

Debate: Did Project Censored Whitewash Serbian Atrocities?

Editors' Note:

David Walls' article in the last issue of *New Politics*, "How Project Censored Joined the Whitewash of Serb Atrocities" (Volume IX, No.1, Whole Number 33, Summer 2002), elicited commentary from Bogdan Denitch and critical responses from Peter Phillips, Diana Johnstone, and Edward S. Herman & David Peterson, all printed below. Each critical response is followed with a reply from Walls.

BOGDAN DENITCH

The Shame and Scandal of Apologias for Atrocities

To the Editors:

IT WAS GRATIFYING TO READ DAVID WALLS'S review, in the current issue (#33) of *New Politics*, of "How Project Censored Joined the Whitewash of Serb Atrocities" during the reign of Slobodon Milosevic, especially the atrocities committed during the wars against Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo. I would like to add a few paragraphs of support to Walls's analysis based in large measure on my own personal experiences in Yugoslavia over many decades.

As a preliminary to my brief contribution to the discussion, I want to at least pose the relevant question, not touched upon in Walls's article, whether the UN-sanctioned NATO interventions in Bosnia and in Kosovo were justified and deserved the support of democrats and socialists. It is not a simple question to answer. Remember that Marx and Engels backed the Allies in the Crimean War against the Russian Empire in the mid-19th century, despite the fact that the Allied forces mainly included undemocratic imperial powers. At the time, England was oppressing Ireland and brutally colonizing India and Africa, France was no less savage in asserting its domination of Algeria and Turkey oppressed most of the population of its own multi-national Empire. Nevertheless, neither the political character nor motives of the anti-Russian alliance were determinant in deciding whether to back the war against Russia; at least not for Marx or Engels, for whom Russia was the greater evil and the main enemy of democratic and social revolutions.

This does not, of course, determine whether the UN-sanctioned NATO interventions in the Wars of Yugoslav Successions, were justified and deserve support of democrats and socialists. It does indicate, however, that support for such actions is not alien to our tradition and has to be argued, for or against, on its own merits. I do believe that while differences on the question of military intervention are legitimate, those who opposed it in Yugoslavia were obliged to offer an alternative way to stop the carnage in Bosnia and Serbia's brutal repression of the Albanian majority in Kosovo.

What is not legitimate is to deny that massive crimes were being committed in Bosnia mainly, though not exclusively, by the Serbs supported by the Milosevic regime in Belgrade, and that for

over a decade the Serbian government was repressing the Albanian majority in Kosovo, having first arbitrarily abolished the autonomy of that province. I might add that in both cases the United States was dragged into the intervention quite late by its Allies, kicking and resisting all the way, preferring that the Europeans alone should settle the problem and take all the casualties. In both cases, Russia went along and China did not use its veto.

So it is simply wrongheaded to treat these interventions as solely or even primarily U.S. policy initiatives. It is also a fact that in Bosnia at least for three to four years other methods of solving the civil war and intervention from Serbia and Croatia were tried at no small cost in lives of UN troops and with no less than 200,000 dead Bosnians, overwhelmingly Bosniak, but including Serbs and Croats, and two million refugees. A part of the cost was the well documented largest single massacre in Europe since the Second World War of more than 5,000 Bosniak men and boys after the surrender of Srebrenica, an enclave declared a safe area by the UN.

Armed intervention was the last thing tried and it did stop the carnage, permitting Bosnia to slowly start recovering.

The decision to intervene in Kosovo was informed by the bitter lessons of Bosnia and the war in Croatia. Only armed intervention stopped the military aggression by the Serbian forces, and unfortunately innocent Serb civilians have also paid a heavy price in displacement and exile for years of brutal aggression and repression by the regime most of them had supported.

Perhaps the worst of Milosevic's crimes was his policy of centralization and Serbian domination which he knew would destroy Yugoslavia and plunge it into bloody wars of succession. In this he was helped by his nationalist rivals, Tudjman in Croatia and Izetbegovic in Bosnia, but the main responsibility for the wars is his and that of the Serbian political establishment.

Milosevic has long ceased to be in any sense of the word a figure of the left, even the authoritarian Titoist "left." For years, while in power, he was allied with such right-wing ultra nationalists as Vladimir Seselj and Arkan, whose militias committed most of the war crimes, rapes and looting during the Croat and Bosnian wars. In the last Presidential election in Serbia he urged his followers to vote for Serbia's Haider, Vladimir Seselj, who is more aggressively nationalist and fascistic than LePen and Haider. Seselj received 23 percent of the vote in a three-way election in October 2002.

None of this necessarily makes me right on the question of military intervention, but I have the right and obligation to shout about massacres and mass rape. I have talked to women in their early teens who had been repeatedly raped by Serbian militia in 1992, I counted corpses in Moslem and Serbian villages and I talked to prisoners of war. And I regard it as a shame and a scandal that people who claim to be on the left in the U.S. still apologize for the atrocities caused by the butcher of the Balkans out of some mechanical formula which supposedly makes the enemies of the U.S. empire politically acceptable no matter how brutal and repressive they might be.

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PETER PHILLIPS

In Defense of Project Censored's Coverage

To the Editors:

A RESPONSE TO DAVID WALLS' CRITICISM requires an understanding of Project Censored's purpose and mission. Project Censored is a 26-year-old media research group at Sonoma State University (SSU). We annually compile a list of the most important Censored/under-covered news stories of the year. Over 200 faculty, students, and community experts participate in the Project. Censored students and staff screen several thousand stories each year, selecting some 900 news articles for evaluation by faculty and community evaluators. Our 90-faculty/community evaluators are experts in their individual fields and rate the stories for credibility and national importance.

