovars bear a striking resemblance to yesterday’s Jews. “Serb” becomes synonymous with “Nazi”. As the Allies’ military preparations increased, so did the intoxication. The more the number of “missing”, “massacred”, “tortured” and “displaced” grew, the stronger the military presence in the region. Planes, ships, troops, tanks, helicopters... are being deployed practically at the same speed as the flood of lies spouted by the Pentagon’s communication experts. To put an end to the massacre, there is no other solution than to put down the “bloodthirsty monster Slobodan Milosevic”. “To save the Kosovars murdered on the roadsides or forcibly evicted from their homes, the United States must send their ‘boys’ to bring order, since the Europeans are incapable of stopping this genocide.” The communication experts have succeeded in “communicating”.

## **Reality**

The method may seem hackneyed, but it worked. Once again, reality escapes the terrestrial world to take up residence, like God, in the heavens. And yet, as we all know, gods only exist as myths of social cohesion.

- *About the thousands of executions*

NATO announces to anyone who will listen that more than 529 sites with thousands of victims have been “detected” by its satellites. Once the bombing has stopped and the province of Kosovo has been occupied by NATO troops, dubbed KFOR (Kosovo Force) for the occasion, the various commissions of forensic experts get to work. Just as yesterday the global bourgeoisie used the alibi of the Nazi concentration camps to justify a posteriori the annihilation of most German cities and their occupants, today the same global bourgeoisie is using “Serbian” mass graves to justify its new bombings. First observation: the 529 sites have melted like snow in the sun and now amounts to 195. Altogether, some 2,000 corpses have been listed by the International Criminal Tribunal (ICTY) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Where are the thousands of others?

One example illustrates perfectly how media intoxication was systematically carried out by NATO. The British Daily Mirror reported (and many TV channels reported the next day) the establishment of a concentration camp in the Trepca mines, where “Serbs had built Auschwitz-inspired ovens” to burn and bury thousands of bodies. According to “reliable” witnesses, a large number of trucks entered the camp on June 4<sup>th</sup> with thousands of people, never to leave again. After the visit of the ICTY investigators, assisted by a team of French speleologists, it was clear that they had found “absolutely nothing”. Yet NATO officially continues to speak of “hundreds of thousands of deaths”. A report published at the end of 1999 by the US State Department continues to refer to the symbolic figure of “10,000 deaths”.

Although real, the massacres organized by Serbian military forces have been greatly exaggerated with the obvious aim of fabricating public opinion, preparing it to accept “the humanitarian necessity of these bombardments”.

- *About forced evictions*

While it’s true that a large number of proletarians living in Kosovo had to flee repression by Serbian troops, it has to be said that the start of the bombing raids really initiated this exodus. We won’t get into a battle of numbers, but let’s just point out that while some 863,000 people were displaced at the end of the war, 90% – or 793,000 – were displaced between March 24<sup>th</sup> and June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1999, in other words

while NATO planes were bombing the region to “save the Kosovars”! It debunks the Allies’ propaganda which affirms that the bombing was intended to prevent Serbian forces from abusing Kosovo. In a document published by NATO, the commission’s rapporteurs came to the same conclusion:

“Air power did not contribute to solve the humanitarian problem in Kosovo, which was one of the main objectives stated by allied leaders at the beginning of the campaign. In fact, it is highly probable that the mass expulsions and violence suffered by the Kosovars were exacerbated by NATO’s willingness to resort exclusively to long-term air strikes.”

A month earlier, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General H. Shelton and Secretary of Defense William Cohen jointly declared before the U.S. Senate: “... we knew that the use of military force could not stop Milosevic’s attack on Kosovar civilians...” Decidedly, falsification, swindling, mystification and deception are the real stock-in-trade of all those politicians, soldiers and journalists who knew what was really at stake in this conflict and did everything in their power to sell it to us as a “humanitarian war”.

### **A “hi-tech” war**

As with the Gulf War in 1991, the military-industrial lobby used this conflict as a full-scale trade fair to showcase the very best of its factories of death.

