

The Brunswick International

Ex-Yugoslavian President, Slobodan Milosevic is overthrown in a "People's Revolution"

Pat FitzPatrick

The Brunswickan

"It was the last eastern European communist domino to fall," John Simpson, the BBC's venerable World Affairs Editor, has written, "but it happened to the same accompaniment as all the others, East German, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Russia itself."

He goes on to cite "the same whistles and plastic trumpets, the same loud chanting, the same belief that because so many people were out in the streets they must be invincible..."

Simpson's comparison was echoed by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who said the uprising in Belgrade "evoked the fall of the Berlin Wall," and, judging from the coverage beamed by satellite into this part of the world from Western Europe and North America, the notion is widely held.

It is just as widely wrong and dangerous, based on factual inaccuracies and lulling the people of Serbia and the wider world alike into a false sense of triumphalism and security — a sense not enjoyed by Serbia's neighbors here in Southeastern Europe. As Croats, Kosovars, Bosnians and Montenegrins know too well, the revolution remains (as of this writing) incomplete: Slobodan Milosevic's powerbase is now Vojislav Kostunica's and Serbia is still nationalist.

The Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ), of which Serbia was a constituent republic, and the present-day Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that it dominates have never been just another "Communist domino" whose fall has eagerly been anticipated by the "liberal-democratic capitalist West."

The "domino theory" was first advanced in the early days of the Cold War by the Truman administration, embraced and articulated in a now-(in)famous National Security Council document referred to as "NSC-68." Very roughly speaking, it held that if one nation of even peripheral or marginal interest to US foreign policy "went Red," the threat to other, more vital nations increased.

Whether or not this gave rise to a policy of "liberating" nations from Communism is hotly debated in American foreign policy circles. Still, even if we assume that the American-led West sought to liberate nations behind the Iron Curtain, Yugoslavia was never included in the policy.

Even before Tito's break with Stalin and search for his own path toward Socialist utopia, American and Western European nations realized that there was something different about Yugoslavia. Happy to have Tito outside the Soviet orbit but not quite ready to embrace a Socialist dictatorship, the West propped-up Tito's regime with generous financial aid—both direct and through international financial institutions—that continued well beyond Tito's death.

That this perception dominated the Western approach to Yugoslavia was underscored by Warren Zimmerman, America's last ambassador to the SFRJ, in his 1996 memoir (subsequently revised and updated to jump onto the Kosovo bandwagon). Describing his discussions with Bush administration Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, Zimmerman recounts that:

...Yugoslavia and the Balkans remained important to US interests, but Yugoslavia no longer enjoyed its

former geopolitical significance as a balance between [NATO] and the Warsaw Pact. It was no longer unique, since both Poland and Hungary now had more open political and economic systems. ... I would reassert... the traditional mantra of US policy toward Yugoslavia—our support of its unity, independence and territorial integrity. But I would add that we could only support the country's unity in the context of progress toward democracy.

Clearly, then, it was never a domino whose fall we awaited and — as subsequent developments illustrated — Western nations did little to nothing to support democracy in Yugoslavia until the aftermath of war in Kosovo.

Slobodan Milosevic was, at first, supported in his efforts to hold the SFRJ together. Although they knew full well this could lead to the use of force (as a CIA analysis leaked to the *New York Times* noted), Western nations were too preoccupied with transition in CEE, the Gulf War and its aftermath, and the fate of the Soviet Union to pay much heed.

Later, despite ample evidence of his misdeeds in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, his influence over the Bosnian Serbs was sufficient for Western nations to declare Milosevic a guarantor of the Dayton Peace Accords.

Tacit support for Milosevic continued until the aftermath of war in Kosovo, when training in Budapest and financial and political support for opposition forces were in the offing. Until that point, however, we did not anxiously await the downfall of the last European strongman, largely for fear that his replacement would have been even more stridently nationalist — the deranged Vojislav Seselj was the most oft-used boogeyman used to underscore the importance of a hands-off approach *vis* Milosevic's claim to power.

Simpson's claim that Yugoslavia was just the last Communist domino to fall is thus troubling, but perhaps more in the *post facto* and moral apportionment of responsibility to which historians and activists are given. Far more troubling is the increasingly common view that the mutant force behind Serbia's dysfunctional behaviour and appetite for carnage was the essentially fictional Communism / Socialism imposed by one man and his band of thugs.

It was a notion, underscored as I wrote the paragraph above, by the anchor of BBC's "This Week," who claimed that "people power" had ousted the "old-style Socialist" Slobodan Milosevic in favour of the democratically elected Vojislav Kostunica who, as I write, is one hour away from being sworn-in as President. Earlier Saturday, a CNN commentator was just as triumphant in declaring that Europe had been "swept of its last vestige of Communism."

