

CAMPAIGN OF POLITICAL REPRESSION CONTINUES AGAINST CROATIAN PARLIAMENT OPPOSITION LEADER, DOBROSLAV PARAGA -- [DEMOCRACY BULLETIN--VOL. 4, NO. 2--SUMMER 1993, THE NATIONAL COUNCIL TO SUPPORT THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS] (Extension of Remarks - July 27, 1993)

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HON. JAMES A. TRAFICANT, JR.

in the House of Representatives

TUESDAY, JULY 27, 1993

- Mr. TRAFICANT. Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to update my colleagues on the situation of Dobroslav Paraga, an opposition member of the Croatian Parliament, who visited Members of Congress recently to share his concerns regarding the authoritarian tendencies of the Croatian Government.
- Unfortunately, since Mr. Paraga's return to Croatia, he has been the subject of nonstop harassment by the Croatian Government. This has included his removal as vice president of the Commission on Human Rights, charges of high treason based on his statements while in the United States and the takeover of his party's headquarters by the Croatian police. Mr. Paraga is an elected member of an opposition party and, as such, he should be able to exercise his right to free speech without harassment.
- In response, Mr. Paraga has peacefully protested in a series of statements, sit-ins, and rallies which reflect his history as a human rights activist who was arrested, jailed, and tortured as a student protester.
- Additionally, Mr. Paraga is undergoing his third political trial, charged with the same transgression as in two previous trials that were dismissed by the head of the Croatian Supreme Court. The head of the Croatian Supreme Court was later dismissed himself. Assisting Mr. Paraga's noted criminal attorney, Svonimir Hodak, is the prominent U.S. attorney, Mr. Joseph Morris.
- At this point, I wish to include several relevant materials for consideration by my colleagues. Please note that the text of the letter to President Tudjman from the American Muslim Council is identical to the text of the letter sent to Democracy International that follows:

The trial of Dobroslav Paraga is a matter of concern to us from the standpoint of human rights, irrespective of our opinion of the politics of Paraga. We do not say this either to support or to criticize the political views and affiliations of Paraga, or anyone else's political views and affiliations. The whole point of human rights is

that they are for everyone, those with whom we agree and those with whom we disagree, those whose friends and affiliations we like and those whose friends and affiliations we abhor. This is the very cornerstone of freedom of speech and of association. If human rights do not exist in this way for everyone, then they do not exist in reality for anyone.

Our concern in this message is with the quality of freedom and the quality of justice in Croatia. We note that Paraga has suffered in the jails of the former Communist Yugoslavia. Today in Serbia, Mr. Vuk Draskovic is being tormented and charged on the identical accusation of trying to overthrow the Government by violence, when in fact all of the evidence is that Draskovic has proceeded by normal political means and that it is the Government of Milosevic that has proceeded by political violence and illegality. We do not want the same thing to happen in Croatia.

The burden of the evidence thus far indicates that the trial of Paraga is primarily a political trial and that its main purpose is to punish Paraga and his colleagues for normal political opposition to the Government of President Tudjman. In light of some of the charges against Paraga and the tactics used by the Government against him, the burden of proof is now upon that Government to show that the trial is truly concerned with the alleged conspiracy for illegal and violent overthrow of the Government. Also, in light of the past dismissal of the President of the Supreme Court after the Supreme Court had dismissed past charges against Paraga, the burden of proof is upon that Government to show that its judges are objective and independent, and that the verdict will be dependent upon an honest and independent judicial determination of the truth or falsity of the charge of conspiracy for violent overthrow of the Government. Otherwise the whole world will feel confirmed in the impression--and it has already gained this impression--that the judicial system of Croatia can be and is being turned to use for the partisan interests of the Government, and that a fair trial is not something that people can expect in Croatia if they disagree with the Government.

In these circumstances, the following facts are particularly disturbing and objectionable:

1. This case is being put to a military court.
2. Paraga has been stripped of his parliamentary immunity as a Member of the Croatian Parliament by the vote of the majority which belongs to the party of the Government.
3. Paraga has been removed from a senior parliamentary post, that of Vice Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights and Minority Rights, because of his criticism on May 25, 1993 at the Washington Press Club of human rights practices of the Government of Croatia. This removal is a serious violation of freedom of speech and gravely damages the credibility henceforth of the Parliamentary

Committee on Human Rights and Minority Rights. This would be the case even if Paraga's criticisms had been without foundation, as the Government claims; but unfortunately the criticisms did have foundation, and the punishment of Paraga for making them only serves to close the circle and make this evident even to outside laypeople.

