

I called David Osborne, the author who has been described as the Clinton administration's "guru" for reinventing government. I told his assistant I wanted to ask Osborne about whatever expenses he might have incurred during his NPR work. The assistant checked with Osborne and told me he would discuss the matter only if the conversation was approved by Romash. Two weeks later, after checking with the vice president's office, the assistant called to say that "unfortunately, David's not going to have time to do interviews." Two weeks after that, the answer was the same. A month later, Osborne was still busy.

It began to seem as if there might be some sort of blackout on the issue. I have not yet given up, but it has become clear that the vice president's office will go to some lengths to protect the secrecy of the National Performance Review budget. Whether they have a legal right to do so is another matter.

Can the vice president's office legally keep details of the NPR a secret? The administration believes the answer is yes. Justice Department spokesman Carl Stern says government experts think there are legal grounds to contend that the vice president's office is not subject to FOIA, although "it is a matter that hasn't been litigated, so you could argue it either way."

Press experts concede that some areas of the White House are indeed exempt from FOIA. But they believe a subject like the cost of the National Performance Review is not among them. "The reason that you have an executive privilege is to protect the decision-making process of the executive," says Rebecca Daugherty, director of FOI at the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, "not to protect [disclosure of] their expenses." The refusal to open NPR financial records "flies absolutely in the face of [Clinton's] statement, which says the presumption should be for disclosure," says Paul McMasters, who for four years was national FOIA chairman of the Society of Professional Journalists.

Vice President Gore himself seems to be in favor of financial disclosure, at least in a general sense. During his televised NAFTA debate with Ross Perot, Gore pressed Perot to reveal what he had spent lobbying against the trade agreement. "Why isn't it a matter of record how much you all spent?" Gore said. "Can that be a

matter of public record? Can you release those numbers? . . . The audience will notice that he does not want to publicly release how much money he's spending."

But when it comes to National Performance Review spending, Gore—like Perot on NAFTA—does not seem to want to release the numbers. So for now, all one can do is speculate. If the 200 on-loan staffers mentioned by Romash fell midway in the GS-13 pay grade (the most common federal salary bracket in the Washington area), they would earn about \$27,500 in the course of working six months for the NPR. Multiplying that by 200 would mean NPR workers made about \$5.5 million in salaries; adding federal fringe benefits would increase that figure substantially. (As for the \$1.5 million from the Defense Department, a Pentagon spokeswoman says the review has returned \$150,000 of that.)

There is also the cost of the review's office in a glossy downtown building near the White House; the owner of the building refused to say how much the NPR paid in rent. Add in office expenses, travel, consultants, and the other costs of doing business. Then there are the costs of the "reinvention teams" and "reinvention laboratories" that the president ordered all cabinet members to organize, the vice president's cross-country federal employee town meetings held to gather worker input, and the implementation effort that goes on today.

It is impossible to come up with even a rough estimate. And accurate figures on the cost of the NPR will have to wait until the administration decides to extend its "openness" policy to a project designed to make the federal government more responsive to American citizens. □

## LETTER FROM ZAGREB



# The Croatian Nation's Pulse

by Leo Raditsa

The people appear more alive on the streets of Zagreb than just after their first elections three years ago. Then, their words were euphoric but their looks wooden, stunned. The streets looked empty, uninhabited, as if the people were repossessing them after a generation's siege—just as I remember Italy in 1948. When I asked them *Why the changes, finally?* they answered one word—"Gorbachev." They meant, I now realize, that they did not take their freedom for their own work, and didn't know what to do with it. "It has not turned out to be so simple," a cousin of mine said, smarting at his own words.

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But now there is visibly more feeling on people's faces. Three years ago they wandered around aimlessly like travelers who awake not knowing where they are; now, they really walk, or stroll. The tension is palpable: the city is ablaze in cigarette smoke. They are learning to speak freely after years of swallowing their words, of lowering their voices at the sight of a policeman, changes that take time and pain, as if each word had to be wrenched from captivity. The lines in front of the American Embassy tell of people who want out—but this time not because of oppression. Something is beginning to stir tentatively in the country, and they cannot stand it. Communism throttled anything that stirred on its own in this country, with the result that hate tempts people: they take it for relief.

