

Croatian Nationalism & the Fight for Socialism

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Introduction

The material in this booklet focuses on a topic that has been a subject of considerable controversy in the recent period — the Croatian nationalist movement in general and the Croatian Movement for Statehood (HDP) in particular. This controversy has been conducted not only in the pages of the left press but also in Rupert Murdoch’s *Australian* and on ABC radio.

The first three items in this booklet first appeared in the August, 1983 issue of the journal *Socialist Worker*, a journal of politics and discussion of the Socialist Workers Party.

The first article, “Croatian nationalism: Its place in the fight for socialism”, is the text of a report adopted by the SWP National Committee on June 12. The reporter, Dave Holmes, is a member of the SWP’s National Executive.

Holmes’ article provides a considerable amount of historical background and factual information about the situation in Croatia today — material which is indispensable to an informed discussion of Croatian nationalism but which has been sadly lacking from much of the debate so far. As well, it presents a Marxist analysis of the relation between the nationalism of oppressed peoples and social revolution. The continuation of national oppression in a country like Yugoslavia, which has gone through a socialist revolution, creates contradictions that must be confronted and resolved if the revolution and its gains are to be protected.

“The Freney school of falsification”, by *Socialist Worker* editor Allen Myers, investigates one of the reasons for the fact that the debate over Croatian nationalism has often seemed to produce more heat than light. It argues that the aim of one party to the discussion, the Communist Party of Australia, has been to *prevent* a rational debate of the issues. This aim has been pursued through a campaign of slander directed against the HDP.

An interview with Dinko Dedic, a leader of the HDP and the editor of *Hrvatski Tjednik* (Croatian Weekly), provides further insight into the misrepresentations on which the CPA’s accusations are based. But it is also of considerable interest for its presentation of the HDP’s origins and its development into the leading left-wing force in the Croatian community.

The interview was originally in two parts, responding to articles by Denis Freney in the June 29 and July 13 issues of *Tribune*. We have combined the two interviews into one and eliminated repetitions. An abridged version of the first part was published earlier, in the July 5, 1983 *Direct Action*.

To augment the above-mentioned material we have included as an appendix most of the articles from a special supplement on the question of Croatian nationalism in the July 19 *Direct Action*.

[For this 2021 PDF edition we have added an appendix containing two articles from the October 5 and October 20, 1982 editions of *Direct Action*.]

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Croatian Nationalism: Its Place in the Fight for Socialism

By Dave Holmes

[Report adopted by the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party, June 12, 1983.]

The general background to this report is the growing involvement of the party with a whole number of migrant communities. This involvement takes the form of general political relations — solidarity work, political discussions, etc. — and also of contact in the workplace, where comrades work alongside people from just about every migrant community.

A decisive task of Australian revolutionaries is to win the mass of migrant workers to the perspectives of socialism and to incorporate the most conscious elements in the revolutionary party. Unless and until this is done, it will not be possible to make a revolution in this country.

An important aspect of this work is familiarising ourselves with the main features of the recent history and politics of the country of origin of each migrant group. In the case of many migrant communities, or important sections of them, the situation in their homeland plays the predominant role in their thinking and outlook.

We are bound to take this into account. This task is a very fruitful one for the party. It fits in with our internationalist outlook and forces us to make it more concrete and definite.

Our first contact with the Croatian Movement for Statehood, the HDP, and our growing collaboration with it, have forced the party to think more closely about our attitude to the Yugoslav workers state. What is the nature of the anti-bureaucratic revolution that is necessary there? What role will the struggle of the various nationalities play in that revolution? And in particular, what role will the Croatian struggle for freedom play in the Yugoslav political revolution?

The purpose of this report is to affirm the general line of the party's work in relation to the HDP, to affirm and spell out in more detail our political position on Yugoslavia, the political revolution there, the role of the national question in that process, and especially the role of the Croatian struggle for freedom.

To understand the Croatian question today it is essential to have some idea of the historical background. In this report I want to outline the main trends of historical development and focus on certain key episodes that enable us to see more clearly the long



historical tradition of Croatian nationalism and the nature of the present conflict between the Croatian nation and the Serbian-dominated Belgrade bureaucracy.

Origins of the Croat nation

The Croats and the Serbs first appear in the Balkans in the seventh century AD. The Byzantine emperor of the time invited these two Slav tribes to move into the area of the north-west Balkans to secure it against other migratory peoples threatening the empire based at Constantinople.

These tribes first took control of the Dalmatian coast and then settled in the territories that are, roughly, modern Croatia and Serbia.

After this settlement missionaries from the Western Catholic Church converted the Croats to Christianity and established the use of the Latin alphabet. This was really the beginning and a key element in the Western cultural and political orientation that distinguishes Croatia and Dalmatia from the Eastern-oriented bulk of the Balkan peninsula in the ensuing centuries.

The history of the Serbs has been very different from that of the Croats, mainly because they settled further to the east and the south. Serbia's cultural and political orientation has been largely to the East.

This began in the ninth century, when the Eastern church began large-scale missionary work among the Serbs. Two famous Slav missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, helped convert the Serbs to Eastern Christianity. They also developed the Cyrillic alphabet, which has been used by the Serbs ever since.

In the early tenth century, the Croats established an independent kingdom, which lasted for almost two centuries. When the last native Croatian king, Zvonimir, died in 1089, Croatia established a union with Hungary, which essentially lasted for over 800 years.

The nature of this link varied over the years: Sometimes Croatia appears to be almost independent and at other times it appears to be completely subordinate, but it always retained a large amount of internal autonomy.

To the east, a strong Serbian state became consolidated toward the end of the 12th century. This state reached its greatest expansion and development under Stefan Dusan, who ruled from 1331 to 1355. Under his rule the Serbian empire grew to encompass what is now modern Serbia, Hercegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, and northern Greece. At his death he described himself as "emperor of the Serbs and Greeks, Bulgars, and Albanians" and was preparing to take Constantinople, the last stronghold of the Byzantines. But the Serbian empire fell to pieces after his death.

Ottoman Empire

In the following era, south-eastern Europe was dominated by the empire of the Ottoman Turks.

The Ottomans originally came from a small emirate in what is now northern Turkey. In the first part of the 14th century, the Byzantine emperors used them as mercenaries in order to try to stem the Serbian advance. But in 1354 the Turks established themselves permanently on the European mainland on the Gallipoli peninsula. From there they spread out to conquer all the Balkans.

In 1389, the Turks won a decisive victory in their advance into the Balkans at the battle on the Field of Blackbirds at Kosovo in

what is today an autonomous province in Serbia. The Christian army, led by the Serbs, was smashed and the Serbian leader, Lazar, was killed in the battle along with the flower of the Serb aristocracy.

By the end of the next century, almost all the Balkans were under Ottoman control. Montenegro — wild, desolate, and isolated — was the only part of the Balkans to escape Turkish domination from the 14th century on. While some Turkish forces penetrated there, they were never able to maintain themselves for long.

The Turkish advance continued after the subjugation of the Balkans. The Ottomans defeated a Hungarian army at Mohacs in 1526 and three years later besieged Vienna. Although unsuccessful, they maintained their empire in Europe against the Christian powers for the next 150 years. In addition to the Balkans, the Turks controlled most of Hungary and part of Croatia.

It's worth noting several points about the nature of Turkish rule, which dominated the Balkans, in the main, for almost five centuries.

In the first period of Turkish rule, the conditions of the peasantry, the great mass of the Balkan people, were probably no worse, and possibly were even better, than in Western Europe. However, with the later decline of the Ottoman Empire, the oppression of the peasantry worsened sharply.

The other point to note is that the Turks exercised religious toleration. The Orthodox Christians were probably better treated by the Turks than they would have been by Catholic Christian rulers. Of course, the social position of Christians was inferior to that of Moslems, and to rise in the Turkish empire the Christian had to convert to Islam.

Most of the Balkan population retained their Catholic or Orthodox faith, but in Bosnia a significant number of the Slavs, mainly the feudal lords, converted to Islam. The mass of the peasantry remained Christian. Also, a majority of the Albanians (a non-Slav people who predate the arrival of the Slavs) converted to Islam.

The pattern of religious identification that exists today in Yugoslavia was, in its main lines, laid down in this period.

The decline of Turkish rule in Europe can be dated from 1683, when the Turks, for the second time, attempted to take Vienna. The siege was broken, and this marked the beginning of an Austrian resurgence.

In a series of campaigns over the next 50-odd years, the Austrian imperial armies won back control of Hungary, Croatia, and various other territories. The Treaty of Belgrade in 1739 established the Sava and Danube rivers as the border between Austria and Turkey. This lasted until 1878 (when Austria occupied Bosnia-Hercegovina).

From this point on, Croatia developed in the framework of the Austrian (later the Austro-Hungarian) Habsburg Empire, while Serbia developed in the framework of the Ottoman Empire and struggle against it.

This statement should be qualified by noting that during the wars between the Austrians and the Ottomans, significant numbers of Serbs had migrated northwards across the Danube and settled in southern Hungary, essentially in what is the Vojvodina autonomous region of modern Yugoslavia.

Early 19th century

In the early part of the 19th century, the Serbians rose up against the Ottomans. They were led by Kara George ("Black" George —

so called because of his hair), a former peasant. This was the origin of the Karageorgevic dynasty, which ruled Yugoslavia in the 1920s and '30s.

By 1806, after a succession of victories against the local and imperial armies, Serbia was liberated. But in 1812 the Turks made peace with the Russians and were able to send their forces back to crush Serbia. By the end of the next year, the revolt was over.

But a second revolt broke out in 1815, fueled by the Turkish repression. This was rapidly successful, and the Serbians were able to make a deal with the Turks and gain very wide autonomy. By the end of the 1820s, Serbia was effectively independent, with only a few Turkish garrisons remaining by treaty.

Another significant development took place in the early 19th century, this time on the western side of the Balkans. In 1809 Austria was forced to cede France a large strip of territory along the Adriatic — embracing Dalmatia, western Croatia, and some largely Slovene provinces above these.

Napoleon formed these into a unit called the Illyrian Provinces. Although French rule lasted only four years, the French Revolution made itself felt. The material condition of the area was much improved, and a significant impetus was given to the development of national feeling among the Croats and Slovenes. The Illyrian Provinces have been described as the first Yugoslav state since they contained within their borders Croats, Slovenes, and Serbs.

Revolutions of 1848-49

The next important development that we should consider in sketching the history of the Croats and Serbs was the great European revolutionary upsurge of 1848-49. This is especially important for us because it is tied up with the history of Marxism itself, in that Marx and Engels fought in this revolution and wrote extensively about it.

The 1830s and forties saw a growth of national consciousness and demand for democratic reform all across old-regime Europe. In Croatia in this period there were many manifestations of a growing national awareness. But this clashed with a similar process developing among the generally more economically and culturally advanced Hungarians or Magyars. What the Hungarians were demanding from Vienna, they were not prepared to concede to the Croats.

The name “Illyria” — taken to signify a union of Austrian South Slavs into their own state — was banned from being mentioned in public. In 1840 the Magyar national movement had succeeded in having Latin replaced by Magyar as the official language in Hungary. But in 1843-44, the Hungarian Diet decided that in Croatia also, Latin would be replaced by Magyar as the state language by the end of the decade.

A storm of protest from the Croats greeted this decision. Kossuth, the Hungarian leader, declared that he could not find Croatia on the map and said emphatically: “I know no Croatian nationality.”¹ Croat-Magyar relations rapidly deteriorated.

Then the revolution broke out. Following on news of the February 1848 uprising of the Paris masses against the monarchy, the people of Vienna rose up, demanding a liberalisation of the regime.

In Hungary the national movement flared up. The Hungarians demanded a representative government of their own. The

Hungarian Diet moved to Budapest, the traditional capital of Hungary. Here it passed the so-called March laws, which aimed to curtail the extensive autonomy hitherto enjoyed by the Croats by incorporating Croatia into the Hungarian administrative system.

All these Hungarian moves went completely against the general national program of the Croats — that is, unification of all the Croat lands in the empire, autonomy in a federalised monarchy, and the use of their own language in public life.

Similar demands had been put forward, and rejected by the Hungarians, by the Serbs of southern Hungary.

In September of 1848, the emperor ordered Jelacic, the governor of Croatia, to restore order in Hungary. Jelacic crossed the Drava with an army of 40,000 Croats to pacify the rebellious Magyars. The Serbs of southern Hungary also armed themselves against the Magyars. These attempts were defeated by the Hungarians. (It should be noted that Serbia itself took no part in the events in the Habsburg Empire in this period.)

While the Austrian revolution, centred on German Vienna, was finally crushed in November of 1848, the situation in Hungary continued to radicalise. Early in 1849 the Hungarian Diet repudiated the Habsburgs, and Kossuth proclaimed a republic.

After a tremendous revolutionary struggle, during which they several times smashed the imperial armies and drove them out of Hungary, the Hungarians were finally defeated when tsarist Russia sent its troops into Hungary to help the emperor.

The counter-revolution dismembered Hungary. Croatia was put directly under the Austrian crown. The Serbs of southern Hungary were formed into an autonomous district. But the Croats and Serbs who had been loyal to the emperor did not get the liberty they wanted. The absolutist regime in Vienna ruled them just as harshly as it did the defeated Hungarians. A contemporary declared that the Hungarians “received as punishment what the other races received as reward”.

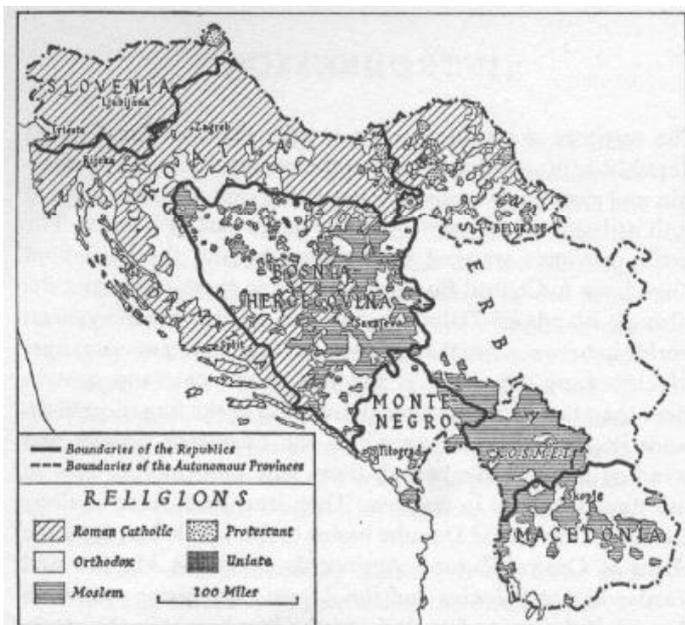
A liberal wit observed of the period of reaction that followed the defeat of the revolution that the Austrian regime rested on three armies: a standing army of soldiers, a kneeling army of worshippers, and a crawling army of informers.

The position taken by Marx and Engels in 1848-49 was based on the overriding necessity to drive forward the national-democratic revolutionary process on a European scale. The old feudal absolutist regimes, which were propping up obsolete economic, social, and political institutions, had to be smashed in the interests of historical progress. And behind the system of absolutist states stood the arch-reactionary power of tsarist Russia, the main enemy of progress in Europe throughout the 19th century.

Marx and Engels judged the various national movements in relation to which side they placed themselves on in this struggle.

