

Serbia's former leader is about to go on trial at The Hague for war crimes. But even as their lives fall apart, Milosevic and his delusional family remain convinced of their heroism.

# The Unrepentant

By Blaine Harden

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he former first family of the Balkans has had a very bad year. The father, Slobodan, was packed off to The Hague and charged with genocide. His trial, the most important war crimes prosecution since Nuremberg, begins next month. The son, Marko, was indicted for threatening to chop up an opposition activist with a rotary saw and throw his body parts in a river. The daughter,

Marija, went on trial for a father's pistol during a drug-and-alcohol-induced frenzy 10 months ago, on the night her father was arrested in the presidential mansion. And the mother, Mirjana, in the first of what Serbian police promise will be many criminal charges, was indicted for improperly using her influence to secure an apartment for her grandson's baby sitter.

One afternoon earlier this winter in Belgrade, I met with Slobodan Milosevic's wife. She received me in the cavernous and nearly empty villa that is the headquarters of her increasingly marginal political party, the Yugoslav Left. She was not in a good mood. She had just come home from her fifth visit with her husband at a detention center in The Hague. Upon her return, she learned of her son's rotary-saw indictment. Her daughter was preparing for trial on weapons charges. And she was due in court in three days to answer charges about the baby sitter's apartment. As she sat down with a translator to talk in a small, ground-floor office, I asked Mirjana Markovic (she has always

used her maiden name) why she thought international and Serbian courts were now trying to put her entire family in prison.

The question provoked a derisive laugh. "Marko was threatening with a saw to cut someone up in pieces?" she asked. "That's humor! That's humor!"

Markovic is a stout woman with pudgy fingers and large, dark eyes. Her voice is a squeaky surprise: a high-register chirp. She speaks with a slight lisp. The effect is that of a tightly wound middle-aged woman trying to sound like a sweet little girl. She was dressed in a black skirt and sweater, with a large gold bracelet on each wrist. Her schoolgirl bangs, which reach down to her eyebrows, form the frontispiece of a smooth helmet of hair that her beautician dyes coal-mine black. (Before the family's fall from power, the beautician received a \$225,000 credit from a Belgrade bank then controlled by the Milosevic family.)

"You see, it is not really nice that my 2-year-old grandson is not indicted," she joked sarcastically. "We *all* have our big guilt."

At 59, Markovic is a year younger than her husband. They were teenage sweethearts, and by all accounts, including hers, they remain the passionate center of each other's lives. In Belgrade's central jail, where Milosevic spent three months last spring before he was taken to The Hague, his wife visited daily. The chief warden observed that the couple were extraordinarily tender, calling each other "puppy" and "kitten." During one visit, while they were snuggling together, the warden saw her lean over and kiss her husband's knee.

"We love each other very much, and it is a well-known thing," she told me. Her life since her husband's arrest has revolved around visiting him in the Netherlands while planning his defense back home. So

Painting by Brenda Zlamany



