

► *Background of a fateful  
Balkan civil struggle.*

## THE RIDDLE OF YUGOSLAVIA

BY LEON DENNEN

A CIVIL war is now under way in the tortured, bleeding, poverty-ridden Kingdom of Southern Slavs — Yugoslavia — between the Chetnik guerilla forces of General Draja Mihailovich and the Partisans of Marshal Josef Broz, the communist leader popularly known as Tito. Tragic in itself, the struggle is alarming as a portent of what can be expected in Poland, Greece and other Balkan and East European countries. An understanding of Yugoslavia is vital for Americans because its struggle is a symptom of deeper cleavages throughout Europe.

What is the truth about Mihailovich — the man not so long ago glorified in the American press and in Hollywood as a very symbol of resistance to the Nazis? Is he, as Tito's spokesmen here claim, merely a reactionary monarchist and even a friend of the Nazis, or is he, as millions of Yugoslavs

believe, one of those legendary Balkan hero-liberators?

And what is the truth about Tito, the former Croatian metal worker? That he is the general secretary of the Yugoslav Communist Party, at one time a volunteer in the ranks of the Russian Red Army, is not disputed. But is he merely one of Stalin's agents in plans to make the Balkans a Russian "sphere of influence," or is he, as communists and some liberals assert, a symbol of new social revolutionary forces released by the war and stirring everywhere?

These questions are easier asked than answered. Unclear to start with, the issues are further obscured by the fact that Tito's cause has been promoted in the United States by groups of well-placed communists and by pro-Soviet propagandists like Louis Adamic who have succeeded in "selling" Tito to portions of our Office of War

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Information, Office of Strategic Services and part of the uninitiated public. Tito also has at his disposal the "Free Yugoslav" radio station located at Tiflis, Russia, and the whole Soviet propaganda machine throughout the world. All of which has given him an overwhelming publicity advantage over General Mihailovich.

Nevertheless, out of the maze of conflicting and often invented information, those intimately acquainted with the Balkan facts are able to arrive at a semblance of truth.

## II

Yugoslavia, made up in the main of about 8,000,000 Serbs, 3,500,000 Croats and 1,500,000 Slovenes is one of those hasty creations hammered together by the Treaty of Versailles. Almost from the day of its birth there arose bitter enmities between the majority Serbs and the minority Croats.

The two peoples belong almost to different civilizations. The Serbs are of the Greek Orthodox faith; the Croats, like the Slovenes, are Roman Catholics. The Serbs are a typical Balkan people — dour, brave, uncompromising. Unlike the Croats and Slovenes who had lived for many generations under Aus-

tro-Hungarian subjection, the Serbs had their spirit of independence and national unity hardened in long and bloody struggles against Turkish rule and in the two Balkan Wars.

During the last war, of all the Balkan peoples, the Serbs alone fought to the end on the side of the Allies. For nearly two years little Serbia barred Germany's path to the Middle East, at a fearful price in suffering and casualties.

The Croats, as subjects of the Hapsburgs, took on some of the polish and urbanity of the Dual Empire and have always regarded themselves as more "European" than the Serbs. For more than two decades they justly fought against "Serbization" by the numerically superior Serbs. It was natural that the Croats in particular should resent the dictatorship of the late King Alexander, exercised from the Serbian capital of Belgrade and administered largely by Serbians, and regard it as a Serb institution. Alexander was assassinated in Paris by agents of Ante Pavelich, leader of the Croatian pro-Nazi terrorist organization called *Ustashi*. Subsequently, by the grace of the Nazis, Pavelich became the head of an independent Croatian state which joined the Axis and declared war on the U.S.A. and Great Britain.

The supreme test for Yugoslavia came on March 25, 1941. On that day the pro-German government of Regent Prince Paul joined the Axis Three Power Pact. The Serbian people were passionately opposed to this move. *Encouraged by Great Britain and the United States*, the Yugoslav Army under the Serbian General Simovich carried out a *coup d'etat* on the morning of March 27. Prince Paul was deposed, the pro-German government overthrown and King Peter, who was then seventeen years old, ascended the throne. The Yugoslav government-in-exile under Peter, formerly in London and now in Cairo, was thus born in an anti-Axis revolt with Anglo-American support and guarantees.

It is a historic fact that the Croats did not join this national revolt. Louis Adamic, himself a Slovene and violently pro-Croat, admits in his recent book, *My Native Land*, that the collapse of Yugoslavia was probably "not a wholly unwelcome occurrence" to many of the Croats and Slovenes who are today leading Tito's Partisans. Partisan sympathizers admit that "tens of thousands" of Serbs have been killed by Croats since Hitler overran the region, and some estimates put the figure at hundreds of thousands.

