

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR-46  
Earthquake:  
Skopje the Morning After

Gosp. Jevremova 32A  
Belgrade, Yugoslavia  
15 August 1963

Mr. Richard Nolte  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

A pall of dust hangs over the ruins of Skopje, like a blanket thrown over a battered corpse, to protect the mutilated city from the gaze of casual passers-by on the highway to Greece. Only those with business in the devastated Macedonian capital are allowed past police barricades erected at the turn-off from the Belgrade-Athens Autoput. Once inside they find, as American Secretary of Agriculture Orvil Freeman did on his brief visit last Friday, that the damage is "worse than I had expected"; none of the news stories and photographs broadcast from Skopje has really communicated the totality of its destruction, and one must see it for himself to discover

that Yugoslav poet Dobriša Čolić is not being impudent when he compares Skopje after the earthquake to Hiroshima after the atom bomb.



On the 26th of July, at 5:17 a.m., an earthquake with an intensity of 10<sup>0</sup> (on the 12<sup>0</sup> Mercalli scale) struck the capital city of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. Other shocks, of decreasing intensity, followed, until over 300 of them had been recorded before the upper Vardar valley had re-stabilized

itself a fortnight later. Within forty minutes of the first tremor a city of 200,000 inhabitants lay mortally wounded. The human death toll was remarkably low - the latest count is still under 1,100, with 3,383 injured and 833 in hospital - but over 85% of the city's buildings had either collapsed or were so badly damaged that they must be pulled down. It is the first large city to be destroyed by earthquake since Messina, half a century ago.

In their reactions to a catastrophe of this magnitude a nation and a regime reveal to public scrutiny much of their soul and their character that is normally hidden. Measured by Skopje in the first fortnight after

the earthquake, both the Yugoslav peoples and their Government have not done badly. The ordinary Skopjanci have generally stood up to the test with a stoic courage marred only by its passivity. Their fellow Yugoslavs have responded with a generosity that matches that of the world at large, which in turn is marred only by a tendency, perhaps inevitable, to measure help offered in terms of Cold War, East-West rivalry. ("They're not doing nearly as much as we are, and the Yugoslavs are noticing it," said in pleased tones.) And the Regime, both Republican and Federal, has acted with a thoroughness and efficiency that are pleasantly surprising in a State crippled by poverty and bureaucracy.

I arrived in Skopje ten days after the disastrous first quake. The earth was still shivering from time to time, but so slightly that only seismographs and the more sensitive citizens could feel its tremors. The injured had been sent to hospital, most of the dead had been dug out and re-buried in more appropriate places. When the wind blew, windows and chunks of masonry would come tumbling down from the abandoned buildings of the city, and the dust rose chokingly again, smelling of death where death still lay undiscovered. Here and there a street was blocked because some larger structure was thought still likely to collapse by itself. The first shock was wearing off, government reorganization was underway, officials had had time to collect their wits, the first foreign assistance had begun to arrive, most of the special foreign correspondents had departed, and it was time to see what the Skopjanci and their Government were going to do next.

Everyone naturally wanted to tell his story of the first day. From the myriad of these I heard, one or two vignettes seem appropriate to a picture of the atmosphere and psychology of the disaster. The Republican Secretary of Information told me how he and his wife had argued after the first quake the relative merits of remaining in their shuddering house or escaping into the street; like most who saved their lives, they opted for the street. There the family gathered and as the hours passed they tried to muster courage to go back inside to rescue their most valuable possessions. The only one who brought himself to do it was the father-in-law, who dashed into the house and returned with...one pair of sunglasses and four unmatched shoes.

That afternoon, while most of the city was searching the still trembling ruins for members of their families, some went for a swim in the Vardar, as the Skopjanci normally do on a hot summer day. Across the street from the Makedonija Hotel, where army units were digging their way toward 70 bodies and as many buried alive, a young man played the guitar.

The next morning, while quakes continued, the peasants of the surrounding area who normally supply the open-air markets of Skopje came as usual with their produce, deposited it at the places where they were wont to sell it, and left it there to be picked up by townspeople in need.

One peasant, from a nearby town, was apprehended by local citizens in the act of helping himself to the contents of a shattered shop window. An attempted lynching was frustrated by police only after the man was so severely injured that he is still in hospital; a policeman was also injured and a police car smashed. This incident is official and has been reported in the

THE RUINS OF SKOPJE





**ELEVENTH DAY:** Sometimes the dead were still being exhumed.



**KARPOŠ:** In this modern subdivision, one apartment house collapsed completely, with 195 dead. Others, while they looked complete except for windows, were so structurally shattered that they must be pulled down. On abandoned balconies potted plants slowly shriveled and died in the hot sun from lack of attention, mute symbol of the death of the city.

press. Unconfirmed but apparently true is that another thief was successfully lynched by a group of soldiers. Also unconfirmed, and probably not true, is the story that eight further thieves were summarily shot by the military acting under martial law; but the story is widely told in the ruins of Skopje.

