

# Yugoslavia: from wage cuts to war - Wildcat



A look at the effect of the 1991-1995 war in Yugoslavia on the class struggle, and the effect of class struggle on the war.

The war in former Yugoslavia has raged for more than four years and has attracted more media attention per death than any other war in history. Bourgeois commentators endlessly speculate about the military and political balance of forces, in other words about the significance of the war for this or that fraction of their class. To understand its significance for *our* class, the world proletariat, we have to look at the effect of the war on the class struggle and vice versa. We have to examine the struggles which the war was launched to repress and the struggles which it provoked amongst the proletarians directly affected by it. This is not any easy task given the lack of reliable sources of information<sup>1</sup>.

The news from the Balkans is likely to remain depressing but this shouldn't stop us analysing how the bourgeoisie were able to get away with this assault on our class and how the proletariat resisted. The future large-scale effective resistance to capitalist war which we hope to see, and which as communists we work towards, will not fall out of the sky – it will develop out of already existing struggles, however limited, and the lessons which proletarians have been able to learn from them.

Like the last Gulf War the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia was an attack on a rebellious and relatively affluent section of the world proletariat. As in the Gulf, the war led to an almost immediate and catastrophic fall in their living standards. There the similarity ends. Unlike the Gulf states, Yugoslavia does not contain vitally important raw materials or other economic resources. During the Cold War it was important politically and militarily as a bridge between East and West. Now the nations of ex-Yugoslavia are of no more importance to world capital than dozens of others across the globe.

Although the interests of the most powerful states in the region are not primarily concerned with immediate business opportunities, we should not forget that there is plenty of money to be made in any war. It's no coincidence that the country which lobbied hardest for the lifting

of the arms embargo against ex-Yugoslavia is the USA, which is also the world's leading arms producer, with over half the world arms market<sup>2</sup>.

The importance of the Yugoslav conflict for world capital is primarily ideological – it's a testing ground for finding out which nations, national alliances and capitalist institutions proletarians are really prepared to believe in and die for. It is more a media and political event than a military one. With the creation of the "International War Crimes Tribunal" in Holland the world's most powerful states can simultaneously shed crocodile tears for the dead of the war and use the threat of International Law to do deals with the warring parties (for example, by the indictments against Karadžić and Mladić). As usual the small-fry will be scape-goated while their political masters will remain free to plan more massacres.

For the Western media it is a matter of contrasting the barbarism of the war with the civilised, humanitarian values of the Western politicians who, of course, are doing their best to bring about peace, and of hiding the fact that it was the "Westernisation" of the barbarian East which brought about the war. The media daily invoke the words "ethnic cleansing" as if they are describing some evil which is unique to the war in ex-Yugoslavia, or even unique to the evil Serbs. They want to make us forget that institutionalised pogroms and forced migrations have always been part of the history of those war machines known as nations. Examples include: the "repatriation" of Germans from Eastern Europe sanctioned by the Allies in 1945; the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne between Greece and Turkey, sponsored by the League of Nations, which required an exchange of populations amounting to one third of the Greek population or the "ethnic cleansing" carried out by Western European immigration officers every day – which will certainly intensify against Yugoslav refugees now that "peace" is officially declared.

The media's vilification of "the Serbs" follows a well-worn pattern. Serbia was the region of Yugoslavia in which there was the greatest resistance both to the IMF-led austerity programmes of the 1980s and to the war when it began in late 1991. For the media and other sources of bourgeois propaganda the most evil dictators are always those who confront a rebellious section of the working class. Supposed opposition to the regime provides a justification for measures against the proletarians who live under it – starvation-inducing trade sanctions, travel restrictions, military attacks and the encouragement of racist attitudes towards anybody who has had the misfortune to live under that regime. Liberal calls to "isolate the regime" always mean, in practice, "isolate the contagion of class struggle".

A less important ideological offensive has been the attempt to create a *bloc* of Orthodox nations – Russia, Serbia, Greece etc. There have also been attempts by Saudi Arabian-backed charities and paramilitary groups to turn the largely secular so-called Muslims<sup>3</sup> of Bosnia-Herzegovina into actual practitioners of the Islamic religion. These have largely been unsuccessful. Coupled with this are attempts by Islamic regimes to get their citizens to join with their rulers in condemning the Western powers for ignoring the plight of their Islamic brothers.

The UN has again played its role of ideological camouflage for the bourgeoisie. The UN may be universally reviled for being "incompetent", "lacking political will", "soft on the Serbs" and so on, but we can not be allowed to doubt that it is, or can be, an instrument of peace, a humanitarian whole which is greater than the sum of its warmongering parts. This requires that the complicity of UN troops in massacres is carefully hidden<sup>4</sup>. The latest "peace initiative", starting with the bombing of Republika Srpska military installations in September 1995 by US warplanes under the aegis of NATO, is yet another attempt by the US government to demonstrate that American might is right and proper. That it is not likely to lead to lasting peace in the region is shown by the simple fact that it involves the lifting of the

arms embargo, enabling Croatia to become an even stronger military power, and the Bosnian forces to reduce their dependence on an alliance with Croatia. In the discourse of anti-imperialism the Western powers are generally assumed to have some sinister hidden plan for countries at war, usually linked to the idea that the imperialists want "a strongman in the region". But why have just one strongman when you can have two or three? The "imperialist" powers have not significantly favoured one side or the other, they have simply created the conditions where the war will keep going – as they did in the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted for eight years and killed a million people without the borders shifting by as much as one metre!

### **War and Capital Accumulation**

Capitalist society is characterised by a war of all against all at all levels. At the level of the capitalists themselves there is a continuous struggle over markets leading to the continuous "revolutionising of the means of production". Capitalists who fail to adopt the latest methods of production must quickly catch up or risk being eliminated entirely. State intervention measures such as nationalisation and state subsidies can alleviate the effects of competition for some sectors but only by taking surplus value away from other, more profitable, sectors. Capitalists can never just sit back and let the profits roll in – they have to keep devising new methods of squeezing more surplus value out of the proletariat. When the working class organises itself collectively to resist this process the tension in society can become unbearable for the capitalists – they can't restructure but at the same time they *must*. War is an obvious "solution" to their problems. From the point of view of capital as a whole, rebellious, and potentially rebellious, proletarians are sent off to massacre each other. From the point of view of individual capitalists, and capitalist fractions, they can solve their short term profitability problems by immediately imposing a whole series of austerity measures (from price increases to the militarisation of labour) on "their own" working class and by directly seizing markets and capital assets from other capitalists.

