

**MONTENEGRO'S SOCIALIST PEOPLE'S
PARTY: A LOYAL OPPOSITION?**

28 April 2000

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MONTENEGRO'S SOCIALIST PEOPLE'S PARTY: A LOYAL OPPOSITION?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The assertion of the primacy of Serbian rights over all other peoples by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic has driven nearly every nationality of the former Yugoslavia toward the Republic's exits. Even Montenegro, once Serbia's closest political and military ally, has not been immune from the turmoil that Slobodan Milosevic has created and has opted to distance itself from Belgrade's controlling influence.

The resulting political tensions have reshaped Montenegro's political landscape. The Socialist People's Party (SNP), which enjoys the support of about one-third of the Montenegrin public, was formed as the result of a split within Montenegro's ruling party, the Party of Democratic Socialists (DPS). The SNP is a party increasingly on the defensive, caught between the initiatives of Montenegrin President Djukanovic to define pro-Western, democratising and reformist policies; and the intimidation tactics of federal President Milosevic who seeks to bring Montenegro to heel and thus salvage the Federation.

Cracks have begun to appear in the SNP's once-united front. Tensions have reportedly increased between party leader Momir Bulatovic, the federal prime minister portrayed by Djukanovic as a Belgrade-centric *gauleiter* of Milosevic, and Predrag Bulatovic, the deputy party chief (and no relation of Momir), who appears to speak for Montenegrins concerned about Momir's incompetent leadership and supportive of the Federation but who are increasingly sceptical of Milosevic's assumption that SNP policies must be tailored to the Serbian leader's wishes.

The SNP seems to be struggling whether to continue as an opposition party owing primary loyalty to Belgrade, or a loyal opposition to Djukanovic whose critique of government actions is based on the needs of the Montenegrin people. The policy issue for the Western democracies is to determine how serious these differences are and whether to engage the putative loyal opposition in serious dialogue that would advance the prospects for Montenegrin reform and stability without undermining the efforts of President Djukanovic to resist Belgrade's pressures.

The SNP has yet to earn a status as the loyal opposition, but the possibility that significant elements of the party wish to do so should not be foreclosed. It is worth exploring – in a cautious but deliberate manner – whether a Western relationship with

the SNP that is based on a reciprocal willingness to identify what is best for the Montenegrins will help Montenegro survive in its end game with Milosevic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Western governments should undertake an exploratory dialogue with Socialist People's Party (SNP) leaders in Podgorica that is based on the assumption that there is a legitimate role for a loyal opposition in Montenegrin President Djukanovic's democratising strategy;
2. European and American non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should establish relationships with members of the SNP, including inviting them to international NGO-sponsored conferences, so long as the SNP does not exploit these overtures to undermine support for the Djukanovic government in resisting Belgrade intimidation;
3. Some Western assistance – including micro-lending programs that require small resources but promise high local visibility – should be extended to SNP-controlled towns on an exploratory basis to encourage SNP party loyalists to revise their perceptions of alleged Western hostility to the party.
4. The US and EU should send small observer missions to the 11 June municipal elections in Podgorica and Herceg-Novi to reassure the SNP that the West supports democracy for all Montenegrins prepared to participate in the electoral process.

Podgorica/Washington/Brussels, 28 March 2000



MONTENEGRO'S SOCIALIST PEOPLE'S PARTY: A LOYAL OPPOSITION?

I. INTRODUCTION

The Socialist People's Party (SNP) is the strongest opposition party in Montenegro, representing a clearly-defined alternative to the governing coalition. That alternative is based on a defence of the existing structure of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), and of the governments and structures under its president Slobodan Milosevic. The policy of the reformist government of Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic, by contrast, carries Montenegro ever further away from FRY structures, embraces contact with and help from the international community, and raises the question of possible independence for Montenegro from FRY. The extreme difference between the SNP's approach and that of the pro-Western Montenegrin government displays a rift much deeper than the usual policy divide between government and opposition. In a significant sense, the two sides inhabit different worlds.

In the 1998 parliamentary elections the SNP polled 36.1 per cent, against Djukanovic's winning coalition's 49.54 per cent. As a result it has 29 seats in the Montenegro parliament against the government's 42. Part of the SNP's public message is that it is stronger than any individual member of the coalition, and is in fact the strongest single party in Montenegro.¹ Published polls suggest that SNP support has fallen since 1998, but the SNP claims its own polls show the reverse, and that the published polls are biased. In general it is standard SNP practice to attribute any unwelcome or inconvenient information to conspiracy against the party. Local elections in Podgorica and Herceg-Novi on 11 June will provide the first indisputable test since 1998 to show who is right.²

The SNP is strongest in the mountainous and poor northern parts of Montenegro. It runs the local government in Kolasin, Andrijevisa, Pljevlja and Pluzine, and governs in coalition with the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and/or

¹ Djukanovic's DPS has 30 seats, but since seats within the coalition were allocated by agreement between the parties this alone does not invalidate the SNP's claim. However, nor is there any independent evidence to support it.

² It may not be undisputed. The SNP has already called for these elections to be postponed, on the grounds that a new law on voters' lists has not been properly implemented. This gives plenty of scope to blame an unwelcome result on malpractice by the governing coalition. The SNP and its predecessors disputed both Djukanovic's election in 1997 and the general election results of 1998. Momir Bulatovic has never accepted any political defeat without protest and allegations of foul play.