Each news story is evaluated on its own merits. We do not evaluate the source publication in its totality or make any claims that our selection of any single story from a source is in some way an endorsement of other news stories by that publication. This strategy has allowed us over the years to recognize individual news stories from a broad spectrum of political perspectives.

Each year SSU students in our Media Censorship class research the top ranked stories to determine the degree of mainstream coverage. This class examines the corporate media's coverage of the story and evaluates the credibility and accuracy of the story in relationship to other news articles on the topic. A collective vote of the students, staff and faculty narrows the stories down to twenty-five each year. This Project-wide voting by some 200+ people establishes which 25 stories will be listed in our annual book. Our national judges, who are scholars, authors, and media experts from across the nation, complete the final ranking of the stories.

While selection of these stories each year is a long subjective judgmental process, we have grown to trust this collective effort as the best possible means of fairly selecting these important news stories. We believe that this group process, involving such a large number of academicians and students, gives us a high-quality annual list of the most important under-covered news stories in the United States.

Every year critics write about one or more of our stories saying that our choices are inappropriate or in some way biased. We always review these concerns and look to our critics for ways in which we can improve our evaluation process. David Walls, however, has taken a somewhat different approach. Walls has linked together a category of stories covering Yugoslavia. He claims Project Censored has hidden political motives and that we have moved into "the netherland of conspiracy theorists, Marxist-Leninist sects, and apologists for authoritarian regimes." Walls names fifteen individuals as participants in this dark underworld including: Michael Parenti, Sara Flounders, Diana Johnstone, Michel Chossudovsky, Martin Lee, Thomas Deichmann, Ramsey Clark, Lenora Foerstel, Richard Becker, Louis Wolf, Ellen Ray, Bill Schaap, Margaret Papandreou, Jared Israel and myself. Walls attacks our individual credibility

by red baiting, innuendo, and linking us erroneously to untrustworthy Serb apologist organizations.

The news stories on Yugoslavia covered in our 1999, 2000, and 2001 Censored books, were initially screened by seven different evaluators including faculty from Sonoma State University's War & Peace lecture series, Political Science and Sociology Departments, and a retired US Marine Corp general. Each story was reviewed and voted on by the entire Project. The stories selected were published in the following publications: *The Progressive*, *CovertAction Quarterly*, *This* (a Canadian monthly), *El Pais*, *The Progressive Review*, *Extra*, *The Village Voice*, *In These Times*, *Pacifica Radio*, *Women Against Military Madness*, *Because People Matter*, and the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*.

We stand on the veracity of the original stories. Oil pipeline feasibility studies were for example initiated immediately after the NATO occupation of Kosovo verifying the original story published in our Censored 2000 yearbook. Furthermore, the Trepca mine complex in Kosovo has been taken over by ITT Kosovo Ltd. - a joint venture of US, French, and Swedish companies.

The US media was extremely biased during the civil wars in Yugoslavia. The 1992 ITN photo was widely used as propaganda to demonize the Serbs as Nazi-like death camp killers. There was no death camp at that site when the photo was taken. Project Censored never claimed that horrendous civil rights abuses didn't occur on both sides of that terrible struggle. The fact that the *LM* magazine lost a liability suit on the story does not under British law mean the story wasn't true. Truth and liability under British law are not mutually exclusive. Had *LM* magazine been publishing in the US, the truthfulness of the story would have been protected by the First Amendment.

Finally, it was widely reported in the media and used as a justification for NATO intervention that the incident at Racak was a Serbian genocidal massacre. These reports occurred well before the forensic team's report was made available and were widely questioned in the European press. To this date the forensic report is at best ambiguous on whether a massacre actually occurred and presents no clear evidence as to the responsible parties.

After reading Walls' piece Carl Jensen, founder of Project Censored, stated "For 25 years, Project Censored's sole objective has been, and still is, to publicize stories appearing in the alternative press that have been overlooked or under-covered by the mainstream media. To suggest that Project Censored is involved in some insidious form of a pro-Serbian conspiracy involving Emperors Clothes, Michael Parenti, Michel Chossudovsky and others is ludicrous."

Herb Foerstel, author of *Banned in the Media* and *From Watergate to Monicagate*, wrote to Project Censored after reading Walls' chapter:

"Having read David Walls' comments and charges, it is clear that he is not seeking a debate on the issues. Instead, he solicits a defense of the personal and professional reputations of the individuals whose characters he has maligned. On principle, one must refuse to participate in such a disreputable process.

“David Walls' emotional defense of NATO intervention in the Balkans resurrects the language of the Red Scare in defining support for the KLA-NLA terrorists as a new litmus test for membership in the democratic left.

“Anyone opposing Albanian terror in Yugoslavia or Macedonia is a ‘Stalinist.’ That epithet is thrown about so capriciously as to taint everyone from liberal economists to heads of feminist organizations to the youngsters protesting the WTO. In the post-Cold War world, such intemperate rhetoric seems quaint and a bit silly. But there is nothing laughable about Walls' use of guilt by association. His chilling witch hunt, reminiscent of the old HUAC, identifies ‘Stalinists’ on the basis of their personal associations, conferences attended, papers published, and support for political organizations, which he calls ‘front groups.’ It matters little that Walls' snooping has produced flawed documentation and groundless accusations. That he should embark on such a witch-hunt at all is sufficient cause for concern. In his view, every journalist who challenges NATO's intervention in the Balkans is a ‘conspiracy theorist.’ Every scholar who disputes the legitimacy of the War Crimes Tribunal is a ‘Stalinist.’ Every author who believes Serbia has been the victim of aggression is ‘an apologist for authoritarian regimes.’