By the tenth day order had been re-established. The main streets had been cleared by bulldozers, and traffic police were operating at the major intersections, where their Italianate flourishes (I have never seen Belgrade police with such Florentine gestures) seemed oddly incongruous amid the ruins. Street lights had been put back into operation by the fourth day, by which time police reinforcements from as far away as Croatia and the Vojvodina had arrived in such strength that there were two of them for every block. At night, with a seven o'clock curfew in force (extended to nine o'clock the day before I left), the combined effect of these measures was eerie in the extreme: the police and the streetlights were the only signs of life in a ghost city in which not one building was inhabited.

This night scene in destroyed Skopje is worthy of comment. The Yugoslav press has been boasting that the almost total lack of looting is evidence of the socialist discipline and honesty of the people. To a degree this may be true, but the police, the lights and the curfew would seem to have played some role as well. An additional precaution has not to my knowledge been reported anywhere: on the first day, before streetlights and police were on hand, some 82 persons (13 of them juveniles) with records of previous convictions for larceny were placed under preventive arrest. (When I murmured something about habeas corpus and Anglo-Saxon ideas of justice, my informant said smilingly that this technique had been suggested by an American police officer some years ago, who had told the Yugoslavs that in America we put suspicious characters behind bars by charging them with vagrancy; on July 26th all Skopjanci had become vagrants.) As a result of all these precautions, only 17 people have been caught looting, more than half of them from other parts of the country, the vultures inevitably drawn to the scene of disaster.



CITY HALL

Meanwhile, life is beginning again with new, temporary norms. The city government has been established in the City Park, where a makeshift fair-weather shelter of latticework and two-by-fours lines three sides of an athletic field with open-air compartments labeled (in cardboard) "Criminal Police," "Historical Archive," "Identification Bureau," "Public Records," and the like. Ward governments have been set up in smaller parks in each of the city's four

districts. Councils and chambers are meeting. The old Partisans of Macedonia's Communist government have returned, it seemed to me almost with pleasure, to their beginnings: this is the way they ran the towns of their wartime "liberated areas," where they first learned something about administration and where they attempted to offer the Yugoslav people models of the "popular government" they promised they would give the country after the war.

These are techniques they understand, and in Skopje today, amid conditions reminiscent of those of a war-damaged city of 1944, they are recovering (as far as I could see during a five day visit) the kind of efficiency and enthusiasm with which they won the war and the country twenty years ago - and which they too often seem to have lost in the humdrum, the temptations and the complexity of running a modern industrializing society. Operating out of tents, or in the shade of park trees as big as those of the Bosnian forests, they tend to drop in passing the revealing remark: "You know, it was not unlike this during the war."

Again, as in those years, the police are operating, the newspapers are appearing, damaged factories are re-commencing partial operation, and people are being housed, fed, and organized with considerable dispatch and humanity under difficult circumstances. As in the war, political education is not being neglected. Sitting in one open-air cubicle waiting to talk to a vice-mayor, I found myself next door to a meeting of what appeared to be the municipal youth council. An earnest young man was harranguing his colleagues on the urgent need not to overlook "training in ideological orientation" among the youth brigades at work clearing ruins and building pre-fabricated settlements.

In going back to its origins in this way, government in Skopje also runs the risk of committing familiar errors. What they are doing now is for the most part being done well - and I'll return to that in a moment - but their plans for the future are clouded with the excessive enthusiasm and skyrocketing aspirations that have been among the hallmarks of this Regime at least since the time of the first postwar Five Year Plan. They seem to be expecting more of foreign aid and of domestic technology and industrial capacity than either is likely to deliver; one can only hope that they will be proved right.

At the moment contradictory schemes are in the air. One senior official enthused to me about the new Skopje that will be a "United Nations city": friendly foreign countries will each build one section, typical of its own homeland and appropriately named ("so the American section, for example, will have an 'Abraham Lincoln Street' and a 'Roosevelt Square,' and so on"). Another official, less senior, denied categorically that any such plan is being considered: but each Yugoslav Republic will build a section. (This in fact, as will be seen, is the plan now adopted for the temporary, pre-fabricated towns to rise around the ruins, but that is a rather different matter.) Statistics reflect the confusion of enthusiasm. There was talk of enough pre-fabricated housing for 110,000 people by the end of the year; then it was said that 70,000 would be housed in pre-fabricated buildings (complete with lawns and trees!), while 50,000 would move into such existing buildings as can be repaired; now it has been revealed that the pre-fab settlements actually on the drawing-boards are designed for only 44,000, while "it is difficult to presume that the fixed program will be carried out."

Another negative feature that probably only troubles unbelievers is inserted by ideology. I came across it in its most naive form, albeit in high places, when I sought an answer to the question: how does it happen that relatively so few people were killed in a disaster of these proportions? The real answer is compounded of several factors. The earthquake occurred during the vacation season, when several tens of thousands of Skopjanci were away on holiday. Although it occurred at 5:17 a.m., Yugoslavs are an early-rising people, and a higher proportion of them than would have been the case elsewhere were already out of their homes, at market or on their way to work, when disaster struck. Most important, relatively few buildings appear to have collapsed immediately, and from those which fell down only minutes later, or which remained precariously upright to await the wreckers now beginning work, the inhabitants had time to escape. People buried in small houses that did collapse were generally pulled out alive, primarily as a result of the heroism of their neighbors and especially of the army units which arrived promptly and plunged in to the rescue.