The bourgeois media like to tell us that war destroys everything – the implication being that it is a folly that nobody, bar mad dictators, could consciously wish for. In reality war destruction is often a lot more selective than they would have us believe. For example, the bombing of Dresden in February 1945 left its industry almost untouched. In Bosnia the nationalist militias couldn't be expected to show quite the same precision as RAF Bomber Command but they generally avoided direct military confrontation with the UN. Consequently, in each town where the UN had a presence its base was situated on the main industrial plant, ensuring that only residential districts were shelled.

An important feature of conflicts within the ruling class in the former "Eastern Bloc" since 1989 has been the tendency for more modern, competitive fractions of capital to dissociate themselves from less competitive ones by waging a struggle against the centralised states which share out surplus value between more competitive and less competitive capitals. This can be seen in the secession of the Baltic states from the Soviet Union, in the fighting between Armenia and Azerbaizhan over Nagorno Karabakh, in the separation of the Czech Republic from the Slovak Republic and so on. These divisions often conveniently correspond to historic linguistic, religious and other "ethnic" divisions. Where these ethnic divisions don't exist they can always be invented. This is precisely the course which the war took in Yugoslavia.

The first of the republics to declare its secession was Slovenia. This was the republic with the most modern industry and most developed trade with the West. The bourgeoisie of Slovenia also had another very straightforward economic reason for seceding. Slovenia was Yugoslavia's border with Western Europe. Most of the duty on Western goods was therefore paid at this border. Secession was a major blow to the hard currency finances of the Yugoslav state, and an immediate gain for the new Slovenian state. The brief (10 day) war which

Slovenia experienced in June-July 1991 helped enormously in creating the national unity required for restructuring<sup>5</sup>. Within Yugoslavia (while it was still in one piece) the Republics of Slovenia and Serbia came to represent the two most extreme political poles. The Slovene leadership, who had economic power but little political and military power, stood for a less centralised "Confederal" state. The Serbian leadership, who had a growing monopoly of military and political power but declining economic power, stood for increased centralisation of the state under Serbian domination. The Slovene Communists were the first to walk out of the 14th (last) Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) when it broke up in early 1990. They immediately ceased contributing their portion of the "Fund for Underdeveloped Regions" earmarked for Serbia – an act of war if ever there was one!

In Bosnia and large parts of Croatia, successive waves of "ethnic cleansing" have created a more and more atomised population, ready to go to wherever they are least likely to be massacred and to work for almost nothing. The US "Dayton peace plan" supposedly allows for refugees to return to their homes but this is obviously bullshit. All sides have seen to it that it is almost impossible for most refugees to return. Amongst other things they have carried out the systematic destruction of housing – for example, after over-running Krajina, causing the flight of almost the entire Serb population, the Croatian Army destroyed over 60% of houses and plundered virtually all of them. Official backing for the refugees' right to return will simply encourage the poor to fight each other more ferociously over who gets the remaining houses.

Hundreds of thousands of Yugoslavs are now living in refugee camps in Germany where they have been told they will be sent back to "their own" country as soon as it is declared "safe" (at the time of writing German politicians are already talking about doing this now that there is "peace"). These refugees have almost no rights at all, apart from the most important right granted by bourgeois society – the right to work! Around Berlin, for example, they might get the chance to earn 2DM per hour working in a factory or 1DM per hour as a servant in the homes of the rich. The effect of this on the overall rates of pay of all workers in Germany hardly needs spelling out.

In Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia austerity has often taken the simple form of workers not being paid. In the Bosnian government controlled regions of Bosnia workers have carried on working for months on end without being paid because it's for the good of their country. Trade union delegations to Western Europe are happy to point this out. In Croatia there was a solid rail strike in early 1995 against unpaid wages. The media denounced the strikers as "pro-Serb" traitors and the strike was broken largely by the Minister of Defence threatening that all the strikers would be drafted and sent to the front lines.

As we have already discussed in [our article on Somalia](#) in Wildcat 17, war is also an important means by which capital expropriates the peasantry. Before the war Yugoslavia was still a largely peasant country. Unlike in the Soviet Union, the Socialist collectivisation of agriculture never got very far. Even industrial workers in large towns maintained links with the countryside, which took the edge off absolute poverty. Now much of the countryside has been ruined. In Bosnia not only have hundreds of villages been destroyed but fertile fields have been liberally sown with millions of land mines, making them unusable for decades. Much of the fiercest fighting has taken place in rural areas and ex-peasants have fled to urban areas. As always, the bourgeoisie are "expanding the populations of cities and saving millions from the idiocy of rural life".

### **Causes of the War**

The first military clashes took place on 17 August 1990 in the Krajina region of Croatia after the local Serbian nationalist party had organised a referendum on political autonomy for the

mostly Serb area. From then on the political and military tensions between the republics of Serbia and Croatia escalated rapidly leading to a state of full-scale war in August 1991, supposedly around the issue of the status of the Serbs living within the borders of the Republic of Croatia. This war did not happen by mistake. It had been painstakingly prepared in advance by both sides in direct response to the movement of struggle launched by the proletariat and making use of the weaknesses of that struggle.

In this preparation Serbian nationalism played the most important role. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, there was the central role that the fraction of the ruling class associated with the Republic of Serbia played in the administration of the army, the police and the state bureaucracy. Secondly, there was the fact that significant numbers of people who considered themselves to be Serbs (or who could be persuaded to consider themselves to be Serbs with the help of media misinformation and physical threats) could be found in all the regions of Yugoslavia apart from Slovenia and Macedonia. Serbian nationalism thus had a potential to divide and terrorise the proletariat across almost the whole of Yugoslavia in a way that other ethnic nationalisms didn't. In this sense the dominant Western media view that "the Serbs started all the trouble" has an element of truth in it, although, being itself a nationalist point of view, this deliberately ignores the fact that the most serious resistance to the war effort would develop in Serbia itself. The ideology of Serbian nationalism (in so far as it can be distinguished from other nationalist ideologies) is analogous to Zionism – the Serbs are a historically persecuted people who suffered horrific massacres at the hands of the Nazis (and, of course, during 500 years of Turkish rule, the Balkan wars, World War I...); the threat of genocide (a favourite Serbian nationalist word) could return at any moment if national unity falters; the Croats were given their own state by the Nazis during World War II so all Croats are Nazis (and Germany was the most enthusiastic supporter of Croatian independence, so say no more...); anybody whose grandparents visited the mosque now and again must be a crazed Islamic fundamentalist.