In 1848-49, as Engels observed, “whereas the French, Germans, Italians, Poles and Magyars raised high the banner of the revolution, the *Slavs one and all* put themselves under the banner of the *counterrevolution*. In the forefront were the Southern Slavs ... and ~~behind them the~~ *Russians* ...”²

Marx and Engels opposed the national movements of such Austrian South Slav peoples as the Croats and Serbs because, *in the given instance*, they acted as “Russian outposts” and fought for the counter-revolution. This stand of the South Slav national movements was definitely an error — it not only pitted them against



One legacy of history is the differing religious identifications in modern Yugoslavia

the cause of historical progress, but in addition they received nothing from the imperial regime for which they fought.

But a large part of the responsibility for the reactionary stand taken by the Austrian South Slavs in 1848-49 must be taken by the Hungarian national movement with its national narrow-mindedness, chauvinism, and centralising tendencies.

The 'Eastern Question'

In 1867 the Habsburg regime was forced to reorganise the empire, and it concluded the so-called compromise with Hungary. Essentially this created two autonomous states, Austria and Hungary, linked by the one crown. The empire was now known as Austria-Hungary or the Dual Monarchy. One result of this restructuring was that Croatia was again affiliated to Hungary.

In the next year the compromise between Austria and Hungary was followed by an arrangement between Hungary and Croatia. This gave Croatia a limited autonomy under the Croatian parliament or Sabor at Zagreb. The mass of Croats strongly opposed this measure, feeling that it was far too limited. It gave Croatia only a small minority representation in the Hungarian parliament and no access to the central administration of the empire except through the Hungarian administration.

The history of the Balkans in the 19th century is concerned above all with the Eastern Question, that is, what system of states and alliances was to replace the decaying Turkish Empire in Europe. There were two aspects to this question: On the one hand there was the struggle of the oppressed Balkan peoples for freedom, and on the other there was the struggle of the European powers for hegemony in the region. The two main powers contending for domination in the region were Austria-Hungary and Russia.

The events of 1875-78 illustrate this very clearly. In 1875 the terribly oppressed Christian peasants of Bosnia rose up against the Turkish administration. Serbia and Montenegro declared war on the Turks, and the Bulgarians rose in revolt. The Serbians suffered defeat but in 1877 Russia, which always posed as the great protector of the Slav peoples, declared war on Turkey and was victorious by early the next year.

The war was ended formally by the Treaty of San Stefano. While Serbia gained recognition of its complete independence, Russia set up a massively enlarged Greater Bulgaria. This threatened the interests of Austria-Hungary and was generally unacceptable to the European powers, who did not want to see an expansion of Russian influence in the area. So in July of 1878 they called another conference, the Congress of Berlin.

While Serbian independence was maintained, the Congress of Berlin sharply restricted Russian aspirations and the Greater Bulgaria project was junked. Furthermore, Austria-Hungary was allowed to occupy Bosnia-Herzegovina. The reason was supposedly because the Turkish government couldn't keep order. There was widespread opposition in Bosnia to the Austrian occupation, especially from the Moslems, and the Habsburgs had to bring in a large army to pacify the province. (Bosnia and Herzegovina were formally annexed by Austria in 1908.)

In the period leading up to World War I, the rivalries between the great powers and their respective clients in the Balkans increased, especially between Austria-Hungary, which sought an access to the Aegean Sea, and Turkey, and Serbia, backed by Russia and blocking this access.

In October 1912 the First Balkan War began. Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro joined together and attacked Turkey. The Turks were defeated all along the line and lost almost all their European possessions.

The Second Balkan War began in the middle of 1913. It was a fight over the spoils of the first war. Serbia refused to share Macedonia with Bulgaria as agreed, and the Bulgarians attacked Serbia and Greece but were defeated.

The Serbian victories electrified the South Slavs in Austria-Hungary. They also dismayed the Habsburg regime, which saw Serbia blocking its road to the east. It determined to liquidate these "Guardians of the Gate". The opportunity came when a Bosnian nationalist assassinated the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand at



Yugoslavia in relation to Austria-Hungary. C = Carniola, K = Küstenland, S=Salzburg



Following World War I, the South Slav regions formerly ruled by Austria-Hungary were forcibly joined to Serbia in a centralised Yugoslavia.

Sarajevo in June 1914. Austria used the incident to go to war against Serbia.

Trotsky's view

At this point it is worth stepping back and considering the problem of the Balkans as a whole. Some comments by Trotsky from his Balkan journalism are very relevant here.

“The frontiers between the dwarf states of the Balkan Peninsula,” Trotsky wrote, “were not drawn in accordance with national conditions or national demands, but as a result of wars, diplomatic intrigues, and dynastic interests. The Great Powers — in the first place, Russia and Austria — have always had a direct interest in setting the Balkan peoples and states against each other and then, when they have weakened one another, subjecting them to their economic and political influence ...

“The only way out of the national and state chaos and the bloody confusion of Balkan life is a union of all the peoples of the peninsula in a single economic and political entity, on the basis of national autonomy of the constituent parts ...”

“State unity of the Balkan Peninsula,” he continued, “can be achieved in two ways: either from above, by expanding one Balkan state, whichever proves strongest, at the expense of weaker ones — this is the road of wars of extermination and oppression of weak nations, a road that consolidates monarchism and militarism; or from below, through the peoples themselves coming together — this is the road of revolution, the road that means overthrowing the Balkan dynasties and unfurling the banner of a Balkan federal republic.”³

But the postwar system of Balkan states was not based on the program of a Balkan federal republic advanced by the revolutionary social democracy. In fact, nowhere in Europe was the national question solved by the victorious Entente powers. Instead, the new Europe created by the Versailles and related peace treaties was based on a whole series of national injustices and contained the seeds of a new and more terrible world war.

The main aim of France and Britain in dismembering the defeated powers and redrawing the map of Europe was to create a system of states that would act as a barrier both to a German resurgence and to Soviet Russia.

As the “Manifesto of the Second World Congress” of the Comintern put it: “The new and tiny bourgeois states are only by-products of imperialism. In order to obtain temporary points of support imperialism creates a chain of small states, some openly oppressed, others officially protected while really remaining vassal states — Austria, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Bohemia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Armenia, Georgia, and so on. Dominating over them with the aid of banks, railways, and coal monopolies, imperialism condemns them to intolerable economic and national hardships, to endless friction and bloody collisions.”⁴

The “Manifesto” went on to point out that “Virtually each one of the newly created ‘national’ states has an *irredenta* of its own, i.e., its own internal national ulcer.”⁵ For example, three million Hungarians lived under foreign governments, German Austria was forbidden to unite with Germany, and Czechoslovakia contained a large German minority.

Formation of Yugoslavia

As World War I drew to a close, the main sentiment among the South Slavs of Austria-Hungary — the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs — was for a union with Serbia and Montenegro in a Yugoslav (“South” Slav) state. During the war a Yugoslav committee representing the Austro-Hungarian South Slavs functioned in exile. It called for the unity of the South Slavs in an independent state.

By the end of 1918 Austria-Hungary was falling to pieces. The army was mutinous, and national feeling was running high in the southern Slav provinces.

On October 5 a National Council of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs was formed in Zagreb. Very rapidly it became the effective government in the South Slav areas of the empire.

On October 29 the Croat Sabor (Assembly) met and declared the union with Hungary to be ended and Croatia independent. It then voted to declare Croatia part of the sovereign state of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs (embracing Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Vojvodina) and vested power in the National Council.

The National Council then undertook to unite the state of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs with Serbia and Montenegro. But the form of the union was not specified, and the Croat Peasant Party leader Stepan Radic opposed this proposal. He explained that the Croat masses were against centralism and militarism and were “for a republic no less than for a national agreement with the Serbs”.⁶

There were quite clearly two roads open to achieve the unity of the Austro-Hungarian South Slavs with Serbia and Montenegro. One was the road of a Greater Serbia. This was the aim of the central Serbian political leader and Serb chauvinist Pasic, and also of Alexander, the Karageorgevic regent of Serbia. This project meant imposing Serbian hegemony over all the other areas and nations. It meant a unitary, centralistic state.

The other road was that of establishing a genuine federation of the various nations that would make up the new state. This would give each national grouping a wide degree of autonomy and self-

government and would best accommodate the different historical, cultural, and socioeconomic levels of the various peoples.

An agreement reached on November 9 (the Geneva Declaration) agreed to form the new state but the governments at Zagreb (the state of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs) and Belgrade (Serbia) would remain until a constituent assembly had met and decided on a constitution for the whole country.

But in the event, on December 1, Alexander proclaimed the union of the two states into the Kingdom of the Serbs, the Croats, and the Slovenes. Montenegro joined shortly after. In violation of the previous agreement and in the spirit of the Greater Serbia project, the authority of the Serbian Belgrade regime was imposed on the rest of the new state.

Heavy opposition greeted the Serbian moves, and Serbian authority was imposed by force. French troops were also used in this operation. As a resolution of the First Congress of the Comintern noted, the Yugoslav government was “being established by armed force”.⁷

Thus, from the moment of its inception, bourgeois Yugoslavia (as the new state later became known) was built on Serbian oppression of the non-Serb peoples.

In November 1920, elections were held to form a constituent assembly to draft a constitution. In Croatia, the Croat Republican Peasant Party led by Stepan Radic won an overwhelming victory on a republican and federalist platform. Right through the 1920s and thirties, the CRPP (later the CPP) was the vehicle through which the mass of the Croat people attempted to realise their national aspirations.

One significant feature of the constituent assembly elections was the strong showing of the newly formed Communist Party. The CP emerged as the third strongest party in the country. Its 200,000 votes amounted to 12.4% of the total. In Macedonia it did even better — here it emerged as the strongest party, polling 40% of the votes.

In various municipal elections around the country in this period the CP also did very well. It had a majority in the Zagreb and Belgrade municipal administrations around this time.

But these successes and the rising wave of worker militancy alarmed the military and the big bourgeoisie. At the end of 1920 the party was banned. It had perhaps 60,000 members at this point.

After the November elections the CRPP boycotted the new assembly. Pasic and the Serbian parties pushed through a reactionary constitution. The constitution was adopted on June 28, 1921 — St Vitus Day, after which it is generally known. This constitution set up a centralist, monarchical state. It declared Yugoslavia to comprise one people of three different “tribes”. It ensured Serbian hegemony over the other nationalities and was strongly opposed by them.

The Comintern & the national question

The effort to hammer out the correct line on the national question was an ongoing one for the CP in the 1920s. It was also a central concern of the Comintern in its dealings with the Yugoslav party.

Early in 1923, for instance, the Executive Committee of the Comintern addressed a critical letter to the Communist Party. It stressed the need for the party to adopt the Leninist principle of

supporting the right of oppressed peoples to self-determination, even to separate and form an independent state if they so wished.

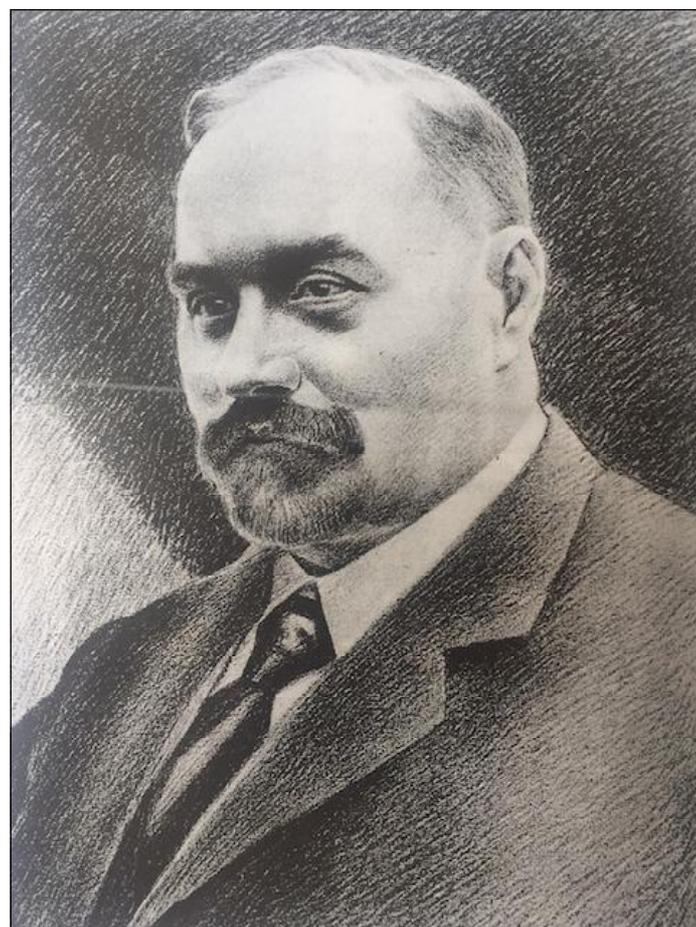
The CP’s Third Conference, held illegally in Belgrade at the end of 1923, reflected this pressure. Its “Resolution on the National Question” stated that Yugoslavia was not a “homogeneous nation state with certain national minorities but rather is a state in which the ruling class of one (the Serbian) nation is oppressing the other nations.”⁸

In mid-1924 the Fifth Congress of the Comintern was held. It adopted a resolution on the national question in Yugoslavia and the Balkans. And although this congress was held in a period when the process of degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern was already well under way, that does not at all mean that its resolutions are uniformly worthless. Certainly this particular resolution is firmly in the Leninist tradition.

The resolution noted that in Yugoslavia the Serbian bourgeoisie was subjecting the other peoples to a regime of national oppression and forcible denationalisation. It pointed out that the theory of “a united trinity of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes is only a mask for Serbian imperialism”.

The Communist Party had to “fight for the self-determination of the different nations, to support the national liberation movements, constantly to strive to remove these movements from the influence of the bourgeoisie and connect them with the common fight of the working masses against the bourgeoisie and capitalism.”

The resolution went on to note that in Yugoslavia there was a mass movement against national oppression. In view of this, “the



Stjepan Radic, leader of the Croatian People’s Peasant Party, assassinated in Yugoslav Parliament in 1928.

general slogan of the right of nations to self-determination, launched by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, must be expressed in the form of separating Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia from Yugoslavia and creating independent republics of them.”⁹

So, at this point, because of the strong national movements, the Comintern favored the slogan of separation.

Early in 1925, at a meeting of the ECCI's Yugoslav commission, Stalin debated Sima Markovic, a central leader of the CP. Stalin correctly pointed out that supporting the right of a given nation to self-determination, to secede if it wished, in no way meant an obligation to secede. And if a nation chose to remain in the existing state, then it should receive a wide regional autonomy.

Royal dictatorship

The decade of the 1920s saw no solution of the national problem in Yugoslavia. In August 1924 Pasic jailed Radic and attempted to dissolve the CRPP. But these measures led to an even stronger showing by the CRPP in the February 1925 elections. Pasic made a deal, released Radic, and Pasic's Radical Party and the CPP (the "Republican" was dropped) formed the new government in the middle of the year.

By 1927 Radic was back in opposition, demanding a federal reorganisation of the state. On June 28, 1928, Radic was shot in the Belgrade parliament by a Serb chauvinist. He died shortly after. The country went into a fundamental crisis of the whole system. There were two opposed camps — Belgrade and Zagreb. The Croats and other opposition forces began to organise a countergovernment at Zagreb. The Belgrade coalition government collapsed. The whole Yugoslav political system had broken down.

Something had to give. The king, Alexander, even explored the possibility of "amputating" Croatia and Slovenia, but the idea received no support. On January 26, 1929, Alexander carried out a coup d'état, dissolving the parliament and abolishing the 1921 Constitution. The regime passed a law for the defence of the state that provided harsh penalties for terrorism, sedition, communist propaganda, and so on. The centralist, Serbian-dominated orientation of Belgrade remained as before. All opposition was repressed.