- *The myth*

During the 78 days of bombing, the US Air Force tried to make us believe in the existence of a “clean” and therefore “hi-tech” war that targeted – with “highly technological” precision – only purely military objectives, thus sparing unfortunate civilians.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, actor William Cohen, US Secretary of Defense, became a salesman extolling the virtues of US-made weaponry. From press conference to interview, this huckster declared that NATO air strikes had succeeded in destroying more than 50% of the Yugoslav army’s artillery and a third of its armored vehicles. General Shelton then raised the stakes, claiming that the air strike had achieved “fabulous results”, destroying 120 tanks, 220 armored personnel carriers and over 450 enemy artillery pieces. For the military-

industrial sector and for the US Air Force, whose aircraft made up 80% of those involved in these operations, this was an “indisputable victory”. Before Congress, General Wesley Clark even declared that the Yugoslav army had been virtually annihilated and could no longer pose a serious threat in the region, since more than “75% of its heavy weaponry had been destroyed”.

The problem was that all those destroyed tanks, vehicles and guns had curiously disappeared from the battlefield by the time the Allies occupied Kosovo. On May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000, this tall tale blew up like an overinflated balloon. Contradictions and rivalries within NATO led to leaks that were reported in the American weekly Newsweek: the figures were wrong!

- *The truth*

According to various sources (military, CIA, civilians), the number of heavy weapons actually destroyed was ridiculously low: 14 tanks, 18 armored vehicles, 20 artillery pieces, i.e. 52 pieces of equipment, representing 6% of Serbian heavy weapons. This is a far cry from the Pentagon’s triumphant figures. As the CIA report points out: “... NATO bombing had very little effect on the potential of the Yugoslav army”, which for the American spy agency constitutes “a real military failure”! The myth of a war waged with sophisticated technological means is thus shattered. Not only were few targets hit, but many of them were nothing more than cardboard decoys offered up by the Serbian army to blind NATO aircraft.

This war confirms one thing: even if it uses sophisticated and extremely expensive weapons (such as unmanned reconnaissance aircraft and satellites capable of reading license plates), a bourgeois army cannot emerge victorious from a conflict if it does not occupy the ground. A war waged at an altitude of “5,000 meters” will never be able to crush an adversary who is content to take cover and wait out the storm. To win this war, it was imperative to deploy men on the roads, in the forests, on the hills, in the mountains, in the cities, on extremely rugged terrain conducive to ambush warfare, surprise attacks, guerrilla warfare... in short, a war that modern armies systematically avoid because, in the end, they very rarely emerge victorious. Despite the over-powerful means deployed, the danger of intervening on the spot included a factor dreaded by all bourgeois armies: getting bogged down. That’s why the Pentagon wanted to spare its troops of

any ground intervention, and promote the theory of a victorious war thanks to the almost exclusive use of the air force.

### **“5,000 meters” and the “theory of zero death”**

This war had to be fought at an altitude of “5,000 meters”, in order to be safe from Serbian anti-aircraft defenses, and then to be able to operate on the ground with virtually no casualties on the Allied side: the “theory of zero death”. But this technological demonstration of the power of the North American army only revealed its limits.

The fear of getting bogged down, the fear of facing guerrilla warfare, the dread of seeing hundreds of bodies repatriated to the United States every day, the apprehension that this war, which was supposed to be “short, humanitarian, clean and hi-tech”, would turn into a real quagmire, as was the case for the Russian army in Chechnya, determined every strategic decision, which is why there would be no ground intervention. The Balkan quagmire could bring to the surface the worst nightmare that still haunts the American bourgeoisie today: its lost war in Vietnam. This is the explanation of the circumstances and limitations under which this war was waged by the North American army. And it couldn't have been any other way, as proved by the German Wehrmacht's bogging down in this mountainous region during the Second World War.

