

On Gogol Boulevard

Neither East Nor West/NYC

1994

About this Section

On Gogol Boulevard is produced for the *Fifth Estate* by New York City/Neither East Nor West, which links alternative oppositions in the East and West, and prints news and documents unavailable in the corporate or left media. OGB sometimes involves Third and Fourth World activists in these efforts. Similar sections also appear in *Anarchy* and *Amor y Rabia*.

Neither East Nor West is responsible for the articles although the *Fifth Estate* is in general agreement with their content and OGB's general purposes.

OGB is not only for anarchists but for all movements seeking paths outside of capitalist and state bureaucratic models.

By the way, Gogol Boulevard takes its name from a popular hang-out for Moscow counter-culture youth.

Address correspondence to OGB/NENW, 528 Fifth St., Brooklyn NY 11215; tel. (718) 499-7720.

Croatian Women's Info-Shop Opens

Zenska Infoteka (Women's Info-Shop) began in March 1993.

The outbreak of war in this region has had a detrimental effect on the women's movement in former Yugoslavia. The pressures and conditions of war have caused many women's organizations to disband and others to break into smaller groups, sometimes with a change in ideology and goals. Also, many relationships between women's groups within Croatia and across what are now national borders have fractured. There is a real threat that the progress gained by the feminist movement over the years will disappear.

Infoteka was established to preserve the knowledge and Herstory of this region and to document and analyze the current decline in women's economic, social and political choices and condition. Our efforts to build up resources and to provide information on women's issues will serve as a basis for our longer-term goal of reviving the feminist movement in this region and for the foundation of Women's Studies as an academic field in Croatia. Currently our education objectives are realized through:

- The establishment of a women's library.
- Translating feminist books into Croatian. We hope to have the first series of books printed in Autumn, 1994.
- Publishing a quarterly bulletin providing information on women's groups in Croatia (including peace activism, lesbianism, violence against women—both war and domestic), analysis of the condition of women in former Yugoslavia, and reviews of feminist literature. The first issue is printed.

We have witnessed a changing political, economic and social climate in Croatia which is limiting women's choices and trying to force women into the "glorified role of motherhood."

Methods of influence will include:

- Supporting women's projects and activism.
- Providing women's groups and activists with information when organizing public discussions and demonstrations.
- Sponsoring and supporting research by and about women.
- Providing space for group discussion, meetings, conferences and public forums.
- Initiating and distributing petitions concerning the rights of women.

We welcome all suggestions for collaboration in meeting these objectives.

—Mica Miadineo, Kathryn Turnipseed, Durda Knezevic

Zenska Infoteka, Women's Information and Documentation Centre, Croatia, Berislaviceva 14, 41000 Zagreb, Croatia; tel. 385 41 276 188, fax. 385 41 422 926.

The Balkans: organizing in the war zone

Hail the Zitzer Spiritual Republic.

Women and draft resisters—they make a powerful combination. They are the spirit behind the Zitzer Spiritual Republic.

It is often women and draft age men who take the leadership in grassroots war resistance movements. This proved true in the village of Tresnjevica in the Vojvodina region of northern Serbia (see Bosnia: End of the State or State of the End?" FE #343, Fall-Winter, 1993).

In the spring of 1992, 200 young men in this village of 2,100 received their military call-up to fight in the war against Croatia. The ethnically-mixed village, close to the Hungarian border, was widely opposed to the war, so the women in town organized a protest demonstration. 800 people showed up, and they decided to take a radical stand.

The group refused to disperse until the military retracted the call-up and allowed the village's other men to return from the front or from exile. They based themselves in a local bar, pool hall, and pizza parlor called the Zitzer Club. The 200 young resisters camped out here for three months, provided with food and support from their families.

The Serbian-controlled government responded at first with threats. For two days the village was surrounded by tanks and troops, but eventually the military backed down and with a few exceptions, the men have remained free.