It was at this point that the Croatian leader Ante Pavelic fled abroad and established the separatist-terrorist Ustasha organisation. (The name means "arise" and refers to Croat rebels of the past.) It was agents of Pavelic who assassinated Alexander in Marseilles in 1934.

In an effort to resolve the ongoing Croatian national problem, which continually undermined the foundations of the whole state, the regent, Paul, concluded an agreement, the Sporazum, with the CPP leader Vlatko Macek in August 1939. This provided for a province of Croatia, with a certain measure of autonomy being exercised by an assembly at Zagreb.

On the basis of this agreement, a new government was formed, the Cvetkovic-Macek government. (Macek was vice-premier.) While the CPP accepted the agreement, Pavelic and other separatists opposed it. It was also strongly opposed by many Serbian chauvinist elements, who saw it as a sell-out of Serb domination.

World War II

On March 25, 1941, Yugoslavia adhered to the Tripartite Pact, the alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan. For Hitler, this was

one of the essential preliminary moves for his planned assault on the Soviet Union.

The day after signing the pact, the Belgrade regime was toppled by a coup d'état. The coup was the work of pro-Allied Serb officers, politicians, and priests, who were not only opposed to the Axis alliance but were also opposed to the regime for the compromise it had negotiated with the Croats. They wanted to ensure the survival of the Serb-dominated, centralist system.

Hitler reacted to the coup by invading Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941. The Yugoslav forces disintegrated rapidly and by April 17 the army had surrendered. One important reason for Hitler's quick victory was the continuing national disaffection, which undermined the will of the Yugoslav army to fight.

In his attack on Yugoslavia, Hitler's propaganda, as in previous campaigns, sought to exploit the national question. In fact, in his rise to power and subsequent European hegemony, Hitler always sought to portray himself as the liberator of the peoples oppressed by the unjust Versailles system. Of course, this was just a mask for the predatory plans of German imperialism.

In Yugoslavia, the victorious Axis powers partitioned the country and established a harsh regime. The biggest fragment of dismembered Yugoslavia was the so-called Independent State of Croatia, or NDH from its Croat initials. The NDH was proclaimed on April 10, 1941, and a government set up under Ante Pavelic and resting on the Ustasha. Appearing to many Croats as the realisation of national goals so long fought for, the NDH at first enjoyed considerable support.

But, established in the midst of the German invasion, the NDH from the outset was completely subordinated to German and Italian imperialism. The Italians seized the Dalmatian coast and as well had an extensive sphere of interest. German troops occupied all the major towns outside of the Italian zone.

Furthermore, Pavelic's regime carried out extensive repressions, pogroms, and atrocities, against its enemies — the Serbs, Jews, and supporters of the Partisans. While these crimes, terrible enough, appear to have subsequently been exaggerated considerably — see below — they did take place, and on a wide scale, and were, in fact, inevitable given the right-wing bourgeois orientation of the Ustasha leadership.

It is important for Marxists to be clear on the question of the NDH and the Ustasha. I think the HDP is completely correct when they deny that the Ustasha was fascist. In the scientific, Marxist sense of the term, it was not. It began as a right-wing nationalist-terrorist organisation seeking Croatian separation from Yugoslavia.

Much is made of its links to Italian imperialism in the prewar period. But we must be precise here. There is nothing wrong with a national liberation movement taking aid from wherever it can find it. The Irish freedom fighters accepted German aid in World War I. Were they wrong in doing this? We don't think so. The Germans had their own reasons for aiding the Irish — to embarrass the British. The Irish accepted this aid and used it to continue their fight for a free and united Ireland.

Again, we do not criticise a national movement for attempting to exploit the antagonisms between the imperialist camps in order to seize independence from the oppressor state. Croatia owed nothing to the Belgrade regime of the Serbian bourgeoisie. It certainly owed nothing to the Allied imperialist camp.

Pavelic betrayed the Croatian national movement, not because he took aid from one gang of imperialists, not because he declared independence in the midst of a war between two imperialist gangs. He betrayed because he subordinated the Croatian national struggle to imperialism, in the given case to German and Italian imperialism.

It was because of this that the NDH could in no way bring real freedom to the mass of the people or establish anything but a mockery of independence. The Europe set up by the Allies at Versailles was built on national oppression and injustice, but Hitler's new European order was no less erected on oppression of the peoples. Real national liberation can be won only in a process of implacable struggle against imperialism, of whatever stripe.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that much of the motivation for labeling the NDH and the Ustasha as fascist is the desire to discredit the whole idea of the Croatian national struggle then and now. One argument used by implication is that the scale and nature of the crimes of the NDH regime show its fascist nature. But in the period of capitalist decline all the forms of imperialism assume a barbarous character. It was the regime of US "democratic" imperialism that unleashed the atomic bombs on Japan. Fascism has no monopoly on horror.

Two other movements contended for supremacy in Yugoslavia during the war. These were the Chetniks and the Partisans.

The Chetniks were led by Draza Mihailovic, a colonel in the Yugoslav army. (The name comes from the Serb bands that fought the Turks in earlier times.) Mihailovic and the Chetniks had a Serb-chauvinist, monarchist outlook. As one conservative account of this period puts it: Mihailovic "was a Serb and always put Serbian interests (as he saw them) first; he was continuously aware of his duties as an officer and his responsibilities to his king."¹⁰ Mihailovic was opposed to both the Croats and the Communists. For a period (January 1942 to May 1944) Mihailovic was minister of defence in the royal government-in-exile.

The Chetniks remained largely composed of Serbs. Their narrow Serb outlook meant they had no appeal for any of the other nationalities. Furthermore, after some initial opposition to the German occupiers, they soon gave this up. Mihailovic wanted to preserve his forces until the Germans were weaker and then use them to impose order and restore the monarchy and the Serbian-dominated, centralised state.

The Chetniks' main efforts went into fighting the Communist-led Partisans. In Serbia the Chetniks had an arrangement with the puppet regime there whereby it controlled the towns and the Chetniks controlled the countryside. Chetnik domination of Serbia remained until near the end of the war, when the Partisans were finally able to defeat them.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the middle of 1941, the Communist Party issued a call for a general uprising and began to organise the Partisan army. Over the course of the war, this grew into a massive movement, which waged a heroic struggle against the occupiers and their local collaborators. Hundreds of thousands fell in this struggle.

The Partisan movement became the vehicle for a social revolution and carried the hopes of the people for a new, free Yugoslavia to be created after the war. The Partisan movement gave rise to a body known as the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), which effectively



Draza Mihailovic, 1943.

functioned as a provisional government.

The AVNOJ first met in November 1942 in Bihacs in Croatia. A second session was held at Jajce in Bosnia a year later. The Jajce assembly set up a provisional government with Tito as premier. It proclaimed that the new Yugoslavia would be set up on a democratic and federal basis. It also warned the king not to return, as the question of the monarchy would be decided by the people after the war.

The national program put forward by the Anti-Fascist Council was decisive in enabling the Partisan movement to win the support of the masses of the non-Serbian nations. The Chetniks' unitarist, Serb-chauvinist, and monarchist outlook could not attract the non-Serb peoples; indeed it seemed to promise even harsher national oppression than had existed before the war. Also, with the withdrawal of Allied support and the waning of the Axis fortunes, the Chetniks' prospects looked more and more bleak.

As for the NDH, its appeal as a lasting solution to the national aspirations of the Croat people was rapidly undermined by its territorial concessions to the Italians, its complete subservience to the Germans, and its reign of terror against all opponents. As the tide turned against the Axis powers, the future of the NDH seemed very limited. The support of the Croats for the Partisan movement gradually increased. This was helped by the proclamation of a Croatian state within a new Yugoslav federation even during the war.

Yugoslav workers state

At a meeting in Moscow late in 1944, Churchill and Stalin came to an agreement on the respective British and Soviet spheres of influence in the Balkans. Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary were assigned to the Soviet sphere, Greece to the British, and in Yugoslavia each was to have a half share.

Under great pressure from the Allies, Tito agreed to form a coalition government with some bourgeois, monarchist elements. This was set up in March of 1945. Ivan Subasic, prime minister of the royal government-in-exile, became foreign minister in the short-lived "United Government".

But despite the Allied pressure for concessions, there was never

any real compromise with the royalists. Subasic and his colleagues had no real base of support among the people. This government ended with Subasic's resignation later in the year.

In the elections to the federal parliament held on November 11, 1945, the CP-led People's Front scored a massive victory, reflecting their wartime record and popular support.

Through the policy, begun during the war, of confiscating the property of collaborators, and through further nationalisations in 1945, the new government already controlled the bulk of industry. State ownership of industry and intervention in all spheres of economic life deepened over the next year, leading to the creation of a workers state.

The new parliament met on November 29, 1945, and proclaimed the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The new Constitution, adopted in the following January, defined the new state as a federal union of national republics. Each republic was guaranteed the right to self-determination, including the right to secede.

Postwar period

In the section which follows on postwar Yugoslavia, I've drawn fairly heavily on a book by Franjo Tudjman called *Nationalism in Contemporary Europe*.¹¹

Tudjman is a well-known Croatian writer and historian. During the war he was one of the youngest Partisan generals and a leader of the Partisan forces in northern Croatia. In 1981, Tudjman was tried by the Yugoslav authorities on fabricated charges. He received a three-year jail sentence and a five-year ban on any public expression. His case is mentioned in the Amnesty International report on Yugoslavia that was published last year.

While Tudjman's view of Marxism has obviously been distorted by the fact that it is the proclaimed ideology of all the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, his book is a very serious and thoughtful work, from which we can learn a great deal.

The establishment of the Federal Republic and the creation of the Yugoslav workers state were great advances for the toiling masses of all the Yugoslav nations. These two developments were essential preconditions for a real and lasting solution of the national problem in Yugoslavia. In view of the many problems that have since developed in this regard, it is worth briefly listing some of the key gains made by the formerly oppressed nations.

Croatia received its national statehood in the federal order, and certain Croat lands some of the Adriatic islands and the Istrian peninsula below Trieste were liberated from Italy.

Slovenia gained statehood for the first time ever, and some Slovene lands formerly under Italy were freed. Macedonia gained statehood for the first time in history under the federal system; Macedonian was declared the official language for the first time. For the first time since 1918, Montenegro regained a separate national status. And the autonomy gained by Kosovo and Vojvodina, despite its limitations, has meant great progress for the Albanian and Hungarian national minorities as compared to their prewar situation.

However, the national problem has not been solved in Yugoslavia. National oppression still exists. There developed a massive contradiction between the socialist principles proclaimed in the Constitution and the actual practice of the Communist Party

leadership of Yugoslavia.

The essential reason for this has been that the reality of bureaucratic domination, which is necessarily centralised, negates in practice the forms of federal decentralisation on which the state is nominally based.

As Franjo Tudjman puts it, "despite the federal state structure, a totally centralistic system was constructed with huge administrative federal bodies for all spheres of social life, from politics and economics to culture and sport. Complete authority was in the hands of the federal organs while the republics were reduced to executive organs of the federation ... [And] because all political and administrative authority and economic and financial power was concentrated in Belgrade and also because the Serbs were the most numerous nation and nurtured a traditional distrust towards the other nationalities (primarily the Croats) ... the Serbian element gradually became dominant, particularly taking over the most sensitive sectors and key positions, not only in the federal administration but also the republics and provinces."¹²

This description applies to the state structure as it was built up after the war and in the 1950s and early sixties. Various reforms have changed aspects of this picture but not the reality of Serbian domination of the state. In 1963, a new constitution was promulgated that strengthened the federal system in the political sphere but which did not alter the system of allocating economic resources, a vitally important question in a genuine federation.

In 1966 a plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Yugoslav Communists (as the CP is formally named) was held at Brioni in the Adriatic. Alexander Rankovic, vice-president of the republic and head of state security, was dismissed from all his official positions.

He was accused of repressing the Albanian minority in Kosovo and of running a secret network within the security services. Rankovic was made the scapegoat for the heavy system of Stalinist repression that existed. In Croatia, for instance, the police kept files on 1.3 million people—about two-thirds of the entire active population.

The decisions of the Brioni plenum heralded a stepping away from the extremely centralist practices hitherto carried out and a move towards a real reform of the federal system as well as a move towards a general democratisation.

Croatian Spring

A widespread liberalisation developed, driven forward by a growing mass movement, especially in Croatia. This process developed most tumultuously in the period from 1968 to 1971. The mass reform movement of those years has been termed the "Croatian Spring," and in fact it was inspired and stimulated by the reform movement in Czechoslovakia — the "Prague Spring" — which developed in 1967-68, and with which the Croatian movement had many similarities.

One aspect of this process was a certain democratisation of the party. For the first time in the history of the LCY, in 1968 congresses of the various republican parties were held prior to the federal congress in 1969. The election processes were democratised, and there were radical changes in the composition of many leading bodies, with new, younger leaders coming forward.

For the first time, the republican congresses themselves selected



Savka Dabčević-Kučar, President of the Croatian League of Communists and Prime Minister of Croatia, was one of the leaders of the Croatian Spring.

their representatives to the leading bodies of the LCY, and these bodies were constructed on a parity basis (equal representation from the various republics, etc.). Thus, as Tadjman puts it, “a kind of federalisation of the LCY was carried out.” This in turn stimulated the campaign for further reforms.

In this period a series of political and constitutional reforms were set in motion through which the federal character of the Yugoslav state was much more clearly defined. The Council of Nations was set up as the most important council in the Federal Assembly. The Federal Executive Council (the government) was constituted on a parity basis as regards republican representation. The self-government rights of the republics were strengthened.

But on the level of economic decision-making and the economic relations between the federation and the republics, the changes were much less fundamental.

The gains and reforms won by the mass movement stimulated the demand for further and more far-reaching changes. From the point of view of the central bureaucratic leadership, certain reforms and concessions had to be made in order to preserve the Yugoslav state. The Soviet crackdown in Czechoslovakia in 1968 played an important role in impelling the leadership to make certain reforms in the federal system in order to strengthen the country.

The mass movement in Croatia was led by reform elements in the leadership of the Croatian party. Tadjman explains that “Croatia was swept by a democratic revival movement which was set in motion by the intelligentsia, but which was joined by all the other strata from students to workers and peasants, and even the majority of the League of Communists. The political and state leadership of the League of Communists of Croatia and the Socialist Republic of Croatia itself stood at the head of this movement especially following the historical Xth session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia (January 1970) when the ideology of Yugoslav unitarianism was condemned as the dominant and persistent political tendency preventing the equality of the Croatian nation and endangering the stability and further social development of Yugoslavia.”¹³

Tadjman goes on to point out that “the younger generation of party leaders, who supported the democratic-liberal reforms of the federation, and who had consequently won massive popularity especially in their own republics (Miko Tripalo and Savka

Dabčević-Kučar in Croatia ...) were politicians of the new mould, with more modern and dynamic views, who within the context of international and internal developments began to seek a way out of the crisis of the totalitarian-socialist society in its democratization and humanization. This led them to establish close links with the intelligentsia and the masses of the people.”¹⁴

One striking example of this came in May 1971, when a huge mass rally was held in Zagreb. Several hundred thousand people turned out. It was the biggest meeting in Croatia in the postwar period. It was addressed by Savka Dabčević-Kučar, president of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia. One writer described the rally as “a triumph of Croatian national feelings and aspirations for freedom, sovereignty and national equality.”¹⁵

The reform process was brutally terminated at the December 1, 1971, meeting of the Presidium of the LCY Central Committee at Karadjordjevo. Tito initiated a sweeping purge of the Croatian reform movement in all its aspects. The party and state leadership were purged; the most prominent figures in the *Matica Hrvatska* (Croat Headquarters—a famous Croatian cultural institution) along with leaders of the student movement were jailed; and thousands of people in all areas of social life were arrested, sacked from their jobs, or persecuted by the police. One estimate is that as many as 32,000 people in Croatia were affected in one way or another by Tito’s crackdown.

