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**THE CASE AGAINST MILITARY
INTERVENTION IN WHAT WAS
YUGOSLAVIA**

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THE CASE AGAINST MILITARY INTERVENTION IN WHAT WAS YUGOSLAVIA

INTRODUCTION

The civil war in the former Yugoslavia has immense implications for Europe. It would appear that Britain is a helpless bystander to events which we had no part in creating. It would also appear that the NATO associated countries are working to reduce the tension and to find a peaceful settlement to what is occurring. TUCND have doubts about all of those assumptions.

While there are no clear solutions to the situation in the Former Yugoslavia it is also clear that military intervention will be neither neutral, humanitarian or capable of creating the conditions for a negotiated settlement to the problems facing the people there.

HELPLESS BRITAIN?

Franco once said that he could have defeated the Republicans without German or Italian help but he couldn't have done it without the help of the British government. Although it would be easy to press the parallel too far, there are disturbing similarities between the Spanish Civil War and the current situation - including the state of a number of the leading West European economies, the emergence of Fascism both as a factor in the civil war and in the politics of the states supporting factions in the war, and also the fundamental changes which Europe is upon the brink of going through. Some of the dynamics which lead to the Spanish Civil War can be seen within the European political systems now and the long term results of that war should serve as a very grave warning to us all. One of the more potent dynamics then, as it is now, was the duplicity diplomacy Britain engaged in.

It was intense lobbying within the EC by Germany, quietly supported by Britain, which brought about the recognition by the EC, of Bosnia-Herzegovina on April the 5th, reinforcing framework set in place by their early recognition of Croatia, which immediately triggered this slowly escalating civil war and began the cycle of events which we see unfurling now. Had that recognition not happened it is unlikely that this civil war would have escalated with such rapidity and very probable that some form of peaceful settlement, all be it a shaky one, found.

It is possible that the escalation of this war was what the German and British Governments

intended to happen. That escalation was predictable and it is a direct result of German and British policies. Our diplomats have either behaved in an un-characteristically stupid way or what we see currently unfolding in the former Yugoslavia is their real, but covert, aim.

The appointment of Owen as the EC's peace seeker is significant. Whilst the foreign minister under the Labour government he supported an unpleasant and repressive regime in Iran solely because it was in the short term interests of Britain's business community and arms manufacturers. His role in politics in Britain has not been to unite disparate forces around position they each find mutually acceptable. If he was prepared to risk supporting a repressive regime in Iran against the needs of the ordinary people in Iran it can be assumed he will do the same in the former Yugoslavia. His appointment would suggest that Britain is not interested in creating the possibility of a negotiated settlement.

True to the British Government's diplomatic tradition Britain has had an enormous impact on the situation, while appearing to be helplessly and gentlemanly benign.

In August Britain sponsored, together with the US, a motion to the United Nations Security Council calling for calling for as much force as necessary to get humanitarian aid into the country.

According to the UN Commander in the region, opening the Sarajevo airport by the UN "didn't change the situation at all. In fact, if anything, it started to feed the fighters." This begs the question as to whether this was what the British Government intended.

Another significant aspect of Owens appointment is the shift away from a predominantly EC peace initiative under Carringtons direction to a dual EC and US intervention with an increased profile for Mr Vance as the US rep.

SERBIAN AND CROATIAN AIMS

Serbia and Croatia have long standing antagonisms because of the behaviour of the Chetnics and Ustasi in the 2nd world war. These antagonisms have been enthusiastically encouraged by the nationalist politicians and by some sections of society within Western Europe. Both states see each other as a serious threat.

The recognition of Bosnia saw a rapid attempt by both sides to grab sections of Bosnia and to remove anyone who they would feel had a loyalty to the other side. This of course leaves out the Muslim community which neither side are interested in.

The difference between Serbia and Croatia, from the point of view of British Diplomacy, is that Serbia appears less interested in pursuing the free market policies promoted by the IMF while Croatia has embraced them. It is that political difference that in part creates the tension but also has decided that the Western powers will support Croatia against Serbia and Montenegro.

