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Otpor - people's power in Serbia



Founded in 1998, within two years the Serbian youth group Otpor (Resist) was to play a central role in bringing down Slobodan Milošević. Initially their campaign aimed to change attitudes towards resisting Milošević, for instance by using nonviolent “guerrilla” tactics of communication (graffiti, street theatre, etc), often using humour to attract interest and to reduce fear. Increasingly, they began to put pressure on the divided democratic opposition and to find points of unity to counter Milošević and to undermine [“the pillars of his power”](#).

Nonviolence training workshops played an important role in spreading their understanding of how they could weaken the regime, and when Milošević did try to steal the elections, they were in a position to expose him and ultimately to stop him. When crowds surrounded the parliament building, the police were unwilling to disperse them. The most famous image is of a bulldozer driving into the parliament, but by that time the police were making no effort to prevent this. The next day Milošević resigned.

Otpor had played a vital role in achieving a necessary step in the democratisation of Serbia – the removal of Milošević – but subsequent progress towards democracy has been disappointing.

Resources:

- “Bringing Down a Dictator”, DVD, 60 minutes
- Albert Cevallos, Whither the Bulldozer?: Nonviolent Revolution and the Transition to Democracy in Serbia (US Institute of Peace special report No 72 - downloadable from <http://www.usip.org>)
- Web page for Centre for Applied NonViolent Action Strategies, which involves some former Otpor activist, includes articles by Otpor activists and others on their strategy and tactics: http://www.canvasopedia.org/content/serbian_case/otpor_strategy.htm

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