While living at the Zitzer Club, the resisters put their anti-war spirit into a new idea. They created a "country" they called the Zitzer Spiritual Republic, a country which according to their constitution has no territory or borders, and is open to all people from any nation, race, or ethnicity who believe in the right of an individual to follow one's conscience. They adopted a national crest which depicts a pizza surrounded by three billiard balls and they took as their national anthem, Ravel's Bolero which was the only record in the place.

Visitors from peace groups in nearby Hungary spread the word about the Zitzer Spiritual Republic and their inspiration spread. In New York City, activists from the Balkan War Resource Group and Neither East Nor West-NYC made plans to form the US Embassy for this new country without borders. In August 1993, Jill Benderly of the Network of East/West Women and Dorie Wilsnack of the War Resisters League visited the village and met the resisters and the women who organized the village's protest movement.

Much to their surprise, Dorie and Jill found that the Zitzer activists had little knowledge of how widely known their story had become. Except for the occasional visitor, they were cut off from communication with outside peace

groups. Their isolation was made even larger by Serbia's controlled media, by the severing of telephone ties with Croatia and Bosnia and by the economics of village life under sanctions.

A campaign was initiated to get a computer and a modem for the anti-war activists in Tresnjevac so they could link up with the electronic mail network that is the lifeline of the peace movements in the Balkans. The U.S. Embassy for the Zitzer Spiritual Republic kicked off the computer campaign at the NYC rock club CBGB's on November 28. One fourth of the funds needed were raised and it garnered some excellent media coverage for the Serbian draft resistance movement.

We want to invite you to become a citizen of the Zitzer Spiritual Republic by supporting the computer campaign and making a donation. Let's create another example where women and draft resisters work together to turn the military on its ear!

Join the U.S. Embassy! All donors get an official Zitzer membership card!

Please make tax deductible checks out to the Aspect Foundation and mail to: Neither East Nor West, 528 5th St., Brooklyn, NY 11215; Tel. (718) 499-7720.

A Primer on Ex-Yugoslavia

by Bill Weinberg

The mainstream media repeatedly characterizes the war raging in the Balkans as the result of "ancient ethnic rivalries" which were kept under the lid by the old Communist regime of Yugoslavia—and have exploded since the country disintegrated.

This is not only a dangerous over-simplification, but it is also racist—implying that Slavs are inherently violent nationalist fanatics, in contrast to "civilized" Western Europeans and Americans. This pseudo-explanation ignores political context—and the complicity of the Western powers in the destruction of Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia had been a multi-national state. Each of its six constituent republics (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Macedonia, and Montenegro with Kosova and Vojvodina as autonomous provinces) had a separate national identity shaped, in large part, by the various imperial powers which have vied for control over the Balkans for centuries.

In the north, Slovenia and Croatia had been under the control of Germanic powers such as the Holy Roman Empire, and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and therefore became Roman Catholic. In the south, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, under the Byzantine Empire, became Eastern Orthodox.

Bosnia, a remote and mountainous region between the two spheres of influence, was never effectively under the control of either, but developed its own "heresy" with populist and anti-authoritarian overtones, known as Bogomilism, which the Catholic powers vigorously tried to exterminate.

When the Turkish Ottoman Empire started its drive to conquer the Balkans in the Fourteenth Century, they gave the Bogomils support in their struggle against the Catholics. When the Turks finally took power, they were therefore welcomed by the Bogomils—who subsequently converted to Islam, the official state religion of the Ottoman Empire. They became today's Bosnian Muslims.

The Serbs, on the other hand, bitterly resented Turkish domination. The Albanians, a non-Slavic people who were an ethnic minority in the southern Serbian region of Kosova and had resented living under Serbian rule, also welcomed the Turks and accepted Islam. Since Kosova had been the scene of a decisive 1389 battle where the Serbs were defeated by the Turks, it became an important symbol of Serbian nationalism.

For centuries thereafter, the Balkans were the scene of a massive power struggle between the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the Nineteenth Century, both nationalism and the idea of South Slav or "Yugoslav" unity began to emerge.

