

The official Bastard-statement on the war in Yugoslavia

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Saving Private Havel

New graffiti is to be seen these days in bombed Belgrade: **SLOBO KLINTONE (Slobo, you Clinton!)**. This simple but poignant message reveals the abyss in which a genuinely democratic stance has fallen since the beginning of the NATO military campaign against Yugoslavia. It illustrates not only the political deadlock of the democratic option: the intrinsic impossibility of a choice between the front-lines of two antagonistic sides; or an extremely dangerous *folie a deux*, which has developed its own dynamics of escalation without predictable consequences. The truly witty identification of the two leaders of the belligerent sides also indicated to what extent they are related on a much deeper level.

In an open letter addressed to his friends in Yugoslavia two days after the first bombs fell, the Slovenian publicist Lev Kreft emphasised the hopeless situation of Serbian democrats "wedged between Sloba and Bill," by the way he related his vision of Clinton walking the streets of Pristina and saying to the Albanians: "As long as I am with you, no one should dare to beat you." People acquainted with the recent history of the Kosovo crises are familiar with Kreft's allusion. On April 24, 1987 in Kosovo Polje, a Serbian dominated suburb of Pristina, Milosevic bellowed this phrase to a crowd of Serbs protesting against Albanian oppression. The police, controlled by Albanian officials used night-sticks to break up the crowd, but Milosevic, at that time the head of the Serbian Communist Party, stepped out to protect them. This phrase "enthroned him as a tsar", according to M. Solevic, one of the leaders of the Kosovo Serbs.

Looking back, this phrase changed the course of events that have culminated in the NATO attack on Yugoslavia. But how can we understand what really happened there? During his famous speech in Kosovo Polje Milosevic called the Kosovo Serbs: "You should stay here. This is your land. These are your houses. Your meadows and gardens. Your memories. You shouldn't abandon your land ... " He appealed neither to some kind of communist ideology nor to national values, but rather invoked universal human rights. The famous switch from communism to nationalism did not occur directly. There was a "humanitarian mediator". Milosevic offered to protect the rights of a minority oppressed by a majority, and under the auspices of the given constitutional framework of Albanian autonomy, the majority had the state on its side. For Milosevic the system was too narrow to cope with the problem, and therefore he stepped outside of it. His solution was to be found "either through the existing institutions or not. On the streets or inside, by populist or elite methods."

This was the start of Milosevic's so-called "anti-bureaucratic revolution": encouraging the solution of a political problem by ignoring the "bureaucratic obstacles" inherent in a given institutional system. The analogy between the way Milosevic and Clinton treat similar political problems is obvious. Was it not the humanitarian argument - instead of a clear political objective - that has been used by NATO to justify its military intervention in Yugoslavia? Have the interventionists not ignored the legal, institutional framework of the UN Security Council, the UN Charter and consequently international law? Both Milosevic and Clinton have done the same: they identified some fundamental human right, hegemonized it, bypassed an "obsolete" institutional framework and acted. In this respect, one could say that Milosevic already has won the war. He lured NATO into playing his dirty game. The breakdown of former Yugoslavia showed us all how dangerous this kind of game can be. It was Milosevic who started to ignore the Yugoslav institutions in 1987, to undermine their authority, and ultimately to demolish them. What are the dangers of a world-wide "anti-bureaucratic revolution" today, set into motion by NATO? This remains to be seen.

Forward into the better past

At this point we should perhaps recall the famous aphorism (attributed to Winston Churchill) about democracy: the worst of all possible systems, but there is no other which would be better. Certainly an attempt to act politically or militarily to protect or promote human rights in a sovereign country where they are being violated by the state itself could be always blocked in the Security Council, due to the "conflict of interests" among its members. In

other words, there is always some kind of antagonism which cannot be completely resolved, and this makes the Security Council the worse of all possible security councils. But do we have a better one?

