

Serbia Progress Mainly A Dream

The following story appeared under the above headline in **The Plain Dealer** in Cleveland, Ohio on Feb. 5, written by C. Michael McAdams, director of the Central Valley Regional Centers of the University of San Francisco:

As the world celebrates the fall of one dictatorial communist regime after another in Eastern Europe, it was dismaying to read "Serbia is getting someplace," by Helen Delich Bentley (Forum, Jan. 4). The article purports to be about Yugoslavia, Serbia and Serbia's xenophobic Communist Party boss, Slobodan Milosevic. But in order to see the Milosevic and the Yugoslavia described by Bentley, one must surely go "through the looking glass," because reality is almost exactly the opposite of her observations.

This would be troubling enough if Bentley was a newspaper reporter (which she was before entering Congress), but it is downright frightening to see the defense of one of the last hardline communist rulers in Europe coming from a Republican member of Congress.

Bentley's opinion is summarized in her statement: "This new freedom and openness coming about in Yugoslavia, with Serbia leading the way, is to a great extent the work of Milosevic..." Bentley then details the great changes taking place in this worker's paradise, even though "it is not democracy as we know it, and changing leaders is not done at the ballot box in open multi-party elections," and she does note a few "economic hardships that include an annual inflation rate ranging as high as 1,000%."

Her praise for Milosevic reaches worshipful heights. Yet, within the past 60 days, the **New York Times**, the **Christian Science Monitor**, and most South Slavic experts have condemned the wave of Serbian nationalism, the continued repression of ethnic minorities, and the hardline communist orthodoxy of Milosevic and his followers.

Yugoslavia is on the verge of disintegration at best, and civic war at worst, largely because of the hardline, orthodox, Serbian communist leadership which, as recently as Jan. 20, fought all moves toward liberalization, pluralism and the "market-style" economic reforms Bentley praises. On Jan. 21, Milosevic warned that those seeking the weakening of the Communist Party's grip on Yugoslavia were calling for "...a war among Yugoslav nations."

According to Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, inflation is now running about 12,000% in Yugoslavia and, as everyone who reads a newspaper in the Western world knows. Slovenia and Croatia have led the way in calling for free elections, a market-based economy and the demise of the communist monopoly in Yugoslavia.

Prime Minister Ante Markovic, a Croat, has led the way to economic and political reform as Milosevic, whom the

New York Times calls "a reflexive authoritarian (who) has also sided with doctrinaire communists to resist dilution of the party's leading role," has fought reform every step of the way.

Bentley warns, as Milosevic and the Serbian-dominated army have warned, that the Serbs are now "comfortable for the first time in their role as a majority," and that "future concessions on the part of the Serbian people will not be made and...will not allow the territorial integrity of the Yugoslavian nation and the republic of Serbia to be compromised."

She does not seem to be aware that while Serbs do constitute a majority in military leadership, in the secret police, in the League of Communists and in the governmental and economic bureaucracy that has given Yugoslavia one of the lowest standards of living in Europe, they have never constituted a majority of Yugoslavia's population. The "territorial integrity" of Serbia is defended, without mentioning that 1.7 million Albanians are ruled over as an oppressed minority by 200,000 Serbs in the "province" of Kosovo and that no vote was ever taken by Croats or Slovenes to "join" Yugoslavia.

The first sentence of the first paragraph of the first article of the Yugoslav Constitution guarantees the right of each of the "republics" to leave the federation. But then again, it also guarantees several other "rights" that are hard to come by in Yugoslavia.

Most remarkably, Rep. Bentley writes, "it can only be counter-productive for the West to criticize the Yugoslavs for doing those things that are necessary to preserve some semblance of law and civil obedience in order to protect the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia and its constituent states."

This is also no doubt her view on Cuba and China. As Bentley notes, the U.S. State Department has, since 1947, supported the communist regime in Yugoslavia with both words and dollars. We turned a blind eye toward Tito's massive repression.

We even ignored, for as long as possible, the work of the Yugoslav secret police in the United States and other Western countries, just to appease the "non-aligned" Yugoslav communist leadership.

Once, Yugoslavia was courted as the first communist country to break with Stalin. It was predicted it would be the first to abandon communism altogether. But times have changed. The Soviet menace is fading, communist parties are falling, and peoples all over Eastern Europe are demanding freedom and independence.

America has but two choices: to support all freedom-seeking peoples in casting off all forms of political and ethnic repression, or to again reap the bitter fruits of supporting petty dictators when the people finally prevail. Bentley has made her choice clear.

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