It is coming home to people that they

are going to have to work for a living. More than once I met people who wanted to open up their own businesses. There are already some thirty thousand small businesses, heavily taxed by a government with little economic sense. Average monthly wages that run about \$70 dollars bear 110 percent tax. The greatest devotees of the free market and Croatian independence in the government are former Communists. But it is hard to know what these alignments mean in a country where nobody knows what is private and what public. I have seen some of these apparatchiks gaze stupefied at the work in the raw you can see on the streets of New York, the involuntary contempt on their faces making it plain they had never seen real work before.

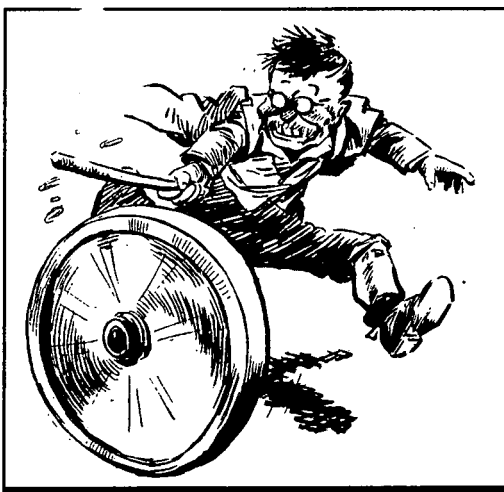
Communism was degrading and murderous, but more comfortable, just as today's killing is comfortable, the ultimate in European self-indulgence and self-destructiveness, killing for those narcissisms of little differences that betray all of Europe's exquisite cruelty. This killing betrays the insides of Communism; it shows that Communism can still undo you after you have renounced it—the leaders in former Yugoslavia cannot get away from its unscrupulousness even though they no longer believe in it. They cannot conceive of decency.

I was struck that Bosnia seemed much farther away from Zagreb than from Rome or Geneva or New York. The news clips on evening television showed Serbian soldiers in Bosnia as if they were a regular army, not the random killing in Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Tuzla, and other towns. The few people that mentioned Bosnia in conversation sounded as if they were admitting something reluctantly, as if they were awakening from a deep dreamless sleep. This distance also shows itself in Croatian president Franjo Tudjman's repeated boast that Croatia has taken the most refugees from Bosnia, as if Croatia had no more to do with Bosnia than Great Britain—and, most importantly, as if it were not implicated in the killing there. People insisted on a news story that held that British U.N. forces had led the "Muslims" against Croats in Central Bosnia despite firsthand accounts, including those of Jonathan Randal in the *Washington Post*, that showed Croats

starting the fighting around Vitez. (At the time I heard this disinformation repeated, 200,000 Croats had been driven from central Bosnia.)

But the denial goes much deeper. It centers around Tudjman's March 1991 deal with Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, before Serbia attacked Croatia and Slovenia, to divide up Bosnia with the Serbs. Almost everybody I met, including people in government, denied the existence of the deal, reported in most important international newspapers. In fact in the days I was there, a journalist from the *European* argued on a popular late night program that anybody who had wanted could have learned of the deal since he had learned of it immediately after it had been done.

Tudjman's readiness to deal with Milosevic behind his people's back dis-



plays a typically Communist mixture of naïveté and brutality, a self-destructiveness worthy of Milosevic and his commander in Bosnia, Myladic—except that Tudjman still has his way out. But only if Croatian public opinion shows its disgust with this deal instead of denying it exists. I mean that Tudjman should back the independence of Bosnia, not of the "Muslims" as he has come to call the Bosnians since Easter, even condescendingly calling the Bosnian president "Ali" on television. (The equation of "Muslims," a category invented by Tito, with Bosnia represents another distortion. For the "Muslims" of Bosnia are either Serb or Croat. And of the 300,000 people still in Sarajevo, between 10 and 30 percent are Bosnian Christian Serbs.)

By "backing," I mean fighting alongside the Bosnians, instead of against them. An alliance of Bosnians and

Croats would be capable of driving the Serbs out of Bosnia and also out of the Krajina and Slavonia in Croatia—in the judgment of one of the best generals of Croatia. Such an alliance would not only earn Croatia the title of republic—for a country that knows independence and the rule of law defends the independence of its neighbors—it would also give it a chance to survive. For the partition of Bosnia, Tudjman's unstated (because indefensible) policy, will lead inevitably to the division of Croatia, already about one-third out of the control of Zagreb, and to random killing that will not end without the destruction of both Serbia and Croatia.

