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880 Minerva

Former Yugoslavia: what is to be done?

My favourite *New Yorker* cartoon is now slightly dated. It shows a group of partygoers clustering around an expert, hanging on his every word. "He understands Lebanon," explains one partygoer to a newcomer.

I've yet to find someone in the flesh or in print who can make sense of the situation in the former Yugoslavia and can convince me of what the West should be doing about it. This is particularly distressing because the words and images of this conflict—its preoccupation with race and religion, its newsreel footage of emaciated men in concentration camps—conjures up Nazi Germany, when the international community similarly failed to act in time.

This week we publish two personal views and two letters about the conflict. In Sarajevo Louise McCorkindale met an old woman "so thin she can hardly stand." In the overcrowded collective centre where she lived the filthy windows were streaming with condensation and it had been beans and bread, every meal, every day for 12 months. "She tells me that she survived the Nazi concentration camps for this. What can I say?" asks McCorkindale (p 877).

On the basis of his experience in Vietnam, Hugh Dudley wonders why Britain doesn't use some taxpayers' money to provide medical teams for Bosnian trouble

spots (p 872). Richard Villar similarly questions the medical evacuation of refugees in his personal view (p 876).

The other main theme of this week's journal is President Clinton's proposals for reforming American health care. In his news story John Roberts provides a detailed description of the new proposals (p 819), while in an accompanying editorial Art Caplan examines the political hurdles that they will have to clear before introduction (p 813). Both Roberts and Caplan agree that Clinton's success or failure as a president hangs on the reforms. To British doctors, who are now used to the purchaser-provider split, many of the details of the new plans will seem surprisingly familiar.

Britain's own internal market regularly throw up unforeseen questions—such as who should pay for the hospital care of those attending Glastonbury Festival. "It would be ironic if you could take a weekend break in Amsterdam confident in the knowledge that as a citizen of the European Community you would receive free treatment in an emergency but that if you went on a day trip to Bath you had to buy travel insurance," note Drs Andrew Sandison and Peter Jones (p 865) in one of several letters on the topic.

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