The crackdown extended to supporters of the reform process in the other republics, but although the purges here were extensive they were not as brutal as in Croatia.

The repression showed that Tito felt the reform movement was beginning to undermine the whole basis of bureaucratic rule in Yugoslavia. “By the end of 1972,” Franjo Tadjman writes, “Yugoslavia was once again a socialist country where all the reins of power and control over all aspects of socio-political activities were in the hands of the ruling group within the LCY supported by Tito’s authority.”¹⁶

However, when the new constitution of 1974 was promulgated, the reforms of the federation initiated in 1968-71 were preserved. The right to self-determination, including the right to secession, appears as always.

But despite this, in Yugoslavia today there is a glaring contradiction in the national sphere between the promises made in the constitution and the practice of centralist bureaucratic rule.

Oppressed nation

The reality of the national oppression of the Croatian people in Yugoslavia by the Serbian-dominated system can be seen vividly with the help of a few statistics cited in Franjo Tadjman’s book.

- In a multinational workers state in which the Communist Party is the sole legal party, the latter’s national composition reflects the relations between the various nations. In 1946 the League of Communists of Croatia accounted for almost 31% of the total membership of the LCY. This was about 8% more than Croatia’s share in the total population of Yugoslavia and reflected the strength and weight of party organisation in Croatia and the role played by the population (both Croat and Serb) in the wartime struggle. But by 1978 this figure had fallen to 17%, well below Croatia’s percentage of the overall

population (about 22%). This shows the distrust of the ruling layers towards the Croats as well as Croatians' growing lack of confidence and interest in the party.

- In Croatia in 1978, one in four Yugoslavs (that is, Montenegrins, Macedonians etc) belongs to the League of Croatian Communists, one in nine Serbs, but only one in 20 Croats! And in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the other republic with a large Croat population, we find even more disproportionate figures: One in five Yugoslavs belongs to the party, one in 11 Serbs, one in 16 Moslems, but one in 25 Croats!
- The officer cadre of the Yugoslav People's Army consisted, in 1978, of only 15% Croats. At the end of the war, it appears that this figure was well above the percentage of Croats in the population.
- In 1969 figures for the national composition of the major institutions of the federal administration were made public. There was public consternation when these showed 73.6% Serbs and only 8.6% Croats. By 1978, the proportion of Croats had fallen to 6%. That is, just under 40% of the population is Serb but Serbs make up almost three-quarters of the staff of the federal institutions!
- Another example is the role played by Serbs in the League of Croatian Communists. In Croatia almost 80% of the population are Croats and only 14.2% Serb. Yet in the LCC and in the state leadership, Serbs hold a large percentage of key positions.
- In 1971, 51% of the 1.2 million Yugoslavs temporarily employed in Europe were Croats and another 20% were Moslems.

Another index of Croatia's national oppression in Yugoslavia is to be found in the allocation of the social product. (The following figures are taken from the pamphlet by Marko Veselica.)

In the decade of the 1960s, for example, Croatia created 27% of the national income, yet received only 11% of new investments. In the same period, Serbia created 33% of the national income of the country yet received 60% of the new investments.

In this period, Croatia earned about 50% of Yugoslavia's foreign exchange yet disposed of only 11% of it. At the same time, Serbia earned less than 25% of the country's foreign exchange, yet it disposed of over 80% of it. Yugoslavia has a somewhat different economic system than the other workers states, but that does not



Franjo Tudjman: From Partisan general to dissident.

really affect this argument.

Franjo Tudjman writes that at one point, so much wealth was being taken out of Croatia, so high a proportion of the national income of the republic, that not even simple reproduction of the economy was possible!

One of the demands of the reform movement in the late 1960s was the transfer from Belgrade back to the republics of control over new investments.

It could be argued that this is a retrograde step and that the federation takes wealth produced in the richer areas and allocates it to building up the poorer regions. Before dealing with this claim, perhaps it is useful to look at the per capita income levels of the various republics and provinces. These certainly show that Yugoslavia embraces vast disparities in levels of development.

In 1979, according to official figures, the per capita annual income in Slovenia was \$4000, in Croatia \$2400, in Vojvodina \$2100, in Serbia proper \$1800, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia \$1300, in Montenegro \$1200, and in Kosovo \$500.¹⁷

One point to consider, however, when looking at the Croatian figure is that half a million Croats have been forced to look for work in Western Europe. If they all returned home, 40% of the workforce would be unemployed, and the per capita annual income would fall below the national average.

However, the wealth that is transferred from Croatia doesn't in the main go to the poorer regions but to Serbia. And then again, the bureaucracy squanders, on itself, a large part of the national income.

Trotsky dealt with this latter point in his Ukrainian articles. He wrote that "it is impermissible to forget that the plunder and arbitrary rule of the bureaucracy constitute an important integral part of the current economic plan, and exact a heavy toll from the Ukraine."¹⁸

Region	Population (1971 census)	Per cent total pop.
Serbia	8,446,591	41.15
<i>Serbia proper</i>	5,250,365	25.58
<i>Vojvodina</i>	1,952,533	9.51
<i>Kosovo</i>	1,243,693	6.06
Croatia	4,426,221	21.57
(79.4% Croats, 14.2% Serbs)		
Bosnia-Herzegovina	3,746,111	18.25
(20.6% Croats, 37.2% Serbs, 39.6% Moslems)		
Macedonia	1,647,308	8.03
Slovenia	1,727,137	8.42
Montenegro	529,604	2.57
Yugoslavia	20,522,972	
(22.4% Croats, 39.7% Serbs)		

Ethnic breakdown of Yugoslavia.*

In the case of Yugoslavia, not only does the bureaucracy gobble up a large amount of the country's income, but its incompetence and mismanagement of the economy have created a debt to the foreign banks second only to Poland's in Eastern Europe. Even the funds that are committed to the poorer regions do not necessarily do much good there, given the bureaucratic administration. All this is justifiably resented by the Croats.

Internationalist aid, such as revolutionary Cuba extends to many Third World countries, is very important. But it must be voluntary, it must result from the free decision of the people concerned. The Croatian people must be masters in their own house and be able to set about overcoming the many problems they face. Then they will consider freely a new relationship with their poorer neighbors.

One other aspect of the national oppression experienced by the Croatian people concerns the attempts to fasten on them an idea of "collective guilt" for the wartime Ustasha crimes. This is a conscious mechanism of the bureaucracy, similar in some ways to the liberal idea that the German people bear a "burden of guilt" for Hitler and fascism.

Part of this campaign involves branding nationalist activity as fascist and linked to the Ustasha. Franjo Tudjman presents evidence that the scale of the Ustasha crimes — real enough and horrifying enough as they were — have been exaggerated wildly, even as much as 10 or 12 times.¹⁹

The object of this campaign by the regime is, as Tudjman puts it, "that of imposing on the Croatian nation the feeling that it does not have any right to protest but only atonement, regardless of the things which have happened to it."

"Moreover," Tudjman continues, "the dissemination of the theory of the enormous historical guilt of the Croatian nation also serves to cover up the truth that in World War II Croatia was not only on the side of the Axis Powers but was also one of the firmest footholds of the anti-fascist movement, giving not a smaller but larger contribution in blood to the victory of the democratic forces over fascism than the other Yugoslav nations."

Example of the Russian Revolution

At this point I want to step back a little and place the Croatian struggle in a broader framework. What role does such a national struggle play in the political revolution against the bureaucracy in a Stalinised workers state?

For the correct Marxist handling of the national question in a workers state, the experiences of the Soviet Union in its early years, when it was led by Lenin and Trotsky, remain for us a model.

In 1922, a struggle broke out in the Bolshevik Party around the formal establishment of the USSR. Stalin at first proposed to have the new state set up by the independent socialist republics of the Ukraine, Transcaucasia, etc *joining the RSFSR* — the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic — as autonomous provinces. Lenin sharply opposed this, insisting that the RSFSR and the other republics should come together *as equals* in a new union.

Stalin's plan reflected a Great Russian chauvinistic attitude. Historically, the Russians had been the dominant nationality, on which the tsarist empire had been based. Russian chauvinism towards the non-Russian nations had a long historical tradition. It was vital for the revolutionary leadership, the Communist Party,

to combat any and all manifestations of this reactionary outlook, especially inside the party.

In the event, Lenin's ideas won out, and on December 30, 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was established. Each republic in the union had the right to self-determination, including the right to secede from the union if it wished.

Lenin's testamentary writings on the national question in the workers state contain priceless guidelines for revolutionaries.

Lenin stressed that "an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation.

"In respect of the second kind of nationalism we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence ...

"That is why internationalism on the part of the oppressors ... must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice. Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question ...

Lenin continued: "What is important for the proletariat? For the proletariat it is not only important, it is absolutely essential that he should be assured that the non-Russians place the greatest possible trust in the proletarian class struggle. What is needed to ensure this? Not mere formal equality. In one way or another, by one's attitude or by concessions, it is necessary to compensate the non-Russians for the lack of trust, for the suspicion and the insults to which the government of the 'dominant' nation subjected them in the past ...

... nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice ... That is why in this case it is better to overdo rather than underdo the concessions and leniency towards the national minorities."²⁰

Trotsky on the Ukraine

As we know, the national program of the Bolsheviks in the USSR was trampled into the mud by Stalin and the Great Russian bureaucracy. Just as class antagonisms and social inequality did not wither away in the Soviet Union, neither did national inequality and oppression. In fact, it intensified.

What this means for us today is that in the bureaucratized workers states the program of the political revolution must include demands on the national question. Trotsky's articles on the Ukraine, written just before World War I, provide invaluable guidance for us.

Trotsky pointed out that "The federated structure of the Soviet Republic represents a compromise between the centralist requirements of planned economy and the decentralist requirements of the development of nations oppressed in the past."²¹

Furthermore, Trotsky explained, the establishment of the federal union didn't settle the national question in the USSR for all time. Depending on the actual developments in the case of a given nation, it might be satisfied with the federation or it might wish to withdraw and form a separate state. That is why the Soviet

Constitution guaranteed the right of self-determination to each nation. (Also, the very act of including the right to national self-determination in the Constitution was a pledge by the state to do all in its power to make the federation work as a free and equal union.)

The correct political approach for Marxists when confronted by national injustice is not to engage in “sterile speculation on the superiority of the socialist unification of nations as against their remaining divided.”²² Rather, it is to ascertain “whether or not a particular nationality has, on the basis of her own experience, found it advantageous to adhere to a given state.”²³

And in the case of the Ukraine, there had been a “massacre of national hopes,” Trotsky wrote.²⁴

“The great masses of the Ukrainian people are dissatisfied with their national fate and wish to change it drastically. It is this fact that the revolutionary politician must, in contrast to the bureaucrat and the sectarian, take as his point of departure.”²⁵

This is the decisive point in Trotsky’s writings on this question. We are revolutionary politicians. We take reality as it is, not as we would like it to be. We go to the masses where they are and as they are and formulate a transitional program to mobilise them in struggle and lead them forward and raise their consciousness.

Trotsky contrasted the revolutionary approach to the nationally oppressed Ukrainians to that of the Kremlin bureaucracy.

The bureaucrat says: “inasmuch as the socialist revolution has solved the national question, it is your duty to be happy in the USSR and to renounce all thought of separation (or face the firing squad). By contrast, the revolutionist says: “Of importance to me is your attitude toward your national destiny and not the ‘socialistic’ sophistries of the Kremlin police; I will support your struggle for independence with all my might!”²⁶

If revolutionists do not fight for the leadership of the national movement in the bureaucratized workers state, if they do not have a program that will enable them to do this, then the masses of the oppressed nation will fall under the leadership of rightist, pro-imperialist elements, who will lead them into disaster.

In his articles, Trotsky took up and answered a number of arguments raised against his slogan of an independent Soviet Ukraine.

First, there was the argument I have already mentioned. That is, it is more advantageous “in general” for various nationalities to live together in the framework of a single workers state than to exist separately. The problem with this approach is that it does not deal with the actual sentiments and mood of the masses of the given nation.

What if the nation is oppressed and wants to leave the state? Do we oppose its aspirations and lecture it on the virtues of a socialist federation? Or do we intervene by championing the national aspirations of the oppressed people, thereby enabling us to win them to the struggle for socialism rather than have the national movement fall under reactionary leadership?

Another argument against an independent Soviet Ukraine took the line that with the removal of an important economic entity such as the Ukraine, the economic plan would be disrupted and the development of the productive forces of the USSR would be set back. But, Trotsky, answered, a plan is not sacred. If the Ukraine

wants to separate, this means that the plan does not satisfy it. The plan can be reworked to take account of the separation of the Ukraine, and if the new plan were advantageous to the Ukraine, then it would be able to reach an agreement with the USSR.

Then, what about the dangers to the Soviet Union if the Ukraine seceded? Wouldn’t the USSR be militarily weakened and mightn’t imperialism attempt to take advantage of this? Trotsky answered that it is true that there are certain risks involved. But then there are risks entailed in the fight for the anti-bureaucratic revolution as a whole. But it is certain that if the bureaucracy is left in control, then the Soviet Union is doomed anyway. In order to defend the workers state, the bureaucracy must be removed. The national uprising is only a segment of the political revolution. And an independent Soviet Ukraine would, out of self-interest, be compelled to enter into a military agreement with the Soviet Union.

The other aspect of this matter was that unless the Ukrainian national question could be solved, then “in the event of war the hatred of the masses for the ruling clique can lead to the collapse of all the social conquests of October.”²⁷ This tendency was seen in the Ukraine in 1941, when Hitler invaded. Large numbers of Ukrainians welcomed Hitler as a liberator at first. This attitude changed when harsh experience convinced them of his real intentions — to dismantle the real gains of October and enslave and exterminate them.

The case of Croatia

While there are some obvious differences between the situation of the Ukraine on the eve of World War 11 and that of Croatia today — in the nature of Yugoslavia compared to the Soviet Union, in the geopolitical situation, and so on — we can apply Trotsky’s *method*, his political approach, to the case of Croatia. The key question is a political one: How should Marxists relate to the Croatian national movement in order to lead it forward along the path of socialism?

Our approach consists, in the first place, in supporting the right of the Croatian nation to self-determination. including the right to leave Yugoslavia and form an independent state.

Do the majority of the Croatian people want a separate state? Or is the direction of their struggle to radically restructure the Yugoslav federation and make it honor its promises in reality? It is difficult for us to answer this question without more factual information. Quite possibly the desire to separate is the majority sentiment.

In any case, this is not the key question for us as *Australian* revolutionaries. The principled position we must take is to support the right of the Croatian people to freely decide their national destiny. If they want to leave Yugoslavia, we support that decision and will help them fight for the new state. If they wish to remain and restructure the federation, we shall support them in that case also.

But whatever the case, we can and shall collaborate closely with a nationalist separatist organisation such as the HDP.

Of course, in discussing the Croatian national struggle in general, or the question of Croatia’s separation from Yugoslavia, a great many concrete problems and aspects of the matter could be raised. We can’t deal with all these here. But I’ve tried to indicate both our principled line and the method, the political approach, that we must apply to this problem.

Collaboration with the HDP

In the final part of this report, I would like to make some comments about the developing collaboration between the Socialist Workers Party and the Croatian Movement for Statehood.

This collaboration is based on two considerations. First, there is the SWP's firm support for the struggle of the Croatian people for national justice. We support their right to national self-determination in Yugoslavia, up to and including the right to secede and form an independent state if they wish.

