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# East Europe Report

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POLITICS

YUGOSLAVIA

DOBROSLAV PARAGA DESCRIBES MISTREATMENT IN PRISON

Ljubljana NOVA REVIJA in Slovene No 48/49, 1986 pp 814-817

[Letter from Dobroslav Paraga, Yugoslav human rights activist: "A Chronicle of Torture and Suffering in Yugoslav Prisons from 21 November 1980 to 21 November 1984"]

[Text] Immediately after my arrest I was locked in a cold concrete cell (without a blanket). After three days I was transferred to a cell without air where I waited all of Monday and Tuesday (25 November) until noon Wednesday in complete darkness and without anything to eat or drink. From 21 to 26 November I did not get anything at all. It was clear that they wanted to make me suffer constantly.

Because of this treatment I soon became ill with intestinal inflammation and gastritis. Then I developed large subcutaneous ulcers and pus-filled skin inflammation on my back and chest.

In mid-January 1984, after endless threats from the State Security Service whose employees took me out of a room in the Investigative Prison into the streets of Zagreb and to further interrogations without my attorney's consent, imprisoned criminal Slobodan Novkovic from Srbac near Banja Luka suddenly and for no reason attacked me, overturned a heavy, approximately 6-meter long bench on my left foot, and jumped on the bench. This resulted in a fractured toe and five fractures in my left foot. They immobilized my left foot with a plaster cast and a splint at the Trauma Hospital in Zagreb. I wore them for a good month and a half, but without appropriate treatment and rest. For that reason I continued to limp for several months while I was in the Investigative Prison. I had a relapse in the form of sharp pains the summer after I was released from prison.

At the end of 1981, after I arrived on Goli Otok, I was subjected to intimidation and terrible torture by the prison administration, headed by Director Anton Silic, Deputy Director Ivos, and the head of the penal/correctional facility, Josip Lopac. At the reception center, in accordance with orders from the head of the center, they put me in with the most hardened criminals. They sent me to work on basket weaving. That section was the worst in terms of psychopathic and criminal tendencies among the inmates. It is a real penal section. Journalist Sanic told my parents that I was subjected to a regimen of strict imprisonment and limited visits.

In January 1982 I spent 10 days in the hospital building at Goli Otok. I had developed lung disease and had a strong allergic inflammation on my body and hands--a consequence of clearing heavy rocks which had been blown up and of picking off parasites from bushes and the scarce trees.

I had still not recovered and was nearly as ill as before when they took me to see Sislic, the director of the penal-correctional facility, because I had complained that I had been put into a group where I was constantly provoked and my life hung by a thread. The director told me that he would put me in a cage where I would die in the dark from cold and hunger. "Either you will conform to my stipulations or you will not leave here alive," were his threatening words.

On that occasion I was punished with 10 days in dim underground cell without any glass window. That was one of the solitary cells in the infamous section 103 intended for solitary confinement.

A guard named Gregor--he had taken me to see Silic--gave me several terrific blows on the back with a rubber truncheon after my interview with Silic so that I stumbled and everything spun around me. The blows left me with thick black marks which later, of course, became fainter. The scars are visible to this day.

They placed me in the same damp concrete cell on 30 January 1982. It is dug approximately five meters below grade next to the building. From the window opening to the ground above there was a ladder that was at least two meters long. The solitary cell in which I was confined was dark day and night since the light of day could not reach it. The inmates called it THE CAGE because one could take only two paces in it--one could only stand bent over or sit bent over in a corner or on the bed. The guards removed all of the clothes that could have kept me warm and took away my blanket. They left me naked, exposed, without clothes, and barefoot to live for ten days in the cage if I could. They laughed as they closed the heavy iron door behind me. The temperature dropped to 5 degrees [Centigrade] below zero. There was a hurricane-like wind from Senj with gusts of up to 200 kilometers per hour.

