

Defend Yugoslavia's Milanovic

NATO murdered journalists, then jailed TV director

By Heather Cottin

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An international movement has been established to protest the already seven-year-long imprisonment of Dragoljub Milanovic, a target of NATO's effort to blame the victim following its U.S.-led bombing campaign against Yugoslav civilians 10 years ago.

During March and April 1999, the Yugoslav television station RTS's dedicated workers willingly risked danger to transmit to the world words and images about the US/NATO bombardment that was targeting the Serbian infrastructure and slaughtering Yugoslav civilians. Early NATO statements focused on the need to "degrade" the Yugoslav government's "ability to transmit their version of the news." (NATO press briefing, April 23, 2000)

NATO bombs and rockets destroyed 10 private radio and television stations and 50 TV transmitters and relay stations during the 78 days of air war. On April 23, 1999, a single NATO rocket—it was a U.S. rocket—hit RTS headquarters in Belgrade, killing 16 people and severely wounding 19 of the 120 workers in the building.

To cover its own role in this murder, NATO used the court that U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright had pushed to establish in 1993. As President Bill Clinton's secretary of state, Albright promoted the 1999 war on Yugoslavia. The U.S. and its NATO allies funded this court, called the International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia and based in The Hague, Netherlands.

The ICTY's goal was to blame all the fighting in the Balkans on the peoples of the Balkans, especially the government in Belgrade.

The ICTY's role starting in 1999 was to blame the victims—that is, to cover up NATO's aggression by blaming Yugoslav leaders. Before the bombing ended, the ICTY had charged Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic with war crimes. It is notable that Milosevic waged a successful defense against these charges until his suspicious death in captivity in 2006, frustrating the ICTY's goals.

In 2001, ICTY Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte claimed that Milosevic and Milanovic had been "warned" about the bombings of the TV headquarters, and were thus responsible for the deaths.

It's true there were weeks of threats and rumors that NATO would attempt such a violation of the Geneva Convention. But the RTS reporters and staff, like many other Yugoslav patriots, voluntarily stayed at their posts.

By 2001, a NATO-organized coup had overthrown the Milosevic government and put NATO puppets in power in Belgrade, and a Belgrade court tried and found Milanovic guilty of the deaths of the RTS workers. Milanovic, a Yugoslav patriot, was the only person to be imprisoned for NATO's war crimes.

Free Milanovic

Activists from Europe and North America, including representatives of the U.S.-based International Action Center, met March 25 in Pozarevac, Serbia, where Milanovic is imprisoned, to organize a campaign to free him.

Renowned Serbian Journalist Liljana Milanovic spoke at the meeting, noting that RTS was “deliberately bombed” according to the NATO commander in Europe at the time, Gen. Wesley Clark.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair admitted that NATO bombed the station after it showed the carnage from the bombing of the passenger train on the bridge in the Grdelička Gauge where 75 civilians were killed.

Thus NATO’s primary goal in attacking the broadcasting facility was not to disable the Serbian military command and control system, as NATO statements later claimed, but an attempt to stifle the truth. This makes the assault a war crime, as even Amnesty International charged in 2000 and repeated just this April.

On April 23 NATO again rejected the AI charge, claiming that the ICTY—itsself a NATO creation—had absolved NATO of war crimes in the past.

The ICTY was never a neutral, unbiased body. When NATO spokesperson Jamie Shea was asked whether NATO leaders could ever be indicted by the ICTY, he said, “Without NATO there would be no tribunal because NATO countries are in the forefront of those who have established the Tribunal, who fund this Tribunal and who support its activities on a daily basis.” (IPS, July 1, 1999)

Thus the decision was no surprise. The ICTY exonerated NATO of responsibility for the crimes against humanity the U.S.-led alliance committed in Yugoslavia. These included deliberately bombarding vital civilian infrastructure, conspiracy to initiate a war of aggression, lethally targeting journalists, using depleted uranium and anti-personnel weapons such as cluster bombs in areas of high civilian concentration, and bombing with the intent and effect of unleashing environmental catastrophe.

No to NATO

Washington and the Western European colonial powers set up NATO in 1949 to prevent workers’ revolutions and to threaten the USSR and its allies. NATO’s first “out of area” war was against Yugoslavia, the only country in its region that was still resisting domination from the West.

Today there are 28 NATO members, including many former socialist countries in the east that are now semi-colonies of the U.S. and Western Europe. NATO, still under Washington’s leadership, backs up the investors and predators that exploit the human, mineral and strategic resources of the world. NATO has encircled Russia, sent its navies to the Arctic and to South America, is in the Horn of Africa and has occupied Afghanistan.

Milanovic’s continued imprisonment would allow the United States and other NATO governments to commit crimes against humanity, bomb and kill with immunity, and jail those

who tell the truth. The current Serbian government is obediently re-trying Milanovic, adding years to his sentence in the service of its NATO paymasters.

Taking up the cause of Dragoljub Milanovic is not only to free an innocent person, it is to vindicate truth. At the meeting in Pozarevac, Vladimir Krsljanin, a political leader in Serbia, said, "This case is about freedom, truth and resistance to NATO."

The writer represented the International Action Center in Yugoslavia at the Pozarevac meeting. For more information on the 1999 war and the ICTY, see "Hidden Agenda: the U.S./NATO Takeover of Yugoslavia," at leftbooks.com.

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