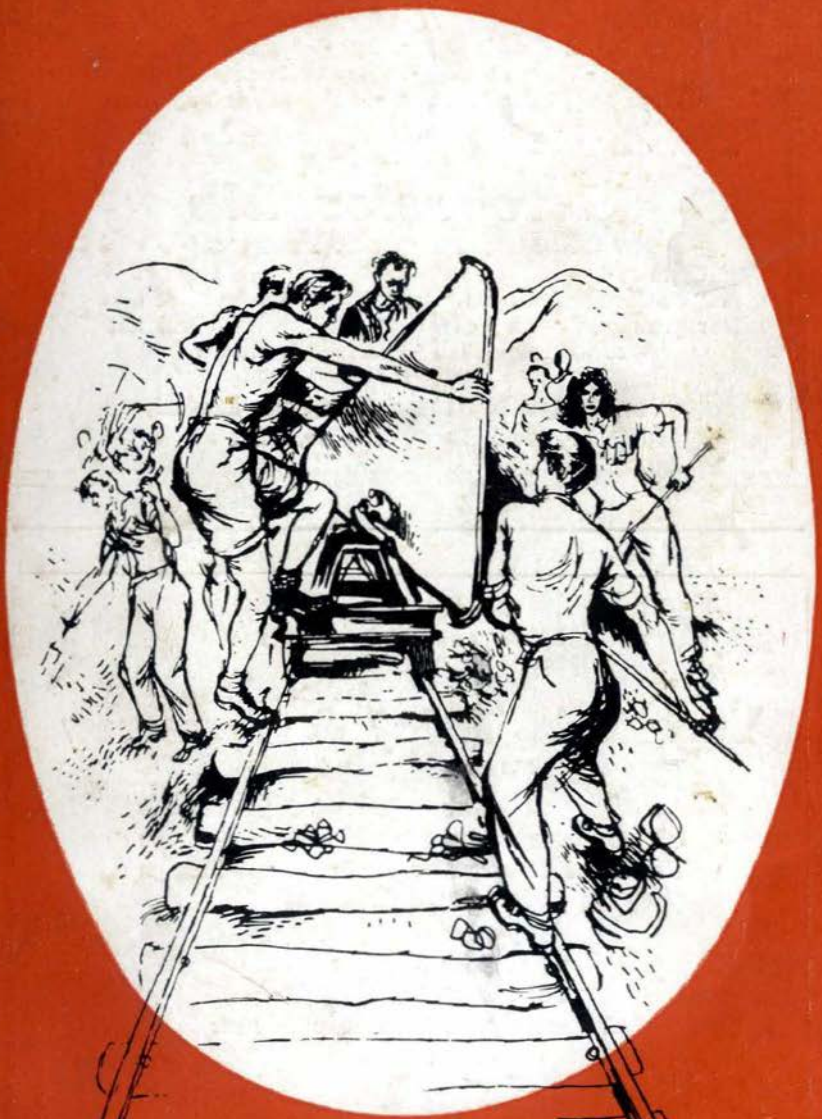
# The Railway



## An Adventure in Construction

★

*Two and Sixpence*

THE RAILWAY

TO THE COMMITTEE AND MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE'S YOUTH OF YUGOSLAVIA AND TO THE VOLUNTEERS OF ALL NATIONS ON THE YOUTH RAILWAY, SAMAC-SARAJEVO, 1947.

Mihailo Sabic, Director of Works, Youth Railway *Percy Horton*

# The Railway

## An Adventure in Construction

*Prepared by British Volunteers on*
*The Youth Railway*
*Samac-Sarajevo, 1947,*
*and edited by*

**Edward Thompson**

LONDON
*THE BRITISH-YUGOSLAV ASSOCIATION*
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# Acknowledgements

THIS book has been prepared by volunteers who worked with the British Brigade in the construction of the Railway from Samac to Sarajevo in Yugoslavia in the summer of 1947.

My thanks are due to the contributors and to all those who sent information; to the Youth Committee of the British-Yugoslav Association who helped in the publication; and to Paul Hogarth, of the group of British artists who visited the line and whose work is reproduced here, to designing the book and collecting the drawings for its illustration.

E. P. Thompson

To go out from the relative calm and serenity of England and plunge for an all-too-brief month into the new life of the Yugoslav people was an exhilarating and inspiring experience for artists. To express pictorially the bustle and activity of the Youth Railway would have been a major task under ideal conditions, but for the artist with but a week or so to spend on the line it was a problem indeed to cope adequately with the lively spectacle of thousands of young men and women building an essential link in their country's economy.

The success of the visit has been twofold: it has produced first-class drawings and water-colours in a variety of techniques and it has enabled British artists for the first time to establish friendly contact with their Yugoslav colleagues.

The drawings that are reproduced in this book are a selection of some two hundred that were made in the course of the summer by both practising artists and art students. Not all made drawings of an illustrative character or worked in a medium suitable for reproduction. For this reason the work of many artists could not be included in this book.

Grateful acknowledgement is made for the loan of originals to: Ronald Searle, Laurence Scarfe, Ern Brooks and F. H. Baines; and to *Our Time* for the loan of blocks on pages ii and 58.

Paul Hogarth

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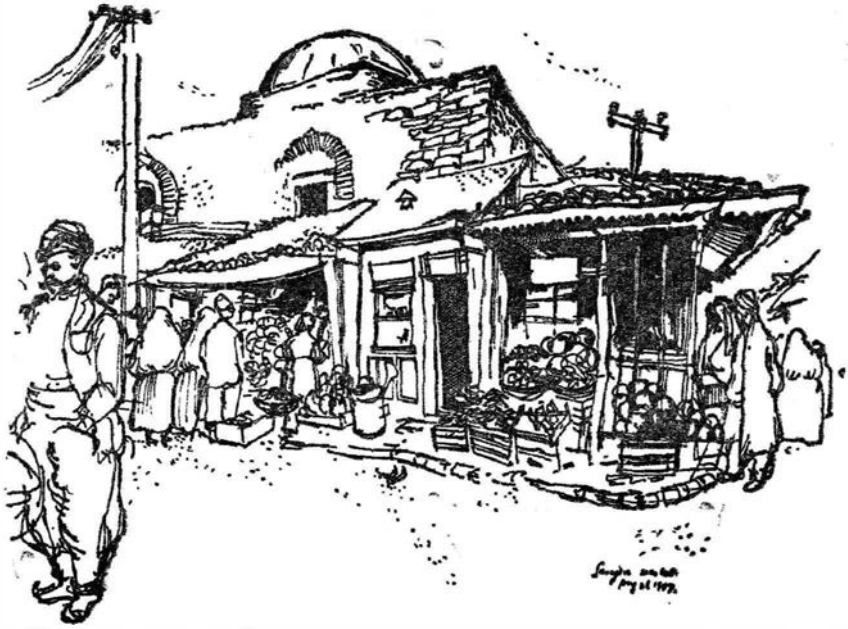


The Market, Sarajevo — *Ronald Searle*

# Preface

THIS is the story of the building of a railway. There is nothing very unusual about the railway itself, although it is an exceptionally good one for the mountainous Balkans. It starts just across the Sava in Slovenia, and crosses the river on great wooden stilts protected by solid ice-breakers. It passes the small market town of Samac, where in mid-summer the peasants doze over great piles of water-melons, apples and pears. Then it traverses Bosnia, following the winding course of the river Bosna. The country becomes increasingly rugged and mountainous, until at length the railway reaches the mongrel city of Sarajevo, a confusion of modern flats, Moslem coffee and cake shops, peasant markets, Turkish minarets and young growing industries.

There is nothing very remarkable about this railway. It is a good railway, of standard Continental gauge, 150 miles long. At first it will be run by steam, but when, in three or four years' time, the electrification schemes of the Five Year Plan are completed, the railway too will be electrified—overhead, of course, because, however well fenced, it would be impossible to prevent the Bosnian goats and the Bosnian dogs and even the Bosnian children from straying on the

line. There are seven tunnels, and one, Vranduk tunnel, is over a mile long. There are a good many bridges criss-crossing the Bosna, and culverts over water-courses—dry and stony trickles in the summer, but brown frothy torrents in the autumn or when the snow on the mountains melts in spring. There are many wayside halts by the clay-white villages.

The unusual thing about this railway is the way in which it was built. It is a Youth Railway. People in England when they first heard about a Youth Railway thought it was some sort of practical game or a propaganda stunt or a big Boy Scout camp. Some of them even imagined toy trains.

But there are no toy trains on the Youth Railway Samac-Sarajevo. This strip of metal, speeding through the Bosna valley, is a sinew of the new Yugoslavia. It will carry coal, iron and metal ores, machinery, timber. It will bring prosperity to Bosnia, one of the most backward of the six People's Republics. The new industries which grow along its path will enrich the people of all Yugoslavia. The construction of this Railway was the most important project undertaken in the whole country in 1947.

It was not built by underpaid Irish navvies or by unemployed drawn from a pool of "labour reserves." It was not built slowly, shoddily, and at great expense, by a foreign company, remaining as a tentacle to suck more wealth out of the impoverished peasantry.

This Railway belongs to the people of Yugoslavia. They talk about it as "our" Railway.

The construction of the Railway was conceived, executed and carried to a successful completion by the People's Youth of Yugoslavia.

In the course of its construction hundreds of thousands of tons of soil and rock were moved. Great embankments were heaped up. A path was hacked through rocks and under mountains.

The old Austrian-controlled companies which built much of Yugoslavia's pre-war railway system might have completed this work in nine years. The Youth Railway was started on the 1st of May, 1947 and the first train ran from Samac to Sarajevo on the 15th of November.

This work was carried through, night and day, by volunteers between the ages of 16 and 25—young men and women from industry, university students, boys and girls from schools and peasant farms.

The great bridge over the Sava at Samac was built, ahead of schedule, by engineering students and disabled ex-servicemen and ex-partisans. Many of these young men and women had lost one of their limbs in the war. Vranduk tunnel was built ahead of schedule. Among the workers who built it were young peasants, mining students from Belgrade, young refugees from the terror in Greece. The work at these projects was supervised by two or three trained engineers.

The workers had compressors and drills, dynamite, tip-wagons, mining equipment.

But most of the work went on without supervision and with only the most primitive tools—bare hands, picks, spades, heavy wheelbarrows. And the work was always finished ahead of schedule.

The work was driven forward, not by threats or by personal incentives, but by songs and an amazing spirit of co-operative will. It was a very great honour for the young Yugoslav peasant boy to hear himself proclaimed a shock-worker. But it was an even greater honour if he belonged to a Brigade, representing his district, his valley or his town, which had once or more been proclaimed a Shock-Brigade.

In the evening, in the hot afternoon sun, or in the early morning they would march, singing, back from a seven or eight-hour shift, not to sleep, but to take part in a comprehensive educational and cultural programme. In their camp life they learnt, through constant practice, qualities of leadership, of democratic self-government and responsibility, and the positive values of community life. And at the end of their one or two-month stay they would crowd into garlanded and slogan-chalked cattle-trucks, brown and tired, proud of their part in building the great Railway, proud to return to their homes as "brigaders," but full of regrets at leaving so soon. The twin slogan of the Railway, "*Bratsvo, Jedinstvo*," "Brotherhood, Unity," would haunt their ears for months. They would go home assured that they had never had a holiday so good before.

FOR three months the British flag flew in a beautiful part of the valley of the Bosna. Every day parties marched up to work (five minutes late and in untidy-blob formation) under the Union Jack. The British were among the many foreign Brigades which came to the Railway at the invitation of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia.

It is in this sense—as workers ourselves on the project, and as spectators of the feats of our friends, the Yugoslav youth—that we present this book to you.

There are many people who would be more qualified to write it. The Yugoslav Government spokesmen could explain in more detail the part the Railway will play in developing the economy of Bosnia. The statisticians of the Youth Movement could tell the numbers of cubic metres of earth that were moved and of concrete that were laid. The educationalists could tell the percentage of illiteracy that was liquidated. And there would always be people to say that this was all "propaganda."

This book is not propaganda. It is the story of what we saw in Yugoslavia while we worked among the "brigaders" on the Railway; of what we heard when we talked and argued with everyone from

distinguished lecturers and youth leaders to cooks, clerks and schoolboys; of what we felt when we danced the *kolo*, shouted or sang with our friends around the bonfires in the evenings. We tell something of the short trip we had around Yugoslavia as guests of the Youth Movement when our work was done; of our very good friends and close neighbours, the Greek Brigade "Georgi Siandos"; and of the formation of a British Working-Group which left us to help in the building of a mountain road in Bulgaria. If there is undue emphasis on our own part in this huge enterprise, this is not because our part was of great importance, but because it is our aim to introduce readers to the Railway as we saw it ourselves.

At the end of the book we include some comments representative of various points-of-view—of what we liked, and what some of us liked and others did not. And finally we draw a few conclusions.

But it is no wish of ours to point lengthy morals. If there are morals to be drawn, then they are implicit in the text. There are many lessons which we might learn from the Yugoslavs of the spirit in which to face economic difficulties and problems of reconstruction.

We wish this book to be, above all, a token of the friendships we made with countless individuals and with the whole Youth Movement of Yugoslavia. They are friendships which we shall not quickly forget, for they are founded on common experiences and on a common achievement. We are confident from what we have seen and taken part in that the youth of Yugoslavia will surmount the gravest obstacles before them, and come through with resilient gaiety and good-humour. We have seen the features of a determined, self-confident and creative people. We know that our friends, enquiring and widely-informed, democratic and proud in their spirit, will sternly resist any attempts on their liberty from outside or inside their country. We are confident of this, for we have watched the building in this Bosnian valley not only of a Railway, but also of strong bonds of international understanding, of a legend which will astound and inspire the future, and of a new, forthright and comradely generation of men.

The Youth Railway at Sarajevo — *Ronald Searle*

# Omladinska Pruga

## by E. P. Thompson

*Commandant, British Brigade, August 15—September 15*

"THE struggle for the reconstruction of the country, for the mastery of economic difficulties, is a component part of that great struggle on the battle-fields which cost the lives of many tens of thousands of young men and women of Yugoslavia, who sacrificed themselves so that others might have a better life. May your youthful soaring and ardour find expression above all in constructive work!"

Tito, 1/1/1946

*"We build the railway.*
*The railway builds us."*

Volunteers' song.

LAST summer, once you had broken through our own newsprint curtain into Central or South-Eastern Europe, whatever you did you could not escape from the songs. Wherever you went—Prague, Sofia, Belgrade—songs welcomed you, travelled with you, and left you only at the frontier. It might have been a rowdy party of boys and girls of any nationality leaving the Youth Festival; or a truck load of weary Bulgarian soldiers driving through the streets after a day's

harvesting; or an impromptu concert in your carriage as your train made its slothful way down to Bosnia.

And in Yugoslavia last summer there was a new hit-tune. The sadder melodies of the partisan struggle are not often sung now—the memories which they recall are too cruel and too close. The song which the errand-boys whistled, massed choirs performed and citizens hummed as they strolled through their parks in the evenings was a song of youth and of reconstruction. This is the first verse:

*Samac-Sarajevo,*
*That's our target!*
*To build another railway*
*This summer, too.*

And here is one of the refrains, in an eager marching rhythm:

*Come on, let's work,*
*Let's build a new railway.*
*And as we work*
*Let's sing a cheerful song.*

In translation these words may sound a little self-conscious or priggish. It is impossible to translate the lilt with which they were sung. The words were not self-conscious simply because they contained no trace of external moral exhortation. They sprang directly from hard work and a daily-growing achievement. They expressed a living fact—that the youth of Yugoslavia were engaged, voluntarily and enthusiastically, in building a railway and that they were singing while they built it.

This railway was not the only thing which the youth were building last summer, nor were the young people the only ones to work on these voluntary projects. But the Youth Railway, Samac-Sarajevo, was the greatest project of this sort, expressing most forcefully the will to reconstruct which inspired the whole people. The workers on these projects were the natural inheritors of the spirit of the partisans. They were proud to acknowledge this. The positive qualities won in those days—the comradeship, self-abnegation and conscious unity—instead of evaporating, as in some other countries, in the swamps of economic anarchy, black-marketeering and renewed disruptions, were carried forward intact into the days of peace. In England some may smile when they hear of shock-workers and of heroic feats of labour. And yet there can be a heroism in labour equal to that in war. Its fruition and recognition appear to arise only in a society whose values are strange to those who have learnt the code of capitalism. It springs from the pride of ownership by the ordinary man of his own country, its sources of wealth and its means of production. The qualities demanded of a man for success in capitalism's heyday were those of individual

enterprise, private initiative in the face of competition, and others with less pleasant-sounding names. The values of a growing socialism are new values, those bound up in a co-operative ethic and in a new emphasis on man's obligations to his neighbours and to society. It is none of my business to examine which ethic is "better." I will only say that I found this atmosphere of social creativeness inspiring, and that all of us who worked on the Railway were so quickly infected by this spirit that we found the heavy work refreshing. Many of the British volunteers were ex-Servicemen, and if anyone had told us, as we walked in our civvies out of the demob. depot, that in a year or two's time we should be getting up at five a.m. and doing six hours' rock-lifting or a long day's cookhouse fatigue for *pleasure*, we should probably have knocked him down. It would be impossible to understand any of this story without accepting this change of values—to understand the slogans or the songs or the emulation at work. It would be impossible to understand how the miners of Vranduk voted to pierce their tunnel without air-shafts (their building would have delayed the work for three weeks) so that at the end of the shifts they were sometimes carried away from the face by their comrades. It would be impossible to understand how the Railway was built at all, for these new values were fundamental to its whole conception. The spirit drove forward the work until the work itself seemed to become possessed by the spirit, reinforcing the determination of the builders and converting a generation to a new way of life.

## II

Without this spirit Yugoslavia could never have survived with economic independence for two years after the war. It was a torn and distressed country which the Nazis left. Of a population of fifteen million odd, nearly two million had lost their lives in the war. The retreating Germans had pillaged and slaughtered the peasants' live-stock, burnt down villages, dynamited bridges and even gouged up the railways behind them. Lonely farms were razed to the ground, and railway junctions were pulverised by our bombing. I was told of one town that changed hands no less than forty times in the fighting.

Nor did Yugoslavia possess the industries essential for the task of recovery. Although rich in minerals and in natural resources, the country had remained before the war backward and dependent on the ministrations of foreign capital. Mineral ores were shipped directly from the country, and the mines themselves were technically undeveloped. The fact that oil existed in the country had been suppressed by the influence of foreign companies. Many sectors of heavy industry were entirely unrepresented.

At this time famine was not far from the thoughts of the people. Great Britain and Russia were licking their own wounds. America was hostile to any sign of recovery. UNRRA could help to stave off immediate disaster, but the Yugoslavs knew that if they were to maintain their new independence, gained in such an agony of sacrifice and held with such pride, they must make the future with their bare hands.

The natural resources were theirs. The will to create was theirs. But between these two lay a great gap. They did not have the tools to develop their resources, nor did they have the skill and training to use them.

The gap had to be filled at once. And they were to face this challenge alone.

## III

The challenge was taken up, not by a Government order, but by the people themselves. It had started already before the war ended.

I have seen in Southern Italy villages where the rubble still lay across the streets two years after our armies had passed, and the dead remained unreclaimed. This could not have happened in Yugoslavia.

Yard by yard, as the Nazis were driven out, the people set to work to repair the damage. At first the work was spontaneous and unco-ordinated. The streets were cleared and homes were quarried from the ruins. Then the elected councils helped to direct the work—this stretch of road or that vital bridge needed emergency attention. Later the Government named the tasks of most urgency. As the people discovered how much could be done by sheer muscle and improvisation, so the spirit grew.

In many places it was the young people who took the lead in this work. Men and women of all ages took an active part in the partisan and resistance movements, but the severe physical hardships of necessity threw the heaviest burden on the young. The young people were those most willing to ignore the national jealousies and rivalries which had embittered for so long the history of Yugoslavia. Their formative years were spent in the struggle for national independence, and in these years they had gained boundless self-confidence. They had become impatient of those who spoke of impossibilities and insurmountable problems. Couriers served with the partisans who were sometimes fourteen years old or younger. There were heroes and commanders between the ages of sixteen and twenty. It was from their actions and outlook that the pattern of the new Yugoslavia was being fashioned.