Under those circumstances I refused food for eight days. It seemed certain to me that no one could endure such hellish torture. I hoped for a quick and honorable death. My feet swelled up so much that I could not put my shoes on when, on the seventh day, the guards took me two kilometers away because Father Smiljan had come to see me. I only stuck my toes into the shoes. I had reached the limits of my endurance. I was shaking from head to toe, my gums were bleeding, and I already felt near death.

The fourth and eighth days of solitary confinement I experienced physical torture. The prison physician, Dr Markovina, along with two guards and two male nurses approached my cell and ordered that I be taken out. The first guard pulled me roughly by the hair, the second by the arm. They made me sit on a chair with a back. They bound my hands behind my back with an iron chain and a padlock. One of them pulled my head back. The other ordered me to open my mouth and suddenly forced a rubber truncheon between my teeth.

The physician then approached me and began to push, through my esophagus, a thick rubber tube into my stomach. He did it so forcefully and roughly that later I spat up blood. Two days later I experienced the same kind of torture.

After I got out of solitary confinement, I was not allowed to associate with other inmates even though I had survived several days alone in a cold concrete cell without heat or windows above the solitary confinement cells in the same building. They placed me there without explanation. Then I was also visited by deputy director Ivos and the head of the penal/correctional facility, Lopac, who threatened that they would prepare another indictment against me because I was a bad influence on the other inmates.

On that occasion they told me that Goli Otok was large enough to gobble up even criminals like me.

After I was released from solitary confinement I was quickly placed into another department--the paint shop--and I was formally allowed to receive the books sent to me from home. The department supervisor, Aldok, forced me to work without respite for hours claiming that I never met the quota and saying that he would again place me in solitary confinement. When I came to ask him what daily quota had to be met, since I had heard from others that it was less than what I had done in eight hours of work, he snapped at me: "You shit, get out of here! Guards, take him to solitary confinement."

They immediately removed and destroyed all the books that I had received from home.

At the same time some of the inmates who were attending the prison elementary or high school--among them one Subasic and one Tomislav Priko--told me that the teacher had warned them that I was a dangerous enemy of the state whose father had been a Nazi and said that their education would be judged by their attitude toward me. He said all of this while teaching them.

In this manner an atmosphere of revenge against me was created among the inmates. While watching the news on television, they overwhelmed me with all sorts of complaints and insulted me in a crude manner. In February or March they showed us a drama about the Cetnik movement. At that time some of the inmates shouted my name and compared me to an Ustasa or a Cetnik.

Along the road from the plant to the settlement (a colony of 500 inmates), the guards shouted: "Paraga, don't break the line"! "Paraga, don't risk your head"! "Fuck your dead mother, Paraga"!, etc.

Somewhat later during the Mayday celebration I spoke with inmate Punos. He asked me to write for a request for a renewed trial. Director Lopac approached us (twice) and told us that he did not want Punos to talk to me because I was a "politically negative person."

In February 1982 a multiple murderer and terrorist of international caliber, BRUNO REKETTI, began to play the role of my protector. He promised to protect me against attacks and also said that he would store my personal possessions

in the movie theater, which was his responsibility. He must have known that I was coming to Goli Otok since he immediately sent to the canteen milk and other food for me even though until then we had not known each other or even met. He demanded, first indirectly and later as a matter of course, that I sneak into the movie theater after work without letting anyone know. He had a whole network of spies who told him if any of the inmates had approached me to talk to me. They were later beaten up. The poor men did not even know why they were beaten up with fists or iron bars. Reketii had a store of alcohol which he used to bribe the inhabitants of the island prison. Several times he arranged black magic seances and tried to force me to take part in these activities, but I always turned him down. In April he tried once again to drag me to a seance--he hung a long dagger from my neck--and since he was not successful, he beat me unconscious with karate blows.

