

Belgrade - New Impressions

Questions to and Replies by Prof. Dr. Georg Meggle, Leipzig Oct 18th 2000

You came to Yugoslavia for the third time. How would you describe the political events of the 5th october and the changes in Yugoslavian society?

The opposition in Yugoslavia, united under DOS and promoted heavily by OTPOR, did get the decisive majority in the elections for Y -President and in the municipal elections as well. In the Y-parliament elections the opposition could not succeed so clearly in consequence of the large scale Montenegro refusal to take part at the elections. And this is the reason why a coalition with the old regime parties had to be installed.

Surely, the conditions for these elections were not fair. The old regime used all its means to change the votes in its own favour; moreover there was a lot of more or less undercover assistance to the opposition from the West. But it is without any question that the overwhelming majority was voting for a radical change. The opposition was wise enough to present a candidate whose personality was known to be a real alternative, an alternative not only to Milosevic but also to many of the leading figures of the opposition in the years before. The words on Kostunica's election posters - "Who does dare to look into your eyes? Kostunica, of course." - were collectively accepted to be true. But nevertheless it should be kept in mind, that the main reason for Kostunica's victory was that the whole thing was a decision against Milosevic; the pro-Kostunica voters may not continue to vote for his agenda as soon as Milosevic and his gang are out. But at present these future prospects are not yet at stake.

The last time I was in Belgrade in June this year the city was dominated by depression. Now it is like a new city. Peoples' noses (at least of those I had contact with) are now elevated by a good deal. "Gotov Je (He is finished/out). We have won!" The whole air has changed.

This change is due not only to the results of the elections. Much more, it is due to the public upheaval in reaction to the old regime's refusal to accept these results. The public not only voted; it demonstrated on the streets. As it had already for the same reason for months in 1996. But now with incomparably bigger efforts. Now with the open compassion of nearly the whole country, e.g., with workers and miners marching into Belgrade with trucks and lorries from Cacak, with the President-elected as the leading figure - and, quite contrary to 1996, with CNN and the other world's media not only watching, but by pressing these events to the centre of the world's interest, taking part. You know all this much better than I. (By the way, I was not given my visa until some days after the change.) Parliament building conquered, policemen joining the demonstrators, the leaders of the special police units refusing to send out the tanks, etc.

"Welcome in Free Serbia!" - this was the greeting I was welcomed with again and again. And then the reporting about what happened on the Oct 5th begins, to be told again and again, with pride and with great alleviation. And all these reports result in one summary: "Now we know how strong we are - and this lesson we will never forget. And so the old regime will have no chance any more."

I stayed in Belgrade for nearly one week. Most of the talks I had with my friends were related to what's going on in these days. No much talk about how the future will be; nearly no looking back into what happened during the last decade. This is quite understandable. After so long a time of humiliation from an oppressive regime and additional heavy and deep humiliation by NATO' bombings now there is the time to indulge in festivities. And as a friend I would be the last one to complain about that. I was taking part in this mood.

Could you tell us how those changes were perceived in Germany?

Well, my opinion presented above may have already been some part of a "german perception". But mine differs from that of many of my fellow-germans in some respects.

Here, back in Germany, many people look at your Oct 5th event as being a double victory: as a victory of democracy in your country - and as a victory of "our" NATO's policy. And, I guess, this might not just be the opinion of the Germans; it seems to be part of the official policy in most NA TO countries, though not explicitly ventilated so - as most prefer not to talk about last year's intervention any more.

Another thing (though again this is probably not just one of the german characteristics) is that although all sides are applauding Kostunica for his victory, some are complaining in the same breath that this man "is not the best choice", meaning by that two things: that he, too, is a nationalist; and that he pronounced himself to be unwilling to hand over Milosevic to the The Hague Tribunal. (And this not only, as many western politicians were too eagerly willing and able to believe, before the elections, but also after them.) Opinions differ as to what conclusions should follow from this "suboptimal election result": full operation only if at least the second "bad aspect" of Kostunica is changed (By whom?). I am sure that again our foreign minister's slogan will win: "Freedom first, justice later". Nearly nobody is arguing about what Mr. Kostunica's reasons for his Den Hague reluctance might be; and nearly nobody seems to notice that with respect to Kostunica's kind of "nationalism", some of our NATO partners would be the much more nationalistic ones.

So much for my dissenses with Germany's public opinion. But this should not diminish the great relief most people feel here about your changes. And the general opinion is, of course, that now it's time to try again with cooperation - and we will do our best in helping your country to recover .