Serb People's Party (SNS) in Zabljak and Mojkovac. Of these only Pljevlja has a population of more than 12,000. Podgorica and Herceg -Novi, interestingly, are the places where the gap between governing "For A Better Life" (DZB) coalition and opposition SNP is closest. SNP supporters tend to be older and poorer segments of the population, and others who feel that things are bad but fear change and the unknown even more.³

The SNP complains of isolation and exclusion from consultation with other political forces in Montenegro. It complains that its members cannot get civil service jobs, are harassed by police and subject to various forms of discrimination. One speaker in parliament used the term "anti-semitism" to describe the situation of SNP supporters.⁴ While liberal Montenegrins are genuinely afraid of the SNP's pro-Milosevic orientation, the SNP from its side feels that the game is rigged against it. This makes SNP leaders defensive in contacts with the outside, though they constantly stress their openness to dialogue. They point to the fruitful work of the inter-party working group drafting new laws on election lists throughout February, and the fact that the SNP voted with the government to pass the new laws, as evidence of that openness.

The SNP complains that it is not allowed fair or proportionate air-time in government media including television. It has its own newspaper, *Dan*, but in general only its own supporters read it, since it functions openly as a disseminator of pro-SNP and anti-government news and comment. So *Dan* alone is not enough to get the SNP message across. The Belgrade state media are more favourable to the SNP, but do not concentrate mainly on Montenegro. The contempt with which Western observers and pro-Western Montenegrins view the onesided coverage of local events, and the pro-Belgrade coverage of world events, in *Dan* is mirrored by *Dan's* contempt for information coming from official Western sources. The two sides are deaf to each other, living in distorted looking-glass worlds.

Because of its political orientation and close identification with the Belgrade Serbian Socialist Party (SPS), the SNP is usually dismissed in the West as an ideological puppet of Milosevic. But the party's supporters believe they speak simple sense and truth against Western propaganda and lies. Since they represent a significant proportion of the Montenegrin electorate, observers need to understand how two such opposed views can exist side by side in a small society.

This paper attempts to look from both sides of the mirror. It asks what background beliefs are necessary in order for the SNP position to make sense, and sets out in what respects these beliefs clash with the typical Western or pro-Western assumptions. It concludes with suggestions for starting to bridge the gap.

³ Percentage of local councillors under 50: SNP-59, DZB-69. Percentage with higher education: SNP-50, DZB-67. – Statisticki godisnjak 1999.

⁴ Zorica Tajic Tabrenovic, 16 February 2000, parliamentary debate on television.

II. HISTORY

In the post-communist period to 1997, political life in Montenegro was dominated by the Party of Democratic Socialists (DPS) under Momir Bulatovic, who was president both of the party and of the republic. In July 1997, after several months of manoeuvring, the party split into two when Milica Pejanovic Djurisc replaced Bulatovic as party president.⁵ Bulatovic declared this proceeding illegitimate and continued to regard himself as party leader: he attempted to call a party congress (his grassroots support was still strong) but the new DPS leaders denied his authority to do this. Nonetheless the "congress" went ahead on 6 August at Kolasin, and those who attended it became the "DPS – Momir Bulatovic."

The mainspring of the split was a conflict between the Montenegro government's wish to end its international isolation, if necessary at the expense of the federal relationship with Serbia; and president Bulatovic's policy of loyalty to Serbian leadership, Milosevic and the FRY.

Bulatovic's prime minister Milo Djukanovic, who had led the revolt against him, stood against him in presidential elections in October 1997. In the first round of voting Bulatovic came out narrowly ahead of Djukanovic, but other candidates gained enough votes to force a second round of voting, between only the two leading candidates. Djukanovic won in the decisive second leg by as narrow a margin as Bulatovic had the first leg.

Bulatovic could not believe his voters had rejected him. He accused Djukanovic of malpractice, said his party did not accept the result, and on 14-15 January 1998, on the eve of Djukanovic's inauguration, organised and led demonstrations which degenerated into violence between Bulatovic supporters and police – each side accusing the other of responsibility for the violence.⁶

Djukanovic's DPS claimed that it, and not Bulatovic's group, was the continuation of the original DPS, and a High Court ruling denied Bulatovic's party the right to continue using the term "DPS."⁷ Following a compromise brokered by the federal prime minister, Radoje Kontic, involving an agreement to early elections,⁸ Bulatovic and his supporters reformed themselves as the Socialist People's Party on 21 March 1998.

At the founding meeting Bulatovic claimed that his new party was "from the first second of its foundation, clearly the strongest political force in the country."⁹ Bulatovic at this stage seems to have had no doubt that his new party would win elections and make Djukanovic's position untenable, and his appointment as federal prime minister on 20 May, replacing Kontic, was a sign how the Belgrade authorities wanted Montenegro to vote – the DPS protested

⁵ *Pobjeda*, 12 July 1997.

⁶ *Pobjeda*, 15 January 1998, and subsequent parliamentary debate.

⁷ *Pobjeda*, 12 December 1997.

⁸ *Pobjeda*, 22 January 1998.

⁹ *Pobjeda*, 22 March 1998.

that this appointment was unconstitutional since new political realities in Montenegro were not reflected in the composition of federal bodies; this is the origin of the Montenegro government's refusal to acknowledge or work with any federal bodies. Meanwhile the election in Montenegro was won by Djukanovic's "Da Zivimo Bolje" (DZB) coalition, and the SNP went into opposition.

In the federal government, however, Bulatovic remained as prime minister against DPS calls for him to resign. In the last federal elections in 1996 the (united) DPS had gained 50 per cent of the vote and 20 of the 30 Montenegrin seats. At federal level too the DPS split; those who joined the SNP were enough to keep Bulatovic in power, with a solid block of Serbian votes also behind him. SNP members loyal to him remained in ministerial posts: still today at federal level the SNP governs in coalition with Milosevic's SPS, Mira Markovic's United Yugoslav Left (JUL) and Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party. The DPS claims the federal premiership for itself, and cite this as one of the reasons for refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of federal institutions; the SNP cites the DPS's refusal to acknowledge federal institutions as a main charge against them in the weakening of Yugoslavia.

