

Skakavac told me of an extensive massacre of Croat civilians there. The numbers of dead are unknown since the JNA has refused to allow the Croat Red Cross into Skakavac to claim the bodies. In Vukmanic, all seven members of the Mujic family were killed after being denounced by a local Serb who had a grudge against them; the Chetnik brigade that took over the village of Kablar slaughtered the remaining men in cold blood, including an eighty-two-year-old Croat. Here too, the bodies have not been turned over to the Red Cross.

In Kamensko and other villages, the bodies of Croats killed during the fighting were allowed to lie decaying in the streets. Between eight and twelve days after their deaths, the JNA finally permitted the Karlovac Red Cross workers to come to collect them. The eighteen

bodies I saw were so badly putrified that the chief pathologist at Karlovac hospital could no longer say with any certainty which injuries had been the cause of death. Whether they were caught in crossfire or deliberately slaughtered, the JNA and the Chetniks had afforded them no dignity in death. The desecration of the Croat villages was complete—churches and schools were destroyed while JNA tanks ran over the local cemeteries.

The attack on northern Kordun was among the most barbaric suffered by Croats during the current war. Nonetheless it remains one of the least known abroad, mainly because major towns such as Vukovar, Osijek, and Dubrovnik were not involved. But at least it can be said that their visible destruction alerted the world to the crimes being committed by the

Forty Eight Hours With Adventists in Zagreb, 1992

By Karl Rhoads

In early February of 1992, I had the opportunity to revisit Zagreb, Croatia. I was only there for 48 hours, but had the chance to again visit my friends, Sretko Kuburic, a pastor of a Seventh-day Adventist Church in the capital of Croatia, and his wife Jasminka. Our conversation focused primarily on the civil war that has pitted Serb against Croat, and in some cases family member against family member, and even Adventist against Adventist. Sretko, who pastors a new Adventist church in Zagreb, and his wife related to me how during the fighting, which was ended at least temporarily after 14 failed cease-fires, they could hear the artillery every night from their house in Zagreb.

It was during my first visit to what was then Yugoslavia in the winter of 1983 that I first met Sretko Kuburic. He was kind enough to take me with him on a pastoral trip to several cities in Croatia, at that time a

constituent member of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. While Yugoslavia was not large by American standards, trains there were not known for their rapidity. Sretko and I had dozens of hours in smoky rail cars to discuss virtually every subject under the sun from Soviet foreign policy, to the weather in Berrien Springs, Michigan, to the restrictions placed on evangelism in Communist Yugoslavia.

From Tito's break with Stalin in the late 1940s, Yugoslavian society had evolved away from the ultra-orthodox Communism that had characterized the immediate post-World War II years. By the time of Tito's death in 1980, restrictions on evangelism were still evident, but paled in comparison to other countries in Eastern Europe. The major obstacle by the time of my first visit was a ban on public meetings which promoted a particular religion, although the importance

public meetings have played in traditional Adventist outreach made the ban a major impediment.

In the 1992 civil war, Zagreb has been spared the devastation that has occurred in other areas of Croatia. But on my second day in Croatia we visited a small town called Karlovac. A quarter of the buildings had major structural damage and many had been completely gutted. Close to 75 percent of all buildings in Karlovac had taken some damage. Nearby villages were abandoned and their residents undoubtedly make up some of the 600,000 refugees and 10,000 casualties already reported in a war that has continued since Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence in June of 1991.

Fortunately, no one in the Kuburic family has been injured, but their future is probably more uncertain than most. Sretko is a Serbian working in the capital of

JNA and the Chetniks at the expense of the Croats. Unfortunately the suffering of the innocent Serbs in Croatia has had no such attention.

During July and August of 1991, eastern Croatia became one in the most violent fronts in the war. As fighting spread through the villages in northeastern Croatia, small shops and kiosks, owned and run almost entirely by local Serbs in Osijek, the regional capital, were destroyed systematically in a series of bomb attacks. A pattern of intimidation and arbitrary violence against Serbs in Croat-held areas then spread through most of the regions in Croatia where fighting had broken out.

In August respected Serbs began disappearing in one town after another, even in the larger cities—including Zagreb—which had been spared the worst of the violence. Among

those who disappeared, to name only two of many, were Dusan Trivuncic, a member of the Croat Parliament for the SDP, the reformed Communist Party, and Dragan Rajsic, the retired head of the safety department at the Sisak oil refinery, thirty-five miles southeast of Zagreb. Both were kidnapped by armed Croats in uniform; the Croat minister of interior, Ivan Vekic, says he has been unable to find out what happened to them.

