

**A**TTTEMPTS by the Serbs to keep Yugoslavia together by using the army and air force, which they control, seem sure to fail.

The violence merely stiffens the determination of the Slovenes and Croats to get out. Can you blame them?

An indication of the way the Serbs see their northern neighbours has just been provided by one Serb Communist leader, Vojislav Seselj: 'We do not need to waste bullets on the Croats', he gloated. 'All we need is some rusty spoons to dig their eyes out'.

Clearly Yugoslavia in its present form cannot continue to exist. And that makes it all the more strange that Western governments should still be propping up this doomed federation.

When professional diplomats — what that great man of the people, Harry S. Truman, contemptuously called 'the pin-striped pants boys' — are absolutely united on a proposition, you can be pretty sure it is wrong.

## Corrupt

The diplomats of the State Department, the Foreign Office and the other EC powers have combined to try to stop the Slovenes and the Croats from seeking independence. They could not be more misguided.

These two small but industrious and brave peoples have as much right to run their own affairs as the British, the Americans or the French. Look at the facts.

*Yugoslavia is a total and irredeemable failure. For nearly half a century it has been run by a brutal, corrupt and incompetent Communist regime.*

The regime is still there and is as nasty and incapable as ever. The country is bankrupt. The currency is almost worthless. There is hyperinflation, high unemployment and growing violence. Ordinary Yugoslavs vote with their feet by emigrating, if they can.

The Slovenes and Croats are unanimous they will do better for themselves on their own — and they are dead right. Yugoslavia has never worked because it is an artificial creation. It is the brain-child of a British university professor, R.W. Seton-Watson, who persuaded the Foreign Office to make it a reality at the end of the First World War.

The Serbs, whose bellicosity had been one of the main causes of that terrible war, had been our ally, and the idea was to reward them. Since the Austro-Hungarian Empire was being broken up anyway, it was decided to transfer its Slav provinces to this new 'Union of the South Slavs', which was to be in effect under Serbian control.

## Hostility

The British knew the package was clumsy but argued it was better than 'Balkanisation' — almost the worst term of abuse, then as now, in Foreign Office vocabulary — half-a-dozen small states, not viable, and always fighting each other.

But Yugoslavia had from the start grave handicaps: three religions (Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam), different alphabets, half a dozen languages and six main races. Moreover, the racial pattern did not always follow the provincial borders, with minorities of most of the races within the major components.

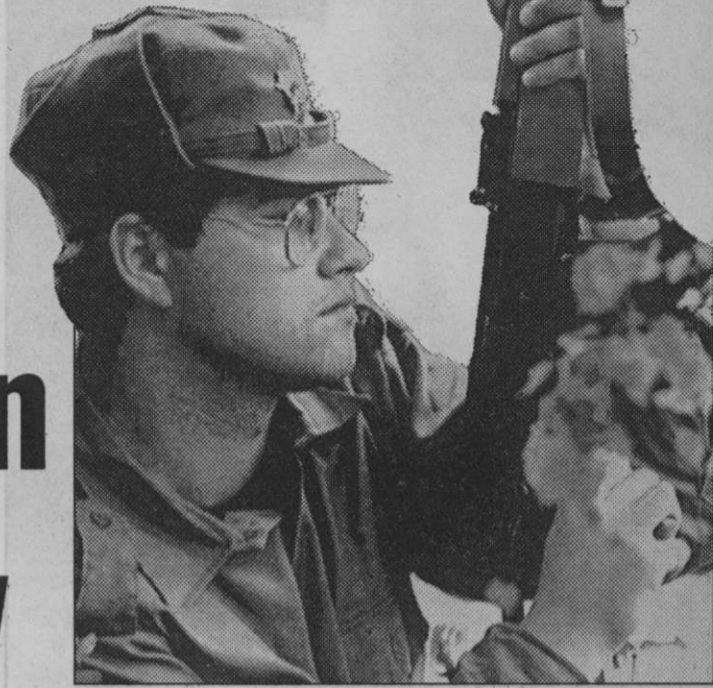
This problem has grown steadily and now constitutes a fearful danger to Yugoslavia's internal peace, since some minorities, especially the Moslem Montenegrins and Albanians, have very high birth-rates, thus provoking fear and violence.

Seton-Watson himself soon realised that the system did not work, since the arrogant Serbs ran the country not as a federation but as a Serb empire.

As early as 1921 he wrote: 'The situation in Yugoslavia reduces me to despair . . . I have no confidence in the new constitution and its absurd centralism.' Seven years later he washed his hands



One of Slovenia's freedom fighters and (above) the maps showing how Yugoslavia was formed



# The Balkan jigsaw

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# doomed to failure



by  
**PAUL JOHNSON**

of his own creation: the Serbs and Croats, he said, 'should be left to stew in their own juice. I think they are both mad.'

During the Second World War, the smouldering hostility between the races broke out into a civil war which killed one in ten of the population. The British compounded earlier errors by backing the Communist leader, Marshal Tito.

*Hence when peace came, the Serb monarchy, bad enough in itself, was replaced by the Communist Party, which was far worse.*

The Serbs remained dominant, in the army, the secret police, the federal bureaucracy and the party machine.

The Slovenes and Croats have always found this intolerable. You have only got to travel through Yugoslavia to see why.

An invisible line runs through the country. North and west of it is the civilisation of central Europe. South and East of it are the Balkans, ruined and corrupted by centuries of Turkish occupation. That line is the fron-

tier of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, and it is striking how little has changed since it was broken up.

So long as the Yugoslav Communist Party was self-confident and its secret police all-powerful; the Slovenes and Croats had no alternative but to grin and bear it.

But now that Yugoslavia is demonstrably as big an economic and political failure as the Soviet Union, its more advanced peoples — like the Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians in the USSR — are getting out.

## Suffered

This has alarmed the striped-pants boys. As always, they prefer to keep small peoples tidied up into big, convenient units, believing they cause less trouble.

That is a fallacy. Look at Iraq, another collection of incompatibles, artificially created by the Foreign Office at almost exactly the same time as they were putting Yugoslavia together.

Winston Churchill, the minister responsible, later — like Seton-Watson — came to see it was a mistake. He called Iraq 'the un-

grateful volcano'. What on earth would he have said now?

We are always putting together these unstable packages. The West Indies Federation was one, the Central African Federation another. Where are they today? Gone with the wind.

Slovenia and Croatia know very well that they are small and need links with a bigger unit. But both are much larger than Luxembourg, and the unit they want to belong to is the European Community, which has made Luxembourg one of the most prosperous small states on earth.

These ancient peoples have a perfect historical right to belong to an organisation which calls itself 'European'.

And, in view of the way they have suffered from Britain's mistakes in the past, we have a particular moral obligation to give them our support.

*John Major, a man rightly proud of his commitment to freedom, should take a hand in this.*

If the Slovenes and Croats can show they are really in charge, with working de facto governments, we should give them speedy recognition. Major himself should look with favour on their bid for early association with the EC.

He would be doing himself a favour, too, by showing that it is he and his cabinet who run Britain's foreign policy — not the striped-pants boys.