Bosnia stands between two deeply antagonistic states, both armed to the teeth. Both are driven by old scores and the desire to redress what they have inherited from their history.

Bosnia was itself deeply divided between factions and the new Bosnian Government, now generically referred to in the press as the Moslems, was eminently predictable that it would be politically unstable. The desire by its two neighbouring states to secure their border made it inevitable that they would both make a grab for land in Bosnia.

On October the 24th the Daily Telegraph reported a "Croat leader in Mostar" as saying "The Serbs hold about 60% of Bosnia and we hold 30%. The Muslims don't control 10%, and yet they're talking of reconstituting the republic. It's reckless folly." That quote is an eloquent description of what the Serbian and Croat aims have been - to grab land regardless of the legitimacy of their tenure of it and to establish a Croat/Serb border. That is what has defacto come about.

Thus what is unfurling before us is the direct result of the agreement by the EC to recognise Bosnia while being wholly impotent to underwrite its security, even were there a desire to underwrite the security anyway.

Britain's support for the German position has been key. It is also perfectly feasible that Britain allowed Germany to take the responsibility for the results of that recognition.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH CROATIA

A great deal is made of Serbian atrocities, which are real and disgusting. What is played down by the press is the equally, if not more, disgusting nature of the Croatian regime. Sanctions are aimed at Serbia rather than Croatia. Reports of the camps and atrocities are predominantly of those where Serbian forces have been responsible and the diplomatic initiatives are aimed at making Serbia bend to the political agendas of the Western powers.

Serbia has been able to subvert the sanctions as has Croatia and their efforts are front page news while quite dramatic information about Croatia's efforts hardly gets a look in.

All 'sides' in this conflict stink. But the partial reporting happening in Britain largely omits the fact that Croatia is an ugly repressive regime.

The Guardian carried a number of articles recently outlining the nature of the regime in the Croatian controlled section of Bosnia. There were frightening similarities to the Ustasi regime during the war. It would appear that the fascist organisations currently operating there now have been placed in charge of the Croatian camps in Bosnia. The Guardian article also gave details of a group of Croatian police shooting an elderly couple for what appeared to be fun.

According to an article in a recent issue of Searchlight the Croatian president is and admirer of Hitler and openly anti-semitic. The same article gave details of a French and a Swiss

journalists who have been murdered by British fascists who make up part of the Croatian forces. It also gave details of the 200 fighters sent by Le Penn's to fight for Croatia.

The Serbian regime is a singularly nasty group of people but it is clear that the Croatian regime is easily as nasty. There is a vocal opposition to the war in Serbia. Any opposition in Croatia would appear to meet the same fate as the elderly couple described in the Guardian.

If we accept the partial view given out by the media in Britain we are half way to believing that Croatia is an acceptable regime and the victim in this situation and that puts us half way to supporting their war aims.

SANCTIONS

The first sets of UN troops assigned to Croatia are from Nepal and from South American countries. It is no reflection on their qualities as troops but none of them can speak Yugoslavian, German, French or English and so none can hold any meaningful conversations with the local populations. Those responsible for deploying them in this context are not taking the idea of sanctions seriously.

Both Croatia and Serbia border countries which have large domestic arms industries and are hard up for hard currency. To make sanctions stick would require a great deal more commitment than is currently in place.

Also the media are concentrating their efforts on sanctions against Serbia. The BBC news, for instance, regularly refers to sanctions against Serbia. The impression TUCND get, therefore, is that sanctions, in so far as they are being applied at all, are being applied selectively.

Recently, however, Croatia has been acquiring heavy duty weapons through Germany and Hungary. Some of Croatia's equipment has originated in South Africa, (who, like Britain, will sell arms to anyone regardless of their politics). There are also strong indications that Germany has been covertly supplying such weapons. Apparently the German Army has 'lost' 1,400 vehicles and there have been reports in the German press of Croatia being supplied with Leopard Tanks - the heaviest and most modern tanks available to the German army.

THE JOB BEING DONE ON US

Croatia has lost considerable amounts of ground in Bosnia to Serbian regular and irregular forces. One of the reasons for this was that the Former Yugoslav army sided with the Serbs and so the Serbian forces were better equipped. All the airforce went to Serbia.

