

JUL Plotted Poll Coup

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JUL officials called on Milosevic to annul the opposition's electoral victory

Slobodan Milosevic's ruling coalition partner the United Yugoslav Left, JUL, urged to him to declare victory "at all costs" after the first round of voting in the presidential elections.

The proposal was the most radical of three plans put to Milosevic by rival factions in the governing alliance, as news of his electoral demise began to emerge earlier this week.

The president rejected the JUL suggestion in favour of a proposal to call for a second round of voting in the Yugoslav leadership ballot. This after admitting that his rival Vojislav Kostunica got more votes than him in the first round of voting.

Milosevic and his cohorts are said to have been shocked by the scale of their electoral defeat. The president was so angered by the results that he is reported to have thrown the head of his election team, Nikola Sainovic, out of his office.

"Although the chief was prepared for some losses, I am sure he didn't envisage such a bad performance," said a member of the election team.

Milosevic's demise left him with little room for manoeuvre. Over the last few days, the lights at the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia, SPS, headquarters were on round-the-lock as officials frantically deliberated over how to respond to the poll catastrophe.

Members of the ruling coalition were deeply divided on the government's response to the ballot results. In addition to the JUL plan, a small SPS grouping, remarkably, suggested accepting the opposition victory. It was Milosevic's inner circle which pushed for a second round of voting.

The JUL officials urged Milosevic to ignore the will of the people and declare electoral victory "at all cost" . This implied introducing emergency measures, provoking unrest and using force to restore order.

The most enthusiastic advocates of this plan were corrupt federal officials. This group of around three hundred people have grown rich over the last decade or so by being loyal servants of Milosevic and his wife, JUL leader, Mira Markovic.

During the government's aggressive pre-election campaign, the group called on the people to choose between Milosevic's "forces for development" and the opposition's "NATO parties bent on destroying the country".

There was a strong possibility that Milosevic would opt for the JUL plan. Under threat from The Hague war crimes tribunal and abandoned by his extremist ally Vojislav Sesjl, the Yugoslav leader is becoming increasingly isolated. But he is known to be an unscrupulous fighter who would not easily relinquish his grip on power.

The army and the police have not been much in evidence during the elections, but only because they've yet to receive an order from their chief.

In complete contrast to the JUL plan, a small group of SPS officials argued that the party's best interests would be served if Milosevic recognised the opposition victory. Some of those behind the proposal fell out with the president last year over JUL's growing influence in the ruling coalition.

There was even evidence that SPS municipal committees in the Valjevo region congratulated opposition representatives after the poll results came through. "In some ways I'd be quite content if we stepped down. I hope that Milosevic will also be smart, " said one SPS official from Valjevo.

In the end, Milosevic accepted the advise of his closest party allies to call a second round of voting. The officials believed this would give them all breathing space in which to come up with a more considered response to the election results. From their shocked appearance after the poll, SPS officials certainly looked as though they needed time to recover from the debacle.

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