



ANNA PUKAS



REPORT FROM ZAGREB



Hate figures

DAILY
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THERE can be no mincing words over this: if Yugoslavia tears itself into shreds, it will be because of naked, racist hatred between the nationalities.

But in a country which has seen some semblance of unity for 45 years, it is inevitable that intermingling and intermarriage has taken place. So where does the now very real prospect of break-up leave people like Anton and Ivana Babnik?

Anton, 44, is Serbian and comes from Vukovar, a town in eastern Croatia with a large Serbian minority. His wife Ivana, 42, is Croatian. Their 16-year-old son Leo simply considers himself a Yugoslav.

Life in Vukovar gradually became impossible for the Babniks. They were regularly abused by both Serbs and Croats. They had to put bars on their windows because they were smashed so often, and because of the increasingly perilous nature of the missiles thrown at them. Eventually they had to move to Novo Mesto, a town in Slovenia close to the border with Croatia. So far, so good.

Except that Slovenia, in its bid for independence, has just been at war with the Yugoslav People's Army which, rightly or wrongly, is regarded as a Serbian army. So, does the whole sorry ritual of abuse start for Anton again?

The family of Zorka Kozomora couldn't begin to classify themselves. Zorka, 51, was born Serbian and is one of eight sisters who between them have husbands of five nationalities. Her daughter-in-law is Croatian and Zorka now gets anonymous death threats over the telephone.

Or what about Colonel Miroslav Ivanovic, who commands the second largest Yugoslav army garrison in Slovenia, based 25 miles south of Ljubljana? His father was Serbian, his mother from Bosnia and Miroslav, 49, married a Croat.

They have lived in Slovenia for more than 20 years and their children are Slovenian and speak that language. Ivanovic is a double target of abuse, as an army officer and as a Serb. His children are taunted at school with cries of 'Go back to where you came from.'

Just where would that be exactly? It's a problem which the warring factions in Yugoslavia have, in their blind hatred, not shown the remotest desire to address.



THE enmity between Serbs and Croats is permeating all levels. The operator at my hotel here warned me she might not be able to find out a Belgrade telephone number for me because Belgrade directory inquiries might not give it to her if they knew she was calling from Zagreb. In Belgrade last week, the same thing happened in reverse. And when I rented a car there, Avis told me apologetically that times being what they were, American Express would NOT do nicely. The firm's Yugoslav HQ is in Zagreb and they were proving 'a little difficult' about Belgrade transactions.



THE Bosnians, it seems, are the Irish of Yugoslavia, so here's a Bosnian joke. A Bosnian wearing traditional dress (it was still common until very recently, including curly-ended shoes) went into a shop in Belgrade to buy an accordion. But the shopkeeper threw him out, calling him a stupid Bosnian peasant. Next day, the same thing happened. The Bosnian finally twigged it might be better to leave off his traditional garb, but still the Belgrade shopkeeper wouldn't sell him the accordion. 'But I'm wearing ordinary clothes so how do you know I'm Bosnian?' asked the hapless Bosnian. The shopkeeper replied, 'What else could you be if you try and buy an accordion from a shop that sells radiators?' Oh well, they laughed at it over here.