

**“Y**OU know,” said my taxi driver, on the way from the airport to the centre of Zagreb, “all the trouble in this country is caused by 10 people.”

He reeled off the names of Yugoslavia's collective presidency and the republican presidents of Croatia, Slovenia and

Serbia. “Just line them up against the wall and shoot them. Then we have no trouble.”

It was a sincere contribution to the cause of peace in Yugoslavia, and unfortunately one which illustrates all too clearly the ingrained mentality of violence to counter violence. Yugoslavia is currently a kind of Wild West, lawless and out of control.

People are dying every day, most of them members of the Croatian police force and innocent civilians. Journalists have been shot, too. Of all the East European revolutions this is so far the bloodiest, as the killing is random and ruthless. It is more arbitrary than in Romania, and is only likely to be exceeded in violence by Albania's revolution when it comes.

The killing started at the end of June in Slavonia (not to be confused with Slovenia). Slavonia is the eastern part of Croatia, which shares a border with Vojvodina, a province of Serbia. Most of its inhabitants are Serbs, but there are large numbers of Croats mixed in. Or there were. Many have packed their bags and fled.

Before the declaration of independence on 26 June by both Croatia and Slovenia, most of the trouble was centered on Krajina, another Croatian region with a primarily Serbian population. Of Croatia's 4.5 million population, around 600,000 are ethnic Serbs. Krajina declared itself independent much earlier this year — an act the Croatian government, which talks so powerfully of “self determination”, ignored — and in the same breath said it wanted to secede to Serbia. This was not only politically unfeasible, but also impractical, since nowhere does Krajina border on Serbia.

In the past week, the scene of the battle has moved back to the Krajina region, closer to the Croatian capital, Zagreb. Here, as in the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, a month ago, the population is wakened into dry-mouthed panic by the sound of air raid warning sirens, and the continual reminders in the media that they should be “prepared for war”. The air raid warnings seemed exaggerated until the weekend, when the Yugoslav air force launched a missile attack on targets in Eastern Croatia. It is in the East that the army appears to be helping the Serbian separatist extremists, who are doing most of the shooting, to cross the Danube.

On the banks of the Drava

# Wilder than the West



EVENING STANDARD  
30/7/91

**SUE  
MASTERMAN**  
reports from Zagreb

and Danube rivers, which join to form Serbia's border, there is plenty of traffic to be seen. Women and children are constantly being ferried from Slavonia to Serbia. Around 20,000 have already arrived there. But the ferries do not return empty. They carry the hot-headed nationalists, armed to the teeth, who are determined to “have a go” at the Croats. The Croats refer to these people as “terrorists” or “Chetniks” — a reference to the nationalist Serbian forces during the Second World War. The Serbs, on the other hand, call the Croatian police “Ustacha”, triggering horrific memories of the fascist puppet regime which wiped out hundreds of thousands of Serbs and other Slavs.

**T**HE controversial presence of the army in Eastern Croatia is another complicating factor. The army moved in two months ago to separate the fighting Serbs and Croats — or so the army claims. With its Serbian-dominated leadership, the army is seen as the defender of the Serbs, not of the Croatian police, which has suffered the most casualties. The Croats paint a picture of police patrols ambushed and slaughtered by Serbian “terrorists”, whose get-away and supplies are assured by the army. This may not be the whole truth, but independent observers say it is a fairly accurate picture.

Last week, the collective presidency — lead by Croatian Stipe Mesic — voted that the army should move out of the rebel republic of Slovenia. Slovenia was to be allowed its independence: the implication — Croatia was not. Croatia is incensed. Its “war cabinet” — which has taken the place of the government — believes Croatia should be treated equally.

It fears that the army will simply be regrouped in and around Croatia. It warns this will mean “civil war”. Croatia wants the army to move out adding that its own police force is capable of dealing with the troubles so long as the army stops supporting the Serbs against them.

Members of the presidency and the government have gone to Brussels for a new round of consultations. There is talk of sending another EC trouble-shooting mission to Yugoslavia, or allowing the monitors to operate in Croatia, or even sending blue-helmeted EC militia in to try to keep the various sides from one another's throats. But there are few grounds for optimism, as countless meetings in the past have all ended in feuds.

Meanwhile, new factors are creeping into the already complex equation. Turkey has declared that it will

come to the aid of Yugoslavia's Moslems — if it is asked. That is a very large group indeed, especially in Macedonia, in the Serbian province of Kosovo, where almost all two million ethnic Albanian inhabitants are Moslem, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where 40 per cent of the population is Moslem.

In the years preceding the First World War, and the assassination of the heir to the Habsburg throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Slovenia and Croatia were part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Serbia was an independent kingdom. Then the Habsburgs annexed Bosnia, and all hell broke loose. Torn by ethnic conflict, Bosnia's population is divided among Moslem, Serbian and Croatian inhabitants. The Bosnian leadership is crying out, like Cassandra in the wilderness, that history is about to repeat itself, and its become the “killing fields” of Yugoslavia.



Serbian guerrillas on patrol near the Croatian village of Kozibrod, where at least 45 died last weekend