### **The Working Class Mobilises**

With the death of Tito in 1980 a terrible secret came to public notice, the size of the national debt – this was at least \$14 billion. It had grown to this size for much the same reasons as elsewhere – increases in energy prices as a result of the "oil shock" of 1974 and the policy of high interest rates by the Western powers. At the beginning of 1980 Yugoslavia became a member of the IMF and in 1981 it received the largest amount of credit ever given by this organisation. In 1983-4 Yugoslavia carried on funding negotiations with 600 Western banks as well as the IMF. The IMF called on the Yugoslav government to impose wage cuts on insolvent businesses, to lift price controls, to increase interest rates and to devalue the Dinar by 25%. The larger banks were propped up with foreign credit and given the function of closing down smaller insolvent banks which had made loans to unprofitable businesses. This was an attempt to deal with a major structural problem in Yugoslavia's economy – its financial institutions were completely mixed up with its industry so many businesses, particularly ones with politically powerful bosses, could effectively print themselves money by granting themselves unlimited credit. In other words, Yugoslavia was expected to carry out an East European variant of the "anti-inflation" measures being carried out in the US and Western Europe.

In 1984 a wave of strikes broke out, starting in Macedonia, which was mostly against redundancies. For example, a textile firm was to have been closed, taking away the jobs of majority of the local population. Three hundred workers successfully struck for 46 days against the dismantling of self-management and in the name of the masses against the "bureaucratic mafia". faced with this kind of militancy the government could not carry out its aims. The number of successful bankruptcy proceedings actually decreased from 156 in 1979

to 97 in 1985. Instead the banks printed more and more Dinars in order to try to reduce wages without closing unprofitable businesses.

Meanwhile, attempts at direct wage cuts continued. In Summer '85 the Koper port administration announced a wage cut because of alleged under-usage of the harbour capacity. The strike was broken after two days by means of sackings and police repression against ringleaders but it led to strikes almost all over Yugoslavia. In the course of the strikes the state controlled unions became almost completely discredited, not least because they had supported all the state's austerity programs. In Slovenia several large factories had struck and workers had handed in their union cards. In Kosovo the miners had struck, partly against corrupt union bosses who were forced to resign.

In March 1986 the government of Milka Planinc stepped down because it was completely unable to impose the IMF's austerity program. The new government, under Prime Minister Mikulić, promised a six-month pay freeze and price rises. This was not to be. The workers forced through an 8% rise in real wages over the course of that year – according to the unions the workers were "eating up the equipment and machines". Once again the government devalued the Dinar and brought a new banking law into effect designed to create bankruptcy of unprofitable businesses through preventing them from obtaining unsecured loans. The first company to go under was a building firm in Titograd (now Podgorica). 2000 workers were sacked and unemployment in Titograd rose to 20%. Then followed the famous "scandal" of the Bosnian food distribution group Agrocomerc. This company effectively printed money for itself on a scale of several hundred million dollars. Its director was one Fikret Abdić, who later set up an independent Bosnian statelet backed by the UN. In Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo (the poorest regions) all the banks failed and many enterprises were simply abandoned. Unemployment jumped to 1.2m – in a country of 24m. Inflation reached 130%.

At the end of February 1987, in response to an increase in various prices, a wage freeze and an intensification of work, several strikes broke out which were described as "wildcat" by the authorities. For a month and a half there were some 80 strikes without warning across Yugoslavia, particularly in Croatia. The authorities threatened sackings and military intervention but the movement continued to grow. After a short interruption at the beginning of April a strike developed in the coalfield of Labin which lasted for 30 days. The miners demanded the cancellation of all price increases, a 100% increase in wages (a common demand at this time) and a change of mine management. Faced with the possibility of the strike spreading the bosses conceded a wage increase of more than 40% and dismissed various unpopular functionaries.

Demonstrations in front of the Republican parliaments by striking workers became common. In July 10,000 workers in a shoe and tyre company went on strike – 5,000 of them went to Belgrade to demand the doubling of their wages and the resignation of the former director, who was then Minister of Foreign Trade. They called for the dismissal of the whole management as well as the whole of the town council of Vukovar. They didn't just go to shout out their demands to the Federal Parliament but also to express solidarity with workers in Belgrade and to call for a general strike throughout Yugoslavia. This represented an important break with the republic-by-republic containment of the movement.

At the end of May 1988 another strike movement broke out, mostly in the mining and transport sectors in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, in response to a "redistribution of revenue" law being passed by the Federal Parliament which would have meant dramatic cuts in wages. In October of the same year there were violent clashes between workers and special police units in Montenegro. For two days Titograd was cut off by the units but the movement still led to the resignation of Montenegro's government. Shortly afterwards the government of

the "autonomous province" of Vojvodina also felt obliged to resign. Finally, in December 1988 the federal government itself resigned and reconstituted itself under the aegis of Prime Minister Ante Marković.

Marković announced the stunningly original program of freeing prices, restricting credit and devaluing the Dinar. This led to another wave of strikes during the first months of 1989 with the now familiar call for 100% wage increases. Industrial unrest continued throughout the year. In December 1989, 650,000 labourers from Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia declared themselves on strike against government policy and once again called for 100% pay rises. The enterprise bosses gave in, contrary to government directives, and granted the demands. Over the course of the year workers managed to force an increase in real wages of around 25%. The resistance to this new austerity programme was particularly strong in Serbia. In Slovenia there was a successful spate of bankruptcies and the emergence of significant unemployment for the first time, but in Serbia the authorities were forced to ignore the wage freeze and to continue bailing out bankrupt enterprises. Within months the average income in Serbia equalled that of Slovenia, with no corresponding increase in productivity. In September 1989, 10,000 striking workers demonstrated in Belgrade and Skopje and threatened to launch a general strike if the Federal government didn't stop inflation. They also demanded that the Deutschmark should be the principle currency they were paid in. As in Britain and elsewhere in the 1970s, inflation was transformed from a weapon of the bosses into a focus for political mobilisation by the workers, who understood that it wasn't enough just to screw more money out of each individual enterprise.

In February and March of the same year Kosovo exploded. There were strikes and uprisings in all the towns of this province – police stations were attacked, trains were attacked, shops were plundered, cops were shot at from the roofs of houses. The university was occupied. Secondary school students boycotted classes. A State of Emergency was declared, followed by a curfew on 27 March. The next day the Serbian parliament voted unanimously for the Autonomous Provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo to lose their constitutional autonomy and become fully integrated into Serbia. The immediate aim of this was to legalise the suppression of the uprisings by troops from outside the province but it also fitted in well with the Kosovo policies of Serbian nationalist politicians and gave Serbia two more votes on the collective Federal Presidency which contained one representative from each of the six republics and two Autonomous Provinces of Yugoslavia.