The alternative Croatia now faces is not between war and peace but between self-destructive unlimited killing of women, children, and old men, with "humanitarian" campaigns in Europe on television every night, and an outright war for the independence of Bosnia that would also assure Croatia's independence. Without the defeat of the Serbs in Bosnia on the battlefield, not even the rudiments of peace will come to former Yugoslavia. And independence for Croatia will mean little more than hatred of the Serbs.

Such a war for Bosnian sovereignty would also show the 400,000 Serbs in Croatia (300,000 outside the seized territories) that the Croatian government can be trusted, for a country that fights for the rule of law abroad will respect its minorities. The destructive consequences of Tudjman's acquiescence in the partitioning of Bosnia show already in exacerbation of differences within Croatia, not only between Croats and Serbs, but also among the Croats, especially the Croats of the coast, Dalmatia, Istria, and Primorje. If I were a Serb living now in Croatia, I would be afraid.

I came to Croatia ready to argue for a full-scale American and European intervention with ground troops. I now understand that it is more important first to face the Croats with the responsibilities of independence, to get them to adopt a rational policy with limited goals that should win wide support in the world—and to supply them, and the Bosnians, with arms. Such a policy would lend the Croats the honor and self-respect they yearn for. □



# Requiem for a Madam

by Benjamin J. Stein

Saturday

"It doesn't get much better than this," my sister said as we started up the Bull River Parkway in Western Montana. She was referring to the vista of a clear river, towering mountains, a vast meadow, and sunlight mixed with shadow hitting the whole schmeer.

In the back seat, Little Sid Caesar was telling us jokes. "Why is six afraid of seven?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"Because seven eight nine," he said.

"Very clever," I admitted as we passed by one staggering vista after another. "Very, very clever."

We had just passed the Clark Fork, a roaring river near Hope, Idaho, and visited the Cabinet Gorge Power Plant, set in a vast canyon of the river. And for some reason, that had started Little Jack Benny thinking about humor.

"Why is eight afraid of nine?" Tommy asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"Because nine ten eleven," he said.

"That isn't funny," I said.

"Will you throw rotten fruit at me?" he asked.

"No, but it's not funny," I said.

Tommy fidgeted in the back seat while I took more photos of the scenery, and bathed in its perfection.

"Well," Tommy wanted to know, "what makes something funny?"

Oh, that kid.

"It has to do with surprise, with familiarity, with embarrassment, with cruelty, with venting tension, with plays on words. It has to do with a lot of things that are extremely hard to put into words."

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"Well, how do you know when you're being funny?" he asked.

"Tommy, my boy, it's really hard to put into words, but I'll get a book on humor for you, and maybe we'll try to figure it out together."

"That would be good," he said, "because Mommy told me that I could make enough money to buy a one-man submarine if I was really funny."

I thought about that, thought about the magnificence of Montana, about what it might be like to be there all alone in the middle of winter.

Tuesday

A call from my agent. Could I hurriedly come over to Studio City to try out for a part in a very funny sitcom called "Hearts Afire"? Is the Pope Polish? I asked for a fax of the script. Out of my faithful Panafax came a torrent of pages. The part was that of a crotchety, slightly crazed high school principal. It was perfect for me except that the character description called for a man in his "mid-sixties." I am a *very*

youthful 48. So you can see the problem right away.

Anyway, I figured it was a chance to meet people, so I sent my little self over there. I was stunned when I entered the casting room. There were eight other men there, with two more right behind me, all waiting to try out for the part. Some of the men were well-known actors. One was running for a directorship of the Screen Actors' Guild.

I might as well leave, I said to myself. I can't compete with all these people. But as part of my new regime, I don't throw fits or act like a prima donna. So, I stayed and read the part and got it. I love it when that happens.

I even got to meet the producer and chief writer, Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, pal of Bill and Hillary. I told her my true story about noting that Bill Clinton, while obviously one of history's great statesmen, had rather inadequate neckties, and then sending him a beautiful Hermès tie, for which he sent me a thank-you note. Linda was amused. I was told to report for work at 10 a.m.—gentlemen's hours—the next day.

When I got home, I told Little Desi Arnaz about it. "Will you watch me when I'm on TV?" I asked him.

"No, Daddy," he said. "Not a chance. I have to figure out what's funny so I can get a cigarette boat."

"Well, maybe you could figure it out by watching me."

"Maybe," he said.

Wednesday

On the job. I appeared at the set at ten, ate a few bananas, on the theory that people think monkeys are funny, and then had a run-through of my scene. It's the longest scene

