

Letters

No Neutrality

I usually rely on *In These Times* to give me the story I don't get in the mainstream media. As for Kosovo, I believe the news reports that there is ethnic cleansing going on, and Paul Hocken's article validates this ("The Kosovo Quagmire," May 16). I try mightily hard never to trust U.S. foreign policy pronouncements, but when it comes to ethnic cleansing, I cannot support a neutral position.

I come from a background that suffered the silence of many "friends" while Hitler kept murdering my people. "Never again" is a principle that has been etched in the hearts of the survivors. So, while the United States and NATO may be using this opportunity to implement their own designs, I remain ambivalent, no matter how strong the accusations by Barbara Ehrenreich and Diana Johnstone are against the United States. I may have given them more credence had they attempted to deal with the problems of the Kosovars, instead of only railing against the United States.

**Aliza Keddem
Portland, Ore.**

Groucho Marxist

During our first Chicago winter at *In These Times* in 1976, Jim Weinstein, an inveterate punster, had a favorite one. "Many are cold," he would say, "but few are frozen."

Certainly not Jim. His warm spirit and agile mind have been the guiding light for *In These Times* for a quarter century. He is a self-described Groucho Marxist who combines an unerring commitment to social justice with a

puckish humor honed as a youth at his grandfather's table.

I believe I was *In These Times*' first employee. Before the first issue was published, I helped Jim with the network of correspondence he established among the dozens of friends he had made over (even then) a lifetime on the left. We worked in a tiny office on Polk Street in San Francisco. He paid me more than I'd ever made—I think it was 50 bucks a week—usually in cash from his blackjack winnings. He regaled me with stories from the past, especially tales of *The Appeal to Reason*, the socialist newspaper published in Girard, Kan., in the early 1900s. Imagine my surprise. I'd grown up near Girard and rarely met a Democrat, let alone a socialist. The main political division in my hometown was Ford vs. Chevy. But my Kansas county, he assured me, had turned out a majority vote for Socialist Party candidate Eugene Debs in 1912.

I was enthralled with this new mentor, although as an earnest young leftist I think I hid it well. His history lessons reinforced the values that had led me to the left in the first place. That is, they grew out of American democratic traditions, not against them. In the Bay Area left of the '70s, filled with disgust at virtually everything American, that was a revolutionary view.

It may be hard to recall some of the singular achievements of *In These Times* in the early days. It was the first New Left institution to actively work at healing the breach with organized labor that was left over from the anti-war movement. Jim consistently advocated progressive

contests in Democratic primaries at a time when the true bloods were urging people not to vote at all. There was genuine debate in the newspaper.

We got a lot of things wrong as well. We overestimated the importance of Eurocommunism. We underestimated the hold, even as we decried it, of what came to be called identity politics. But our Monday morning editorial meetings never lacked vigor or engagement—we always felt the urgency of responding analytically to the news.

Jim was the heart of it, that rare creature on the left who genuinely enjoys the give and take of disagreement and debate. We've remained friends, sharing our interests in food and politics. On a recent trip together, we probably spent half our time arguing politics in the serious but good-natured manner that he inspires.

Those days on Polk Street were a lot of ink and newsprint ago. Over the years, like many of *In These Times*' cranky readers, I've been infuriated as often as I've been edified. But *In These Times* never has lost the democratic spirit that its founder brought to it. In this time of transition, I'd like to honor that spirit—and Jim.

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Truth, the First Casualty

No issue in recent memory has engendered so much confusion and anguish on the left as the war in Kosovo.

Things are not as simple as they were during the Cold War. The conflicts that consume human lives today are largely civil wars fueled by ethnic hatred. Some conflicts cry out for direct intervention. In Rwanda, for just one example, the world sat by as Hutu nationalists slaughtered Tutsis by the hundreds of thousands.

The situation in the Balkans, however, is less clear cut. Many mistakes have been made. They begin with the decision by the West to sanction the break-up of Yugoslavia along ethnic lines, rather than seek an internal settlement. This was initiated in 1991, by Germany's recognition of Croatia, their World War II ally, as an independent state. In 1995, the world community stood by as Serbs massacred 7,000 Bosnian men in Zepa and Srebrenica, U.N.-declared safe zones. That same year, nothing was done when Croatia ethnically cleansed itself of an estimated 250,000 Serbs living in Krajina.

In Kosovo, NATO should have supported the non-violent resistance to Milosevic with the same enthusiasm it is now showing the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a terrorist force that has funded its operations through drug smuggling. (The KLA recently appointed Agim Ceku, one of the planners of the Croatian ethnic cleansing known as "Operation Storm," as its new military commander.)

Yes, there were negotiations, but the Ramboulet accord set conditions that NATO negotiators knew were impossible for Serbia to accept. Ramboulet would grant NATO the right to move troops freely in all of the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia," not just Kosovo. Is it surprising that Milosevic rejected an agreement that would have, in effect, give NATO free reign throughout the entire country? "The economy of Kosovo shall function with free market principles," the accord further states. Did the United States expect Serbia, which has a mixed economy, simply to bow to orders from the outside to transform its economic system?

Understandably, the international community did not want to stand by and see the genocide committed by Serbs in Bosnia repeated. In the case of Bosnia, a military response was needed. But was it the right solution for Kosovo?

Rollie Keith, a field director with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), monitored the human rights situation in Kosovo prior to the bombings. "I did not witness, nor did I have knowledge of, any incidents of so-called 'ethnic cleansing' and there were certainly no occurrences of 'genocidal poli-

cies' while I was with the [OSCE] in Kosovo," he wrote recently. "What has transpired since the OSCE monitors were evacuated on March 20 ... obviously has resulted in human rights abuses and a very significant humanitarian disaster as some 600,000 Kosovar Albanians have fled or been expelled from the province. This did not occur, though, before March 20." He concludes: "I would attribute the humanitarian disaster directly or indirectly to the NATO air bombardment and the resulting anti-terrorist campaign."

Without doubt, Serb forces and paramilitaries have committed atrocities. But is the situation in Kosovo as apocalyptic as NATO spokesmen would lead us to believe? *The Los Angeles Times'* Paul Watson, one of the few journalists in Kosovo, recently reported that there were "hundreds of young men everywhere" in the town of Svetlje, now home to about 15,000 displaced ethnic Albanians. "By their own accounts," he writes, "the men are not living in a concentration camp, nor being forced to labor for the police or army, nor serving as human shields for Serbs. Instead, they are waiting with their families for permission to follow thousands who have risked going back home to nearby villages because they do not want to give up and leave Kosovo." He

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notes that their presence challenges "the black-and-white versions of what is happening."

The United States and its NATO allies had other options. They could have pursued a settlement through the United Nations with the Russians on their side. They could have offered to lift the economic sanctions against Serbia, in return for a greater presence of U.N. and OSCE monitors in Kosovo. But NATO chose not to negotiate, and the results have been disastrous.

The ground war already has started, albeit in secret. KLA military leaders told *The Guardian* that U.S. and British special forces have joined KLA troops in waging a guerrilla war—known by the code name "Picnic"—in Kosovo. Concurrently, NATO decided to broaden its bombing targets in Serbia in the hope that Serbian citizens will turn against Milosevic. NATO's destruction of power grids has left Belgrade and other cities without light and water. We've tried to bomb civilians back to the Stone Age before. It didn't work then. It will not work now. Cluster bombs are no substitute for diplomacy.

It's time to stop the war.

Joel Bleifuss