4. Charges are being raised against Paraga for his political criticisms of the Government of Croatia and in particular his criticisms of its human rights practices. Paraga's statement at the Washington Press Club has been

(a) discussed at a meeting of the Central Committee of the ruling CDU party, with President Tudjman presiding. The Central Committee has declared that it 'considers the attacks by some individuals in opposition circles, not part of the regular partisan disputes but rather aggressive attacks not only against President Tudjman and the Croatian Democratic Union but also against the foundations of the Croatian State.' (Vecernji list, Zagreb, June 3, 1993)

(b) characterized by the Committee for Internal Policy and National Security as highly treasonous and an offense against his parliamentary oath to uphold the honor and reputation of Croatia and its Parliament. (Vecernji list, Zagreb, June 3, 1993)

(c) denounced in a Statement of the Croatian Government (printed in Vjesnik, Zagreb, June 3, 1993) as 'political sabotage par excellence against the Government of Croatia, the Croatian President and the Croatian State . . . '

Paraga has been indicted for 'spreading false reports,' a criminal offense in Croatia. (Associated Press, June 5, 1993)

These actions have a threatening character toward all freedom of speech. Mr. Dubravko Vidovic of the opposition Social Democratic party stated that 'they could be using him [Paraga] as an excuse to silence all critics.' The fact that Mr. Vidovic prefaced his comment with a statement of dissociation--that 'Paraga was too harsh in his criticism'--is itself indicative of the chilling effect of the Government's measures against that criticism.

In regard to the sullyng of the statehood and reputation of Croatia, we would like to bring the following facts to the attention of the Government of Croatia. We are completely familiar with the statement of Paraga at the Washington Press Club, since it was an open public event. That statement supported the statehood and independence of Croatia. It contained no attack whatsoever against that statehood and independence, nor against anything that could legitimately be considered a foundation of Croatian statehood and independence. The event was attended mostly by representatives and supporters of the Croatian government it was not reported in the Western media. Paraga's making of this statement did very little if any political damage in the West to the Government of Croatia, and did no damage at all to the people of Croatia and their independence. However, the

subsequent persecution of Paraga, which is being widely reported in the West, is doing considerable damage to the reputation of Croatia in the West.

If the Government of Croatia wishes this trial to be a fair trial, and for it to be perceived as such in the eyes of the world, then it will have to:

1. Withdraw all charges against Paraga for political activities and statements critical of the Government and person of Mr. Tudjman.
2. Restore the parliamentary immunity of Paraga and his Vice Chairmanship of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Minority Rights.
3. Conduct the trial in a non-military court, in a large enough courtroom, without excluding portions of the public and press that the Government might rather not have present.
4. Conduct the trial under a judge whose independence is demonstrable and unsullied; and reinforce the independence of the Croatian judiciary by restoring the President of the Supreme Court who lost his position after the Supreme Court had dismissed charges against Paraga.

These four measures are needed to ensure freedom and justice in Croatia, to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of Croatian statehood, and to protect the reputation of Croatia around the world. We strongly urge the Government of Croatia to take these four measures.

Signed for Democracy International on June 23, 1993 by

Ira Louis Straus,
Executive Director.

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THE MUSLIM PARLIAMENT

of Great Britain,
April 14, 1993.

His Excellency President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia,
Parliament (Sabor) RH, Zagreb, Croatia.

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Dear President Tudjman: We are concerned about the Bill of Indictment that has been issued before the Court Martial against the leaders of the Croatian Party of Rights, the Leader and the President Mr. Dobroslav Paraga and the Vice-

President Mr. Ante Dapic, who are members of the Parliament (Sabor) of Croatia and who are also democratically-elected members of the Parliament, respectively.

In particular, Mr. Dobroslav Paraga is the Vice-President of the Committee for Human Rights and the Minority Rights in the Croatian Parliament and Mr. Dapic is the President of the Committee for Grievances and Complaints in the same Parliament.

As the human rights activities of these members of Parliament are well-known and respected, we, the Human Rights Campaigners, deplore the act of their Court-Martial. This act of prosecuting one's own members of Parliament simply because they hold opposing views has never been exercised before in any democratic country and it is in defiance of the application of human rights.

The development of human rights in Croatia should be encouraged and not discouraged at the beginning with action that targets the opposition and tries to prosecute the legally and democratically elected members of Parliament.

Yours sincerely,
MASSOUD SHADJAREH,

Chairman, The Human Rights Committee and The Muslim Parliament of Great Britain.

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SDA CHICAGO U.S.A. FOR

Bosnia-Herzegovina,
Northbrook, IL, June 16, 1993.

His Excellency President Franjo Tudjman,
Zabreb, Croatia.