In Britain we do not easily see an immediate need for a youth movement. It is difficult to persuade one's friends that youth has any

distinct contribution to make to the nation—or that it should be organised nationally in order to do it. But in Yugoslavia it is not difficult to see the special rôle of youth. The youth of Yugoslavia are not only, as statesmen always say, the standard-bearers of the future, but the masters of the present and the tutors of their fathers as well. Young men and women who learned to read and write in the partisans have gone back to their villages to teach the illiterates of the older generation. Here also they lecture on national and international affairs, explain new machinery and the Government's economic plans. Of course, the older peasants do not sit reverently at their feet nor do they always listen passively to all these new-fangled notions. But the members of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia do not feel self-conscious or foolish at being so. They are proud of their membership and conscious of their responsibilities.

Just as groups of shock-workers formed themselves among the workers in every factory, so the youth movement appointed itself to be the shock-group of the whole nation in meeting the problems, not only of reconstruction but of building a new country whose standards were set high above those of the old Yugoslavia of 1939. It was their own will to do this, but history forced the decision. They could see most clearly the future in which they wanted to live, and they knew that, if they did not take the lead in building it, it could never come about at all. This was most evident in the fields of technical and academic education. A great part of the pre-war educated class had been killed in the war or had been discredited by collaboration with the enemy. Men of forty, fifty and over were performing miracles of self-education, but the bulk of the teachers, technicians and professional men of the future had to be found among the students and young workers of 1945. They were faced with heavy handicaps. Not only were the survivors relatively few in number, but their normal school and training had been altogether broken by war. Some had walked out of their schools at the age of fifteen and gone to the forests, not to return for four or five years. Others had spent two or three years as prisoners in concentration or slave labour camps. The problems of psychological readjustment were considerable. Like many other Europeans they had grown up in isolation from the cultural and intellectual life of other nations. Even the raw materials of education—the text books, libraries, instruments, schools and laboratories—were in short supply.

It is characteristic of their mood that the Yugoslav youth met these problems, not by retiring into the silence of academic concentration, but by practical expedients and by collective effort. In this way the more fortunate could help on the backward. They aimed not to produce a handful of geniuses but to raise the level of their entire generation. And they decided in their holidays, not to cram up an additional syllabus, but to build a railway.

The decision was officially announced at the Third National Congress of the NOJ (the People's Youth of Yugoslavia) in May, 1946. But this was after considerable discussion behind the scenes. The spontaneous movement to rebuild of the immediate post-war months was increasing in girth and vigour and seeking new outlets. The NOJ wished to initiate a national project on an altogether new scale which would set light to the imagination of all its members. Meanwhile the planning commissions of the Government were preparing the details of the Five-Year Plan. Vital to this plan was the increased production of coal. Large undeveloped coal mines existed in the region of Banovici in Bosnia, but the area was isolated from the rest of the country. Plans to construct a railway line from Banovici to the main line at Brcko were studied, but were regretfully postponed for several years owing to the lack of labour, skilled direction and materials. The Central Committee of the NOJ challenged this decision, and guaranteed that the youth would voluntarily provide the labour for the work. Their suggestion was met with some scepticism. Skilled engineers shook their heads at the impossibility of building a railway with unskilled labour and in so short a time. The necessary equipment was quite unavailable and was being used in repairing lines destroyed by the Germans. The Central Committee put forward its offer once again. They persuaded a handful of experienced engineers to take the risk and direct the work. Their request was finally agreed to.

The results amazed the Government, the engineers and the youth themselves. Over sixty thousand young workers, peasants, students and older schoolchildren (together with some working-groups from other nations) took part. The first "brigades" arrived only two weeks after the preliminary surveying had started. Tents and temporary barracks were thrown up. A nucleus of skilled workers trained the first volunteers, and from among these earlier groups instructors for the later brigades were found. The railway—running for 56 miles through difficult country, and including tunnels and many bridges—was completed in six months, three weeks ahead of schedule. Throughout this time technical, educational and physical instruction was given, and the workers took part in hundreds of cultural activities.

Almost at once the railway was put into use. No time was given for the lengthy business of soil-subsidence in the embankments and trains still run cautiously and slowly. There have been one or two landslides. But the coal is being carried away from Banovici.

## IV

The success of the Youth Railway, Brcko-Banovici, vindicated

the claims of the youth movement to be the shock-group of Yugoslavia. It stimulated the development of similar projects this year in Bulgaria, Albania and others of the eastern democracies. It also prepared the ground for the more ambitious project of 1947, the *Omladinska Pruga* or Youth Railway from Samac to Sarajevo.

This was to be nearly three times as long as the Brcko-Banovici railway. More than three times as many people were needed to work on its construction. All the services and activities existing in embryo on the previous railway were to be developed on a far greater scale. But, as before, the work was to be completed in just over six months. The Government would ensure the delivery of all available supplies. The rest was up to the NOJ.

The building of this railway, again in Bosnia, was in conformity with Article 5 of the Plan:

> "to ensure a speedier tempo of development in the economically backward republics and remove all consequences of uneven development."

The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, together with those of Macedonia and Montenegro, were the most backward and neglected parts of old Yugoslavia, and it is in these parts that it is intended to accelerate most rapidly the rate of development. In particular the Bosna Valley is to become a new industrial centre for Yugoslavia, based upon the rich mineral resources which are only now beginning to be fully exploited. Metallurgical and chemical industries will be established in the valley in the next five years, together with factories for turning out medium agricultural machinery, building materials and many other products.

At the beginning of 1947 the Bosna Valley was served only by one narrow-gauge railway, built by an Austrian company before the first Great War. Since all supplies and workers going to the *Omladinska Pruga* travelled on this line, we came to know it well. It was fantastically inadequate to serve the greater part of a republic. Over long stretches the trains were by regulation forbidden to exceed twelve miles per hour, on which occasions the narrow trucks wobbled and jigged in the most alarming way. Gradients were very steep, and the curves so sharp that sometimes the wheels of two or three carriages screeched in unison for nearly a minute while smoke came off the line. And while the carriages at the rear were screeching one way, those at the front had already started to screech on the opposite right-angle. No wonder that the trains were known to fall off the line more than once on the journey from Zenica to Slavonski Brod—an event which caused very little comment since they never went fast enough to put anyone in danger.

To transform this into a serviceable railway would have needed complete relaying—new cuttings, more tunnels, new embankments,

softer gradients and slower curves. It was decided that it would be cheaper and quicker to cut an altogether new track for a wide-gauge continental railway on the opposite bank of the Bosna. Meanwhile the old *pruga* could screech and stumble through a last year or two of existence and feed in the supplies for its successor.

## V

The Central Committee of the NOJ works is in a set of offices off one of Belgrade's main streets. A young sentry stands at the door to give dignity to the entrance—he can certainly have no other purpose, since I never saw him, by day, question anyone who entered. The outer offices have the usual air of bustle and great efficiency of any youth movement. There is from the minor administrative workers just that hint of bureaucracy one meets in a " base area "—for, while the Railway was being built, they resented being tied to their desks, and were keen to impress the visitor with their own indispensability. And indispensable they were, for it was from here that the 200,000 young volunteers on the Railway were enrolled and organised, while at the same time many other local schemes and different activities were coming under their supervision.

In the inner offices, those elected leaders of the NOJ who are not touring the country are constantly at work. I was able to interview two of the youth leaders and ask them about their part in organising the project. One of them, a man of about 24 of Moslem parentage, was wearing on his breast pocket the proudest medal of Yugoslavia, the silver 1941 star, worn only by the first of the partisans. The girl was also an old partisan fighter, while our interpreter, a slim and attractive girl of 21, had left school to fight for two years in the mountains and to spend a further year in the even more dangerous underground work in occupied territory. Now she was a student at Belgrade University, and had already spent her two months on the Railway. Such people as these are not Amazons or monsters of political single-mindedness, but warm-natured, sensitive and generous, in some ways very like their British counterparts, in others very different—more adult and rather wiser perhaps, more certain of their own capacities and limitations.

The work of preparation began in January, and this year the first surveying was carried on well ahead of the working-parties. The experience gained in building the line Brcko-Banovici was invaluable, and many of those who were trained in this work were leading the projects of 1947. Additional training courses were held during the winter in leadership and in certain skilled jobs. When the work began, these cadres were reinforced by several thousand experts (the proportion never rose above one in ten) including engineers, mining experts, foremen, quarrymen, mechanics and so forth. But this aid

was of a technical nature only, and the entire responsibility for organisation and administration remained with the youth themselves.

The recruiting of volunteers for the Railway started early in the year. The campaign was launched nationally and through the many branches of the NOJ in the factories and schools, universities and villages throughout the country. The age limits set for both sexes were from 16 to 25 years, and volunteers had to pass a medical examination before being accepted. No compulsion was set upon anyone to come, for, apart from all else, the Railway could only be built on time if every worker had the enthusiasm of a volunteer.

The campaign had, of course, official Government backing. Tito himself had opened the Brcko-Banovici line, and had said in his speech of January 1st, 1947:

> "Let this year be the year of still greater contributions of efforts and energy by the young generation of Yugoslavia. . . . While school, vocational education, and physical and cultural training should be your tasks, your spare time should be spent in the reconstruction of your country. The building of new railway lines, roads, factories and mines and also new homes is awating your participation in 1947."

The NOJ is a powerful organisation in Yugoslavia, on a par with the great trade unions, and in its campaign it had the full support of the Popular Front and women's organisations. This last was of particular importance, for the younger peasants and the school-children had, of course, to receive parental consent before they came to the line. The way for many a rebellious Moslem daughter, eager to throw off the tradition of yashmak and subservience and to work alongside her own generation, must have been smoothed by a chat between her parents and the local Women's Committee.

It was aimed to start and complete the work with peasants' and workers' brigades. The students and schoolchildren took the middle shift, during the months of their summer holidays. The brigades were organised on a local basis—some towns had several brigades, with different numbers and names—while in the universities they were sometimes organised on a faculty basis (the mining and engineering students had their own brigades organised for special tasks). The size of a brigade varied, but three hundred volunteers was the average number. A certain semi-military flavour was given by the name "brigade" and this was confirmed by some aspects of the discipline and organisation on the line. We quickly discovered in our own brigade, which never numbered as many as three hundred at one time, that it was impossible to organise it without borrowing some elements from the routine standing orders of an army camp; we might have gained in efficiency if we had accepted a military pattern even more. There was nothing sinister in the fact that the camp-life, work, and collective activities of 200,000 young people were organised according to this pattern. This does not mean that the name

" brigade " was accepted purely out of convenience. The democratic army of the partisan war had left no bad taste in the mouths of its members or of the nation, and the builders of the Railway were proud that there could be soldiers of peace as of war. But, in spite of anything which newspaper correspondents who spent a few days in Belgrade and a few hours at the line may have written, there was no trace in this of the offensive *Führerprinzip,* the aggressive military tone of Fascist and anti-democratic youth movements. We, who spent weeks or months living on the Railway, know more about this atmosphere and know it to have been democratic. There was no kow-towing, strutting, bullying, saluting, or segregation of leaders. The discipline was ninety-nine and nine-tenths self-imposed by the volunteers themselves. The leadership was elected, either on a temporary or permanent basis, by the members of the brigade at its first formation. A good record of service, tact and patience were qualities far more in demand than a " leader " attitude. The officers of the brigade (Commandant and Deputy, Cultural and Sports Officers, Works Foremen, etc.), once elected, organised the work and arranged the brigade's programme ; their orders on everything from personal hygiene to the issue of stores were obeyed. But they lived, ate, slept and worked in the most informal relations with the other volunteers, and anyone critical of their methods or harbouring a grievance could bring the matter forward in open meeting, through the Wall Newspaper or in conversation with the officer concerned. The only distinction of the officers was that they were expected to, and did, work longer and harder hours than the rest of the brigade. Those who wish to hint at comparisons between the youth of Yugoslavia and the movements of the Nazis do not understand the difference between construction and aggression, between education in self-government and authoritarianism. Nor do they know what they are talking about, for we know that they rarely went to the trouble to find out any but the most superficial facts.

Certain people have also questioned both the age and the voluntary nature of the labour employed on the line. The answer to the first question is simple. So far as it was in their power, the youth leaders prevented anyone under the age of 16 from taking part in the work on the Railway. A few youngsters did manage to squeeze through. Once they were discovered they were employed on jobs around the camp, and not on the heavy work on the line. Every brigade had one or two messenger-boys, and they were usually about 14 years old. Our neighbours, the Triestines, proudly owned to a boy of 12. He had come with his elder brother, who was his guardian, and he was his exact image—fair hair, blue eyes, and all—but half the size. He dressed up in railway " uniform " and cap and insisted on being treated with the respect due to a full " brigader." But he was

Vlada Begic, Shock brigade miner *Paul Hogarth*

more of a mascot than a worker, and was packed off on goodwill delegations to other brigades to keep him out of mischief.

Certainly, some of the 16-year-olds seemed very small to us, but nothing would have been more tactless than to have said so. There were marked differences in the physical characteristics of the volunteers from various parts of the country. At the end of our stay two brigades of the same age-group were living beside us, one from the district of Maribor and one from the Dalmatian coast. The Dalmatians clearly developed physically rather earlier than their Maribor cousins, many of whom still looked like children. But, more than this, the casual visitor may have been deluded by definite cases of physical retardation. Rickets and the diseases of undernourishment were not uncommon in pre-war Yugoslavia and increased with ferocity during the war. The physical education and development of the retarded was among the primary rôles which the Railway was intended to fulfil.

At the other end of the age-limit there were rather more exceptions. The "Railway Fever" infected more than those who may strictly be called "youth" (the British Brigade can witness to this) and it was not unusual for older people to turn up and demand to be put to work. The villagers and peasants living beside the line were often as enthusiastic as anyone (they were compensated for their land, although some farmers insisted on giving it freely; they were the first who would benefit from the Railway, and relations between the volunteers and the local people were always good) and they sometimes gave a few hours' work. There were even cases of parents who found that their sons and daughters were going to the Railway, and decided to come as well. Anna, who cooked for several weeks for our brigade, is an example of these. The few who came worked as ordinary volunteers under the youth leaders, and had no more say than their children in the running of brigade affairs. Nor did an even more numerous group of older people, the teachers and even university professors who volunteered to come out and help with the educational work in the leisure hours, and to wield a pick or spade with their students on the line. They would give their advice if asked, but in the ordinary way they kept in the background. This really friendly and co-operative relationship between the teachers and pupils was one reason for the success of the recruitment campaign. Many teachers encouraged their classes to go, and those who went with their students to the line found that their presence there, far from weakening their natural authority, greatly increased the respect and affection in which they were held.

The part which these strong national organisations, assisted by the schools, played in the recruitment campaign may seem to have put a measure of compulsion on the volunteers. This is quite true.

But the compulsion was the moral pressure of a society whose total effort was directed to reconstruction. It may be fairly compared with the social pressure on a young man in a nation engaged in a fight for its independence, when no conscription exists and volunteers are wanted at the front. And this is only a fair comparison when it is understood that the pressure came not only from society, but from the conscience and inclinations of the individual as well. It is not difficult to see how the "Railway Fever" developed. In the schools it gathered strength like any craze—only a craze with a purpose, and with adventure and a good holiday combined. The majority of a class would take a resolution to go and work together, and those who were left out would feel shame-faced and isolated—especially in the later stages when boys and girls were already swaggering back with *Pruga* badges, a new repertoire of songs, and common shop-talk about Vranduk and Samac bridge and tales of their own prowess. In the factories the trade unions guaranteed the jobs of young volunteers, provided that they found two of their comrades who would pledge themselves to increase their output to make up for their comrade's absence. And, naturally, when he returned, bronzed and enthusiastic, from Bosnia, his two comrades wanted to take the same holiday as well.

In this way, to mix a metaphor, the Railway Fever grew like a snowball. Soon everyone was talking about it. The competing local brigades were followed proudly in their home towns or villages, as we follow football teams. The volunteers, wherever they went, were the special favourites of the nation. Parents exchanged gossip about the feats of their children. Brothers and sisters too young to volunteer were contented only when allowed to build a miniature *Pruga* of their own. Newsreel, radio and Press all boosted the volunteers (it must have been a great experience for the peasants, seeing one of their first films, to have watched the brigade of their sons and daughters flash upon the screen), while the local journals followed closely the progress of their brigades, recounting the successes and unexpected hold-ups, reporting the winners of the sporting or cultural events, and giving detailed statistics (and statistics, largely meaningless to us, mean a lot to the Yugoslavs) of the shovelfuls, barrowloads and cubic metres of rock, earth or cement that had this or that done to them during the week. When the local boys won the Section flag or became twice or three times honoured as a shock-brigade, then there were beaming faces at home and celebrations. The departure or welcome-home of a brigade at the station of one of the big towns was a sight to be seen—the trucks garlanded with branches and flowers and chalked with slogans, the tears and the laughter, perhaps a band and some songs and *kolos*, certainly the Serbo-Croat equivalents of "Now don't sit around in wet feet!" and "Remember to

write and tell us all about it," or "Johnny! How brown you look!" all over the place.

I asked many people this question about compulsion. From all of them, youth leaders or students with whom I chatted around the evening bonfires, I got a similar answer. No, certainly no one was compelled to come—but, then, "of course, we consider that it's everyone's duty to take a part in reconstruction." And that is the complete answer. No one worked on the Railway against his will (except for some German prisoner-of-war labour, which was used only to put up the huts, the showers, etc.), and no one who came reluctantly was *wanted* in that company. There were a handful of youths, uneasy about the part they played during the war in collaborationist households, who came to the Railway hoping to expiate past sins and thinking that a more wholesome record would serve them better in the future. But it was the compulsion of their own consciences and self-interest which sent them there. They were accepted into the comradeship of the brigade like any others, and I was told of several who set out with the only aim of working off a black mark in their past, and who ended as enthusiastic converts to the Railway spirit.

But, to tell the truth, it was a silly question for anyone who had seen the Railway to ask. Railways just aren't built like that out of conscript labour. People don't run uphill in the mid-day sun with heavy wheelbarrows or charge down on you whooping with a truck-load of slag if they have been forced to come by unmentionable threats! In fact there was keen competition to work on the Samac-Sarajevo project and many had to be refused. Samac-Sarajevo was the national project of the year, and by far the biggest. To this project came the foreign volunteers, the fraternal delegations and the greatest share of the concert parties and lecturers. The local projects in each Republic, although equally important, seemed in comparison humdrum and provincial. The only compulsion necessary was in persuading a sufficient proportion of the youth to stay and take their working holidays at home!

## VI

The H.Q., or *Glavni Stab*, of the Railway was established at Zenica, which is situated towards the Sarajevo end of the line. It was a little less than fifteen miles from the British camp at Nemila, and was one of the very few sizeable towns on the length of the Railway. Those of us who spent several weeks on the line often jumped an afternoon train on the narrow-gauge line or hitched down there on business or pleasure. We came to know some of its haunts quite well. There were several excellent cake-shops, selling meringues and fluffy confectionery of an egginess and richness which would lead

to prosecutions in England today. Another shop sold good creamy coffee, bread, a saucerful of local butter and another of honey or marmalade for less than a shilling. Chocolate was a different matter, and if you bought several of the thin, fudgy slabs you would find that you were ten shillings out of pocket. We discovered that this was the rule in Yugoslavia. Essential foods or rationed goods, and even petty luxuries like cakes, ices or drinks, were cheap or very reasonable by British food-subsidised standards, and remarkable when compared with the ruling prices in Italy, for instance, or France. But luxuries—chocolate, hotel meals, off-the-ration sugar and so forth—were heavily taxed, and those who bought one luxury would have to choose to do without others.

Those who expected to find any amenities in Zenica were at first disappointed. On the station platform, all day and much of the night, there squatted and jostled a great throng of people, patiently waiting to jump and cling perilously on to the first train, " express " or goods, that was foolish enough to halt in the station (these station scenes were the most eloquent testimony to the need for the new railway). The long, rough and winding main street (the *only* street) looked more like a peasant market-centre than a growing industrial town. Water-melons and fruits were piled by the gutters, and all sorts of animals wandered among the barefoot yelling children, the old moustachioed peasants, and the veiled women drawing water from the street pumps. On one of these pumps I found a Turkish inscription, and, somehow, the occasional minarets circled by pigeons (and, perversely, floodlit with electric bulbs at the end of Ramadan) kept on reminding one of the Sultan's rule. But contrasts were not lacking to shock one back to reality. Railway volunteers of many nationalities were to be seen everywhere, and often a supply truck, an embussed delegation, or a bejeeped member of *Glavni Stab* would carve a way through with its horn. (The horn is still as useful a driving-weapon in Bosnia as the gears or brakes.) Entering a cake-shop, one was almost certain to find a Czech or Canadian volunteer, or a Bulgar *Udarnik* guzzling at the next table, and handclasps and " *Zdravo !* "s (the universal greeting) would be exchanged. Everywhere there are signs of busy industrialisation, for Zenica is to be one of the centres of the Bosnian Ruhr. Building and construction work can be seen all round the outskirts. Already before the war several industries were established here, including a light steel works (owned by the German armaments firm of Krupps) which has been confiscated by the Republic and which was then turning out rails for the *Omladinska Pruga.* The best buildings in the town have been turned into " Radni Doms," workers' clubs and canteens, which *Pruga* volunteers were always welcome to enter. At the invitation of the workers the finest club was often used by *Glavni Stab* for official Railway dinners and celebrations.