The SNP thus started out as a group personally loyal to Momir Bulatovic against Djukanovic's challenge or rebellion, but the reason it was loyal to him was that it shared his support for the existing Yugoslav structures and for Milosevic, who became president of the FRY while the DPS was breaking up.¹⁰ In part the party represents such political weight as Bulatovic still enjoys in Montenegro. But in two years of parliamentary opposition the party has also established a clear policy identity. By now it makes sense to ask whether the SNP's primary loyalty is to Bulatovic (and through him to Milosevic in Belgrade), or to its policies. This question has important implications which are treated below in sections IV and V.

III. POLICIES

A. Patriotic

The basic idea which drives the SNP is that Montenegro belongs with Serbia in partnership. The idea rests on emotional foundations: words like "brotherhood" and "fatherland" are common currency in the SNP. Milosevic's third Yugoslavia, built from the remnants of Tito's second Yugoslavia, is identified as the fatherland to which primary loyalty is owed. This patriotism is itself a policy: the SNP's fiercest and most passionate denunciations of the Djukanovic government refer to its cautious stance during NATO bombing in 1999. But then on these foundations of emotion or principle has to be erected a system of arguments and policies to convince Montenegrins that partnership with Serbia is also the best policy for Montenegro as a whole. The SNP does

¹⁰ The Djukanovic side at first always expressed full support for FRY structures, but was never able to work with Milosevic. This, and not the question of Montenegrin independence or separatism, is the issue which most characteristically divides the DPS and the SNP.

rely on the emotional appeal of the federal partnership, but also argues that partnership will bring the best results for Montenegro.

The SNP policy regarding the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is that Serbia and Montenegro are already equal partners.¹¹ At the federal level organisations exist which the SNP respects. The SNP, not Djukanovic's DPS, inherited the Montenegrin seats in federal elected bodies. It, at federal level, is in coalition with Milosevic's SPS in the government, and holds national ministerial posts. Its president, Momir Bulatovic, is federal prime minister. The SPS does not run candidates for election in Montenegro, so that the SNP is effectively its representative in the republic.

After the assassination of federal defence minister Pavle Bulatovic (an SNP member) in Belgrade on 7 February 2000, he was replaced not with another SNP politician but with a serving soldier, General Dragoljub Ojdanic. Taunted in parliament by other parties over this, the SNP defended the line that when national security was at stake, party considerations became secondary. On the one hand, such solidarity with the common cause is impressive; on the other hand the SNP as a coalition partner does appear not so much junior as subservient, never criticising Milosevic or Serbia at all, in contrast to the more competitive but still (so far) cooperative atmosphere within the governing DZB coalition.

B. Serbs or Montenegrins?

The separate identity of Montenegrins and Serbs is acknowledged in the Yugoslav census, which in 1991 found that Montenegro contained 61.86 per cent Montenegrins and 9.34 per cent Serbs. But the question of ethnic identification is often confusing. Many self-identified Montenegrins would feel no contradiction in asserting that they are also Serbs; on the other (separatist) side of the argument, other Montenegrins are actively promoting a separate Montenegrin identity.

The SNP is with those who assert the identity of Serb and Montenegrin, or at least an inseparable closeness. A parallel would be that there are Texans who are proud to be Texan but are just as proud to be American. There are Serbs who are not Montenegrins, just as there are Americans who are not Texans, and these in Montenegro provide voters for the SRS and SNS, but there are no Montenegrins who are not in some sense Serbs.

This makes the SNP an ethnic party of the Montenegrin-Serb ethnicity. In pitching its appeal at Montenegrins with Serb affinities it offers nothing to Montenegro's other ethnicities. None of its parliamentarians is a Bosniak or Albanian, and it appears to receive few votes from those groups. Certainly the emotional identification with Yugoslavia is unlikely to pick up much support from muslim or Albanian voters. The main electoral target of the SNP is undoubtedly waverers from the DZB, especially Djukanovic's DPS and the

¹¹ And the DPS position is that constitutionally they are, and should be, but in fact are not.

People's Party. In theory, since the rhetoric of the SNP is patriotic rather than ethnic-nationalist, it could start to pick up Muslim votes if the present government's economic policies continue to make people feel poorer. More likely though, the fear of Serb nationalism is too strong, so that minority votes abandoning the DPS would go into mono-ethnic parties such as the Bosniak SDA and the Albanian Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA) and Democratic Alliance (DS). An increase in support for the SNP would thus tend to strengthen ethnic divides in Montenegro.

C. Army and Police

On security policy the direct confrontation between the world-view of the SNP and the government comes out most clearly. For the SNP the Yugoslav Army (VJ) is in Montenegro to carry out its duties as defined by the Yugoslav constitution. It cannot be seen as a hostile presence, as Djukanovic and his Western backers see it.

Djukanovic on the other hand (again according to the SNP) has built up a police and paramilitary force of some 20,000, which the party claims is far too strong for such a small republic. One in every thirty Montenegrins is a policeman. Conveniently ignoring the fact that the Montenegrin police were expanded by Djukanovic to maintain Montenegro's autonomy against intimidation from Belgrade, the SNP rhetorically asks what purpose this force can have other than internal repression, confrontation with the VJ and maintenance in power of the present government? At the very least, the voting block created by 20,000 police and their families dependent on Djukanovic for jobs is a form of electoral manipulation.

SNP accusations that Djukanovic, not the SNP or the VJ, is really the main threat to stability in Montenegro have even reached the point where SNP spokesmen have openly accused Djukanovic of provoking confrontations with the VJ, in order to create the very civil war he himself has been warning against, to give himself an opportunity to clamp down on the SNP, and to give NATO an excuse to bomb Yugoslavia again. By this stage in the argument, the gap between the two sides of the mirror seems truly unbridgeable.