The strike movements in the 1980s had many positive features, apart from their sheer size. The strikes were completely unofficial (due to the unions being openly part of the state bureaucracy) and were often very active, involving occupation of work-places to prevent scabbing. There were also numerous demonstrations and blockages of roads in solidarity with the strikes. Yugoslav workers had never been domesticated into the Western European style of strike where everyone goes home and watches TV until the union tells them to go back to work. For this reason any official figures relating to number of strikes or days on strike (even figures used by us!) should be taken with a large pinch of salt. Here we are not talking about well-defined "labour disputes" which begin and end at set times with a specific list of demands. It was not unusual for one factory to have more than one wildcat strike in the same week or even for there to be two separate strikes going on in the same factory at the same time.

Despite the simultaneity of the struggles, they were uncoordinated, tending to confine their scope to specific provinces. This was the main weakness that the bourgeoisie came to exploit. This was helped by the fact that, like other manifestations of the class struggle in Eastern Europe, workers' anger was overwhelmingly directed at the "corrupt, bureaucratic, one-party state". This sort of perspective fitted in very well with the projects of the nationalists who

could present themselves as the "voice of the people" which had long been suppressed by the evil Communists. This "subjective" factor was also helped along by the "objective" economic factor that austerity and restructuring had not been completely held back. Economic divisions between the regions had been exacerbated. For example, unemployment in Slovenia was still only 1 or 2%, while in Kosovo it had reached 30%. This intensified regional resentments within the working class – "the Croats are privileged", "Serbs and Montenegrins are poor because they are lazy". Since the 1970s jobs for migrant workers in Western Europe had become less available. As a consequence more and more workers from the poorer regions (e.g. Serbia) were migrating to Slovenia instead, leading to the usual divisions between natives and immigrants.

### **The Bourgeoisie Responds**

Slobodan Milošević began his exploitation of these divisions by making a successful bid for leadership of the Serbian League of Communists in September 1987. The issue which he made use of was the status of the Serb and Montenegrin minority in Kosovo, where there was a large Albanian majority (around 90%). The media, increasingly under the control of Milošević's faction, began to pump out stories about how Serbs in Kosovo were being driven from their homes and faced "genocide" at the hands of "terrorist separatist" Albanians. In reality there was hardly an Albanian nationalist movement, let alone a separatist one, and what there was certainly didn't have the means to drive out Serbs. The Kosovo issue was also chosen because of the symbolic nature of Kosovo in Serbian nationalist mythology – it was the site of an important battle in 1389 where the Serb forces were crushed by the Turks, leading to almost five centuries of Ottoman Turkish rule. Serbian nationalists celebrate the anniversary of this battle as if it was a victory, in much the same way that British nationalists remember Dunkirk. In concrete terms the use of this mythology helped to mobilise all the Serbian nationalist forces behind Milošević's faction, from academics and novelists to the Party, the media, and the Orthodox Church.

Milošević organised a series of large-scale rallies and demos throughout Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro which were used to force the resignation of Yugoslavist LCY bureaucrats so that they could be replaced with Serbian nationalist LCY bureaucrats. This was known as the "anti-bureaucratic revolution". Serbian nationalism in general was as much about recuperating discontent amongst "Serbian" proletarians as it was about intimidating non-Serbs throughout Yugoslavia. In 1988, for example, rallies were deliberately held in Montenegro to capitalise on an upsurge of unrest which developed after the Republic declared itself bankrupt. As soon as Marković's austerity programme was unveiled it was attacked by the Belgrade press as "anti-Serbian". Because of this role it could provide a social-democratic framework for making the necessary strategic concessions to the working class without encouraging them to ask for even more. Milošević's faction always understood very well that in order to maintain national unity the policy must be, to some extent, "guns *and* butter". Milošević's election victory in December 1990 wasn't just a result of monopoly control of the media. He had arranged an illegal loan (of around \$1.7 billion) from Serbia's main bank to the Serbian government. He used this to grant hefty wage and pension increases.

The climax of the nationalist demo movement was the celebration of the 600th anniversary of the battle of Kosovo on 28 June 1989 in which a million or so Serbs from all over Yugoslavia and the world were gathered on the site of the famous battle for a festival of Serbian cultural kitsch and nationalist speeches. The significance of such a gathering so soon after Kosovo had been shaken by uprisings, and pacified by tanks, should be obvious. This gathering was a triumph for Milošević, sealing his domination of Serbian politics from then on.

At the beginning of 1989 radio transmitters in Vojvodina were redirected to beam Serbian nationalist propaganda into Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Serb-populated regions of Croatia and Serbian nationalist rallies began to be held in Croatia. In the same year Serbian nationalist militias armed by the state began to be trained in Serbia – these would later form the shock troops of the Serbian side of the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Throughout 1990 and up to the outbreak of war in 1991 Serbia's Interior Ministry secretly supplied weapons to Serbian nationalists based in the majority Serb areas of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The opportunity for civil war offered by Milošević was gratefully seized with both hands by Tuđman. One of the first actions taken when Tuđman's party came to power was the repeal of a large chunk of the Titoist legislation protecting the rights of national minorities – a calculated attempt to encourage the growing nationalist paranoia in Serb regions of Croatia. This was followed by the systematic sacking of Serbs from government jobs and many private companies. There was a whole series of other measures designed to incite ethnic divisions – names of streets and squares were changed so as to erase anti-fascism, Socialism and anything to do with Serbia; the "Croatian" language was officially re-invented, supposedly without "Serbian" words<sup>6</sup>; the flag of the new ruling party became the official national flag and was flown everywhere. Tuđman's famous comment during his election campaign that "I am doubly happy that my wife is neither a Serb nor a Jew" was hardly likely to endear him to people whose grandparents had been murdered by Croatian Nazis.

In Slovenia the leaders of the Communist League had promoted a campaign of Slovenian national pride in the mid-1980s around the slogan "Slovenia My Homeland", which consisted primarily of a series of TV adverts portraying the beauty and diversity of the Slovene countryside. Tee-shirts displaying this noxious slogan also became extremely popular. Later they increasingly used the media to blame the other republics for the country's economic ills. However, it was the political forces emerging outside the Communist League which had the greater influence on the development of Slovenian nationalism. In the 1980s a whole range of Western-style single-issue campaigns arose – ecology, conscientious objection to the military, human rights and even gay rights. No doubt most of the idealistic young people and intellectuals who participated in these movements would have been horrified by the idea that their efforts would be used to contribute to the break-up of Yugoslavia and hasten the descent into civil war, but nevertheless this is so. By the late 1980s the Republic of Slovenia's Youth Organisation had ceased to serve the LCY and become a major focus of opposition to the regime. In particular its newspaper *Mladina* ("Youth") had become a major thorn in the side of the military. On 31 May 1988 Janez Janša, a senior *Mladina* writer on military affairs was arrested on suspicion of betraying military secrets. Later two more journalists and a non-commissioned officer were arrested after classified documents were found at the newspaper's office. The trial of the four led to a massive public campaign in their support and although they were initially sentenced to terms of between 5 months and 4 years they ended up serving much reduced sentences. The trial of the four was very widely seen as an attack on Slovenia since the JNA (*Jugoslovenska narodna armija*, "Yugoslav People's Army"), with its overwhelmingly Serb and Montenegrin officer corps and Serbo-Croat (not Slovenian) as its language of command, was perceived as a Serb institution. Janša was to become Minister of Defence a year before Slovenia declared independence and played a major role in organising its 10-day war<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, when the Slovenian opposition, with massive popular support, organised a rally in Ljubljana in February 1989 to condemn human rights abuses in Kosovo, it provided an opportunity for the Communist leadership in Slovenia to openly defy the LCY for the first time.