*Glavni Stab* itself was situated in a spacious building at the far end of the long street from the station. It looked very like a forward divisional H.Q. behind a static battle-line—without the General's caravan, the officers' mess and other trappings. A sentry stood by the door. Temporary huts were grouped round. There was a small vehicle park with two or three jeeps, a few 30-cwt. trucks and a signal van. From here the major administrative and organisational work was done. Supplies were indented for and sent up and down the line. Brigades were directed to the points where they were needed. Work reports were collated and targets set. Letters—the youth ran their own postal service—were sorted and delivered. The cultural and sporting programmes of the ten sections were co-ordinated, and occasional great Sunday rallies or competitions were arranged. This is only a general outline of the work, for, with a community so large under their government, hundreds of details came under the supervision of the youth leaders. In the hot summer, health and hygiene, to take one instance, were a constant headache to them. There was a fine medical service on the line, with hospitals, first-aid posts and ambulances, run by qualified doctors, surgeons, dentists and nurses, assisted by medical students. But the execution of elementary hygienic precautions, often strange to the young peasants, was a major work of education in itself, and was the responsibility of the brigade and section leaders, supervised by *Glavni Stab*. "Gippy-tummy" and minor fly-borne upsets could not be entirely stamped out, but they could be restricted by proper attention to sanitary arrangements and the protection of food. Protection against the more dangerous diseases—dysentery, typhoid and typhus—needed even more stringent precautions. Slogans were put up in the mess shelters, warning volunteers to wash before meals. Detailed instructions were sent out for the digging of latrines and the chlorination of drinking water, while all incoming parties, foreign brigades included, were inoculated and D.D.T.-ed.

This by no means exhausts the responsibilities of *Clavni Stab*, which often assumed a paternal character. Parents, worried by the long silence of sons too excited by their new experiences to write home, would sometimes ask for information. (The offenders would probably receive a rocket from their brigade commanders for delaying the rebuilding of the People's Republics!) Young brigade commanders of 18 or 19 might find themselves in difficulties, and a member of *Glavni Stab* would have to rush off in a jeep to help him and sort out the tangle. Even cases of petty crime would be found among so many thousand people—we experienced one or two cases of black-marketeering and cookhouse thieving amongst ourselves. All such matters had to be treated with tact and imagination, and

the harassed members of *Glavni Stab* were far from being cogs in an inhuman machine.

Their greatest difficulties were in poor communications and scarce means of transport. The "road" or rock-strewn track lay on the same side of the river as the path of the new railway, and drivers sometimes had to take to the *Pruga* itself. Trucks were in very short supply, and it was a miracle that food, mail and the daily paper (for the Railway had its own paper, run by the volunteers themselves) always arrived—though not always on time. Communications up and down the line, and even further, were maintained by couriers or by ordinary German-type field telephone. The line was faulty, and sometimes the most garbled messages went through. I have heard a wretched telephone operator at *Glavni Stab* howl down the line to Sarajevo for literally twenty minutes "Allo! ALLO! No! NO, NO! TWO wagons to take SIXTY Roumanians to Dubrovnik. NO! ROUMANIANS! ALLO! ALL-O-O! NOT SIXTY wagons, TWO wagons, TWO wagons!" and to have hung up in despair, after having convinced a railway official that sixty wagons were wanted immediately to move two Bulgarian brigades. The messages which used to come the fifteen miles to Nemila were rarely more reliable. One evening a message came which suggested that ten delegates were wanted the next morning at Zenica for a short works conference. The works foreman and his deputies were accordingly packed off with several others, only to discover that they were embarked on a five-day goodwill tour of the line, without so much as a toothbrush. I have rarely seen any man so angry as our Scots foreman, who was more interested in beating the "norm" on the line than in *kolos* and celebrations, and who was wise to the pleasures of a five-day trip in the back of a bus on Bosnian roads.

These difficulties meant a good deal of de-centralisation, leaving many responsibilities to the brigade and section leaderships. The line was divided into ten sections, each with its Section Commander and staff. The divisions were according to the nature of the work and the number of workers needed. VI Section, on which the British worked, was one of the shortest, for it included Vranduk tunnel and several tricky pieces of rock-blasting and engineering. At the Samac end of the line there were long stretches where the embankment marched over more level country, and the sections were many miles long. Our Section H.Q. was at Nemila, in a hut which was a warren of offices, with diagrams, charts and statistical graphs on the walls. The sections themselves were divided into several departments, but these were working and not administrative units. The section and department leaders were among the finest type of young Yugoslav. I remember our Section Commander particularly well. I think he was shy of the English and that we puzzled him. He was only

twenty-one years old, but he wore the proud 1941 star. He had a quiet, self-effacing manner, and he would drop in every now and then to see if we had any troubles or complaints. It was only when I had to work out organisational problems with him that I came to have a glimpse of his real qualities. He had a comprehensive grasp of every detail in the section under his leadership, and was quick to understand the problems arising from our own haphazard system of running our affairs. He made clear decisions and gave clear and patient instructions, and it was obvious that his staff and the brigade commanders regarded him with confidence and respect. He gave the impression of a man with a simple, muscular and honest mind, with a quick sense of humour and no trace of personal ambition or conceit. He may have been relieved when the British left his section, for we had given him more than one uneasy moment during our stay—but he left our final bonfire just as he left our camp on his other frequent visits, with the same cheerful and good-natured grin, as if to say: "Well, perhaps you will drop in again next year. Or perhaps I will come and visit you in England. What does it matter? The distance between our two countries is not so great, and if there is real friendship between our youth, why then, the distance is nothing to consider at all!"

## VII

The brigade was the working unit on the Railway. Something has already been said of their formation in each locality, and more will be said later of their actual work on the line. Here it remains only to describe the way the volunteers lived, and how they settled into the new environment.

A brigade arriving in July or August would come down on the old screeching line. They would probably travel for some miles alongside the track of the new *Pruga*, already showing impressive progress, and, at the Samac end, with the tracks already laid. The volunteers, shovelling and pushing barrows all along the line, would stop to cheer in the rookies—or, if they were newcomers themselves, would increase their work to breakneck speed and try to create an impression of long service and great experience. When they had arrived at their destination, the volunteers would be shown to their huts, and, if they were lucky, be given a shower. They would be issued with strong, cheap boots (if there were enough to go round—the foreign brigades always got these first) and the Railway "uniform"—a two-piece suit of blue or brown denims or working overalls. In the mid-summer, boots or bare feet and overall slacks were more than sufficient clothing, although those of us unused to the sun were well-advised to have some covering for neck and shoulders. The suit served as a uniform on special occasions and rallies, but in the

evenings some people—particularly girl students and volunteers from the towns—changed into "civvies." In general, however, everyone worked, ate, danced, studied and sang in the same suit of overalls, which were washed, together with underclothes and socks, in the cold mountain streams. The suit remained the property of the volunteers when they left the line, and they could often be seen wandering round in them in their home towns.

The brigade huts were long wooden constructions, usually with a double tier of plain wooden bunks laid down the middle. Straw palliasses and blankets made up the bed. The huts usually had one or two small offices and a larger common-room tacked on the end. Meals were eaten in an open shelter, the roof sometimes twined with branches or vines, while the cookhouse stood apart. The incoming brigade would hoist their flag with ceremony, and set about improving their camp. They would tack up their name in large wooden letters above the hut, hoping that in a few weeks' time (the usual length of stay was two months) they could add the word *Udarnik*.[1] The ground would be carefully swept and the hut scrubbed, while small flower-gardens or five-pointed stars and designs in red and white stone would be set in front of the hut. Then the artists would set to work, painting slogans and designs on the woodwork—perhaps a large picture of an *Udarnik* badge, or the peasant costumes of their home district, or an heroic representation of a girl with an over-size pick. Later, slogans in white pebbles would be set into the embankment itself, giving the name of the brigade and the number of days in which the work was finished. The brigade artists would also design beautiful notice-boards, and a wall-newspaper would be started up.

A lot could be told about the nature of a brigade from the way in which they set about improving the camp. It was amazing what a bit of wood and ingenuity could do (as witness the Greeks) and although all the brigades lived on the same pattern, they soon developed different personalities. The brigade would begin to form a character as soon as it settled in. Some would be grimly determined to become shock-workers; some boisterous and happy-go-lucky; some would plunge into cultural activities out of working hours, while others would find the work on the line and around the camp more than enough for the day. Because all of the Yugoslavs worked like beavers on the line, some of the British thought that they were in some way "different" and that a harder upbringing had accustomed them to heavier work and longer spells of endurance than ourselves. But this was by no means true. For some of the peasants, no doubt, boots were an unaccustomed luxury, the work strained no unused muscles, and the food and living conditions were more than tolerable

[1] Udarnik means "shock worker"—or "Stakhanovite."

(as indeed they were). But for the city-dwellers from the schools and universities the first week or two of work were a real test of will and staying-power. There were even some who, having spent the war in Zagreb, Belgrade or on the Dalmatian coast, found the routine of camp life far less familiar than the largely ex-Service British.

There were other characteristics which marked the different brigades. The peasants followed, almost universally, the custom of shaving their heads in the summer, whereas this was less common among the other volunteers. It looked strange and a little ugly to us, but there was no doubt of its convenience for those working in the dry, pulverised earth or the black filth of the tunnel. The students, of course, were more " sophisticated " in other ways, gaining something in humour and tolerance but losing in spontaneity. The Greeks on our section, very few of whom could speak any language but their own, had made up for this by setting a terrific pace at the evening bonfires when we all met together. They had the whole business cut-and-dried, and no one could hope to compete at the same pitch of intensity. Slogans would be roared back and forth, and one would be thrown up into the air by laughing volunteers. Then, without any signal, one would find oneself with joined arms moving rhythmically round in a circle in the firelight, singing back the words of the leader. And then perhaps more shouting, or a swift and expert Greek peasant dance, led by a girl in working-overalls with her long black hair streaming behind her. The bonfires of the peasant brigades (and often of our own) followed much the same pattern, and when the Greeks marched up singing they would steal the show. But our good friends the Belgrade mining students stood a little aloof from this. Their bonfires were tranquil and informal affairs, and they seemed to regard the antics of British and Greek alike with good-humoured tolerance. They would sit round the fire in groups, resting after a heavy day's work, and occasionally the accordionist would strike up dance music and couples would shuffle round on the uneven ground. Here one had more chance to make individual friendships and to talk[2] or argue at leisure. I sometimes had to rub my eyes to persuade myself that I was not among a group of British students on an English summer evening.

Volunteers of both sexes lived in the same huts, with wooden partitions between their quarters, and worked in the same brigades. No distinctions were made in the life and very few in the work, although the men did the greater part of the tunnelling, the drilling,

[2] Communication was never a great problem, if one was prepared to push on regardless. Many Yugoslavs spoke German, some French and a few English. Our interpreters were always ready to help out. A famous figure of our brigade was Sean, the Irish International Brigader. When he became Bde. Q.M. he used to carry on long conversations in what sounded like pidgin Irish interspersed with gestures and Spanish expletives. But he always brought back the food and stores for which he asked.

dynamiting and rock-lifting. Girls made up something in the region of 25 per cent. of the volunteers on the line. They undertook the heavy work at their own insistence, and fiercely resisted attempts at discrimination like shoving them on to permanent cookhouse (a very heavy job in itself) or on to camp duties. The relationship between the sexes was one of the healthiest things about the Railway. It was a remarkable victory when one considers the peasant tradition of much of Yugoslavia and that in the villages alongside the *Pruga* the veil is still worn. The sexes lived in complete equality, although the proportion of girls holding the most responsible positions is still low. It was a new experience to us—and somehow very moving—to catch our first glimpse of the boys and girls pushing loaded wagons down the rails together. Many of us thought, when we came out, that we were freed of superstitions and that our ideas were "advanced." But we found on the Railway a truer comradeship than we had known between the sexes, because it was based upon common work in which was gained a greater knowledge of each other and a new respect. We realised how rarely, even in our enlightened society, a woman can win the unqualified respect of men unless she fights for it tooth and nail. At the same time, on the Railway a very strict moral code was observed. It would not be true to say "imposed" because it was somehow a part of the spirit of the *Pruga* and of the common work, and it was rarely questioned. If this had not been so, then parents and educationalists would undoubtedly have raised opposition to the whole project. But the atmosphere seemed even to frown on the conventional chivalries which we and the French and Swedes brought with us, and in the Yugoslav brigades cases of serious transgression against the *Pruga* code were pretty well unheard-of.

## VIII

The work on the line lasted from six to eight hours, according to the age and decision of the volunteers themselves. After work the cultural and educational programme would begin. These activities are treated more fully in another section. It remains only to say that these activities were not by-products of the work on the line, but an integral part of the whole conception of the Railway. "The Railway builds us" ran the *Pruga* song, and the truth of this was borne out in every action of the volunteers. It can be seen most clearly in the technical and vocational training. In the work itself the shortage of skilled men in Yugoslavia was rapidly being made up. Not only linesmen, drivers, mechanics, miners, engineers, etc., but also telegraphists, clerks and typists, postal workers, doctors and architects were being trained. Not all of these youths will continue with the job they learned on the Railway, but the total effect will be to increase greatly the general quality, experience and resourcefulness of Yugoslav

labour. Equally complementary to the work on the line was the physical training, already mentioned above. Great emphasis was se on this, and P.T. and sport had honoured places in the programme Those of us who attended a great sports meeting at Zenica and wh saw the narrow shoulders and undeveloped bodies of some of th young volunteers can appreciate an enthusiasm which (in the case o P.T.) we failed to share.[3]

But physical and vocational training did not end the work of th Railway as Schoolmaster. Last year, of the few thousand illiterate who worked on the Brcko-Banovici line, several hundred escaped uncured. This year they set themselves the target, as did the partisans, of letting not one of the volunteers who came to the Railway leav it without being able to read and write. Academic work was carrie on for one or two hours after work, the volunteers squatting out i the sun, or in the shade of the embankment. Military training wa also given. Its importance has, naturally, been put quite out o proportion by one or two correspondents. The training was neithe sinister nor secret. One " training-ground " was a few hundred yard from our camp, and the British could watch it as they walked to an from the shop at Nemila where we went to buy tins of grapefruit juice. It amounted to the first two or three weeks general introductio to fieldcraft and infantry tactics which a British Army recruit is give —how to crawl, how to move across ground in formation, how t throw a grenade, march, and fire a rifle. I saw nothing more advance than is given in the Junior Training Corps in our public schools. Needless to say, foreign brigades did not join in.[4]

It would be difficult to make an exhaustive list of the many othe Railway activities. Everything from film-shows to chess competition were held. Visiting professors and men of letters gave lectures on the Five Year Plan, international affairs, history, economics, popular science and agricultural technique, civics and literature and the arts. Any number of discussions were held. There were political rallies, sports and cultural meetings and P.T. displays. Reading groups, libraries and wall-newspapers all performed an educative rôle. Th brigades formed their own choirs and art societies. Orchestras and dramatic companies from the cities visited the line, while the volunteers produced their own concerts, sketches and plays. The Youth Railway newspaper—*Borba*—and the wall-newspapers published

[3] And did not take part in, except for one Sunday morning of evil memory when the girls shamed us by doing jerks before breakfast.

[4] A deputy commandant of our brigade—an ex-officer whom we called " the Colonel "—was once so exasperated at our continual defeats at football that he offered to pick a team of British marksmen and challenge any brigade on the Section. He will not soon forget the horror on the faces of the Yugoslavs, who were busy combating foreign propaganda that they wer training an International Brigade to intervene in Greece.

poems by the volunteers, and the best of these were recited by the authors at every ceremony. The Railway had its own photographic and film units. The traditional peasant dances were encouraged and performances of them were given round the bonfires in the local costumes. Each brigade had, of course, its own tame artists who decorated the place, but students from the arts schools had their full-time job in portraying the work on the line. Not one of the volunteers with whom I spoke, peasant or schoolboy, thought this strange in any way. They respected the artist's work as being equally important as their own; they were eager to pose, and crowded round the canvas or demanded to look through the sketch-books. Everywhere one felt this new healthy attitude of the people to the arts, as a normal and manly occupation and one which somehow reflected credit on them. They were proud that exhibitions of painting, drawing and sculpture were being held, done by their comrades and showing themselves at work; they were proud that young architects and art students were designing the wayside stations; and they were proud that national artists and writers would often visit the Railway to talk with them and draw inspiration from their example.

But, more than this and yet including all this, the Railway was building a new generation. I remember that, when I spent a day or

Girl Bricklayer — *Paul Hogarth*

two on the Bulgarian Youth Railway, Sofia-Pernik, I saw a group of young girls sitting under a haystack and talking eagerly together, I asked my interpreter what they were saying. "They have appointed themselves a shock-group in the brigade and they are saying, 'Everything from the standard of work to the way the girls leave their shoes at night depends on us.'" The Railway taught, as no course of instruction could ever have done, democratic initiative and self-government and the true values of community living. It taught the youth about each other, and about the various nationalities which make up Yugoslavia—and as they grew to understand each other better so they grew more united. It taught the responsibilities of the individual in a society in which only the co-operation of every member resulted in the success of the whole. It taught the new value of labour, of labour freely and enthusiastically given and honoured in achievement. It taught the youth to read, to think, to govern themselves, to organise, to instruct others and to lead. In the West, while cherishing democracy and fearing all personal usurpers, we often leave little room for true democratic leaders to arise; our party system and safeguards leave the way open instead to charlatans, demagogues and mediocre yes-men; and, as in the late war, leadership at every level is trained in the bitter school of disaster. But democratic leadership is not an inborn characteristic; it is the fruit of testing and experience and responsibilities successfully met; it is the product of a society as much as of an individual. For this form of leadership the *Omladinska Pruga* was an excellent school. Imagination and decision, resourcefulness and patience, were demanded at every level. Those in positions of leadership in the Yugoslav brigades were under the constant critical eye of their friends and comrades, while, since they were elected representatives, they could feel confident of the most loyal support. They could make their first mistakes without greatly endangering the happiness of those under their guidance. Once elected, they were expected to lead; the problems of organisation and administration were theirs to sort out, and they were not expected to take refuge either in the orders of superiors or in endless committees. If their brigade or group or section succeeded in its job, that was their reward. But if they spared themselves in their work or showed self-interest, if they sought to create privilege for themselves or assumed an autocratic manner, then they were quickly removed from power. They were moved because they were hindering the building of the Railway, and the Railway itself was building new industries, new knowledge and new friendships, new relations between the sexes, a new outlook, new qualities in Man, and a new society.