“Walls would censor Project Censored by blacklisting any author who brings the light of day to events in the Balkans. Please do not allow these groundless attacks to silence you or weaken your resolve. This is precisely the kind of political pressure that Project Censored was created to overcome.”

David Walls, a retired Sonoma State University administrator now assigned part-time to the Sociology Department, wrote a similar article for the Sonoma State University student newspaper after the publication of *Censored 2000* two and a half years ago. At the time, students from the Project strongly rebuked him in print the following week, and Carl Jensen and I responded later in the student newspaper as well. For the next year, Walls continued to snipe at Project Censored by sending emails to various faculty members on campus, but failed to generate any widespread support for his position.

In conclusion, Project Censored will continue our 26-year work of reporting on censored/under-covered news stories that the corporate media fail to cover. In the 1999 and 2000 Censored yearbooks seven out of 96 stories we cited were about the Balkans. This coverage level seems very appropriate given the degree of control the Pentagon exercises over the news with its restricted access rules and media pools. Many important news stories on U.S. military affairs remained uncovered/censored by the U.S. corporate media. We will continue to find independent sources of news on these subjects. To think that the Pentagon, after Vietnam, Granada, Panama, and Iraq suddenly became a humanitarian organization in the Balkans seems ridiculous to us and to most rational observers.

PETER PHILLIPS is the Director of Project Censored and an Associate Professor and Chair of the Sociology Department at Sonoma State University.

DAVID WALLS Replies:

IN MAY 2000 I WROTE IN THE Sonoma State *Star*, our campus newspaper, that Project Censored had joined a cover-up of Serbian atrocities at Bosnian detention camps and a massacre of civilians in Kosovo. Over the past two and a half years Project Censored has offered no substantive rebuttal of even one of my points of criticism, and Peter Phillips presents none here. Instead he repeats that Project Censored was right all along and explains a methodology which is itself under question precisely because – at least regarding the Balkans – it seems unable to detect and reject dubious sources with inaccurate stories. Phillips quotes Carl Jensen that Project Censored's sole objective is "to publicize stories appearing in the alternative press that have been overlooked or undercovered by the mainstream media," which tellingly neglects to emphasize the project's additional claimed criteria of credibility and accuracy.

Phillips continues to defend Thomas Deichmann's story from *LM* that ITN faked the picture of the emaciated Fikret Alic taken at Trnopolje camp in Bosnia on August 5, 1992. Trnopolje was one of three Serbian-run camps, along with Omarska and Keraterm, in the municipality of Prijedor. Phillips writes, "There was no death camp at that site when the photo was taken." Interesting question: when would a Prijedor death camp cease being a death camp? If the last killings there stopped a month before the photo was taken? A week before? The day before? An hour before? We know from the evidence presented to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the trial of Dusko Tadic that he was involved in gruesome crimes at Omarska camp as late as July 27, just nine days before the ITN team's visit there. Ed Vulliamy's interview with Alic revealed that he had been forced to help dispose of the nearly 200 bodies of men slaughtered in Room 3 at Keraterm camp on July 24, twelve days before ITN captured his image on videotape at Trnopolje, where he had been moved. One might well conclude the picture of Alic doesn't begin to capture the horrors that took place at the three Prijedor camps.

The ITN libel suit against *LM* was conducted under British law, which is different from that of the United States as Phillips notes, in that it puts the burden of proof on the defendant - which, however, is not to say that truth is not at issue. The fact remains that *LM* was unable to produce for its defense a single witness who was present at Trnopolje on the day of the ITN visit. You can read the blistering comments of Vulliamy, who was there at Trnopolje on August 5, 1992, in his article "Poison in the Well of History," available on the website of the Guardian: (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/itn/article/O,2763,184815,00.html>). Deichmann, in contrast, did not visit Trnopolje until four years later, in 1996. Phillips writes, "Had *LM* magazine been publishing in the U.S. the truthfulness of the story would have been protected by the First Amendment." This is backwards: if *LM* had been publishing in the U.S. the *falsity* of the story may have been protected by the First Amendment.

From a pro-feminist standpoint, I am most disappointed that Phillips has refused to admit that Project Censored was wrong in denying the systematic rape of women during the Bosnian conflict. Both its story about the Bosnian detention camps in *Censored 1999* and Michael Parenti's essay, ch. 6 in *Censored 2000*, scoff at reports of systematic rape (Parenti was the co-keynote speaker at Project Censored's annual award ceremony this year). This is particularly

ironic, as one of the greatest recent gains for women in international law has been the precedent-setting decision by the ICTY that the systematic rape of women in wartime is a war crime and a crime against humanity. The ICTY decision came in February 2001 in the case of Dragoljub Kunarac, Zoran Vukovic, and Radomir Kovac, convicted of presiding over the systematic rape of Bosnian Muslim women by Serbs in the Bosnian town of Foca during 1992-3, the same period discussed by Project Censored.

On the story that western capitalism coveted Kosovo's aging and polluted Trepca mine complex, Phillips claims vindication by arguing the facilities have been taken over by ITT Kosovo Ltd. Phillips apparently got this piece of misinformation from yet another story by Sara Flounders, this one in the August 24, 2000, issue of *Workers World*, reported as an update in Censored 2001. In fact, UNMIK, the UN agency providing civil administration in Kosovo, took over the Trepca complex and shut down production in August 2000. Their objective was to protect the community from continuing pollution and dangerous working conditions. UNMIK contracted with the ITT Kosovo Ltd. consortium to conduct the environmental clean-up and modernize the plant (the first facilities at Trepca were opened in 1920). UNMIK insists the Trepca complex remains in public ownership, and is sorting out multiple competing ownership claims, most dating from the Milosevic regime's attempts to privatize the complex.

