

The country of confusion

THE YUGOSLAVS, by Dusko Doder (Random House, 256 pages, \$10).

Reviewed by Geoffrey Fox

Communism and non-alignment, socialism and market competition, atheism and religious conflict, one-party rule and grass-roots democracy—these are a few of the elements that combine to make Yugoslavia one of the most contradictory and bewildering social experiments in Europe. Washington Post correspondent Dusko Doder, a native of Yugoslavia, paints a vivid picture of this land through historical narrative, reports on current social conditions, and his own observations and interviews of people ranging from newly-urbanized peasants to the former party vice president and current dissident, Milovan Djilas.

Created in 1918 from fragments of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, Yugoslavia is a multi-national federation with deep social divisions. Rivalry and jealousy are fierce between the nine million Serbs, "eastern" in traditions and Orthodox in religion, and the five million Croats, Roman Catholic and "western." Even their common language divides them, for the Serbs write it in Cyrillic script (like Russian) and the Croats in Roman, or western, script. Besides Croatian nationalism, the regime must contend with the linguistic and religious demands of Slovenes, Macedonians and Albanians, the last of whom are Muslims.

It has been Josip Broz Tito's great accomplishment to hold these disparate populations together in one state, to preserve the independence of that state from the two postwar superpowers, and to oversee a large increase in material prosperity for the 22 million Yugoslavs. But in the process, enormous new problems have been created.

Doder is liveliest when describing some of the incongruities created when a modernizing Communist state meets a pre-capitalist culture.

For example, brides are still purchased in the Muslim areas, but the price has gone way up and the girls don't always cooperate; a peasant woman in Belgrade sells vegetables from her Mercedes; and veteran Communists occasionally avenge their relatives by murdering other veteran Communists.

The rotating migration of an estimated one million Yugoslavs to jobs in western Europe has placed special strains on Yugoslav society: not only is the absence of so many men a serious problem for families, but the returnees bring back foreign tastes, foreign ideas (they seem especially to admire Swedish socialism), and, often, foreign earnings which they invest in fancy homes or small businesses and prestige goods such as automobiles. More and more Yugoslavia seems to deserve the label attached to it by Italian leftists—"il socialismo borghese," or bourgeois socialism.

The weakest part of the book is the discussion of self-management, a program of democratic management of industries by the workers themselves inaugurated in 1950. Doder's vignettes give the impression of bungling incompetence by, or on behalf of, ill-informed workers, whereas in fact workers' self-management has improved technical efficiency and has been a major contributor to Yugoslavia's having one of the highest economic growth rates in the world in the years 1953-1972. His statement that "direct grass roots democracy based on self-management is irreconcilably at odds with Communist one-party rule" is itself irreconcilably at odds with the experience not only of Yugoslavia but of Cuba, China and socialist Chile (1970-73) as well. Workers' self-management has also had the effect of reducing economic inequalities (between regions and between individual workers), a tendency which has been reversed by Tito's 1965 introduction of "market socialism."

According to Doder, "The introduction of a market economy has

provided an element of rationality in the system; consumerism has diverted attention from political grievances and toward materialism, which is lustily pursued by almost everybody." On the contrary, it is evident that the market economy provides for the greatest irrationality in the system. For example, since the economic reforms ("market socialism") of 1965, a firm's growth depends not on its technical efficiency or the utility of its product, but on such factors as its integration into the market and the quality of contacts with the local bank. Comprehensive nationwide economic planning is impossible.

As Doder himself shows us, those regions of the country which are already more advanced, such as Slovenia, continue to develop while more backward regions, such as Macedonia, provide them with labor and (by their purchases of finished goods) with capital. Thus regional inequalities and capital concentration increase. Despite massive development needs in Yugoslavia itself, a million Yugoslav workers are providing cheap labor to western European capitalism. Even so, as many as 10 to 15 percent of the labor force in regions like Macedonia remains unemployed. This is not "rationality"; it is not even a "system."

This richly detailed book is not, as Milovan Djilas claims on the dust jacket, "non-ideological,"—if such a thing is even conceivable—but one which implicitly judges Yugoslavia against the American values of consumer acquisitive power and formal institutional protections of dissent. By these criteria, Doder pronounces the country a "better" place to live than the Soviet bloc, but "worse" than western Europe.

Looked at another way, Yugoslavia is an underdeveloped country that has retained the party dictatorship of European Communism, added the social democratic institution of self-management, but surrendered its economic planning to the vagaries of a world market dominated by the developed capitalist countries, the whole thing barely held together by the ad hoc improvisations of the aged Marshall Tito. It is no wonder that Yugoslavs appear confused.

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