The proof that this is so can be found in the statistics. Nearly half of those who died (more than 460 of the less than 1100) did so in five large buildings which collapsed immediately - one of these being the Makedonija Hotel, which was widely publicized because it contained foreigners. In one modern apartment house in the new "Karpoš" subdivision no less than 195 persons were killed. (I should perhaps add that many local people I spoke to were convinced that the real number of dead is a multiple of the official 1100. This is a natural conclusion to come to, looking at the ruins or counting the dead in the house next door, but I can think of no reason why the Government should want to underestimate the total, or why their statistics should be more than a few hundred wrong at most, even in confused circumstances.)

But none of the officials of whom I asked this question about the remarkably low death-toll gave me this answer. What I was told always began instead with the preamble: "You see, this is a Socialist country..." After several repetitions this began to sound like the religious primitive who says, "You see, we are a God-fearing people," implying that natural catastrophe strikes only the impious; I almost expected to be told that none of the dead had been Communists or members of the Socialist Alliance. In fact I did say in exasperation to one official: "Excuse me, but if a ton of masonry falls on your head, I really can't believe that being a Communist or a citizen of a Socialist state would help very much." He looked at me with blank incomprehension, and I realized that in Skopje at this time the remark was in bad taste.

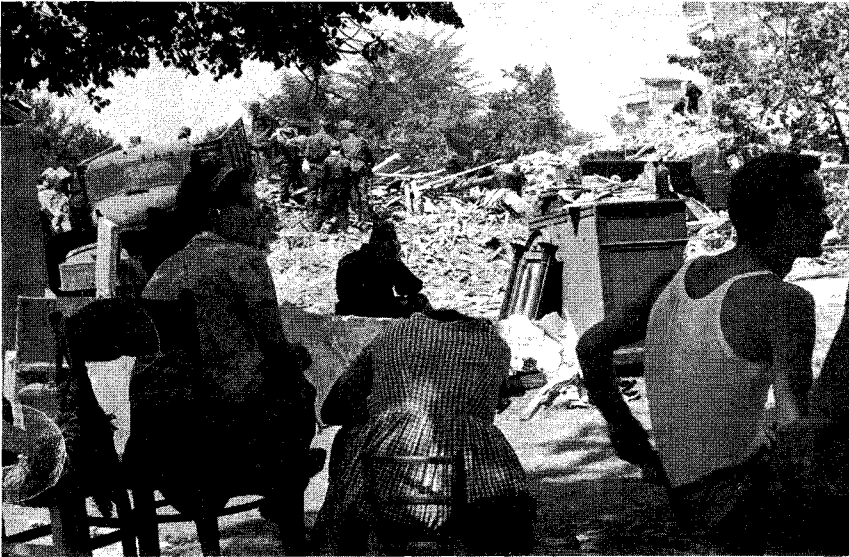
What these people meant, of course, is that under Socialism people think of their neighbors and, as one put it, "would not dare face the world if they had missed a chance to save one." It is undoubtedly true, as I have already remarked, that one reason for the low death-toll was the heroism especially of young army recruits in rescuing those trapped in still crumbling buildings. I prefer to think that such occurrences are not a monopoly of the Socialist world, but it is of considerable significance that this sort of Communist, remembering perhaps the morale of the ancient régime in his own country, believes (or at least says) that it is.

This ideological irritant appears again, in a different form, in a proclamation issued after a meeting of the Skopje aktiv of the League of Communists on the seventh day after the earthquake, which stresses the "role of Communists" in coping with the consequences of the disaster. This is fair enough. In a society in which the League of Communists is a governing elite, it is right and proper that it should demand of its members a leadership, a sense of

civic responsibility and an example that would justify its claim to be an elite. With this in mind, what judgment shall the outsider of goodwill pass on that part of the proclamation which speaks about "the image of a communist which, at this moment, should be persistence, self-sacrifice, responsibility and discipline. The image of a communist should also be reflected in his struggle against foreign, peculiar, and petit-bourgeois manifestations, such as low-spiritedness and apathy, panic, a feeling of ruin, fatalism, and so on. At the same time, the image of a communist should radiate humaneness and socialist humanism. The personal example of the communist must be the sole criterion for judging his value."

(My own judgment, when I had analyzed the statement more carefully, was that it is in general a perfectly reasonable, if somewhat fatuous, exhortation to the less sophisticated members of a fairly extensive governing elite as to how they should behave and what they should do for the morale of their people. The source of my trifling irritation was that such natural, universal and surely "classless" reactions to a catastrophe of this magnitude - low-

spiritedness, apathy, panic, a feeling of ruin - should have to be described as "foreign" and "petit-bourgeois". An irritation no doubt influenced by consciousness that both these labels apply to me!)



Nothing to do but sit, watching one's home being pulled down, hoping to retrieve something from the rubble.