The first "free" (i.e. multi-party) elections held in the Republics of Yugoslavia, in 1990, were a veritable referendum on war. In all the major protagonist Republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, ethnic nationalist parties won clear victories over Yugoslavist representatives of the old Communist League and non-ethnic liberal parties. Elections in Slovenia were won by Demos ("Democratic Opposition of Slovenia"), a coalition of five opposition parties who were so confident of their ability to break away from Yugoslavia that they immediately began preparations for issuing a new Slovenian currency. In Serbia in December, Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) won 194 out of the 250 Assembly seats. In Croatia, Tuđman's HDZ won enough seats to form a homogenous HDZ government. Even in supposedly "multi-ethnic" Bosnia the three ethnic parties<sup>8</sup> gained over two thirds of the votes cast, enabling them to carve up power between them. Effectively, the citizens of Yugoslavia were asked: "Are you in favour of ethnic slaughter? Yes/No". Voting for ethnic nationalist parties legitimised secession – the secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia, of the Serb minority from Croatia, of the Serb and Croatian minorities from Bosnia and so on. In any nation state secession is an act of war.

Having won seats in the Croatian parliament the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) MPs did not take them up. Instead they formed the "Union of Communes of Luka and Northern Dalmatia" out of the six constituencies they had won. It had its own parliament, the Serb National Council, in Knin. Its first act was to declare its independence from Croatia. It immediately received the protection of the JNA which had already disarmed the territorial defence forces<sup>9</sup> of Croatia and Slovenia (although Slovenia managed to keep a large part of its weapons). The creation of this mini-state constituted a major act of economic warfare against Croatia by Serbia since it cut major road and rail routes between Zagreb and Dalmatia, disrupting production and immediately wrecking the Dalmatian tourist industry. This pattern was to be repeated in Bosnia-Herzegovina with the SDS constituencies there.

These political manoeuvres were not enough in themselves to silence the working class – only heavy artillery and nationalist death squads could do that. In the meantime the class struggle carried on. For example, in April 1991, 700,000 workers struck in Serbia, almost a third of the Republic's workforce. Many had not been paid since before the December elections.

In March 1991 there was an impressive riot against the regime in Belgrade. The occasion was the calling of a demo on March 9 by the "opposition" parties in the Serbian Parliament, principally the SPO (*Srpski Pokret Obnove*, "Serbian Movement of Renewal") led by Vuk Drašković. They were protesting about bias in the official media. The demo was banned by the government and everyone knew it would lead to a massive confrontation with the forces of order. As such it attracted almost everyone who had a grudge against the regime. The nationalist supporters of the organising parties were undoubtedly out in force as they had travelled from all over Serbia but they were quickly joined by large numbers of workers who hadn't been paid for months, together with students, school kids and the unemployed. Most of the participants were not carrying flags or banners of any description and a few people even burned the flags of Yugoslavia and Serbia. The police had been preparing for the event for several days with thousands of them being returned from occupying Kosovo. They were all equipped with riot shields and gas masks. The demo was due to start at noon in Republic Square. Half an hour before this a major riot had already broken out in and around the square. The crowd initially drove the police out of the square. They then listened to nationalist speeches while the police reorganised to attack them with tear gas and water cannons. This in turn led to several hours of intense rioting in which shops and banks were smashed throughout the centre of town and police vehicles were torn apart by rioters armed with rocks and iron bars. A cop was killed, as was one demonstrator when the cops drew their pistols

and fired on the crowd. Order was only restored when JNA tanks appeared on the streets in the evening. Drašković was arrested and held for several days which worked wonders for his political credibility – leading liberal intellectuals to campaign for the release of a man who would later send his own nationalist militia ("The Serbian Guard") to fight in Croatia and Bosnia.

The next day saw more rioting as students who had participated in a series of meetings marched toward the centre of town from Student City, a huge collection of crumbling high-rise concrete blocks situated across the Sava river. Fighting began on the Brotherhood and Unity Bridge and *simultaneously* in the centre of Belgrade – clearly a large number of non-students had immediately taken the opportunity to attack the pigs. This, though, was a more orthodox political demo with thousands of students carrying placards and banners calling for Milošević to resign. After more fighting with the cops the demonstrators managed to occupy Terazije, a main thoroughfare South of Republic Square. This led to a week-long vigil involving hundreds of thousands of people which became a veritable tribune of the people with non-stop speechifying by students, academics, lawyers, famous actors and, apparently, even the odd worker. The demands put forward by this tribune were purely political. There were calls for the resignation of various top state functionaries and for the non-SPS media to be allowed to function without hindrance. Most of these were eventually granted and everyone went home.

Both these demos were highly politically ambiguous. They expressed both the depth of social discontent and the ease with which it could be recuperated into nationalist and liberal politics.

### **The War Begins**

The Croatian nationalist irregulars lagged behind their Serbian counterparts but by early 1991 the more militant elements of the HDZ, together with the more extreme Croatian nationalist formations, were distributing weapons and blowing up homes and shops belonging to Serbs. Throughout Spring and Summer 1991 there were numerous small provocative actions by both sides. The JNA was regularly intervening on the side of the Serb nationalists by safeguarding their territorial gains. As the ten-day war started in Slovenia there was a drastic upsurge in fighting in three areas of Croatia between Serb irregulars and the JNA on one side and the Croatian police and the Republic's embryonic army, the National Guard, on the other. In regions such as Eastern Slavonia and Banija nationalist militias arrived in the villages and carried out massacres according to ethnic criteria, forcing those of the "wrong" ethnic group to flee either to the large towns or to other rural areas where they would be under the "protection" of the rival militia. The people carrying out these actions were generally not from the local area. It was not a question of people who'd lived side by side for decades suddenly deciding to kill each other. Neither was it an eruption of long-suppressed ethnic hatreds, as the media make out. It was a well-organised state policy. Most of the Serb irregulars came from organisations led by well-known political figures in Serbia, such as the Chetniks led by Vojislav Šešelj of the Serbian Radical Party and the Arkanovci (literally: "those who belong to Arkan") led by Arkan, a mafia-style gangster from Belgrade. Many of the Croatian irregulars were recruited from Croatian émigrés who had returned to fight for their endangered fatherland. Others were simply mercenaries<sup>10</sup>. Many of the actions carried out by the JNA were not even ethnic cleansing – they would simply blow villages apart with heavy artillery, forcing the entire population, irrespective of supposed ethnicity, to flee wherever they could. These operations came to be aimed more and more at the big towns such as Osijek.

