

Correspondence on Serbian nationalism and Vojvodina

6 March 2002

The following email was sent in response to an earlier exchange on nationalism in Serbia, published on January 19, 2002. This in turn was prompted by the article: “Montenegro: European Union opposes moves towards independence” by Paul Mitchell published on January 5, 2002.

Dear Mr. Mitchell

According to the Hungarian Human Rights Monitor, “In many cases the settlers from Krajina have moved in by force into Hungarian homes while the Serb authorities failed to intervene. The Serb settlers from Krajina region are placed above the law and they receive preferential treatment over the indigenous Hungarian population in the areas of employment, housing and social assistance”... Could I remind you that settlers from Krajina are actually refugees who lost their homes, other property and were lucky to escape with their lives?

Would you be able to quote an independent, non-biased body on this issue? Hungarians, unfortunately, were in the forefront of the Western Imperialistic drive to demolish Yugoslavia. We all know how “human rights” bodies are conveniently used to discredit inconvenient governments and justify aggression against them.

As for “...For the peoples of former Yugoslavia this means the construction of the United Socialist States of the Balkans, with full rights for all national and ethnic minorities...” Are you joking? You have just watched one of those creations being demolished.

The world is full of armchair socialists like yourself Mr. Mitchell who are often of more use to capitalist governments than to the working class.

ZT

Reply:

As someone who follows the *World Socialist Web Site*'s coverage on a regular basis, you are well-aware

that we have exposed the role played by the major powers in promoting the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. We have explained at length that the modern version of the old imperialist policy of “Balkanisation ” has created a series of mini-states that are subject to the direct economic and political control of the major powers. You will also know that the *World Socialist Web Site* has written at length on the forced expulsion of some 100,000 Serbs from the Krajina region of Croatia in 1995—describing it as the largest single act of ethnic cleansing since the recent Balkan conflicts started—and of the collusion of the US and other Western powers in it.

The record of our website on these issues confirms the mendacious character of your criticisms. You seize on a formulation that is used in a quote cited on Vojvodina and the fact that it is taken from a Hungarian source in order to imply that any reference to discrimination practised by Serbs against the ethnic Hungarian minority in the province is manufactured propaganda. This simplistic approach is bound up with your own pro-Serbian nationalist position. Your claim that nationalist tensions in Vojvodina are only the product of ethnic Hungarians is no more convincing than those who claim that Croatian nationalism was solely a response to Greater Serbian domination. Or that the ethnic cleansing of Serbs and other minorities from Kosovo was just retaliation for the persecution of ethnic Albanians before the NATO intervention.

We, on the other hand, have sought to explain that in the absence of a socialist perspective based on the common class interests of the workers in the region, the resulting struggle over scarce resources is exploited by various nationalist demagogues—Serbian, Croatian, Albanian, Hungarian and others—and channelled into a fratricidal conflict that opens up the Balkan peoples to imperialist intrigue. Indeed the greatest advocates of

nationalism in the Balkans are the imperialist powers themselves. And this cannot be answered by elevating Serbian nationalism into some form of anti-imperialist current, simply because for a time the Milosevic regime was viewed as an obstacle to establishing Western domination of the region through the fragmentation of Yugoslavia.

Your attack on “armchair socialists” and dismissal of any possibility of constructing a United Socialist States of the Balkans only confirms your political bias. We are not wont to accept your right to judge who is politically useful to the working class, given that the advocates of a nationalist policy have already proved themselves as either the instruments of one or more of the imperialist powers or as camp-followers of Milosevic, Radovan Kradjic, Ratko Mladic and other political bankrupts and communalist politicians.

Sincerely,

Tony Robson

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>