Since a string of incidents in February and early March,¹² tension between the government and the army seems to have subsided. There have even been talks between the two which give some hope of a permanent decrease in domestic tension. But it remains a fact in Montenegro that non-SNP voters see the army as the main threat to stability, while SNP supporters fear and distrust the police. Those who fear the army remember Bosnia, and the frightening experience of having the VJ on Montenegro's streets during the Kosovo conflict in 1999. Those who fear the police remember the January 1998 clashes, allege that entry into the force is closed to SNP members, and claim various sorts of state oppression such as telephone-tapping.

¹² See ICG Balkans Report No. 89, *Montenegro: In the Shadow of the Volcano*, 21 March 2000.

If asked "What would you do if the VJ intervened to displace the Djukanovic government?" the SNP dismisses the question as carrying both a propaganda message and a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of the VJ.¹³ It is true that nothing in the SNP's behaviour or policy supports any suggestion that it is in favour of use of force to resolve political disputes (Montenegro has been blessedly free of political violence since the January 1998 incident). On the other hand, assuming circumstances where the collapse of the government could be ascribed to Djukanovic's own fault - as it certainly would be by Belgrade - it is hard to imagine Momir Bulatovic refusing to form a provisional government "until elections can be held," if it could be presented to the public as a patriotic duty to prevent a collapse of law and order, and given some constitutional cover. After all, he still refuses to accept the legitimacy of his original defeat. The federal parliament would support him. And if Bulatovic led, his party would follow - though perhaps not all members and definitely not gladly.

The question of "paramilitaries" is another area where two worlds collide. The Djukanovic government has alerted the international community to the existence of a large unit called the 7th Military Police battalion, a federalised paramilitary unit alleged to consist entirely of troublemakers and SNP members, whose task would be to foment unrest and instability if Belgrade decided to move against Podgorica. The VJ and SNP position is that the 7th battalion is a normal and orderly military unit, recruited mostly locally from Montenegrins. Indeed its members can often be seen peacefully walking around towns in military uniform, usually unarmed. The SNP accepts that its members have a strong presence in the battalion, but say (1) that job opportunities in Montenegro are poor, particularly for young men, so joining a locally-based army unit is a natural step; (2) that anyone with DPS sympathies looking for a career in security will naturally join the police, which is closed to SNP supporters. While the purpose of the 7th battalion is intimidatory, so far its actual behaviour has been unthreatening: government criticisms have concerned its potential, rather than its actual, use. SNP member Zoran Zizic made an interesting proposal in parliament on 19 April,¹⁴ to create a parliamentary commission to study the incidence of people with criminal records in both the 7th battalion and the Montenegro police. The government side did not take up the invitation.

D. Economic

Much of the SNP's core support demands no more than the emotional patriotic appeal. But if the party is to win elections it needs to win the economic argument. It needs to prove that Djukanovic's economic policies and reforms have harmed, rather than helped, the people of Montenegro, and that a *rapprochement* with Serbia would produce better results.

¹³ But Zoran Zizic, speaking in parliament on 19 April, stated clearly "If Serbia attacked Montenegro I would defend Montenegro as I would from any other (invader), but I know it won't come to that." (live TV broadcast, carried in *Vijesti* and *Dan*, 20 April 2000)

¹⁴ Live TV broadcast, reported in *Dan* 20 April 2000.

The battlefield for this debate now is the introduction of the two-currency policy in November 1999, the subject of a long set-piece debate in parliament from 15-23 February 2000. The Djukanovic government hoped with this policy to bring price stability to Montenegro, and immunity from hyperinflation caused by the rapid depreciation of the dinar, caused in turn by over-issue of currency by the National Bank of Yugoslavia.

The two-currency policy had two instant and unwelcome consequences. First, Serbia intensified a trade blockade against Montenegro which had begun with certain food products in summer 1999 but became ever stricter, so that by the beginning of March all goods traffic between the two federal partners was reported blocked. Secondly, prices in Montenegro suddenly jumped as access to cheap Serbian goods was denied – the opposite of the intended effect.

The SNP uses the observed inflation as an argument that, by cutting itself off from its main traditional supplier Serbia, the Djukanovic government has done damage to the Montenegro economy. The SNP newspaper *Dan* regularly publishes comparisons of prices of staple goods in Serbia and Montenegro, which show that prices are much lower in Serbia. The government response to this is that low prices in Serbia are a result of price controls which are unsustainable in the long term, as shown by the experience of fifty years of communism in many countries. They either remove from farmers the incentive to produce, or else lead to the form of rationing manifested by queuing for and unavailability of basic goods. The system will eventually collapse of its own instability. The SNP responds that it cannot be right to cut oneself off from the cheapest local source of supply. This argument has a powerful appeal to ordinary citizens facing increasing financial difficulties, who have enough to worry about in the short term without trying to understand theories of economic reform and long-term benefit. It will hold strength as long, but only as long, as the controlled Serbian economy continues to find the resources to avoid collapse.

The SNP must also defend Serbia's trade blockade. It has not adopted the tactics of some in Serbia who have denied the existence of the blockade. Instead it has attempted to show that the embargo is in fact the fault of the Djukanovic government. Several arguments are advanced in support of this. First, that the Podgorica government has been abusing its access to price-controlled Serbian goods by selling them abroad at a profit, therefore the Belgrade government must protect its own producers and taxpayers. Secondly, that Montenegro's control over its border and customs services cuts off revenue from federal authorities and makes federal monitoring of trade impossible. Third, that the introduction of a separate currency regime has made of Montenegro a separate economy with which Serbia is in effect trading, so that the unity of the Yugoslav economy was broken from the Montenegrin side and trade controls are a natural result of that.