This list of "peculiar manifestations" is in fact a fairly reasonable description of the present attitude of the lower levels of Skopje society. When I arrived many of them were still living in the streets, under a bit of canvas stretched between sidewalk trees, or with nothing more than a rescued iron bedstead and a cooking

pot on the parkway down the middle of one of the wider avenues. A growing proportion of these were moving into one of the four tent settlements organized by the city, or were leaving to live with relatives or friends in other parts of the country, and the number still sleeping in the open decreased noticeably in the days I was there. But there were still enough without any form of shelter to inspire Mayor Blagoje Popov to issue another appeal for more waterproof tents this week.

The tent cities and the evacuation are both well organized. The latter - symbolized by the long convoys of army trucks heading north along the Autoput, loaded with the pitiful remnants of household belongings and with the family



itself perched on top of it all - had reduced the population of Skopje to an estimated 100,000 by the end of the first week in August. Emphasis is being laid on moving out the non-working population, especially small children in view of the continuing possibility of an outbreak of contagious disease among the ruins. But because the exodus is entirely voluntary, it has not gone exactly as the authorities have wished. On the one hand, there have been bitter complaints in the press that some ("only a handful" of course) of the very technical experts and other specialists most needed in the city, victims of panic, have decamped. Some industries are threatening to cut the pay of workers who do not report back without some reasonable excuse (an automatic one is that of a working mother with small children, who is urged to leave). On the other hand, despite reports of more than 40,000 children received in camps and homes in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, the city is still full of them. I talked to some parents in one of the tent cities about this and set off a spontaneous and energetic discussion among them: some said that it was their duty to their offspring to send them away, others distrusted the treatment they might receive in such distant and strange countries as Slovenia and Croatia. A Moslem woman from Bosnia, who has lived for some years in Skopje, told me that her more conservative co-religionists among the Macedonians are particularly unwilling to see their children put in Christian surroundings or a Christian home, even temporarily. Government officials with whom I spoke said categorically that there will be no forced separations of families, so that if working men are unwilling to send away their children, with or without their wives, society will simply have to cope with them in Skopje.

This means, for the moment, tents. In the city park, on the hill called Babi Gazi, and at two other points in the city, a large proportion of the remaining 100,000 Skopjanci - there are as yet no accurate figures, but 60,000 was the number cited by the city's public information officer - have been put under canvas. Once again one is reminded of wartime Partisan camps in the hills. Each of the settlements represents one of the four wards (opštine) of the city, which has a committee in charge of distributing tents, bedding, and other necessities, and which urges the applicant, if he has small children and no functioning place of employment, to evacuate instead. Garbage collection has been organized, the ubiquitous Yugoslav street sprinkling trucks are operating. The attempt to persuade a people not known for their addiction to modern hygiene to use curbside wooden W.C's has been successful enough to prevent any spread of contagious disease or dysentery - so far.

Each settlement also has a public kitchen, organized by the Yugoslav Army but being replaced during my visit by foreign help in the form of mobile kitchens (at the Gazi Baba settlement I watched the East German Red Cross setting up housekeeping with Saxon thoroughness and an air of "now we're here..."; one of the senior Yugoslav camp officials was pestering a visiting Belgrade journalist with the anxious and curious question: "Are all these East Germans Communists?"). At first the food was free at these kitchens, but on the twelfth day after the earthquake a system of coupons was costing 120 dinars (about 15¢) for three meals a day per person. Foreigners were assured that this price made certain that donations from abroad were in fact still being given away free, but that it was considered preferable for psychological and other reasons to make some charge.

In fact, at the two tent settlements I visited about a third of the families had established rudimentary kitchens of their own, beside their tents, at which they prepared meals from foodstuffs bought at the open markets, beginning to

operate again. A city official told me that this was regretted, because it meant a return from the high-calory diet prepared in the army kitchens to the low-calory one - at this season mostly paprika and tomatoes - usual among poorer Macedonians, "and in the coming months we are going to need strong, healthy workers for the tasks that lie ahead."

At the moment, however, most of the people in these camps have nothing to do, and it is here that failures in organization become evident. All workers in the socialist sector are being paid their regular salaries, and all families (including those who were privately employed and who therefore have no salaries to collect) have been offered immediate assistance of 80-150,000 dinars, according to family size, plus a promise of credit facilities at low interest rates. But few in the tent cities have a functioning place of work to go to, and there has been no effort to muster any except for some youth brigades for work clearing ruins or getting the city moving again.

The result is a growing tendency, familiar to those who have seen refugee camps anywhere, to lie around and wait for "them" to build a new city. Yugoslavs from other parts of the country with whom I talked made more of a point of this than I was inclined to do; for my friends from Belgrade it was typical of the Macedonians to wait for other Yugoslavs to do their work for them.

That this is not entirely fair I discovered when I left the demoralizing atmosphere of the tent settlements to visit some of the factories on the outskirts of the city, which were farther from the epicenter of the earthquake and consequently less damaged and able to begin partial operation again a few days after the disaster.