It was from communists, dissident Croat *Ustashi* groups, guerilla bands roaming the countryside, and Catholics who despise the Greek Orthodox Serbs that the Partisan movement was born. Tito later assumed leadership of this movement upon direct orders from the All-Slav Committee organized in Moscow. As Leigh White, an American correspondent who spent the crucial months of 1941-42 in the Balkans recently put it: "For my part I find it difficult to forget that Croatian communists, like their comrades in France, refused to fight for their country until the Germans invaded Russia."

### III

As a summary of the fratricidal war now going on it would be enough to say that General Mihailovich is a Serb and a legitimist while Marshal Tito is a Croat and communist. But the picture is far more complex. The Balkans have always been, and remain today, a pawn in the hands of the Great Powers.

Great Britain needs to dominate the Balkans to protect Mediterranean communications with Egypt and the Near East. Russia has always coveted the Balkans as a means of controlling the Dardanelles and bolstering its influence

in Eastern and Central Europe. Stalin has merely followed the historic Russian pattern in setting up the All-Slav Committee, with headquarters in Moscow and branches in the United States, Canada, South America and other countries.

On March 27, 1941, millions of Serbians, defying the victorious Nazi war machine, and without the remotest hope of aid, declared war on Germany. Winston Churchill stated in the House of Commons at the time that "the Yugoslav nation has found its soul." Hitler took a terrible revenge. At dawn on April 6, 1941, he launched an attack that made shambles of Yugoslavia's cities, towns and valleys. His Hungarian, Italian, Bulgarian and Croatian satellites joined in an orgy of murder. After twenty-one days, the country lay inert, broken, apparently dead in the European world.

Then, suddenly and dramatically, the name of Draja Mihailovich and the deeds of his Chetniks thrilled the anti-Axis world. When Mihailovich, after the Nazi invasion, retired to the mountains of Montenegro to organize his guerilla forces, he was only an obscure officer in the Yugoslav Army. The government-in-exile in London knew little about him. At first the

whole idea of guerilla resistance seemed fantastic. The Germans regarded it as irresponsible romanticism — very Balkan, picturesque, but futile. But by June, 1941, they changed their minds. Engagements involving thousands of men on each side took place between Axis troops and Chetniks. "Whether Mihailovich or Axis commanders provoked the earliest encounters," writes Adamic, Tito's most vociferous spokesman in America, "is not clear." But, he adds, "my guess is that many of them just happened." He admits that Mihailovich was "killing Nazis, Italian Fascists and Quislings right along" and that his chief aim "was to prepare Yugoslavia's population for the day when the Western anti-Axis powers, Britain and America, would finally be ready to invade Europe." The Yugoslav government named Mihailovich War Minister, a post he still holds, and its military policies were at all times intimately coordinated with those of the United Nations.

Recently, after the Roosevelt-Churchill-Stalin conference at Teheran, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden committed Great Britain to all-out military support of the Partisans. Though his statement and pronouncements by other British and American officials were

most cagily phrased, they left a clear presumption of ultimate Anglo-American support for Tito's brand-new "Provisional Government," announced after the Teheran meeting as a rival to the legal Yugoslav government-in-exile.

The explanation offered for this repudiation of the government which Britain and the USA helped to bring into being, and of the erstwhile Allied hero Mihailovich, is "that the Partisans are engaging a large number of German divisions" whereas the Chetniks are apparently "inactive." What makes the explanation exceedingly curious is that Mihailovich has been engaging the Germans only in minor skirmishes and conserving his main forces *upon the counsel of British military advisers who joined him soon after he had organized his Chetniks*. Some of these advisers are still with Mihailovich.

The original quarrel between the Chetniks and the Partisans was almost the same as that between Russia and the Western Powers—the matter of a "second front." Tito emerged as leader of the "revolutionary" Partisans only after June 22, 1941, that is to say after Hitler's attack on Russia. Immediately he demanded all-out action against the Germans, regardless of costs. The Chetnik leaders, how-

ever, followed Allied policy, and explicit British advice, in conserving their main forces until the future Allied invasion of the Balkans.

It was, in fact, this refusal of Mihailovich to open a "second front" in the Balkans that served as signal for the powerful Soviet propaganda machine throughout the world to commence its campaign against Mihailovich.