This is the policy area where the strain between Yugoslavia-patriotism and Montenegro-patriotism shows most clearly. Yet it is also the area where SNP arguments may be having most effect, simply because people are feeling the

bad effects of the current situation. The argument that inflation in Montenegro has followed the introduction of the two-currency system is common ground, but it is also clear that its principal cause is denial of access to Serbian goods. The SNP claims that, by introducing the two-currency system without any consultation at federal level, or even in the Montenegro parliament, the Djukanovic government was offering an open slight to Belgrade. But the argument that the ensuing blockade is a legitimate defence of Serbia's interests is an argument better made in Belgrade than by a party which claims to put Montenegro's interests first. It can be put to service in support of the case that confrontation with Serbia is the wrong policy for Montenegro, but it can hardly be used to show that the authorities in Belgrade, Serbian or federal, have Montenegro's best interests at heart.

To put things right, the SNP urges that the two-currency system should be abolished in favour of a return to a unified Yugoslav market. Since this could only be achieved through a pro-SNP majority in parliament, and hence through an SNP government in Montenegro, it probably would lead to a removal of the trade embargo and a fall in prices in the short term. But it would make Montenegro once again vulnerable to hyperinflation in Serbia (which has not yet resumed, kept at bay by price controls), reverse the economic reforms of the Djukanovic government, and make reform in Montenegro dependent on reform in Serbia. Where does the SNP stand on economic reform?

E. Reforms and Privatisation

The general economic orientation of the SNP is that some balance is needed between failed communism and too-rapid reform. It claims to wish to avoid creating a society where one-fifth become richer while four-fifths lose ground economically. Its recipe is to take everything slowly. This in itself is a normal traditional policy for reformed communists in post-communist countries. In lock step with Belgrade, the SNP also asserts that most of Montenegro's ills are caused by international sanctions, which have created a depressed economy not ripe for rushed market reforms.

Privatisation provides a good illustration of the SNP approach. The SNP accuses the government of carrying out privatisations in a way which enriches a few entrepreneurs, who happen to be close friends or members of the government, and throws workers onto the street without a future. It does not oppose privatisation in principle, but would rather proceed in a way which spread the wealth as widely as possible, and if possible empowered the workers of an enterprise themselves and allowed them to take their own decisions. Also there should be a social safety net, funded out of the proceeds of the privatisations, to help those who lost their jobs as a result of streamlining.¹⁵ More than anything the SNP is concerned to show that the government's handling of privatisation so far has been non-transparent and even corrupt – the word "robbery" (pljacka) is openly used. In this they have

¹⁵ From televised parliamentary debate, 10-20 April 2000.

even received some support from the Social Democratic Party (SDP), a member of the governing coalition, as well as from the Liberal Alliance (LSCG).

This attempt to put first the interests of the weakest members of society is typical of the SNP approach, which involves many elements of traditional socialism. From the experience of other liberalising economies it takes the message that free-market reforms can create a playground for corruption and fat cats, rather than the preferred Western message that some transitional pain is the price necessary to be paid for long-term health.

F. Crime and Corruption

The idea that the Djukanovic reforms are merely creating a new elite is linked closely to the idea that Djukanovic's own circle compose a principal part of this elite. They are characterised as "Those who are living better" (bolježivci) in parody of the governing coalition's title "For a Better Life" (Da Živimo Bolje). *Dan* in particular can seldom let a day pass without using this sharp-edged joke.

The SNP on the whole refrains from making specific accusations of corruption against individuals, though – in conjunction with a Belgrade-sponsored propaganda offensive – it made effective political use of the indictment of Foreign Minister Branko Perovic by an Italian court in 1999 for crimes allegedly committed in 1993, and Perovic subsequently resigned. It is prone to accuse the government of wholesale corruption in general terms. It also makes maximum use of the continuing controversy with Italy over the activities of Montenegrin gangs in Italy, and the alleged safe haven offered by Montenegro to Italian mafiosi. Since there is now better understanding between Italy and Montenegro over the issue, there is currently less mileage in it, but *Dan* still reprints Italian press stories against Montenegro whenever it can.

SNP leaders themselves, it should be said, are not conspicuous consumers. Their headquarters is a dowdy hut some way from the centre of Podgorica. No luxurious cars park outside. Whatever profits Momir Bulatovic may have made when he was president of Montenegro, they have not visibly enriched his followers. Some subsidy is received from Belgrade for *Dan*, but the newspaper too is produced in very modest surroundings – and evidently feels some economic pressure, for it has recently increased its price from 5 to 6 dinars.

G. Foreign – the American Empire

The SNP view of world politics is the same one which official Belgrade has adopted. The fall of the Berlin Wall offered an irresistible opportunity to the United States to win the Cold War forever and establish political and cultural hegemony in eastern Europe. In most countries it did this by imposing a market system which brought new countries into the world economic system dominated by, and formed in the image of, American capitalism. Now the process is being extended militarily by the eastwards expansion of NATO. Only in Yugoslavia was this pressure resisted, and so the Americans hastened the

break-up of Yugoslavia by successively backing anti-Belgrade forces which emerged (Tudjman until Croatia was safely independent, Izetbegovic until Dayton, the KLA). Belgrade still holds out heroically against American blackmail, and has suffered isolation and direct attack as a result. The European Union is too weak and disunited to offer resistance to growing American power.

To most Western minds this scenario is simply not recognisable. A more standard analysis is that the US for a long time resisted becoming too involved in the Balkans, hoping that the Europeans would resolve the problem in their own back yard. Armed intervention had to wait three years in Bosnia, while in Kosovo it occurred only after the failure at Rambouillet had committed the entire West either to decisive action or political humiliation. As for the Europeans, there are some who call openly for American leadership, and some who resent it when they get it – and some even in both camps at once. But no government in the EU would tolerate being described as a US puppet.

So there is an unbridgeable gap of perspective. What makes it possible to believe in this American plot, which has been neither identified nor denounced in the vigorous and various Western media, usually so anxious to debunk their own governments? Psychologically the reasons for the SNP view seem reasonably clear: if somebody much bigger and stronger than you attacks you over a sustained period, then either they are a power-crazed bully or else something is seriously wrong with you. The Western analysis naturally assumes the second alternative; anyone with any loyalty to Belgrade, or sense of solidarity with the sufferings of the Serb people, must work on the first. And in the Balkans conspiracy is always a favourite explanation of unwelcome facts, the more secret the better.