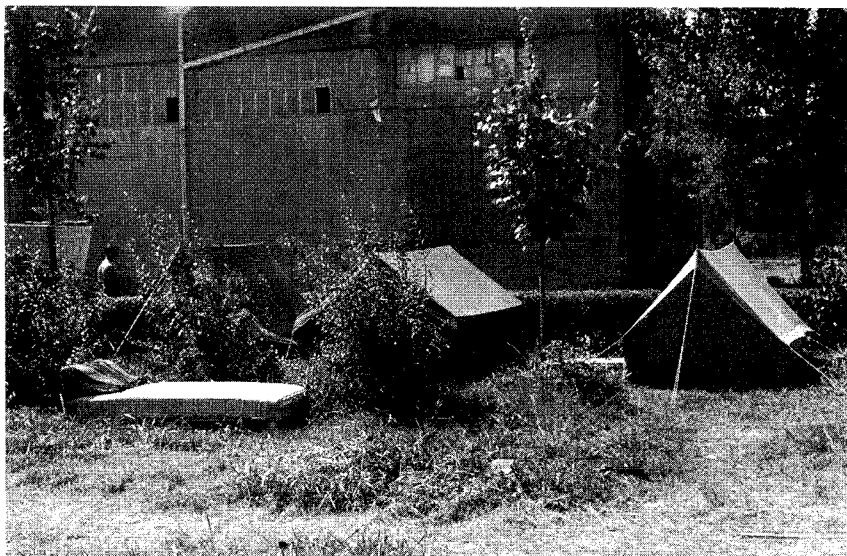
The most impressive of these was the Skopje Glass Factory, employing over 1000 workers and already operating at 30% of pre-earthquake capacity. In its activity, its atmosphere and especially in the personality of its director, Comrade Bogoev, I found the esprit de corps that is the longed-for goal of the Yugoslav system of workers' self-management. The results are heartening. In the beautifully landscaped park that surrounds the eight-year-old factory the workers have set up their own tent settlement to house all their own families. It is managed by a staff representing the Workers' Council, the Party aktiv, the trades union, and the factory youth organization. Those who are not yet back at work, or employed making the repairs that they expect will raise production to 60% of normal within the month, are transported to Skopje every day to help clear ruins.

Director Blagoev greeted me apologizing for his attire of shorts, an undershirt and shoes borrowed from one of his executive assistants. He was on holiday when the earthquake struck, his house is a pile of rubble, and he has only the few possessions that were in his camping rucksack. He and his wife live in a pup tent alongside those of the firm's secretary and accountant. But he had been a Partisan in 1941, he told me, and things were worse then. What is particularly moving and an aid both to recovery and morale, he said, has been the sheaf of telegrams he has received from the firm's foreign customers, offering assistance as well as condolences. He had told one of these, who asked what he might do, that housing for the workers was urgently needed, and he had just received word that a complete barracks, the gift of this customer, would arrive within ten days. "When one is not alone," Blagoev said, "it goes well."

Later I remarked on the beauty of the park surrounding his factory, and the glance of intense pride he gave it, explaining that it was disrupted



**WORKERS' HOUSING:** This is the tent settlement for its workers erected by the "Tito Metal Works", a factory with more than one thousand employees which was functioning again the fourth day. Five hundred of the workers are housed in these tents, but the enterprise hopes to have pre-fabs completed "before the rains."



**MANAGEMENT HOUSING:** These are the new "homes" of the Director of the Skopje Glass Factory and his executive assistants.

now, told me more than the words he had spoken, which might have been composed for my benefit. As I left after a tour of the windowless, cracked buildings where production was under way again, my host pointed to a group of trees near the gate and said that a nightingale had taken up residence there five years ago and had sung for them every summer evening since then, but that it had not been heard since the earthquake; he hoped it would return.

The contrast with the Skopje Glass Factory I encountered one afternoon on the banks of the Treska, an icy mountain stream that emerges from a steep-walled canyon to flow into the Vardar a few miles above Skopje. I had fled there to escape the dust and 96° F. heat of Skopje for a swim and a picnic on the rocks. (Anticipating conditions in the ruined city, I had brought food and blankets for sleeping in my car from Belgrade, and I preferred these to the sweltering tent among the rubble set up for foreign journalists by the efficient Republican Secretariat of Information.) A middle-aged man in a bathing suit came down to the water's edge with his Fiat 600, and began washing it, although it was perfectly clean.

A Belgrade friend who was with me said, "There, that's what I mean about the Macedonians." "Let's find out," I said, and we went to talk to him. This time my friend was right. The man told us that he was the director of a Skopje cement factory - an industry particularly in demand just now. What more could he do? he asked us. He had worked until 3 p.m., and anyway most of his stock had been commandeered for urgent use, and who was going to pay for it? He had moved out here to relatives of his wife, who had a house near the Treska, and had been very busy transferring his television, his refrigerator and other valuables to safety from his Skopje apartment.

Perhaps my Belgrade friend was being unduly critical. Perhaps this man was responding to a very human need, after the traumas of a disastrous week, to do something very ordinary and normal, such as washing his car on a hot afternoon, even though it was clean. But the contrast with Comrade Blagoev, like the contrast between the Glass Factory and the Babi Gaza tent city, seemed instructive.