NATO has treated UN institutions in the manner which Bolsheviks treated the democratic institution of parliament - as a bourgeois club where genuine rights have no chance of being recognised and will be blocked by some particular class interest. Therefore, the Bolsheviks eliminated the parliament, and the consequences thereof are today usually summed up under the concept of totalitarianism. They did it in the name of some common good, of course, in the same manner in which NATO is demolishing the institutions of international law today. However, NATO is acting as much in the favour of the so-called common good as the Bolsheviks did, and it represents an instance of universal human rights, just as the Serbian Communist Party leader Milosevic did 12 years ago in Kosovo Polje. This fact should be obvious to the world public. After all, how can one claim to be a protector of minority rights after having provided extensive military and political support for severe oppression of some other minority, like the Kurds? Even if the use of force has to be recognised as a justified means of achieving democratic goals, how can one bomb Belgrade without bombing Ankara? Why not bomb Moscow because of Chechnya, or Peking because of Tibet? "Why can't we do to our Albanians, what Turks have done to their Kurds?" may seem to be a peculiar justification, but as long as the opponent's position is untouched by the universality of justice as well, there does not appear to be an appropriate answer to this cynical question.

There is always a particular political goal which should be considered beyond all the humanitarian rhetoric. What is then the political objective of the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia? As far as we know, this ought to be a political autonomy for the Albanians within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: something they already had under the Tito Constitution of 1974 and which was taken away from them by Milosevic in 1989. NATO wants to give this institutional framework back to them. As a political project, this endeavour is a historical scandal: nineteen of the most advanced liberal-democratic states of the world bombing an ex-communist one to reinstate a communist political status quo ante. NATO is bombing its political way into a better past. How can this desperate political eclecticism be understood? Why has NATO turned communist or "Yugo-nostalgic," now that it is really too late? The pre-1990 Yugoslav Federation (which actually was a confederation) in which Serbs accounted for no more than 37 % of the entire population was the only realistic institutional and political framework for the political autonomy of Kosovo. Under democratic conditions in that Yugoslavia, a politician such as Milosevic never would have had a chance to win an election with a Serbian nationalist program.

A dwarf, not a giant

This political nonsense of the NATO military engagement in Yugoslavia reveals its very sense. **Bombs are not falling to enforce some political solution. They ARE this political solution.** After only a week of bombing president Clinton stated explicitly what the objective of this bombing was: victory. Whatever this means politically. There is no political strategy behind NATO. Its members have never made a choice between two contradictory principles: state sovereignty or national self-determination, both they have chosen to recognise and violate at the same time. NATO is without a global democratic solution for this dilemma: one that can claim universal validity, challenge the existing world order, and insist upon its radical reform.

This circumstance explains best why NATO cites "humanitarian causes" as a motive for military intervention and not the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? For the "humanitarian cause" is the highest possible level of universalisation, that the USA and its NATO-allies can afford, not merely a rhetorical excuse for the promotion of some dirty power interests, as so many leftists claim today. There is no so-called hidden agenda of the NATO military action in Yugoslavia: an alleged plan to control the Central Asian oil over Kosovo-crossroad or even to seize the gold which, as is rumoured, has recently been found there.

The old-fashioned materialistic fantasy about politics as a superstructure of some basic economic interests doesn't help us to understand the true motive of the NATO intervention. Rather it suppresses its real political meaning in the same way as the humanitarian rhetoric does. For what is hidden behind the both is not an insatiable imperialist giant, but a poor, frustrated and confused political dwarf. Nothing expresses this fact better than the ever-larger waves of moral scandalising over the tragical fate of the innocent victims of war and genocide. **The real scandal today, at the end of 20th century is not the fact that people are being expelled from their homes, raped and killed before the eyes of a helpless democratic audience,** (in view of our own historical experience made in this century, this is rather trivial) **but the truth that this democratic audience and its political representatives still don't have any political answer to this challenge.**