Attacks on Serbs have since sharply increased. The bodies of thirteen murdered Serbs were discovered in the Sisak region, which has been under extremely heavy bombardment from JNA units in Petrinja—bombardments that virtually everyone I talked to agreed made the Croat forces there treat local

Croatia. Jasminka is Croatian, but her parents live in Serbia. Her parents have received threatening phone calls and have had rocks thrown through their shop windows. The situation in Croatia is also very unsettled. The Croatian government denies that it encourages anti-Serbian discrimination, but reportedly Serbs are being fired solely on the basis of ethnicity.

The Adventist Church structure in what was Yugoslavia has not split on ethnic lines. One denominational officer is reported to have said, "There will be no Serbs nor Croats in heaven, only Adventists." (Hopefully, there will be some Jews, Moslems, and Buddhists as well, but I digress.) The question of service in the warring militaries, though, is of obvious concern to both Serbian and Croatian Adventists. There are Adventists in both armies. In Serbia, draftees have no legal recourse to military duty, although draft evasion is widespread. The Croatian government has allowed those opposed to the war for ethical reasons to perform

alternate service.

The conditions under which the church engages in evangelism in Croatia have improved since a democratically elected government took power in Zagreb. The ban on public meetings has been lifted and the church has taken full advantage of the new opportunities. Sretko pastors a church in Zagreb that has been established in the last year. He is conducting seminars on both Daniel and Revelation. Currently, he spends five days a week conducting these meetings. Unlike the old days, the only limiting factor is funding to rent meeting places. Sretko's meetings in Zagreb will be followed by meetings conducted by David Currie, the Ministerial Association Director for the Trans-European Division.

The civil war in what was Yugoslavia has apparently tended to discourage interest in organized religion. The security situation is so unstable that people are reluctant to move about at night. In addition, many Croats have left the country to protect themselves from the war.

Since the war began, Sretko says attendance at meetings has fallen.

I asked Sretko and Jasminka if they had considered joining their relatives in the United States. They said, "No, at least not for the time being." Jasminka's parents have no plans to leave, and they did not want to leave the region under those circumstances.

I left Croatia grateful for the fact that the United States has not had a war fought in the lower 48 states since 1865, but feeling a little guilty that my life is so stress free in comparison. We can hope and pray that peace will find Croatia and Serbia soon, and that whether the war ends or not the hope of Christ's second coming will bring a measure of peace to all believers in those two countries.

Karl Rhoads is a foreign policy advisor to a member of the United States Congress. A graduate of Andrews University, Rhoads received his M.A. in 1987 in Soviet and Eastern European Area Studies from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London.

Serbs all the more brutally. In September thousands of Serbs began leaving their homes in the port town of Zadar after many people were beaten in the streets by Croats and forced out of their apartments; several were lynched. Many Serbs leaving Croat towns who have relations in other European countries have tried to find temporary refuge abroad. But most are forced to go to Serbia or Montenegro, although few have any desire to go to either place. A large minority has also left Croatia for the multi-ethnic republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Again the wave of uncontrolled Croat anger apparently was provoked by the violent attacks by JNA units in the region.

Before long I heard reliable reports of a massacre carried out by right-wing Croats. This happened in Gospic, a mixed town in the western part of Lika, which was first attacked by Chetnik and JNA units in late August. As with many towns in Croatia, the division between nationalities in Gospic is reflected in the town's geography. All but a few of the residents of the eastern part of the town were Serbs, who fled behind JNA lines as soon as the first attacks began. But a considerable number of Serbs also lived in the western, largely Croat, part of town and, in response to the appeals of the Croat government, they remained there. These are colloquially known as "loyal Serbs" or slightly more frivolously, "Hrbi" (a conflation of the words for Croats and Serbs in Serbo-Croatian).

On October 16, an alarm signaling a Serb attack sounded in the town, and once again the miserable inhabitants of Gospic took refuge in cellars. Life in the bomb shelters in Croatia is a humiliating experience. After the first rush of

intense anger and frustration toward an enemy who only reveals himself in a shower of deadly projectiles, people become apathetic and gullible, ready to accept any orders or demands made of them. When groups of uniformed Croats entered several of Gospic's cellars on the night of October 16 and took away over one hundred Serbs who had taken shelter in them, witnesses told me, they complied without protest.

