

# Civil war looms in Yugoslavia

by Konstantin George

The disorderly outcome of the July 30-31 plenary session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia has all but guaranteed the centrifugal breakup of the Yugoslav Federation along ethnic lines by sometime next year. The plenum's proceedings, an endless stream of recriminations between Serbia and the republics which are resisting Serbian domination, documented the irreconcilable split in the country along east-west lines, with the western republics of Slovenia and Croatia, joined by Muslim Bosnia, at odds with a "Greater Serbia" coalition of the eastern republics, formed by Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. The confrontation is expected to escalate between now and the December extraordinary party congress, which will bring the fight to a head. From that point on, anything could happen—including secession by Slovenia and Croatia, civil war, a "Greater Serbia" military coup, or all of these combined.

Over the past year, a "Greater Serbia" power play, led by the radical demagogue Slobodan Milosevic, has gained enormous political strength. The Milosevic gang has gained control over the republics of Montenegro and Macedonia, as well as the autonomous regions within Serbia of Vojvodina and Kosovo, giving them control over the entire eastern half of the country.

In the weeks preceding the plenum, Serbia extended that power play into an assault on the western republics of Croatia and Slovenia. In July, the Serbian media launched a campaign of denunciation against the federal government of Prime Minister Ante Markovic (who comes from Croatia) for favoring Slovenia and Croatia at the expense of Serbia. The Serbian media accused Markovic of doing this to "create unrest in Serbia" with the goal of "toppling the government of Serbia."

One week before the plenum, the Slovenian Party met and defied Serbia and the Serbian-run military by passing a new Slovenian Constitution, proclaiming Slovenia's right to secede from Yugoslavia, and declaring "null and void" the provisions of the current Yugoslav Constitution which give the central government in Belgrade the sole right to declare an emergency and to send troops into a constituent republic.

At the plenum, Markovic and others denounced the Serbian plot to grab all Yugoslavia, but they carefully avoided attacking Serbia by name, mindful of the fact that Serbia

continues to enjoy strong support from the country's military leadership. Markovic charged "opponents" of trying "to topple the [federal] government," of "drafting plans to make a [Serb-dominated] strong central government responsible for everything," stripping the republics of most of their present constitutional powers. Markovic complained bitterly, "Most of the measures we've taken have been blocked or prevented." He was backed by Ivica Racan, a Croat member of the federal party Presidium, who declared, in a reference to the Serbs, that "nationalism is creating false hopes and feeding illusions that this is the only way to overcome existing problems."

Slovenian speakers reiterated their republic's right to secede, and warned that if Yugoslavia does not remain decentralized, and allow a "multi-party system," Yugoslavia will cease to exist.

Bosnia, with a one-third Serbian minority, feels most threatened as the next target of the Milosevic power play. Reflecting this, Bosnian speakers, led by Central Committee member Muhamed Abadzic, attacked Serbia and Milosevic by name: "There are attempts to thrust Slobodan Milosevic upon Yugoslavia as the new savior. . . . Other national groups see it as a provocation to see the picture of Milosevic everywhere, on buildings, cars, trucks, buses."

## The Serbian coup threat

Milosevic did not directly respond to these charges at the plenum. Instead, the Serbs let the military leadership take the offensive, by openly threatening a military coup unless a thorough purge of the national leadership is undertaken. The purge call was issued in a plenum speech by Gen. Simeon Bunic, a Serb and political boss of the military. He warned that "growing [non-Serbian] nationalism is threatening the security of the state and many political leaders are not acting for the good of the country. . . . It's clear that many top positions have been occupied by people who have no developed sense of society as a whole." This, he warned, could lead to "destructive events."

Right after the plenum ended in pandemonium, the misleading political calm prevailing in the Kosovo region since the bloody strikes and riots of March came abruptly to an end, when 600 ethnic Albanian miners from the Trepca lead and zinc mine—the mine where the February strike wave began—walked out.

The strike will in all likelihood mark the opening round of an escalating fragmentation crisis between now and the December extraordinary party congress, which the just-ended plenum was supposed to have been preparing for. But instead of making those preparations, the only thing which the Central Committee members agreed upon at the plenum, was a privately expressed, consensus that the December party congress will almost certainly be the last for the federal party, which will mark the end of the Yugoslav state as it has existed since 1945.