Despite the deployment of force and technology, not to mention the tons of propaganda spouted about the effectiveness of air warfare, this conflict has once again demonstrated the limits of such a powerful army. Its inability to take responsibility for its own deaths speaks volumes about the real social cohesion that exists not only within it, but also behind it, in the United States. Regularly in this review, we talk about what the bourgeoisie systematically tries to conceal in the country of “Uncle Sam”: the appalling misery that reigns there. Accumulation of wealth goes hand in hand with extreme deprivation, the “shantytownization” of entire cities, urban violence, drugs, overcrowded prisons, workers who are on permanent anti-anxiety medication, and so on. All these factors certainly played a part in the White House's decision not to provoke ground intervention by US troops in Kosovo. As NATO spokesman Jamie Shea confirmed at one of his daily press conferences:

“The air option aims to preserve as many of the pilots’ lives as possible, as the loss or capture of any of them could have a detrimental effect on public support for the operation.”

Any ground intervention entailed the risk of American troops getting bogged down – a “new Vietnam”, as the British general commanding UN troops in Bosnia put it: “We all saw the Serbs leaving Kosovo proudly, their flags flying. We clearly hadn’t done the damage we claimed. If we led a ground campaign believing we have done the damage we claimed, I think we would have a very nasty surprise.”

Military failure, fear of getting bogged down, fear of ground intervention, the real weaknesses of the North American army despite the media hype about “technology”, contradictions of interest between imperialist powers within NATO... all these factors explain why this war was supposed to be short and fought exclusively in the air. Behind the media hype, behind the display of war techniques, one essential thing was missing to transform this conflict into a premise for widespread destruction: the massive and active participation of proletarians. Their mobilization in defense of one side under the banner of “human and citizens’ rights” or “in the name of humanitarian intervention” was not a real success. Instead, complete passivity prevailed. There was no real mobilization “to smash genocidal Serbs” or “to defend the Slav brothers”. The bourgeoisie was unable to mobilize the proletarians in one camp or the other, which was the prerequisite for transforming the conflict into generalized slaughter. As a result, the bourgeoisie felt obliged to put an end to the war and, through its intervention in Kosovo, quelled any inclination to struggle in the Balkans, in order to conceal the reactions of our class against this war.

### 3. PROLETARIAN REACTIONS TO THE WAR: MUTINIES IN THE SERBIAN ARMY

On May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1999, under heavy NATO bombardment, a war protest movement began among Serbian troops and civilians in Kruševac. Within a few days, it spread to several large towns in south-eastern Serbia, from which most of the conscripts fighting in Kosovo originated. The Belgrade government and general staff should certainly not be taken for fools. They knew full well what they were doing when they sent the 3<sup>rd</sup> Yugoslav Army to wage their dirty war in Kosovo. The troops from Vojvodina, Montenegro and other parts of the

country were not reliable for a long time. Their morale was very low. After a decade of war and insubordination, desertion was rife in all units. Even in Belgrade, the army was admitting that it was unable to mobilize the men needed to keep Kosovo within the Yugoslav Federation.

Insubordination and desertion in the capital city have been commonplace since the mid-90s. So, it's no coincidence that the war policy pursued by the Milosevic government for the past decade involved calling in large numbers of foreign mercenaries, rabid nationalist militias and even former gangsters turned "warlords" like the now-defunct Arkan and his militia, "the Tigers". With no soldiers left to fight in Kosovo, the local managers of capital were forced to draw on this Third Army to wage their war. But this policy was not without risk. In previous conflicts, mutinies had already affected troops from this region. The general staff, hamstrung by this unfortunate precedent, could do nothing else, as the other units were so gangrened by defeatism.

The repatriation of bodies of soldiers killed in action is often the signal for the outbreak of protest. In Kruševac on May 14<sup>th</sup>, seven bodies arrived from the front, whose names the military authorities refused to divulge. The conscripts' relatives quickly demonstrated in front of the town hall, demanding to know whose bodies they were. In Prokuplje, the same scenario was repeated on May 19<sup>th</sup>, when the arrival of eleven soldiers killed in Kosovo directly provoked a riot. In other towns, such as Čačak, anti-war demonstrations are a daily occurrence. The authorities' response is swift and violent because the balance of power still allows it. The ringleaders were arrested, and large numbers of security forces cordoned off the town to prevent any gatherings. In Raška and Prokuplje, a pre-emptive crackdown was launched to prevent any further protests.