The second consideration is the progressive positions taken by the HDP and its continuing positive evolution.

This collaboration has certainly been a two-way street. We have learned a lot from it so far and will undoubtedly learn a lot more. We've definitely learned a lot about the history and politics of the Balkans and, in retrospect, the publishing of Trotsky's book (*The Balkan Wars*) several years ago was certainly well timed.

We have gained a much more concrete understanding of the nature of the system of bureaucratic rule in Yugoslavia. We've been forced to think a lot more about the political revolution in a country like Yugoslavia and how the struggle against national oppression fits into this. We have also gained a real education on the richness and historical legitimacy of the Croatian national tradition and struggle and have been forced to confront some of the stereotyped images of this struggle, which had affected us along with the rest of the left in Australia. All this has been an extremely positive experience.

On the other hand, we're confident that in the process of common work and discussion with the HDP, we can demonstrate the validity of Marxist ideas and show that these have nothing to do with the bureaucratic falsifications of Marxism promulgated by Belgrade and Moscow.

Furthermore, our work with the HDP can help to strengthen the party's work in the labour movement in this country. Around 200,000 Croats live in Australia, and the vast majority of these belong to the working class. Many work in the building trades. While some Croats will return to Croatia someday, the great majority will stay and live and work here. Through the HDP we can gain their attention and carry on party work among them, especially our industrial and trade union work.

Since its formation in 1981, the HDP has taken some very progressive stands. The articles by Jamie Doughney and Jim McIlroy in the October 5 and October 20 issues of *Direct Action* last year give an extensive account of these. But it's worth recalling them briefly because quite a few supposedly left-wing groups don't perform nearly as well:

- The HDP supports the Irish freedom struggle and has carried material on this in *Croatian Weekly*.
- During the Malvinas war, the HDP came out against British imperialism and for Argentina.
- The HDP supports the revolutionary processes in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and HDP comrades are active in Central America solidarity work in Melbourne.
- The HDP supports the Palestinians in their struggle against Zionism and imperialism.
- And, as the *Direct Action* series pointed out, many HDP members identify strongly with Fidel Castro and revolutionary Cuba; Che Guevara remains a revolutionary symbol for them

also.

Through its ongoing struggle, the HDP has established itself as the most influential group in the Australian Croatian community. The *Croatian Weekly* is certainly the most widely read Croatian-language paper in Australia.

The HDP's efforts to get itself established in the Croatian community have meant an ongoing confrontation with right-wing elements. HDP members have been bashed and even knifed by rightist thugs. But the HDP's efforts have more and more isolated the right-wing elements. Support for the HDP's general orientation has grown considerably.

In the postwar period, and even into the early 1970s, there was a strong tradition of Croatian community support for the Liberal Party. That is a thing of the past. A sign of the new reality is the *Croatian Weekly's* support for Labour in the last elections.

The HDP, of course, is a coalition of views. That's true internationally as well. And on the international level, the Australian HDP is on the left wing. The example of the Australian HDP has already had a strong influence on the HDP abroad, and this influence can only deepen as the HDP here moves forward. The *Croatian Weekly*, for example, already circulates in the United States and Western Europe, and this aspect of the HDP's work will certainly develop.

The HDP as a whole is not a Marxist organisation. It is a revolutionary nationalist movement that is strongly influenced by the progressive struggles going on in the world today. The HDP's orientation is bringing many of its members towards Marxism, and our collaboration can only take this process further.

The HDP is not clear on every single question of the day. There are some of their positions or formulations with which we would disagree. But our method is not to make a list of perfect Marxist positions, tick off those which the HDP supports, and then give them a score. That would be an utterly sterile and sectarian approach.

The essential thing is to recognise their positive evolution. This was the general framework in which we approached Solidarity in Poland. They used some equivocal formulations, their international positions were often naive, and they never came out for the revolutionaries in El Salvador. But we grasped the thing whole, understood the experiences which had made them, and saw the profoundly progressive content of their struggle.

Solidarity didn't say very much about socialism, although there were a few quite significant comments made on occasion. But we understood that for Solidarity there was absolutely no thought whatsoever that the factories would be run by anybody but the workers themselves. For Polish workers, the common ownership was a fact of life; their demand was to make the proclaimed principles of the system operate in real life.

It is the same with the Croatian struggle. Whatever the reactionary thoughts in a few right-wing heads, the system of social ownership is accepted by the mass of Croats, and certainly by the HDP. A point to remember here is that the great majority of Croats living abroad are workers; they do not want to return home to establish the rich in power.

Their own experiences have given Croatian activists an education in the nature of imperialism. The US government supports the Belgrade regime and considers the maintenance of Yugoslavia an important objective of its foreign policy. Western

banks have lent a fortune to Yugoslavia and, as in Poland, they have a stake in seeing a government in power that can guarantee repayment.

There have even been reports recently that troops from the US forces in Europe will go on R and R in Yugoslavia, most likely in Croatia. Will Croatian towns be turned into Yugoslav Saigons for the soldiers of US imperialism? Such an experience is unlikely to win the Croatians to support for capitalism.

It is well documented that Belgrade operates a secret service abroad that particularly specialises in the murder and persecution of Yugoslav activists abroad, usually Croats. This Yugoslav version of the KGB, known by its acronym, UDBA, has close links with the police and intelligence agencies of the imperialist countries. ASIO collaborates with them in this country and helps out in the persecution of progressive Croat activists and the infiltration of migrant circles. All this is yet another way in which HDP members and other Croatians have received an education in the real nature of imperialism.

In our view, the HDP leaders are revolutionaries. They have a different history to ourselves; they have been formed by the experiences of national oppression in a Stalinised workers state. But we are confident that as a result of their experiences, including in this their collaboration with our party, they are moving in a progressive direction.

The HDP comrades have already registered impressive successes in building an organisation with a weekly paper and extending their influence. We can certainly appreciate that.

As a result of the collaboration between the HDP and the SWP and also through the development of the class struggle in this country, many more Croatians will come to see the need to build a revolutionary workers' party here and fight to overthrow capitalism. We hope they will join the SWP. Some will belong to both the HDP and the SWP. In our view there is no contradiction in this, as we are both working for the same end—a world free of class exploitation and national oppression. ■

Notes

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A Reply to the Communist Party on Croatian Nationalism

The Freney School of Falsification

By Allen Myers

For some months now, there has been an escalating debate on the left concerning the Croatian nationalist movement and the role of a new and left-wing element within it, the Croatian Movement for Statehood (HDP). Aside from the HDP itself, the chief protagonists in this debate have been the Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party of Australia.

Differences on the left are of course not unusual, nor are discussions about them, even sharp discussions, something automatically to be regretted. In the recent period, the SWP and CPA have debated such questions as the prices-incomes accord and strategy for the peace movement and will no doubt continue to do so. Such discussions, even if they do not resolve differing political judgments, can at least help to clarify them.

But the debate about Croatian nationalism and the HDP contains an element that makes it different from most other such discussions. While there are undoubtedly differing political assessments involved here, they have not hitherto been the focus of discussion. This is so because, for more than a year now, the CPA has been conducting what can only be called a smear campaign against the HDP. The goal of this campaign is to portray the HDP and its members as ultraright terrorists who seek to recreate a regime like that of the Ustasha, which ruled Croatia on behalf of German and Italian fascism during World War II.

The article by Dave Holmes in this issue deals with the fundamental factual and political questions in the dispute. This article will therefore not take them up, except as they directly touch on its central aim, which is to expose the slander.

This article will demonstrate beyond any reasonable doubt not only that the CPA's charges against the HDP are false. It will also show that the methods used by the authors of the campaign guilt by association, innuendo, unsupported assertions, national prejudice, and outright lies — are such as to leave no doubt that the accusers themselves *know their accusations to be false*.

Proving this — including, I hope, for honest members of the CPA — will require a fairly detailed and sometimes complicated examination of the shifting charges presented in the name of the CPA. The CPA material to be examined is itself of a nature that is often disgusting.

For these difficulties, I can only apologise to the reader in advance; the sad fact is, however, that there is no pleasant way to lance a boil. But before proceeding, I would urge readers to consider why the effort required is worth expending, and not merely by members of the organisations directly involved.

What is at stake

The smear campaign of the CPA harms the entire labour movement. Lies and slander — on which it is based — are the weapons of the bosses, instruments for diverting the attention of the workers from their real enemies.

To this general truth should be added certain specifics of the

Australian situation. The working class in Australia includes large numbers of migrants from Eastern Europe and, more recently, from Vietnam. Many of these migrants left their homes because of the economic hardships caused by war, imperialist economic blockade, and similar factors, others because of a lack of democracy in their homelands. Such experiences can give them a distorted and negative view of socialism and illusions about life in a capitalist “democracy” that require time and experience to overcome.

It is obviously important for the labour and socialist movements in Australia to be able to involve such migrant workers in the class struggle in this country, regardless of how correct or incorrect their views of the situation in their homelands. This is a precondition for a united Australian labour movement and for overcoming conservative or right-wing attitudes among migrant workers.

The CPA's campaign against the HDP, however, is explicitly intended to *exclude* this group of Croatian workers from the labour movement. Such a goal would be a grave mistake even if the campaign were directed against an organisation with far more conservative views than those of the HDP. But in fact it is directed against a group that undoubtedly constitutes the *left* wing of the Croatian community in Australia, and is based on a systematic *falsification* of what the HDP stands for.

If the CPA campaign were to succeed, it would carry a clear message not only to the 200,000 to 250,000 Croats in Australia, but also to all workers from Eastern Europe or Vietnam. It would tell all such workers that having left their homelands makes them inherently suspect, that they are barred from the labour movement in Australia unless they can pass an entrance examination administered by self-appointed guardians of the labour movement's ideological purity.

Exposing and repudiating the CPA's slanders is thus more than simply a matter of justice to the HDP, important as that is. It is a matter that concerns the ability of the labour movement in Australia to incorporate workers from the most diverse backgrounds.

Anonymous charges and the ‘Ustashi flag’

The CPA paper *Tribune* first referred to the HDP on May 5, 1982, in its report on the May Day march in Melbourne. On that occasion, marshals — who evidently felt that their tasks included an unconditional defence of the present Yugoslav government — objected to the HDP marching behind the Croatian flag. They further objected to placards carried by HDP members and by Kosovans (the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia) denouncing the suppression of their national rights. *Tribune's* account of this incident read as follows:

At the start of the march, Mr O'Neil [one of the marshals] was threatened by a group of Croatian marchers who were carrying a flag similar to the Ustashi flag. While they agreed not to carry the flag, they refused to leave the march, claiming that they were Trotskyists.

However, other members of the Yugoslav community claimed

that they were, in fact, Ustashi, and the Croatian banners denounced Yugoslavia as a fascist state.

In an attempt to avoid a confrontation, the organisers reluctantly allowed them to march. The presence of Croatian marchers and a group of Albanian nationalists bearing banners proclaiming 'Death to the fascists of Tito's Yugoslavia' created a lot of negative feeling, but the march proceeded to the Yarra Bank without incident.

Even if we had to rely solely on the "information" provided by *Tribune*, this account is obviously defective. First of all, we are told that O'Neil was "threatened" by the HDP. But in the very next line, *Tribune* reports the result of the "threat" — the HDP agreed not to carry its flag! What sort of "threat" is it that results in the "threateners" making concessions to the person "threatened"?

Furthermore, *Tribune* says that the marshals "reluctantly allowed" the HDP to march. That means that the marshals, in some fashion, initially attempted to *prevent* the HDP from marching. Thus it appears, even from *Tribune's* account, that O'Neil and/or other marshals tried to exclude the HDP from the march but did not succeed in doing so, although they did succeed in preventing the HDP from carrying the Croatian flag. Why, then, didn't *Tribune* simply say so?

In trying to justify this attempted exclusion, *Tribune* presented three arguments: (1) The HDP banners "denounced Yugoslavia as a fascist state". (2) The HDP members were "in fact" Ustashi, according to "other members of the Yugoslav community". (3) The flag carried by the HDP was "similar to the Ustashi flag". It will be instructive to consider these arguments.

1. It is, of course, incorrect to describe the Yugoslav regime as fascist. This seems to be one of those cases, unfortunately all too frequent on the Australian left, in which the term is made into little more than a synonym for "repressive." During more heated periods of the Sino-Soviet dispute, for example, it was not at all unusual for supporters of one side to denounce the other as "fascist".

But such a misuse of the term was never grounds for excluding anyone from a May Day march — nor should it have been.

Moreover, it should be recalled that a constant theme of the CPA smear campaign is that the HDP is only the Ustasha under another name, and that the Ustasha itself is fascist. It would be more than a little unusual, however — to put it mildly — for fascists to *denounce* others for being fascist. For fascists, the word "fascist" is obviously a term of *praise*, not denunciation.

2. This is a particularly glaring example of *Tribune's* bad faith. The paper levels a particularly serious charge at the HDP on the basis of nothing more than the word of *anonymous* accusers. Neither the HDP nor *Tribune* readers have any chance of examining the good faith or the knowledge of these unnamed "other members of the Yugoslav community". Nor does *Tribune* cite the evidence, if there is any, on which these anonymous accusers base their charge. We are expected to believe the accusation because of a faith in the honesty and accuracy of people (how many?) whose identity we are not allowed to know!
3. The Australian flag is very "similar" to the New Zealand flag, and also "similar" to the British flag. It would be a mistake,

however, to presume that an Australian flag carried in a May Day march is proof of any particular attitude towards Piggy Muldoon or Margaret Thatcher. *Tribune* was simply hoping to take advantage of its readers' lack of knowledge about Croatia. The flag which the HDP was prevented from carrying in the march is the Croatian national flag; it predates the Ustasha by some 15 centuries. The "similarity" of this flag to that of the Ustasha is due to the fact that the Ustasha added its own emblem to the Croatian flag.

Does the CPA think that this fact places an obligation on Croats to adopt a new flag? To do that would be to do precisely what the CPA falsely *accuses* the HDP of doing: It would mean acknowledging, although from a "left" standpoint, the right of the Ustasha to pose as *the* representative of the Croatian nation. An analogy suggests itself: During May Day marches one often sees workers carrying Eureka flags. *Tribune* has never, to my knowledge, denounced such workers as fascists on the grounds that the same flag is used by the Australian National Alliance. Were it to do so, wouldn't that be acknowledging that the Australian National Alliance had a proprietary *right* to the Eureka flag, that the Eureka flag was just as much the symbol of the ANA as the swastika was of the Nazis?

'Dubious views'

Following the appearance of this *Tribune* article, the HDP wrote a letter correcting the numerous misstatements it contained. *Tribune* printed neither a retraction nor the HDP letter. (The HDP then sent the letter to other left papers; it was printed in the June 2, 1982, issue of *Direct Action*.) In fact, *Tribune* waited four months before admitting to its readers that the "facts" of its article had been challenged. And even this admission carefully concealed from readers precisely what the HDP had challenged. The article by Dave Davies, in the September 8 issue, said only that the HDP had "complained to *Tribune* about a report on the May Day incident and *by request forwarded documents on their organisation*". (My emphasis.)

How revealing of *Tribune's* standards! On the basis of no evidence that would stand the slightest examination, *Tribune* accuses the HDP of being Ustashi. When the HDP refutes the charge, *Tribune* does not retract it. Nor does it ask its unnamed "other members of the Yugoslav community" for *their* evidence. No, *Tribune* instead appoints *itself* as judge in the case, and then demands that the HDP prove the slander to be false! In *Tribune's* court, anyone can level charges anonymously against the HDP, and the HDP will be considered guilty until proven innocent. In fact, it will be considered guilty *even after* proven innocent, as we shall see.

