

The nationalist pride and the passion

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THE TRAGEDY of the Yugoslav situation is that it is all so unnecessary but various former communist politicians like Kucan in Slovenia, Milosevic in Serbia and Tudjman in Croatia made cynical use of nationalist passion to gain power in their respective republics. That a collective insanity has taken hold, pace Stipe Mesic, is evident from the letter sent by a group of Slovene writers in Ljubljana (Guardian, July 3). The "terrorists" of the Yugoslav Army to which they refer include the general commanding the first troops to be sent in, the first Yugoslav Army helicopter pilot to be killed, and the Federal deputy Defence Minister with whom the first ceasefire deal was struck, all Slovenes. Such nationalist Slovenes should reflect that Slovenia would be in no position today to declare its independence if it had not been a part of both pre-war Yugoslavia and Tito's Yugoslavia. They just have to look across the border to Styria and Carinthia, Austria's "tenth province", where their Slovenian kin have been waging a losing battle against assimilation by the German majority.

Edward Pearce's article "A land riven by ancient hatred" goes some way to redressing

the bias towards "plucky" little Slovenia and "put upon" Croatia against the "hegemonist" and "barbarous" Serbs. The idea of a Yugoslav state was first championed by Croats in the last century. Its principal champion during the first world war in the face of Serbian indifference personified by their great Radical leader, Nikola Pasic, was the Yugoslav Committee led by Ante Trumbic, a Dalmatian Croat, who was much more frightened of Italian designs on Croatia. The Yugoslav idea's later proponents included the most famous one of all, Tito, a Croat, who once fought in the Austro-Hungarian army against the Serbs.

Just like Pasic, most Serbs today are more than happy for Slovenia to go its own way and Croatia as well provided the Serbian settled areas of Croatia are able to join Serbia. Croatia's new constitution which does not recognise the Cyrillic alphabet nor the Serbian variant of their common Serbo-Croatian — Croato-Serbian language gives the lie to Croatian claims that the rights of their Serbian minority will be respected and reinforces Serb apprehensions of a repeat of their suffering under the Croatian Ustasha regime.

Edward Pearce is quite right

to warn against the danger of casting Serbs in the role of demons and Croats as Angels but the age old enmity of which he speaks only goes back as far as the end of the last century when the rulers of Austria-Hungary played one off against the other. Until then, Serbs and Croats had got along quite well if not overly intimate and the Slovenes have had no troubles with the Serbs until Milosevic made his wretched appearance. Heaven grant that all the parties concerned realise that they have just as much in common as they have differences and that there is no historical justification for shedding each other's blood.

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ATROCITIES in Yugoslavia by men such as Vojislav Seselj, leader of the extreme nationalist Serbian radical Party described by Ian Traynor (Guardian, July 2) are not isolated incidents but are examples of an insidious and growing Serbian nationalism which has been aided by the west over the years through its support of a united Yugoslavia. It is worth adding, as was widely reported in non-Serbian parts of Yugoslavia that when the 12 young Croatian policemen were killed

on May 2, the perpetrators not only gouged out the eyes of their victims, but cut off their genitals too. The event was scarcely reported in the west, and where it was it came over as just another example of Yugoslavian violence. The fact that Vojislav Seselj is an elected member of the Serbian parliament, and is not in a prison or lunatic asylum, makes the fact that he proudly accepts responsibility for his dreadful crimes even more shocking.

The Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic may not be quite as insane as Mr Seselj, but certainly he is no less nationalistic in his aims, and after the events in Kosovo last year, and the "Bloody Sunday" demonstrations in Belgrade recently, his hands are similarly stained even with the blood of his own people. But yet when the EC "troika" members visited Belgrade they were shown on TV talking with Milosevic and members of the Serbian Government in an atmosphere of calm. By contrast, members of the democratically elected government of Slovenia can only appear in the media protected by armed guards, and on Tuesday it was deemed too dangerous for Mr Genscher to visit Ljubljana. This, the capital of the republic which has been

proclaimed by "Time" magazine as "an island to freedom in Western Europe", and which Gorbachev visited three years ago to gain inspiration for perestroika, why?

The dangerous thing is that there are many more small and some bigger Seseljas and Milosevics in Yugoslavia, particularly in Serbia and the humiliated but still powerful army. They are people who know their time is short and that the death of communism pushes them on to the rubbish heap of history. Their reactions now are not rational. Krsko, Slovenia's nuclear power power station, was two months ago stated as a target by the Serbian nationalists, but as the case of the Croatian policemen shows, rhetoric and reality are not far removed in present day Yugoslavia.

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The letter published yesterday from Branka Magas should have read: The war is not a war of the Yugoslav Federation against rebel republics, nor is it a war between Yugoslavia's constituent nations. It is a war designed to defend a bankrupt parasitic regime in Serbia and a deeply undemocratic concept of Yugoslavia.