What, in your opinion, will be the future of Yugoslavia and the Balkans?

I don't know. But I am sure that a good answer to the first part of your question (future of Y) depends on the answer to the second one (future of the Balkans). And so helping Y means helping to improve the situation in the Balkans in total. But all this help will be in vain if the Balkan people don't come to terms with each other by themselves. And this development is no project to be done very soon; and every decision which is aiming at any fast solution will be damned to create not improvement, but the very contrary. So let's all have a long breath, at least not a shorter one than we needed and still need in Northern Ireland and in other places as well. As far as money from outside to be pumped into the Balkans is concerned there might be one special incentive for the Balkan people: The more cooperative they are (not only with the West, but – much more important, of course – between themselves), the more they will get. And, I am sure, this profit will not only hold on the financial level.

What the future of your country will be? Well, I just hope that this question will mostly be decided upon by yourself.

You raised your voice against NATO bombing last year. Could you summarize your arguments for our readers?

Humanitarian Interventions are wars waged for humanitarian reasons, the main reason being to stop high level violations of human rights. Now, I do in fact think that such wars might be morally justified – but only if there are certain conditions fulfilled, namely the traditional conditions for a war to be a just war. These conditions were definitely not fulfilled in the case of NATO's bombing of Y last year . That bombing was, just to mention the most important factors, not necessary to eliminate the alleged reasons for the intervention; the bombing itself was essentially enlarging the scale of atrocities. The intervention did undue damage to outside parties; and more than that: the kind of bombing was connected with crimes against humanity by itself. So, whether the U.N. would have signed this war or not, this war was morally wrong. (For more details see my arguments via link Forum in www.mentis.de)

The whole instrument of so-called Humanitarian Intervention-warfare is to be regulated by international rules. And this should hold all the more for the case of an intervention without the previous placet of the U.N.'s or its security council. The justification of these wars is analogous to that of emergency assistance cases in criminal law . And if you plea for having acted for emergency assistance reasons even against existing law your action has to be checked by legal process afterwards – without ally exception. These same rules should apply on the international level for alleged emergency assistance wars.

But, so one might object, what if these legal processing rules don't yet exist? Well, then those who plea so strongly to be in accord with morality can and ought to put themselves on trial by

free will. That's the test of whether their morality-appeal is really to be taken seriously or not. And, in this process, being the actor whose acts are in dispute whilst also being the judge in one's own case is prohibited exactly in the same way as it would in law in general.

So, just in order to minimize the potential for misusing the Humanitarian Warfare instrument, it is clear what the world's nations should ask for at present: Not only to put Milosevic and the main figures of his gang to trial; but also the persons most responsible for the NATO-bombing-connected crimes should be given a fair chance of their decisions to be checked by reference to international law. But I have not yet heard of ally step in this direction. And of no step of even to amend international law in this respect for the times coming.

If there is no "moral progress" into this direction, then the present intervention doctrine combined with the false opinion, that we did bomb Serbia into democracy will deliver the best (or worst) premises for trying the same "successful bombing into democracy" very soon again. Serious violations of human rights abound; and so will reasons for changing that by far-distance warhead bombings. A good thing as far as there are no NATO soldiers killed, whatever the "collateral damages" to the "feed people" will be. (Vietnam was only a failure; Y-bombing democracy's victory.)

To be fair to my German and other Western fellows: I have heard the same weird argument also in Belgrade. Whereas my view, as sketched above, is taking sides with Kostunica in these respects.

Could you tell us your opinion about contemporary European Philosophy?

Sorry, this is too big a question for a short answer. There are too many countries about whose philosophy scene I have nearly no detailed information about. And in fact I just do not care about everything which runs under the title philosophy, in any country whatsoever. Life is short, and there are many things much more interesting than just philosophy. But as far as clear thinking in that field is concerned, there seem to me to be some good prospects. Analytical Philosophy, as one essential branch of philosophy craving for clarity, is producing good work in many European countries, some of the best being produced, for my taste, in Scandinavia. And there is at present a shift in this analytical field from the narrow topics of theoretical philosophy (with Logics at its centre) to the wide spectrum of practical questions, including bioethics, information-ethics and even just war ethics again. But both in theoretical and practical philosophy, there are some colleagues and students in your country who can compete at the highest level. I met some here in Belgrade during each of my three stays. And I think that these people will have something to tell us; something, e.g., about the various weak, but sometimes very strong, relations between individual intentions and society's changes. Let's hope they will do it.