It is no coincidence that the first big town to be destroyed was Vukovar, which was besieged and bombarded by the JNA for three months, starting in July. There was almost certainly complicity between the two sides – in Croatia there were widespread rumours that the

Croatian government had prevented arms getting through to the city's defenders. Militarily the JNA needed a quick and easy victory to boost the morale of its increasingly mutinous troops and politically Croatia needed a spectacular Serb atrocity to show the world media. Both were happy to devastate a traditionally militant section of the working class which was proving to be resistant to ethnic segregation. The inhabitants tried to organise an armed resistance which was separate from that of the nationalists – when the JNA entered the town a whole series of corpses were found which had been shot from behind, summarily executed for refusing to join the National Guard or the Croatian nationalist irregulars.

### **Resistance**

In Croatia there was relatively little resistance to mobilisation orders<sup>11</sup> (except among those considered to be Serbs) but in Serbia and Montenegro there was massive resistance to conscription into the JNA. Significantly, *all* called-up Albanians refused to join the JNA – this was a significant blow in itself given that there are up to 1.5 million Albanians in Serbia. There was also widespread desertion<sup>12</sup> affecting *all* sections of the army, even military intelligence personnel! In December 1991, after numerous JNA victories, the Croatian forces began to achieve important successes. This signified that the JNA was beginning to disintegrate. The level of disaffection in the ranks became apparent in the form of a widespread petty insubordination similar to that of US troops during the Vietnam War – soldiers failed to wear proper uniform, refused to salute officers, drank alcohol and took drugs on duty... In the words of one JNA conscript who described an officer trying to tell him off for some minor infringement of regulations: "he knew he couldn't make me do what he wanted because I had a Kalashnikov and six hand-grenades and he didn't know quite what I was going to do with them". One conscript in the Knin region stole a tank and drove it all the way back to Belgrade, parking it in front of the Federal Parliament as a protest against the war. For this eminently sane act he was confined to a mental hospital.

In Belgrade thousands of young men were regularly sleeping at a different flat every night to avoid the call-up and draft dodging became downright fashionable! When a mass mobilisation of reservists was ordered, only 10% of those liable turned up. In many villages whole communities cooperated in resistance by warning each other about the approach of the military<sup>13</sup>. All over Serbia and Vojvodina young men hid themselves with the help of their families and friends, and tens of thousands fled the country. According to an article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (June 1994) the total number of draft dodgers and deserters who have fled ex-Yugoslavia is over 100,000.

When stories began circulating that hundreds of Montenegrin reservists were being killed in Slavonia, resistance to the war developed even more swiftly than in Serbia. This was the reason for the JNA's offensive into Eastern Dalmatia and its attack on Dubrovnik – the virtually non-existent Croatian resistance provided an opportunity for easy victories (and a great deal of plunder) for the Montenegrin conscripts.

In December the duration of military service was extended from 12 months to 15 months and the army admitted that more than 10,000 reservists had refused to join their units. The military authorities threatened draft dodgers and deserters with long prison sentences under Article 121 which even prescribed the death penalty for a deserter who left the country. Some draft dodgers who had made a public protest against being mobilised were grabbed off the street, imprisoned for 2 or 3 days, and then sent to the front to clear mine fields.

In addition to the steady individual attrition of the JNA there were numerous collective revolts, although these never coalesced into an organised movement. The biggest refusal took place at Kragujevac, a garrison town in central Serbia, where 7,000 reservists presented themselves at the call-up without their arms. They shut themselves in the camp and refused to

move. The military authorities ended up exempting all of them from service and had to content themselves with just putting them on a local employers' black list. At the end of August 1991, 700 reservists from Smederevo refused to be taken from Bosnia to the war zone in Croatia. In November 1991, 200 reservists stood in front of the office of the district president in Valjevo until their commander signed their military books stipulating that their service was complete. On 18 December, at Markušica, on the front in Slavonia, 700 reservists refused to fight after already having done their 45 days of recall. A general ordered the arrest of their officers but backed down when troops threatened to shoot him. At the beginning of January 1992, 150 reservists deserted as a group from the front at Osijek after spending more than a month on the front line and returned to Belgrade to protest at their conditions of life. In March 1992, more than 700 reservists on leave at Gornji Milanovac revolted and refused to return to the front in Eastern Slavonia. There were also numerous revolts by reservists from Vojvodina who frequently mutinied or ran away, irrespective of whether they were "Serbs" or "Hungarians" or whatever. Thousands of soldiers were brought before courts martial.

The undermining of the JNA didn't stop the war but it definitely shortened it in Croatia – Milošević and Tuđman were to sign a UN/US brokered peace treaty on 2 January 1992. When the war in Bosnia began in April 1992 it followed much the same pattern as in Croatia with the JNA protecting the territorial gains of the Serbian nationalist militias. But the JNA, now called the VJ<sup>14</sup>, withdrew from Bosnia in May, leaving large quantities of equipment and officers with the newly-formed Bosnian Serb Army (that is, the army of Republika Srpska). This army rapidly conquered around two thirds of Bosnia-Hercegovina but there followed a period of more or less stalemate between the competing sides which lasted until mid-1995. This undoubtedly constituted an incredibly gloomy episode in proletarian history – throughout former Bosnia-Hercegovina massacres, mass deportations, mass rapes and all the other horrors of capitalist warfare reigned on a scale not seen in Europe since 1945. But even in conditions like these *national unity is never as complete as the bourgeois media would have us believe*. This is shown by the fact that all sides have had to use terror to make proletarians participate in the armed forces – in besieged Sarajevo young draft dodgers have been seized from cafés by the military police and immediately taken to dig trenches on the front lines (Guardian, 2 November 1993). In the Serb nationalist held regions of Bosnia and Croatia in Spring 1995 there were a whole series of summary executions of people accused of desertion, insubordination and stealing from the army (War Report, June 1995). Martić (the Knin leader) and Karadžić even had to issue a public appeal for deserters to return to their units by July 5 or face prosecution. Charity workers have reported their convoys being robbed by "armed ex-soldiers". The lack of national unity is also shown by the "morale problems" reported by military commanders on all sides and, particularly clearly, by events in Banja Luka in September 1993.