## IX

The Railway completed its remarkable work by building bonds of friendship between the youth of many nations. Invitations were

sent to the youth of all countries represented in the World Federation of Democratic Youth, and fifteen or so nations sent one or more brigades—the British, French, Bulgars, Greek refugees, Danes, Hungarians, Palestinians (Jew and Arab), Roumanians, Triestines, Czechs, Italians, Canadians, Belgians, Poles, Swedes and Albanians. There were also a number of smaller working-groups from other countries—Australia, Holland, India, Switzerland, the West Indies, and Austria were among them. No brigade came from Germany. The Soviet Union sent no brigade, because, I was told, the Russians wished to give no grounds whatsoever to their enemies for complaints that the eastern democracies were under their domination. I feel myself that they were over-sensitive on this, and we all regretted that we had no chance to get to know the Soviet youth. We also regretted that the U.S. State Department refused (on the pitiful grounds that they could not "protect" their nationals !) to allow American youth to enter Yugoslavia. One or two American students working in Europe managed to squeeze through and were welcomed to work with our brigade. I should say at once that, on our part, we encountered no official resistance to our visit. There were minor cases of bureaucratic interference in getting transit visas on the way out, but the British Embassy in Belgrade gave us a warm welcome and every assistance. Together with the Consul at Sarajevo they supplied us with flags, films, exhibition materials and photos, regular information bulletins and packages of papers ranging from the *Times* to the *Daily Worker* and including illustrated periodicals. The Ambassador himself was always ready to welcome British volunteers. The Military Attaches' department must have worked overtime many times to sort out the Trieste and Austrian transit permits, and yet every new British volunteer who arrived at the office was given prompt and cheerful attention—and a *Player* as well.[5]

Two "International Brigades" were also formed at the Youth Festival in Prague. They were largely spontaneous affairs, formed from delegates who decided to put to an immediate practical test the resolutions of friendship which they had passed in the conference halls. One brigade was led by an Englishman, Bill Horne, and British groups served in both. Some bright entrepreneur faked up—from their presence and from the other foreign brigades—a story of the imminent invasion of Greece by an international force, passing along an under-

5 Unfortunately the same cannot be said of all H.M.'s servants overseas. It was reported that members of the Palestine brigade were victimised on their return. Trieste was a flagrant example. Danish, Italian and British volunteers passing through were viciously assaulted by small Fascist groups at the station or in public parts of the city. Although the offenders were well known, the British refused to protest or attempt to protect even their own nationals, and the British-trained and Fascist-infiltrated police were openly hostile. From this experience those of us who were victims gained an even greater respect for our Triestine *Pruga* comrades who, on their return, faced serious injury and disfigurement.

ground route (Vranduk tunnel?) through the Balkans. He converte himself into an "authoritative source" and sold the story on th international anti-Communist market. Among British papers the *Dail Telegraph* and the *Daily Graphic* made use of it. All I can say i "God help the democratic Greeks!" But this is unfair to the Inter national Brigades, which had taken on a more tricky job than build ing the Tower of Babel and whose members did not get off to th same flying start before the Almighty intervened against them Australian Communists and Dutch Catholic Youth worked wel enough together, but—as one story has it—the Czech National Socialist were so keen to prove their devotion to the ideal of personal liberty that they would down tools every now and then and hitch-hike abou the neighbouring countryside sight-seeing. The brigades settled dow and worked very well in the end, although from a distance the curiou medley of beards and exhibitionist hats seemed always to be obscure in linguistic fog.

The problems of organisation for the Yugoslavs were, of course immense, particularly since they insisted on every foreign brigad taking, at their expense, a week or ten days tour of Yugoslavia at the end of their work. Thoughout the summer, hotels at Dubrovnik were reserved for the foreign brigades, and though there was rarely enough room for everyone and the railway system was slow and congested the trips were a great success. The foreign volunteers were met wherever they travelled, with a really sincere welcome from all classes of people. But it was travel and exit visas which provided the NO with their greatest headaches. Most countries sent brigades which worked, took their holiday and crossed the frontier in both directions as one group and on the same bloc visa. Others, through no fault of their own, came in ones and twos and small groups, and wished to split into various different parties to make the return journey. In our brigade, for instance, some wished to remain in Yugoslavia as tourists; some to visit Bulgaria, Greece or Albania; and one girl wanted to work her passage on a Yugoslav cargo-boat to Singapore. Since most of us entered on group visas especially granted for Youth Railway volunteers, the necessary permits meant special application to Government departments. For a time the youth organisers struggled with the problem, but finally an edict was issued that the individuals should depart with the same group and leave at the same place at which they had entered. For many of us this was a disappointment, and various interpretations were set on the action. I have seen it quoted as an Awful Example that two foreign volunteers who, in their enthusiasm, arrived visa-less as stowaways at a Yugoslav port were sent without ceremony back to their homes, although the Embassy concerned was prepared to countenance their arrival. But Yugoslavia

is not a comic opera state, and she expects the customary etiquette of entry and exit to be observed. Security considerations may have influenced the final order. But I am convinced that organisational problems were the over-riding consideration, and while acting as commandant of the British Brigade I had more than one chance to look over our provincial hedge and see some of the work involved. I do not mean to run down the work of the British on the Railway. But we have a lamentable tendency to assume that we have a right to travel abroad when, where and as we please, without the formalities demanded of lesser races. One Scotsman arrived, kilt and all, with a complete blank in his passport where his visa should have been; and several of us, myself included, cheerfully overstayed the date stamped in the book. Nor were we by any means the only offenders. The NOJ had many brigades to look after, and they suffered from an absolute shortage of personnel. Nada, in her Belgrade office, coped pretty well single-handed with all of us (when her abnormal patience was tried to breaking-point she would say pathetically, "But I'm not a travel agency") and her "consulting-room" was always furnished with insistent patients of several nationalities. The NOJ was supposed to have an up-to-date picture of how many foreign volunteers were wandering in which parts of the country at any time, and the state of their visas, and, to be honest, I cannot believe that their figures were not often cooked.

The foreign brigades department of *Glavni Stab* at Zenica had other worries as well. Several of the eastern democracies had similar projects of their own, and the volunteers from these countries fell quickly into the routine. The Bulgars and Albanians, in particular, were monstrous workers and set a pace in every activity which only the Greeks and the crack Yugoslav brigades were able to equal. They became three or four times Udarnik brigades. But other parties arrived with the haziest of ideas of what was expected of them, and thought themselves embarked on a novel sort of holiday. (They were.) Some volunteers arrived in one brigade with a couple of trunkloads of clothes apiece. We were told an amusing story of one brigade (no names, no packdrill). On arrival they were shown their huts, and the embankment where work was already in progress.

"Aha! It is magnificent! What an inspiration!" They were shown the tools which they were to use.

"How interesting! Ah yes, and how primitive!" They were shown the tools once again.

"But what is this? A moment, please. We do not understand."

"This is where you will live, comrades, and here are your tools. You can organise the work as you please."

"But what is this? We understood we had come here to take part only in *travail symbolique*."

Not all the problems of the foreign department could be passed off as good-humouredly as this. Individuals sometimes flagrantly ignored the travel regulations (these applied only to group travel and exit; wherever we went on the line or the trip we were free to see all we could in the time and talk with whomever we pleased). There were other abuses of hospitality. One brigade—I never discovered which—sold its issue of blankets on the market at Dubrovnik. No wonder Bogdan sometimes appeared, black around the brows and with sweat on his forehead. Bogdan was the leader of the department and he became, in the brigade's last weeks, our very good friend. At first he was only an impressive figure who appeared at our brigade "presentations" when a group was about to leave; but, as we grew to know him better, we discovered the easy-going temperament and fund of caustic humour under the imposing surface. Before he came to the Railway he was the Editor of *Jez*, the country's leading satirical paper. He was, I believe, the only youth leader over 30, and he was chosen for the job because none of the younger generation had the same knowledge of the eccentricities of foreigners. A student in the 1930's, he had done post-graduate work in Paris and had travelled widely in Europe. He had returned to Yugoslavia before the war to carry on illegal political activity. A prisoner much of the war, he later managed to join the partisans. One day when he came to lecture he stayed and chatted of his experiences far into the evening. Hearing of the persecution which Communists and anti-Fascists received from the old Yugoslav régime, one realised sharply how few of his friends of student days had survived concentration camp, execution squad and partisan battle to take a part in building Yugoslavia today. As he watched the young miners at work there was something proprietary, almost paternal, in his eyes. For him the Railway was a new chapter, the chapter of achievement, while for many volunteers it was the beginning. And something in his manner and in the bitter lines of humour on his face prompted the mind to ask—how great was the cost?

Good friends of our brigade also were Zuko and Velezar, Bogdan's right-hand men. Zuko was a young partisan leader, very capable and well-liked by all the foreign brigades; but he was troubled by an old wound, and he was in hospital when our brigade left. Velezar looked after cultural relations, and tried to supply us with lecturers on the aspects of Yugoslav society which interested us most. Several times he came to talk himself, and he had a genius for appreciating the subtler shades of difference between our national traditions, and for explaining developments in Yugoslavia, not in jargon but in terms of our own experience and our own forms of democracy. He was a student of 23 or 24 and a fluent linguist. I heard him after one sumptuous international beanfeast translate after-dinner speeches into four different languages without making notes or fumbling for a

word. We had other good friends among the small staff of interpreters and organisers at Zenica. The work which they all did towards increasing international understanding would be difficult to overestimate.

The slogan of the Railway was "Brotherhood, Unity!" It was roared out at the bonfires according to a formula whenever anyone shouted the words "Omladinska Pruga!" If slogans have any meaning—and they have—few will be found to pick a quarrel with this one. There was no formula about its practice. Foreign volunteers were hustled in their free time almost to the limit of their energies. The brigades were invited somewhere nearly every evening, to meet either another foreign brigade or the Yugoslavs themselves. It has been suggested in a section of the British Press that, since several of the foreign groups did not work long enough on the line to repay the cost of their keep and the holiday trip, the Yugoslavs were serving sinister propagandist ends by inviting them. What mean, contorted and contemptible nonsense this is! In one column "iron curtain" and in another this! If the Yugoslavs had anything to hide, what a ridiculous business to invite thousands of young people to come to their country! It is a worthless piece of provocation—but let us examine it all the same. The business of promoting true international friendship has changed overnight from a garden-party luxury into a question of human survival, and it is time that we looked it in the face.

The Yugoslavs have a different form of society from our own. They regard it with pride, since they are building it themselves, and they were keen to show it at advantage to visitors. Certainly the eager volunteers on the Railway were the best showmen the nation could have found. When they talked with us they naturally gave us their own interpretation of national and international affairs. They were particularly welcoming to the British since they are distressed at the post-war deterioration of relations between our two countries, and believe, rightly or wrongly, that the offences against friendship have been largely on our side, and that if our people learn more of their country our mutual goodwill will increase. But visiting brigades were not subjected to a high-powered propaganda campaign. The British, for instance, learned most of their secondhand information about Yugoslavia not from the outside lecturers whom we ourselves invited, but from the interpreters and delegates who lived amongst us. We all came to know their characters, their tastes and prejudices and enthusiasms, and we all became their personal friends. But, supposing they had wished it, they could not have prevented us from forming our own opinions. One met on the Railway, not only young Communists, but republicans and monarchists, Protestants and Catholics and non-politicals—although it was noticeable that "politics" seemed irrelevant on the Railway and political opinions were not questions

one often thought of asking. On the trip the foreign brigades usually spent several days in Dubrovnik, passed up the Dalmatian coast and visited Zagreb, Belgrade or Ljubljana—all places where the opposition is most vocal and where the disgruntled flock around the English-speaking like wasps and blue-bottles round a jam jar. Nor were the foreign volunteers themselves, as has been suggested, all "hand-picked Communists." One met the most remarkable medley of political opinions, and some amusing contrasts. A Canadian loudly pro-Soviet arguing with a Roumanian equally loudly anti-Communist, or Swedish Marxists going hammer-and-tongs at Czech exponents of "western democracy." If the percentage of Communists in any brigade was unduly high, this was emphatically not the fault of the Yugoslavs (who were childishly pleased whenever they heard that some Conservatives had come to our brigade), but of the youth of those countries who did not take full advantage of the invitation, or of their Communists for bagging all the seats. As far as Yugoslavs were concerned everyone except drunkards or Secret Service agents was welcome.

But the Yugoslavs did *not* regard the Railway as one more friendship jamboree. If the World Youth Festival was the drawing-office of international unity, then they intended the Railway to be the foundry. They realised that *travail symbolique* leads only to *amitié symbolique* and they had a far profounder aim in view. They believed that hard work would lead to hard-headed understanding. They were impatient of foreign groups reluctant or unable to do their full share of work, both because the work was urgent and had to be done, and because they knew that the workers themselves would become frustrated, secretly ashamed of themselves and poorer for the experience. They did not hide their hope that the British would come on future occasions organised as a work ng brigade, prepared to stay some length of time and to compete on equal terms with the others. On the Railway, perhaps for the first time in history, large-scale international friendship was taking on really tangible form. And it turned out to be something quite different from what we expected. It was not a rather dreary business of sympathetic condolences, a gloomy aura of not feeling any particular malice towards anyone. It was made up of a number of dislikes, irritations, and fits of anger, as well as laughter, songs, sudden attractions, gratitude and admiration. Nationalities developed friendships as people do, not unquestioningly but with qualifications, disliking certain characteristics or weaknesses, but accepting the whole. We found that some nations had a particularly quick sympathy for each other, and that this had little relation to geographical, political or cultural affinities (I believe that it was the Triest nes, Australians and the Balkan peoples with whom the British found most in common, and not the Swedes, Canucks, French,

Czechs or Italians), while other nations might even find for each other initial antipathy.

I think we came to understand and like the Yugoslavs far more through the occasional mistakes, frictions and organisational disasters than we would have done from any number of expressions of goodwill. Our minds were first and foremost on the job, and the Railway—that wonderful mason and agent of change—did the rest. Our Press and our statesmen have, since the war ended, discoursed endlessly on friendship, as if it were something which they could offer with a gesture but which other nations had chosen to withhold. But if we are serious for a moment we will see that friendship is not in our gift but is yet to be made, by mutual intercourse and common effort. Of the two great post-war schemes to build this real friendship, the World Youth Festival has been regarded by some with indifference or hostility, while the Railway has been mentioned by the same people only in terms of abuse. I can only suppose that those who rush, with such hearty ignorance, into the attack, do not *wish* such ties of friendship to develop when the Yugoslavs and Balkan peoples are included. If this is not so, let us hear from them practical proposals for a scheme as courageous, broadly-conceived and tenaciously executed as that of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia. For, let it be understood that they have one alternative only if they do not find such a scheme—and that is to prepare for war.

The Yugoslav youth leaders had one further purpose in mind when they invited the foreign brigades to their country. Their youth had been isolated from the world throughout the war. Now reconstruction was claiming all their time, and the lack could best be remedied on the home ground. But they did not fuss unduly once they had got us all there. They mixed the ingredients together and let the chemical agencies of language and common work break down the barriers until "*Bratsvo! Jedinstvo!*" had a meaning as real, as gritty and as robust, as *Omladinska Pruga* itself. We felt as if it was international friendship which had formed the hard callouses on our hands.

## X

Turning over these pages I find that very much has still remained unsaid. Many of the details which brought the Railway to life have already slipped from the memory. I find that I have said little about "politics," not by design but because nowhere did such a digression seem in place. Arguments and discussions were plentiful on the line wherever the foreign volunteers went, but the job of building the *Omladinska Pruga* itself was one which we never thought to question. Whatever our various opinions the need for the Railway was obvious, and we could get on with the job in a spirit of unity and with a good

heart. I gained the impression that the attitude of the majority o young Yugoslavs to their own national affairs was very much the sam They followed all matters closely. But the unity of war and recon struction went very deep, the problems before them were urgent an left little room for argument except in points of method. They go on with these jobs with all the speed they could, and they seemed t regard our attention to party tactics, political auctioneering and parlia mentary jockeying as a curious form of western fixation. The Railwa was a great social phenomenon, and although different interpretation may be set on the cause of its arising, it cannot be defined in conven tional party terms.

But, more than this, I feel that I have failed to give flesh an blood to the story. Perhaps this can never be done unless one goe to see *and work* oneself. I have spoken endlessly of the Railway spiri although, of course, the earth was moved and the *kolos* were danced not by spirits, but by very real young men and women, and it is o them that the strong visual pictures remain. They have thronged m memory as I have been writing. I remember the entrance to Vrandu tunnel, and the miners coming out at the end of their shift, smudge with black, exhausted and smelling of the carbide from their lamps or the dawn at Nemila, when we crawled out of bed and went u to the spring, the sun catching the mountain tops, while handkerchief of mist still clung to the wooded slopes, and in the valley a neighbour ing brigade marched singing back from the night-shift. Or th presentations when the cheering and slogan-shouting matches began. The Greeks, a sectarian crowd, would launch straight in with "Stalin Tito - Dimitrov!" or "Harry Pollitt - Zahariades - Harry Pollitt Zahariades"—to which someone invented the reply of "General Markos Zilliacos!" Most of all I remember a delegation up to the Samac end of the line—watching the Zagreb students drilling in mid stream the rock foundations of a bridge, and attending a huge evening bonfire with speeches, exhibition dances and songs. Throughout all these memories there winds the *kolo*, the leader with his head thrown back at the clear stars, singing out the lines in an open half-oriental voice :

*"Broaden the ring, Lolo from Kozara!*
*Make it wider still, then we can move better.*
*Comrade Tito, little white violet,*
*All our youth loves you.*
*Comrade Tito, little blue violet,*
*You are fighting for the people's rights.*
*We are two brothers, both in the fight.*
*Weep not, Mother, if we should perish*
*(We are brothers, from below Kozarica)*
*For as many leaves as there are on Kozara.*

*There are still more young Communists.*
*And as many branches as there are on Kozara,*
*There are still more young partisans . . .*"

Sometimes a girl would break from the wide circle moving slowly round the fire, and would dance lightly in the centre, keeping her face always towards the one or more young men who followed her in, and who swooped and swerved round her with arms outstretched, leaping, clapping and shouting in time with the music. Then another girl would come in, and the first would take once again her place with us in the circle. And finally the bonfire would die down and a few groups would be left sitting on logs and talking by the fire. British and Yugoslavs would sing the Railway Song together once again:

"*Samac—Sarajevo.*
*That's our target.*
*To build another railway*
*This summer, too.*"

Two other lines of the song have stuck for a long time in my memory and continually thrust themselves forward:

"*Dan am zivi, zivi rad*
*u novoj slobodi.*"

"*Long live our labour*
*In our new-found freedom.*"

# Work

## by Bill Francis

*Brigade Works Foreman, August*

"FAITH moves mountains" is an apt description of the stupendous achievement of the Yugoslav youth of both sexes, who by voluntary effort built the railway line from Samac to Sarajevo. The secret behind this gigantic feat is the boundless creative spirit released by the new democratic organisation of labour. Yugoslavia is ablaze with this new spirit; to the foreigner paying a visit or working in the country, it is a most inspiring and exhilarating experience.

To realise the magnitude of the task which confronted the planners and volunteers, it is essential to have a picture of the nature of the work and the means at their disposal to carry the job through.

Because of the technical backwardness of Yugoslavia before the war and the vast destruction of property and terrible loss of life caused by the Fascist invaders, there was no reservoir of skilled labour to

draw upon, very little modern equipment such as bulldozers, mechanical shovels, etc., and a shortage of other materials necessary for such constructional work.

The railroad winds for 150 miles through the undeveloped valleys and rugged scenery of Bosnia, which made the work of the gallant army of volunteers extremely arduous. Five major bridges had to be constructed, one of which, spanning the Sava river at Samac, was 650 metres in length. Four tunnels were blasted through solid rock, and thirty-seven stations were built. The work also involved clearing trees and thick undergrowth, cutting and felling along the right of way, ferrying cement and timber across the fast Bosna river, repairing and remaking the road where the Railway crossed it, diverting streams and digging new beds, making concrete drainage systems, fitting up telephone and signal lines, and the erection of numerous brick structures.

Four million cubic metres of earth and stone were dug and shifted to build up the railway embankment. Eighty per cent. of the work on the line had to be done by hard gruelling pick-and-shovel work. Where there were enough tip-wagons, the earth was loaded on them in the tunnels, quarries or cuttings, and they were pushed on guide-rails to the place where earth was needed for the embankment. As each layer of earth rose up it was compressed by stamping with heavy wooden dumpers. Then rock or shale was tipped over the outside slopes of the embankment to protect it from heavy rain and frost. But much of the earth was shifted in thick, old-fashioned wheelbarrows. Sometimes the barrow-runs were hundreds of yards long, and uphill, climbing up banks and crossing streams on thin planks. It is easy enough to push a wheelbarrow down the garden, but it is a different matter to push a full barrow ten or fifteen miles a day in Bosnian sun. It was boring and back-breaking work. Hands and feet became sore and blistered, back and arms ached; but the Yugoslav youth went at it as if it were a holiday. They often ran at the work, trying to surpass each other. Some of them pushed two loaded barrows, one on top of the other !

What a wonderful, glorious and noble sight, to see thousands of young students and workers from all Yugoslavia voluntarily slogging away with pick and shovel and barrow during their vacations!

How did the youth set about organising this invaluable contribution to the reconstruction of their devastated country? Once the plan was agreed upon by the Government Economic Council, the Central Youth Council, together with the government engineers, assessed the work, the manpower and material requirements, and drew up a timetable of works progress. Where materials were short the factory workers pledged themselves to double their output and ensure delivery of supplies to the youth in time.

Girl with barrow — *F. H. Baines*

Work on the line was divided into ten sections, each having its own administrative and technical staff, also the necessary tools and equipment. Invitations were sent out to all the youth administrative districts throughout the country to supply one or more brigades of volunteers.

