

Tony Benn: "the main enemy is NATO"

WHATEVER the deficiencies of the former Yugoslavia, it was held together without bloodshed.

Then Yugoslavia tried to reform its economy. The IMF came in and demanded cuts. They squeezed the economy.

The federal government pushed the responsibility for making the cuts down onto the republics. They decided that it would be best not to be part of the Belgrade set-up.

The Germans came in and recognised Croatia. That is how it seems to have begun. A new, strong, unified Germany wants to assert its role inside Europe.

Then, of course, the war began. The policy was to establish a dominant Croatia.

The ultimate carve up of Bosnia between Croatia and Serbia is probably what stands behind the American peace plan.

President Clinton wanted to show how strong he was. But— after Vietnam— he did not want to commit any American ground troops. So he brought in the ultimate US weapon, the air strike.

The British government has given endless assurances that they had no intention of becoming participants in the war. Now we see not just an air strike but a war against the Bosnian Serbs, launched by the most powerful military machine in the world, NATO.

I must confess to you that I am not even sure about the "Sarajevo massacre".

There is a simple rule in politics - you ask who benefits from what happens. And those that benefited from the Sarajevo massacre were the Bosnian government, who got NATO help for their war against the Serbs.

It appears that the NATO airstrikes destroyed a hospital. But they said that this was not deliberate, it was an "accident of war"!

What about the Sarajevo market massacre? Perhaps that was also an "accident of war".

Now America has taken the side of NATO and the Germans have gone along with it. The Germans can not participate very easily because people remember that they were there before. But the Germans are supporting the Americans, and they are a part of it too.

Now the UN is an agent of war. It has handed over power to NATO. NATO has replaced the UN and is used to enforce Western interests on any country that is intransigent.

The propaganda in the media is unprecedented. The BBC has been a disgrace. The

silence of political leaders of all parties has been a disgrace. The impression is that everyone in Britain supported the Cruise missile attacks.

The UN should withdraw the authority it has given NATO. The arms embargo should be strictly enforced: the Americans have been arming the Croats to act as their agents against the Serbs.

Negotiations should continue without military threats.

It is a civil war — it is not as if Bosnia had existed for years and then was attacked by Serbia. It is a civil war. And in a civil war you can only provide a table.

Tony Benn MP was speaking at the "Committee for Peace in the Balkans" rally on 18th September.

An open letter to Tony Benn

"The main problem is Serb imperialism"

Dear Tony Benn,

THE PROBLEMS with the rally of the "Committee for Peace in the Balkans" on 18 September began with the title: "Stop the NATO bombing".

It's like "Oppose the Maastricht Treaty". "Oppose Maastricht" covers very different attitudes to Europe, and "Stop the NATO bombing" covers very different attitudes to Serbia.

You, we, and Norman Tebbit can all agree to "oppose Maastricht" — but with very different positive alternatives to the Euro-capitalist plan we all oppose.

On 18 September you were applauded by the most foul Serb nationalists— people who ripped up copies of *Workers' Liberty* outside the meeting and howled at us inside it, people who believe the Albanians of Kosovo are "illegal immigrants" who should "get back to their own country". They cheered loudly when you told them that the Sarajevo market-place massacre on 28 August could well have been staged by the Bosnian government to provide an excuse for NATO intervention— as if anyone needs one more bloody atrocity as an excuse for anything in the ex-Yugoslavia.

Why did the Serb chauvinists cheer you, Tony Benn? Because you challenged none of their prejudices. Because you want the strict enforcement of a one-sided arms embargo which keeps the Bosnian Muslims weak. Because you criticise the Western imperialists when they turn against Serbia, without fingering the major aggressor in the region: Milosevic's Serb

imperialism.

During the 1980s the old Yugoslav ruling class split along national lines. The bureaucratic and military machines, based in Belgrade, were transformed into instruments for Milosevic's Serbian chauvinist policy. He moved first against the Albanians of Kosovo (perhaps you remember the slogan "Kill the Albanian leadership"?) and the Hungarians of Vojvodina. Then he launched wars against Slovenia and Croatia, and in 1992 he spread the war to Bosnia. Do not be mistaken: war was Milosevic's policy and it was carried out against the majority of all the peoples in Bosnia. They did not ask for war. They retreated into "ethnic" camps only when the guns started firing. The Bosnian Serbs are fighting, but as part of a campaign whose main directing centre is in Belgrade.

Mladic is a general in the Yugoslav army. He is in the pay of Belgrade. You cover up for Milosevic if you talk about Bosnia's problem being "civil war".

"The main enemy is at home", a supporter of Socialist Action said, using a good old slogan to obscure the issue. But the main problem in ex-Yugoslavia is Serb imperialism. Yes, the Western powers are hypocrites. No one should trust them, no one should believe they are going to bring a democratic peace to the area. Yes, we should oppose the bombing, and yes the Labour Party should vote against the government's policy in the Balkans— Labour should act like a real opposition. In parliament we would vote for British troop withdrawal.