Most of the Serbs were professionals working in Gospic's local administration. They included the town's deputy district attorney and

the deputy head of Gospic's prison, to which, in terrible irony, they were at first taken. After this at least twenty-six were murdered, according to a list later obtained by the Croatian government. The final figure of the massacre victims is still to be confirmed, although

The most striking characteristic of the Chetnik movement is its obsession with violence. Its members apparently take pleasure in torturing and mutilating civilian and military opponents alike.

over seventy-five Serbs, including many women, are unaccounted for. The only Serb minister in the Croat government, Zivko Juzbasic, says he fears that over one hundred were killed in the Gospic massacre. Ten weeks after it took place, Interior Minister Vekic has not given any explanation of what happened, although he has said his ministry is preparing a statement on the case.

If a UN peacekeeping force is not deployed, the civil war will very probably intensify in Croatia and in all likelihood spread to Bosnia-Herzegovina, as Serbian forces continue their merciless attacks. Meanwhile Serbian civilians in Croatia face serious threats to their lives every day. The Serbian Democratic Forum, a movement which has attracted most of the prominent Serb intellectuals and professionals in Croatia, has appealed to the government in Zagreb to arrange the orderly evacuation of

Serbs in Croatia under international supervision. The appeals have so far been ignored. Those who rightly denounce the Belgrade regime for its aggression should be concerned about aggression against the Serbs in Croatia as well.

The Zagreb government has in effect done nothing to stop the violence against Serbs for two reasons. The war has intensified radical chauvinist sentiment among the Croat population and in particular among its fighting forces, which now include thousands of fascist Black Legionaires, and members of the Ustasi and of the extremist paramilitary organization called HOS. Many Croats would regard strong statements of public concern for Serbs as a demonstration of weakness by President Tudjman and his government. Croatia also presents itself as a democratic state which abides by Western European standards on human rights. Instead of confronting violations of human rights, the Croat government attempts to hide them in the hope that they will disappear, and escape the attention of the West. This policy cannot work for long and can only bring dishonor to the Croat cause.

Notwithstanding the marked nationalist character of the conflict, the federal army has claimed from the very beginning that it represents Yugoslavia. In fact, the assumption that behind the war lies a well coordinated Greater Serbian plan is a serious misconception, and one that makes a diplomatic solution to the crisis all the more difficult. "Serbian" policy is determined by three political forces—Milosevic, the JNA officer corps, and the leaderships of the self-proclaimed Serb republics in Croatia and Bosnia. Each has its own program which sometimes coincides with the others, but frequently differs. In addition, there are often bitter divisions within the officer corps and among the leaders of Serbian enclaves, and these disagreements can have unpredictable and dangerous consequences.

One often hears how the army is "Serbian-led" or "Serbian-dominated," which it is, but this does not mean that the first concern of

many of the top officers is to serve the cause of greater Serbian unity. The Hague Peace Conference, which first convened last September under Lord Carrington's chairmanship, tried to find solutions acceptable to all the republics and ethnic groups in Yugoslavia; but it failed to take into account the political motives of the men who are doing most of the fighting. The JNA officers have tried to justify their military attacks by claiming that the rights of the Serbs (i.e., Yugoslav citizens) were threatened by Croatia's secessionist government. They were, however, primarily concerned with the need to protect their own status and privileges. No federal Yugoslavia would mean no JNA. The diplomats and politicians trying to stop the war realized too late that this powerful army could not just be wished away.

Although the primary allegiance of the army officer corps has been to Yugoslavia and not Serbia, the decay of federal institutions has aroused the latent Serb nationalism within the army. Seventy percent of the officer are Serb, and no doubt they are as much affected by the spread of irrational nationalism as everyone else. Early in the Yugoslav conflict, two main factions formed within the army leadership. The first was associated with the federal defense minister, General Veljko Kadijevic, and his deputy, the Slovene Stane Brovet, two of the three-man joint chiefs of staff. With a Serb father and a Croat mother, General Kadijevic has always associated himself with Yugoslavia and not with Serbia. The Serbian nationalist press has heaped abuse on him during the past three months, accusing him of undermining the war effort because he refuses to support Serbia's chief war aim—the expansion of Serb territory by military means. Kadijevic, it seems, genuinely believes in a political solution that has by now become a fantasy: the restoration of the Yugoslav state, including parts, or even all, of Croatia.

At the same time, a powerful network of Serb nationalists emerged among the officer corps to compete with Kadijevic's Yugoslav

ideology. Its best-known representative is Blagoje Adzic, a Serb from Croatia whose entire family was slaughtered by the Ustasi during the war. As the member of the three-man joint chiefs of staff who is responsible for operations in the field, Adzic is in a position to decide military strategy. From the beginning of the conflict, he has advocated that Yugoslav federal ideology be cast aside and the JNA be converted into a Serbian army which would integrate the Chetnik fighters into its command.