H. Kosovo

Kosovo is an outstanding case where incompatible agendas and selective memory make it hard for the SNP and the West to understand each other.

For the SNP the issue in Kosovo was that some Albanians formed the KLA and adopted terrorist tactics against the legitimate authorities. Using violence themselves, they had to be countered with violent means. If excesses were committed, they were on both sides, each provoking the other, and were a sad and predictable result of a breakdown of law and order. This simple exercise of sovereignty by Yugoslavia was seized upon by the predatory Americans as an excuse to intervene, under the guise of "peacemaking," but really to detach Kosovo from Serbia in pursuit of the anti-Serb program described above. Failure to prevent ethnic cleansing of Serbs since June 1999 despite a huge international armed presence provides further evidence of an anti-Serb agenda.

For the West, Kosovo was a test-case of the strengthening hypothesis that, in the new world order, national sovereignty was no longer paramount, but could in certain cases be made subordinate to universal human rights ideals. In Kosovo the root of the problem was not the KLA but the conditions which had

given birth to the KLA, namely the exclusion since 1989 of Albanians from political and professional life in Kosovo, a land in which they formed a 95 per cent majority population. This in itself was a political problem which could and should have been resolved by dialogue. But military intervention was justified when military operations against the KLA started to treat the whole Albanian population as a target. The SNP's obligatory blindness to Serb failure to acknowledge that their own authorities carried out a massive campaign of ethnic cleansing against Albanians before June 1999 is yet another example of the ability to ignore or dismiss unpleasant facts and believe more comforting government propaganda.

It is hard to see how there can ever be reconciliation between these two points of view. Since very few Montenegrins visit Kosovo, their view is naturally shaped by media coverage of the dispute, just as in the West. Every consumer of news has a natural tendency to believe stories which support his or her existing beliefs, so the Belgrade state media and *Dan* have a natural constituency of uncritical hearers. But in the case of the Western version the possibility that governments have manipulated information, or simply lied, grows less with time, since no secret agenda could long survive the level of media scrutiny all Western governments come under – indeed an active debate about the NATO intervention in Kosovo continues. The very fact that this debate exists in the West is seized upon by *Dan* as proof of the unjustness of the Western cause, rather than taken as a good example which Yugoslavia itself might follow. The distorting mirror can permit no virtue to exist on the other side.

IV. SPECTRUM OR SPLIT?

Although Momir Bulatovic remains president of the SNP, his post as federal prime minister has taken him out of the day-to-day activity of Montenegro affairs. The same can be said of those SNP ministers and members of federal bodies who live in Belgrade. This brings a natural difference of perspective between this group and the SNP politicians who work in the Montenegro parliament, who are handling local business all the time.

This difference of perspective never mattered in the old pre-SNP days, when a unified DPS under Bulatovic was a loyal satellite of Belgrade, but now in Montenegro the SNP is in opposition and its leaders have had to sharpen their wits in political debates much more lively than in Belgrade's controlled environment. In Belgrade the SNP is under the wing of Milosevic's SPS and its members are required to do little thinking of their own.

Speculation that the party might actually be concealing serious internal differences has usually centred around the person of Predrag Bulatovic (no relation to Momir Bulatovic), party vice-president and leader of the SNP group in the Montenegro parliament. This has not been a question of policy differences, which have never been allowed to appear in public, and Predrag Bulatovic has never allowed himself to appear disloyal to his party leader. It has been more a question of tone and general approach. While Momir

Bulatovic still seems opposed to any form of engagement or dialogue with "enemy" forces in politics, Predrag has more often spoken for peaceful resolution of problems by dialogue. But all concerned know that public disagreement would be disastrous, and so far Momir Bulatovic has been able to maintain party discipline – or, to use the SNP's own language, internal party consensus has been unbroken.

This explains the significance of the coalitions for local elections in Herceg Novi and Podgorica scheduled for 11 June 2000. The SNP came under pressure from various parties more radical than itself to join forces – most seriously from Mira Markovic's JUL, which attracts almost no votes at all in Montenegro, but also from Vojislav Seselj's SRS and the (local) Serb People's Party (SNS).¹⁶ The votes the SNP risks losing from its moderate wing are probably greater than those it would gain from such an alliance. The party itself was divided on the issue, but there was no sense of crisis until Momir Bulatovic announced that the coalition with JUL and the SRS would go ahead, before the SNP's own central committee (glavni odbor) had had opportunity to debate the issue. Both the deal and the announcement were made in Belgrade.

The following version of the rest of the story was made public through the independent newspaper *Vijesti*, which claimed to have insider accounts of the ensuing events from discontented SNP members at high level. The party's executive committee (izvršni odbor) met on 10 April to discuss the matter. Several members were absent but a vote went 7-6 in favour of accepting the coalitions.¹⁷ In this vote the minority were mostly Montenegro-based members, including Predrag Bulatovic, Zoran Zizic and Zorica Tajic-Rabrenovic, while the majority were Belgrade-based. The argument of the minority was that the coalitions would not help, and would quite likely harm, the SNP's electoral performance. Their only purpose was to help JUL and the SRS get representation in elected bodies in Montenegro. Thus Momir Bulatovic had put the interests of his party second to his own career as federal prime minister (where he had recently been receiving less-than-firm support from Markovic and Seselj).