Dear Mr. President: This is to bring to your attention the outrage and protest that our community feels against the ongoing prosecution of the Hon. Dobroslav Paraga and his associates at the hands of your Court and Military Prosecutor, as well as the undemocratic and illegal procedures of the Court and the Parliament.

The Hon. Dobroslav Paraga is a democratically elected representative of the Croatian people, the elected Vice-President of the Committee for Human Rights and Minority Rights, the well-known and respected human rights campaigner who was previously prosecuted under the Serbo-Communist regime, a supporter of Muslim-Croatian friendship and cooperation, a supporter of the integrity and sovereignty of the sovereign Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a well-known Croatian patriot with vision and leadership who understands the dangers,

the motives and designs of Serbian aggression. His only sin was to fully understand Serbian intentions and to not trust in their promises in Karadjordjevo or elsewhere. His prosecution is a stain on democracy, the legal system, the Presidency, the Parliament, and the freedom of Croatia.

Mr. President, if you continue to prosecute Mr. Paraga you would confirm the darkest suspicion of many Western observers that an autocracy and dictatorship is in the making to inhibit and oppress the freedom loving people of Croatia. Mr. President, we are asking you to stop this charade and prosecution of Mr. Paraga and his innocent associates. Instead, you should use his good offices to help you build trust, cooperation and alliances with the Bosnian Muslims.

Sincerely,

Becir Tanovic, *President.*

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[DEMOCRACY BULLETIN--VOL. 4, NO. 2--SUMMER 1993, THE NATIONAL COUNCIL TO SUPPORT THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS]

Miroslav Kovacevic is a professor of pediatrics accredited to the Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine in Chicago. He is a Croatian-American who immigrated to the United States 20 years ago. In March, 1992 he established a 'Save The Children Of Croatia Fund' under the auspices of St. Jerome's Church in Chicago. Its purpose was to provide assistance to Croatian war orphans who lost one or both parents in the Balkan war. The relief campaign initiated by Dr. Kovacevic was simple and effective. The orphans were identified by a group of volunteers in Croatia, who reported their names to fellow volunteers in the United States. Each child's name would then be matched with a sponsor in the United States or Canada who would pledge a monthly support contribution of \$50. This money was deposited in a special bank account of the St. Jerome's Church, approved by the Diocese. Each month, the Church would receive a list of eligible children from Zagreb, and a sum equal to \$50 per child was transferred to the Privedna Bank in Zagreb, where an individual account was opened for each child and put under the control of its guardian.

The task of identifying eligible children was not always simple. Sometimes there was interference by government officials. In order to facilitate the process Dr. Kovacevic invited President Tudjman's wife to be Honorary Chairperson of the Croatian side of the operation. The program functioned successfully between March and November, 1992. Approximately \$600,000 was transferred during this period, and provided aid to some 2,000 Croatian orphans. Dr. Kovacevic planned to extend the program to children in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Then the trouble started. Franjo Tudjman's authoritarian regime intervened to halt their work. Why this happened is not altogether clear, but some suspect that the

reason lies in a rivalry between the regime and an opposition party led by a friend of Dr. Kovacevic.

On November 10, 1992 Dr. Kovacevic received a faxed message from the President's wife, announcing that the headquarters of the fund had been arbitrarily moved from Chicago to Zagreb, that sole signature on the bank account had been taken over by a person unknown to Dr. Kovacevic, and that henceforth only children approved by the Ministry of Defense could receive assistance. In response to Dr. Kovacevic's urgent calls to the bank in Zagreb, top officials at the bank reported that on orders from Mrs. Tudjman, no further information regarding the account was to be given to him.

He later found out that the person to whom Mrs. Tudjman had given sole authority over the bank account was a certain Ivanka Zoric, a close personal friend and confidante.

These arbitrary and unilateral acts left Dr. Kovacevic with no other conclusion than that the St. Jerome's Church of Chicago 'Save the Children of Croatia Fund' had been stolen.

In a 45 minute telephone conversation with Mrs. Tudjman on November 16, 1992, Dr. Kovacevic pleaded for restitution of the fund--to no effect.

On November 22, a detailed written communication repeating the request was faxed to Zagreb, but no reply was received.

On November 24, a Dominican priest in Zagreb, Fra. Zadro, armed with a written authorization from St. Jerome's Church in Chicago requested permission to examine the Fund's bank account at the Privedna Bank, and was refused. On December 3, a Zagreb attorney, Mr. Madunic, similarly authorized by St. Jerome's Church, requested access to examine the account and was refused.

On the same date a new fax was sent to Mrs. Tudjman, demanding an immediate resolution of the matter, and her resignation as Honorary Chairperson. Again no reply.

