

LEADING CROATIAN POLITICIANS DISCUSS MOVEMENT OF CROATIAN INSURGENTS

BY
IMRE PROKOPY

A ccording to a report from Zagreb dated late in September *during the clashes in Bosnia alone more than 20.000 children were bereft of their parents, who were either killed or have disappeared.* The Croatian Government has removed these orphans to towns and villages less exposed to danger, which have most readily undertaken to provide for them and to bear the cost of their education.

A fact strikingly illustrative of the methods of warfare and the ruthless carnage characteristic of the partisan robber-bands is also the account given, on the basis of disclosures made by a partisan officer who had been taken prisoner, by the Zagreb daily, "*Hrvatski Narod*"; "*I was told*", said the officer who had been taken prisoner, "*that the object of our struggle was to achieve the liberty of the people, and we were informed that the Russian troops had already crossed the Drave and the Save and were at the gates of Belgrade. When we attacked one of the towns, the rattling of the machine-guns terrified the inhabitants, who fled out into the streets only partly dressed, whereupon we took aim at them and shot everyone whom we saw. By the morning we had collected all the foodstuffs we could find in the town we had occupied, caught all the members of the Ustasa and murdered every one of them. Some of our men — even officers — cut off (with axes) the ring-fingers of the victims who had been shot. We initiated a veritable campaign of robbery and pillage against towns and villages; and when the work of plundering, destruction and mass-*

murder had been completed, we retired to the forests or among the mountains."

When, after the liberation of the town of *Jajce* (in Bosnia) and its environs and after that neighbourhood had been cleared of insurgents, the victorious German and Croatian troops on November 9th. entered *Serajevo*, the German commander, General *Fortner*, made a speech to his soldiers in which he established the fact that many hundreds of robbers had paid with their lives for their rebellion against the Croatian State.

Equally revealing in respect of the inhumanity and monstrous ravages of the partisans is the statement made by Foreign Minister *Lorković* to the effect that in Montenegro alone *in recent months more than 7000 peasants had been murdered by the insurgents.* ("*Hrvatski Narod*", November 17th., 1942.).

And now let us inquire into the opinion of some of the leaders of Croatian political life respecting the action of the insurgents that has resulted in the destruction of so many lives.

Early in November the "*Spremnost*" (Preparedness), a Zagreb daily, published an article from the pen of Dr. *Vilko Rieger*, Propaganda Minister, dealing with the partisans in which the writer *inter alia* establishes the fact that in Yugoslavia the statesmen representing the Pan-Serbian idea were at all times by conviction zealous supporters of every anti-Croatian movement. . . . The Yugoslav communist party operating in secret was also under the direction of Pan-Serbian dreamers, who hated the Croats just as bitterly as did *Yevtitch*, *Zhivkovitch*, *Stoyadinovitch* and *Tsvetkovitch*. Later on in his article the Croatian Propaganda Minister explains how after the falling to pieces of Yugoslavia these Croatophobes — acting on the suggestion of London and Moscow — joined hands to form bands of

partisans... The mountain bandits for a short time acknowledged as their leader General Drashs Mihajlovitch; later on, however, when the time came to divide the spoils obtained by robbery and pillage, they quarreled among themselves and split into groups. Wherever these partisans appeared, they left behind them veritable graveyards. Wherever they go, they are guilty of vandalism and incendiarism, ruining and destroying everything. They show particular hatred of the Croatians; and they would fain exterminate the Mohammedans. In the concluding part of his article the Croatian Propaganda Minister points to the fact that the fighting and the depredations of the insurgents in Bosnia and Lika serve exclusively the interests of London and Moscow.

As pregnantly illustrative of the situation resulting from the outrageous depredations of the bands of partisans, particular interest attaches also to the speech made at *Sisak* by M. Lorković, Croatian Foreign Minister, on November 15th., before a mass assembly of members of the Ustasha (*Ustaša*) organization, from which we would cite the following passages: — "We Croatians", said the Foreign Minister "when we see the horrible havoc being wrought by the bands menacing the life and peace of our peasants, workers and burghers, are warned by personal experience what would be bound to ensue if these inhumanly savage hordes succeeded in gaining possession of our native land and were in a position to commit everywhere in the country those crimes which so far they have only been able — provisionally — to commit in certain villages or towns... There are only a few Croatians to be found in the ranks of these partisans. For the most part these bands indulging in orgies of vandalism are recruited from non-Croatians whose one and only desire is to finally and definitively annihilate this country... Who are these forest heroes?

They are men who were trained in murder by their leaders already in the Spanish civil war, or in the terror-schools of the Russian Bolshevists, — or in the secret societies meeting clandestinely in Belgrade... *These partisans tell the people of the towns and of our passive territories that Croatia is unable or unwilling to provide the people with food; and what have they done, I would ask? In Syrmia, for example, they have destroyed the corn, set fire to the threshing machines and night after night have ambushed and attacked our national defence soldiers...* In other districts they have devastated the crops of potatoes, oleaginous plants and maize; and, wherever able to do so, they have committed railway stations and depots to the flames, and blown up the railway trucks conveying food consignments for the starving children in Dalmatia and Herzegovina. And, when they destroy these engines and trains and the articles of food carried by them, thereby depriving a considerable proportion of the population of their food supplies, they actually have the insolence to howl and bellow in the ears of the people, "You see, the Croatian State does not worry about you and fails to provide your daily bread..." And when they set schools on fire, then too they proclaim aloud that they are the champions of national development. In Montenegro an abandoned priest who had joined their ranks addressed the people in the following terms: — "Comrades, we have long ceased to believe in the existence of God! Spit upon Heaven, and you will see that there is no God" ... However, I can assure you — and you will shortly have the opportunity to experience the truth of my words — that the armed troops of Croatia will attack these criminals with such force that they will be unable any longer to stand this winter... The rumour is also being spread everywhere that the Allied troops fighting shoulder to shoulder with us are costing us a fortune and

that they are starving you to death. The truth is, however, that the bulk of the German and Italian troops provide themselves with food out of their own supplies. But it is also true that last year we received a few hundred wagonloads of maize from the Germans, while in the autumn of the present year we are receiving 4000 wagonloads of potatoes . . . And in any case I am in a position to re-assure you and to declare that the Croatian State rests on foundations of granite, for it is built on the will of the whole Croatian nation . . ."

The mass meeting of the Ustasha organization was addressed also by Dr. *Vrančić Visko*, Secretary-of-State in the Croatian Prime Ministry, who *inter alia* revealed to his audience that three months prior to the collapse of Yugoslavia, by the good offices of Jancić Voja, former Minister and director of the Belgrade broadcasting station, Chetnik songs had been broadcast daily from the Yugoslav Capital inciting the people to murder . . ." "Unless we forget", continued Dr. Visko, "what happened in Croatia during the twenty-three years of Yugoslav rule, we shall be able to understand why our young State has to contend with so many difficulties. We must not lose heart, however. *All the troubles that have been inflicted upon us are the fire through which the Croatian has to pass in order that it may be purified and acquire the hardness of steel*" ("*Hrvatshi Narod*", November 17th., 1942).