The response to this clarion call was terrific, its notes resounded beyond the Yugoslav borders, striking harmonious chords in the hearts of democratic youth in 18 other countries; 20,000 foreigners crossed the Yugoslav borders, not to pillage and plunder, but to extend the hand of friendship in helping reconstruction.

The brigades were dispersed to the sections all along the line, to work on an average for a period of two months. Each brigade elected its own works foreman, who received instructions from the section engineer on the work to be done. A certain number of paid and skilled workers—engineers, explosives experts and quarrymen—helped the youth in their work. Some of these skilled experts themselves volunteered for the work. One of these was the Chief Engineer directing the greatest project on the line, Vranduk tunnel. He was a Partisan in 1941. He became a regimental commander, leading the struggle in this very part of Bosnia. Sometimes he and his men hid in the caves of the mountain through which the tunnel is now driven. In the struggle he lost his wife and his two elder sons. His third son lost his arm, and is now a student and a leader of the Yugoslav youth

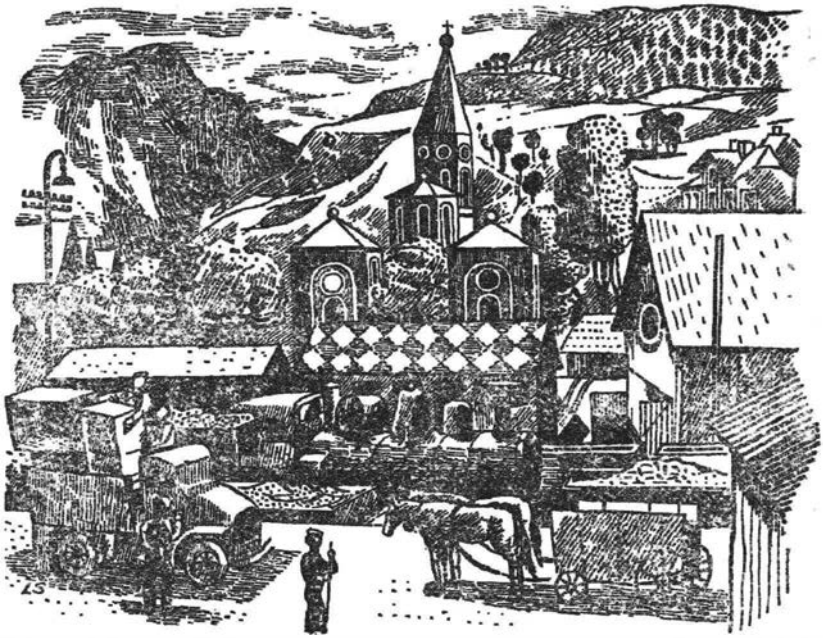
movement. It was from the selfless devotion of men like this in both generations that the Railway was built.

But such experts did not order the youth about. They gladly passed on their knowledge. During the work on the line hundreds were being trained as dynamiters, carpenters, or tractor drivers, and for other skilled jobs.

The Youth Railway was very statistics-conscious. Every brigade had its own statistician. Figures were needed by the engineers to plot the progress of the work and by brigades and headquarters to judge individual and group performances. It was thought that the best work could only be achieved if every worker was fully informed about the progress of the work, and knew how his effort was contributing to the whole. A system of checking the work of each individual existed. The tempo of the work evolved around the "norm" which was a measurement of a good day's work, and was calculated on the age, sex and experience of the workers, as well as the nature of the soil, length of the run, and other factors. Keen, competitive, friendly rivalry was fostered by a system of awarding a banner to the best brigades and *Udarnik* badges to the best individual workers. Brigades became honoured as "Shock-Brigades" if they exceeded their norm by 30 per cent. over a period of three weeks. Points were given not only for the work on the line, but also for the care of tools, the smallness of the percentage of workers on cooking, staff or camp duties, and cultural activities in the general life of the camp. A brigade could be honoured more than once as a shock-brigade, and there were some which were honoured three or four times. Many of the foreign brigades were proud to win the same honour. The Albanians achieved 400 per cent. of their norm on one shift, and were four times proclaimed shock-workers.

The British, who answered the same call, did not win this honour. We were sad that we could not do this, for there were few among us, girls as well as men, who did not give our best in the work and return to camp with every muscle exhausted At the rock-face our group often exceeded the norm, achieving sometimes 200 per cent. But the long, slogging barrow-runs were more difficult. Our care of tools was not good. The percentage of workers on camp duties was high. Few of the British stayed long enough to get used to the work, coming as they did from lecture-rooms and offices. When the blisters subsided and the muscles loosened up, it was time to go. We determined that if a brigade goes back next year, then it will be organised to show our friends in Yugoslavia what British youth can do.

The building of the Samac-Sarajevo Railway is an example to the Western Democracies in the throes of reconstruction of what youthful energy, with a grand ideal behind it, can accomplish when supported by the government.



**The Station, Zenica** *Laurence Scarfe*

# Study

## by Dr. S. Mason

*Lecturer in History of Science, Oxford University.*
*Cultural Officer, July.*

THE character of cultural education on the Youth Railway may be set by contrasting the approach to this question of the British Working Groups and the Yugoslav Brigades, for the two attitudes mirror our differences nationally. To us, cultural work and the appointment of a full-time cultural officer seemed a luxury, a superfluity, at least in the early part of our stay, whilst to the Yugoslav Brigades there were no two ways about it, education was an integral part of their reconstruction, a full-time cultural officer an obvious and unquestioned necessity. Remember the slogan: "We build the railway, the railway builds us." And this set the tempo of education and the whole of the cultural activities. The Yugoslav paintings of the Youth Railway, and some of their songs and dances, both expressed and evoked the very spirit of endeavour. We ourselves felt and responded

to this spirit as can be seen in some of the drawings and sketches that our artists made out there. In our songs and dances we were less fortunate ; apart from the virile survivor of our own folk dances, the Scots reel, all we could offer were the rather meaningless motions of the " Hokey-cokey." In artistic activities, painting, song, dance, and drama the various brigades were on an equal footing, some of the best drawings, for instance, coming from the peasant brigades. In other matters the activities of the different brigades were diverse. The peasant brigades had to cope with the illiteracy of their members, whilst the mining student brigade from Belgrade studied the more advanced aspects of statics and dynamics. But they shared, through their wall newspapers, a knowledge of the progress of the Railway as a whole, and in their more general education saw their effort as part of the Five Year Plan in a wider pattern of the historical development of a socialist economy. The study of history to the Yugoslavs is not so much a quest for the atmosphere, or ethos, of an age, as in our universities, but more a search for the pattern of development, whereby history may be understood and the future planned.

Much interest was expressed in the British Universities at the meetings we held jointly with the Belgrade students. Teaching methods seemed to be much the same, apart from the wide use of seminar methods of mutual student education. Through their organisations Yugoslav students have wider powers of self-determination in the Universities, and through their links with the Youth Movement take part in its activities nationally. Barriers to the entrance of talented but poor young people to the universities have been abolished by the provision of grants, free meals and clothing, though the more well-to-do sections of the Yugoslavs still pay fees for university education.

In further meetings we learned of the development of national literatures in the various parts of Yugoslavia, and of the history of the national movements generally in the country. Much discussion centred round the nature of the new democracy, practical examples of which were seen in the activities of the brigades and the running of the Youth Railway generally.

In turn we provided speakers for other brigades on a variety of subjects from the home policy of the present government to English literature. Through these meetings and by many mutual friendships we came to understand and appreciate the tasks the Yugoslavs have set themselves, and their attitude to questions arising from this central problem of industrialising the country. Education and learning generally is considered vital to this development and the evolution of an educated, informed, democratic people. To them learning is the vehicle of wisdom, bringing understanding and government of the world in which we live, and not, as learning sometimes becomes to weaker spirits, the refuge from a seemingly cruel and perplexing cosmos.

Sports Festival, Zenica — *Ronald Searle*

# Recreation

## by Martin Eve

*Brigade Choirmaster, July and August*

THERE were more things than work on the Youth Railway. After a much-needed afternoon siesta, in the cool of the evening, recreation began. What sort of entertainment could there be in the heart of the Bosnian countryside, miles from cinemas, theatres and all the town amenities to which we are accustomed in England? Part of the answer is that the theatres and cinemas were sent from the towns to the Railway. While I was there we were visited by the Belgrade Opera Company, actors from the Sarajevo Repertory, and a students' orchestra from Ljubljana; and we also saw two or three films. But this was only a small part of camp entertainment; all the rest was organised by the brigades themselves.

Most people know that the Partisans used to sing wherever they went—vigorous and inspiring songs, some of them folk-tunes and others written during the Occupation, about the fight for freedom. These songs, and others written for peace-time and reconstruction, are sung

by the Railway brigades marching to and from work ; and sung in three or four parts, they certainly sound effective.

Some of the British Brigade thought these songs were too " political." They were about Tito and democracy, or about Istria ; and " Death to Fascism " was all very well but shouldn't be in a song. But the Yugoslav folk-culture is still a living tradition, not a glass-case survival, and so continually renews itself, and remains in touch with national sentiment and thought. Just as they used to sing about the struggle against the Turks and Austrians, and the peasant heroes who led them, so they now sing about Tito and the Partisans. The songs about *mladi proleteri* are just as spontaneous as " Tipperary " and " Pack up your Troubles." But the older songs are still popular too ; " Dalmatia my homeland," " Marjane " and the Slovene " Hey Brigade," for instance.

These popular songs (and what a contrast they are with our mass-produced " popular " songs) that everyone sings are not the only ones we heard in Yugoslavia. At the concerts arranged by VI Section, the Yugoslavs sang more complicated and sophisticated ones, often with accordeon accompaniment. (I almost became reconciled to accordeons used in this way). We learnt, among other things, that it is not only Italians who know how to sing Verdi.

Yugoslav dancing, like their singing, reflects the same qualities that they show at work, and in life generally. They are close to folk-culture, and to the community spirit of the village. So when they dance, they don't always dance in pairs, as we do in the West, they form a circle with linked arms, and move around to their own accompaniment of singing. The simplest and most informal of these dances is the *kolo*. This starts up anywhere—in a station yard, for instance, while waiting for a train—people join in or drop out as they wish. There are many set verses, which are repeated antiphonally, but new ones can always be added to fit any occasion. In addition to the *kolo* and other less simple steps, there are national dances ; we saw Serb, Croat and Macedonian dances done in national costumes, and enjoyed as much by the dancers as by the audience. It is a tremendous achievement that the old national rivalries should now take this peaceful and altogether delightful form.

Apart from concerts, at which these songs and dances would be " laid on," there were the less organised and more frequent bonfire parties. One of the brigades would collect a good pile of wood (no great difficulty in the Bosna valley) and invite all the rest of the section round after supper. As each brigade arrived, there would be some sharp competition in slogan shouting.

British people have a natural aversion to shouting slogans (except at football matches) and many who went out to the Youth Railway

disliked the idea, which they perhaps associated with early memories of pre-war news-reels. However it was noticeable that as soon as they started to join in themselves, they forgot these inhibitions and shouted as loudly as anyone else. This was not, I think, because they suddenly succumbed to a herd instinct; but because they realised the value of slogans where language was such a barrier. The slogan *Bratsvo Jedinstvo* really meant something to the Partisans, who were trying to unite the antagonistic national groups of Yugoslavia. And *Bratsvo Jedinstvo* came to mean something to us; a link between the youth of Western Europe and Eastern Europe, and the promise of a deeper friendship between our peoples.

A variation of this greeting of one brigade to another was practised by the wilder races, Greeks, Bulgars, and British. Guests and hosts charged each other and competed in lifting one-another shoulder-high, like a successful team. Success in this was not always commensurate with determination, and there was liable to be opposition. A visiting Soviet Trade Union delegate was first lifted himself in this way, and then lifted complete with car and chauffeur, before being allowed to drive off.

A *kolo* or one of the other similar dances would start up when the slogan-shouting (and weight-lifting) had spent itself. Then someone would start up a song, when the dancers were getting exhausted—and so on, each brigade being expected to contribute something. One could always take a rest from dancing, sit on the logs which were drawn up round the fire to serve as seats, light up a *Drina,* and start a conversation in German. Yugoslavs, fortunately, have no objection to conversing in German if they can speak it, and a great many can; but more and more are learning English in the schools, as a second language, and it should be easier every year for the British visitor to make himself understood.

At these bonfires, it must be confessed that we felt very keenly the lack of our own national culture, which has been destroyed by years of individualism. The arts have become professionalised, and the remains of our heritage, folk-songs and dances, are artificial to the average city-dweller. (I hope that Yugoslavs don't really think that the "Hokey-cokey" is our national dance.) Perhaps that is why we were so impressed by the Yugoslav songs and dances, which seemed to bubble out at the least opportunity. They are part of that spontaneous collective initiative, which has built the Railway this year. Perhaps it might be thought a grim task, to clear 150 miles of track with very little machinery, almost with bare hands; but no one can accuse the Yugoslavs of being grim. They always had time for a smile and a joke, or a song. The Railway Song, with its countless verses and versions, adapted to fit every occasion, will be remembered by many people from every country in Europe for years to come. My

first and most vivid recollection of Yugoslavia is of Jesenice, a little frontier station, at three in the morning. I had gone to sleep in Austria; as I woke up the other side of the border, I heard three girls singing this song, in a rich contralto which carried across the platform and roused me from sleep. Outside there was a delegation, boys and girls with banners. No one had told them to turn out in the middle of the night; they had waited there to welcome the strange English who had come across Europe to work with them. It was our first contact with the Yugoslav people; and it was a fair sample of their spontaneous friendliness.

# The British

## by Dorothy Sale

*Organising Secretary, August 15—September 15*

FROM Zenica onwards, the little narrow-gauge railway follows the course of the River Bosna for some miles. Above it rise the steep sides of hills, wooded with beeches, under which grow wild cyclamen extending to the edge of the track, and conifers, which before the war provided the material for Bosnia's chief industry.

Beyond the Vranduk tunnel, the embankment is cut from a face of hard grey rock for about a mile. Then come more earth embankments, with concrete tunnels here and there to let through the swift little streams that run into the Bosna from the hills. The group of long white huts a mile or so from the tunnel mouth is Sixth Section.

The peasant children, leading their sheep and goats around the scarce mountain pasture, became quite used to the *Pruga* and to the camps beside it, including the one centred about a long white hut surmounted by a red lion pawing at a red star, and the words *Britanska Brigada.* For three months of the summer this was the home of the British brigade on the Youth Railway.

For many of the peasants in this remote Bosnian valley, and for many of the young workers on the line who came from distant parts of the country, these members of the British brigade were the first British they had ever seen, and on them was built their conception of the British people.

On the hot afternoons, the British could be seen lounging about the camp. A strange crowd to look at, the men with unshaven faces and pink, blistered backs, and the girls with bright coloured sunsuits and smoked spectacles. Their camp was a mess, compared with some of the others on the section, particularly with that where the

Second Greek Brigade, "Georgi Siandos," made their home for the summer. Here the whitewash was dazzling and fresh, the grass crisp and green, and there were always fresh pine branches around the entrance. On the British huts the whitewash was grey and flaky, and the camp area was uneven and untidy. Behind the messing shelter long rows of washing flapped lazily. Here on this camp, four hundred and sixty British, a mixed crowd, varying in age from sixteen to over forty, came and worked for a couple of weeks and left in groups of about fifty all through the summer.

Brigade members came from many parts of the British Isles and of the British Commonwealth, from Canada, Australia, India, the West Indies, Egypt and Africa. There were students, three hundred and twenty of them, the majority ex-Service, and intellectuals, about seventy, including university dons, writers, journalists, schoolteachers, engineers, and also about thirty artists, some of whom came out especially to record the work of the railway. There were a few workers, too, factory workers, shop assistants, clerks, typists, textile workers; these, however, were only about thirty in number, because average holidays are not long enough to allow travelling. In order to spend the necessary month or more away from England, most of these people had to give up their jobs; although their numbers were small, it was from this group that many of the leaders of the brigade came. The politics of brigade members varied considerably. About thirty to forty per cent. were Communists, ten per cent. were Labour Party members, a few Conservatives, and the rest non-party. Some people had come out of curiosity, some with a vague idea of doing some kind of social work, some to study the politics of the new Yugoslavia, some wanted a holiday with hard physical work, some just wanted a holiday, some came with all sorts of odd reasons "to study the Yugoslavs at home," or "to observe the impact of the West on the East." They had all come to the Railway with this in common, that practically none had any idea of what they were coming out to, either the nature of the work or the mode of living on the line.

The story of the organisational development of the British brigade would make an interesting study for a sociologist. This group of people, sometimes over two hundred in number, with the internal organisation of the brigade left entirely in their hands by the Yugoslav authorities, slowly and painfully forged a democratic community. In a group of this size, there is in embryo nearly every social problem; and the British middle class, for all the word is constantly on their lips, have very little conception of what democracy means in practice, and very little experience of self-government. Most of us haven't even the experience which membership of a trade union gives. But this is a book about the Youth Railway, and the story of how the British finally worked out their problems has no place here. Because

of the group system on which its members came out, our brigade was organised quite differently from all the others, its problems were different, and their solution only partially possible.

The important thing is that, in spite of the very small publicity given to the Railway in England, in spite of the demands of our own industries, in spite of currency and travel difficulties, this token force of young people from England came out to work beside the People's Youth of Yugoslavia on their great project.

We were greeted with immense enthusiasm. Everywhere the British were fêted and cheered, not with officially organised and led cheers, but with the spontaneous shouts of the young Railway volunteers. For the young people of Yugoslavia welcome friendly visitors, and are certain that once people from abroad have seen their country, have seen the spirit with which they are rebuilding, seen the wartime unity maintained in the period of reconstruction, they will return to their own lands, and will put an end to the torrent of lies which sections of the foreign press pour forth about them.

Life in the camp had a bit in it of the life of an army camp, a bit of the harvest camp, a bit of the atmosphere of a pre-war Scout or Guide camp, and plenty that was unlike any of these. Each camp on the section developed its own personality, not least the patch of land under the Union Jack. For the first few weeks of the brigade's life the British shared quarters with the Palestinian brigade, and a working group from Australia. Patricia Dunne, leader of the first group out, and for two months commandant of our brigade, describes the early days :

> "At Nemila the first days were spent in acclimatising ourselves to Camp Life. The International atmosphere—there were Greeks, Albanians, Danes, Swedes, Italians, Palestinians, Australians as well as Yugoslavs, each with their own camp in the Sixth Section—the mixing of students, ex-servicemen and women, sailors, workers and professional workers, and the metamorphosis from a working group of twenty-one to a full brigade taxed the imaginaton and initiative and called for much adjustment. The group was anxious from the beginning to conform to the general pattern of organisation which prevailed throughout the Section, namely that the group (and later the brigade) should have its own elected leadership, officers and cookhouse staff. A complication of the early days that called for more than the average amount of tact and imagination was the preparation of meals by a staff composed of Arab, Australian and English whose job it was to provide food palatable to all three races from the same tin and out of the same pot.
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> " The experience of sharing quarters with and working beside the team of Palestinians in which there were Arab and Jew was a good introduction to the general feeling and spirit of the camp. The unity of Arab and Jew had a special significance for the British who were fully conscious of it, and the admiration for the Arab leader under whom they worked at first was genuine and sympathetic."

The Railway authorities soon reversed their plan of confining all the foreign brigades to one section, and as the various brigades on

Sixth Section left, their place was taken by Yugoslavs, until the Greeks, the Triestinians and the British were the only foreigners left there. Our relations with these two brigades were the warmest, and many of our best memories of the Railway are about them, but we were also very glad of the chance to get to know some of the Yugoslavs really well. The section amongst which we most most friends was a brigade of mining students from Belgrade University, a crack group who were working on the Vranduk tunnel. Most of them spoke either French or German, and one or two of them English, so we found it quite easy to talk to them. The Australian group mentioned by Patricia Dunne soon left to go on to the International Youth Festival in Prague, but two of them stayed and worked as members of the British brigade until they left with the Bulgarian working group.

The British camp was awakened at five o'clock in the morning by a buglar whose intentions were the best, but whose intonation sent shivers down the spines of the sensitive. Between five and six the British got up. There were always a few hardy spirits one could be sure of meeting early at the washing place, but only a few. The rest left the main ablutions of the day until after the morning shift. The washing place was a spring which had been led down by means of planks to a wooden trough, which should have provided space for about a dozen people to wash; but, although the British camp carpenter was always nailing up odd pieces of wood and unblocking stoppages, there always seemed to be something which prevented more than about three people from getting a proper wash at the same time. But this had its compensations, for several nearby brigades washed at the same spring, and there were opportunities for many interesting conversations while we were waiting.

