



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Serbians overthrow Milosevic (Bulldozer Revolution), 2000

- Colour Revolutions (2000s)

Time period notes: *Although Otpor began before February 2000, they had been inactive for some time because of the NATO bombings of Serbia. February 2000 marked the groups founding congress*

February

2000

to: 7 October

2000

Country: Serbia

Location City/State/Province: *Focused in Belgrade, but with actions nationwide*

Goals:

Primary: Overthrow Slobodan Milosevic

Secondary: Free and Fair elections, free university, free and independent media

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 105. Establishment strike
- 115. Selective strike
- 117. General strike
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents
- 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 001. Public speeches
- 016. Picketing
- 031. "Haunting" officials › picketing homes of officers known to have beat protestors
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Serbian citizens
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Otpor

Partners:

Serbian pro-democracy political parties (organized into the Democratic Opposition of Serbia), Independent Media (radio, television, newspapers), Serbian workers, and rural population

External allies:

National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, Center for Civic Initiatives, Police and Military forces who joined opposition, Serbian Orthodox Church, National Media

Involvement of social elites:

Mayors of major cities besides Belgrade

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:**Groups in 2nd Segment:****Groups in 3rd Segment:****Groups in 4th Segment:****Groups in 5th Segment:**

- Democratic Opposition of Serbia

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Allied Police and Military members
- Mayors of cities outside Belgrade
- Serbian Orthodox Church

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Joining order of other groups not known, because the support for the campaign grew gradually and drew from many parts of the population

Segment Length: *Approximately 1 month 10 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Milosevic Regime

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Not known. There was some property damage: sticks used to break through police barricade into parliamentary building, some rooms in federal building set afire, and media building burned down.

Repressive Violence:

Opposition beaten by police; Shots fired in October 2000 protests, wounding four.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign overthrew Milosevic, creating fair Parliamentary elections, creating more independent media. Success in goal of free university not known

During his first seven years as president of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic led the country into several wars with Croatia and Bosnia and isolated it internationally. While he spent money on the country's secret police and military, unemployment reached as high as 50 percent before 1996. Citizens led several anti-war and pro-democracy campaigns in the early '90s, but failed due to lack of outside support. Opposition groups continued both violent and non-violent struggles against the regime, but neither was having any success.

In November 17, 1996 municipal elections were held across Serbia. Zajedno, an opposition group composed of several pro-democratic political parties, won elections in 40 cities, beating the Milosevic-backed politicians. Milosevic refused to certify the victories. In response Zajedno called for marches and street protests. At the same time university students called for similar protests, especially in Belgrade, the capital city. These protests were successful at instituting the democratically elected politicians, but Milosevic's oppressive dictatorship continued.

After the successful election, Zajedno fell apart due to internal strife. Later in 1997, at the end of his lawful term as Serbian president, Milosevic assumed the Yugoslavian presidency, while keeping the same powers he had held for the last eight years. In March 1998, in the midst of struggles in Kosovo, secret police took action against the Kosovo Liberation Army, a violent resistance group, killing 80 men, women, and children.

In October 1998, student veterans of the 1996 protests formed a new non-violent opposition group called Otpor. They held their first, mainly symbolic march in December, walking from Belgrade to the city of Novi Sad. With strong support already in the large cities, the purpose of this march was to involve the rural provinces in the struggle.

Otpor had a structure of horizontal leadership and used grassroots organizing. From its inception members were to use only nonviolent methods of resistance as made clear by one leader of the group, Srdja Popovic. Otpor had one main goal: to remove Milosevic from power. Their secondary objectives included free and fair elections, free university, and free and independent media.

In March 1999, after Milosevic failed to cooperate with NATO negotiations, NATO launched a bombing campaign against

Yugoslavia that lasted 78 days. During the bombings Otpor members were inactive. To this point nonviolent resistance movements had received little outside aid. The United States had given \$15 million dollars to independent media in Serbia while spending \$1 billion in the form of cruise missiles and other weapons to fight Milosevic.

In February 2000, after the bombings, Otpor held its founding congress. Eighty chapters from across the country participated. At this meeting, participants decided on a three-phase plan to overthrow Milosevic: they wanted to bring about early presidential elections, win these elections by calling huge numbers of people to the polls, and then change the political system with the momentum of a new political climate.

Much of Otpor's action was also symbolic and humorous, beginning with their emblem of a black fist, a parody of Milosevic's favorite image of a bloody fist. These types of actions lessened the sense of fear within the country. They distributed T-shirts, pamphlets, and stickers to spread the message of opposition. Activists even performed humorous street theater productions. In one such humorous skit, activists used a makeshift telescope to show people on the streets the "eclipse" of Milosevic.