#### IV

According to Balkan legend, two other communist "Titos" preceded Josef Broz on the scene. In any case, soon after the present Tito took command, cables from London, Cairo and Berne, Switzerland, began to stream into the United States with the startling charges that Mihailovich was a fascist and a Nazi collaborator. The principal disseminators of this information were the communist New York *Daily Worker*, the Soviet-controlled Inter-Continent News agency and the Free Yugoslav radio station in Russia. At the same time pro-Tito propagandists in the United States became extremely active in spreading these rumors against Mihailovich and his Chetniks. Chief among the propagandists was Louis Adamic.

In *My Native Land* Adamic remarks that "there is no proof of the rumor circulating in the best informed progressive Yugoslav circles in London and New York early in '43 that Colonel Draja Mihailovich was ever a paid foreign agent." It can be said with equal fairness that there is no proof of the rumor circulating in the best-informed circles of Washington and New York that Adamic is a paid agent of Stalin. For some time Adamic has plied the trade of a professional foreigner — an American among foreigners, that is, and a foreigner among Americans. His trade thrived when Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, impressed by the suave young man of literary talent, took him under her motherly wing. He became a familiar figure in influential Washington salons. As an expert on the American "melting pot," he became perennial adviser to the Office of War Information and the Office of Strategic Services and gained a notable influence in government circles on matters involving minority races.

There seems little doubt that this taste of power has left Adamic strangely disturbed. In his book he warns that if Anglo-American forces come to Yugoslavia "with the wrong approach . . . someone

will be apt to kill the highest British or American officer he can get at. . . ." In a speech delivered in Slovenian in Cleveland last November 14 — a translation of which is before me — exaggerated self-importance and confusion predominate:

I am standing here as President of the United Committee of South Slavic Americans. I have not yet thanked you or anyone else for electing me. . . . Alas, there was no one else who could assume this work which was badly needed. During the last three months there was work in the United Committee day and night, and now I am standing before you quite tired . . . but also somewhat satisfied and proud.

Amazingly, this one-time progressive champion of the immigrant underdog in America has developed symptoms of Slovenian chauvinism. "I am for [Tito's] Slovene National Army," he cries, because it is "the main factor in the whole situation — a factor which will enable Slovenia to get back the provinces of Goritza, Trieste and its part of Carinthia and Styria." Adamic also insists that he is for a "republican Yugoslavia in which there will be with Slovenia a free and partly autonomous Croatia and a free and partly autonomous Serbia." Since Slovenia has 1,500,000 people, Croatia 3,500,000 and Serbia 8,000,000, his proposal is at least curiously phrased. His book,

moreover, has strange passages in which he speaks of the former Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Ninichich, as a "Christianized Hebrew" — as distinguished from "real Serbians" — and of the Yugoslav Minister in Washington, Fotich, as "an uncomfortable part-Jew."

All the same, Adamic and the other propagandists have been able to tip the scales of American public opinion in favor of Tito. By Adamic's own boast, the OWI in Washington has been sending many of his statements "by radio to Yugoslavia and generally to Europe." He has also sponsored the pro-communist former editor of *Yugoslav American*, Lieutenant Alexander Vucenich, as Office of Strategic Service liaison man between the Tito forces and the American authorities. Although OSS has a long dossier on Vucenich's pro-communist activities, he is now in Cairo sending reports to Washington on the situation in Yugoslavia.

The extraordinary success of the anti-Mihailovich campaign may be judged by the manner in which the former hero is now ignored or smeared as a matter of routine in newspapers here that have no means of knowing the facts but merely follow the prevailing fashion. Again and again military actions carried

out by the Chetniks have been attributed via Russia to Tito's forces. *Mihailovich's frantic cables to the United States urging corrections, literally scores of them, have been ignored.* His angry denials of collaborating with the Nazis somehow have failed to reach the press. Some day, it may be hoped, an enterprising newspaper will obtain these cables and publish the essential portions. Here, for instance, is a cable dated December 6:

*Woods and Mountains of Yugoslavia* —

The communist radio station "Free Yugoslavia" informed the world and this information was reproduced by the London radio that the Partisan formations destroyed the bridges on the railway Uzice-Visegrad-Sarajevo frustrating thus for a long time the use of this important railroad linking Serbia with Bosnia and the Adriatic Sea. A representative of the Democratic Yugoslav News Agency saw General Miroslav Trifunovich, Commander of Serbia in the Yugoslav Army commanded by General Mihailovich, from whom he received the following statement concerning the above Communist propaganda:

"I can tell you only this — the four bridges of the railroad Uzice-Visegrad were destroyed by our units under my own command and in the presence of Brigadier Armstrong, Chief of the British Military Mission. . . . This happened at the beginning of October, 1943. On the seventh of the same month we took a 150 meter long railway bridge over the Drina River after thirteen hours of hard fighting because the bridge was guarded by one German and two Croatian quisling

companies, protected by twenty-five block houses on both sides of the river. The bridge was taken by assault and using only hand grenades. We lost twenty-one dead and thirty wounded. This operation and the complete destruction of the bridge was executed in the presence of Brigadier Armstrong and Lieutenant Colonel Siez, chief of the American Military Mission.