Phillips conveniently presents a list of 15 names mentioned in my critical comments. I would exempt Martin Lee and Margaret Papandreou, who are only tangentially connected to these stories, and Phillips himself, whose role has been to promote the propaganda of others. The remaining dozen individuals constitute a veritable gallery of Milosevic apologists. Indeed, four are members of the International Committee to Defend Slobodan Milosevic (Sara Flounders, Ramsey Clark, Lenora Foerstel, and Jared Israel) and two (Michael Parenti and Louis Wolf) are listed as signatories to one or another of its petitions. To the best of my knowledge, Phillips has met personally all but one or two of these people. That's not a conspiracy, just a network of association and influence that has managed to pull Project Censored into its orbit.

Phillips' charge of "red-baiting" is a red herring that functions these days to distract activists from considering the potentially harmful effects of authoritarian political sects like the Workers World Party (WWP) on progressive social movements and institutions. During October 2002 the Internet and alternative press were buzzing with discussions of the impact of the WWP (a major sponsor and organizer of the October 26 antiwar demonstrations) on the nascent peace movement through its front groups, the International Action Center and ANSWER. For example, see the articles by Michelle Goldberg in *Salon.com*, Todd Gitlin in *MotherJones.com*, *The Nation* political correspondent David Corn in the *LA Weekly*, and Michael Albert and Stephen Shalom in *ZNet*. There have also been heated discussions of the WWP's role from the far left (Louis Proyect's Marxmail list) to the right (libertarian Justin Raimondo's *Antiwar.com*). Without such discussions, it's only newcomers to social movements who are innocent of the background, tactics, and impact of such sects and their front groups - until they learn the hard way.

Phillips also quotes Herb Foerstel's rant, which displays him so engulfed in a cloud of revolutionary nostalgia -- "Red Scare . . . witch-hunt . . . HUAC . . . blacklisting" -- that he's lost

track of which century we're in. Fifty years ago if you associated with communists you risked being considered a dangerous subversive; now you only risk being thought a fool. This fog surrounding Foerstel prevents him from reading my actual words. Nowhere do I define "support for the KLA-NLA terrorists as a new litmus test for membership in the democratic left," nor do I argue that "every journalist who challenges NATO's intervention in the Balkans is a 'conspiracy theorist.'" My article is a critique of historical falsification, not "an emotional defense of NATO intervention in the Balkans." I did not "throw about so capriciously" the epithet "Stalinist"; I used the term "Stalinoid" once in an appropriate context. My research drawing exclusively from public sources in print and on the Web is not "snooping." What was it Mary McCarthy said about Lillian Hellman? "Every word she writes is a lie, including 'and' and 'the.'" Foerstel's comments are hysterical, and an embarrassment for Project Censored to put forward as a substitute for reasoned argumentation.

And what's Phillips implying at the beginning of his next-to-the-last paragraph? I surmise he would be happy to demote me to adjunct status, but I remain a tenured professor in the sociology department. I'm enjoying teaching part-time under the faculty early retirement program, a wonderful provision of the contract with the California State University that our union, the California Faculty Association, defends vigorously.

DIANA JOHNSTONE

The Media and Yugoslavia: A Reply to David Walls

To the Editors:

IN YOUR SUMMER 2002 ISSUE, an academic named David Walls complains at length about Project Censored for its 2000 awards regarding Yugoslavia. Those reports all challenged the mainstream media consensus on Yugoslavia that led up to NATO's 1999 war. As one of several writers attacked, I am described by Walls as among the most prolific apologists for Serbia, who was once the respected European correspondent for *In These Times*. The implicit threat is clear: anyone who deviates from the standard media interpretation of the Yugoslav drama can only be an apologist for Serbia and ceases being respected.

Back in 1984, when I assume I was still its respected European correspondent, *In These Times* published an article of mine warning of the danger of Yugoslav disintegration. I must have been truly clairvoyant to foresee the disaster several years before the rise of Milosevic if, as Walls tells it, the unraveling of Tito's multi-ethnic and politically balanced Yugoslavia was begun by Milosevic when he moved to end the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina provinces in 1989.

From 1989 to 1996, I took leave from active journalism to serve as press officer of the Green Group in the European Parliament. While there, I watched how complex events in Yugoslavia were transformed by prejudice and propaganda into a simplified moral tale of good and evil that suited the self-justifying ideology of the new European Union as privileged champion of human rights. I had known Yugoslavia first hand from my student days, and resolved, once I left the Parliament, to investigate for myself what was happening there. By then, the one-sided anti-

Serb dogma was established. Neither *In These Times* nor *The Nation*, whose editors previously had sought my contributions, would publish my unorthodox because balanced - first hand reports from Kosovo in 1998.

So my twenty-five years of first-hand experience of European politics, including Yugoslavia, suddenly counted for nothing. Any story about Serbs committing rape, murder or ethnic cleansing would be eagerly accepted - whether or not it was true. I saw journalists in Pristina hiring absurd all-terrain vehicles to go out on daily safari looking for Serbian atrocities. That was what editors were clamoring for and that was the path to career advancement. Background pieces giving more than one side to the story were definitely not wanted. Meanwhile, a number of veteran reporters with insight based on years spent in the region could no longer be published (for example, the former Belgrade correspondent of the French Communist Party newspaper *L'Humanité*).

