

# Does the deadlock in Yugoslavia threaten the future of the nation?

By Diana Johnstone

**Y**UGOSLAVIA SEEMS CAUGHT IN A DEADLOCK. There is broad agreement that the system is not working. But there is radical opposition as to what to do about it.

"The exaggerated decentralization of Tito's 1974 Constitution is ruining the country," protest the Serbs, who with more than eight million of Yugoslavia's 23 million people are by far the largest of its many national groups.

The Slovenians, who number fewer than two million but who carry a disproportionate economic weight, disagree. On the contrary, they have been sounding the alarm that attempts by Serbian nationalism to centralize Yugoslavia are leading to disaster—probably an army takeover.

The mid-October Belgrade meeting of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav party was billed in advance as a decisive showdown. Slovenians toured Western Europe warning that a Serbian putsch was imminent. Mass rallies throughout Serbia—protesting against alleged abuse of Serbs by ethnic Albanians in the autonomous province of Kosovo, calling for the resignation of corrupt officials and hailing the new Serbian party leader Slobodan Milosevic—lent plausibility to Slovenian anxieties.

But when the meeting was over, nothing much had happened. The representatives of six republics (20 for each, regardless of population) and the two provinces Voivodina and Kosovo (15 each), plus 15 for the army, canceled each other out as usual. Milosevic was in the minority in the 165-member central committee. Since the Slovenian nightmare had not come true, it was time to wonder whether Serbian nationalism was the real problem or only a symptom.

Aggravated by unchecked inflation and a failing economy, national antagonisms have been rising to the surface, pitting the country's center against the periphery. The geographical and political center of Yugoslavia is Serbia, whose republic shares its capital city, Belgrade, with the federal government. The centrifugal forces are in both the rich northwest and the poor southeast. The richest are the Slovenians, whose prosperous little republic leans toward neighboring Austria and Italy, and the poorest are the Albanians in the southern Serbian province of Kosovo. Serbs accuse the Albanians of deliberately driving out non-Albanians in order to create a racially pure Albanian Kosovo that would eventually secede from Yugoslavia to become part of neighboring Albania.

The characteristic feature of conflicts between nationalities is that people do not speak the same language, literally and figuratively. What is happening these days in Yugoslavia sounds very different depending on whether it is recounted in Slovenian, Serbian or Albanian, separate languages echoing conflicting historical memories.

**Seeds of conflict:** Only the Serbs can look back to an ancient state of their own, and they are proud of their history: an independent kingdom of Serbia in the Middle Ages, a tragic defeat by Turkish invaders in the 14th century, centuries of nursing na-

tional identity under Ottoman rule. Serbia was the first of the Balkan States to revolt against the Ottoman Empire in the early years of the 19th century, followed by Greece and Bulgaria. Landlocked Serbia's efforts to expand southwest toward the Adriatic Sea across the late-falling provinces of the Ottoman Empire, notably Slavic Bosnia, were frustrated when the Austro-Hungarian Empire took them instead. This was the conflict that ignited World War I in 1914.

To justify a larger state, Serbs invented the concept of Yugoslavia, land of the Southern Slavs, which after the war absorbed not only Bosnia but also Slavic provinces that had been under the Austro-Hungarian Empire for many centuries: Croatia and Slovenia.

Some of Yugoslavia's minorities are not Slavic at all, notably the 450,000 Hungarians of the autonomous Serbian province of Voivodina, and least of all the 1.7 million Albanians in Kosovo. Their non-Slavic language, their Moslem religion and their clannish customs make the Albanians the most mysterious of Yugoslavia's ethnic groups for the others. With by far the highest birthrate in Europe, the Yugoslav Albanians have in a few decades grown to more than 80 percent of the population of Kosovo.

Tito's 1974 constitution attempted to forestall national conflicts by extreme decentralization, including annual rotation of top federal leaders and extensive autonomy for the six republics and the Serbian provinces of Voivodina and Kosovo. Serbs complain that Voivodina and Kosovo can change their

constitutions without Serbian permission, but the Serbian constitution cannot be changed without their accord. In mass demonstrations, Serbs have been demanding to exercise more control over Serbia itself and its provinces.

Serbs are unanimously persuaded that the Albanians have been mismanaging Kosovo and trying to make life unbearable there for everybody but themselves. Horror stories

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circulate in the Serbian press of Albanian rape and other forms of violence against Serbs. To outsiders, these stories appear the product of mass hysteria.