On December 15, 1992 full details of this affair were communicated to the Croatian Ambassador in Washington, Peter Sarcevic, and requesting his urgent mediation. This communication was transferred to Mrs. Tudjman and Ambassador Sacrevic has refused further comment.

On December 31, 1992 Dr. Kovacevic received a fax message from Mrs. Tudjman demanding that all monies belonging to the Church Fund in the United States be immediately transferred to the expropriated account at the Privedna Bank in Zagreb. The message also demanded that all further communication in the matter be directed to her personal fax number, and that none be sent via the Croatian Embassy in Washington or the Office of the President in Zagreb.

Officials of St. Jerome's Church in Chicago refused to transfer any further funds to the expropriated account in Zagreb pending restitution.

On January 7, 1993, Dr. Kovacevic received a visit from two messengers at his Chicago home. They were expressly sent by Mrs. Tudjman. They had one message: stop being stubborn. The doctor replied that he would immediately start organizing a new network for the delivery of aid to the children, and if that failed, he would return all monies at the St. Jerome bank account to their sponsors.

Then followed the enormous task of setting up an alternative organization in Croatia. A new bank account was opened on January 28, 1993, at 'Slavonska Banka d.d.' in Osijek. The reconstitution of childrens' names and addresses was a particularly difficult in the war-ravaged countryside where addresses change constantly. The Privedna Bank in Zagreb refused to provide any information. Nonetheless by March 9, some 1,938 individual accounts were opened for each child, and St. Jerome's Church in Chicago resumed the transfer of funds: on March 15, \$100 per account; on April 6, \$50 per account; on May 17, \$50 per account.

But the troubles were not over. On March 24, 1993, the 'Slavonska Bank' in Osijek advised Chicago they had received an order from the Privedna Bank in Zagreb, signed by Mrs. Ivanka Zoric on orders from Mrs. Tudjman, that all funds they were holding in the name of St. Jerome's Church-- 'Save the Children of Croatia Fund' be transferred immediately to Privedna Bank in Zagreb. 'Slavonska Bank' refused to accede to this order.

Dr. Kovacevic continued to be harassed by phone calls and 'visitors' at his Chicago home, until one day the mystery surrounding this bizarre series of events was made clear.

That was May 16, 1993, when the individual donors in the United States who had sponsored children under the program, received a personal letter from Mrs. Tudjman. Its contents leave no doubt that behind all this was a political machination, namely the Tudjman Administration's long-standing battle with a man called Dobroslav Paraga, a friend of Dr. Kovacevic.

Paraga is a pro-democracy human rights activist, and leader of the Croatian Party of Rights. He has a long record of activism, first against the Communist government of Yugoslavia, where he was jailed as a 'counterrevolutionary,' and later, in opposition to Tudjman and his ruling party, the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ). He is an outspoken critic of their authoritarian methods. This has earned him Tudjman's undisguised hostility, including arrest, imprisonment, charges of insurrection and treason, and a continual barrage of disinformation against him and his party--most notably that they are fascists.

Paraga has twice been adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience.

Mrs. Tadjman's letter to the fund donors makes it quite clear that Paraga's friendship with Dr. Kovacevic is the real reason behind her actions concerning the children's fund. She links Paraga's name with the Doctor's in denying the allegations catalogued hereinabove. She cites a press conference held in Zagreb on April 21st, by the Party of Rights, in which the dispute over the children's fund was publicly aired. The following day, the local press carried the story with the headline `Where Did Help For The Orphans Disappear?' She states that the untrue allegations damage the reputation of Croatia, and implies that this was intentional.

In an address to the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on May 25, 1993, Dobroslav Paraga criticized the Tadjman administration for its poor human rights record and non-respect for democratic principles. After his speech, 12 congressmen wrote to President Clinton calling his attention to `authoritarian tendencies of President Franjo Tadjman and his intolerance towards free press and political expression in Croatia.'

On June 4, the Croatian Parliament voted to remove Paraga from the Commission for Human Rights for having `slandered' Croatia during his visit to the United States.

On June 5, before a Military Court in Zagreb, a criminal trial was opened in which Paraga was charged with offenses against the state, political subversion and high treason. Paraga's Croatian attorney, Zvonimir Hodak will be assisted by a prominent U.S. legal counsel, Joseph Morris, President of the Lincoln Legal Foundation.

The war-orphans in Croatia and the private citizens in America who want to help them are thus caught in the middle of a political squabble in which they should never have been involved. Without entering into the merits of the case the Croatian government feels it has against Paraga, the least one can say is that the heavy-handed methods it has shown here do not speak well for its public relations expertise! Too bad, for there is a very large reservoir of sympathy in the United States for the people of Croatia in their time of suffering--a valuable resource Croatia can ill afford to jeopardize.

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