

A similar pattern with different predicates occurred in the Ukrainian vote. Gorbachov won his vote on Ukraine accepting a new Union Treaty. But the degree of anti-Moscow mass ferment in the republic was clearly shown in the resounding "Yes" to the second question, which called on the "Ukrainian Supreme Soviet" to put into practice the far-reaching "Declaration of Sovereignty" adopted by that Parliament on July 16, 1990. However, as in the Russian Federation case, there was a catch to this. The resolution that was voted up specified "sovereignty . . . within the Union," i.e., keeping Ukraine in the empire, and, worse, by mandating the "Ukrainian Supreme Soviet," i.e., the present Parliament with its two-thirds communist majority, to put sovereignty into practice, quietly dropped the promise that Moscow had made last autumn at the height of the mass strikes and demonstrations in Ukraine for "free elections" in 1991 to elect a new Ukrainian Parliament.

Gorbachov was most successful in the Muslim republics, where under the not-so-democratic guiding hand of the local party mafias that run these fiefdoms, votes of 90-95% were scored for the new Union Treaty. The same huge majorities were produced for companion questions, calling for full sovereignty for each of these Muslim republics.

For Gorbachov and for the Moscow leadership as a whole, these qualified successes come at a critical juncture, where mass ferment against the economic debacle is rising fast and threatening to explode. Spearheading this is the nationwide coal miners' strike, which on March 22 will enter its fourth week. What began on March 1 in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine, has since spread to involve some 300,000 miners in over 165 coal mines, and to affect every major coal region of the U.S.S.R.: Donetsk, the huge Kuznetsk Basin in Central Siberia, the huge Karaganda coal fields in Kazakhstan, the Rostov on Don region in southern Russia, the Vorkuta mines in the far north of Russia, the coal mines of western Ukraine; and as of March 19, the strike had spread to the coal mines of the Chelyabinsk region in the Urals.

The Kremlin's tough attitude toward the striking coal miners, refusing to give in to their wage and other economic demands in total contrast to the posture adopted by Moscow in previous miners' strikes, reveals how supercharged the political atmosphere is. Moscow has chosen the policy it sees as the lesser of two evils, preferring to take the production losses and ripple effect on other industries on the chin, rather than granting the miners a victory, and thus opening the floodgates for strikes in Soviet industries across-the-board, which would create far greater economic damage and unforeseeable political consequences.

For Gorbachov, it's far easier to win a "mandate" on paper than to win the people's support in practice. The March 17 referendum was not a crucial test, but merely an episode. The real test will come in April as the mass unrest seething just below the surface comes closer to erupting.

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## Yugoslavia

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# Odd bedfellows act to avoid civil war

by Konstantin George

As of this writing on March 20, the Yugoslav Federation may have pulled back from the brink of civil war. The threat of catastrophe has been building up over weeks, as the Federation's largest republic, Serbia, is pitted against the independence-seeking northwestern republics of Croatia and Slovenia, and the Serbian-dominated Armed Forces have actively threatened a military coup. Fear of the totally unpredictable consequences should that Rubicon be crossed, however, has produced a new constellation of political forces, both in Croatia and Slovenia, and most emphatically in the ranks of the Serbian elite, to pull back from the abyss. These forces, while having no love for each other, have, ironically, a common interest in preventing a civil war this spring.

The tactical form this operation has taken is the drive to undermine the key player seeking to plunge Yugoslavia into civil war, the demagogic bolshevik who is President of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic.

A series of events that occurred on March 19 points to likely success for the operation to declaw, if not dethrone, Milosevic. To start with, a declaration by the Serbian-led Yugoslav General Staff, read on Yugoslav TV, confirmed that the Yugoslav Army will not stage a military coup as had been desired by Milosevic. The General Staff declared categorically that the Army will "not interfere in the political conflicts" in the country, and "under no circumstances" will the Army allow the situation to devolve into "armed clashes" let alone "civil war."

Beyond that, the Army issued demands which were remarkably balanced, in that while some of these were directed against Croatia and Slovenia, others rejected the Milosevic policy of trying to forge a Greater Serbia this spring by force of arms, through detaching Serb-inhabited territories from Croatia and the central republic of Bosnia, sandwiched between Serbia and Croatia.

The part of the declaration aimed at Croatia and Slovenia was: 1) the demand that the Territorial Forces of the Army be again placed under the command of the Yugoslav Army (last year, Slovenia and Croatia had removed their Territorial Forces from the central command of Belgrade); and 2) the demand that the financing of the Armed Forces be guaranteed (Croatia and Slovenia had considerably reduced their contributions to the federal budget, above all to the Armed Forces).

Defense spending comprises 30% of the total Yugoslav federal budget.