The UN has security council has agreed to hold a war crimes commission to investigate atrocities carried out by Serbian forces yet it is clear that atrocities are being committed on all sides. Much of the information on these Serbian war crimes is being supplied to the UN by the US White House. Now although it is unlikely that many people would regard the Bush administration as an accurate source of information, untainted by the desire to influence US public opinion in for the Presidential election, any more than we would regard it as an accurate predictor of Tax regulations, but our press are slavishly repeating the information as though it had been glean directly by the UN.

Both sides are clearly preparing for a big push by the Croatians to regain some of this land, especially in Bosnia. Serbia, for instance is conserving manpower by avoiding taking urban areas. (Street fighting can cost up to 80% casualties, even with seasoned troops).

Such a push would only be thinkable if the Serbian domination of the air was removed. Without aircover of their own Croatia's heavy tanks and artillery would be too vulnerable to be usable, were the Serbian airforce still active.

The Serbian forces have taken far more ground than they say they need. It may be that in Bosnia they have taken more than they can reasonably be expected to hold but have done so with the intention of making the retaking of this ground as expensive, in human terms, for Croatia as they can.

In all of the material being fed to the media by our foreign office references are made to the need to provide air cover for our troops on what is supposed to be a humanitarian mission. The Austrian foreign minister gave an interview on the BBC on the 24th of August where he advocated an air exclusion zone - along the lines of that set up in southern Iraq and in Kurdistan. The US now openly advocate it and measures have been taken to try and impose such an air exclusion zone.

It looks to TUCND, therefore, that the general aim in all of the media hype we are being treated to is to gain support for either neutralising the Serbian airpower or for doing that and providing Croatia with air support, thus making the Croatian push theoretically feasible.

In other words our media are doing the same for Croatia that it did during the Spanish civil war.

A land grabbing push may be theoretically possible but whether it is practically possible is another question. The Morning Star recently reported attempts by Moslem forces to take sections of Sarajevo from Serbian irregulars, saying that the Muslims were suffering heavy losses in the process. None of the Croatian forces have experience of taking ground against entrenched troops. It is likely they have miscalculated what is required as it would appear the Muslims have in Sarajevo. If such a push does begin, a great many people on both sides will be killed and it is at that stage the atrocities against 'enemy' civilians will escalate on both sides.

THE ROLE OF THE CAMPS

The role of camps may not be as extermination camps but rather to hold the civilian personnel hostage and reduce the risk of partisan activity being organised against the forces holding that particular territory. The camps would also appear to be part of a terror campaign against the civilian population by Croatian, Muslim and the Serbian forces.

Another typical terror device has been the use of rape, which appears to be systematic rather casual, by all sides. Systematic rape, does not happen automatically but it is clearly prevalent in Yugoslavia. The US deliberately encouraged their troops to rape people as a terror weapon in Vietnam. The other thing that would suggest that it is being used to terrorise the population is that a large proportion of the victims are living through what must be an appalling experience.

The use of rape, the encouragement of racism by the various party's, the acceptance of Fascists in the Croatian forces and the shifting of the population on an ethnic basis should have an important message for us. Dehumanising the enemy doesn't just facilitate atrocities it actively encourages them.

The camps may rapidly become extermination camps if Croatian forces do begin such a push and it becomes bogged down, which is probably what would happen.

MILITARY INTERVENTION

There have been a number of calls from people on the left, even from some within the peace movement, for some form of military intervention to save those held hostage in the camps. The question which is never addressed by those making such calls is how exactly this military task would be achieved. How would the troops get there, how would they get the hostages out, how would they prevent others being taken hostage? That's before any assessment is made of what would be done with the thousands of refugees this would involve, given that both Croatia and Serbia are now refusing to take refugees.

It's worth bearing in mind the attitude of Britain, Germany and a number of other European states to refugees seeking asylum from persecution and civil war.

Military intervention is being vociferously called for by the Croatian and while it still existed, what was left of the Bosnian government and resisted, equally vociferously, by Serbia. The incident where a UN convoy was fired on killing two French soldiers happened in an area controlled by Muslim forces. The Italian aircraft that was shot down was travelling over territory controlled by Croatian forces. The effect of both of these incidents was to increase the public pressure for military support for Bosnia and Croatia.