On 1 May 1982 Reketii showed me black on white that the Presidency of Croatia had decided to reduce his sentence by a year for the first time since he had been incarcerated. He felt that the reason was that he was keeping an eye on me and that his pardon was due to me. Next day, when he was quite drunk with brandy, he told me that in mid-November 1981 he was summoned to see director Lopac, who ordered him to keep an eye on me, keep me separated from the other inmates and--when the time was right--physically liquidate me. As a reward, Lopac promised him the best job in the penal/correctional facility. Lopac said that he would release Reketii on parole seven years early. Reketii also told me that he was supposed to talk me into trying to escape from Goli Otok; he would then drown me or murder me in some other fashion and cover me with rocks. The penal/correctional facility administration would then let it be known that I had perished while trying to escape. He added that, in addition to himself, two others had received the same orders. He was protecting me from them because he felt I had strong homosexual leanings. If I did not give in to him, he would kill me and the other two.

Two weeks later, he indeed tried to liquidate me. Allegedly the other two had decided that they would kill me that day, and he wanted to beat them to it. He threatened me with a knife and wanted to immure me into a niche that had been dug in a wall of the movie theater. I was suddenly overcome by a great weakness, unable to breathe, and everything spun around me. A bell rang; it was time to count the inmates. The criminal flinched. He had to call the other inmates to take me before the building where they took the head count.

After that I went to see Dr Nakic day after day. I was plagued by severe headaches, dizzy spells, and loss of consciousness. Several times I staggered in the prison courtyard and had to grab the walls of the buildings. On the third day of my illness the physician noted that he ought to measure my blood pressure. It turned out to be exceptionally high (200/120) and rising. By 1 June my condition was very serious. They took me to the mainland by boat and put me in the Simunska Hospital in Zagreb.

I spent a good three weeks in the Simunska Prison Hospital in the psychiatric ward. I was examined and treated by Dr Ranko Radonjic. Even though my health did not substantially improve, Dr Radonjic was unscrupulous enough to send me back to Goli Otok with a blood pressure that was a great deal higher than normal--200/110.

On 30 June 1982 they took me, along with two other inmates, in the back of a small prison van to the district prison in Rijeka. Once there I was locked up for two days in the reception area, which faces on the busiest part of Rijeka, so that it is filled with exhaust fumes from the street. The inmates there knocked on the door several times demanding that a physician see me, but none came. The prison cook and several inmates took me half-conscious to the van, which took me back to Goli Otok. I came back totally exhausted. I was put in the prison infirmary. I lost consciousness for four days. Placed on a stretcher, I was taken to the mainland by boat a second time and then to Zagreb. Dr Nikolic said that I was in the pre-stroke stage--my blood pressure was 240/150. I was treated in a Zagreb hospital from 6 July to 10 November 1982. Because of my badly damaged health, the Croatian Secretariat for Justice decided to place me in the Lepoglava penal/correctional facility that same year (1982).

In Lepoglava, I was frequently examined and given TRASICOR 80 and SINAPRES for high blood pressure. My health was damaged primarily because the prison authorities had placed me in solitary confinement five times, which is against the regulations. The regulations state that an inmate may not be placed in solitary confinement if it would damage his health. My health was damaged. I was taken from solitary confinement to the Simunska Hospital three times (20 January, 25 May, and 28 July 1984).

Because of a petition on Human Rights Day, 10 December 1983, I was imprisoned again. As a protest against this harsh punishment I refused food for 21 days. Prison physician Stankovic force-fed me seven times with a tube. Finally, due to the swelling of my esophagus, the tube went into my trachea and I began to suffocate. By his own admission, he exposed me to 12 life-threatening force-feedings with a rubber tube, even though he had at his disposal painless intravenous devices, only to torture, humiliate, and possibly even kill me. Because of Dr Miroslav Stankovic's rubber tube, my gastrointestinal tract bled for three days after I was released from solitary confinement.

I spent 271 days of my four-year term in solitary confinement in prisons and hospitals, where I was psychologically and physically tortured.

Since my release, I have been under treatment for high blood pressure, which has not gone down.

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