Serbia secured its independence as the Ottoman Empire declined. But the new conflict between Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire plunged all of Europe into the First World War in 1914. The Great Power alliance of Russia, Britain and the U.S. lined up with Serbia, while the rival bloc of Germany and the Turks were allied with the Austro-Hungarians. Croats and Slovenes, conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army, were pitted against Serbs.

After the war, the victorious Britain and the U.S., in cooperation with local forces that aspired to South Slav unity, created the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, uniting the six nations under a common state for the first time. However, the Yugoslav state was built on the Serbian monarchy, and shortly descended into a 'dictatorship.

The tensions this system bred exploded with the rise of fascism and the Second World War. Nazi Germany invaded in 1941, occupying Serbia and establishing an "independent" puppet state in Croatia under the Ustashe, a Croatian fascist organization. The Ustashe established death camps and carried out genocide against thousands of Serbs, as well as Jews and Romani ("gypsies").

Communist guerrillas known as the Partisans resisted the Nazi collaborationist forces with the aid of Britain and the USSR. The Partisans emerged victorious in 1944, and their leader Josip Tito was installed in power. Tito rebuilt and industrialized Yugoslavia under a Communist dictatorship, but, unlike other Eastern European regimes, steered a course independent of Moscow.

Tito was also adept at balancing the rivalries between the six constituent republics. While his regime did indeed keep a tight lid on any expression of nationalism, the destruction of the Yugoslav system following his death in 1980 had to do with factors other than the mere lifting of that lid.

The first of these was Yugoslavia's economic decline. In the effort to turn a peasant economy into a major industrial and military power, the Communist regime racked up a \$20 billion debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other foreign sources—a figure comparable to many Third World nations.

In the 1980s, the IMF called in its chips, and payment plans imposed harsh austerity on Yugoslavia's workers. Wealthier Slovenia and Croatia, industrialized with German investment, started to resent their undue contribution to the federal budget.

It was a Serbian Communist Party higher-up and banking official, Slobodan Milosevic, who first openly violated the Titoist taboo on expressing nationalist sentiment. He launched a campaign which brilliantly exploited both legitimate class resentment against bureaucratic elites and Serbian racism against the Albanian minority in Kosova, linking populism and Serbian nationalism. This campaign propelled him into the Serbian presidency in 1987. The Yugoslav National Army, with a largely Serbian officer corps, closed ranks with Milosevic.

In 1990, as a new deal with the IMF imposed economic "shock therapy," freezing wages and dramatically cutting back services, elections were held in each of the republics. Opportunistic politicians followed Milosevic's lead, exploiting popular anger and cynically playing the obvious card of nationalism in their bids for state power.

Franjo Tudjman, ex-Communist general and open nationalist, was elected in Croatia, and used his control of the press to create nationalist frenzy, much as his ostensible enemy Milosevic was doing in Serbia. State propaganda scapegoated ethnic minorities—Serbs in Croatia, Albanians in Serbia—and posed national purity as the new solution.

In December 1990, Slovenia voted to secede from Yugoslavia in a national plebiscite. Croatia followed suit a few months later, but it was Great Power meddling which propelled the situation towards war. U.S. defense contractors like Lockheed had long been selling arms to the Yugoslav Communist state, and the Bush administration had used Yugoslav banks and arms trading companies to launder CIA weapons smuggling in the Middle East.

In June 1991, the U.S. sent Secretary of State James Baker to Belgrade, the Serbian and Yugoslavian capital. Baker warned Milosevic of the "dangers of disintegration" and urged that Yugoslavia maintain "territorial integrity."

Milosevic took this as a "green light" to use force to halt Slovene and Croat secession. Simultaneously, Germany, with substantial investments in Slovenia and Croatia, was urging the European Community to recognize their independence—which was taken by the breakaway republics as a "green light" to secede.

One week later, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence and Milosevic sent in tanks and troops. The war was on.

Milosevic accepted Slovene independence after ten days of fighting, but in Croatia, with a large Serbian minority, war raged until the end of 1991, leaving cities in ruins and the country independent but divided by large areas of Serb military occupation.