Like a hundred other messages from Chetnik headquarters, this information was never publicized in the American press. The credit for that Chetnik victory remains Tito's and is one more item used to undermine Mihailovich and to extend a *de facto* if not yet a *de jure* recognition to the Partisan "Provisional Government" in open violation of Britain's agreement with the legal Yugoslav government, which is also the recognized member of the United Nations.

Events are moving with lightning speed. As recently as October 22, 1943 — that is to say, before the Teheran conference — the British Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Mr. Ralph Stevenson, held a conference in Cairo with war correspondents accredited with the Allied High Command during which he discussed the internal situation in Yugoslavia. Though apparently never published, a transcript of the interview has reached the United States.

To the Partisan charges, echoed

here by Communist propaganda, that Mihailovich has lost control in Serbia, Mr. Stevenson replied that "It must be stressed that Mihailovich certainly has control of all Serbia, a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, extending out to the Adriatic in Dalmatia and even to Slovenia." And he added:

All the accusations of the Partisans that Mihailovich is a fascist, collaborating with the occupational forces, are completely unfounded, and spring entirely from the efforts of the Partisans to blacken Mihailovich among the Serbian population, and frustrate him when the moment comes to seize power in the country. General Mihailovich from the beginning of the struggle has loyally collaborated with the Allies and no one can doubt his loyalty as an ally or as the representative in the country of the Yugoslav Government.

## V

There is no doubt that Mihailovich is a monarchist, faithful to his oath to King Peter. Though they helped put Peter on the throne, there is no reason why the United States and Great Britain should foist Peter's régime upon Yugoslavia when the war is over. There is even less reason, however, to foist upon the unhappy country the rival "Provisional Government" set up by Tito and his associates. (At this writing representatives of



Tito's government have already asked for visas to come to the United States to seek recognition.)

The original State Department policy of permitting the peoples of liberated countries to decide their own future after the enemy has been expelled seems to make more sense than ever. Of course, if occupying forces or political groups in temporary ascendancy are allowed, as Tito is now doing, to carry out bloody purges in advance to assure the "proper" outcome in any plebiscites the whole procedure will

become a mockery. To prevent the "fixing" of plebiscites through preliminary terror is perhaps the greatest single political task facing the victorious Allies.

Americans, far from the scene and inundated by pro-Tito propaganda, should not be too hasty in discounting the Serbs, their Chetniks and the Chetnik leaders — those, that is, who have consistently fought by our side and coordinated their policies with the larger policies of the Allies — in favor of Tito's hand-tooled "Provisional Government."



*"All right . . . so it isn't  
TRUE air power . . ."*

## CLINICAL NOTES

### NOT-SO-GOOD NEIGHBORS

**B**EFORE Argentina succeeded in replacing the shamefaced pro-fascist régime of Castillo with the undisguised fascist and pro-Nazi régime of General Ramirez, two small Latin American countries tried similar stunts — fortunately without success. Though small in population and area, these countries are of great strategic importance to the United States. The fact that these attempts went virtually unnoticed in the United States is proof of the deep ignorance of all things Latin American that still prevails here. Surely equivalent uprisings suppressed in small European countries would have been headline stuff here. Yet Ecuador and Panama are of the most direct importance to the security of the United States.

In Ecuador, "sailors" revolted at the end of August, shouting "Viva Velasco Ibarra!" Few will remember here that Ibarra was dictator of Ecuador from 1934 to 1935, supported by pro-fascist elements in the army and reactionary high clergy. During his short-lived ré-

gime, ended by another revolt, he favored the Nazis wherever possible. Since then Ibarra tried several times to seize power, but without success. The August effort is the latest in the series.

The establishment of a pro-Axis government in Ecuador at this time might have had even more serious results than the existence of a hostile régime in Argentina. Some time ago we leased from Ecuador the Galapagos Islands, the island of Salinas in the Bay of Guayaquil and the port of Santa Elena, which is the westernmost point of South America. These acquisitions are of tremendous importance for the defense of the Panama Canal. Under a pro-Axis setup our activities in the leased territory would be seriously hampered, and at best would be reported to our enemies.

The revolt in the Republic of Panama occurred at about the same time. Our press told us that a Dr. José Pezet, former Vice-President under President Arnulfo Arias, and a number of high police officials were arrested when a con-