Moreover, in an effort to conceal its dishonest behavior, *Tribune* then *changed the accusation*. Davies' article was headed "Croatian group has dubious views". But the dispute was not about whether or not the CPA was justified in disagreeing with the HDP's views. What was at issue was *Tribune's* retailing of anonymous slanders calling the HDP "Ustashi". Davies deliberately *falsified* the issue, writing "Their [the HDP's] members claim to be 'socialists'. They complained to *Tribune* about a report on the May Day incident ..." — as though *Tribune's* original article had criticised some

position of the HDP concerning “socialism”. (Davies didn’t bother to explain what the “May Day incident” consisted of, other than to say the HDP had joined the march.)

Later in the article, Davies attempted to dispose of the HDP’s pro-socialist views in this way: “The HDP documents say nothing of the kind of Croatia they envisage when Yugoslavia is ‘destroyed’, making their claims to being ‘socialist’ hard to judge.” This was an outright lie by Davies, for the HDP letter concerning the first *Tribune* article — the letter *Tribune* refused to print stated plainly: “We stand for the creation of independent socialist states in Croatia and the Balkans generally ...”

Assuming collective guilt

But Davies’ chief method of demonstrating the “dubious” character of the HDP’s views — a method subsequently repeated by *Tribune* — consisted of pointing to the crimes of the Ustasha and complaining that the HDP has not sufficiently condemned these.

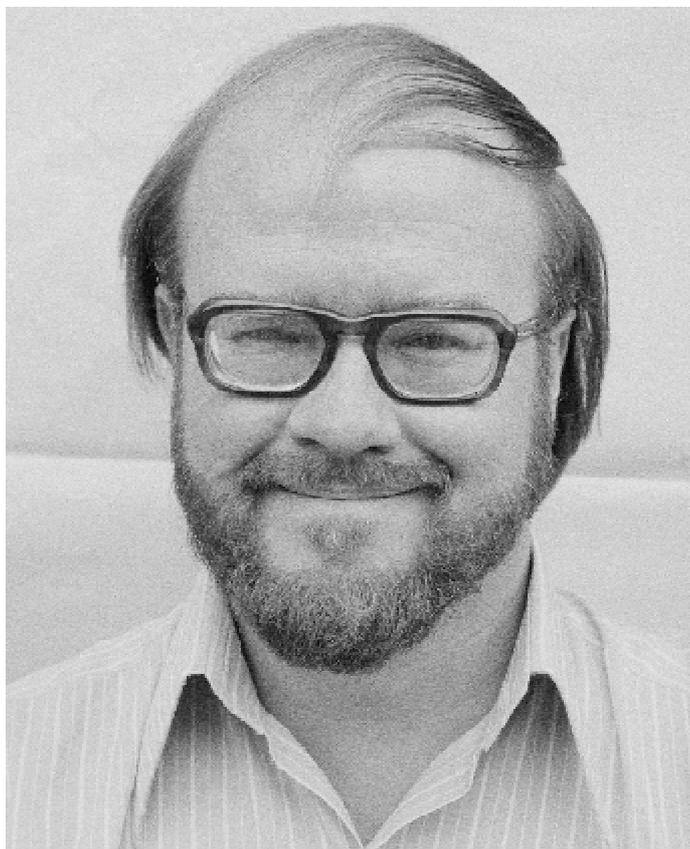
This sort of demand, it should be noted, is never addressed to causes or organisations that the CPA supports. For example, *Tribune* has carried articles defending the Polish workers and their union, Solidarity. It is no secret that a majority of Solidarity members and leaders support the independence of Poland and are practicing Catholics. Yet *Tribune* has not denounced Solidarity for never having condemned the crimes of the Pilsudski regime. Nor has it called Lech Walesa “dubious” for his failure to condemn the Spanish Inquisition or the pope’s collaboration with fascism during Mussolini’s rule. (Incidentally, Pope Pius XII once described Ustasha leader Ante Pavelic as “a much-maligned man”. Does this make Solidarity, through its connections with the Catholic Church, a branch of the Ustasha?)

And what does the CPA send out to people who may write in asking what the CPA stands for? Does it send them impassioned denunciations of previous Australian governments’ white Australia policy? Are such inquiries responded to with a condemnation of the Australian government’s complicity, through its wartime alliance with US imperialism, in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? And if the CPA’s promotional material does not emphasise these questions, would Davies believe we are justified in saying that the CPA has “dubious views” concerning racism and the slaughter of civilians in wartime?

Why, then, does *Tribune* assume that there is something “dubious” in Croatians focusing their attention on what the Yugoslav government is doing to their country today rather than on what Pavelic did to it 40 years ago? Clearly, there is an unstated assumption behind *Tribune*’s demand that the HDP *prove* its non-Ustasha character by denouncing the Pavelic regime. The assumption is that *simply being Croatian* carries with it some responsibility for the Ustasha. It is an assumption of a *collective guilt*, which Croatian political activists must remove from themselves before they can be accepted by the labour movement. In short, it is racism dressed up as protection of the labour movement.

Escalating the slander

From the first *Tribune* article to Davies’ article there was a detectable escalation of the smear against the HDP. While the May 5 article called the HDP members Ustashi, it did so not in *Tribune*’s name



Denis Freney, 1977 (Search Foundation).

but through quoting those useful and anonymous “other members of the Yugoslav community”. On the other hand, the September 8 article only *implied* the accusation, but it marked the first time that a *Tribune* writer took *direct* responsibility for an attack on the HDP.

The campaign was to continue through such a process of step-by-step escalation. Each subsequent attack became a hit more brazen in presenting concocted “evidence” against the HDP or in simply increasing the accusations without even a pretense of evidence.

Following Davies’ article, the next step in the campaign was presented by Denis Freney in the April 27, 1983, *Tribune*, in an account of a minor incident that occurred at the Karl Marx Centenary Conference in Melbourne in early April. Headlined “Ustasha critic ejected from Marx Centenary conference”, Freney’s article began:

MELBOURNE: An elderly Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, Jacob (Jack) Bilander, was forcibly ejected from a Socialist Workers Party (SWP) Karl Marx Centenary Conference forum on Croatia by party stewards after he had strongly criticised Ustasha war crimes.

To supporters of the CPA’s anti-HDP campaign, it must have seemed too good to be true. And such a response would have been well founded, for in fact Freney’s account wasn’t true. (Even the dateline on it was a lie, for Freney was not present in Melbourne at the events he pretended to describe.)

No one at the forum raised the slightest objection to Bilander’s denunciation of Ustasha crimes, and he was not ejected for making them. Bilander was removed because, after he had already had his say in the discussion period, he refused to stop shouting and to allow other members of the audience to speak. Freney himself

buried an acknowledgement of the reality in the middle of his article, when he quoted from a letter in which Bilander admitted that he had “refused to allow the meeting to proceed”.

As it happened, this was the *third* session of the conference that Bilander had disrupted in a similar fashion. On the first two occasions, he managed to restrain himself only when warned that he would be ejected if he did not stop interrupting other speakers. On the third occasion, he ignored repeated warnings and finally had to be removed so that the session could continue.

What an opportunity Denis Freney missed “in Melbourne”: He could have written other articles beginning: “An elderly Polish survivor of the Holocaust was threatened with ejection after he had strongly criticised the Solidarity trade union as anti-Semitic” and “An elderly male survivor of the Holocaust was threatened with ejection after he had strongly criticised feminist opponents of the nuclear family.” Freney’s restraint in this regard is due only to the fact that the CPA sees no advantage for itself in smearing Solidarity or women’s liberation.

Not content with his fiction of a persecuted “Ustasha critic,” Freney went on to expand Davies’ charges. Whereas Davies had claimed — falsely — that the HDP “say nothing of the bloodbath perpetrated by the Pavelic regime”, Freney escalated this into “HDP apologies for the Pavelic regime.” (*Tribune* readers, it seems, are expected to have short memories.) He wrote:

Last October, the SWP felt it necessary to distance itself from the HDP apologies for the Pavelic regime. But HDP leader Stipe Suto last January addressed the SWP National Conference ...

What more “proof” could anyone ask for? If *even* the SWP, which invites HDP representatives to its National Conference, had to pull back from “HDP apologies” for the Ustasha, then those “apologies” must be pretty straightforward and unambiguous.

But why, then, didn’t Freney simply quote these “apologies”, instead of bringing in the SWP’s “distancing” in order to make his case? Why the roundabout way of convicting the HDP of Ustasha sympathies? Wouldn’t it be more convincing to quote passages from the HDP’s paper applauding Ustasha pogroms against Jews, Serbs, Gypsies, and Croatian opponents, or articles arguing that concentration camps were an unfortunate necessity in Croatia between 1941 and 1945?

But Freney’s behavior here appears strange only if one assumes that he was reporting honestly. The HDP doesn’t “apologise” for *any* Ustasha atrocities, and consequently the SWP has never had to “distance itself from the HDP on this.

Last October, *Direct Action* presented a series of two articles by Jamie Doughney and Jim Mcllroy outlining the origin, evolution, and current views of the HDP. The second article contained a passage that presumably served Freney as the inspiration for his escalation of the slander campaign: It noted that some “HDP material suggests that although the [Ustasha] government had a right-wing character, it did represent a form of independence that was until that time denied the Croatian people.”

Doughney and Mcllroy then went on to explain that, *if* the HDP did consider the Pavelic regime to have been genuinely independent, the SWP regarded such a view as mistaken:

It is our view that the Pavelic regime was a quisling regime that owed its existence wholly and solely to the German imperialists. It could not be described as genuinely independent.

And that is the sum of the “apologies” and the “distancing” — a possible difference over the degree of independence of the Ustasha regime. Just in case Freney’s pursuit of the HDP has made him incapable of understanding the distinction, let me draw him a picture:

Unlike some on the left, possibly including the CPA, the SWP considers the Australian government independent in every meaningful sense of the word. That does not make the SWP “pro-Hawke”, “pro-Fraser,” “pro-Whitlam”, “pro-McMahon”, “pro-Gorton”, or “pro-Menzies”, nor does it mean that the SWP “apologises” for Australian participation in the Vietnam War, the treatment of Aborigines, or any other numerous crimes committed by independent Australian governments.

Furthermore, to the very limited degree that the degree of the Pavelic regime’s independence has any relevance to how one regards its atrocities, the view against which *Direct Action* argued would imply the very *opposite* of an “apology”. While there could be no moral or political justification for the Ustasha regime’s crimes under any circumstances, its responsibility for them would have been all the *greater* had it been really independent.

Mark Aarons’ scissors

The three articles already described would, by themselves, be more than enough to earn *Tribune* the Rupert Murdoch Trophy for Gutter Journalism. So pleasing was the “success” of the CPA smear campaign, that it was decided to take it to the air waves.

This was done on June 19, in the ABC radio program “Background Briefing”- — produced by Mark Aarons, son of Laurie Aarons, nephew of Eric Aarons, and brother of CPA National Executive member Brian Aarons. The program was preceded by an endorsement in *Tribune*:

Background Briefing on Sunday June 19 at 10.15 am, will contain an important program on Ustasha activities in Australia and overseas. In particular, it will concentrate on the Croatian Movement for Statehood (HDP) which claims to be on the left, yet is unwilling to distance itself from the fascist Pavelic nazi puppet regime in the Second World War.

The program promises to be an eye-opener for those on the left fooled by HDP propaganda.

The program did indeed prove to be an eye-opener — for anyone who still believed that the CPA was capable of discussing the HDP honestly. Aarons’ attempt to live up to the *Tribune* blurb equating the HDP with the Ustasha rested on one of the oldest tricks in the book. Aarons simply alternated excerpts from an interview with HDP leader Dinko Dedic with accounts of the atrocities carried out by the Ustasha. In the same way, any right-winger could alternate excerpts from an interview of a CPA member with accounts of Stalin’s concentration camps and thus “prove” that socialism means mass murder and slave labour.

Perhaps suspecting that listeners would find this cheap trick less than convincing evidence of the HDP’s “unwillingness to distance itself” from the Ustasha, Aarons used his editorial scissors to construct additional “evidence”. Dedic had pointed out that of course the HDP was opposed to atrocities, whether committed by the Ustasha in Croatia, by Europeans in Tasmania, or wherever. But Dedic made the mistake of assuming that Aarons would broadcast his remarks as he made them. And so, when Aarons

mentioned hundreds of thousands of civilians killed in Ustasha camps, Dedic tried to correct him by mentioning an *official Yugoslav study* that put the total number of such deaths at 59,600. That was all Aarons needed — a few snips to remove the source, and the figure became Dedic’s personal assertion in the face of what “everyone” knows: Shock! Horror! HDP leader minimises Ustashi crimes! And, Mr Murdoch, if you ever need an editor ...

The four-year-old Ustasha terrorist

Not to be outdone by Aarons, Freney took a page and a half of the June 29 *Tribune* to further display his talents. The article was featured on the cover, which — again in a stroke worthy of Murdoch — bore the headline “Croatian terrorists’ links” and the HDP emblem superimposed on a photograph of marching Ustasha troops.

Freney’s article opened with the disclosure that a former HDP member in Sweden had accused Nikola Stedul, the international president of the HDP, of co-authoring the rules of a secret terrorist organisation, With Death Until Life. A dozen paragraphs about this group quoted from its rules and mentioned several Croatian newspapers that received those rules anonymously in the post. But there was no mention of any terrorist action actually carried out by With Death Until Life. Indeed, Freney presented no evidence that such an organisation actually exists as anything more than an individual who has access to a typewriter and a post box.

Next Freney provided a dozen-paragraph biography of Stedul. This was a real triumph of investigative journalism — it proved conclusively that Stedul has been a nationalist for most of his adult life.

Then followed another 10 or 12 paragraphs describing every violent incident Freney could discover for which a Croatian nationalist admitted responsibility or had been convicted or charged, plus at least one bombing for which no one ever took responsibility or was arrested.

Do you get it now? Freney was setting out the elements of a perfect syllogism, of the sort taught in logic courses at Joe McCarthy University. The reader had only to put the pieces together. It goes like this:

Major premise: Some Croatian nationalists are terrorists.

Minor premise: Stedul is a Croatian nationalist.

Conclusion: Stedul is a terrorist.

The conclusion then becomes part of a further syllogism: Some Croatian terrorists belonged to right-wing organisations. Stedul is a Croatian terrorist. Therefore, the HDP is a pro-Ustasha outfit.

A “reasoning” process something like the above then allowed Freney to conclude his article: “... the accusations ... that Stedul was the co-author of the With Death Until Life terrorist rules cannot be easily dismissed, *despite Stedul’s denials.*”

The emphasis — it is probably not necessary to add “of course” — was not Freney’s. I have added it to call attention to the article’s only mention that Stedul denies any connection with the terrorist rules! *Tribune* may have started the anti-HDP campaign by imitating Murdoch, but by now it could teach even him a few tricks.

Freney’s “exposure” of Stedul began with the following shocking disclosure: “He was born in Croatia in 1937 and was a child during the bloody rule of the pro-nazi Ustasha regime in the ‘Independent Croatian State’.”

It seems that there are only three possible political points being made here. One would be that any non-“dubious” Croatian must be born in Serbia. A second would be that it was an obligation of Croatian four-year-olds to overthrow the Ustasha. I doubt that even Denis Freney would subscribe to either of those views, at least publicly.

The third possible point is the one that underlies all of *Tribune*’s attacks on the HDP the racist assumption that Croats take in pro-Ustasha sentiments along with their mothers’ milk.