What is indisputable is that Albanians in Kosovo have schools and a university in their own language. This has tended to produce young intellectuals more trained in Albanian cultural nationalism than in any marketable skill. Unemployment in Kosovo runs to 40 percent, compared to 15 percent nationwide.

Over the mountains in Albania, the living standard of Albanians is much higher—paradoxically, perhaps, because the much harsher Communist regime there has combatted traditional cultural patterns that persist among Yugoslav Albanians. The rate of wage-earning among women is twice as high in Albania as among Albanians in Kosovo, where women often neither read nor write but stay at home and have lots of children, counting on the extended family to make up for the lack of job prospects. In short, Kosovo Albanians are a pocket of Third World under-

development in Europe.

**The great divide:** Serbs bitterly resent this Albanian population explosion in what they consider the historic cradle of the Serbian nation. Kosovo is the site of the Patriarchate of the medieval Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as of the "Field of Blackbirds," where invading Turks wiped out the Serbian nobility in a battle whose 600th anniversary will be commemorated next June. The fallen heroes of Kosovo are celebrated in Serbian epic poetry.

Since Albanians massively converted to Islam under Turkish rule, Serbs have tended to regard them as turncoats who sought privileges with the Turkish overlords, the better to move into Serbian territory and oppress the Serbs. These perceptions set the stage for highly emotional conflicts.

The Slovenians, who spent the Middle Ages in a cozy corner of the Hapsburg Empire, want no part of all this historic costume drama. Young Slovenian intellectuals are far more interested in asserting their cultural closeness to modern Western Europe.

Slovenia produces a full quarter of Yugoslavia's exports. With only 8 percent of Yugoslavia's population, Slovenians resent carrying 20 percent of the federal budget and seeing their wealth "drained" to develop the south, with nothing to show for it, whereas more investment in Slovenia would be sure to be profitable. They complain that Slovenian subsidies simply serve to maintain a "power elite" in places that manifestly do not interest them very much. The gap between Slovenia and the poor south continues to widen.

In a recent interview, a group of young Slovenian intellectuals explained the gap by the work culture, the "Protestant ethic" (although Slovenia is mostly Catholic), the older industrialization and more highly qualified working class in Slovenia, where traditionally everyone spoke several languages and traveled for work to German-speaking cities. The nostalgia for the Austro-Hungarian Empire is muted but patent.

"The Serbs consider themselves the only state-builders in Yugoslavia," Slovenians say. "But their state was medieval, whereas we and the Croats had the experience of a modern state when we were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire."

Croatia is the other rich northern republic, which lies between Slovenia and Serbia and includes the vacation paradise of the Dalmatian coast.

When Yugoslavia was created by the victorious allies after World War I, the most violent opposition came from Catholic Croatia. After the Nazis invaded Yugoslavia in 1939, the terrorist Croatian nationalist movement, the Ustashi, briefly ran a separate Croatian state, supported by fascist Italy, that systematically murdered Jews and Serbs.

The Slovenians have historically been more tranquil, rather like the Czechs.

Serbs say the Slovenians forget that they were "nobodies" in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with no recognition of their culture, no schools in their language. "They have a veto power in Yugoslavia that they certainly would never have in Western Europe," a Serb argues.

Serbian intellectuals say Slovenians are right to seek reforms, but tend to be provincial and forget history. "They speak of being part of the West as if the West were homogeneous," a Serbian intellectual says. "The West is everything from the French Revolution to Hitler. Which West do they choose?"

**Peace moves:** In the '80s youth in the Slovenian capital city of Ljubljana found a way







Serbian party leader Slobodan Milosevic has been a key figure among Serbian nationalists who hope to centralize power in Yugoslavia.

to strengthen their rapprochement with Western Europe by creating a peace movement whose representatives attended international meetings. The widely circulated Slovenian youth newspaper *Mladina* has attacked Yugoslav arms sales to Ethiopia and campaigned against construction of a seaside villa for army officers. The Slovenian peace movement has concentrated on fighting for the right to conscientious objection. The most prominent leader of the Alliance of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, Janez Jansa, has developed a sustained critique of the Yugoslav concept of "socialized defense," accused of militarizing society.

