

**CROATIAN POLICE ATTACK PROTESTORS AT PEACEFUL TRADE UNION RALLY -- (BY JACK ANDERSON AND JAN MOLLER) (Extension of Remarks - March 19, 1998)**

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**HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS**

**in the House of Representatives**

*THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 1998*

- Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, today I am sharing with my colleagues various newspaper articles related to a recent peaceful rally in which protestors were attacked by Croatian police. It was reported in the Federal Tribune that there were between 12,000 to 14,000 policemen from throughout Croatia brought in to control an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 protestors. The rally was organized by the largest trade union in Croatia and several opposition political parties. The reported focus of the rally were issues of high unemployment and poor living conditions for workers and retirees, while at the same time it has been reported that Croatia's President Franjo Tudjman has amassed a considerable fortune for himself and his family. I am also inserting into the **Record** an informative article released this week by Jack Anderson and Jan Moller entitled, 'Croatian Seeks To End Human-Rights Abuses.'

**[FROM BBC NEWS, FEB. 21, 1998]**

The Croatian Interior Ministry has denied reports that police used force against demonstrators during a mass protest in the capital Zagreb.

Tens of thousands of people took part in what is described as the largest rally the nation has seen, against growing poverty and unemployment.

The government banned the demonstration from main city square, Ban Jelacic square, deploying hundreds of police with riot gear to prevent the crowd from gaining access.

Protesters threw apples and eggs at officers and a shop window was shattered.

An Interior Ministry statement, carried by the official news agency HINA, contradicted Croatian radio and TV reports that several people were being treated in hospital for injuries.

Five police staff were also reported injured.

The demonstration was organized by three trade unions and backed by 10 opposition parties.

Correspondents say about 10,000 protesters moved to Marshall Tito square, also known as Theatre Square, where they held an hour-long meeting.

The head of the Croatian Workers Trade Union, Boris Kunst, said he was saddened that the Croatian police had raised their hands against the protesters.

'These people that gathered here are those who defended Croatia,' he said. 'But they cannot live off their salaries, while the others are decorating their palaces and are stealing from us.'

Protesters called on ministers to reduce their own salaries and scrap the newly-introduced 22% value added tax which has seen prices increase on basic goods including food.

Correspondents say Croats have been reluctant to demonstrate against the government, lead by President Franco Tujman, since the country achieved independence through a devastating war in 1991.

But dissatisfaction among citizens is mounting as the majority of them face post-war poverty.

An unemployment rate, which independent analysts say tops 23%, is at the center of public grievances.

As the rate rises a new wealthy elite, consisting mainly of businessmen favored by the government or ruling party members, has emerged.

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ZAGREB. President of the United American Trade Union headquarters AFL-CIO John J. Sweeney sent a letter to the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tudjman protesting confiscation of the trade union's property. Mr. Sweeney appealed to the government of Croatia that it was urgent that they change their position and rescind their orders under the 'law of unions' in relation to the trade union's property, and withdraw their decision about nationalization of the trade union's property, declared the International Department of the Association of the Independent Trade Unions in Croatia, the largest association of trade unions in Croatia.

BERLIN, Federal Republic of Germany. At the peaceful rally in Zagreb, which was organized by the Association of Workers' Unions and several political opposition parties, on Friday, February 20th in the capital of Croatia, Zagreb, were tens of thousands of people who protested against social and economic policy and unemployment. The target of this protest was Croatian President Franjo Tudjman

and the government of the ruling party, HDZ, who were proclaimed responsible for the poor living conditions of workers, retirees and unemployed persons. People shouted `Tudjman is Sadam' and `All of you are thieves'. People were angry and resisting the selling of many factories to leading members of HDZ for symbolic money and that the current value of the private property of the President and his family is more than \$1 billion.

VIENNA, Austria. A Press Correspondent from Zagreb reported that President of Croatia, Dr. Franjo Tudjman has property of several billion dollars in German marks and this was the reason for the large workers' demonstration in Zagreb's streets. It is very important that the trade unions want to change policy through their demonstrations.