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, two thousand demonstrators, many of them soldiers, demanded that the municipal and military authorities in Kruševac publish the exact number of men killed in action, together with their names. The mayor, Miloje Mihajlovic, a member of the Serbian Socialist Party (Milosevic's party), was violently jostled when he announced that he could not meet their demand. The protest then targeted the mass media, and the premises of the local television station were ransacked, despite the presence of a large police force. On the same day, a



thousand people gathered in Aleksandrovac to oppose the departure of reservists to Kosovo. The town's mayor, surrounded by his bodyguards, tried in vain to calm the situation, but failed. The angry demonstrators threw him to the ground and beat him. He was saved from being lynched by a military police unit, who hid him in a store toilet before taking him to Nis hospital in a serious health condition.

The day after these incidents, on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 5,000 demonstrators, most of them women, once again invaded the town of Kruševac. The windows of military and municipal buildings were targeted: stones, eggs and bolts shattered them. The proletarians invaded and ransacked the premises of the local television station. During the night, the first signs of our class's reaction against the war appeared among the troops at the front. More than a thousand reservists from Aleksandrovac and Kruševac deserted the Kosovo front, spreading the movement that was developing in the towns.

"We managed to get home. There were many problems along the way. They even used water hoses to prevent us from going home. They demanded that we lay down our arms. We refused to obey. It was not enough that we were killed by bombs, now they are beating our parents. I shall not go back there. This is not a war; this is frenzy in which it is both difficult to survive and to remain sane. I want to keep my senses. I don't want to kill anyone, nor do I want to be killed..." a deserter told to Alternative Information Network.

During the night, the deserters made their way to these two cities. Early in the morning, most of the reservists camped out in the surrounding villages, a stone's throw from their homes, having been prevented from going any further by the forces of repression. However, at dawn, 400 of them managed to slip through the net and enter Aleksandrovac, where they and others marched "with weapons slung over their shoulders". The region's military command intervened on television, accusing them of "undermining the morale of the troops" and "collaborating with the enemy". Proletarians don't give a damn about these old fogies who, along with the damn planes that have been bombing their wives, children and parents for days on end, are their real enemies.

The proletariat recognizes only one war: its own! The one that pits the world's proletarians against the bourgeoisie, regardless of their uniforms: Yugoslav, Croatian, American or French. How admirable is

the lack of patriotism shown by these mutineers who, weapons in hand, assert that their interests are totally opposed to those of the State! The interest of the proletariat is not to go and kill other proletarians in Kosovo, or to be shot down so that the Serbian bourgeoisie can continue to profit from this situation. Our interest is to put an end to all fratricidal wars, to all wars that pit proletarians against other proletarians, our interest is to turn our weapons against “our own” bourgeoisie, with a view to transforming this carnage into a social war against the dictatorship of capital. When these star-spangled assassins claim that these rebellious actions “undermine the morale of the troops”, they are in fact giving the real direction to stop this carnage: to generalize the mutinies to other units and at the same time prevent the possibility of open repression against the uprisings.

On Wednesday May 19<sup>th</sup>, the General-in-Chief of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Yugoslav Army came to negotiate with the mutineers camping on the outskirts of Kruševac. Nebojsa Pavkovic offers them a compromise: their absence from the front will be considered as a simple “leave of absence” for a few days, if they accept returning to the front. The deserters refused and demanded an end to the war. The very same day, the population of Kruševac prevented the departure of the buses taking the reservists to the front. Only one bus managed to leave the town under escort and reach Kosovo. But cracks appeared among the mutineers in the outskirts of the town. The next day, several hundred of them accepted the general’s offer and handed over their weapons to the military authorities. The reaction to the weakening of the movement came from another group of reservists who had also been established for over two months in the vicinity of Kruševac. A core group of more than 300 armed men infiltrated the town, expressing their refusal to be sent to Kosovo to be killed.

