

## Small Group of Loyalists, Mostly Old, Mourn Milosevic

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By [IAN FISHER](#)

BELGRADE, [Serbia](#), March 16 — They were his deepest loyalists, only 1,000 or so strong, most of them old and quietly angry. "He killed no one," said Jugoslava Lekic, 73, named for the nation that she believes [Slobodan Milosevic](#) died trying to save.

Ms. Lekic had just paid her respects today to Mr. Milosevic's coffin, covered with a Serbian flag and red roses as it was put on display in a museum here for the first day before his burial on Saturday.

Whatever fears there were that Mr. Milosevic, in death, would provoke a nationalist outpouring did not come true today: There were flowers, candles and free lapel pins showing Mr. Milosevic's face, but no huge numbers and, amid the white hair and canes, no unrest.

Still, even in this group of the hardest core, it was possible to find conflicted feelings about the legacy of Mr. Milosevic, the wars that claimed up to 250,000 lives, the future of a dismantled Serbia in Europe.

"You know, I don't know who is responsible for the wars," said Djordje Rafailovic, 22, who had waited for several hours, without success, to see the coffin. His father, he said, was a Serb soldier in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo — abandoned, he said, by the Serb Army in a moment of crisis. Mr. Milosevic's son, he noted, had not fought there.

Still, he felt that Mr. Milosevic deserved to be honored as a great, if flawed, Serb leader, and that all the horrors in the Balkans could not be blamed on him alone. That, he said, was why he wanted to see the coffin.

"The West says everything is his fault," he said. "But that's not true."

The coffin — not opened with a view of Mr. Milosevic's body — was laid out in the Museum of the Revolution in the suburban Dodinje section of Belgrade, after much wrangling of how to handle Mr. Milosevic's burial. Serbia's leaders, negotiating for the nation to join the [European Union](#) and under much pressure to produce top war crimes suspects, had rejected a state funeral for Mr. Milosevic or his burial in the cemetery reserved for national heroes.

And in fact, there were no Serbian leaders at the viewing today, nor when Mr. Milosevic's body arrived as cargo from The Hague on Wednesday.

A compromise allowed for the coffin to be displayed at the museum for two days, before it is transferred on Saturday to Mr. Milosevic's hometown of Pozarevac, 30 miles south of Belgrade, for the funeral and burial.

But that too drew criticism from the director of the museum.

"I strongly protest as a director, person and citizen of this country, and call on the public and the Serbian government to react against a violation of cultural autonomy and the political use of a cultural institution," Ljiljana Cetinic, the museum director, said in a statement.

Also missing today were members of Mr. Milosevic's family: A warrant for the arrest of his widow, Mirjana Markovic, who lives with her son in Russia, was temporarily withdrawn on Tuesday, and leaders of Communist Party here said today that they expected her to arrive in time for the funeral on Saturday.

Mourners began being admitted to the exhibition room — boxed in by windows with a snowy, monochromatic view — early this afternoon. The line snaked from the outside of the museum, hung with a large banner of Mr. Milosevic, up a set of stairs into an exhibition room, where the coffin rested on a crimson-covered stand, flanked by members of his Socialist Party and a picture of him a dozen or so years younger.

One gray-haired man marched with a slow military step to the coffin, and began to address the picture, invoking the American-led [NATO](#) bombing of Serbia during the conflict over Kosovo in 1999.

"You promised to defend us and for it with your life," the man said. "But you didn't die." He called Mr. Milosevic "immortal."

The humble surroundings were one reason for anger among the mourners, who felt he deserved the full pomp of a state funeral. There was no shortage of other reasons for anger: against the Hague war crimes tribunal, which they accused of allowing his death, possibly by poisoning; against what they said was a continuing demonization of Mr. Milosevic and by extension all Serbs; and against the United States.

"You have to know that your country can't survive if you bomb everyone who you would like to bomb," Ivana Zigon, a well-known Serbian actress, told an American reporter. "You have to turn your face back to history and see that all empires that believed they were powerful enough to conquer the world ended without glory."

But life in downtown Belgrade, crowded at times years ago with crowds supporting Mr. Milosevic, then with crowds who wanted him gone from power, was calm and, to hear some describe it, uninterested or depressed.

"I am very ashamed of it," said Mirjana Gvozenovic, 20. "He is a man who killed a lot of people and brought misery for 10 years to this country."

"They still support some ideals, which are rotten," she added, speaking of the crowds at the museum. "It's not our future."

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