

# Balkan feuds never die

**I**t seems my recent column on the rebellious Yugoslav province of Kosova has touched off the Third Balkan War—in Toronto, that is. Scores of angry Serbians wrote in to denounce me and deny my assertion that Kosova's Albanian majority was being roughly handled by Yugoslavia's Serbian rulers. Good for them. No one ever accused the doughty Serbs of being timid and I love a good fight.

This tempest in a Turkish coffee cup also shows just how dangerous the Balkan's old tribal feuds still remain.

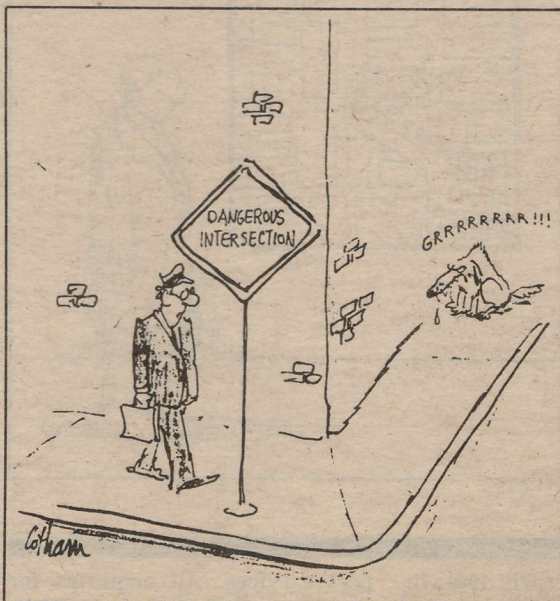
One letter I received did give me pause for more thought and inspired this column. His Eminence, Georgije, the Serbian Orthodox Bishop of Canada, wrote a long complaint to the *Sun* about me. In it, he lists an entire page of alleged Albanian crimes against the Serbians of Kosova, including the abduction and forced marriage to an Albanian of a 13-year old Serbian virgin and the by now infamous case of the Serbian farmer, George Martinovic who—depending on which side you listen to—either forced a large bottle up his anus or was raped with same by nefarious Albanians. Life in the Balkans has its moments.

The good Bishop Georgije went on to say that "it would be impossible to list all the Albanian crimes carried out on the Serbians living in Kosova." These Serbians refused to abandon Kosova in spite of the "tyranny and abuse ... the terror" from the Albanians and, "patient Christians" all, remain steadfast.

Other letters from incensed Serbians accuse the Albanians of Kosova of being terrorists and racists. They warn, darkly, of the threat of "Greater Albania!" Now, there are only 1.8 million Albanians in Kosova and smaller numbers in Montenegro and Macedonia. Deployed against them is a large portion of the Yugoslav Army, plus the much-feared secret police and special anti-riot units.

Albanians make up about 9% of Yugoslavia's population. Who, one must ask, is bullying whom?

**Punch**



**ERIC  
MARGOLIS**



But what really caught my attention in Bishop Georgije's letter was its none-too-subtle tone of religious zeal—almost a crusading spirit. Most of the Albanians of Kosova are Moslems and the rest Catholic. Sometimes it's hard to tell which religion is less popular with the Orthodox Serbs but I suspect the Moslems come in first. Underlying the whole squabble over Kosova is the historical enmity between Orthodox and Moslems. Many Serbians seem to have confused the Albanians with their old Turkish enemies.

There is also the strong anti-Moslem bias in Yugoslavia that remains an unfortunately active force today, a subject about which we hear very little. No one even knows for sure how many Moslems there are in Yugoslavia since hundreds of thousands were forced to Slavicize their names.

Many others, including large numbers of Kosovar Albanians, were forced out of the country. Besides 1.6 million or so Albanian Kosovars, there are perhaps 2 million or more Moslems in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. They are Yugoslavia's hidden minority.

Since religion is so closely linked to the explosive nationality issue in Yugoslavia, the central government in Belgrade has made strong efforts to downplay its influence. Particular pressure has been brought against Moslems, including the reported closing of mosques and religious schools and discrimination against Moslems in jobs, the military and government.

Bulgaria, it's worth noting, has been doing much the same to its Moslem minority. Except that the Bulgars have been far harsher than the Yugoslavs, using forced conversions and name changes, backed by jailing and even some reported executions to enforce the Bulgarization of its unfortunate Moslem minority.

Interestingly, the only real competition to communism in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia seems to be resurgent Islam. Communist leaders don't like this one bit. Moslems in the Balkans are often treated as second-class citizens and given the same sort of cold shoulder as the Jews of the Soviet Union.

This is one more reason why the uproar in Kosova has such dangerous overtones. Any major outburst of religious and tribal passion in Kosova could easily ignite the powder train of Balkan hatreds. Just look at Belfast or Beirut to see what happens when tribalism runs amok. What's needed now is for Belgrade to ease up on its repression of the Kosovar Albanians and to start giving them a better economic deal.

Risky, to be sure, but it's time Belgrade make Kosova into an autonomous federal republic. It's also time for all concerned to stop puffing hot air and calm down. Balkan tempers are notoriously bad. And, may I respectfully suggest to the good Bishop Georgije, that he might practise a bit more Christian neighborliness toward the Moslems and Catholics, infidels though they may be.