Western media coverage of the Yugoslav conflicts throughout the 1990s represented an altogether extraordinary case of bias and self-censorship, culminating in a unilateral war waged by NATO in blatant defiance of international law, supposedly on humanitarian grounds. This was the censored story not of a year but of the decade, perhaps of the last half-century. If anything, Project Censored gave too little, not too much, attention to this story. But since even the alternative media rarely published truly alternative reporting about the Balkans, there was not much for Project Censored to find.

The Oil Pipeline Story

AT A TIME when it was being widely trumpeted that Western interest in Yugoslavia could be only humanitarian because there was nothing there of economic interest, the ongoing project to build an oil pipeline across the Balkans through Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania was so little reported that Project Censored (to my surprise) singled out for mention an e-mail message I had sent to friends in Minnesota, who published it in the November 1998 bulletin of Women Against Military Madness (WAMM). Walls describes my message as the dubious Balkan oil pipeline tale and dismisses it as follows:

“Although a Balkan pipeline route has been the subject of a modest feasibility study, the U.S. government continues to support a pipeline proposed by BP Amoco and Chevron from Baku in Azerbaijan to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean. That puts the pipeline through the Caucasus, nearly a thousand miles east of the Balkans.”

Now, my WAMM item mentioned the Ceyhan project, which at the time (and for several years to come) was stalled because it was extremely long and expensive, and running through insecure Kurdish territory. To speak of the pipeline overlooks the fact that several pipelines are in the works. The one planned by the U.S.-based Albanian-Macedonian-Bulgarian Oil company (AMBO) is shorter and its estimated cost is less than half that of the Ceyhan pipeline. What Walls calls a modest feasibility study cost \$980,000, most of it U.S. taxpayers' money. Ted Ferguson, the CEO of AMBO, used to work for Dick Cheney's company, Brown and Root, which has been making handsome profits from contracts to provide infrastructure and services to the giant new U.S. military base in southern Kosovo, Camp Bondsteel. In September 2001,

Ferguson announced plans to complete the AMBO pipeline in 2005. Who knows whether this will happen? The point is that in 1998, when NATO was preparing to go to war to force the Yugoslav government to accept NATO occupation of Kosovo, the claim that there were no Western economic interests in the region was simply untrue.

Much later, in the February 15, 2001 issue of *The Guardian* (London), George Monbiot wrote: "During the 1999 Balkans war, some of the critics of NATO's intervention alleged that the western powers were seeking to secure a passage for oil from the Caspian Sea. This claim was widely mocked. The foreign secretary Robin Cook observed that 'there is no oil in Kosovo'. This was, of course, true but irrelevant. [. . .]

"For the past few weeks, a freelance researcher called Keith Fisher has been doggedly documenting a project which, as far as I can discover, has been little reported in any British, European or American newspaper. It is called the Trans-Balkan pipeline, and it's due for approval at the end of next month."

Shouldn't this belated 2001 discovery of the AMBO pipeline be enough to vindicate Project Censored for having cited the item on the pipeline published in November 1998?

Personally, I have always considered these direct economic interests secondary to broader geopolitical motives. I never claimed that the Kosovo war was waged for oil. Rather, my view is that the primary motive for the 1999 war was to establish a new humanitarian mission for NATO beyond the Treaty area and to reinforce U.S. military presence in Europe.

The Role of Project Censored

WALLS DESCRIBES THE ACTIVITY of Project Censored as searching for hot stories that the mainstream media fail to cover and giving awards which have become 'Alternative Pulitzers,' commendations for excellence in independent reporting. I am not particularly familiar with Project Censored, but I would have thought that the search was less for hot than for politically significant stories that have been neglected because their content does not fit the agenda of the major interests that own and direct U.S. mainstream media. The notion of Alternative Pulitzers strikes me as rather comic. The Pulitzer Prizes awards money to reporters whose work is supported by the rich mainstream media establishment. Project Censored awards no money at all to reporters who had no money to start with when they wrote their alternative reports. In short, the Pulitzer Prizes are career trophies. Project Censored on the contrary is not about journalistic careers or even about excellence in reporting: it is about truth that is suppressed.

Walls is identified as a sociology professor at Sonoma State University. He claims first hand acquaintance with Project Censored. However, there is nothing to indicate that he has any particular competence to judge events in Yugoslavia. From his article, one may conclude that he bases his criticism precisely on the dubious sources of the mainstream media, whose gaps and misrepresentations were the target of Project Censored in the first place.

Alternative media are few and far between, usually operating on a shoestring and often connected to leftist political groups whose devotion to a cause inspires staff to work for next to nothing and without the infrastructure available to rich commercial media. Thus it is easy for

Professor Walls to employ McCarthyite tactics to discredit a priori such sources as *Workers World* (the publication of [. . .] a Leninist sect) or *Living Marxism* (some sort of Trotskyist) and Jared Israel (a former Maoist). Personally, I am allergic to ideologies in general and have never been part of any of those political currents, but I can respect other people's commitments so long as they are honest. I consider articles should be evaluated on their merits, including mainstream reports, regardless of the bias of their owners or editors. Such evaluation is admittedly difficult and requires a mixture of background knowledge, awareness of how stories develop, and that mysterious human faculty called judgment.

NATO and the Democratic Left

WALLS WRITES: "On the subject of the former Yugoslavia, Project Censored, I sadly concluded, had departed the terrain of the democratic Left for a netherworld of conspiracy theorists, Marxist-Leninist sects, and apologists for authoritarian regimes."