If the local population has not been conspicuously well organized to help themselves during these first weeks after the earthquake, the opposite has been true of the assistance arriving from outside, both foreign and Yugoslav. The Yugoslav press has been giving suitably large and grateful publicity to the former category, coming from all sorts of countries, including even token offerings from arch-enemies China and Albania. Official Americans in Belgrade have been prompt to notice that the amount and variety of aid offered by the Eastern Bloc has been conspicuously less than that offered by the (richer) West, and to claim that the Belgrade press, demonstrating its non-alignment, has done its best to make Eastern and Western aid appear approximately equal. Whether this last is true or not I cannot say; I have not done their minute analysis of headlines and column inches.

The structure and usefulness of this foreign assistance is not the story that interests me in Skopje, but I must mention the extremely good impression that the first visible American help has made on all who have been touched by its operations. This is the U.S. Army's 124 bed Eighth Evacuation Field Hospital which was flown from West Germany to Belgrade, trucked in its own vehicles to Kumanovo, a town forty kilometers from Skopje, and set up in tents

on a disused military airfield there in time to begin operations on 29 July, just three days after the first earthquake. I spent several hours on the site talking with American doctors and nurses and Yugoslav patients (and consuming considerable quantities of Army chow), and I came away with great pride in what my countrymen are doing, and in the men and women who are doing it. The hospital has been given an impressive amount of publicity here, too, and I have personally seen about half an hour of films made at the Kumanova airfield for Belgrade television. The operation is doubly significant as the first time since the war that Americans in uniform have appeared in public in Yugoslavia.

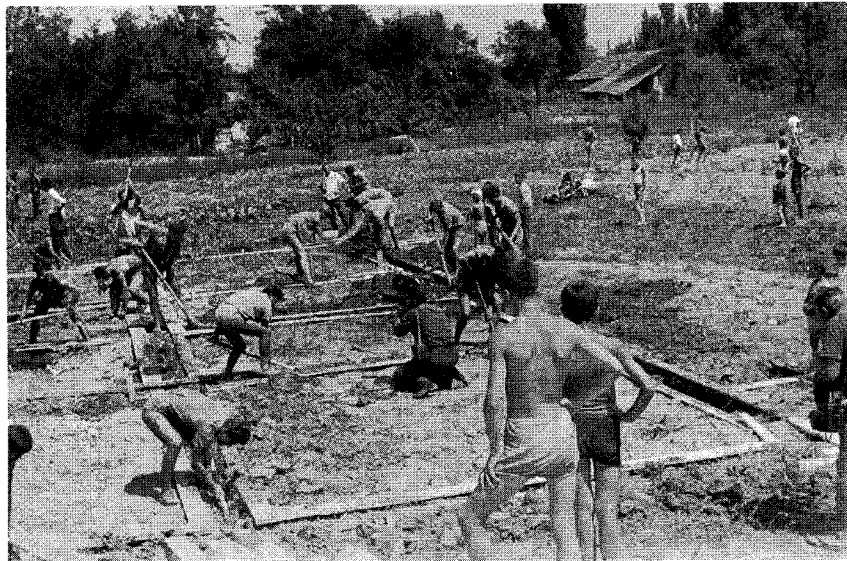
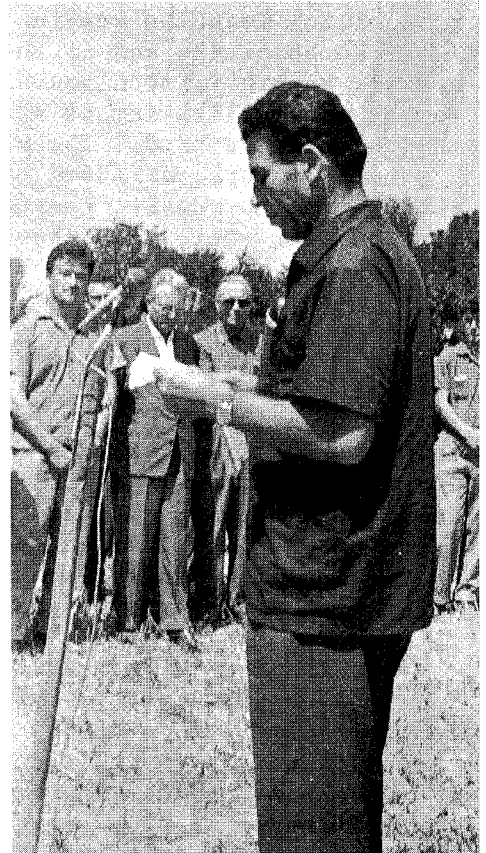
Theirs are not, however, the only foreign uniforms in the Skopje area this month. A Russian team of engineers and sappers, 500 strong and with 125 pieces of heavy equipment appropriate to their mission, set up camp on the outskirts of the city on 6 August and began work the next day, clearing rubble and pulling down the remains of ruined buildings. They were as welcome as the American hospital, and as the Scandinavian blood and medical supplies that arrived within fifteen hours of the earthquake (remarkable organization!), for by the twelfth day it was heavy equipment and experts in its use that were most urgently needed. The Macedonians gathered in excited groups to watch the Russians at work, directed by a colonel with a power megaphone. Their camp, when I went to see it, reminded one of the Americans' attention to amenities for the men: television was being installed, nightly movie shows arranged, and soccer, volleyball and basketball facilities laid out.

