

REVIEW OF NEW BOOKS, 22 September 2004

Adam LeBor, *Milosevic: A Biography*. Review by Dennis Reinhartz

For at least the past decade and a half, Slobodan Milosevic, the now former leader of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), from the Balkans and The Hague has occupied a portion of center stage in international affairs. Consequently, there has been an increasing number of books published recently about this controversial figure. One such volume is *Milosevic: A Biography*, by Adam LeBor, a British journalist who has reported on the Wars of Yugoslav Succession for the Independent and the London Times and who has written several other books on Central and Eastern Europe, including *Hitler's Secret Bankers* (1997) and *Seduced by Hitler* (2000).

LeBor's study is a life and times of the man and a history of the complex region from which he comes. Although this is not an authorized biography, the author did have close access to Milosevic's family and friends, including a lengthy interview with his equally notorious wife, Mira Markovic. Approximately the first third (ten chapters) of this volume rightfully deals with its subject's early life and amazing rise to power, using socialism, capitalism, and nationalism at will after Tito's death. The rest of the book, save the final two chapters, concentrates on the turbulent years of his dictatorship. Chapters 24 and 25 briefly cover his overthrow and transition to The Hague, respectively. Although LeBor's approach is more journalistic and narrative rather than historically critical-analytical, he has written a solid and thoroughly informative biography of Milosevic.

Given some of LeBor's previous experiences, research, and publications, it is perhaps not surprising that he casts his subject overall in the light of other twentieth-century European dictators, such as Hitler and Stalin. Although this is a standard interpretation, it is by no means the only one. Louis Sell, for example, in his *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (2002) attributes his actions, especially in captivity, more to his unique Balkan (Serbian) personality and context.

LeBor's biography is straightforward, clearly written, and quite objective, and it should be engaging even to a wide-ranging readership. *Milosevic: A Biography* contains some black-and-white illustrations and basic maps and also has endnotes and an extensive bibliography of English language sources that should help readers less experienced with the specific or broader subject matters delve more easily into them, should they so desire.

DENNIS REINHARTZ

University of Texas at Arlington

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