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**(BY JACK ANDERSON AND JAN MOLLER)**

When Dobroslav Paraga rallied his fellow Croatians for change in 1991, he could get only a few hundred supporters to publicly protest Croatian President Franjo Tudjman's regime.

Seven years later, close to 15,000 of Paraga's countrymen routinely crowd the city squares in discontent over the civil rights violations and declining economic fortunes that have befallen Croatia under Tudjman's watch. One-fourth of all Croatians are currently unemployed.

`Before, people were afraid to speak out against the government,' Paraga told our associate Kathryn Wallace. `Now they are hungry.'

Conditions were supposed to improve when the communist government toppled in 1990 and democracy prevailed.

But Paraga tells us the new government is still communist, albeit disguised as a social democracy.

A 1997 State Department report agrees with this assessment, referring to the government as `authoritarian' and Tudjman's recent re-election as `fundamentally flawed.'

`The president serves as head of state and commander of the armed forces, chairs the influential National Defense and Security Council, appoints the prime minister who leads the government, and approves senior appointments in local government,' the report states.

' Government influence circumscribes and weakens the judiciary. This, combined with the extensive constitutional powers of the presidency, the overwhelming dominance of the (Croatian Democratic Union, Tudjman's party), its absolute control of television, and the continuing concentration of power within the one-party central government, makes Croatia's nominally democratic system in reality authoritarian.'

It also grants the government the ability to violate human rights as it sees fit.

The tall, rumped Paraga doesn't look the part of a patriot or a politician. Yet in the last decade he's been arrested and jailed in his own country as well as in Austria and Canada for what the Croatian government calls 'high treason' and 'terrorist acts.'

Paraga's offense? He was the president on the Croatian Party of Rights 1861, espousing such radical views as freedom of the press and an equitable separation of powers between the judicial, legislative and executive branches of government. A 1993 visit to Washington to raise awareness of human rights violations in his homeland led to his removal from the legislature. The government's reason: 'Dissemination of false information' to incite rebellion.

'Our neighbors have freedom, but we stay at the same place,' Paraga told us. 'I have lost 28 friends in car bombs and assassinations, (and) I have been imprisoned. I have lost fear.'

While Paraga has been outspoken of the offenses of his government--assigning responsibility for the assassinations of 28 officials of his party to Tudjman's group--he disavows any violent or terrorist activities.

He is in the United States now at the invitation of recently retired Rep. Ronald V. Dellums, D-Calif., the ranking member of the House National Security Committee, to help draft a human rights resolution--which, if passed, would be the first official policy statement by the United States about the government of Croatia.

It's not the first time that Paraga has sought congressional help in his freedom fight. He first came to our attention nearly a decade ago, in 1989, when Croatia was still part of communist Yugoslavia. Then a 28-year-old dissident, he had already been in five prisons for a total of four years, the first time being when he was only 19.

In 1980 he and his friend Ernest Brajder were thrown in jail for circulating a petition opposing torture in Yugoslavia. Paraga came out alive, but Brajder did not. After three days in jail, he was dead in what the U.S. State Department admitted were 'mysterious circumstances.'

Back in 1989, Paraga made the rounds on Capitol Hill, as he has this month, explaining the plight of those who dared stand up to the Croatian authorities. The Senate believed Paraga and passed a resolution with plenty of 'whereas' and

` therefore' language. It had no binding effect on anyone, but it nevertheless made headlines in Yugoslavia.

One again, Paraga is hoping that a congressional resolution will help prod the Croatian government into loosening its iron-fisted grip on power and information. He told us that his party, disbanded by the government, nonetheless has the support of as much as 80 percent of young people in Croatia.

After nearly a decade of war and political turmoil, it's high time that Croatia gets back on the road toward free markets and respect for human rights. If a congressional resolution can help bring this about, we urge Congress to act without delay.

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