

Mihailo Crnobrnja, *The Yugoslav Drama*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp. xiv, 304

reviewed in the Canadian Journal of Political Science/

XXX :4 December 1997

**David Law**

**(Queen's University & Royal Military College)**

When Mihailo Crnobrnja completed the first edition of *The Yugoslav Drama* in late 1993, the prospects for ending the conflict in the former Yugoslavia appeared faint. So much so that to some of us, myself included as a member of NATO's international staff at that time, they seemed very much to be in danger of fading out altogether. But the worst was yet to come: the bloodying of the market place in Sarajevo, the ethnocide in the so-called safe areas and UNPROFOR's rising embarrassment at the hands of ruthless irregulars holding its peacekeepers to hostage and ridicule. Fittingly, the final chapter of the first edition was entitled *Is there a Solution?*

That the second edition concludes under the heading *A Chance for Peace at Last* underscores just how much fortunes have changed during the last four years. As Crnobrnja explains, the turning point came in the spring of 1994 when NATO airpower was unleashed over Bosnia. Together with the reversals inflicted on Bosnian Serb forces by the Moslem and Croat armies, this set the stage for the Dayton Accord that still holds sway today.

Nevertheless, it is hard to put this book down with a sense of relief. In Crnobrnja's assessment, a lasting peace is threatened on several fronts. There is the plight of the over two million refugees and displaced persons, and the restitution of their property. There is a shattered economy to be rebuilt. There is a civil society to be restored. Clearly, it will remain difficult to rally confidence in the future while masterminds of ethnic cleansing remain in power and their lieutenants are able to defy international warrants for their arrest.

So what should the West do? Crnobrnja advocates an extended military presence under US direction and European-led financing of reconstruction. He warns that the alternative could be a new war in and over Bosnia, with the wider consequences of which many have warned through the conflict. He is right to do so. The Balkans are full of weak and fractured states as Albania's recent collapse underlines. If anything, the risk of overspill has increased. At the same time, America has been tiring of its leadership role in European security while in European capitals budgetary rigour has become the mantra. The big picture is not encouraging.

The strong points of The Yugoslav Drama are many. The author is a practitioner, a former Yugoslav diplomat who represented his country in Brussels, and who has keen insight into the workings of the various institutions that have been involved in the conflict. Himself a Serb, he castigates those members of the Serb elite who misused their community's nationalism in a desperate effort to stay professionally afloat in post-Cold War Europe. He writes then with credibility about how similar concerns were played out in Yugoslavia's other republics, and why the responsibility for the country's breakdown and in part even the atrocities that came in its wake has to be shared. He dispenses convincingly with an argument that was often tossed about in the West as its governments agonised over the cost and terms of engagement. For Crnobrnja, there is no Balkan mind-set of national megalomania, indelible grudges and bestial behaviour to which communities of the area succumb whenever they are released from the containing grip of superior force.

Less than expert *Yugo-watchers* will have to read the book in tandem with a chronology, a supply of maps (larger than the three provided here) and a who's who. Beyond that, the editing in the penultimate chapters is sub-standard and the analysis is sometimes ambiguous. A prime example of this can be found in the passages relating to Tito's track record and legacy. Did the Yugoslav leader stand up to Stalin or was he pushed out of the emerging communist bloc? Was he a creative patriot or an apparatchik-opportunist? And what was really his part in the dissolution of his country? But these are hard questions, and Mihailo Crnobrnja is not the first to fail to come completely to grips with them.