It is rather comic that Walls backs his indictment of conspiracy theorists with a sort of conspiracy theory of his own, relegating all the unorthodox reporters to the same netherworld, apparently because a number of them were invited to a conference in Athens attended by radical journalists, most of whom were anti-NATO and pro-Serb. Now from this one might conclude that being anti-NATO already indicates a departure from the democratic Left. This is the crux of the matter. The democratic left represented by Walls, instead of acting as a main force for peace, has been reducing its function to providing the ideological alibi for war. Even if, when war comes, this democratic left complains about some of the most inescapably noticeable violence and destruction wrought by the United States and NATO, it has already legitimized their operations by credulously echoing every allegation of human rights violations committed by other people's governments and dismissing contemptuously any suggestion of ulterior motives on the part of their own national leaders.

Professor Walls complains that stories selected for the 2000 Project Censored awards and Michael Parenti's commentary "lack [. . .] a balanced historical perspective on the last decade of war in the former Yugoslavia." Well, of course. Pieces cited by Project Censored are necessarily too short, too fragmentary, to provide historical perspective. But it is clear from the details of Professor Walls' article, themselves fragmentary, biased and sometimes inaccurate, that he himself is very far from having a balanced historical perspective on the subject.

After over a decade of confusion and distortion, deception and self-deception, a balanced perspective is indeed hard to achieve - but it is imperative for the revival of critical thinking on the left and for the development of a clear-sighted movement for international justice and peace.

DIANA JOHNSTONE'S recent book, *Fools' Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions* (Pluto Press, London), will soon be distributed in the U.S. by Monthly Review.

DAVID WALLS replies to Diana Johnstone:

DIANA JOHNSTONE DESCRIBES her extensive experience covering European politics over 25 years, and questions my standing to speak about Yugoslavia. For me, this raises an important issue: are only experts or movement celebrities privileged to address matters of international affairs? What about the voice of the ordinary informed citizen? I claim no academic or journalistic expertise on the Balkans, but I have been interested in Yugoslavia since my student days in the 1960s, when Tito's earlier break with Stalin appeared to create an opening for a possible "third camp" between the Soviet Union and the West. I first visited Yugoslavia in 1966, a trip that sticks in my memory because I was in Belgrade during the celebration of Tito's 70-something birthday. The parks were full of children's art, and the family I was staying with had tickets to the gymnastic spectacle in the sports stadium honoring Tito, who was there, in the distance, in his white marshal's uniform. I left with a fond feeling for the people of Yugoslavia that remains with me to this day.

Johnstone didn't need to be clairvoyant in 1984 to warn of a possible break-up of Yugoslavia. During a week's visit to Yugoslavia in 1972, vacationing with another family from Belgrade, I remember discussing the prospects for the country after Tito. I was startled, in my naïveté, by the family's apprehensions about the country's ability to stick together (and that was eight years before Tito's death in 1980). For that matter, the Praxis group of Yugoslavian philosophers had been warning of centrifugal forces threatening their country at least since 1971. Later, as the Eastern European bloc was beginning its dramatic upheavals in the late 1980s, I had the opportunity with a group of academics in February 1988 to enjoy lunch and conversation at the Yugoslavian embassy in Washington, DC, with Ambassador Zivorad Kovacevic (mayor of Belgrade from 1974 to 1982). Kovacevic clearly saw that Yugoslavia's future was with Europe. He was recalled by Milosevic in 1989, and retired from government service. He formed an NGO to advocate for democracy in Serbia and the other former Yugoslavian republics, and remains active in pro-democracy movements today. I have long known there to be many people of great decency, courage, and goodwill in Serbia. That's what made it all the more dismaying to see the direction Milosevic began to lead the country.

I mention these personal reminiscences not to suggest the experiences give me any unusual insight into Yugoslavia, but because they did give me additional motivation to look deeper into the conflicting reports we began to receive on developments in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Few of us are authorities on every corner of the globe. Most of us rely on reporters and magazines we have come to trust for analysis of world events. When these trusted sources confront us with diametrically opposed interpretations, the resulting cognitive dissonance presents us with three possibilities. We can ignore the discrepancies and push the whole matter out of our minds. Or we can choose to believe the report that's most consistent with the mental model we carry in our heads of how the world works. Or we can take the time to dig into the matter, trying to the best of our ability to ascertain what the truth is, even if it means painfully revising our conceptual map of the world. Most of us don't have the time or motivation to follow the latter path very often, but with Project Censored based at my home campus, I felt a responsibility to try to determine the truth of their stories on Yugoslavia.

One such story that drew my initial skepticism was Johnstone's report on the proposed Albanian- Macedonian- Bulgarian Oil Company (AMBO) pipeline, supposedly an important

motivator of NATO intervention in the Balkans. Johnstone criticizes me for describing the \$980,000 AMBO feasibility study as "modest." To us as individuals a million dollars sounds like a lot of money, but it's pocket change in the pipeline business, and a small slice of political pork for Congress. Compare it to the actually proceeding Baku to Ceyhan pipeline (construction began in September 2002), whose engineering study alone cost BP \$76 million, and whose total cost is estimated to be \$2.9 billion.

Pipeline fever continues to grip Project Censored. In the recently released *Censored 2003* the hypothetical AMBO pipeline resurfaces for story award #10 in the imagination of Michel Chossudovsky, who sees it as a major cause of NATO intervention in Macedonia. This story was hard to swallow even for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, a stalwart Project Censored booster, in its annual coverage of the top ten Censored awards that delicately described Chossudovsky's thesis as "more of a starting point than a smoking gun." A pipeline plot also figures in *Censored 2003's* story award #4 on the causes of the war in Afghanistan, although it plays a relatively minor role in the featured book, *The Forbidden Truth*, by French authors Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquie.