### **Mutiny!**

The mass revolt in the ranks of the Bosnian Serb Army in Banja Luka (the largest town in the Republika Srpska region of former Bosnia-Hercegovina) in September 1993 was the most significant act of rebellion by soldiers in the whole of the war. The political consciousness of the participants was almost certainly pretty reactionary. Their slogans and demands essentially corresponded to the usual patriotic whining about how "war profiteers" were having an easy life while decent patriots were giving their lives at the front. But even if what they were thinking about was "a fair day's pay for a fair day's killing", in their *actions* they undermined the war effort (and stopped it dead for several days) by putting their needs before the needs of capital's war economy.

On 10 September three units of the Bosnian Serb Army, the First Army Corps of Krajina, the 16th Motorised Unit and the First Armoured Brigade, mutinied on their return to the front.

They drove into town in their armoured cars and took over the main official buildings, notably the local radio and TV stations, the town hall and the Head Quarters of the Army. They were led by an "emergency general staff" led by NCOs and sub-alterns.

Their demands were for an increase in their pay (which stood at around \$1 per month for an ordinary soldier) and the arrest of "war profiteers, who instead of standing watch in the trenches are getting rich with the blessing of those in power". A black list of 700 profiteers was drawn up and they began arresting them, including the mayor of Banja Luka! The insurgents seized the power stations and provided the town with an uninterrupted electricity supply, something it hadn't had for months. The rebels began broadcasting from the TV station but this was quickly blocked as the transmitters were located in other parts of Bosnia. Soldiers in other brigades began to send telegrams of support but the movement did not generalise in a practical way, although newspaper reports on 14 September said that rebellion had spread to other units such as in Sokolac near Sarajevo.

The movement was defeated by its acceptance of the trap of negotiations and even parliamentarism – at one stage the leadership of the mutiny called for the anticipated general election to be brought forward. In one unit pay was negotiated for, in another it was the question of the dismissal of certain "corrupt" officers or politicians... After a week the movement was over. The state gave the mutineers 10 days leave and a promise to address their social demands, while some leaders of the mutiny were arrested.

### **The Future**

However inspiring the Banja Luka mutiny may have been (at least when it started), and however much all sides may have suffered attrition of their forces by desertion we must stress that it is the soldiers and potential soldiers of the JNA/VJ who have shown the most significant resistance to the war effort. This largely explains the lack of *direct* involvement by Serbia in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina for most of the time that it has raged. Over the last three years or so there have been recurring panics about the VJ becoming directly involved in the war again, but these have proved to be the result of mere sabre-rattling by Milošević. The attack on Krajina by the Croatian Army in August 1995 was the most recent example. This time there was a general mobilisation in Serbia and Montenegro with military officials knocking on the doors of potential recruits all over Belgrade. They knew that just sending out draft papers was a waste of time! Tanks were sent to the Croatian border. Once again there was widespread avoidance of the call-up. In Montenegro only 6% of those called up reported to the barracks (*War Report*, October 1995). Even in these parts of ex-Yugoslavia, though, the anti-draft resistance has not taken on any kind of organised form, apart from small knots of people who know each other well.

But it is no use simply bemoaning the lack of organisation of our class brothers and sisters in the Balkans. As long as proletarians remain trapped within the walls of nationality they will continue to be taken by surprise whenever "their" ruling class starts to send them to the battlefields, they will continue to look for some local solution to their problems, to hope against all reason that some peace agreement will hold or that some more humane fraction of capital will come to power. This war has been a great success for the bourgeoisie. Firstly, in the short term, they have crushed resistance to economic restructuring. Although the heavy guns are temporarily silent the war against the proletariat continues in its "peaceful" forms – millions of workers continue not to be paid and austerity deepens. Secondly, they have significantly advanced one of their most important projects of the last two centuries, the nationalisation of the proletariat. This is not only true within ex-Yugoslavia itself but also in the neighbouring states. For example, both Greece and Bulgaria have profited from the use of the "Macedonian question"[15](#). In Greece the major political parties were able to organise two major nationalist demonstrations in 1992 which together mobilised around 10% of the Greek

population. We cannot deny that our project, the re-internationalisation of the proletariat, has suffered a serious setback.

As communist internationalists the most important way we can show solidarity with proletarians in ex-Yugoslavia is, of course, by taking up the struggle against "our own" bourgeoisie. It was, above all, the isolated nature of the class struggle in Yugoslavia and, in particular, the *success of the introduction of the free market in the rest of Eastern Europe*, which enabled, and compelled, the bourgeoisie to impose such a bloody solution to their problems. However, this should not be an excuse for failing to create solid links of international solidarity. It is only by building such links that the rich experience of resistance to restructuring and war gained by proletarians in ex-Yugoslavia can be shared with the rest of us and that we can share our experiences of struggle with them. This may not sound like a very inspiring conclusion given the sheer scale of the crime against our class which the international bourgeoisie have got away with, but it is the only realistic course of action and the only way to prepare ourselves for the class battles of the future – battles which the bourgeoisie will undoubtedly try to win by means of the tried and trusted methods of nationalism and war.

*Wildcat #18 (Summer 1996). Taken from the [No War But The Class War](#) website.*

- [1.](#) This article takes its information from a wide variety of sources. A lot of information comes from tantalising single paragraphs in the mainstream bourgeois press of Britain and France and the numerous journalistic books which have been written about Yugoslavia in recent years. A small amount comes from British leftist publications.

The only regular info. we get from Croatia comes from the English language newsletter *Zaginflatch* which appears to be produced by anarcho-punks. The only info. about the situation in Bosnia which we have, apart from the bourgeois press, comes from gossip relayed via Serbia and Croatia.

Much useful basic info. comes from conversations with friends from the region. Hvala l(ij)epo!

Well-researched information about the social and economic background to the war can be found in the German pamphlet *Jugoslawien: Klassenkampf, Krise, Krieg* produced by *Osteuropaarchiv*. It has been translated into Serbo-Croat but has never been published in English. An English edition would be very useful.

- [2.](#) According to a series of reports published in Washington in May 1995, the US was at that time a major supplier in 45 of the 50 regional conflicts, often to both sides (*Guardian*, 30.5.95).
- [3.](#) In Yugoslavia the distinction is clearly made between Muslims (with a capital 'M') meaning people of the "Muslim" nationality and muslims (with a small 'm') meaning people who practice Islam. The Bosnian Muslims were considered to be one of the constituent nations of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, along with Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and so on. Although recognised as a "national minority" when Socialist Yugoslavia was founded at the end of World War II they were not granted the status of nation until 1971. This was done in order to reduce the power of both Croatia and Serbia within the federal state. In terms of ancestry, Muslims are mostly descended from Serbs and Croats (mostly Serbs) who converted to Islam under the Ottoman Empire. According to a survey carried out in 1990, only about a third of people in Bosnia who considered themselves to be Muslims also considered themselves to be muslims (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1994).