For the Yugoslavs, the army was the first on the scene, some units having arrived (I was told) within fifteen minutes. They were responsible for the initial rescues and organization, and for the initial distribution of tents and first aid, and all the results I saw speak well for their efficiency and dedication. Financial and other assistance quickly poured in from the Federal Government and other agencies throughout the country; banks reopened for business, in makeshift quarters, on the fourth day, and on the fifth wages and relief grants were issued and a moratorium was imposed on the servicing of debts, including installment payments for the furniture, refrigerators and television sets buried beneath the ruins.

In the first two weeks there were only two conspicuous deficiencies: a lack of heavy equipment, which could not be helped, and a complete log-jam in the movement of goods by rail, which largely could have been. (Yugoslav railroads have been in trouble for some time anyway, and did not need an earthquake to confuse their operations. But the presence in the Skopje marshalling yards of hundreds of freight cars loaded with goods for enterprises no longer in a position to receive them did not help.)

All over the country there was a flood of volunteers to help in the stricken city. Wisely, most of these were refused, but it was quickly decided to make use of volunteer youth brigades for manual labor. A number of these already at work on the Autoput around Belgrade were designated to go to Skopje; two of them, recruited from among Skopje University's 12,000 students, went home immediately to prepare a camp for their fellows. These arrived at about the same time I did, but when I left it was still unclear whether or not they would be of much use. They seemed to be spending most of their time

**YOUTH BRIGADES AT DJORČE PETROV:  
A speech by Mayor Popov, and so to work**



careening around the ruins in trucks, waving huge flags and singing cheering songs: "We swear to our beloved Marshal Tito, we shall build a new Skopje on the Vardar."\* Some had been put to work unloading the freight cars jamming the Skopje station, but were called off two days later because the work was "too dangerous". For the same reason they were being kept away from the job of clearing rubble and pulling down damaged buildings, which was left to the Soviet specialists.

The one task remaining for the youth at this stage was that of putting up pre-fabricated settlements. Here again, Yugoslav short-term planning seems to have been thorough and sensible. After several false starts, subject to the excessive enthusiasm I have already mentioned, it was decided to build seven such pre-fabricated "sub-cities", which should eventually house 70,000 citizens, around the periphery of the destroyed capital. The deadline is December, "before the first snows," but as I have said, it seems unlikely to be met unless massive foreign help is forthcoming.

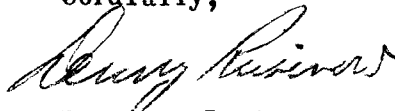
I attended the ground-breaking ceremony for the first of these settlements, outside the village of Djorđe Petrov near the confluence of the Treska and the Vardar. There some 800 young men and girls, bronzed to the color of their khaki shirts and shorts from their work on the Autoput, had assembled to hear a little speech by Skopje Mayor Blagoj Popov, which they interrupted with frequent choruses of the song, "We swear to our beloved Marshal Tito..." When he was finished, and while newsreel and television cameras recorded the scene, they began furiously digging foundations for a settlement to house 12,000 Skopjanci. Under the trees beside the field a group of 38 West German engineers and technicians from the Bundesanstalt Technisches Hilfwerk in Munich bent over blueprints and supervised the arrival of trucks bearing sections of prefabricate buildings. They had come, their leader told me, to help with the ticklish work of digging out the injured and dead from the ruins, but had arrived too late for that, despite an American airlift to Belgrade. Then the Yugoslavs asked them if they could help with the prefabricated settlements, and now they are prepared to stay as long as they are needed, if only the American airlift will provide them with some decent beer.

It is a good beginning, representing a resolute attempt to tackle what is now the paramount problem: how to get 110,000 Skopjanci out of tents and under more solid shelter before the rains of October and the snows of December. What is particularly encouraging is the strenuous effort being made to accept only durable solutions, and to avoid panic. According to the latest plan, some 50,000 can be housed in the 2,200 existing structures which can be repaired. Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Belgrade and Macedonia have each pledged the building of one pre-fabricated community, which all together will handle an additional 46,000. Who will build the rest is still unclear; I was told that of the 1,200,000 sq. meters of pre-fabs involved, domestic production cannot possibly cover between 300,000 and 400,000 sq. meters. Some foreign assistance has already been pledged.

\*Their usefulness is not really very relevant, since the raison d'etre of the youth brigade today is primarily educational, a field in which they are remarkably successful, as David Binder pointed out recently in one of his excellent feature stories in the New York Times. (4 August 1963)

If the target is not met, some citizens of Skopje are in for a hard winter. December seems a good time for me to go back for another look. Then one will be able to make some firmer judgments as to how well the Yugoslav peoples, the Yugoslav government, and the "humanitarian solidarity" of the world, about which the press here has been boasting since the earthquake, can cope with the gravest disaster to strike this country since the war and the Cominform ex-communication.