Jansa has a whole liberal program for democratic reforms and free-market economics symbolized by his proposal to change his organization's name to "Alliance of Youth Organizations and Movements," dropping the word "socialist." The reform movement wants a new constitution for Slovenia making it a "normal European" state.

The Slovenians are also hostile to Yugoslavia's traditional "non-alignment" policy. "We are fed up with ideological wars," says a statement of the Slovenian youth organization. "We condemn Yugoslav foreign policy that has isolated us from our cultural, historical, economic and political environment." The Slovenians want "integration with Europe."

As in other parts of Yugoslavia, notably Serbia, intellectuals who question the system risk getting into trouble. Several young intellectuals, including Janez Jansa, were arrested last May for passing military documents to *Mladina*.

Jansa's friends organized a defense committee that quickly attracted 80,000 members—a huge number out of a population of only 1.8 million, showing the broad base of

the reform movement in Slovenia.

Since politics makes strange bedfellows, the prosperous Slovenians are in de facto alliance with the poverty-stricken Albanians of Kosovo—a place few care even to visit. The key is a common enemy, the Serbs.

**Making waves:** Just as the Serbs suspect a deliberate separatist plot lurking behind the Albanian birthrate in Kosovo, Slovenians accuse the Serbs of inventing the Kosovo problem as a pretext to impose centralized Serbian rule on all of Yugoslavia.

The irony is that reform intellectuals in both Serbia and Slovenia denounce the ruling "politocracy" as incompetent and corrupt. But the Slovenian strategy is to use decentralization to float their own tight little ship westward. The Serbian strategy is to try to find a strong captain and crew to trim the

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Yugoslav ship of state they see springing multiple leaks on all sides.

Thus at the central committee meeting the Slovenians lined up against the Serbs with defenders of the status quo, starting with the current rotating party leader, Stipe Suvar, a Croat considered a "neo-Stalinist" conservative. Suvar's speech laid into Serbian intellectuals who have been debunking Tito—a Croat whom Serbs blame for the "anti-Serbian" constitution.

Serbian historian Miodrag Milic, a critical

Marxist who recently spent 18 months in jail for attacking the official version of socialism, complained to the West German daily *Tageszeitung* that "Yugoslavia has been run for decades by a Croatian-Slovenian coalition against the 'Balkan south,' left economically and culturally underdeveloped." This is what has fanned national antagonisms, he said. "The people are hungry. In Kosovo, chaos reigns. Yugoslavia is ready to become another Poland."

Milic sees the nationalist demonstrations of Serbs as a prelude to a "general strike" on social issues.

Another critical Serbian intellectual, Svetozar Stojanovic, takes a calmer view. He thinks the Western media have over-dramatized the situation. Tito kept the lid on conflicts. Now people have to get used to national questions being raised openly, not only by the small-minority peoples, but also by the Serbs, who for a long time kept quiet about their own national interest.

It is fine for Albanians to enjoy cultural autonomy, says Stojanovic, "but the official ideology created illusions among Albanians that national minorities have some recognized international right to separate and join the mother state. This is not possible."

The federal structure was based on the illusion that all federal institutions must operate on consensus, a "consensual utopia," Stojanovic calls it, where everyone can veto everything. "We critical intellectuals want an amendment, or rather a clause in a new constitution, listing the vital issues subject to veto. Other issues should be able to be decided by the majority."

Stojanovic is counting on next year's radical economic reform to change things. It will mean a unified Yugoslav market of goods, capital and labor. It will break up fortresses

of privilege and force people to move around. This will change problems and perceptions.

**Lessons to be learned:** Stojanovic sees parallels with Mikhail Gorbachev's problems. On the national problem, he says, the Soviet Union has a lot to learn from Yugoslavia positively and negatively. The USSR is overcentralized. It can learn from Yugoslav decentralization. But it can also learn from Yugoslavia not to take decentralization too far.

"If, as in Yugoslavia in the '70s, you put the emphasis on a federal structure based on national identities, you are bound to be in trouble, because demography changes all the time," he observes. Population shifts due to varying birthrates or immigration will constantly destabilize a political system based on different ethnic or national identities.

"The alternative is to develop citizens' rights and representation alongside national representation, to balance the national principle with the citizens' principle," he concludes.