The ideological purpose of the humanitarian approach is then to represent war as some kind of natural catastrophe. It naturalises social and political phenomena and in a way that blocks any kind of rational political engagement. It leaves only two actors on the stage of history: an anonymous mass of innocent victims and a couple of pathological monsters. To help the one, means to exterminate the other. Concrete political antagonisms, the whole battlefield of political concepts and their protagonists no longer appear on the scene. This distorted picture of a particular historical situation is completely at odds with reality, but of course not with needs of those who have produced it. As a genuine ideological fantasy it serves its purpose even if it is extremely contrafactual. That what everybody could perceive as a simple lie - "We bomb Milosevic. Not Serbian people"- proves to be a very useful lie for both: for those who are bombed as well as for those who bomb. For it makes Serbian people retroactively innocent, i.e. not responsible for all the atrocities either committed by war criminals living undisturbed among them or induced by the politicians freely elected by those same people. On the other hand, it buttresses the illusion that people in a democratic system never make a false choice. And if they make one, it is always due to a "lack of objective information".

If Serbs in Belgrade would know what their soldiers and policemen are up to now in Kosovo, i. e. brutal ethnic cleansing, they wouldn't allow this to happen. Unfortunately, the evil dictator has robbed them of free media, and has thus turned them into innocent victims of manipulation. Of course, it is the western democratic audience who gives much more credence to this naive illusion than the Serbs themselves. It helps them to suppress perhaps the severest trauma of democracy - the fact that there is no hundred percent reliable fuse which can completely protect democracy from its regression into some kind of totalitarianism. In the whole ideological edifice "free media" play only the role of the so-called subjective factor. If the system works is thanks to them. If it doesn't, there is its failure to be blamed.

Transparency of evil

Certainly Serbs in Belgrade know enough about ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo, at least, no less than they knew about what happened to Vukovar or later in Sarajevo. In that sense they don't differ from Croats who are well-aware of the fact that 400 000 Serbs were forced to leave Croatia over the last ten years and of their 24 000 burned homes; who know by name their own war criminals with whom they live in peaceful coexistence without ever thinking of prosecuting them. Croats - with some exceptions, albeit ones without any real significance for the political situation - have never asked their Serb compatriots to return back, nor, for all that matter, would Serbs ask the expelled Albanians.

If there is some lesson to be learned from the Yugoslav disaster, then it is about the full transparency of evil. Nothing has happened in these to date ten years of war what hadn't been "entirely predictable", and what hadn't been even announced in advance. Why then such common outcry over the genocide in Kosovo now after the same practices have been closely followed all over former Yugoslavia for almost a decade? Why hadn't there been an outcry before the war ever has started, when today's President of Croatia Tudjman published his book with the idea that a genocide could have entirely positive consequences because it "leads to an ethnical homogenisation of a given nation and therefore ... to more harmony ..."? A politician endorsing such idea was financially, politically and later militarily backed by the countries now most engaged in the NATO war campaign in Yugoslavia. Both Tudjman and Milosevic had outlined the later ethnic cleansing in Bosnia even before the war in Slovenia (1991) have ever got underway, and this, too, is a well-known fact. Those who for instance ask why it is that today's Pol Pot of the Balkans, Slobodan Milosevic, still yesterday was accepted everywhere as a reliable negotiator, we could reply by asking a more cynical question: What is actually wrong with Pol Pot since it was the United States which protested against the Vietnamese military intervention in the Red Khmer's Kampuchea.