Breakfast consisted of bread and coffee. Dark brown bread, mainly corn meal, sliced apple butter, and *ersatz* coffee, for, like the rest of Europe, Yugoslavia is almost without real coffee. Then the "work parade." At committee meeting after committee meeting the decision was made that the work parade should be at a quarter to six. A working delegation of five young Yugoslavs who were attached to the brigade took this quite seriously, and would solemnly fall in at five forty-five, shovels on their shoulders, while the British sat munching bread and jam, or were still emerging, bleary-eyed, from their huts. But by six o'clock or soon after, there was a bunch of people round the Union Jack, and as soon as reasonable numbers had assembled, two parties shambled off to work.

Of the two main British working groups, one worked at a rock-face loading up rock, which the skilled dynamiters had blasted overnight, on to tip wagons, running them along for a couple of hundred yards or so, and emptying them over an embankment. During the

summer the track ate further and further into the rock, and the embankment thrust itself out to meet the earth-built one which the other party was building more slowly with picks, shovels and wheelbarrows. For some of the working party, the great rock took on a symbolic importance. In the words of Jock, Scottish foreman of the group, "They saw in that rock a symbol of obstruction, a bar to the progress of the Yugoslav people in their struggle for national independence, peace and prosperity."

The girls worked on the same jobs as the men, and work went on for six hours with a break in the middle for sandwiches. It was hard work for people unaccustomed to railway building, and most of the group were glad when twelve o'clock came round. But although we were tired at the end of a shift, it was a healthy physical tiredness, which made the work seem like a real holiday to those who were stale from too much working with books, or fed up after a year in a stuffy office. And after the first few days, when blisters had subsided a bit, and muscles relaxed from their stiffness, twelve o'clock seemed to come much more quickly, and the last hour of work to seem less like eternity.

Food in the camp was good. There was plenty of bread, fruit and vegetables, and there was fresh meat usually about twice a week. To begin with, members of the brigade tried their hands in the cookhouse, but no one had come out specially to cook, and the results of amateur attempts were rather horrible. At length we accepted the offer made by our Yugoslav liaison officers, and a Yugoslav cook was lent to the brigade. Her name was Anna, and during her stay we became extremely fond of her. She had come to cook for a brigade on another section, because her young son, Vladimir, was working with them. Before the war she had been a textile worker in Zagreb, working all day, and keeping house for her husband and two sons in the evenings. Her husband had been killed at the beginning of the war, and for two years she herself, although she was no longer young, had been with the partisans, first as a courier and then as a cook. It was here that she had gained her experience of large-scale cooking. And really excellent cooking it was. But she contributed more to our camp than good food. She was a simple person, with no great knowledge of politics, but she had very deep-rooted in her the values of the new Yugoslavia, the values, learnt among partisans, of comradeship and social living. She could not understand or tolerate the scrounging that went on among the brigade members. If there was a limited supply of milk, then it should be saved until there was enough for everyone to have a little in the morning coffee, not used by those with access to the cookhouse to make tea for themselves. "In the partisans, I have seen twenty people share one cigarette," she would tell us, when she had come to complain of some

piece of petty scrounging which, to those who had only recently come out of the Army, seemed quite legitimate.

The other Yugoslavs who were at different times attached to the brigade were all young. The four interpreters, Sasha, Joe, Jasminka and Ranko made many friends among us. Joe was an architectural student from Split, studying at Zagreb. He had a fine record in the resistance movement, and spoke almost perfect English. He first learnt English when he was living at home with his father, and engaged on underground work which had to remain a complete secret. In order to explain to his father why he lived at home all the time, he invented the excuse of studying English on his own. He had a great sense of humour, and refused to be either perturbed or surprised by anything that the British did, even in the early chaotic days. He had an invariable answer to questions or requests, "Everything can be arranged."

Jasminka was a very pretty, fair-haired girl of twenty-three, also from Dalmatia and studying at Zagreb. She was temperamentally very different from Joe, conscientious and hard-working, and intolerant of slackness or stupidity. She told us that in the universities the students held elections to decide who they thought were the best amongst them to represent Yugoslav students to the foreign brigade were all young. The four interpreters, Sasha, Joe, Jasminka her best language, she hoped to be sent to an Italian or Triestinian brigade. When she was sent to the British, she was at first very disappointed, but at the end of the camp, when she was helping us with the final arrangements, she said, "Next year, if I am asked which brigade I should like to work with, I shall say the British." She too had a long resistance record, starting when she was sixteen.

Ranko was the same age as Jasminka, and came from the same town. His father had been a doctor, the greatest rheumatism specialist in Yugoslavia, who was killed by the Ustashi during the war. Ranko had fought with the partisans, and was now studying chemistry in Belgrade. He was with us only for a very short time, but he took a great interest in brigade affairs, both on and off the line, and always came back to camp beaming with pleasure if the group he had been working with had exceeded its norm for the day.

Apart from the interpreters, there were always delegates attached to the brigade. With us longest was Bata, who had been taken from his job as commandant of his own brigade to act as contact between us and Glavni Stab. He took his duties very seriously, and always carried a bulging despatch case when he went in to Zenica to report. However, when I went in with him one day, I discovered that the bag contained only a loaf of bread and a tin of meat—his rations for the day. All messages and questions from the brigade were carried in his head. Also with us was a working delegation of five: Pero, who

had spent two years in Dachau after being captured during the partisan fighting, Dragon, Nikolai, and two Milanko's. They worked like beavers, and were always a small shock-group of their own on the line. Anton was not an official delegate to the brigade. He wanted to work on the *Pruga*, but was also very behind with his work as a history student in Belgrade. He hit on the idea that if he got himself attached to the British brigade, he would be working on the Railway and also learning English. So he turned up with his English-Serbo-Croat dictionary and a book of English poems, and walked about the camp with a copy of *The Times* and an air of great concentration, memorising words like "redundant." Before the war he had been a Catholic, and had thought of Communists as "men with tails and horns," but during the war he had spent two years as a partisan fighter in Venezia Giulia, and had met Communists of several nationalities. Now he was an enthusiastic member of the People's Youth movement, and a supporter of Tito's régime.

The cultural and recreational activities on the Railway have a special section of the book to themselves. For most of us they were as important as the work itself, for it was through them that we came to understand the great significance of the Railway in breaking down barriers of nationality, religion and occupation among the young people. The British, to begin with, were puzzled by the slogan shouting and cheering. On the first day in camp, the most familiar slogans were explained to the new group. This was usually done by Peter, who was for six weeks deputy commandant and "cheer leader." "When I shout '*Omladinska Pruga,*' you shout back '*Bratsvo*' . . . that means 'Brotherhood,' then I shout '*Omladinska Pruga*' again and you yell back '*Jedinstvo,*' 'unity,' then I give it again, and you come back with '*Bratsvo, jedinstvo, bratsvo jedinstvo . . .*' and keep it up until someone shouts 'Hurrah' . . ." To some people it sounded fun, to others it sounded childish, or even sinister, but that was before we met any Yugoslav brigades. At a bonfire or a casual visit to another brigade, we would be greeted with cheers and a long shout of "*Omladina Engleske, Omladina Engleske . . .*" Cheering and handshaking would go on, until we were longing for Peter's voice yelling "*Omladinska Pruga*" so that we could show, by shouting out the slogan of brotherhood and unity, how much we were moved by this great demonstration of friendship and welcome. The slogans were not sinister, because they were not empty or ambitious phrases. They echoed a real fact, the unity of action and the friendship that existed between all nationalities on the Railway. It showed itself in the smallest aspects of the life we led. Travelling on the railway we were never allowed to unpack our own rations or meals. If we arrived alone at a railway station or a town, there was sure to be someone about who was wearing the railway badge, and who would be eage

to help us find our way around, to show us the town, to discuss British politics. We came back to England with notebooks full of addresses of young Yugoslavs who wanted to correspond with us, friends of an evening or a few days, but friends whose memory is a warm one.

Of the other slogans that we shouted on the Railway, the same can be said. Some were political. Those of us who shouted with the Greeks for the withdrawal of British and American forces from their country did so, not as an empty gesture, but because it was the only way we could express to them, who did not speak our language, our determination to do all in our power to influence opinion in England to take notice of the disgraceful policy which our Government is pursuing in Greece. We knew that many of these young refugees had lost their homes and families because of the actions of our fellow-countrymen, that many of them, like Kostas, the young secretary of the brigade, had themselves been wounded by British bullets. The slogans that we shouted with them were an apology and a pledge. They were not childish, they were not "fun"; and the longer we stayed on the Railway the more real they became.

It would not be possible to speak here of everything that the brigade did and was during the summer. For in these three months there were many changes. The brigade itself changed, groups went and new ones came, each with its own character, each creating a different atmosphere in the camp. The leadership of the brigade changed, and the organisational forms. The valley itself changed, from the hot, crisp, long days of high summer to the shorter, thundery days of autumn. Plums, apples, water melons and grapes came in turn to the stores, as the leaves of the beech woods turned from rich green to warm golden brown. And all the time the *Pruga* itself was changing. The long embankment behind the camp was being hewn and moulded from the hard rock and amorphous soil of the valley, until it stood like a great corded sinew, stretching in both directions, and nearly ready to have the rails laid on it when we left.

Our memories of the summer will all be different. But we shall remember the valley in the mornings, cold and hazy, with the mist rising from the river and being drawn up the sides of the hills into the grey-blue misty sky, and the evenings when there were to be celebrations, when the wooden tables and benches were set out in a wide circle in the short, warm twilight, with tins of purple and gold wild flowers on them, and bowls of ripe tomato salad, cucumber and grapes. We shall remember the white road that ran past the camp, and the blue-starred chicory flowers that grew alongside it, wide open in the sunlight, tight closed if there was a sign of rain. And all the time, as a constant accompaniment, a high, rhythmic rattle of wheelbarrows. Behind the camp and along the whole length of the line, by the roadside and on building sites or bombed areas in the

towns, the primitive, squeaky wooden wheelbarrows were in constant service. And those of us who spent long mornings pushing them know that their high whining voice expresses the enthusiasm, energy and relentless determination of a fine people to rebuild their shattered country.

No one who worked on the Railway left Yugoslavia quite unchanged. For some of the British the responsibilities which they found themselves obliged to undertake in the brigade developed unsuspected funds of resource and leadership; others found expression in the actual work or in the work about the camp for practical abilities which they never dreamed they possessed. But the most important thing was the impact on us of the great spirit which possesses the young people of this new democracy. We had the feeling of a generation which had seized control of its own destiny. On the Railway, where nearly everyone is between the ages of 16 and 25, members of the generation which formed the greater part of the partisan fighters, the determination and self-discipline were inspiring. An opponent of the Government whom I met in Belgrade said, when I told him how much I had been impressed by the spirit of the young generation, "Ah, but you have been carried away by the spirit of the Railway, by the brotherhood and unity which you find there. All Yugoslavia is not like that." Of course all Yugoslavia is not like that. The spirit of the Railway is a youthful one, but from what we saw of the rest of Yugoslavia, and we all saw a certain amount, we formed the impression of a country whose unity and determination were good to see, a country whose reconstruction achievements show that this is no specious and superficial unity, but a real and deep-felt unity of action; a country that is worthy of its magnificent youth.

# The Greeks

## by Ernest Bennett

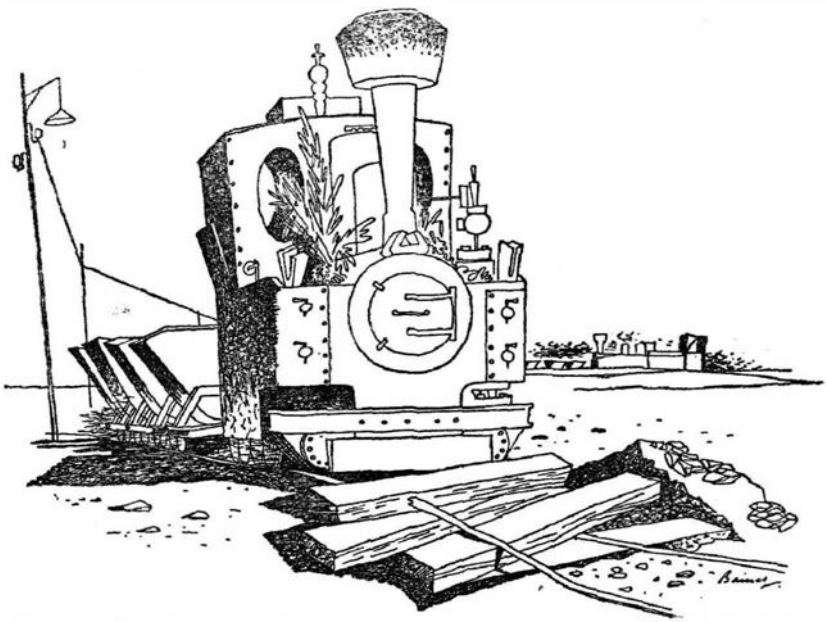
*Cultural Officer, August, "Georgi Siandos" Brigade*

TO THE British who arrived at the beginning of July at the camp near Nemila the foreign brigade by whom their curiosity was most aroused was, as perhaps is only to be expected, the brigade of Greek refugees on Yugoslav soil. Expected because here were refugees from a political persecution which was a result of deliberate policy in Greece by Britain. Here too were men and women who had fought behind barricades only two years before against the kin of many of the British Brigade and against several of its very members. Mutual

curiosity would seem to have been certain but its results could hardly have been predicted.

The Greeks, on the day of the arrival of the first British group, marched half of the four kilometres of hot, dusty road to greet the travel-weary Britons, and, to the accompaniment of singing and embraces, the Greeks took on their own shoulders the packs of the newcomers and the Greek and British flags, side by side, led the merged columns to the huts of the "Britanska Brigada." The two flags were a presage of comradeship which was to become the talk of the *Omladinska Pruga.*

The *Georgi Siandos* brigade was made up of refugees, mainly from the 1945 Terror. Its members had walked through the mountains, mostly from Salonika, although a few were from farther south, even as far as Athens. Many had come in winter, sometimes with their whole families and sometimes alone, escaping from the savage slaughter and persecution which followed the events of December, 1944. They sought refuge in the new Republic of Yugoslavia, with whose people they had formed close ties in the common partisan struggle, when Greek and Yugoslav units had sometimes fought side by side under the same command. They were given sanctuary, under Article 31 of the Yugoslav People's Constitution, and in July, 1945 were offered the empty deserted village of Boulkes in the Voivodina as a home. Con-



Shunting Engines near Zenica *F. H. Baines*

trary to some accounts, they were strictly forbidden to return and take up the struggle again in Greece, and, although their wholehearted sympathies lay with General Markos, they disciplined themselves to thrust all thought of helping him from their minds. It was from the thriving colony of Boulkes that the young men and women—many of them had fought with EAM against the German invaders—came to help build the Railway alongside their Yugoslav hosts. The Brigade worked hard. Their achievements on the line were seldom equalled and were praised by many authorities as an example of selfless effort. Their camp, to which they returned early each morning after a hard eight-hour shift 500 metres deep in the Vranduk tunnel, itself spoke much for their attitude to the many aspects in which life presented itself here on the line Samac-Sarajevo.

The Greek camp was indeed a landmark in the Bosna valley. It was gay with garlands and the badges of EPON (the Greek youth movement), EAM, the Democratic Army and the World Federation of Democratic Youth were worked in coloured stones on the banks. Many pennants on high, painted flagstaffs were fluttering spots of colour against the dark green of the steep sides of the valley. Four huge pictures of Zachariades and Tito, Siandos and Markos, surveyed from the roof of the hut the cleared square in front of them—the scene of many bonfires and nights of dancing—and the high white archway and four columns beyond which commanded the steps at the entrance. A theatre and volley-ball pitch were always the free-time gathering places for enthusiasts of athletics and the arts. It was very noticeable how few of the volunteers were to be found only at one place or the other. The musicians volley-balled, and the volley-ballers acted and sang. There was none of that division into artist or athlete so common in Britain.

A characteristic feature of the Greek Brigade's activities was the work of the official staff—a small group whose work, although it did not take them to the tunnel, yet demanded of them a ceaseless round-the-clock activity. The literally countless numbers of duplicated posters and slogans pasted on thousands of railway stations, buildings, tramcars, and on almost everything in the area large enough to hold a poster, bore witness to the work of these half-dozen men and two young girls. So also did the printed slogans on small paper slips which were released and burst in clouds above every rally, or among every gathering of people, wherever the Greek Brigade chanced to pass.

It was an inspiration for us from Britain to work beside these people. They all had suffered already so much as a result of their opinions that the unaccustomed might expect them to have had enough. But men of the calibre of young Kostas, permanently crippled by British bullet-wounds (which festered because their discovery might well have resulted in his imprisonment or execution)

love freedom too keenly to lie low while others work. To all the heroes of the brigade—to Georgi, their commandant, who was hunted like an animal for weeks by the gendarmerie before he escaped to Yugoslavia, and fourteen-year-old "Maria" who was twelve when her father was torn from her and who, not knowing whether mother or brothers lived, was forced to face the snow-swept crossing to Yugoslavia without them—to these and many like them their work, work for the cause of the people's liberation, is their life.

And yet they could play. They sang and danced with an abandon and energy which was unequalled even by the Yugoslavs themselves. Into this whirlwind of work and song the British Brigade, neither willingly nor unwillingly but inexorably, was swept.

The bonfires which in the evenings called all the brigades together were affairs of such unrepressed enthusiasm that the more reticent British hesitated to take the plunge. It was here that the Greek-British association had its first effects. At first slowly, but with increasing momentum, inspired by the example of the Greeks who could, apparently at will, throw themselves with equal fervour into moods of gravity or light-heartedness, the British gave themselves up to that cheerful abandon which characterised these unforgettable evenings.

Greek-British get-togethers soon became to resemble pitched battles, and both sides set-to to cheer the other into submission. More than once the cheer leader of the British Brigade had to retire, voiceless, to be substituted by another—yet right to the end his counterpart among the Greeks held his place until many of us were genuinely concerned for his future power of speech.

But although such celebrations increased, a more serious note was soon introduced. British interest in these heroes of the struggle in Greece did not end in slogan-shouting and dances, but grew keener. So too did confidence in these democrats from the country that was their oppressor, grow among the Greeks.

The Greeks brought out an edition of their brigade newspaper in English in honour of their British comrades. Pamphlets on the history of EPON were also published. Several weeks before the Greeks finished their work on the line the bonds of comradeship were strengthened by a number of lectures, the first of which told the history of the Trade Unions of Britain to an appreciative audience of Greeks. Just before the Greeks left for their home at Boulkes, they answered questions on the Greek situation submitted by members of our brigade.

When the Greek Brigade did at last leave, taking with them to Boulkes a British delegation, there were few among our brigade who did not feel a loss, and notice something had gone with them that left the Section at Nemila a quieter one, undoubtedly, but also lacking

that supreme sense of high political purpose and energy which was characteristic of the Greek exiles in Yugoslavia.

But the seed of new understanding was already germinating. Yugoslavia and her people gave the British a picture of promise and achievement arising from a great political effort. They took back a picture, too, of fruitful unity from a part of Europe which was once so divided and impoverished by fratricidal conflict as to result in the addition of a new word to our language—" balkanisation."

From the association with the Greeks, however, arose the certainty that as long as men and women who could work so selflessly as those of the " Siandos " brigade at Nemila, whose whole lives were examples of rare dignity—as long as these are persecuted by banishment or shooting for no more crime than that of being what they are, then the very rights of men are at stake and must be fought for, no matter what the cost.

What centuries failed to achieve in the Balkans has been achieved. The Nazi occupation, followed in Greece by that of the British and Americans (claiming like their predecessors to be bulwarks against Communism) with police, arms and bullion have enabled, through suffering, the forging of a real brotherhood in the Balkan peninsular.