Major General Lewis MacKenzie, the Canadian commander of the UN forces in Sarajevo sector, in an interview in the 19th September issue of Janes Defence Weekly, made it very clear that there are extreme limits on what can be done through military intervention. 'If you send in a force large enough to pacify the entire nation, you are talking staggering numbers'.

The military intervention being mooted through the UN will not be neutral, it can not be. It will be essentially to support Croatia and will be used to support a further round of land grabbing in Bosnia. Nothing more nothing less.

CONCLUSION

It would be very foolish indeed for Croatia to begin a military campaign to regain territory if air cover is not denied the Serbs. If it is denied then such a campaign will be almost inevitable and an all out war may ensue.

Both Croatia and Serbia currently feel it necessary to appear at least to be suing for peace. That is because Serbia has what it wants now and Croatia can't take Bosnia without outside help. It is possible, therefore, that the situation may not slide into all out war.

There are currently deep divisions within the Serbian leadership. Issues such as the completely one sided nature of the UN war crimes commission and sanctions have strengthened the hand of the faction which does not wish to negotiate a settlement against those who are now seeking some form of political solution. It is unlikely that anyone within the British, German or US diplomatic communities is so stupid as to not realise that that would directly contribute to strengthening the military solution faction.

If we look at the British Government's policies towards Somalia, Indonesia, Cambodia, the Middle East or South Africa it should be clear that it is concerned about humanitarian issues. It is likely, therefore, that the British Government's aims are something other than humanitarian.

The Searchlight article suggests that Germany is perusing something akin to the Greater Germany policy pursued prior to the Second World War. That may be a bit over the top but it does fit with events.

There are two things that Britain has to gain by supporting this. One is that by encouraging instability the demand for weapons for all countries in Europe is stimulated (the arms market has all but collapsed) and the continuation of Britain's huge defence budget can be politically justified. Britain sold weapons to both sides in the Iran - Iraq war, for instance.

We may also wish to see Germany drawn into a war which would in turn drain its resources and reduce the competitiveness of its economy.

The US are concerned to stamp out any semblance of the communist regimes and Serbia has retained some semblance of the old regime.

What all three (Germany, Britain and the US) would like to see firmly established in the political culture of their own populations is the right to use of military force anywhere it may suit their interests. TUCND believe this is the principal aim behind the British Government's policy in the region.

The Soviet Union's support for Cuba and Vietnam undermined the ability of the US intervening militarily wherever they wished. Since then it has been a long term aim in US foreign policy to regain their capacity to intervene militarily to support their economic and foreign policy interests.

All of these parties are playing very dangerous games. A full scale war in Yugoslavia would have deep and long term effects on European politics and we, the peace movement should do all that we can to avoid this.

WHAT WE SHOULD DO

As a general aim we should be seeking a political negotiation to the crisis which should include a negotiation over the rights of the people in the disputed territories. This may mean a negotiation over a new border. The alternative to this are attempts at military solutions and we should do what we can to ensure that these are made as difficult and impractical as possible. Therefore, we should:-

- a) Campaign against the deployment of troops in Yugoslavia in any other capacity than imposing the arms embargo.
- b) Campaign against the deployment of airpower on behalf of any of the warring parties, covertly or overtly. That means against an air exclusion zone.
- c) Campaign for the use of effective enforcement sanctions against the import of militarily significant equipment by all parties in the conflict.
- d) Campaign for as much pressure as possible to be placed on the Serbian and the Croatian authorities to negotiate a settlement.

TUCND believe that full scale war in the area is avoidable. If a full scale war does develop it could last for years and the cost both in human and financial terms will be horrendous, as would be the longer term consequences for politics in Europe. There also remains the possibility of other European states becoming embroiled in the war which could lead to a general rearmament of European states. In the darker recesses of the Britain's foreign policy thinking this may be a covert aim, as a way of doing a Lazarus job on the collapsing international arms market. TUCND consider such a policy to be an obscenity.