Peter Phillips also serves as national and international news editor of a local biweekly alternative newspaper with which Project Censored has a cooperative relationship, the *North Bay Progressive*, which featured a long essay in its June 13-26, 2002, issue by Karen Talbot, "U.S. Oil Profits Drive Policy in Central Asia." Talbot argues the now-abandoned Unocal proposal for a gas pipeline across Afghanistan to Pakistan and India drove U.S. policy first to support the Taliban and then to fight it. Anyone who takes this theory seriously should read Ken Silverstein's "No War for Oil!" in the August 12, 2002 issue of *The American Prospect*. Talbot is yet another member of the International Committee to Defend Slobodan Milosevic. She also worked for the World Peace Council (WPC) in its old pro-Soviet days, and is now a board member of its surviving remnant, which has migrated from Helsinki to Athens. An earlier version of her article appears on the WPC web site. I guess we should expect her story to turn up on the award list in *Censored 2004*.

Although Johnstone is more sophisticated than these economic reductionists, seeing broader strategic interests underlying NATO intervention in the Balkans, some of her readers have clearly taken the pipeline interests to be the ultimate explanation of NATO's actions. One critic has described the explanations of groups like Workers World as "kindergarten Marxism." Marx and Engels famously described the executive of the modern state in the *Manifesto* as a committee for "managing the *common* affairs of the *whole* bourgeoisie" (emphasis provided), not for going to war over the individual interests of any specific corporation at any given moment. Even their necessarily simplified epigram is considerably more subtle than the parody of Marxian analysis offered by theories that find the causes of war in obscure pipeline and lead mine interests.

Johnstone claims to be providing a balanced account of events in the former Yugoslavia, but she is the source of the *Censored 1999* story denying systematic rape in Bosnia. Her article "Seeing Yugoslavia Through a Dark Glass" from the Fall 1998 *CovertAction Quarterly*, (available on the journal's web site) was first delivered as a paper at that May 1998 Athens

conference of radical journalists. The precedent-setting ICTY verdict in the trial of Kunarac and associates for the systematic rape of Bosnian women in Foca has been available since February 2001, but Johnstone does not take the opportunity presented here to revise her earlier denial. Maybe she will get around to it in her forthcoming book.

A couple of minor matters: Johnstone takes issue with my describing Project Censored's awards as "Alternative Pulitzers." I don't think that's a particularly apt characterization either, but I was quoting others who have used the term. *AlterNet* founder Don Hazen attributes the coinage to former *In These Times* publisher Paul Obis. Johnstone laments my dismissing her as a "formerly respected correspondent," but she herself points out that *The Nation* and *In These Times* came to this conclusion well before I did. I'm comfortable following their lead.

EDWARD S. HERMAN & DAVID PETERSON

Walls and the Hegemonic Truth

To the Editors:

ON NO SUBJECT HAS THE HEGEMONIC TRUTH serving establishment interests been as effectively disseminated as on Serb atrocities and Serb responsibility for all the ills of the Balkans. This view rests on a simplified, and essentially ideological picture of what caused the ethnic cleansing and killings of the 1990s, supported by highly selective and often outright false evidence. It has captured and overwhelmed numerous liberals and leftists, who have been unable to cut through the huge propaganda barrage, and have made the NATO war there a humanitarian enterprise overcoming true evil. Now that it has become evident that al-Qaeda played a significant role in helping both the Bosnian Muslims and KLA, and that under NATO control of Kosovo a true ecumenical ethnic cleansing has taken place covering the Roma, Turks, and Jews, as well as Serbs, the liberals and leftists who crusaded for the NATO war maintain a sturdy silence on these developments (as do the mainstream media) as a necessary part of preserving their mythical history of good versus evil.

David Walls' piece is a perfect illustration of the swallowing of a hegemonic propaganda line based on ignorance and a selective use of evidence. Johnstone notes Walls' statement that the "unravelling" of Yugoslavia began when Milosevic "moved to end the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina provinces in 1989," which is ideology parading as history, that ignores the significance of the fall of the Soviet Union; German, Austrian and papal interests and intervention; U.S. intervention; Croat nationalism and Croat and Slovenian economic interests, and other factors.

Beyond this demonstration that Walls is out of his league, we believe that every illustration of bias given by Walls disintegrates on close inspection. He cites Tribunal judgments, as against Radislav Kristic, "convicted of genocide," as if that court was an objective institution of justice rather than an arm of NATO-and, in John Laughland's words, "a rogue court with rigged rules." Walls never digested the significance of the fact that when criticism of NATO became troublesome in May 1999, after NATO had moved to attacking Serbian civilian targets in

straightforward violation of the Genocide Convention, the Tribunal issued a hastily concocted indictment of Milosevic based on unverified U.S. intelligence claims. This was only the most spectacular Tribunal PR move serving NATO, allowing continued de facto war crimes by the Tribunal's masters.

We only have space here to examine one of Walls' cases, so let's take the first, Racak. Just as he takes the Tribunal as an objective source of information, he relies on Helena Ranta, the woman selected by OSCE to do the forensic study of this alleged massacre, although her forensic expertise was limited to dentistry. On March 17, 1999, Ranta's team submitted a report whose findings were substantially identical with those of a Serb team; but for purposes of a press conference Ranta issued a separate report that was acknowledged to be her personal views and "not to be interpreted in any way as the authorized communication of the Department of Forensic Medicine of the University of Helsinki, or the EU expert team of pathologists."