And yet this friendship excludes no one. We stood in humility in the company of these vital and warm-hearted young Greek peasants and workers. It was *they* who had suffered most, but it was their tact and their generosity which made us feel welcome among them. Not once did any one of them express, in word or action, the feeling in all their hearts—that, were it not for the British, the energy they spent so freely in piercing Vranduk tunnel would have been driving through mountains on their own soil ; and that, instead of living as exiles fearing constantly for their friends and families, they could have invited other nations to take part in building up their own torn and heroic country. Nor did they once suggest that we or the British people were conscious accomplices in the atrocities and injustices which they had suffered from the hands of an evil clique propped up with British arms. They told us of their experiences frankly, a little reluctantly, suggesting only that the British were kept in ignorance of these things and that once they knew the truth, they would, without any doubt, start up in distress and horror and wash the blood of their Greek comrades-in-arms from their hands. And we, the friends and fellow-workers of the Thrice-*Udarnik* Mining Brigade *Georgi Siandos,* believe that once we have made their story heard, this will be the case.

# BOULKES

WHEN the *G. Siandos Brigade* left Nemila in August, they invited the British Commandant, Deputy, Works Foreman and seven others to accompany them as guests to their home village at Boulkes. As we set out, we knew only that the United Nations Balkans Commission had said of it and its population of refugees:

> "Refugees from Greece are being subjected to political inoculation and propaganda envisaging the overthrow of the Greek Government. . . . We recommend the refugees be rounded up and segregated into camps controlled by a permanent commission, and be not permitted to indulge in any political or military activities. . . ."

*The Times*, August 2, 1947, had made reference to this report and had said in an editorial:

> "20,000 Greeks fled to Yugoslavia . . . a substantial proportion being of Slavo-Macedonian origin. What is now happening is that these and other refugees are flowing back into Greece, not as peaceful citizens, but as fighters in a partisan cause." [1]

So, as we entrained at Nemila we were as well equipped with the "facts" of Boulkes as was the rest of the world.

Except, of course, that we knew a hundred of these refugees; and had worked alongside them on the Youth Railway, where they worked for two months without a day's break in the 1,600 metre Vranduk tunnel; and had grown to respect their qualities of energy and high integrity.

These men and women, whose lives were a lesson of unselfishness and harmony to all who met them, just didn't seem to fit in with what UNO had had to say of them and their village.

But—some naïvely consoled themselves thus—UNO represents the voice of nations desirous of creating peace and its honesty cannot reasonably be questioned.

Many of us, to whom the incongruity between our own experience and UNO's charges was a glaring one, had little that was positive upon which to build any impression, and our feelings were somewhat mixed, perhaps, as to what to expect.

Forty-eight hours later, having seen this village against whose name such shameful calumnies, that the community was a centre of military activities, had been cast by UNO and the whole of the

[1] Yugoslavia has given the freedom of Boulkes to the Greeks, on condition that they do not attempt to rejoin their comrades in Greece. This is in accordance with obligations under the United Nations Charter.

Western-influenced press—having seen how completely the village's life was absorbed in the peaceful pursuits of agriculture and horticulture, musical and dramatic art, and education, we knew that our knowledge of the honesty of purpose of our comrades of the Greek brigade had not let us down. It had, rather, reinforced the opinion which our experience of recent American methods had led us to hold—namely, that the Balkan Commission's Report was the verdict of two powers judging in their own cause, not an impartial statement of fact.[2]

The faith in UNO of not a few of the ten who visited Boulkes was sadly shattered by the double lesson presented by the UNO report and the evidence of the peaceful village.

What we saw was a village settlement, lost in the seas of rich Voivodina wheat save for the spire of the old church which reached above the corn and trees to the sky. Long, white byres could be seen from a distance, surrounded by clean farm buildings and barns filled with hay and threshed wheat. Signs of intense agricultural work were everywhere.

We saw something we had not seen in the countries of Western Europe. Well-fed men and women threw themselves into their work as if their lives depended on it, as, indeed, their progress certainly did. But here was no black market; here was no such thing as military conscription or training to sap the fruits of labour and throttle progress; here even was there no time to waste in political indoctrination, nor was there need of it, for these people had gleaned their political lessons in a way more bitter than can readily be set in words.

A few of the old men of the village knew only this: that for them the thudding temples and pounding heart of the political quarry in a hunt which means life or death were past for ever: that here in their village of Boulkes they could talk and argue, as men will, on the affairs of their life, or of the camp, or of the world, without fear of an official displeasure which in the past used to make itself felt by terms of prison, or a beating-up in the gendarmerie post.

We saw all this. For myself, who had known the Greece from which these old men had fled, the sight of them now in their new-found security was a moving inspiration.

We learned, too, of the completeness of this community, of how it elected its People's Committee each year, on a universal and secret ballot, of how it distributed the wealth resulting from the people's work. We saw, as in a gap through clouds, the kind of Greece which would surely arise when Germany's friends, who were now Britain's and America's friends, would be replaced in Government by repre-

[2] The Press never ceases to emphasise that the Balkan Commission's Report was carried by a majority vote. It was, by six out of eleven members, Belgium, Colombia and France abstaining and Russia and Poland voting against.

sentatives of these men and women of Boulkes, and of the seven million like them in Greece.

We visited the factory where smiths made tools which craftsmen used to build fifteen farm carts per day, and wheelbarrows and cart-wheels. These, sold through co-operatives to farms all over the neighbouring territories of Yugoslavia, constituted an element of trade, increasing the community's prosperity.

We saw a boot and shoe factory, and a factory where cloth was woven and made into clothing—the equal of anything in Europe today—for the villagers. The surplus was again distributed through co-operatives.

We saw the village's own co-operative store and the restaurants and the fine, unrationed food ; the healthy children, who bowed their heads to their books and slates at nine every morning and studied and played, and danced until evening and did not tire like their little brothers and sisters in Greece, whose meagre, ill-clad bodies and deep eyes bespoke that Greece's tragedy was the tragedy of common people.

We saw a spirit of learning that was the property of every citizen —as much of the 60- and 70-year-olds who were learning to read and write, to whom even at the closing of their days a bright new world was unfolding—as much of the young mechanics and labourers learning the deeper science of their crafts—as of the generation who, now young, will be the first generation of a new era of progress for Greece.

We saw a theatre towards whose construction every citizen had offered his or her spare time so that in their evenings they might listen, as we were honoured to listen, to choirs of their children singing songs of the Greece they could barely remember.

More than this we saw during those crowded days—the infants' nurseries, the mothers' and children's welfare clinic, the hospital and pharmacy where all treatment was free.

As if it were trying to tell us something, the subdued clatter of the printing press seemed to follow us wherever we went in the village. From this press came the village's newspaper and translations into Greek of the Classics.

After a time it seemed that there really was a message in that never-ceasing throb and clatter. It seemed to speak something like this :

" We are unknown in the world. Tell the world about us. Bring our cause into the daylight and, like a plant which has been long in darkness, it cannot but flourish."

We who have been in Boulkes have known an experience we shall never forget. There is not one of us who has not felt a new confidence from our contact with these people—confidence that while

**Dynamiter, Vranduk Tunnel** *Ronald Searle*

such people exist, then the cause of progress and human brotherhood is secure. A new determination and energy is ours, that while reaction is free to threaten these and all other such pioneers of freedom's cause, then no effort to meet it and destroy it will suffice but our very lives themselves.

# The Trip

## by Violet Henderson

IT WAS very cold at midnight, as we clambered into the trucks which were to take us to the station. In a very short time we were there, leaving behind us the lovely wide Nemila valley, with " our " piece of the railway lying, silent now, beyond the maize fields, and the marsh where the croaking of hundreds of frogs disturbed the night.

Our last evening had been a memorable one. Four of the Greeks had come along to say good-bye, and we had sat in the crowded common room, British and Greeks, for a couple of hours, singing, turn about, now enjoying the Greek version of " She'll be coming round the mountain," now an authentic rendering of " Waltzing Matilda " from one of the Australian members of our brigade, and now all joining in some song which everyone knew. Here, even more than at the mass celebrations we had attended, we felt how firm and unbreakable were the bonds of friendship and affection that had formed between these eager, warm-hearted young refugees and ourselves, and it was with a feeling of sadness that we shook hands with them in farewell.

Indeed, it was sad to be leaving the valley, for our share in building the Railway, small as it had been, had brought us such dividends in feelings of comradeship, in the immense satisfaction of working at a job that was really necessary alongside other people of all nationalities, that the loss of these was something for which not even this holiday, long looked forward to, would compensate. Since then one has realised that it was not really a loss, for the memory of inspiration of these weeks will be lasting. But we did not think of that at the time. Now we felt that our rôle was that of tourists—with a difference, of course, for we were proudly wearing our railway badges which at once established us as friends with any Yuogslav we met on our travels.

No one who has travelled on the existing railway system in Yugoslavia has any need to enquire why new railways are being built. Our first journey, for example, was to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, a distance of less than sixty miles. It took us twenty-four hours to get there. The line, you see, was a single track one, and we often had to

wait for a few hours to let a priority train pass. At one of these stops, three of our party had wandered off to bathe in a nearby river. Our quite unpredictable little train moved off without them. About five miles further we stopped at a small station, and got out to stretch our legs. Along the track, walking towards us, were two figures. Yes, they had caught us up after their bathe, which apparently had been very enjoyable. The third truant turned up mysteriously in Dubrovnik two days later.

Because of the time our journey took us, we saw nothing of Sarajevo, staying there only long enough to walk through the dark streets to the last Yugoslav brigade which was to entertain us, for we were now leaving the Youth Railway behind us. No longer were we to look out of our train windows to wave at the enthusiastic young workers on the *Omladinska Pruga,* toiling hard in the burning heat as we travelled west on holiday.

Next morning we awoke, still in the train, to find ourselves in the mountains. The Dinaric Alps defy description. They tower above the Sava, the most beautiful river I have ever seen, a river that was lime green, clear, swiftly flowing, and tossing up waves of foam.

Descending into the lowland, we came to Mostar, a little Moslem oasis in the middle of this country that seemed almost desert. The large towns we visited later were very similar in many ways to any large European town, but Mostar belongs to that other part of Yugoslav life that stretches a hand back across the centuries to touch an earlier civilisation. It was hot there, and dusty; the streets were narrow, and lined on both sides with white houses. The market was busy the day we wandered around it, with local women, some in *Yashmaks,* some of them more modern without, busy doing their shopping. But new, modern blocks of flats are rising in various parts of the town that has seen so little change for hundreds of years; the famous mediaeval bridge which we saw, and which has, no doubt, in the past enabled many a wild brigand to cross the river, looks as if it will endure to see the many developments just beginning to effect great changes in the small Moslem country.

We spent one more night in the train before we arrived at our destination, Dubrovnik, on the Dalmatian coast.

Many descriptions have been written about Dubrovnik, the town which before the war was the favourite holiday resort of the wealthy of many European nations, and during the war provided a delightful resort for Italian and German officers to spend their leaves. A town of such beauty could not escape being the subject of countless purple passages, and this is certainly not the place for another. Here, in the town that has scarcely changed since Richard the Lion Heart and other crusaders passed through it, we were far from the Youth Railway, not only in distance, but also, we felt, to some extent in spirit. Here

was what many people mean when they use the word "civilisation." That is, there were fine hotels and palatial restaurants with terraces on which one could sit for hours, as some of the wealthy Yugoslavs appear to do, sipping wine or delicious Turkish coffee. There were shops which sold the most wonderful ice cream or *sladoled*, one Serbo-Croat word that came glibly off the tongue of the least skilled linguist among us. In one of these shops we met the beautiful dark-eyed girl, a native of Dubrovnik, who spoke English.

"What do you do ? " we asked her.

"Do ? " she said.

"Yes, work at," we suggested. She had never heard the word "work" apparently.

"Oh, I don't do anything!"

"But you must work at something ? " We didn't intend that there should be any misunderstanding.

"No." She too intended that there should be no misunderstanding. "I live with my mother."

She didn't seem to know about the Youth Railway, or perhaps she just wasn't interested. At any rate, it had been an interesting conversation.

Our hotel, and it was entirely given over to us for the four days we stayed in Dubrovnik, was right on the sea, a circumstance for which we were greatly envied by the Hungarian brigade who—to our pleasure, for we liked and got on well with Magyars—were also on holiday with us. They had to walk a hundred yards to reach the blue-green waters of the Adriatic, while we descended a flight of stone steps leading from the terrace of our hotel to the edge of the sea. Sometimes we bathed in the morning before breakfast, and once, for the air was warm, at night, after we had returned from our last international concert which had taken place spontaneously in the garden of the Hungarians' hotel.

The flawless beauty of the mediaeval town, surrounded by tremendously strong walls right down to the lovely harbour, induced us to spend most of the day wandering about it. No advertisements defaced the mellow stone of the buildings in the old town, where traffic was not allowed. One day, we slipped through a stone archway off the main street, to find ourselves in the shady court of a Franciscan Monastery. Looking up through the palm trees to the balcony above, we saw a brown-robed monk pacing slowly up and down, reading. And the centuries seemed to jostle one another as we saw, now out in the street again, a friar in a brown cassock, walking along behind an old peasant woman wearing a full wide skirt decorated with the gayest and most elaborate embroidery, while a little further off strolled a woman officer on leave from the army and some nuns from a nearby convent.

It was in this same street that we were hailed by an English tourist, who informed us of the marvellous holiday he was enjoying on the Dalmatian coast. We asked him if he intended visiting the Pruga, and on receiving his answer "No," we assured him, somewhat arrogantly I must admit, that he hadn't really seen Yugoslavia if he left without seeing it. Yes, maybe it was rather arrogant, but it was our genuine feeling, for Dubrovnik, superbly beautiful as it was, lacked the atmosphere of enthusiasm and purpose that made our stay on the Railway such a valuable experience. It was in Dubrovnik that we met the lady of leisure who informed one of our party that the Germans were really quite decent fellows when you got to know them. This reminded us of the Europe that was still clinging to the old ideas, still grasping at luxuries that money can buy, as if life had nothing else to offer. The new Europe was not being born here, the creative spirit was lacking, and that was why I, for one, was not altogether sorry to leave after our four days there, to sail up the Adriatic for Split, our next port of call.

The past was with us again as we saw the great ruins of Diocletian's palace towering over the little sea-port. The local inhabitants sat, in the cool of the evening, chatting in the shadow of the magnificent Corinthian columns. Here we were approached by a Yugoslav student who informed us of the lack of free speech in his country, and of the impossibility of expressing opinions unfavourable to the government, because of the risk of being "reported" and punished. All this he told us with a curious lack of caution in front of Joe, our Yugoslav interpreter.

We left Split late in the evening, stoically prepared to spend another night in the train, this time in order to get to Zagreb. One advantage of travelling by night, as we nearly always did, is that the daylight is saved for sightseeing; on the other hand, we were not always in the freshest condition. A weary and unwashed group of Britons next morning descended from the train to discover that there had been a confusion as to the time of our arrival, so that no one was there to meet us and tell us where to go. But at last our escorts appeared, and with our visions of soap and water, coffee and sleep nearer realisation, we climbed painfully into the lorries waiting to take us to our hotel. We drove solemnly round three sides of the square that lay outside the station, and descended outside the truly magnificent Hotel Esplanade, a stone's throw away from the station itself!

No beggar waking up to find himself in a king's palace, and being treated as if he had a right to be there, could have felt more overwhelmed by the hospitality shown him than we were here. We soon felt ready to make the most of our two days in the big industrial city, pulsating with life. We shopped in the large *Narodni Magazin*, the State Store, investigated book shops, and in the afternoon were

taken to see over a textile factory. We were met at the door by a young girl, a shock worker, who made a speech of welcome and presented us with a bouquet of red gladioli. The workers, most of them very young, who kept exceeding their norm, looked up from their whirring machines to smile at us, and, no doubt, to make comments about us to their neighbours, just as we marvelled at the speed with which they worked and their eagerness to continue working despite our invasion of their works. Deeply impressed by this further evidence of the really amazing capacity for work of these people, we made our way over to the crèche, where the very young chidren of the workers played, in charge of two teachers.

"They'll probably greet us with the railway song, these three-year-olds," someone said, by way of being funny.

They did.

"Samac Sarajevo . . .

To je nasa meta . . ." in high childish voices greeted us as we entered. They laughed along with us.

The next day we visited three factories being built on the outskirts, and near these we saw people busy working on the highway that is being constructed between Zagreb and Belgrade. But along with these important tasks, the Yugoslavs have found time to build in Belgrade a Pioneer Railway, a miniature *Pruga* which will be worked entirely by the children of the city who will take it in turn to spend two months at the Railway School and have fun learning citizenship at the same time.

Our holiday at Zagreb ended. At night, naturally, we caught our train to Lubljana. We were beginning the journey out of Yugoslavia, although we spent two days in this town waiting for our passports, two days in which we bathed in the open-air swimming pool, walked up to the old castle, and argued in bad German about whether the present government was a good one to live under or not.

At last the passports arrived, and at midnight we made our way through the deserted streets back to the station. The train moved out, and we settled down in our seats to get some sleep. But just then I was asked to speak to two young Yugoslavs who spoke German and wanted to learn about Britain from us. One of their questions, asked almost pathetically, I will never forget. It was "Why do your newspapers say such bad things about us?" Why indeed? I tried to answer their questions, and they said, as they got ready to leave the train, for their station was approaching:

"What will you people do who have seen something of our country and what we are trying to do, when you get home?"

I said that we would tell people exactly what we had seen and learned during our stay. These two young officers, one Air Force, one Army, had, unintentionally and most significantly, rounded off our

holiday for us. We carried back with us this honest and deeply-rooted desire of the young people of Yugoslavia to be understood. They were not asking for much; only that the world should find out the facts about them and their country. We cannot afford to let them down.

# The Youth Railway Newspaper

by Sam Shepperson

*Brigade representative on* Borba

WHEN the Railway was opened in May, the Yugoslavs set up at Zenica an emergency press to print a daily newspaper for the young workers. Erected in the short space of a month, it had a rotary press, four large linotypes, and all the modern paraphernalia of newspaper production. Its hasty erection was a tribute to the skill and enthusiasm of those young students and journalists who had made the production possible. It was named after the national paper *Borba* ("Struggle") and was called *Borba na Omladinskoj Pruzi.*

In the middle of July, I was elected by the British brigade to represent them on this newspaper. The overture came from the Yugoslavs on the H.Q. of the Railway, who were anxious that the newspaper should include an international section, in the language and about the lives of the foreign youth brigades.

We began with a permanent editorial board of a Czech, a Pole, a Swiss girl, myself, and George, a Yugoslav journalist and sub-editor of the paper who had been born in America. We found English and French sufficient for normal purposes, although George and the Pole had sometimes to resort to what came to be known as "Slav Esperanto"!

The last page of the paper became the international section. Each day it was to contain some material from the twelve or more nationalities on the Railway. For a few days we almost drove the compositors mad with our many languages, and the new types and styles they needed. But, by expedients and by improvisations, our international page (of news, drawings, information about various foreign brigades and their youth movements, and about the progress on the Railway) began to appear in the 50,000 daily edition of the Youth Railway *Borba.*

I had the opportunity of meeting youth of many nationalities at our printing press, and the friendships I had made whilst working on the line were consolidated in print. I met many of the 2,000 Canadians of Yugoslav origin who have returned with so much

enthusiasm to their homeland. They shared, with a large contingent of Serbs and Croats returned from Belgium, a firm conviction that a new life was being built up in Yugoslavia, and that they were not going to be kept out of it. As Ivan Kapulica, leader of a group of Belgian Yugoslavs, wrote for our paper:

> "There is but one reason for my return . . . Freedom, the freedom to make a better future . . . "

I was greatly impressed by the treatment of the German prisoners who worked at the printing press. They received the same rations as the Yugoslavs, and mixed with them on equal terms. Here the Yugoslav criterion, that he who is willing to work is guaranteed security and freedom by the State, was extending itself to peoples who had, only yesterday, been their bitter enemies.

In the evenings I often went with my Yugoslav journalist comrades to the workers' clubs or cafes in the town, where our paper was as eagerly received as on the Youth Railway itself. During my month's stay on the paper I received every courtesy possible, and found that no restrictions were placed either on my movement or my writing. I experienced the complete negation of that muzzling of the Press and liberty which some of our newspapers have claimed exists in Yugoslavia.

I left my work regretfully, but filled with the conviction that the slogan "Youth Unite! Forward for Durable Peace!" which headed our international page each day, had been achieved in one corner of the world at least. I am now hoping that what we achieved in Zenica may spread to all its corners.