On Saturday May 22<sup>nd</sup>, the 300 reservists now occupying Kruševac were joined by the rest of the deserters who had fled the front on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Not only did they refuse General Pavkovic’s proposal, they also refused to be sent to the front. It was in Kruševac that opposition to the war took a new twist: on Sunday May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1999, several thousand inhabitants demanded the return of all soldiers from Kosovo. By 7 a.m., deserters were occupying the town. Over 2,000 demonstrators gathered, many wearing Yugoslav army uniforms. Among them were reservists refusing to leave for Kosovo, deserters and relatives of soldiers, as well as other proletarians. All protesting against the

continuation of the slaughter. The local authorities try to cope with this new discontent, which further cracks the sacred union, and decide to ban all gatherings from now on.

When the demonstration joins the deserters who control certain parts of the town, the men of military age are sworn not to respond to any summons. During the demonstration, slogans were chanted with determination: "Bring back our sons", "We won't go to Kosovo", "We want peace", "You won't fool us anymore". A number of officers in town try to intervene to calm the situation. A general tried to harangue the demonstrators, reminding them that "the fatherland is in danger" and that "everyone must accept their duty", everyone must accept "sending their sons to the front". He and his bodyguards are beaten to a pulp. Bloodied, he speaks again, accepting the mutineers' demand to save his own skin, while advising them to disperse and return home. The demonstrators refuse, and some of them call for daily rallies until the war is over. Other demonstrators go to the headquarters "to have an explanation" with the officers hiding there. The latter, terrified by the incidents in morning, try to receive them as cordially as possible, explaining that there was never any question of sending them back to Kosovo. Only "volunteers" will be sent. A few shots are fired and the officers are being called "liars" and "bandits".

Despite the deserters' determination, the ever-growing number of troops patrolling the city remained loyal to the government. The deserters, like the other protesting proletarians, make no serious attempt to win them over. The situation seems deadlocked. The balance of power is still unable to shift, despite the arrival of two pieces of good news: deserters announce that "special units" are blocked in the Kopaonik mountains, and another thousand deserters arrive directly from Kosovo. Kruševac became the center of the protest. Deserters, mutineers and armed proletarians instinctively sensed that a change in the balance of power at this point was the key to extending the movement. Other deserters from Aleksandrovac tried to join forces with those from Kruševac, driven by the need to unite in order to be stronger. But they are held back by troops loyal to the government. Here too, we have no information to suggest that serious attempts were made to undermine their capacity for repression and shift the balance of power in favor of the proletarian struggle. Isolated, the mutineers decided to turn back and, together with over a thousand other proletarians, organized an anti-war demonstration in Aleksandrovac.

Other demonstrations broke out at the same time in Raška, Prokuplje and Čačak, where the police reacted very brutally and beat up a large number of participants.

Simultaneously, the military command stepped up the pressure and ordered the general call-up of all reservists in the region, at the same time forbidding their relatives to accompany them to the barracks that were to serve as regrouping points. What the army particularly feared was a repetition of the acts of insubordination that were beginning to multiply in front of all the country's barracks: relatives and friends systematically accompanied reservists, and then mutinies become commonplace. Mothers chained themselves to their children, not wanting them to "die for nothing", men attacked officers and, shouting at them and insulting them, the enrolment of reservists systematically turned into a demonstration opposing their departure. These demonstrations now shake every town in the region. Some reservists are taking part with their weapons, and the general staff fears above all that the demonstrations, peaceful for the time being, will turn into violent clashes with the forces of repression.

Pressed by a perilous situation, the Belgrade government proposed an arrangement: the deserters had until May 25<sup>th</sup> to hand over their weapons to the military authorities and rejoin their units. Under these conditions, the government announced that it would "forget" their desertion, otherwise they would face court-martial and execution. At the same time, large numbers of police were massed in Kruševac. The crackdown begins, and six people are sentenced to pay between \$250 and \$750 for taking part in an illegal anti-war meeting. The police prevented any further demonstrations in Serbia's industrial south: Kruševac, Aleksandrovac, Prokuplje and Raška were sealed off. Despite this impressive deployment of police force, no reservists left for the front, and weapons were not yet returned. Proletarians not only hid the draft dodgers, but continued to prevent any reservists from leaving for Kosovo.