The fallacy that Milosevic was little more than an authoritarian Communist dictator was underscored by an Otpor activist whom I met here in Zagreb some months ago. Speaking of the opposition's campaigns past, he expressed anger at his fellow Serbs' "sheep-like" behaviour. "But, damnit, they voted for him!" he said in English after pointing to activist messages that had highlighted the ruin Milosevic had wrought on Serbia.

Since his rise to power in 1987, Slobodan Milosevic has justifiably been able to claim to have been a "democratically" elected leader. Although he frequently relied on



Students tear a billboard showing Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic in downtown Belgrade, on Tuesday, October 3, 2000.

electoral fraud in the twilight of his now-ended rule, Milosevic rose to power and maintained his position through the ballot box. Even when electoral fraud is considered, state-run and independent polls alike may have differed on how much support Slobodan enjoyed, but virtually all were unanimous in revealing that, until early-to-mid summer, the strongman remained the nation's most popular politician.

Beyond the thousands loyal to him for the sole fact that he allowed them to enrich themselves at the expense of the average Serb, Milosevic's primary constituency comprised the ranks of the poor, the rural and the uneducated. Even before the first mass anti-regime demonstrations in 1991, opposition to his message of nationalist (not Communist) hate was primarily found among youth and the educated middle-class elite in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis and other urban centres.

What was different this time around was that Milosevic's primary voter base turned against him, first at the ballot

box two weekends ago, then this past Thursday on the streets of Belgrade. Otpor and the at-last unified Democratic Opposition of Serbia may have provided the organizing kernel, but what finally swamped the regime were lines of cars stretching for 37 kilometers from the countryside to Belgrade, pouring at least half a million largely rural protesters into the capital's streets.

The DOS-led national strike may have sparked it all, but the strike was supported by those who had previously been stalwart in their support of the regime. Garbage piled up in the streets as sanitation workers stayed home, transit workers refused to report to work, and (most significantly) 4,500 coal miners in Kolubara downed their picks, leading to rotating blackouts as they strangled the Obrenovac power plant that meets at least half of Serbia's power needs.

The army and police were the final pillars of support for the Milosevic regime. When their apparently overwhelming vote for Kostunica in

the presidential elections is considered, it is clear that the about-to-be installed President has inherited much of Milosevic's power base.

In the Central and Eastern European revolutions a decade ago, dissident forces were swept to power with programs and national visions that, by and large, differed wildly from the regimes they overthrew. That is not the case with Vojislav Kostunica and the "people's uprising" that swept him to power.

The groups casting their ballots for Kostunica did so because he promised a little bit of change and a lot of continuity: change with promises of revitalizing the economy, but his message of Serbian nationalism was continuous with Milosevic's earlier (failed) promises of Greater Serbia.

In that light, Kostunica will have problems satisfying the conflicting demands of those who voted for him: the Army and rural nationalists on the one hand, and the urban, educated elite and middle class (or what remains of it) on the other.

Even allowing for exaggeration for the electorate's benefit, it is clear that Vojislav Kostunica remains as committed a nationalist as he was in his 1970s opposition to Tito and his late-1980s opposition to Milosevic. If anything, he is a "true" nationalist in comparison with the just-deposed President, whose nationalism was merely the vehicle used to satiate his thirst for power.

In short order, Kostunica has promised Slobodan Milosevic that he will not be given a one-way ticket to the Hague and is believed to have promised the Yugoslav Army (VJ) that he will oppose any and all cooperation with the ICTY in favour of domestic court proceedings. Renewing Serbia's claim to Kosovo, he has rejected the helping hand offered by the United States (rhetorically — he'll take their

reconstruction aid) and condemned NATO at the same time as noting Serbia's allies as France, Greece and Norway. These, he hopes, will help usher Serbia into the New Europe.

Vojislav Kostunica is presently caught between the proverbial "rock and a hard place": nationalist demands and expectations at home and the liberal-democratic conditions for outside assistance. In an ideal world, Misha Glenny would be right in saying in this weekend's *New York Times* that "strident proclamations... are simply counterproductive. For the moment, everybody's overriding interest must be to assist Serbia's new leader as he tries to consolidate his authority and build a stable government..."

But Serbia is no ideal world and, far from Simpson's claims, the revolution is incomplete. In that sense the Institute for War and Peace Reporting's Tony Borden — who has done heavy "talking head" duty over the past few days — offers a far more realistic appraisal. To draw on another American metaphor, the West should "walk softly and carry a big stick," offering concrete aid only as Kostunica fulfills set conditions.