# The First International Brigade

## by Peter Worsley

*Leader of the British Working-group*

THE First International Brigade consisted of twelve different nationalities from as far apart as Spain and Australia, Holland and South Africa, although the majority were Czech students from Brno and Prague. We had all come from the World Youth Festival, and since much of the initial organisation was done on the train en route for Yugoslavia, the makeshift administration showed its effects for a few days. A camp meeting on arrival at Maglaj, conducted through four interpreters, cleared up many of the difficulties and elected representatives of each national group to form a camp committee; whilst individuals irrespective of nationality were elected to take charge of sport, camp hygiene, education, etc. At camp meetings language diffi-

culties tended to slow down proceedings, and a strong chairman was needed, but in all other activities French, English, Czech and, ironically enough, German, were the normal means of communication, and there was no real impediment to social circulation.

We divided ourselves into three work-groups—all multi-national—and started off at a terrific pace, until continual rain slowed down work and occasionally prevented it altogether. This was overcome later by a great spurt of enthusiasm when we put up 200 per cent. and above for the whole of the last two weeks, and were cited as a shock brigade. By working together and in hard-hitting discussions we certainly gained an insight into the problems of other countries—probably the most fruitful aspect of our brigade life. But in addition we learnt each other's national songs, idiosyncrasies and tastes, and established a deeper understanding of the personal life of the other countries than could be gained from any purely formal acquisition of knowledge. After all, when you've eaten your 200th Czech *knedlik* dumpling, you remember that more clearly than their national history!

# Artists on the Railway

## by Dr. F. D. Klingender

At the invitation of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia a group of British artists—some of whose work is represented in this book—visited the Railway in August, in order to draw and sketch the process of construction. Several went on to Belgrade and Zagreb as guests of the Belgrade Cultural Committee and got in touch with the artists of these cities. Dr. Klingender, who accompanied the group, records some of his impressions of the Railway.

AT THE entrance of Vranduk tunnel three Yugoslav students are waiting for transport, their paintboxes slung across their shoulders. The scene is a lively one. Out of the gaping tunnel mouth trolleys loaded with blue rocks are pushed by brawny, sun-tanned boys. Lorries and jeeps pass along the road, carefully picking their way to avoid the worst holes. The hum of their engines mingles with the ringing of trolley rails and with the chugging of the compressed air engine which feeds the drills way back in the mountain.

These are three of the two hundred students from the art schools of Sarajevo, Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana who come to the line and work as specialists. They draw and paint the work in progress. They are attached, two or three at a time, to the working brigades, sharing their lives and helping in the decoration of their camps with gay murals and slogans. One meets them sketching all along the line.

"When we finish school," one of the Vranduk boys is saying, "few of us will want to work as isolated individuals. The jobs which await us are so vast that they can only be tackled collectively; and at the same time they are so varied that there is ample scope for individual expression. The master-class, which is really a collective workshop, is preparing us for this kind of co-operation, and when we've passed through it we shall want to carry on as a team." (The master-classes now being organised at the Yugoslav academies provide two additional years training for the most gifted students who have finished the normal six-year course; they are attached, according to their own choice, to one of eight well-known artists who have been granted the official rank of "masters" and work with him in his studio.)

The art students who are now recording the building of the Youth Railway are already, in fact, discussing the plans for the stations with the architectural students who are designing them. Thus they are making sure that sufficient suitable spaces will be provided for the murals and decorative sculptures which they themselves will be carrying out in a year or two.

Even more remarkable is the confidence of these students that it is they, rather than their seniors, who will create the new art of Yugoslavia. A new art, they claim, can only grow up as part of the new life the people as a whole are creating. But youth is its most dynamic force, and the Samac-Sarajevo Railway its symbol. At Vranduk they dispensed with the ventilation shafts usual in this type of construction. Before the driftway was pierced through the mountain many young workers fainted on the job. But the tunnel will be finished ahead of schedule. It is in the same spirit that the young artists are tackling the job of their own development. The Railway, they feel, is theirs; their own work matures as part and parcel of it. The older artists who merely visit the line cannot capture its true spirit as the students are doing and, besides, their vision was already formed years ago by the life of the past. Not that the young artists despise tradition; on the contrary, they respect and value it. But they are living in the present and must express the present, and the contrast between today and yesterday is too great for yesterday's forms to be of much use in this task. Hence they look upon Matisse, Rouault, Picasso, as the supreme expression of yesterday with all its strife and contradictions, an expression which sums up an epoch of five centuries. To express the new life, which is now beginning, new forms are needed. They can only grow out of that new life, and it will probably take a long time before they have reached a degree of refinement comparable to the best art of yesterday. "I have seen reproductions of ancient murals from Crete," the Vranduk boy was saying, "and they looked just like paintings by Matisse. The art of

A Street in Zenica *Laurence Scarfe*

Crete disappeared thousands of years ago, and there was nothing like it until Matisse came along. Does that mean that in all that period art was bad? It is true that the work which replaced Cretan paintings was for a long time crude and 'archaic,' but from it sprang the classical art of democratic Greece. What we are doing today may seem crude to you. But we are sinking our roots deep into the soil of our people's experience, and we hope that in time our art will grow up rich and strong."

While drawing his portrait, a member of our group asked Mihailo Sabic, a former partisan leader and now chief director of works on the Youth Railway, what he thought of Yugoslav art today. He replied: "Life moves too fast for our artists." The situation which faces our colleagues is, in fact, quite outside the range of the artists' usual experience. With us art offers a momentary escape from the difficulties of life or it may appear as a ray of hope to brighten our spirits. In Yugoslavia reality is racing ahead of dreams. Adjectives generally applied to art, there apply to life; it is epic, dramatic and supremely beautiful. No work of art can match the sheer beauty of a people building a new world by their own united effort. The artist can only hope to seize the exaltation of this precious moment in order to preserve its memory.

# General Comment

## I

## by Richard O'Brien

*Organiser for National Association of Boys' Clubs. Labour Party. A Deputy Commandant of the Brigade*

ONE afternoon I went on a visit to the Commandant of the Sixth Section of the Youth Railway. We went to obtain some general information about the Youth Railway and, in particular, to try to get the views of the Commandant on the British Brigade. We found the headquarters of the Section occupying a long log hut; it was remarkable only because of its cleanliness and tidiness—its atmosphere of order and efficiency. Along the wall inside the hut were graphs and charts illustrating statistically the progress of the Railway and number of workers involved. The Commandant's room was bare and the walls were uncovered except for a photograph of Tito and another of Stalin. The room was functional—and so was the Commandant. He welcomed us cordially and after polite preliminaries we got down to business. For half an hour we took down figures of earth moved, bridges built, roads constructed, drains dug: everything was covered. We got an impression of progress—of driving forward ruthlessly against all difficulties; of energy and enthusiasm; of discipline and control. We came away impressed.

This interview has remained for me symbolic of the Railway. The driving power and energy of the workers, the order and efficiency of the Yugoslav Brigades, the emphasis of shock-work—these characteristics were noted by all the British and were reflected in the Commandant's statistics. The Yugoslavs are on the move and they mean to create the New Society by the sweat of their brows. They see their Society in terms of new houses, new schools, better railways. They concentrate therefore on figures—for, as Davidson has said, when the just society has been built it will be its own reward. No need to go deeper. No need to ponder the vexed questions which weaken and divide the West. All is clear, simple, intelligible.

But clearly a society cannot be built upon electric power and new drains. The springs of the human spirit demand more than material progress for their satisfaction. The Yugoslavs on the Railway fell back in their traditional culture as it expressed itself in the *Kolo*. I shall not forget a moment one evening when the firelight caught and held the face of a fine peasant woman as she was swaying slowly round the fire leading the singing. Here was an emotion simple and

genuine and utterly sincere. The woman was spontaneously expressing herself—the old traditional culture of the Slavs was enabling her to voice her satisfaction at being one of those on the Railway. This was fine, I felt: here was the Old Culture giving expression to the virtues of the New Society. For it was the particular virtue of the Railway to give each worker that sense of personal significance in, and responsibility for, the community without which no worker can be entirely happy.

But alas ! I cannot end here. Next morning the brigades were marching to and fro singing martial songs and shouting slogans. It seemed to me that there was a whole world of difference between the easy singing of the peasant round the fire and the disciplined, dull choruses of the marching brigades. This was emotion manufactured for a particular purpose, and for this reason many of us could not bring ourselves to accept it.

I regard the Railway as being of immense social significance. It is a genuine attempt to bring people of all races and classes together on a common enterprise for the good of all ; and it has succeeded. It has done so because the people believe that under the new social system the personal contribution made by each will be to the ultimate benefit of the community as a whole. This is the meaning of the New Society. May the Yugoslavs continue to advance—down the road to freedom.

II

## by Jeff Skelley

*London factory worker, Communist Party*

WE WERE waiting to collect rations for the British Brigade in the tiny Nemila station when we met Nada and her friend. These two sturdy Yugoslav girls were attractive, open faced and friendly. They had just finished their two months' voluntary work on the Youth Railway and were on their way home.

My companion, who was an Oxford student, talked with them in German. "Suppose there had been no war, what would you have been doing now ? " he asked.

When she understood this question she shot a look at us. It was the look of someone who has experienced a great deal.

But she was a young girl, 23 years of age.

Speaking quietly and slowly, she started to tell us her story.

"My father was a miner," she began, "a Communist miner. When I was young he was often out of work and during a strike he was arrested and sent to prison. All this time we were very poor. Sometimes we had to go hungry ; school was out of the question.

"Then the war came and my father joined the Partisans; and he was killed in 1943. After that I became a Partisan too. You know the story . . . how thousands of young people fought with Tito . . ."

She began to talk faster and more fiercely.

"And what would I have been doing now had all that not happened?" she repeated. "Well, I'll tell you. I should have been little better than a *slave* somewhere! I would still have been illiterate, ignorant—stupid!

"You see, when we were with Tito, we had not only to fight,

Peasant woman, Zagreb — *Paul Hogarth*

but we had to learn to read and write. We became educated, just as those boys and girls are being educated back on the Youth Railway."

She calmed down and nudged her friend. "What would we have been doing," she said again with a laugh.

Then she continued quietly: "When I have seen my family I am going to the Red Cross school to become a nurse. We are very short of trained nurses and doctors in our country. And Tanya here, she will become a chemist."

The pride of that Yugoslav girl in her country, and her confidence in the future were unforgettable.

This was the spirit we found throughout the whole country, the spirit of a newly found freedom liberating the energies of millions of people.

Once, perhaps, it was the spirit of only a few, of men like the Communist leader Mosa Pijade who spent 12 years in prison for his political convictions, but who, during his imprisonment, translated into Serbo-Croat the three volumes of Marx's *Capital*, and taught himself Chinese.

Now that spirit is the possession of the whole people, uniting them and inspiring them with enormous confidence and courage.

With this spirit we saw them tackling their Five-Year Plan knowing it will consolidate their independence and bring them prosperity.

How pitiful and contemptible, we reflected, were the lies about the iron curtain and the Yugoslav police State!

In all this the Yugoslav Communist Party has played a significant rôle: I am proud to be part of that movement.

But I also see the challenge. For I know that only when the British people achieve such a unity of purpose will they be able to carry out the miracles of reconstruction they have done in Yugoslavia and the other new Democracies.

## III

## by Lalage Sharp

*Labour Borough Councillor for Holborn. A Deputy Commandant of the Brigade*

LIKE many others, I went to Yugoslavia, not merely to join in the courageous Youth Railway project, but to see a "New Democracy" at work, and to check, if possible, the current rumours that Yugoslavia was a police State under Russian domination.

I found a country where Russia was, indeed, a dominant influence —but only as trail-breaker and encourager of the young Yugoslavia as she fights her own way forward to a new prosperity. Army and

police I hardly saw, and we were allowed to wander at will over the towns we visited. Although there is no official opposition in parliament or press, nothing could have been freer than the criticism of the régime made by some of the people we met. Discussions with our comrades on the Railway about the problems of democracy, the political trials, etc., revealed a very strong political consciousness, and a completely different conception of democracy, but one which demands respect. They were unable to understand why the English, having elected their representatives, have apparently so little confidence in them that they think more of criticising every action than of giving them positive help in carrying through their programme. More important, they are convinced that it is impossible to achieve the social and economic good of the majority without ruthlessly sacrificing the interests of the minority. This minority may criticise and oppose, but political opposition, in the form known to the Western democracies, is a product only of years of parliamentary democracy. Too often this minority resorts, not to criticism, but to underground methods of regaining power such as sabotaging the Five-Year Plan, and trying to arouse inter-racial feeling—the complete disappearance of which has been one of the outstanding successes of the present régime. The success of the political system is often justified solely on its tremendous material achievements, both industrial and social. It was on the over-stressing of this side, if anything, that I felt the New Democracy might founder. In the name of material progress, ruthles measures may so easily be taken which appear justifiable, but are fatal to democracy, unless the people are fully awake to the danger. I was disturbed by their refusal to consider even the possibility of this, though at the moment it is clearly a foundationless fear. The political awareness and self-confidence of the young Yugoslavs we met showed that the strength of the present government lies in the overwhelming and enthusiastic support of the people. It is clearly no minority-imposed autocracy.

Here, in fact, lies the secret of the inspiration which drives the Yugoslavs, young and old, to achieve the enormous successes, such as the two Youth Railways, and the other vast reconstruction schemes of which we saw much evidence. They have confidence in themselves and in their leaders ; they have no doubts, such as the English workers have, that the fruits of their extra labour line the pockets of a few, for they have succeded in establishing a geniune economic democracy, with a really logical wage structure. The complete classlessness was most noticeable in the cafés of Belgrade. Furthermore, the existence of a fully-planned objective in the Five-Year Plan, both generates and directs the enthusiasm needed to attain its aims. This was apparent in the very act of the People's Youth volunteering to build a 150-mile Railway in advance of its time in the plan. Their cer-

tainty of succeeding in the completion of this Railway in six months—an apparently impossible task—was one of the most remarkable features. The energy formerly dissipated in inter-class and inter-racial struggles has been transformed and magnified into a fight for a common cause. It was this enormous enthusiasm which struck us all in Yugoslavia, in working, dancing, singing, teaching the local peasants, discussions, physical training and youth rallies. Where the potential forces for good in united youth movements were perverted to militarism and training for war in Germany, they are here used in the constructive battle for peace and prosperity. Conditions were primitive enough, food was limited—but all this mattered so little in their battle for the future. Sometimes they were over-ambitious—in their desire to show their country to the British, for instance, their efficiency collapsed under the general difficulties of understaffing and extreme pressure on their still hopelessly inadequate railway system. Nevertheless, the uncalculating generosity of the intention outdid the inconvenience caused.

Returning to England, filled with a sense of solidarity of our two peoples, which should be able to overcome any misunderstanding between our governments, I felt I had been part of a tremendous adventure, inspired with energy, courage and confidence. My return through an Austria of lifeless depression, a Switzerland of smug self-contentment, a France of embittered divisions to an England of purposeless disillusionment, made me realise how much more than mere material achievement has been won in the new Yugoslavia.

## IV

## BULGARIA

by Dr. Mary Barrow

*Medical Officer to British Brigade, July and August*

On the invitation of the Bulgarian Ambassador in Belgrade, who visited the Youth Railway, a group of twenty-seven volunteers formed the "Frank Thompson" working group to visit Bulgaria and to take part in reconstruction work there.

Under the leadership of Deric Beech, a young worker of Coventry, the group spent ten days working at Hain Boaz on the construction of a new motor road. In addition, the members of this group had opportunities of studying at first hand various aspects of social, political and cultural developments in Bulgaria.

They were received everywhere with traditional hospitality, and were greatly impressed with the spirit and enthusiasm prevailing amongst the Bulgarian youth and people.

## POSTSCRIPT

*from "Joe" Dvornik, Interpreter to the Brigade*

Dear Comrades of the British Brigade,

I want to send my comradely greetings to all of you, members of the British Brigade, who worked together with our youth on the Youth Railway Samac-Sarajevo. In a few days—fourteen days ahead of schedule—the obligation will be fulfilled, the Railway will be opened and the trains will start running over that monument of the youth's spirit and unity. There in the Bosna valley between Nemila and Vranduk tunnel, in the embankment, stream bed, rock face, you have left an imperishable proof of your friendship for our people, of your will to fight for peace, international collaboration and democracy. Remember those days you spent in our country working together with our youth, when you witnessed the tremendous creative energy of our people awakened by our revolution, our national-liberation struggle, by our new democracy, directed not only towards the lifting of our standard of living through our Five Year Plan, not only towards a rapid cultural advance of our peoples, but also towards the establishment and deepening of friendly brotherly relations with all peoples.

Receiving letters from some of you and reading British papers, I can see that you are fulfilling your promises. Thank you for your contributions to the triumph of the truth about our country.

Living with you this summer I learnt to know and love your people. I wish you a happy and prosperous Britain.

Long live the brotherhood and unity of our two peoples!

Death to Fascism! Freedom to the People!

# Conclusion

THIS is the end of our story. In days of austerity and "Work or Want," some people have become bored with stories of reconstruction. We hope that this story has held their interest.

The British who shared in this experience returned with many opinions. On the Railway some defended fanatically every aspect of Yugoslav life—including some which the Yugoslavs themselves were most keen to erase. Others looked for political police under every wheelbarrow. Some did not like the slogans, the marching, or the military training. Others were so rushed off their feet that they could not decide what they liked at all.

But on two things we reached complete agreement. The Railway was a genuine attempt to forge international understanding. May there be many such schools for friendship in the next years! Our hosts, often with poor facilities, did all they could to make us at home. They did not pry into our affairs, nor did they try to stampede us into unquestioning support for their country. The Yugoslavs whom we met at great gatherings were warmly welcoming, and curious to know more about our people and our country. The Yugoslavs who lived with us, our interpreters and delegates, were not dogmatic and impenetrable sphinxes, but people like us, with a fund of humour and quick-understanding, thoughtful and independent, making up their minds for themselves.

And we agreed on the enthusiasm and remarkable capacity for work of our friends. We have testified to this in our book. But now there is greater evidence than this. For on November 15th the first train, garlanded with autumn branches, nosed cautiously up the 150 miles of new-laid track from Samac, steaming past the rock-face and the deserted hut at Nemila where we lived, through Vranduk tunnel, to Sarajevo, where it was met by Marshal Tito himself.

We are proud that we took part in this work, and glad that, in these ill-tempered times, there were British youth working beside the other nations. We made many friendships and we did not overstay our welcome. But we are not altogether satisfied with our part. We worked with a will, but we might have worked better. We had little to show in other activities, in athletics and sport, in theatre, entertainments and song. Our song-books were dull, and we knew none of our own folk-music. The Scots did not bring their kilts or their pipes (and what could a piper *not* have done in Bosnia for British-Yugoslav friendship?) and few of them knew their own reels and dances. As for the English, we often felt shamefacedly that we had less home-made culture in our hearts than any nation we met. Our choir, quite frankly, was a joke, and the nearest thing to a part song we produced was "London's Burning." These faults came from inexperience and lack of foresight, and from the system of organisation which sent us to the brigade in small groups and dribbles, and which took us away again as we were beginning to get to grips. We hope that, on a future project, a British brigade will go out ready to meet all these demands, going with good organisation and a competitive spirit, taking with it more young workers and trade unionists as well as students. For the British this year lacked nothing in will and enthusiasm, and we are convinced that, so organised, it could return proud of the account it had given of our people, having been in the forefront of all activities.

Finally, there are those who suggest that we should not have left to work in another country in the time of our own crisis. We believe

that international friendship is in no less critical a state than our economic affairs, and is no less vital an affair to our people. We believe that if a similar scheme were organised in our own country the Yugoslavs would gladly take time off from their own reconstruction to help us. Moreover, we believe that we have returned inspired with a greater will, and with a clearer idea of how our problems can be faced. The Yugoslavs, with a backward and shattered economy, are certain of the future. We returned to find our own country, with its great industries and skilled people, humiliating itself before America and doubtful of its own ability even to survive. What is wrong with us? Where is that spirit we met in Bosnia—to work *and* want and enjoy it, so long as we maintain our freedom? For we are engaged in a common struggle still alongside the Yugoslav people, a struggle which is only the complement and conclusion of our common sacrifices in the war. Peace did not end the struggle for the Yugoslavs, because the second half of their great war aim was not finally and irrevocably secured. The slogan of the partisan struggle still inspires every activity of today. Leaders shout it at the end of speeches; it runs along the length of the tramcars in Belgrade; it is at the foot of every official letter passed on the Railway.

Death to Fascism! Freedom to the People!
*Smrt Fasismu! Slaboda Narodu!*

*Ern Brooks*

# THE BRITISH-YUGOSLAV ASSOCIATION

is a centre and a source of reliable information for everybody who is interested in the New Yugoslavia, its problems and its progress in solving them.

*For details of membership and further information write to*

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