Things were even more complicated and bloody in Bosnia, where the Muslim minority was faced with both large Serbian and Croatian minorities. While initially reluctant to secede, Bosnia voted to do so when faced with the alternative of remaining in an openly Serb-dominated Yugoslavia after the departure of Slovenia and Croatia.

Bosnia's Muslim president Alija Izetbegovic built a multi-ethnic coalition government before seceding in February 1992, but Serb nationalists under Radovan Karadzic revolted and, with massive support from Milosevic, eventually seized 70% of Bosnian territory.

The Serbs subsequently established concentration camps in abandoned factories and forcibly expelled Muslims from their villages in a brutal campaign of "ethnic cleansing." Bosnia's Croats initially sided with the Muslims against the Serbs, but when the United Nations started to accept that Bosnia would be permanently divided, Croats and Serbs closed ranks to expel Muslims from their remaining areas. Many Bosnian Muslims now suspect a Trudjman-Milosevic plot to divide Bosnia between Serbia and Croatia.

Yugoslavia now consists only of Serbia and tiny Montenegro. As war continues to rage in Bosnia, many anticipate that newly independent Macedonia may be next to explode. Nationalist elements in Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece all maintain claims to Macedonia, and Macedonia also has a large Albanian population. The Albanians in Kosovo continue to suffer persecution and repression under Serbian domination.

In Turkey, nationalist elements are pushing for intervention on behalf of Balkan Muslim groups such as the Bosnians and Albanians, while Russian nationalists are calling for intervention on behalf of the Serbs. Although this context is consistently ignored by the mass media, these rival imperial interests could propel the Balkan crisis into a wider war—possibly on a global scale.

Peace activists, Greens and anarchists are active in each of the former Yugoslav republics, and are attempting to resist the consolidation of racism, nationalism and militarism. Their voices are also consistently overlooked by the mass media, and it is up to us, their counterparts and natural allies in the West, to lend them solidarity.

Adapted from *War at the Crossroads: An Historical Guide Through the Balkan Labyrinth* by Bill Weinberg and Dorie Wilsnack, available for \$1.00 per copy from the Balkan War Resource Group, War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette St., NY NY 10012; (212) 228-04502.

For a list of ex-Yugoslavian anti-war groups send 50 cents to the above address for War and Peace in the Balkans.

Czech Anarchists Fight Nazis

Anarchists are in the lead in the Czech Republic demonstrating against and physically confronting fascists. In Oct. 1993, 200 marched in Prague against growing racist and fascist violence, particularly from nazi-skinheads. Speakers pointed out three recent events: the fatal injury of Filip Venclik (an anarcho-punk from the band Rusko [Russia]) by a man who was seen giving the Nazi salute; the murder of a 38 year old man in Prague who defended Romanies ("Gypsies") against nazi-skinheads; and an attack on a Romani in the South Bohemian town of Pisek.

There have been 14 nazi victims since the Revolution of 1989.

NENW Network Forming

To further our work with alternative oppositions, Neither East Nor West-NYC is calling for the formation of a continental network. Please write us at 528 5th St., Brooklyn NY 11215 for a position paper on the idea; or call (718) 499-7720 for more information.

Anti-fascists in Poland

Radykalna Akcja Antyfaszystowska (Radical Anti-Fascist Action) came into being in May, 1992 as a response to the development of the nationalist movement in Poland. RAAF acts mainly in Warsaw but we have our supporters in the whole country.

We are anarchist and people connected with the alternative milieu. Our aim is to fight nazis by any means necessary. We organize protection for independent demonstrations, collect information about nationalist activists, and break up nazi meetings. We publish posters, leaflets, stickers and our bulletin. We are interested in cooperation with anti-fascist groups from other countries.

The anti-fascist movement in Poland acts under unfavorable conditions. Our enemies in many cases are supported by businessmen and official parties. We don't have any such support. Assistance from our Western comrades would be very useful—for example, we need sprays and walkie-talkies.

If you want to get more information about our activities, write to us: RAAF, P.O. BOX 45, 02-792 Warszawa 78, Poland.

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