For three days the line was "no comment."¹⁸ Behind the scenes went on intensive negotiations. Some sort of evidence that all was not well was provided by the fact that neither Predrag Bulatovic nor Zoran Zizic played any role in an important parliamentary debate on privatisation, being held at the same time. By 14 April talk of a compromise solution was leaking out, and when the central committee met on 15 April the vote in favour of the coalitions was unanimous; both Zizic and Predrag Bulatovic very publicly supported the decision at meetings soon afterwards,¹⁹ and resumed normal levels of participation in parliament. The crisis – if such it was – had passed, and the party at all levels had decided that a presentation of unanimity was the best

¹⁶ The SNS is an offshoot of the People's Party (NS), now part of the DZB, which split at the same time and along similar lines to the DPS in 1997.

¹⁷ *Vijesti*, 12 April 2000.

¹⁸ *Monitor*, 14 April 2000. *Dan* noted the *Vijesti* stories but dismissed them routinely as propaganda.

¹⁹ *Dan*, 17 April 2000.

way to encourage the faithful and appear credible to floating voters. But party discipline had been maintained at a cost. At least one prominent party officeholder, Vojin Cicmil, head of press and information, resigned his functions for "personal reasons" – interestingly, *Vijesti* coverage immediately became less detailed. And even if an open split had been prevented on this occasion – and without *Vijesti* none of this might ever have been made public – the party's internal fault-line had been aired in public once again.²⁰

Momir Bulatovic evidently felt that the damage done to his party's image by the detailed coverage in *Vijesti* must be undone, and accused *Vijesti* of using police information from overheard and misunderstood telephone conversations, and of association with the CIA. *Vijesti* in response calmly insisted on their "high-level sources" within the party.²¹

Momir Bulatovic's strategy of blaming everything on an anti-SNP campaign is a precarious one. Internal debate is nothing shameful in a political party, and the resolution of disagreements by democratic vote is a positive strength, so why the need to appear absolutely unanimous (again an echo of old communist priorities)? *Vijesti's* sources might possibly have been ill-intentioned or may have exaggerated the passion of the debate,²² and the impressive united front put up since the central committee decision could in time have discredited the stories; but to suggest that they were a CIA conspiracy or a police plot, while it may satisfy the faithful,²³ naturally inclines other readers to believe *Vijesti* even more. The party's strident reaction has much to do with its feeling that it is embattled and victimised, that the forces against it are strong and unscrupulous, that it cannot afford to show any weakness. The SNP is not the only party which demonises its enemies and accepts no criticism of itself – but it does have those characteristics in full measure. Thanks to the workings of the distorting mirror, which make it impossible to find a compromise between competing sides of a story, many individuals first decide which side to believe *a priori*, and then assume that the truth is whatever story their own side puts out.

So the frequently asked question, how likely is the SNP to split into "Montenegro" and "Belgrade" factions, remains intriguingly open behind a facade of old-style communist party public unanimity. An SNP split would be a severe setback to the pro-Yugoslavia cause, a high price that induces caution among the party leadership.

²⁰ It is worth asking why Markovic and Seselj would want to create this problem in the first place. Surely their interest is to have the SNP as strong as possible in Montenegro? Unless for some reason they want the SNP to lose, one must conclude that they do not understand how Montenegro works.

²¹ *Vijesti*, 17 April 2000. ICG has discussed this episode with *Vijesti* and believes its sources are good.

²² Zoran Zizic tried a reasonable line like this – we don't always agree on everything, but to suggest that we would fall out at this critical moment is ridiculous – see *Dan*, 17 April. But he also echoed Bulatovic's allegations that the *Vijesti* stories were a police-inspired plot.

²³ ICG analysts heard the Momir Bulatovic version defended as obviously true in Pljevlja and Bijelo Polje shortly afterwards.

Unless of course the leader himself became a liability. Momir Bulatovic is dominant within his party but not popular among other voters: the SNP might even be stronger without him. There are two interesting features of Bulatovic's political career: he has never accepted a defeat but always accused the other side of foul play;²⁴ and he has always claimed that the forces behind him are absolutely unanimous until division becomes impossible to conceal.²⁵ However, his position appears safe. Even assuming that a desire existed to replace Momir Bulatovic as leader, that can only be done at a full party congress,²⁶ which would itself involve a major public controversy. Since the leader's position is secure, and since the cause depends on party unity, then party unity seems likely to be sustained behind the leader for the foreseeable future.

The crisis would be likely to come only if the party started undeniably to lose support. This is why the coming local elections have an importance far greater than the question of who governs Herceg-Novi or Podgorica. Is the SNP message gaining converts and strength, as the SNP themselves claim? If yes then there is no need to question Momir's leadership. If no then the question could re-emerge whether the party has a long-term future with him as leader. It should be noted, though, that by querying the government's implementation of the new law on voters' lists (involving allegations in *Dan* that false voters have been included on the new lists) the SNP has already prepared the way to blame a bad result yet again on cheating by the government side. The looking glass will not shatter this time.

V. PATRIOTS OR SCOUNDRELS?

The SNP exists for three reasons. First it does what Momir Bulatovic tells it to, and to that extent it becomes an ally and dependent of Slobodan Milosevic. Secondly it defends the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia against what it perceives as a Western-backed agenda to weaken it or even break it up. Thirdly it advocates a range of traditional left-wing policies for the current problems of Montenegro.

On evidence so far, whenever any tensions appear between these three purposes they are resolved in favour of the first: Momir Bulatovic remains the undisputed leader of the party. And on any occasion when tensions may have been present, the whole party unites behind the victorious line, because any sign of disunity would benefit only the party's enemies: that seems to be the message from the recent coalition negotiations with SRS and JUL.

But the SNP will not win elections solely on the leadership of Momir Bulatovic, nor is the emotional appeal of the FRY enough to gain a majority in present-day Montenegro. These are factors which keep the party's core support loyal,

²⁴ Loss of DPS presidency July 1997, loss of Montenegro presidency October 1997, general election May 1998.

²⁵ See e.g. *Pobjeda*, 26 March 1997, at the start of the open split with Djukanovic.