A frame-up forestalled

Freney’s June 29 article was headed “Croatian group’s terrorist links big questions for coming visit.” But the article focused on Nikola Stedul, who was not about to visit Australia since in fact he lives here.

The “visit” referred to in the headline turned out to be that of Professor Mirko Vidovic, who was shortly to arrive in Australia. A brief introduction to Freney’s article said that “Two competing pro-Ustasha movements, the Croatian Movement for Statehood (HDP) and the Croatian National Council (HNV) claim Vidovic as a member”, and suggested that the Australian government should refuse him a visa. But the main body of the article did not even mention Vidovic, his upcoming visit, or any links he might or might not have with terrorism. Why, then, was he the focus of the headline? What is the connection between Vidovic and Stedul, who was the real subject of the article?

Freney’s seemingly irrelevant reference to Vidovic in fact imitated Mark Aarons’ treatment in the Background Briefing program. Aarons too referred to Vidovic as an HDP member and implied that he should not be given a visa, but did not otherwise link Vidovic with the rest of the program.

But this rather peculiar behavior becomes comprehensible when it is realised that Aarons and Freney *were preparing a frame-up*. Vidovic is *not a member but a political opponent of the HDP*.

Following the appearance of Freney’s article, *Direct Action* interviewed Dinko Dedic, a leader of the HDP in Melbourne. (Excerpts from the interview were published in the July 5 *Direct Action*; the full text is given in this pamphlet.) Dedic described Vidovic as “a person from whom we would not even buy a second-hand car”. The very formation of the HDP had involved a split with Vidovic and his perspective of relying on US imperialism. And Dedic pointed out that the CPA was well aware of the real situation of hostility between Vidovic and the HDP:

I am sure they know that, because I explained it in detail in the interview I gave to Mark Aarons, though he chose not to include that bit in the ABC program.

In short, Aarons and Freney knew that Vidovic was a *real* right-winger, a supporter of US imperialism. They knew that he was a political opponent of the HDP. They nevertheless publicly described him as a member of the HDP. If this frame-up hadn’t been exposed beforehand, *Tribune* would then only have had to quote from Vidovic’s speeches in Australia in order to “prove” that the HDP was really “pro-imperialist”!

Freney discovers pro-Soviet Nazis

Dedic’s interview also pointed to a telling omission in Freney’s article. When summarising Nikola Stedul’s political activities, Freney

had left out Stedul's role in founding the Croatian Socialist Party—apparently that was a bit difficult to fit into the “pro-Ustasha” smear.

Freney must have been concerned at the speed with which his slanders were unravelling. So, in the July 13 *Tribune*, he tried to tie them together again and once more escalate the level of hysterical accusations against the HDP.

The article began by alleging that the HDP “praise the ‘Independent Croatian State’ set up under Hitler during World War II”. It will be recalled that *Tribune* began, in Dave Davies’ article, by claiming that the HDP “say nothing” about Ustasha crimes; in April Freney escalated the charge to “apologies” for Ustasha atrocities; in July he has blown it up into “praise” for the handiwork of Hitler.

In its headline, *Tribune* went even further. This referred to the HDP as “the ‘left-wing’ Ustasha.” And later in the article, Freney bluntly called the HDP “Nazis”.

All in all, this is quite a remarkable evolution in the accusation, particularly so in view of the fact that *Tribune* has yet to present anything except frame-ups in support of it. It is hard to see how the CPA can enlarge the smear further — but perhaps in a future article Freney will tell us that the four-year-old Stedul in 1941 was the head of a Ustasha concentration camp.

In support of his slander of the HDP as “Nazis”, Freney presents an argument which demonstrates that too-long an immersion in a smear campaign can destroy the mental faculties to the point where the slanderer loses the ability to make his lies consistent or plausible. Thus Freney justified the “Nazi” slander by pointing out that the Brown Shirt wing of Hitler’s party used anticapitalist demagogy and that the word Nazi itself is an abbreviation for National Socialist German Workers Party! (The question inevitably arises: In the course of his researches into German fascism, did Freney discover *who* originated the Big Lie technique?)

What follows from these two historical facts? Logically, nothing. But Freney long ago abandoned logic as a useless impediment to a good smear campaign. So what followed in his article was this astonishing argument:

Ever since the Stalin-^Tito split in 1948, some Ustasha elements have dreamed of gaining the support of the Soviet Union in their struggle to set up an independent Croatia ...

The present international president of the HDP, Nicola Stedul, formed the Croatian Socialist Party in 1974 ... The ‘Socialist’ Party had a distinct pro-Soviet bias.

It is difficult to find words that would adequately characterise Freney’s method. In order to smear Stedul as pro-Ustasha, Freney suppresses the fact of Stedul’s activity as a socialist. Then after the frame-up is exposed—Freney tells us that the Croatian Socialist Party was Ustasha, since it was founded by someone “proven” to be a Ustasha; “proven,” that is, only by earlier suppressing the fact of the party’s existence!

If Freney really expects readers to swallow that, perhaps it’s not so surprising that he also expects them to swallow his fantasy about a “Nazi” “Ustasha” party that is pro-Soviet. Presumably these pro-Soviet Ustashi are counting on Moscow to supply them with brown shirts and other material aid for the

establishment of a fascist Croatia, the whole business being directed by the ghost of Stalin, which is seeking revenge on the ghost of Tito.

While this particular construction of lunacy and lies is undoubtedly the low point of the smear campaign to date, several other aspects of Freney’s latest article require at least brief mention.

One of them is the remarkable foresight of the HDP. The left-wing positions of the HDP, Freney asserts, are a “trick”. (They are quite a convincing “trick,” it might be added. On a number of issues, such as Palestine and the Malvinas war, the HDP stands well to the left of the CPA. There is no need for Freney or anyone else to assure us that there is nothing whatsoever insincere in the right-wing positions of the CPA.) The HDP decided on this “trick” in order to win support from the ALP and the left “last year, when a Labor victory looked increasingly likely.” Thus the HDP was not fooled by the almost universal pessimism that gripped the ALP throughout most of 1982; well in advance, the HDP foresaw the events of February 5, when the ALP changed its leadership and Fraser was stuck with an early election that he suddenly no longer wanted.

The HDP’s foresight is even more surprising in view of the fact that the HDP doesn’t really exist, according to Freney. In a studiedly offhand remark, he refers to “HNO [Croatian National Resistance] members operating under the cover name of the HDP.” This is characteristic of Freney’s gutter methods: The lie is sandwiched into another sentence in a manner meant to suggest to unsuspecting *Tribune* readers that Freney is merely referring to something that is common knowledge or that he demonstrated in an earlier article. Once printed, the lie can then become a reference point for further elaborations of the campaign, allowing *Tribune* in future issues to claim that the July 13 article proved Freney’s unfounded assertion.¹

Freney tries to identify the HDP with the HNO, a quite different organisation, as part of his more general effort to equate any form of Croatian nationalist activity with every other. Once all manifestations of Croatian nationalism have been made equivalents of each other, they can all be referred to as Ustasha.

And in fact Freney’s July 13 article for the first time makes quite explicit the racist assumption only implicit in earlier *Tribune* articles. Freney simply uses “Ustasha” as a synonym for “Croatian nationalist”. For example, referring to the June 21 issue of *Direct Action*, he writes:

The HDP and its backers in the SWP also imply some sympathy for the Ustasha cause from the part of Cuba ...

Relations between Cuba and Yugoslavia were strained in recent years over the line the Non-Aligned Movement should take. But for the SWP or the HDP to imply that Cuba might sponsor Ustasha elements is ludicrous and an insult to the Cuban revolution.

Freney’s “concern” for the good name of the Cuban Revolution would be more reassuring if the entire passage were not a pack of lies from beginning to end.

First of all, *Direct Action* has never implied Cuban “sympathy for the Ustasha cause”. *Direct Action* doesn’t believe that Croatia’s national rights are the same thing as the Ustasha cause. Nor does it believe Freney’s truly insulting assertion that the Cuban government would share his racist view that Croatian nationalism and the Ustasha are the same thing. That is the main point, but there is another major distortion connected with this brief passage

of Freney's article:

Direct Action has never implied Cuban support for the cause of Croatian nationalism. So far as we are aware, the Cuban government has never taken a public stand on the question of Croatian national rights, and we do not pretend to be able to read the thoughts in the minds of Cuban leaders.

The item in the June 21 issue of *Direct Action*, which Freney misrepresents as implying Cuban "sympathy for the Ustasha cause," was a brief message to Dinko Dedic from a leading international officer of the HDP who had just visited Cuba. The message *did not mention* any Cuban attitude on Croatia whatsoever. *All that it dealt with was this HDP leader's enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution.* The message concluded: "It is impossible to look at such a success and at the same time avoid wishing the same for Croatia."

No wonder Freney chose to lie about this letter! It was a choice of that or of calling the HDP pro-Cuban Ustashi. Evidently, combining pro-Cuban Ustashi with pro-Soviet Nazis in the same article was too much even for Freney. Perhaps, after all, he does still have a tiny bit of respect for the intelligence of his readers.

The real issue

I have analysed the CPA's smear campaign in far more detail than would have been necessary to demonstrate that it is based on conscious and deliberate bad faith. Even a fraction of the above material would be sufficient to convict the campaign's authors of lies, amalgams, distortions, and unfounded accusations sinking to a depth that fortunately has rarely been seen on the Australian left in modern times.²

This detail seemed necessary because of the likelihood that many *Tribune* readers would lack thorough knowledge of the events, groups, and individuals about which the paper's writers spoke in a tone of authority. Thus, even the exposure of this or that deliberate lie in *Tribune* might still leave such readers wondering whether there was not, nevertheless, something "dubious" about the HDP. Since the authors of the anti-HDP campaign were obviously counting on the principle "throw enough mud and some of it will stick", it seemed necessary to neutralise the Davies-Aarons-Freney mudbath with as much soap as possible, short of making this article book length. Hopefully, the explanation of the *methods* on which the smear campaign is based will help readers, even those lacking detailed knowledge of Croatian politics, to see through the future productions of the treacherous trio.

But it is not enough just to reject *Tribune's* disgraceful campaign against the HDP. Stopping there would leave the criminals still enjoying the fruits of their crime. For the smear campaign against the HDP has a very definite purpose. It is intended to *prevent any discussion* by the labour movement of the central issue raised by the activity of the HDP.

That central issue is: Do the Croatian people suffer national oppression in Yugoslavia today? Is the HDP's call for an independent Croatia worthy of support by the labour movement and other progressive forces?

The article by Dave Holmes in this issue explains why the SWP regards Croatia as an oppressed nation and supports its right to self-determination, up to and including secession from Yugoslavia.

I will not repeat or summarise that explanation here. What

should be stressed here is only the fact that *Tribune*, in all its articles on the HDP, *never* addresses the central issue of Croatian national oppression.

And that is precisely where any serious discussion has to begin. Even an *honest* discussion of the HDP — one without the slanders and distortions that *Tribune* has relied on so far — would be a futile exercise without a clear understanding of the justice or injustice of the HDP's central demand for an independent Croatia.

It should be obvious that critics of the HDP have a *particular* responsibility to speak out against the national oppression of Croatia, and to make any disagreements they may have with the HDP's strategy for overcoming oppression subordinate to solidarity with their just cause. This is true of any national liberation struggle, not just the Croatian. The Irish or Palestinian liberation movements, for example, have at various times been led (or misled) at least in part by quite conservative forces. But criticism of such forces by a paper that steadfastly refused to say anything about British or Zionist oppression would only be a cover-up for the oppressors.

National liberation movements almost inevitably include conservative, even ultraright, forces. This is so because they are *national* — that is, grouping together different classes.

This fact is not a mystery, even to Denis Freney. Thus in a talk on East Timor which he gave at Sydney University on July 6, Freney stated quite correctly: "In all national liberation movements there is a wide range of opinion. Fretilin is no exception, and even contained right-wingers." It needs only to be added that for a time the East Timorese independence movement included the conservative UDT, which later sold out to the Indonesian government. That sell-out does not invalidate the Timorese national cause. And, contrary to his attitude on Croatia, it did not lead Freney to denounce Fretilin as pro-UDT or agents of the Indonesian generals.

There is thus nothing unusual or startling in the fact that the Croatian nationalist movement includes right-wing forces. Freney can therefore make a case against it only by denying that it is a national liberation movement — that is, by denying that Croatia is nationally oppressed. But that is exactly the line that the CPA has to avoid, because it would lose that argument, and would end up confronting the bureaucratic and Serb chauvinist character of the Yugoslav government. The only way out of the dilemma, it was evidently decided, was to heap one slander of the HDP upon another.

The attacks on the HDP are particularly disgraceful because this organisation undoubtedly constitutes the left wing of the Croatian nationalist movement. But the attacks would be a gross political blunder even if the HDP's positions were to the right, rather than to the left, of the CPA's. To make this point clear, I would like to cite a historical example of a national liberation struggle in which the CPA played an honourable role.

A 'Pavelic' aided by the CPA

After Japan's surrender to the Allies in World War II, and under pressure from young radical nationalists, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta declared Indonesia independent on August 17, 1945. The Sukarno-Hatta regime headed the Indonesian state throughout the subsequent war of independence against Dutch imperialism.

Yet Sukarno and Hatta had headed the Indonesian front for

the Japanese military administration and had actively collaborated with Japanese imperialism throughout the entire period of its occupation of Indonesia.³

Moreover, this leadership had some considerable atrocities against its name. In particular, it had actively recruited unsuspecting peasants and workers as *romusha* (forced labourers) for the Japanese military. In this massive program, certainly tens of thousands, and more likely hundreds of thousands, of *romusha* were literally worked to death in the most appalling conditions.⁴ The Allies in 1945 made no secret of their intention to put Sukarno and Hatta on trial for war crimes, and would undoubtedly have done so but for the fact that the war ended before they had reconquered Indonesia.

It would be no exaggeration to call Sukarno the Indonesian Pavelic, or to call Pavelic the Croatian Sukarno. Each *betrayed* the national struggle of his people by subordinating it to the interests of a foreign imperialist power. And the war crimes committed by each necessarily followed from that betrayal.

It is a historical fact of which the CPA has so far been justly proud that it played an important role within the Australian labour movement in building solidarity with the Indonesian independence movement. CPA leaders then didn't make the mistake of assuming that the crimes of Sukarno-Hatta converted Indonesian independence fighters into pro-fascists. The Australian labour movement fortunately didn't make its solidarity conditional on the Indonesian fighters denouncing Sukarno for his war crimes.

The CPA played a progressive role in this struggle because it understood an important point that Davies-Aarons-Freney have been attempting to conceal with heaps of slander. It is the cause for which a movement fights, not the worthiness or unworthiness of its leaders (and especially not of its *past* leaders), that determines a national movement's progressive character.

Furthermore, the Sukarno-Hatta leadership proved to be an inadequate leadership for the struggle against the Dutch. Just as they had relied on Japanese imperialism during the occupation, so they repeatedly sought to compromise with Dutch imperialism on terms of less than full independence. During the independence war the Indonesian regime jailed and murdered militants who wanted an all-out struggle against the Dutch. Largely as a result of the policies of Sukarno-Hatta, Indonesia won formal independence but not real freedom from imperialism; its exploitation changed from directly colonial to neocolonial. But again, it would have been a horrible sectarian blunder for the Australian labour movement to have stunted its aid or to have held back until the Indonesian people replaced Sukarno with a more intransigent leader.