- [4.](#) An article in the British newspaper The Observer (10 September 1995) is particularly revealing. It details how there were systematic attempts to destroy film showing the UN forces (in this case those of Britain and Holland) remaining passive while the Bosnian Serb Army organised the massacres which it carried out after capturing Srebrenica in July 1995. Apparently a video was destroyed on the orders of the Dutch Commander in Chief, Hans Couzy, and some film taken by Dutch troops was "accidentally" destroyed by the wrong chemicals being used in its development!
- [5.](#) This is summed up beautifully in a passage in the book Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse (Christopher Bennett, Hurst & Co., 1995):

"Before war broke out, Slovenia was in much the same position as the rest of eastern Europe's former communist states ... major restructuring was necessary to transform the economy from planned to free market and this would almost inevitably entail a decline in living standards and a jump in unemployment. ... a prolonged period of labour unrest and strikes appeared on the cards, with potentially destabilising political consequences. However, as a result of the war, Slovenes were much better prepared psychologically to deal with the pain of restructuring and, in contrast to the rest of eastern Europe, labour unrest never materialised.

War instilled a sense of discipline and national pride in the Slovene labour force ... Just ten days of fighting was more than enough to convince Slovenes to count their blessings ... While the Brioni Accord, the peace agreement which officially ended the war in Slovenia, was followed by a three-month moratorium on independence, it effectively gave Serbia, via the National Bank of Yugoslavia, three months in which to sabotage the Slovene economy. It was a continuation of war by other means and the economic downturn in Slovenia was immediate and sharp. However, this, too, proved a blessing in disguise, since it provided Slovenes [sic] with a perfect scapegoat for the economic crisis and, at the same time, compelled Slovene businesses to force the pace of reconstruction and aggressively seek out new markets. ... Surveys of public attitudes since independence have revealed profound changes. The idealism which characterised Slovene society in the 1980s ... has largely disappeared and been replaced by a hard-nosed realism and a virtual obsession with work."

- [6.](#) The attempts by Serbo-Croat-speaking ethnic nationalists in Serbia, Croatia and even Bosnia to define their "languages" as separate is one of the more laughable aspects of the war. In Croatia an official "Croatian" has been created which has been purged of "foreign" words (apart from German ones) and which has incorporated many "Croatian" words not used since before the Second World War. The Serbian nationalists have interfered less with the language but have revived the Cyrillic alphabet for most official purposes. In Serbia itself this was not so ludicrous because most people had some familiarity with it. In "Serb" regions of Croatia, however, many people had never used it and had to learn it as quickly as possible to show that they were proper Serbs!

If someone tries to convince you that "Serbian", "Croatian" and "Bosnian" are separate languages don't say "Your ideas about Balkan linguistics are interesting but I must however disagree with them". Just say: "Crkni, nacionalistički drkadžijo!" ("Drop dead, nationalist wanker!") – this should be understandable in all three "languages".

- [7.](#) During Janša's court case he was even supported by Western anarchists. The anarchists in Trieste organised a press conference with him to denounce the Yugoslav

regime which "represses basic freedoms". In France the review Iztok circulated a petition for him.

- [8.](#) These were: the Muslim SDA – Stranka Demokratske Akcije ("Party of Democratic Action") which also had a smaller branch in the Sandzak region of Serbia where many "Muslims" live; the Serb SDS – Srpska Demokratska Stranka ("Serbian Democratic Party") which also existed in Croatia; the Croatian HDZ – Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica ("Croatian Democratic Community") which was an off-shoot of what became the ruling party in Croatia.
- [9.](#) The territorial defence units were the local organisations of national defence which were supposed to be capable of acting independently of the JNA in the event of a foreign invasion.
- [10.](#) An idea of the complicity between Serbia and Croatia can be gained from the case of a young aspiring mercenary from Britain who's knowledge of geography left something to be desired. Nineteen-year-old Neil Valentine arrived in Belgrade, where amused officials redirected him to Croatia!
- [11.](#) Admittedly we have little information about this. According to a report by the "Conscientious Objectors Group" of "Anti-War Campaign Croatia" from February 1994, there is an "unofficial and unverified estimate" that about 30% of reservists didn't answer the call-up in 1991 and 1992.
- [12.](#) We must make a distinction here between the real movement of desertion against the war and the tendency for the JNA to disintegrate into national sections – something which was going on at the same time. There were numerous instances of "desertion", particularly by members of the officer corps, which were, in reality, just a changing of sides from one army to another. This was a result of the decentralised nature of national defence in Yugoslavia.
- [13.](#) At this point we should mention a serious con trick which has been perpetrated against those attempting to show solidarity with the anti-war resistance. This concerns the "Zitser Spiritual Republic". This was supposedly a local anti-militarist initiative based in the mostly "Hungarian" village of Trešnjevac in Northern Vojvodina in which, following militant local demos against the draft, the Zitser Club (a pizza parlour and pool hall) declared itself to be an independent republic and became a centre for anti-war organising. Its supposed activities were widely advertised in "alternative" and anarchist-leaning publications in the US (including Anarchy magazine), Western Europe and even in other parts of ex-Yugoslavia (we acquired its address in Trešnjevac from a Croatian fanzine!). In fact, as far as we can ascertain, this initiative was largely a publicity stunt by the Hungarian-nationalist party DZVM (Demokratska zajednica Vojvođanskih Mađara - "Democratic community of Vojvodinan Hungarians"). Using the name "Zitser Spiritual Republic" they could approach various Western pacifist and civil rights organisations and get hold of large quantities of money and computer equipment. The contact name for the "Spiritual Republic" was Lajos Balla, a local politician involved in DZVM.

If nothing else this episode should serve as a terrible warning as to the dangers of the "send money to this address" style of pseudo-solidarity widely practised by Western anarchists.

- [14.](#) Vojska Jugoslavije, "Armed Forces of Yugoslavia". The name changed after the governments of Serbia and Montenegro declared themselves to be the Savezna Republika Jugoslavija, "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia", (SRJ) on 27 April 1992.

This was supposed to be the successor state to Socialist Yugoslavia and is sometimes referred to as "the third Yugoslavia".

- [15](#). A very useful text on this subject was published by the Greek group TPTG (Ta Paidia Tis Galarias) in no.3 of their magazine. They can be contacted at: P.O. Box 76149, Nea Smirni 17110, Athens. The text is available in English from them or from us.