As NATO bombs rained down on most Yugoslav cities, the protest spread to other regions. In Podgorica (capital of Montenegro) and Kruševac, reservists who had left the front line arrived in town and, together with the parents of soldiers, demonstrated to demand "the return of their children". The army, the government and local authorities were unable to stop the spread of the refusal of war. The

bourgeoisie is reluctant to repress because it's not sure what will emerge from the confrontation. The country has been at war for over 10 years now, and the sacrifices are imposed one after the other. For over a decade now, families have been regularly told of the death of their son, husband or father, "fallen heroically on the field of honor". Even for those who believed in the nationalist mirage, the situation has become unbearable. The government opposition also feels completely overwhelmed by this movement, which is beginning to spread. Zoran Djindjic, leader of the Democratic Alliance, which groups together a large part of the government opposition, declares: "It was not the opposition that organized these demonstrations, which, by the way, have no political objectives... Today, Milosevic can only appease these people if he satisfies them. And he can only satisfy them if he stops the war, gives them back their children or finds them work. (...) In fact, it is the victims of his policies who have taken to the streets. What we've been waiting for in the last ten years."

Even if, for the time being, this governmental opposition is clearly antagonistic to the movement opposed to the continuation of the war, it is counting on the tiredness of the proletariat to get back in the saddle and present itself to them as an alternative to the current government. And Djindjic adds that he understands exactly what's at stake: "... the opposition hasn't gained in popularity yet either, but we have a better chance for the future because we didn't take part in the war."

The new generation is taking over. It is with the opposition card that the bourgeoisie hopes to crush the proletarian revolt movement.

Despite the heavy police presence that now surrounds the region, the proletarians continue to refuse to go to the front and to hand over their weapons. The general commanding the Serbian troops in Kosovo has himself travelled to try to stem the reservists' discontent. Promises have been made so that they surrender the weapons in their possession. The State cannot tolerate being deprived of its monopoly on violence. The army demanded that all those mobilized be sent to the front immediately, to which young conscripts replied: why was this mobilization sparing "the rich or certain privileged people"? In Vojvodina, the courts handed down several sentences against those who opposed the war.

The situation remains perilous for the Milosevic government. A way out of this impasse must be found quickly. On the one hand, aerial

bombardments have not succeeded in destroying the Serbian army or forcing it to leave Kosovo; on the other hand, mutinies threaten to dislocate it, raising the specter of communism in the region. A “Gulf War”-type scenario is taking shape. This situation (the explicit threat of serious social unrest) is driving the bourgeoisie to put an end to this war.

On June 7<sup>th</sup>, Yugoslav generals Marjanovic and Stefanovic secretly met British general Michael Jackson in Kumanovo, Macedonia. For weeks, through its Russian ally, the Yugoslav government had been trying to make contact with the Allies to get out of the crisis threatening to sweep it away. In two days of negotiations, a “military-technical” agreement was signed, while mutinies in the Serbian army were still not extinguished and demonstrations were taking place in many of the country’s cities. The agreement provides for the immediate withdrawal of Serbian troops from Kosovo and the occupation of the province by a KFOR contingent. Although three days were planned for the evacuation, the Serbian army abandoned the area in just one day. On June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999, NATO stopped bombing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Tensions dropped a notch. Yugoslav troops are more or less demobilized, which dislocates any prospect of continuation and/or extension of the May mutinies.

