

Serbian protests continue

AS we go to press, the streets of Serbia's capital, Belgrade, have been filled for over 40 days running by demonstrators protesting against the vicious regime of Slobodan Milosevic. Despite often freezing weather, the protests have continued without a break since late November, when the opposition won the elections for 17 major local authorities, including Belgrade, and the regime cancelled the results.

On 3 January Milosevic signalled the beginnings of a climbdown, acknowledging that nine of the 17 local authorities had indeed been won by the opposition. The protests, however, continue.

Since 1991 Milosevic has taken imperialistic war to the rest of former Yugoslavia, whipping up Serbian chauvinism. The result for the Serbian people has been little but defeat, brutality against minorities within Serbia, economic ruin, and a political regime little looser than the old Stalinist system, with independent and dissident media regularly suppressed.

Much of the opposition is right-wing. Some, for example, denounce Milosevic for not being Serbian-chauvinist enough, and "selling out" in Kosovo, where Serbian rules colonial-style over a 90% Albanian population.

The students of Belgrade University, however, have declared: "We are not taking sides between the party in power and the opposition — what we insist upon is the rule of the law. Any government which is not willing to acknowledge its own electoral defeat does not deserve our support and we overtly oppose it".

They demand the establishment of a

new electoral authority and the resignation of the Chancellor and student vice-chancellor of the university. Unfortunately they have also approached the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church to bless the students' cause. The Orthodox Church, the backbone of Serbian chauvinism, has mostly supported Milosevic, but is now backing the opposition.

According to Belgrade journalist Branka Kaljevic: "This is the third time in Milosevic's ten-year rule that students have come out in the streets to protest. They first protested in March 1991. The authorities welcomed them with tanks, tear gas and brutal police repression... The students booed down both the then highly popular Radovan Karadzic [the Bosnian-Serb warlord] and the Serb Patriarch Pavle who had called on them to disperse..."

Many students then left the country to avoid being called up for Milosevic's war. Another round of protest in June 1992 again failed to topple Milosevic, and again many students went abroad. "Now, four years later", writes Branka Kaljevic, "a new generation is in the streets".

Whether a section of this new generation can spearhead a powerful and consistently democratic opposition, and link up with the workers, we cannot tell. But only that outcome offers hope for a liveable new settlement among the peoples of ex-Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where partition into three hostile and chauvinist "ethnic" statelets remains the reality under the surface of the Dayton agreement.

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