National difference has often been the only legitimate pluralism in the socialist states. Latent conflicts tend to be channeled into national antagonisms, which may be the first to explode. The only remedy would be a political pluralism that can transcend national lines. Multinational socialist states may have to cultivate political pluralism to hold themselves together.

Meanwhile, Stojanovic does not believe Yugoslavia will be destroyed by its time of troubles. "Although there are troubles, for a state to disintegrate in Europe, you need a different international situation," he says. "Neither bloc today has any interest in seeing Yugoslavia disintegrate." □



# Duke's ALAMO

By Geoffrey Rips

AUSTIN, TEXAS

**T**HERE ARE JUST THREE THINGS WRONG WITH the Dukakis campaign in Texas: its style, substance and strategy. The 10 points by which he supposedly trailed in the state going into the last two weeks of the campaign were not insurmountable. But given the candidate and the months his organization wasted while conducting purges of the state's Democratic Party stalwarts and ducking continuous Republican salvos, it is doubtful that even all Lloyd Bentsen's horses and all his men can rescue this campaign.

And they should have been way ahead. You cannot talk about prosperity today in Texas. You cannot ask if Texans are better off than they were four or eight years ago and expect a positive answer. Since 1980 one million Texans have fallen out of the middle class to below the poverty line. Taken together, they comprise a city the size of Dallas.

Eight hundred thousand Texans are reported to miss at least one meal a month due to lack of income. Food banks from the rich agricultural regions of the Texas Panhandle to the Rio Grande are distributing two to 10 times as much food as they did three years ago and meeting less than half the reported demand. At 7 percent, the state's official unemployment rate is the second highest of the 11 largest states and 33 percent above the national average.

One hundred and forty Texas banks have closed since 1986, with 70 expected to close this year. The State Banking Commission reports that the state's banks lost more than one-quarter of their assets in the past year and slightly less than one-quarter of their total deposits. Home foreclosures are at record levels. Even if the rest of the country is cautiously comfortable on election day, in Texas this should be a Democrat's year.

**His style:** Michael Dukakis' primary campaign in Texas was characterized as much by what it was not as by what it was. It was not as willing to ape the Republicans as Al Gore did in his primary campaign. It was not as closely identified with narrowly defined issues—or as poor—as Richard Gephardt's campaign. It did not carry a loser's sign around its neck the way Paul Simon's and Bruce Babbitt's campaigns did. And, above all, it was not like Jesse Jackson's campaign.

What Texas Democrats thought they saw in Michael Dukakis was the embodiment of a state of being with which Texas, strangely enough, could identify. Both Massachusetts and Texas have been at varying times producers of enormous wealth and national political leadership. Energy prices, however, dictated that when the fortunes of one state were up, the fortunes of the other had to be down. Dukakis proposed to temper this love-hate relationship with a Texas-to-Boston natural gas pipeline, benefiting the economies of both states.

Texas Democrats also thought they recognized a Texas brand of politics in Dukakis' painless pledges of economic development and, most important, in the influx of money to the Dukakis primary operation. It was more money than a Democratic presidential campaign in the state had seen since the days when big-oil money supported Lyndon Johnson. Those were the days when most Texas Republicans were still Democrats.

Their last vestige is Bentsen's political machine. Texas Democrats thought they finally had a winner.

What they had was a set of conditions that could become a winner if played right. In the primary, this set of conditions had conceded the black vote to Jackson, but it had taken the lion's share of the Mexican-American vote, with the Spanish-speaking Dukakis pledging jobs, education and economic development in the Rio Grande Valley. His campaign had attracted liberals with talk of jobs and justice in Central America. It had garnered a good portion of labor's support. And it had even managed to pull in Tory Democrats with its talk of the high-technology prosperity of Massachusetts, with its evident financial backing, and with the fact that Michael Dukakis was not Jesse Jackson.

The question for the Democrats was, once this set of conditions managed to satisfy enough constituent groups to secure the nomination, could it define itself in such a

way as to appeal to the general electorate?

Even before the convention, however, there had been troubling signs that Dukakis might not be able to manipulate the political symbols Texas voters find crucial to their identification with candidates. Dukakis talked about economic development and growth, but he looked like austerity—tight-lipped, closefisted. Texas has had four years of austerity. Bush at least looked like he knew how to live.

In Texas politics there are no clear demarcations between substance and style. They are closely linked. This past summer, for