

# Ancient dark brooding

**H**ail Greater Serbia! This rather bizarre slogan may not arouse most Canadians, but to 22.5 million Yugoslavs, the old rallying cry of Serbian nationalism means more big trouble in an already deeply troubled nation. Yugoslavia's Serbs, who make up about a third of the population, are on the warpath.

On Tuesday, 80,000 Serbs rallied in the latest of a series of mounting demonstrations over the crisis in Kossova which is fast shaking the Yugoslav federal state to its wobbly foundations.

Kossova is Yugoslavia's poorest province, with 50% unemployment. Just under 2 million ethnic Albanians make up 90% of the troubled province's inhabitants. The Albanians are largely Muslim, with a Catholic minority. They are old blood enemies of the Orthodox Serbs who cherish Kossova as the cradle of their medieval empire.

Kossovars — as the Kossova Albanians are called — have been demanding a fully autonomous republic within the Yugoslav federation.

They insist that Serbia exploits Kossova, keeps it mired in poverty and treats the region like an occupied territory.

Kossova is currently garrisoned by a large hunk of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army and the Serbian security police.

Thousands of Kossovars have been thrown into Yugoslav prisons where they are frequently abused. Amnesty International has denounced Yugoslavia for violations of the human rights of its Albanian citizens.

The Serbs have responded by calling for more Albanian heads to be broken. The increasingly powerful Serbian party boss, Slobodan Milosevic, has seized on this issue and is leading what many Serbs call their third great national revolt.

Kossova's remaining Serbian minority is being driven out by the Albanians. So charge the Serbs, supported by Montenegrins and many Macedonians, also traditional enemies of the Albanians. Yugoslavia's other important ethnic groups who don't much like Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Bosnians, are moderately sympathetic to Kossovars.

Behind all of this nationalist fire and smoke lies the far graver problem of Yugoslavia's collapsing

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economy. Inflation is running at about 190% per annum. Exports are falling and the nation staggers under a huge foreign debt.

Unemployment is rising. Real wages are falling. And Yugoslavs of all ethnic groups are hurting. Unable to deal with the nation's thorny problems, politicians are gleefully diverting public opinion by stoking the fires of nationalism.

Yugoslavs are peppery people. It doesn't take much to get them riled up at their neighbors.

Right now, Albanians make excellent scapegoats for Yugoslavia's ailments, and party boss Milosevic may well believe that he can become a second Tito, or perhaps a sort of Marxist monarch, by launching a Serbian crusade against Kossovars.

Deep down, this means the old fight of the Serbs against the Turks.

The Albanian Kossovars are handy stand-ins for distracting old bogeymen from the past.

This political theatre is also very popular in Greece and Soviet Armenia where people are diverted from growing economic problems by drum-beating over the evil Turks (in Greece) or the evil Azerbaijanis (in Armenia).

Truly, nationalism is the last refuge for scoundrels and certainly, as we see in this latest Balkan hot pot, for politicians who have wrecked the economy. This time, Milosevic and his mad-as-hell Serbs are playing with fire. Stirring up nationalist passions in the Balkans is like shooting off Roman candles in a gunpowder factory.

Yugoslavia's other ethnic groups will not calmly sit back and watch Milosevic promote his explosive version of Serbia *ueber alles*.

Croatians and Bosnians have long knives and longer memories of massacres of their people by Serbs during the dark years of World War II.

Albanians, a fierce race of stubborn mountain warriors, are not about to be pushed around by the advocates of Greater Serbia.

Neighboring Albania, to which Kossova once belonged, may not sit idly by if Serbian troops begin to machine-gun Kossovars.

Albania, tiny as it is, managed to kick out the Russians in 1961, and might just decide to take on the Yugoslavs. Balkan warriors fight best when they are hopelessly outnumbered.

The frightening prospect of a Fourth Balkan War in this century or civil war in Yugoslavia ought to dampen down its steamy ethnic passions.

Alas, most people have forgotten just how savage Balkan feuds can be — and how dangerous to world peace. World War I began in Serbia. Let's hope World War III does not.

The Serbs would do better to forget about the glories of yesterday and begin solving the economic crises of today.

## Punch