The Serb expert and team spokesperson, Professor Dusan Dunjic, found evidence of gunpowder on the hands of 37 of 40 victims, suggesting the handling of firearms; in 38 of 40 cases there was evidence of killing from a distance; and many of them were clothed in a manner suggesting paramilitary service (see his "The (Ab)use of Forensic Medicine," www.suc.org/politics/kosovo/documents/Dunjic0499.html). Is his evidence less trustworthy than Ranta's? Walls fails to mention that the report she and her team prepared on the massacre has to this day not been publicly released.

Walls neglects all other sources and context. He fails to mention that Racak was a KLA stronghold, and that the KLA had reoccupied the town after a Serb-KLA shootout, and that it was the KLA that "found" the bodies on the following morning. He doesn't mention that the attack on Racak was observed by OSCE monitors, with two APTV photographers present, by invitation of the Yugoslavs. Why would the Yugoslavs invite observers to an action where they intended to slaughter civilians? Why would they leave a lot of dead civilians in a heap for their enemies to use against them (and we would wager that Walls swallows the belated claims of Serb mass removal operations where bodies are not found)?

Christopher Chatelet of Le Monde was in Racak the day of the massacre, found the site calm, OSCE observers helping some elderly people, but telling Chatelet that nothing important had happened. There were no signs of a massacre. After the report of a massacre Chatelet and Le Figaro reporter Renaud Giraud insisted on seeing, the AP photographers' tapes of the days events, which Chatelet and Renaud say showed fighting but nothing supporting a claim of a massacre. These were independent observers on the scene. The AP photographers and OSCE representatives who were at Racak have not been available for further inquiry. Have they and the final big OSCE report been kept unavailable ever since to protect Yugoslavia?

The "preferential method" of research that Walls displays in discussing Racak we believe characterizes his other analyses of Yugoslavia, so he, not Project Censored and its authors, is the true "apologist" - for an institutionalized but false NATO party line swallowed by the New York Times, In These Times, Christopher Hitchens, and many more.

EDWARD S. HERMAN is an economist and media analyst; his most recent book, co-edited with Philip Hammond, is *Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo War* (Pluto, 2000).

DAVID PETERSON is a freelance researcher and writer based in the Chicago area.

DAVID WALLS replies to Edward S. Herman and David Peterson:

ONE MAY SAY OF EDWARD HERMAN what Norman Thomas said of Henry Wallace: he is a man "so firmly in possession of the truth that the facts don't matter very much." Herman and David Peterson get one thing right, however; I do base my conclusions about the crimes in Bosnia on the extensive body of evidence amassed at the ICTY trials. It's ironic that just as progressives are excoriating President George W. Bush for opposing the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Herman has been relentlessly attacking an actually existing prototype, the ICTY (see, for example, his articles in the April and May 2002 issues of *Z Magazine*).

Herman's brief against the Tribunal is based on claims regarding NATO crimes he believes the ICTY should be prosecuting but isn't. Aside from the Milosevic trial, which he spends most of his articles attacking, Herman pays no attention to the dozens of ICTY trials that have often gone on for several months, with each side presenting scores of witnesses and compiling massive documentation. Although the majority of cases have involved Serbs, Croats and Bosnians have also been arrested and brought to trial. Judges have scrupulously followed strict rules of evidence, throwing out the testimony of unreliable witnesses and finding some of the accused innocent. By ignoring the Kunarac case (which declared for the first time that systematic rape of women in wartime is a war crime and a crime against humanity) Herman and Peterson appear to be blinded by their own vulnerability to a component of "hegemonic truth" - namely male chauvinism. Given the vital importance of this precedent to women world-wide, even the harshest male critics of the ICTY ought to be able to grant its significance.

Most of Herman and Peterson's comments are directed at the January 1999 Racak incident in Kosovo, and argue that no massacre has been proven. They aim to discredit Dr. Helena Ranta, the director of the EU Forensic Expert Team in Kosovo, by claiming she is only a dentist. Once again Herman and Peterson are revealed buying into a piece of the "hegemonic truth" they purport to decry - by adopting the dated idea that a physician must be at the apex of forensic science. For one thing, forensic odontology is a central forensic discipline, as teeth are a vital means of identifying human remains. And Ranta is not only a D.D.S., but has a Ph.D. in microbiology (a key field in this day of DNA analysis) and an appointment on the faculty of Forensic Medicine at the University of Helsinki. She is an internationally recognized forensic authority.

Herman and Peterson ask whether the evidence of Professor Dusan Dunjic is less trustworthy than Ranta's. In a word, yes. One doesn't need to impeach Dunjic's integrity to acknowledge that he had access only to initial autopsy evidence. Ranta's team returned in November 1999 and March 2000 to the site where 23 bodies were found in a gully near Racak with a full

complement of photographers, surveyors, and other crime scene analysts. They found bullets at the points where the bodies were positioned, and linked these to the bodies by DNA evidence. Shell casings were also recovered, which allowed identification of the number and types of weapons fired. The evidence makes clear the victims were executed where their bodies were found. In a separate interview, available at the Balkan Witness web site, Ranta estimated the bodies at the Racak gully had been shot from a distance of a couple meters. Dunjic reported using a paraffin test to determine whether the victims had recently fired guns. As Ranta's report notes, however, modern forensic science advises using a more reliable test. When Ranta's team employed that more reliable test, the results came up negative. Contrary to Herman and Peterson, the executive summary of the final report of the EU Forensic Expert Team has been available since February 2001, and it may be read at the Balkan Witness web site.

For all who would whitewash the realities of war crimes, genocide, and systematic rape of women in the former Yugoslavia, I can do no better than conclude with the words of Ed Vulliamy from his "Poison in the Well of History" article. "Shame, then, on those fools, supporters of the pogrom, cynics and dilettantes who supported them, gave them credence and endorsed their vile enterprise."