Adzic is also linked politically to one of the most powerful men in the army high command, General Marko Negovanovic, the former head of the military intelligence organization KOS, which has an immensely effective network of agents and informants throughout the army and indeed in all the Yugoslav republics. General Negovanovic and the KOS have put their weight behind the army's nationalist wing. Negovanovic's influence recently increased further when he was appointed the Serbian minister of defense. As the federal government fades steadily in importance, the new republican cabinet in Serbia, which in addition to Negovanovic includes some other ambitious nationalists, has further undermined the position of the federal defense minister, General Kadijevic.

Such overt Serbian nationalism presented Milosevic with a diplomatic problem since his strategy depended on maintaining the increasingly dubious concept of a federal Yugoslav state. At international negotiations, and particularly at the Hague Peace Conference, he tried to disguise Serb aggression against Croatia by defending the right of Yugoslavs (notably the Serb minority in Croatia and the Serbs in Bosnia) to remain where they are in

Yugoslavia. If he were to agree to General Adzic's demands that the national army should be transformed into a Serbian army, the war of the Yugoslav state against irredentists would become simply an expansionist war guided by a Greater Serbian ideology at the expense of Croatia, which has an elected government.

Their mutual need to cling to the Yugoslav idea led to the close relationship between Milosevic and General Kadijevic. Recently they have made it clear that they want a political solution to the crisis. They have done so largely

because Milosevic needs international support for his republic if he is to remain in power after the war. His flexibility was demonstrated during the crucial session of the Hague Peace Conference in the middle of November, when he agreed in private to drop the

The assumption that behind the war lies a well coordinated Greater Serbian plan is a serious misconception, and one that makes a diplomatic solution to the crisis all the more difficult.

demand that the Serbian-dominated areas in Croatia be allowed to detach themselves from Zagreb's rule. He did so against the wishes of both radical Serb leaders like Babic, who publicly denounced his decision, and the army's nationalist wing. Just as the document with this concession was about to be signed, however, the nationalist officers ordered the heavy bombardment of Dubrovnik, completely undermining Milosevic's position.

In early December, General Kadijevic was close to an agreement with Cyrus Vance on a cease-fire that would allow a UN peacekeeping force to be deployed. Once again Dubrovnik was bombarded and the agreement undermined. Kadijevic was forced to apologize and he called for an investigation to find out who had ordered the attack—an implicit and humiliating admission that he did not control all his forces. Vance returned to the UN aware that while he could talk for hours with

Kadijevic, any agreement would depend on the will of others.

Although it is Croatia that has had to suffer the violence of the war, the divisions in the Yugoslav or Serbian camp now threaten the stability of the current regime in Serbia, the very existence of the federal army, and the security of the Serb mini-states in Croatia. The possibility that Milosevic, the JNA leadership, and the Serb leaders in Croatia and Bosnia could fulfill their disparate aims is receding steadily. According to senior army officers with whom I recently spoke, the JNA is beginning to break up for three reasons. First, the military is buckling under pressure of ideological divisions within its own ranks; second, in the wake of the economic collapse throughout eastern Yugoslavia, the army is no longer guaranteed a sponsor; and, finally, the army is unable to attract anything approaching the number of recruits it requires to wage a long war.

In early January, Milosevic and Kadijevic were working hard to bring about a cease-fire and thus create the conditions for the arrival of a UN peacekeeping force in Yugoslavia. This is not because these thoroughly unattractive men believe in the inherent justice of a UN-led solution, but because without a UN buffer zone in Croatia, they see a political and even a military defeat staring them in the face. Their moderate alliance has in turn produced a new flock of hawks including the Serb nationalists in the army and Milan Babic in Knin, who has warned that any UN troops deployed inside the Krajina are likely to be fired on. The hawks continue to believe, wrongly I suspect, in the efficacy of a nationalist war. Yet the JNA cannot sustain its operations indefinitely. It will, however, cause further havoc in Croatian towns, and may ignite a new conflict in Bosnia if a political solution is not found. Ironically, without a UN peacekeeping force in Krajina, Bosnia, and Eastern Slavonia, the Croatian National Guard, bolstered by the support which international recognition promises, stands an excellent chance of regaining most of the territory containing a considerable Serb

population that it has lost to the Serb irregulars and the JNA. Such a defeat for Serbia would create a new nationalist grievance in the Balkans comparable in its emotional force to the hatred of the Versailles treaty in Weimar Germany.