While another declared aim of NATO’s air strikes was to get rid of Slobodan Milosevic, he, just like Saddam Hussein in 1991, remained firmly in power after the war, with the more or less tacit consent of his former enemies, to suppress any attempt of the proletariat to challenge the existing social order. In NATO’s eyes, Slobodan in Belgrade and Saddam in Baghdad were preferable to a social revolution. Despite its disputes, the capitalist family remains united against any threat to its reign.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Milosevic stepped down from government in October 2000 after a tortuous electoral process and major mobilizations.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The conflict over Kosovo in the Balkans has revealed the problems the bourgeoisie currently faces in imposing its solution to the contradiction between valorization and devalorization.

Widespread war still cannot be imposed socially. This is an enormous limitation of capitalist reality today. Indeed, such a war is indispensable to the survival of capital, which, without this massive devalorization of the over-abundant means of production (over-abundant relative to the current possibilities of capital's valorization), is absolutely incapable to relaunch a new cycle of accumulation. The bourgeoisie undoubtedly has the strength today to launch local wars without, indeed, the proletariat being able to react and stop them, but these local wars are no longer enough.

The defense of "human rights", the right of "humanitarian intervention", the demonization of the enemy... are ideological realities that are totally insufficient to mobilize proletarians massively for war. The apathy with which the proletariat responds to these calls for imperialist mobilization is certainly not a revolutionary guarantee, but it does constitute an important brake, insofar as the most conscious factions of the bourgeoisie fear the consequences that this generalized war, which the social system so badly needs, could have.

The obstinacy with which the bourgeoisie seeks to prolong a local conflict internationally, and the ensuing stalemate, immediately provokes reactions within our class. Whether in Sudan, Iraq or, more recently, Yugoslavia, the prolongation of local wars undertaken in recent years under the UN flag has almost systematically forced the proletariat out of its apathy and get back onto its class path. The proletarian insurrection in Iraq was certainly the most striking example.

The specter of a revolutionary situation following the outbreak of a generalized war continues to hamper the bourgeoisie's war plans. The technological war that the public disinformation media are trying to sell us is not achieving its objectives, and although the option of a traditional war presents the risks mentioned above, it is highly likely that we will return to traditional forms of warfare, as happened in Iran/Iraq or more recently in Kashmir between India and Pakistan. But, as we have seen, the great terror of the international bourgeoisie is to get bogged down in a massive war that would resurrect the ghost

of the revolutionary proletariat, and see the current complicit leniency of its wage-slaves transformed into a new October 1917, outside and against all pacifist and social-democratic alternatives.

Without prejudging the weight of the more immediate determinations that may lead this or that association of imperialist sharks to throw themselves headlong into a war of conquest that could result in a more or less extensive generalization, we nevertheless believe that the fear of losing everything in the face of the resurgence of revolution is influencing the current and temporary bourgeois hesitations to commit themselves to a war on a larger scale, and above all one with greater social implications.

This being said, and despite all the limits we see today in the bourgeoisie's action towards generalized war, we must recognize that the proletariat is still incapable of asserting its own objectives. It would be misplaced triumphalism to claim otherwise. Despite the resistance to war which we described in this text in relation to the war in Yugoslavia, it must be admitted that the proletariat too finds itself in a difficult situation, where the absence of proletarian structures and associations, the absence of a massive working-class press, the lack of internationalism, the isolation of communist nuclei... all weigh heavily on the movements of struggle which are occasionally unleashed.

A dramatic consequence of this reality is that when the proletariat rises up against war, as in Iraq, or when it takes up arms in the face of catastrophic survival, as in Albania, it remains terribly isolated. Faced with this situation of isolation, the bourgeoisie has no difficulty in containing the social conflagration and offering insurgent proletarians one alternative or another, with the aim of getting them to leave their class terrain.


