What US-backed “democracy movements” have produced in Serbia and Georgia

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A change of regime is being carried out in Ukraine along the same lines as those carried out in Serbia (2000) and Georgia (2003). So-called “democracy movements,” which enjoy substantial financial, ideological and logistic support from American and European institutions, put the existing regime under pressure until it is forced to give way to a new regime more completely dominated by Western imperialist powers.

The protagonists of the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine openly acknowledge their debt to the “Rose Revolution” carried out in Georgia against Eduard Shevardnadze and the “Peaceful Revolution” in Serbia, which led to the fall of Slobodan Milosevic. Activists of the Serbian Otpor group have advised the Georgian Kmara and the Ukrainian Pora movements.

In Belgrade, Otpor activist Alexandar Maric now leads a “Centre for Non-Violent Resistance,” which trains activists and, according to the Zurich newspaper *Tagesanzeige*, “exports the Belgrade revolution worldwide.” His clients include the opponents of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, the Zimbabwean opposition under Morgan Tsvangirai, and activists from Georgia and Ukraine.

The Western press has provided the propaganda accompaniment to the coups carried out in Belgrade (Serbia) and Tiflis (Georgia), and the one underway in Kiev, describing the process in glowing terms as a “democratic revolution.” However, what transpires in the aftermath of these overthrows goes largely unreported. Hardly a single journalist has taken the trouble to investigate the outcome of the democratic promises made by the new ruling powers.

However, reports by Amnesty International and other organizations show that, if anything, the situation with regard to democracy and human rights in these countries—as bad as it was under the old regimes—has actually worsened. The pursuit and abuse of political opponents remains a priority for the new “democratic” rulers.

In its 2004 annual report, Amnesty International records the results of the “Peaceful Revolution” in Serbia as follows: “torture and abuse by police officers remain widespread, in particular, in connection with ‘Operation Sabre’.”

Under “Operation Sabre,” a state of emergency was imposed after the murder of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, and within a month 10,000 persons were detained without warrant. Amnesty International reported in detail on some of the cases:

“On March 14, Goran Petrovic and Igor Gajic were arrested in Kruševac in Serbia and held in detention until May 13 without contact with the external world. According to reports, they were tortured in order to force confessions from them. In the course of interrogation, officials placed bags over their heads, which they sealed, and then began beating both men. Igor Gajic was doused with water and then tortured with electrical shocks.

“In June, three police officers in Pljevlja in Montenegro were accused of torturing Admir Durutlic, Dragoljub Dzuver, Jovo Dosovic and Mirko Gazdic in order to extort confessions that concerned drug trafficking. According to reports, they beat Admir Durutlic, delivering blows and kicks, including blows to his genitals. The policemen struck him down and repeatedly forced his head into a toilet. Dragoljub Dzuver was repeatedly struck in the stomach and ribs. The four men had to spend the night at the police station, where they were beaten once again. After they were freed from detention, they were given medical examinations that reported numerous bruises and

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welts."

The suppression of minorities has also continued under the new regime. Amnesty International writes:

"Members of the Roma community continue to suffer discrimination. A memorandum submitted in April by the European Centre for the Rights of the Roma, an international non-governmental organisation, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights established that discriminatory practices were taking place in nearly all areas of life. The authorities seemed to offer little protection to members of the Roma community facing attacks by racist groups. The authorities evidently failed to react after a group of young people attacked Roma in February in a Belgrade housing estate.

"In May, an unofficial settlement of the Roma in Belgrade was destroyed. Around 250 inhabitants, largely members of the Roma community from Kosovo, were forced from the area without any provision of alternative accommodation."

According to a recent report by Reporters Without Borders, Serbia/Montenegro ranks 77th worldwide on the index of press freedom, following the murder of a journalist who had investigated a corruption scandal involving the prime minister of Montenegro.

Since the coming to power of Mikhail Saakashvili, a 36-year-old attorney trained in the US, Georgia has slipped from 73rd to 94th on the Reporters Without Borders' index of press freedom. In an open letter published in July of this year, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) expressed its "concern over the recent evolution of human rights in Georgia." The organization complained, amongst other things, that President Saakashvili had been given the authority to dissolve the parliament, as well as to appoint and dismiss judges.

In January, police violently broke up two peaceful protests over social problems. In one case, the demonstrator Zaal Adamia was beaten unconscious in his house after the protest and then dragged to the police station. In March, the police stormed the church of an "extremist priest" and beat up thirty people. In another case, the chief of police personally beat up a female demonstrator.

According to the FIDH, a demonstration in the village of Krtsanisi against the building of an oil pipeline was broken up June 9, 2004 by "excessive force," as was a hunger strike by earthquake victims in the capital city of Tiflis in July. One of the hunger strikers is said to have required hospital treatment for his beating at the hands of the police. Saakashvili later defended the police action.

The human rights organization writes: "The increasing incidences of torture, inhuman and humiliating treatment, and arbitrary detention remain matters of deep concern for the FIDH...The police practice various methods of torture—blows with rubber sticks or the backs of chairs, locking people in a safe and beating on the safe from outside, hanging victims by their hands, the use of electricity, etc.—in order to extort confessions and extract evidence, sometimes completely false... [H]uman rights defenders are often subjected to violence. For example, on May 4, Mr. Levan Sakhvadze, head of the Rustavi branch of the NGO Former Political Prisoners for Human Rights, was badly beaten by unknown assailants."

While the Saakashvili regime has trampled on democratic rights, it has fulfilled the expectations of its Western supporters. The US government-run Radio Free Europe drew the following balance sheet one year after the "Rose Revolution":

"Government efforts to impose fiscal discipline have helped replenish depleted state coffers, while measures have been taken to reform the Soviet-style education system, privatize the economy, and modernize the military and police forces. Under Saakashvili's rule, Georgia has also improved relations with the international financial community and donor nations and boosted ties with the European Union."

In February, Saakashvili visited President Bush, proudly noting that US instructors had trained thousands of Georgian soldiers and that Georgia was striving to obtain admission to the European Union and NATO.

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