²⁶ According to *Vijesti*, 13 April 2000. Remember that Bulatovic lost the presidency of the DPS at a meeting of the central committee, and believed that a congress would have supported him (see section II).

but do not attract new converts. The political battle has to be won on policies which affect Montenegrins directly.

In many policy areas, such as security, foreign policy and the independence debate, voters at large seem already to have made up their minds, and events only serve to confirm their existing views. The economy is the most likely area where people are uncertain, and the SNP can pick up votes. Inflation, unemployment and the trade embargo from Serbia are damaging the Montenegro economy, and the government's reforms are not yet seen by many voters to be working. The two-currency system has generally been accepted by the public, whose main concern is how to survive until the end of the month. The privatisation process does not have a good image and is feared by workers. The effect of international aid is not always felt or appreciated by the public at large. In SNP-run municipalities, which tend to be the most run-down and in need of help, there is a belief that the government will not even permit aid to be spent in "hostile" territory.²⁷ Undecided voters are caught between the government message that Yugoslavia is the cause of all Montenegro's problems, and the SNP's message that Yugoslavia is the solution to them.

There are difficulties in the position. For example:

- Serbia is obviously bullying Montenegro, with the trade embargo and by freezing official bilateral contacts. The SNP argument, that Serbia has been provoked into it by the renegade Djukanovic regime, seems to serve a Serbian, rather than a Montenegrin or even a Yugoslav, agenda, though it may be a vote-winning – if yet untested – point that with the SNP in power the embargo would be removed and some prices would fall, at least in the short term.
- The SNP position involves not only support for the FRY itself, but also support for the Milosevic government. There is no internal contradiction in this – Milosevic's poll ratings among SNP party members are actually better than those of their own leader Momir Bulatovic. But complete loyalty to a Belgrade ally undermines the SNP's claim to be working for Montenegro. Is the SNP under Milosevic's control, or does it just happen to agree with him on everything? Again this is not a problem for the party faithful, but how will it attract new supporters from Montenegrins pursuing their own republic's interests?

On the other hand, these Yugoslav patriots have nowhere else to go. If their main policy objective is to preserve Yugoslavia, and they see Djukanovic's activity primarily as a foreign-backed attempt to break it up, then they cannot afford to be in disagreement with the federal institutions in which they themselves still participate. Perhaps indeed the SNP is split into "Milosevic" and "Montenegro" wings, as suggested earlier, but for the SNP to adopt an anti-Milosevic stance now would be to hasten the separation of the two federal units. For some Milosevic is a genuine hero, for others he just happens to be

²⁷ ICG interviews in Pljevlja and Mojkovac, April 2000.

the force in power in Belgrade – but all must support him, or else the whole point of the SNP is lost.

Furthermore, the Milosevic perspective is believable to traumatised Serb-centred minds. From the Western point of view the entire Milosevic world-view is invented to keep him and his circle in power in Belgrade. But that world-view, of legitimate Serb interests thwarted by a world conspiracy against them, is shared by millions of Serbs including some of Milosevic's opponents. The SNP, and those in Montenegro whom they represent, believe it too.

VI. CONCLUSION – THE CASE FOR DIALOGUE

The distorted looking-glass effect, where two groups in Montenegrin society live in worlds which are not mutually recognisable, where reality splits along ideological lines, is dangerous for Montenegro. If the SNP were a crank or fringe party their views would not matter, but they speak for at least a third of Montenegrins. Can anything be done to improve conditions for a dialogue between the SNP and the West?

In Serbia Western engagement is complicated by the sanctions policy and the need to avoid policies that strengthen Milosevic. In Montenegro it need not be governed by the same factors. Western aid should be extended, on an exploratory basis, to reach poorer areas which vote SNP as well as more prosperous areas under government control to encourage SNP party loyalists to revise their perceptions of alleged Western hostility to the party. An experience of co-operation between SNP councils and international agencies would be instructive for both sides. The Montenegro government too, if it is wise, will promote such projects rather than – as SNP mayors allege – punishing populations for voting SNP. A friendly international presence in places such as Pljevlja and Kolasin, and the application of small-scale micro-lending and grant policies, modest in resources but high in visibility, would at least give the two worlds a chance to compare notes, and get used to each other.

Similarly, non-governmental invitations to dialogue should be offered to the SNP, through European and American NGOs. This semi-official route may be more promising than government contacts, where flexibility of debate is naturally limited, though it would not be harmful for more visiting dignitaries to offer to meet the SNP too. The SNP claims to be open to dialogue, and the party made much of its membership in a Yugoslav delegation to an Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting in Marseilles recently. More exchange of views at an international level could do more good than harm.²⁸ Indeed, regular dialogue and the opportunity to earn international respectability would strengthen the SNP's stake in the peaceful resolution of disputes. Such exchanges should be private but not secret, so that both sides can make a

²⁸ One reason sometimes advanced for not meeting the SNP is that the party would capitalise on such meetings for propaganda purposes. This must be watched carefully in any effort to engage the SNP in dialogue to avoid undermining President Djukanovic's firm resistance to Milosevic.

genuine attempt to understand each other, rather than feeling obliged to restate party lines.

Western governments and NGOs could also make good use of the upcoming municipal elections in Podgorica and Herceg-Novi to send small observer teams to make contact with the SNP and other political parties, thus demonstrating their interest in a dialogue with the party and their support for democracy for all Montenegrins.

The point of this would not be to break up the SNP – any such attempt from outside would be counter-productive and likely to fail. Yet dialogue with Momir Bulatovic himself – a high-profile supporter of Milosevic – would not be appropriate. The purpose of building bridges is to reach politicians who genuinely think for themselves, as at least some of the SNP do. If the attempt at dialogue is to be made, it needs to be made with politicians active and working in Montenegro itself.

Podgorica/Washington/Brussels, 28 March 2000