Otpor received outside funding from the National Democratic Institute. The Center for Civic Initiatives distributed copies of Gene Sharp's book *From Dictatorship to Democracy* to the organization. The International Republican Institute trained 400 Otpor activists in nonviolent struggle. Otpor also distributed a training manual in nonviolent struggle based on Gene Sharp's *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

The government attempted repression through censorship, arrests, and violence. Secret police raided Studio B and B-92 Radio, two independent media stations, and took over their programs. After every arrest of Otpor activists, groups of supporters gathered outside of the prison demanding their release. The Milosevic government closed Belgrade University and illegalized Otpor. Despite such repression Otpor support grew in both the cities and rural provinces. Activists and supporters made symbolic acts even more humorous and silly so that arrests appeared unjustified to the general public. This method fought the fear tactics of repression.

In June 2000, Milosevic passed a law that would allow him to run for another term as president. On July 27 he moved the election date forward to September 24, hoping to be reelected before the opposition could gather a unified political campaign against him.

Otpor launched two major propaganda campaigns for the election. In the first, they printed the words "He's Finished" (Gotov Je!) on stickers, t-shirts, and posters to break the myth of Milosevic's invincibility and to keep people from simply voting for the incumbent. In the second they did the same with the words "It's Time" to bring out the greatest volume of voters. Otpor leaders knew that a large voting population would reduce the effectiveness of fraud in the election.

Meanwhile Otpor was also struggling to unite opposition political parties. Despite differences among the 18 separate parties, Otpor created the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) through manipulation and the promise of 500,000 votes if the parties could agree to a single candidate. The DOS decided on Vojislav Kostunica.

At the September 24 elections 80 percent of the population voted. Despite results released later showing that Kostunica had won 50.24 percent of the vote to Milosevic's 37.15 percent, the Federal Election Commission called for a run-off vote, claiming that Kostunica had not won a majority of the vote. In response, opposition leaders called for mass protest of these results to begin on September 27. Even the Serbian Orthodox Church urged Milosevic to step down and asked the police and army to defend the opposition victory. The campaigners would have until October 8, the date of the run-off vote, to overturn the results.

200,000 people came together in Belgrade to support Kostunica's victory with mass demonstrations. Opposition supporters also came together in the other major cities, where opposition politicians had won municipal elections. At the same time Otpor leaders met with groups of police and agreed that ally police forces would obey orders, but not execute them against protesters.

Coal miners in the Kolubara mines that produced coal for half the country's electricity went on strike. News workers in nationally run media protested bias and disobeyed orders from the regime. Belgrade's mayor called for general strikes that began

on October 2. Across the country citizens had shut down cities and production with strikes, barricades and civil disobedience. On October 3, police issued warrants for the arrest of Otpor leaders and removed human blockades. However there were already reports of police disobeying such orders.

On October 4 secret police attempted to take over the mines, but 20,000 opposition supporters led peaceful demonstrations against them. The next day police had disappeared from the mines and miners continued to strike.

Opposition leaders had called for protesters from the provinces to come to Belgrade on October 5 to protest. The plan was to stage a sit-in at the federal parliament building until Milosevic conceded. Velimir Ilic, the mayor of Cacak, led a procession of provincial opposition into Belgrade with the help of allies in the police force. These protesters also came with bulldozers for dispersing blockades. They met hundreds of thousands of others in front of the federal building and the national media building in Belgrade. At the federal building police allies stepped aside or held back non-allied police as protesters charged into the federal building, some carrying sticks or metal bars. Non-allied police launched tear gas into the crowd. At the media building police fired live bullets into the crowd, wounding four. Despite Otpor's continued nonviolent ideology, groups of protesters burned the media building and several rooms in the federal parliament building.

On October 6, the Russian Foreign Minister met with Milosevic and Kostunica. The Constitutional court reversed their previous election ruling and certified Kostunica's victory. That night Milosevic announced his resignation as president and Kostunica was instated as the Yugoslovian President on October 7, 2000.

Otpor successfully overthrew Milosevic with their determinedly nonviolent struggle. In the aftermath, the European Union gave \$2 billion for reconstruction and Serbia moved forward with its rebuilding when free, democratic parliamentary elections were held the following December.

Research Notes

Influences:

Writings by Gene Sharp and the Zajedno protests following the 1996 elections influenced this campaign (1).

This campaign began the wave of "Colour Revolutions (2000s)" (2).

Sources:

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Not reviewed: Joshua Paulson, "Case Study: Serbia, 1996-2000," in Sharp, Gene and others, *Sharp's Dictionary of Power and Struggle: Language of Civil Resistance in Conflicts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp.10-33.

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Max Rennebohm, 08/09/2011

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