Meanwhile the decision of the European Community Foreign Ministers on December 16 to accept the independence of the Yugoslav states that ask to be recognized as such has far-reaching implications. First, it reinforces the growing confidence of Germany in foreign policy matters, since throughout the autumn the United Kingdom, the United States, and the United Nations publicly asked that recognition of Croatia and Slovenia be postponed until a comprehensive settlement had been agreed on by all parties. Germany ignored this request and in mid-December announced that it would recognize Croatia and Slovenia on January 15.

The French, who are traditionally suspicious of the US and Britain and fear playing second fiddle to Bonn, proposed a compromise: that only the republics that met democratic standards should be recognized. Unfortunately, the French plan, commendable in principle, was thrown together in haste simply to prevent an open split in the European Community. Germany showed that the issue of democratic standards was not decisive when it announced that it would recognize Croatia and Slovenia "unconditionally."

Until now Germany's recent policies in Eastern Europe have been much more beneficial to the countries there than those of the United Kingdom or the United States. Despite its preoccupation with the former GDR, German business has been investing steadily in Eastern Europe, notably western Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, and Hungary; in doing so Germany is contributing more toward regional stability than any other Western nation. Mrs. Thatcher's nightmare of German expansion would carry some political weight if her government or that of John Major had shown the slightest inclination to encourage investment in Eastern Europe.

In its new policy toward Yugoslavia, Germany demonstrated for the first time that it could, on a major issue, openly oppose the stated aims of American policy, which are often transmitted to the Europeans through the United Nations or through British diplomats within the European Community and at the Hague Peace Conference. From the point of view of the diplomatic power game, the unilateral German move is understandable, especially since American and British policy in Yugoslavia has been concerned to restrict the growth of German influence in the region. But it is most disturbing that the place selected for this test of strength should be Yugoslavia. Serbia, for its part, interprets the determination of Germany (together with Italy and Austria) to recognize Croatia as a revival of the wartime Axis alliance. This could be said to be true only in the sense that Germany now has strong economic interests in some of the same regions that it did in the 1930s—western Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, and northern Italy. The Belgrade government also believes that the Catholic Church has had an important part in bringing about this alliance, a claim that is not entirely without foundation. The recognition of Croatia now is likely to open still further the breach between the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

The decision of the Kohl government to recognize Croatia “unconditionally” is unfortunate in several ways. It implies that Germany has such a single-minded concern for its own interests that it is willing even to recognize East European republics that are unable to guarantee the safety of citizens under their control. The massacre in Gospic, for example, was not carried out by irregulars but by forces of the Croat state. Britain, which is under pressure not to undermine the unity of the EC, may follow Germany’s lead and also recognize Croatia. And now that the federal prime minister Ante Markovic, Washington’s main ally in Yugoslavia, has resigned, the United States, too, may recognize the Tudjman regime.

But recognition will not stop the fighting. The army and the Serbs have said they will not with-

draw if Croatia is recognized but will fight all the harder. If Germany uses recognition to supply Croatia with weapons—which it has not been able to do so far because of the UN arms embargo against Yugoslavia—then the conflict will be fairer but it will be much bloodier as well. Recognition probably also means an end to the Hague Peace Conference, which presumed that a comprehensive settlement would be arranged before recognition was granted to anybody. It also makes the work of the United Nations more difficult. But, above all, it raises the possibility of the war spreading to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The German recognition of Croatia and Slovenia has forced the president of Bosnia, in which Croats and Muslims make up the majority, to apply for recognition. The Serb leaders in Bosnia immediately said that if the republic were recognized they would form their own state within Bosnia. The Muslims warned in return that such a step would lead to “tragedy.” Such a possible chain of events underlines the urgent need for the deployment of UN troops inside Croatia. If they are deployed in the three regions with large Serb populations, as proposed by Cyrus Vance, then these would assume the status of demilitarized zones under UN control. The three regions would belong neither to Croatia nor to any Yugoslav or Serbian state. This is clearly not a satisfactory long-term solution—and it depends as I write on the ceasefire of January 3 holding up—but if UN troops are deployed, the military conflict should come to an end, without doubt the most important task at the moment.

No doubt the Serbian politicians, by their aggressive and irrational behavior, have contributed greatly to the current tragedy, but Croatia bears a share of responsibility as well, and therefore Germany’s unilateral move to recognize Tudjman’s regime is of dubious moral value. In its practical consequences, recognition risks causing more death and destruction. As a model for a future approach to disputes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, moreover, it is nothing short of catastrophic.