

Death in Belgrade: an eyewitness report

28 April 1999

I was a medical student at Belgrade University before NATO annihilated this city with their bombs. All of that has changed now. Now I do what I can to help with what little experience I have to offer. Everywhere you go--businesses, homes, factories, and all of our beautiful bridges have been demolished in a matter of weeks with US missiles. I think about the labor and years it took to rebuild a single bridge after WWII. But that damage is still repairable. What is not repairable, what cannot be restored are the people who were killed and injured at Serbian TV. I worked in the hospital the night the injured and the dead were carried in, one by one, from NATO's deliberate and heinous attack against these defenseless workers.

S., who does not want his name revealed, was severely crushed beneath the bombed debris of the 24-level Business Center where Serbian TV operates. The Doctor had to remove his leg. Later, in the evening, when the sun splashed over the Wasteland of Belgrade, I heard him crying; it was a muffled weeping, the kind of break-down no man really wishes anyone to hear. I gave him his peace and dignity by not appearing at that moment. His dose of medication can wait...

The lights dim, flicker and dim again. We never know when the electricity will go out. No heat. And to make things intentionally worse, the U.S. is planning to cut off our oil supply. There is no propaganda being played inside these corridors. War can never have a "spin" side to it. It is always horrible and there is never anything righteous about killing and maiming children and people with bombs.

Tonight, I helped Nina give birth to her baby. When the doctor slapped him--his cry bloomed in the middle of all this emptiness and isolation; it gave me a strange, eerie feeling as though it were impossible for me to embrace his birth. What "Humanity"? When did it ever exist--except perhaps in this first graceful moment of being born.

NATO representatives attempted to justify the deaths

of Serbian TV workers by claiming that "they were an extension of Milosevic's war machine," as I heard CNN call it. Does that make them feel better? Do they actually believe they haven't murdered anyone by hiding behind this atrocious excuse? These people were not in the military. They did not march to work with guns and explosives and tanks. They were civilians. There is no justification--no matter how hard CNN/Time producers attempt to justify it through their "spin machine of propaganda" nothing can justify bombing a television station as if it were a military base.

Perhaps your American readers will now find comfort in believing that I am also "brainwashed by Milosevic." Truth is discovered through multiple versions of experience. We can watch CNN. Americans, on the other hand, cannot watch Serb TV. If Americans believe that Serb TV is all propaganda, then why not show it and let them judge for themselves? (And not edited excerpts--but all of it). John Stuart Mill wrote, "If an opinion is suppressed, and it is false, then we lose the opportunity of obtaining a clearer conception of our own position. Hence there shouldn't be any censorship of political speech." What American journalists and politicians argue is "Serb TV is all propaganda, therefore it should be censored." Not only did NATO attempt to censor Serb TV--they felt it was their patriotic duty to kill innocent civilians who worked there.

The CNN spin works like this: Continue to present the undeniable suffering of Albanian refugees. (It is horribly sad and equally unjustifiable and if I could change it all, in my own feeble way--I would; and so would many Serbs, but there are two sides to every story.) And the American people only hear one side. They only show pictures of the refugees, which will certainly minimize any feelings Americans may have towards those who died under NATO's bombs. But when a crushed woman locked beneath a ton of rubble

screams out in pain--how can you reason that it is of "no consequence"?

Outside, a small rain taps on the sill. Everything has changed from the window. From what I see--the world will not cleanse itself from wars. Tomorrow I will either help these people to heal or help them to die.

MR Belgrade, Yugoslavia



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