However, the Army stated in the strongest language that it will not allow any territorial encroachment by one republic against any other: "The borders in Yugoslavia will be secured from any kind of threat and no changes will be allowed." This fires point-blank against Serbian leader Milosevic, as no other republic except Serbia has ever advanced territorial claims on other republics.

Without the support of the Army, the position of Milosevic has become all but hopeless. He had to have Army backing to pursue his planned confrontation with Croatia over its regions of Pakrac and Knin, inhabited by ethnic Serbs.

Within hours of the General Staff declaration, the turning point in the crisis came, as Belgrade TV announced that "it has been decided" to hold a meeting of the Presidents of all six republics in the Croatian capital of Zagreb on March 21, to work out a solution to the crisis. This is tantamount to an order summoning Milosevic to appear in the capital of his arch-enemy, Croatia. If the Serbian leader shows up, he will be humiliated and lose. Should he decide to boycott the meeting, he will be more isolated than ever. Either way, he cannot win.

### **Serbian elite dumping Milosevic**

The current phase of the Yugoslav crisis opened with mass demonstrations earlier in March in Belgrade, by the anti-communist Serbian nationalist opposition to Milosevic, centered in the Serbian Renewal Party led by one Vuk Draskovic, an avowed Serbian chauvinist like Milosevic, but of the pre-war monarchist stripe. These almost daily demonstrations are the public face of a deep split in the Serbian elite over how to proceed to create a "Greater Serbia." A large part of the Serbian elite, in the Armed Forces, and above all in the Serbian Orthodox Church, had concluded that Milosevic had become a hopeless liability, and that his "flight forward" was plunging Serbia to disaster.

This conclusion had been reached already last year, but at that time, Milosevic was unassailable—riding high on a wave of popularity gained by his brutal suppression of ethnic Albanians who live in the then-autonomous province of Kosovo, which is within Serbia's borders. However, the worst winter economically since the early postwar years has destroyed the former popularity of Milosevic (George Bush, take note!). The "bread factor" has become paramount. The economy of Serbia is plagued by hyperinflation, mass unemployment, and the threat of shutdown of large industrial enterprises. The crisis is qualitatively even worse than what is going on in Russia.

To distract attention from the shattered economy, and as the only way to recoup his eroded position, Milosevic decided to launch a war against Croatia by no later than May 15. Until that date, the Serb Borisav Jovic will be Yugoslav State President, under the rotation system among the six federal

republics, and presumably, would collaborate with Milosevic in calling on the Army to annex for Serbia the Knin and Pakrac regions of Croatia.

This was the last straw for the strong opposition faction in the Serbian elite behind Vuk Draskovic. Had the Milosevic plan gone ahead, it would have unleashed not only a full-scale civil war between Serbia and Croatia, but forced Slovenia and Bosnia into the war as Croatia's allies. On top of that, the Albanian resistance in Kosovo, which Milosevic had contained, but never crushed, would have exploded in Serbia's rear.

### **The 'British factor'**

The constellation of forces acting to prevent civil war is by no means confined to native Yugoslav parties. British interests are actively meddling to block the imminent threat of uncontrolled disintegration, by toppling the Serbian Communist regime of Milosevic. This policy, while having the beneficial by-product of preventing a bloodbath at this time, is aimed at restoring the pre-war hegemony Britain had exerted in the Serb-dominated Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1918-41.

From the British imperial standpoint, the only viable counter to the German and other Central European interests who are actively boosting the republics of Croatia and Slovenia, which historically had been part of Central Europe, as provinces of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, is to build up Greater Serbia. Never one to support an obvious loser, Britain has no use for the vehicle of the discredited, weak, and mentally unstable Slobodan Milosevic, and the institution of the Communist Party.

There is strong British support for the anti-Milosevic "Greater Serbia" faction around Vuk Draskovic and his Serbian Renewal Party. Draskovic, in an interview broadcast on German TV March 15, declared that "the day I become President of Serbia," replacing Milosevic, "the first thing I will do is bring back Prince Alexander" from his London exile to become "the King of Serbia."

Unlike Milosevic, Draskovic is not opposed to Yugoslavia becoming a loose confederation of sovereign states, and, indeed is not opposed to Croatia becoming independent as such, as he stressed in the cited interview to German TV. However, like Milosevic, Draskovic, as he repeated in the interview to German TV, will never allow an independent Croatia within the present borders: "The Serbian regions must join Serbia. . . . If Croatia refuses, that means war." Tactically, however, Draskovic is willing to take his time in creating a Greater Serbia—British style.

Thus, Yugoslavia will probably avoid going over the brink this spring, but no one should become complacent over the breathing space achieved. The underlying political factors, centered above all in the Serbian elite's unswerving goal of creating a "Greater Serbia" out of the ruins of Yugoslavia, mean that the civil war, now on "hold," is at some point all but inevitable.