We'll bomb you into stone-innocence

"Only a stone is completely innocent," Hegel once wrote. If this makes any sense then in politics. Neither the Serbs in Belgrade are innocent, nor is the western democratic audience. The alleged innocence of both is only a retroactive effect of a common depolitization taking place within a humanitarian framework. In any case, humanitarianism today is not only a new opium for people which makes them blind to the political meaning of historical events. Its ideological use is of much greater importance. The best example of this is the attempt to find some juristically plausible justification for the military intervention in Yugoslavia, which according to

international law is illegal. Here the notion of "humanitarian intervention" is used to argue that it is a matter of "custom and practice". To be sure, "customs and practices" are never universal. They vary according to different cultural identities. "Serbian genocide of Albanians" is a crime against humanity only because it doesn't fit European cultural standards - thus military intervention is called for. By the same token, a "Turkish genocide of Kurds" is a peculiar Turkish custom which depending on our interests we either support or sadly regret. Not only democracy and justice are particular customs, war is one as well. Instead of understanding its political logic, the West has throughout only seen "people who have been fighting each other for centuries" in the Balkans. War has been a part of their cultural identity and there was no reason to intervene in it. One could recall the words of Marion Graefin Doenhoff, who in September 1991 wrote on the front page of "Die Zeit": "It would be crazy to intervene militarily in this Balkan chaos of one's own free will. It would be pure madness. (...) But if they are determined to vent to their Serbo-Croatian hatred, then one should leave them do it." Far from being simply an excuse to further the cause of a military intervention, humanitarianism even hinders it. That is why it always seems that military interventions in former Yugoslavia come too late. They were late because they were following a humanitarian logic, instead of a political one. Thus, they don't prevent humanitarian catastrophes. They actually produce them by making humanitarian sense of their political nonsense. Kosovo today is the best example of this. Humanitarianism is the last one conceptual framework of the practical universalism and in that sense, it is only a symptom of the politics which has renounced all its universal claims. The western democratic world, now represented by NATO, is not capable of coping with the deepest crises of the world political order. It lacks a global vision within which it would be possible to shape the politics of human rights in keeping with its projected universal validity. Thus the bombs on Yugoslavia are merely an ersatz for this ideological and political failure. They are dropped not to save universal human rights but to protect particular western customs, and what they damage most is the already existing world order, granted rather imperfect one, - but the only one we have. It obviously has to be changed, if not revolutionised. However, feeble political NATO-mind is least able to do this.

A collateral gain

If the face of the inevitable victory of democracy in the wake of communism's fall was ever visible, then it was the **face of Vaclav Havel**. Ten years ago, he stood for all of the universal values of democratic civilisation from Magna Carta to Frank Zappa. At that time he opened up the perspective of a world-wide reinvention of democracy, extending much further than the simple adaptation of the postcommunist countries to the liberal capitalism of the West. In his Presidential Address given two years ago in Washington under the title "The Charms of Nato" Havel was enthusiastic about an America which assumes its responsibility for the whole world. It should do it in the way which, as he said, "should embody those premises that have a chance of saving our global civilisations ... values that should be adopted today by all cultures, all nations, as a condition of their survival." And he welcomed of course the decision to include three Eastern European nations in NATO. These three countries, Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic finally became members of the Western military alliance, shortly before the first bombs fell on Belgrade. As a consequence, the greatest personification of democracy in the recent history was also drafted. Today when the bombs are falling on Belgrade the brave soldier Havel obsequiously joins in. Do these bombs really represent what he expected "to save our global civilisation"? Should they, as an appropriate means of solving our political problems, really "be adopted today by all cultures, all nations, as a condition of their survival"? Can they really save the hope for democracy, once personified by Vaclav Havel - the last vivid symbol of a moral and political liaison between the western world and the universal idea of democracy? It seems that democracy has again lost its face.

This in itself is not so bad. Moreover, this could be the only "collateral gain" from the damage done to democracy by the NATO military intervention in Yugoslavia. "**Slobo, you Clinton!**", marks not only the radical impossibility of a genuine democratic stance. Democracy's only chance lies in the fact that it has no more its fixed place within the existing political framework, nor a recognizable personification. Its meaning is freely floating again and can be caught only by our imagination. It is up to us to reinvent its future perspective. And make use of that freedom here and now.

