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Trends. Sending Messages: The Fate of Slobodan Milosevic

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As President Vojislav Kostunica continues to attempt to consolidate his political power throughout Yugoslavia, controversy still rages as to the fate of the former president, Slobodan Milosevic. Of special interest is whether he should be forced to stand trial at The Hague as an indicted war criminal.

The argument that he should stand trial is based on beliefs that otherwise (1) his crimes are not crimes; (2) the probability of similar crimes perpetrated by others in the future will increase; (3) a sense of rule of law and of justice will be subverted; (4) a sense that all wrongs must be punished will be inappropriately subverted; (5) criminal, unethical, and/or immoral behavior will be excused; and (6) dead and living victims will be denied their pound of flesh.

There's also an argument against Milosevic standing trial. This argument is based on beliefs that a public airing of crimes can significantly contribute to or constitute (1) necessary punishment; (2) a victim's pound of flesh; (3) deterrence of similar crimes; (4) strengthening of the rule of law and of justice, and (5) underlining the wrongness of criminal, unethical, and/or immoral behavior. (It must be noted that in arguments for and against standing trial, Milosevic's status is as indicted, not convicted, warranting tenuous use of the terms crimes and criminal.) Moreover, standing trial may be conceived as exacerbating malignant nationalism and difficulties in national healing.

So what is the answer about what ultimate action will send what message? The two arguments address this question with combinations of reason, empiricism/experimentalism, and faith/authority. Ultimately, the arguments reflect differing weltanschauungs that are faith-based. As with almost all such arguments, controversy waxes more than wanes whether as persona or underneath it. Thus, the controversy is less about Milosevic and more about ourselves and the kinds of people we believe we have been, are, and strive to be. (Bobocel, D. R., Son Hing, L. S., Davey, L. M., Stanley, D. J., & Zanna, M. P. (1998). Justice-based opposition to social policies: Is it genuine? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, 653-669; Levine, D. P. (1998). Demanding justice. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society*, 3, 39-51; Mikula, G., & Wenzel, M. (2000). Justice and social conflict. *International Journal of Psychology*, 35, 126-135; Montada, L. (1998). Justice: Just a rational choice? *Social Justice Research*, 11, 81-101; Pepitone, A., & L'Armand, K. (1997). Justice in cultural context: A social-psychological perspective. *Cross-Cultural Research: The Journal of Comparative Social Science*, 31, 83-100; Trueger, S. (October 18, 2000). Put Milosevic on trial. *The New York Times*, A30.) (Keywords: Slobodan Milosevic, The Hague, Vojislav Kostunica, War Crimes, Yugoslavia.)