The European Union will, as you read this, be in the process of lifting sanctions on Serbia. This is a good first move, but any other assistance must be tied to a list of conditions. Remove the Karic family's industrial and smuggling base, and we'll prop-up the Dinar. Find Radovan Karadzic and hand him over to the ICTY and we'll reopen an embassy for more talks. Remove...

Only then may we say that the operation to remove the nationalist cancer from the heart of Southeastern Europe has truly begun.

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In the face of fighting in the "Holy Land"

Christian and Muslim solidarity in Bethlehem

Russel Maier

The Brunswickan

BETHLEHEM, Israel - In the usually quiet Biblical town of Bethlehem, Muslims and Christians marched together to protest the escalating conflict in the Holy Land. In a rally coordinated by a dozen Bethlehem churches, three hundred Palestinians marched towards Rachel's Tomb, the nearest Israeli presence in Bethlehem. The majority of demonstrators consisted of Christians from a multitude of local denominations. Their march was a symbolic show of solidarity for Friday's widespread Muslim demonstrations across Palestine and Israel. Through the protests, both groups denounced the harsh clamp down by the Israeli Military and the consequent loss of life over the past ten days. According to the Red Crescent (the equivalent of the Red Cross) over 80 have been killed and over 2500 injured. Approximately 95% of these have been Palestinians — the vast majority young men or boys.

At first at the front, but then quickly swallowed as the crowd swelled, was Deacon Sami Suleiman arm in arm with Abdil Majid, the Muslim Imam from Deheishheh refugee camp. Around them, children, middle-aged men, and elderly women still dressed in their Sunday best, chanted in Arabic for an end to the violence and in

support of peace. Suleiman, to be ordained next week at the Latin Patriarchate Church of Beit Jala, said that the churches wished to show the world that frustration and hurt is felt by both Palestinian Muslims and Christians. Suleiman described how a child from one of the families in his congregation had been severely wounded by an Israeli rubber bullet to the stomach. In broken English, he described the sentiments of Bethlehem's Christian community: "if you damage a person's car, he will be angry with you, but if you kill their boys and girls, how do you think they will feel?"

However, Sunday's protest is not just the consequence of the week's deaths and injuries, but of years of brewing frustration. Since March of 1993, Palestinians have endured heavy travel restrictions between Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. Despite Jerusalem's proximity and its great significance to Palestinian Muslims and Christians, many have seen it only in photos and on television — their visit prohibited by military checkpoints and the difficulty of obtaining an Israeli permit. Palestinians have also watched for years as their Israeli neighbors have constructed settlements and modern road systems next to their debilitated own. To the protest of a host of international human rights organizations, many Palestinian houses

have been destroyed to make way for these construction initiatives. In areas such as Gaza, these settlements, the equivalent of North American suburbs (complete with street lights, running water, grass and trees), have been built side by side the squalor conditions of densely packed refugee camps. Palestinians in camps such as Khan Younis, where they have lived since being expelled from their homes in 1948, do not have drinkable running water or a reliable sewage system.

As the demonstration reached the walled fortress surrounding Rachel's Tomb, Israeli soldiers, perhaps mistaking it for yet another mob of angry stone throwers, launched shock grenades before the crowd had reached the end of the road. As several boys threw rocks in return, steel coated rubber bullets and tear gas canisters were fired, quickly dispersing the crowd of churchgoers.

According to Suleiman there is a

spiritual dimension to the situation and present conflict. Referring to the oppression his people have endured and continue to endure, he described how "it is dangerous to play with the souls and spirit of people. This is for God and not for humans. Part of being truly human is about living in peace and having hope for the future." Gesturing to young boys and men taking cover from the Israeli stun grenades only a hundred meters away, Suleiman asked, "What future do the boys and girls have? With this situation, they have no future."

According to fifteen-year-old Ahmed Issa, a Deheishheh refugee, and other boys on the front line throwing stones, there are only two alternatives. Palestinians can either quietly suffer their bleak situation indefinitely or "fight with honor for freedom and the blood of those who have died." For Ahmed, "At least this way we can live and die with dignity."

Right-Catholics and Muslims join arms in protest of Israeli Military Aggression.



Violence begins with the lowering of a flag in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) - Clashes between security forces and independence activists armed with bows and arrows in Indonesia's remote Irian Jaya province saw at least 31 people killed, and at least 45 injured last weekend.

Many of the victims were shot to death by police, who had lowered the separatist Free Papua Movement's "Morning Star" flag, inciting clashes. Flying this flag is against Indonesian law. Violence continued into Saturday, seeing many brutally killed by pro-independence rebels. Mass burials were held late Saturday.

The state of security improved when extra troops were dispatched to Wamena, making 59 arrests, and forcing many of the activists and separatist rebels out of town.

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