



Above: Street scene in Plovdiv, Bulgaria
Below: Yugoslav shepherd-girl



(continued from previous page)

These regions all spoke Latin when the ancestors of the present warring nations belonged to Europe only geographically. But the Slavs poured in after the third century A.D. followed by hordes from Central Asia called Huns, Magyars, Bulgars, and Petchenegs. They had hardly all shaken down into Christendom when the Turks—last of the Asiatic invaders—swept like a hailstorm up the peninsula to the Gates of the West at Vienna. Six centuries they stayed farming the peasants, the *rayah* or toiling cattle of the conquerors. Then, towards the beginning of last century, when the hand of the parasite ruler was trembling with inevitable demoralisation, fugitive chieftains appeared to reclaim their people, raiding out from the impenetrable fastnesses to which the boldest and bitterest had all through the centuries escaped — mountain-sheltered nooks in the Greek gulfs, the Black Mountain of Montenegro, the oak forests of Serbia, the further slopes of the Balkan Range (core of Bulgaria), and the Principalities across the Danube still proud of their origin as Roman colonies (hence *Romania*) that had Russia to their back.

It is because the peninsula's centres of redemption were so many that the Balkan map has shifted colours like a chameleon; that its states have changed shape and size like amoebae; and that their strife has been backed like that of fighting cocks by calculating "Powers." For there are bigger differences inside some of the present nations than exist between them. Half of Yugoslavia, for example, is Roman Catholic; half Orthodox. Half writes Latin alphabet; half Cyrillic. One strip (Slovenia) is thoroughly Western: one strip half barbaric,

and so on. Blame history for the political mis-shape of the Balkans. Racially, culturally, and linguistically (with the single exception of the Greeks) its people are all Slavs together and little brothers of the Russians.

Time to Forget Balkan "Nations"

In fact, to think about Balkan "nations" is simply to perpetuate Balkan misery. Europe as a cultural unit is smaller than we normally think. Of the great area east of Germany and Italy only Finland, Bohemia, Hungary, and the "German" section of Poland have taken part in the western historical development that has created national states, national languages, national laws and law-courts, national monarchies and churches, national cultures and literatures, national armies and education systems, an urban middle class and capitalist industry. Elsewhere from Estonia to Istanbul there has been only the one "Green Proletariat," speaking local Slav dialects (now called languages), ruling its local life by village elders, fanatically attached to its little farms, and not caring greatly whether The Castle spoke Swedish, Russian, German, Magyar, or Turkish.

Our attempt to ring-fence little areas of these peasants into constitutional, capitalist nation-states has created chaos. Politically it is being suggested (by Sumner Welles for the whole area, by Tito for Yugoslavia, by Stalin along the Baltic shore) that we cultivate the existing roots instead: i.e., go back to village and regional self-government inside two, or at most three, confederations of the present states. The boundaries of such Federations would be fixed by economics, not politics—which in itself would raise Balkan and East European standards considerably. More, however, would be needed. The entire Slav world rejects our capitalist notion of intangible property — whether it be investments, labour, or merely more land than a man's own family can market-garden. In Russia the peasant now works on his own plot for fun and pocket-money and on the Collective farm for subsistence. Possibly the reverse may suit the Balkans, i.e., individual farming, made payable by slack-period work in village co-operatives. If only Henry Wallace's much-derided vision of "a T.V.A. for the Danube" were made reality (the potential power for it is hurtling through the Iron Gates), then "Soviets plus Electricity" (to quote Lenin this time: "Soviets" meaning village self-government and co-operative industries) might read Salvation for East Europe.

This is speculation. The fact is that the Russians are in the Balkans.

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