Cordially,



Dennison Rusinow

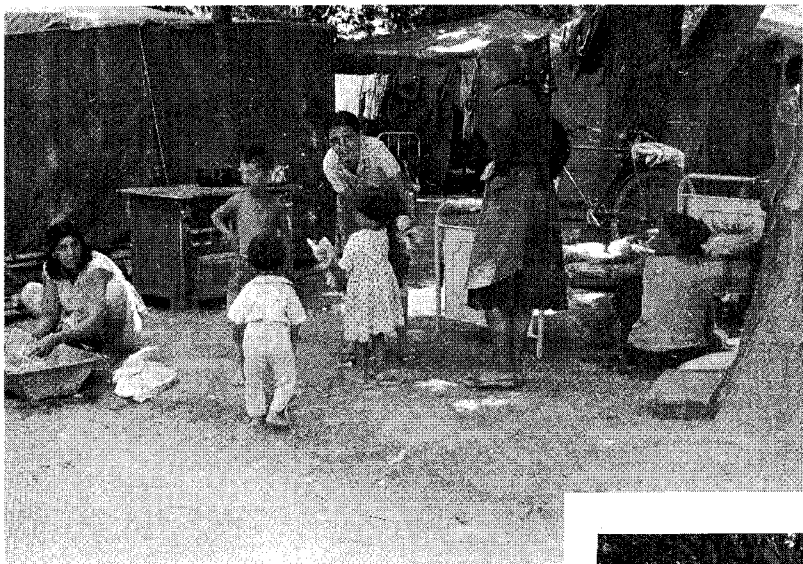
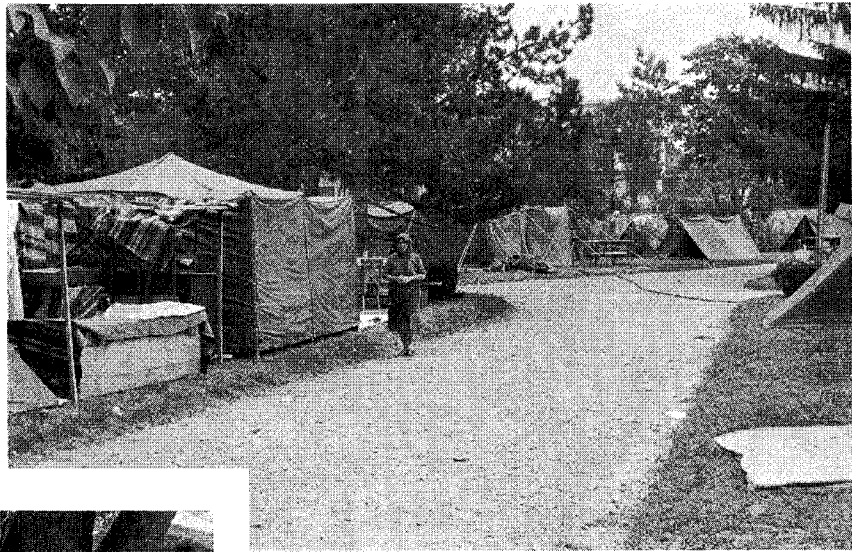
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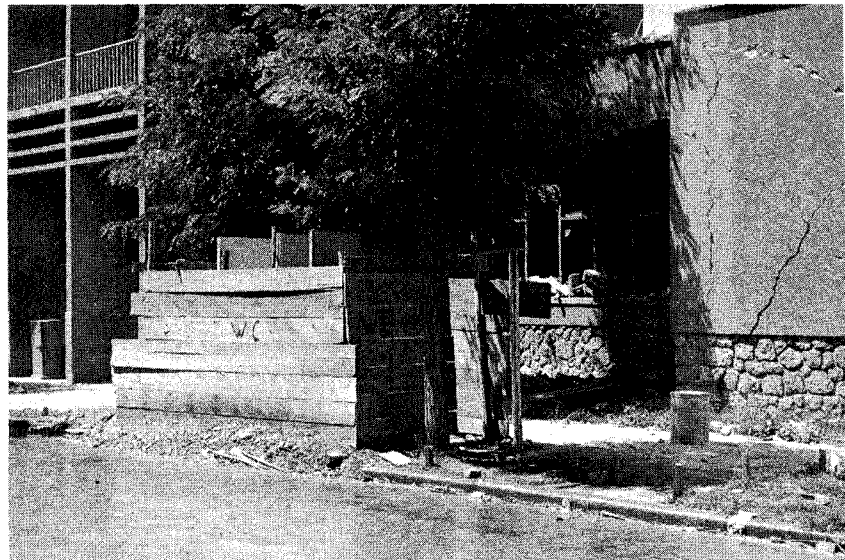
RUSSIANS AT WORK



SKOPJE TODAY: Housing



SKOPJE TODAY: Dining out...and "hygiene"



SKOPJE TODAY: A Yugoslav must have a kafana and a barber