More than ever, the organization in force of the exploited, the organization of the proletariat as an international party, is indispensable to the development of a classist response to the war. The only way to prevent the militaristic spiral imposed by capital, the only way to oppose the wars the bourgeoisie is developing all over the world, is to fight and organize collectively for the definitive destruction of this disgusting society. ★





**IF YOU WON'T COME TO DEMOCRACY  
DEMOCRACY WILL COME TO YOU!**





Original title in French: Résistance prolétarienne à la guerre

Author: Internationalist Communist Group (GCI-ICG)

Publication date: May 2001


English translation: Class War

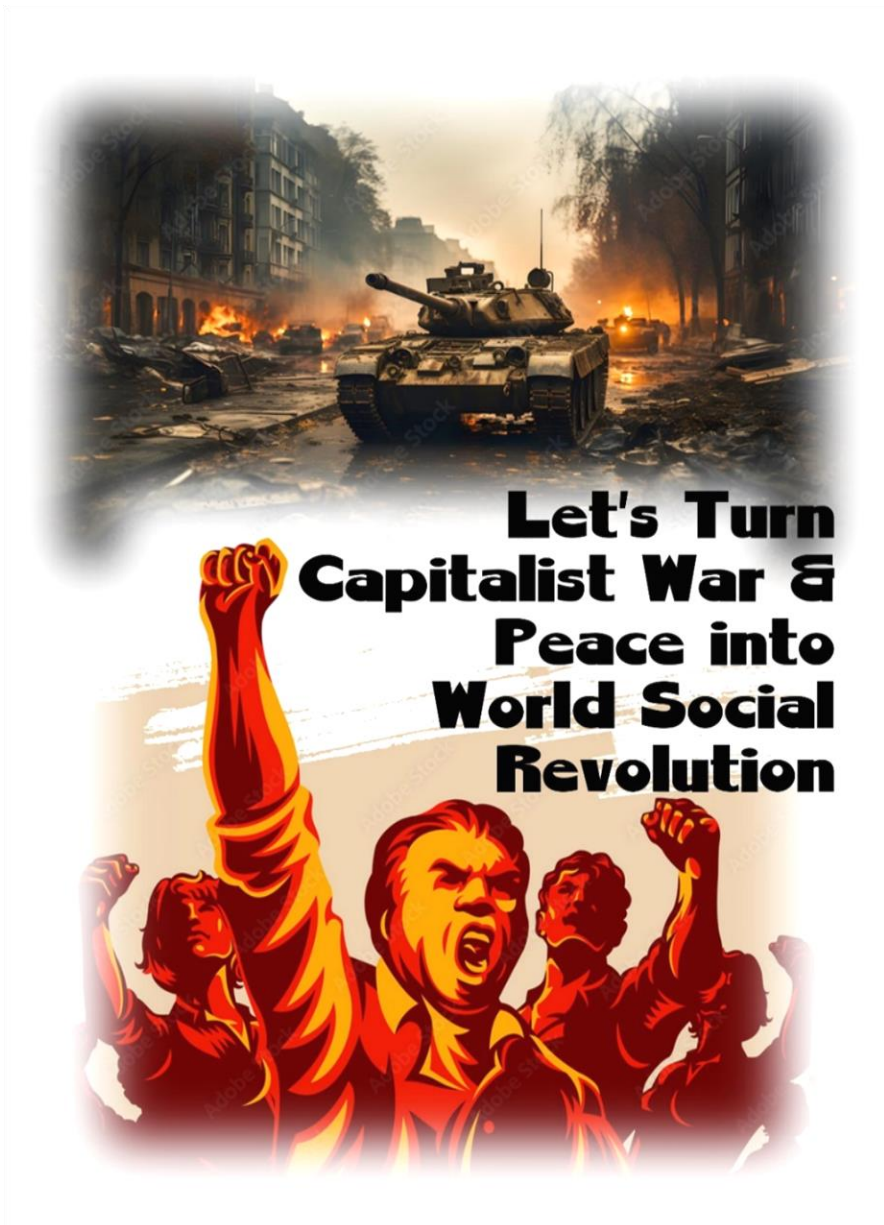
Title of the publication in English: Proletarian Resistance Against the War - Yugoslavia 1999

Editor of the present publication: Class War

Publication date: May 2024

Editor's contact: [autistici.org/tridnivalka](http://autistici.org/tridnivalka) ★ [tridnivalka@autistici.org](mailto:tridnivalka@autistici.org)





**Let's Turn  
Capitalist War &  
Peace into  
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Revolution**