It is possible, even probable, that the question of Sukarno will arise again. For it would not be surprising if the passage of time and the crimes of the present Indonesian regime were to cast a rosy glow over the Sukarno period in the eyes of many Indonesians. It is likely that many Indonesians who will fight the generals and their imperialist backers will at the same time have illusions about the degree of real independence and social welfare achieved under Sukarno. Many will be unaware of Sukarno's war crimes, or will regard them as inventions of imperialist and government propaganda. (There are in fact already several groupings in the opposition to the generals that regard themselves as Sukarnoist, or which use the name of Sukarno to counterpose populism to the

policies of Suharto.)

Where will the CPA stand if such forces emerge in the leadership of a struggle against the Indonesian generals? Obviously, the party would have to choose: Either break with the progressive practice of the 1940s or break with the present sectarian method applied to the Croatian national movement. The method of Davies-Aarons-Freney is harmful not only because it relies on lies and slander but also because it is teaching the CPA a sectarian attitude that can undermine support for other progressive causes.

Imperialism & national liberation

The HDP is quite correct in pointing out that the Croatian *people* are not responsible for the crimes of the Pavelic regime — just as, for example, the Australian people are not responsible for the crimes their government committed in Vietnam.

But that does not at all mean that Croatian nationalists are indifferent to the question of how and why, at a certain point in history, the Croatian independence struggle found itself caught in the deadly trap of the Pavelic regime. Were the crimes of the Ustashi a consequence of their strategy for achieving national independence, or were they unrelated to that strategy, the product of some other cause?

In the Croatian community, there is a wide spectrum of response to this question, from the ultraright denial that Ustasha atrocities occurred to the Marxist answer — just as there would be a similar spectrum in Australia in reply to the question of why European settlement included a genocidal policy towards the Aborigines, or why the Australian government committed criminal aggression against the Vietnamese.

The Socialist Workers Party would argue that the Ustasha's crimes against both non-Croats and Croats flowed more or less inevitably from its false strategy of seeking national liberation through the patronage of imperialism. Pavelic chose to subordinate himself to German and Italian imperialism, but the result would not have been fundamentally different if he had chosen the camp of the "democratic" imperialists. No imperialist power has ever granted a subject people real national liberation as a reward for services rendered. The Filipino politicians who subordinated themselves to US imperialism in World War III betrayed their nation as thoroughly as Pavelic betrayed his.

The HDP is clear that the independent Croatia it seeks has nothing in common with the Croatia of Pavelic. But as an organisation it has no position on precisely *why* the Ustasha regime was what it was. And there is no reason why the HDP *should* have such a position, either as a condition of membership or as a prerequisite for co-operation with other organisations. A correct historical analysis is an obvious help in avoiding a repetition of past tragedies. But only sectarian idiots make agreement on history a precondition for united action for common goals today.

To give another example, which perhaps even Davies, Aarons, and Freney can understand: if the United States government invades Central America, the action will be opposed by many, hopefully millions, of US citizens. They will do this without agreeing on why the US government waged war against Vietnam — some of them will even believe that it was *right* to do so and without even agreeing on why it is attacking Central America.

But, it might be argued, isn't it possible that the HDP might in

the future turn away from its present anti-imperialist and pro-socialist positions if it doesn't clearly understand why the Ustasha's path to "independence" in fact led elsewhere?

And, as I have already said, it is true that an understanding of the past can help to orient us correctly in the future. This is why the SWP is interested in discussing with HDP comrades the lessons of the past — not only Croatia's past, of course. We think that the HDP, the SWP, and the labour movement generally can only benefit from such discussion *honest* discussion, that is, not mudslinging.

But the evolution of political groups is basically determined by their own material and class interests and their own experiences, not by their understanding or misunderstanding of more-or-less distant historical events. A Marxist understanding of the past can at most speed a progressive evolution or retard degeneration; it cannot convert an exploiting class into fighters for human emancipation. The fundamental cause of national oppression in Yugoslavia today is not insufficient study of history by the Yugoslav League of Communists but the material interests of the privileged, primarily Serbian, bureaucracy. And the CPA's reactionary campaign against the HDP is certainly *aided* by a large measure of ignorance, but its *cause* is the political interests CPA leaders believe that it serves.

The HDP as an organisation has existed for only two years. It consists primarily of young workers who grew up in Croatia and who reacted against their own experience of oppression, but who at the same time saw socialist economic relations as an accepted fact of life. The HDP's political roots can be traced, not to the Ustasha, but to the Croatian League of Communists and the reform movement of 1968-71. The HDP has shown the courage to stand up for its views not only against the CPA smear campaign but also against physical attack by right-wingers in the Croatian community. Far from moving in the direction of allying itself with imperialism, the HDP takes a strong anti-imperialist stand on the Middle East, Ireland, and Latin America. In practice the HDP has shown considerable skill in explaining to the Croatian community why Croatian independence cannot be achieved through reliance on imperialism.

It is characteristic of the CPA smear campaign that it tries to turn even the HDP's anti-imperialist propaganda against the HDP. Thus several *Tribune* articles have featured the following opening sentence from an HDP leaflet: "Croats in America welcomed the election of Ronald Reagan as their new President with considerable enthusiasm."

Both Davies and Freney have tried to turn this remark into an HDP endorsement of Reagan, although it is obviously nothing of the kind. It simply states a fact: Many Croats were under the illusion that Reagan was a supporter of Croatia's national rights — an illusion created by demagogic statements he had made in the past. The leaflet in question goes on to prove, from Reagan's record as president, that he is in reality an *enemy* of the Croatian cause. In other words, it explains to Croats in a popular and transitional way that the US government, whatever it might say at given points, is *not* an ally in their struggle. And then *Tribune's* muck merchants try to sell the idea that this is an example of the HDP's "right-wing" politics!

Terrorism, Fraser & Freney

Several articles in *Tribune*, as already noted, try to portray the HDP as "terrorist." The HDP does not really need to be defended against this charge, for the only "evidence" for it presented is acts of violence by *other* organisations or individuals — most of these acts in fact committed before the HDP even existed. So the charge is only one more illustration of the fact that all Croats look alike to Davies-Aarons-Freney.

But the question should be briefly considered from another standpoint — for what it shows about where the anti-HDP campaign is taking the CPA.

For Marxists, the use or non-use of terrorism is a secondary, tactical question because terrorism itself has no class content — it can be used by either side in the class struggle. The terrorism of the capitalists is reactionary not because it involves violence but because of the reactionary ends it serves. On the other hand, terror can also serve progressive causes — as when the Bolsheviks took hostages to prevent capitalists aiding the White armies and imperialist invaders during the Russian Civil War, or when strikers use force to stop scabs. The terrorist actions of the FMLN against the Salvadoran dictatorship are progressive.

It is also true that Marxists generally oppose terror by *individuals* or *small groups* even when the intention is to serve a progressive cause. They do so not on moral grounds but because small-group terror is almost inevitably counterproductive: By its very nature, it tends to exclude the masses, who are necessary to achieve any really fundamental social change; it diverts attention from the basic issues to the spectacular actions of the terrorists.

But it is only reactionaries and people fooled by their propaganda who think that a progressive cause can be discredited by pinning the label "terrorist" on it. Thus the Zionist regime calls the Palestinians "terrorists" in the hope of distracting attention from the justness of their cause; Thatcher does the same to the Irish freedom fighters for the same reason, Reagan does the same to Central American revolutionaries, and so on. Yet as part of its anti-HDP campaign, *Tribune* now prints articles which presume that the cause of Croatian national self-determination can be discredited by calling its supporters terrorists.

Predictably, open reactionaries have seized on this opportunity for their own ends. On July 12, the *Australian* carried a feature article on the controversy over Croatia, which unfortunately further publicised many of the CPA slanders against the HDP. Of special interest to this Murdoch organ was the chance thus offered to label left-wing Croats and their supporters as terrorists:

The most disturbing aspect of Croatian ties with the Left was mentioned in the report published by the Institute for the Study of Conflict in 1979 titled *Croat Separatism: Nationalism, Dissidence and Terrorism*.

The study looked at the danger of Croat terrorists making links with either the Soviets or with left-wing terrorist groups.

If this is not sufficient warning of where the anti-HDP campaign is taking the CPA, there is still worse. *Tribune* has published material attempting to *justify* the anti-democratic actions of police spies and the Fraser government.

Thus, without even a blush, Freney's June 29 article said of one Croatian organisation that "according to a Commonwealth Police report, [it] ceaselessly sought to organise the overthrow of the

Yugoslav government by force and violence”. One wonders if Freney would be similarly willing to accept the accuracy and good faith of a Commonwealth Police report on the activities of the CPA.

In the same article, as part of his poison-pen job on Nikola Stedul, Freney found that he and Malcolm Fraser could render each other mutual services:

Stedul is still an Australian citizen but says that the Australian government “has been depriving me of my freedom of moving around for a few years”. After several requests for an Australian passport, Stedul was told last year that it was “not in the interest of Australia” to do so.

It would seem that the Fraser government, which had earlier been embarrassed by the association of top Liberals with Ustasha elements, may well have had good grounds for refusing Stedul a passport.

Fraser infringes the civil liberties of a left-wing Croatian by denying him a passport. That is a fairly straightforward and unsurprising situation, one that calls for a vigorous protest by the labour movement. But “it would seem” to Freney that socialists can safely leave the decision as to what is “in the interest of Australia” in the hands of Malcolm Fraser. Freney is confident of this because “it would seem” to him that Fraser and the Liberals can be “embarrassed” into abandoning their support for right-wing causes. Therefore, if Fraser infringes civil liberties, “it would seem” to Freney that he should invent justifications for such undemocratic actions, because that “would seem” to be a necessary part of framing the HDP as pro-Ustasha. And if Freney must sink to such depths to frame the HDP, then “it would seem” that he is more than willing to do so.

Freney’s defence of police ‘justice’

Furthermore, “it would seem” that Freney is also willing to issue a blanket endorsement of any charges that US or Australian police might lay against Croatian nationalists. Using “Ustasha as a synonym for “Croatian,” he wrote in his July 13 article:

The HDP cried that the Ustasha terrorists arrested since Reagan took power are all innocent and are being subject to “witch-hunts” and “summary trials” because of their “anti-Yugoslav political views”.

The HDP is similarly upset by the jailing of Ustasha supporters in Australia under the Fraser government. Those convicted of planning terrorist acts were also, of course, innocent and the subject of a frame-up.

Freney’s heavy-handed irony is more than a little misplaced in a paper that claims to be for “socialism”, since it only conveys the idea that it is absurd to suggest that the police might engage in a frame-up. But people who lack Freney’s touching faith in the absolute propriety of the FBI or the NSW Special Branch might care to consider the possibility of frame-ups with a more open mind.

Let us briefly look at one case cited by Freney in his effort to convince readers that Croatian nationalism and terrorism are equivalents. This is the case of what he calls the “six Croatian terrorists jailed in 1981 for planning to blow up Sydney’s water supply and other terrorist acts”. (In fact, there were *seven* people convicted, not six. Freney’s reason for “forgetting” one of them will

emerge shortly.)

To start with, merely stating the charge is enough to raise doubts. It is conceivable that misguided Croatian nationalists might believe that blowing up a Yugoslav travel agency could aid their cause. But *Sydney’s water supply pipeline*? Could anyone imagine a connection between Sydney’s water supply and Croatian independence? Isn’t the charge itself sufficient cause to suspect a frame-up?

But the facts of the case raise even more doubts — to put it mildly — than the inherent absurdity of the charge. *All* of the following information is taken from a source unconnected with Croatian nationalist organisations—namely, a long article by Christopher Keats that appeared in the March 8-14, 1981, *National Times*.

The case began on February 8, 1979, when Vico Virkez walked into a Lithgow police station and announced that he was part of a conspiracy to blow up Sydney’s water supply pipeline and Yugoslav clubs and travel agencies, the explosions being set for that night. Accompanied by newspaper photographers, police raided Virkez’s house, where they arrested Maksim Bebic, who also lived there.

In Virkez’s car, police found gelignite, detonators, and blasting caps.

Virkez provided police with the names of five Croatians living in Sydney whom he said were involved in the “conspiracy”. This time without media representatives, police arrested the five, claiming that they found small amounts of explosives in the direct possession or in the house of four of them.

In direct breach of the Police Commissioner’s Instructions, the explosives thus “found” were not recorded in the CIB Exhibit Book. A detective senior constable later testified that he had placed the explosives in his locker. Nor were these explosives tested for fingerprints — an oversight police were unable to explain at the trial. The quantities of gelignite “found” on the Sydney men were much smaller than the amounts mentioned by Virkez, yet police admitted that they questioned no one about where these explosives might be.

Furthermore, the police did not conduct a search of any of the targets which Virkez had said were to be bombed that night. Two days later, however, they did conduct a search of the Elizabethan Theatre, which Virkez had said was to be bombed that day. No bomb was found.

It emerged at the trial that Virkez in 1971 had been treated at the Callan Park Psychiatric Hospital because of “voices in his head telling him to kill”. Doctors there adopted a provisional diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. It also emerged that Virkez was unknown before February 8, 1979, to Special Branch police who kept a close watch on political activities in the Croatian community.

With the exception of Virkez himself — and possibly of Bebic, who might have been presumed to be aware of Virkez’s possession of explosives — the case against the “terrorists” would have looked a bit thin. Fortunately for “justice”, however, all six named by Virkez were obliging enough to “confess” immediately. The five Sydney men went even further than merely confirming Virkez’s charges, and volunteered the information that they had also conspired to murder two prominent members of the Croatian community in Sydney! *None* of these “confessions” was signed; all six defendants denied having made them; the judge refused to allow the

“confession” of one defendant to be admitted at the trial, after medical and photographic evidence had been presented that he was bashed in CIB headquarters on the night of his arrest.

Two questions for Denis Freney: Have you ever heard the term “verbal”? If so, do you believe it refers to anything real?

On February 20, 1979, however, Bebic was questioned in the absence of his solicitor. Following this, in the presence of his solicitor, he signed a typed confession. He later repudiated this confession, and its contents were inconsistent with other evidence — for example, it stated that Virkez had held meetings with all the Sydney defendants, but Special Branch surveillance of the Sydney men going back as far as six years recorded no such meeting.

Vico Virkez pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 26 months in prison. He was released within 10 months. “Forgotten” by Denis Freney, he was not forgotten by the Australian — or Yugoslav — authorities. Not long after publication of Keats’ article, Virkez — an Australian citizen since 1972 — *voluntarily* returned to Yugoslavia!

After a 10-month trial, the jury in effect recognised the character of the “confessions” by acquitting on the charge of conspiracy to murder. Inconsistently, however, it convicted on the charges of conspiring to make and use explosive devices and of possessing explosives.

In his summing up to the jury, the judge said: “The issues in this case are black and white. Either the police conspired together ... or they are telling the truth and the accused are telling untruths, as are those who support them ...”

But the jury managed to return a verdict which said that the police conspired only on *some* of the charges. Jurors later said that a key factor in their decisions was the number of police involved: More police testified about the explosives “found” on the defendants than testified about the “murder” charge.

“It would seem” that Denis Freney would not have been so indecisive if he had been a member of the jury: He has demonstrated his ability to “convict” Croatians — any Croatians — on far more tainted evidence than the police presented.

Freney, moreover, seems blissfully unaware that his endorsing of the activities of Fraser, the Commonwealth Police, and the NSW Special Branch does more than merely disgrace *Tribune*. It is always dangerous for the labour movement to call on the capitalist state to restrict civil liberties, even when the immediate target is *really* a right-wing group or individual. Such restrictions inevitably become a precedent for use against the labour movement and progressive causes.

This danger is all the greater when the “justification” for restricting civil liberties is as broad as “terrorism”. There has never been a national liberation movement some section of which did not at least occasionally make use of terrorist methods. Has Freney forgotten that “terrorism” is the pretext used to prevent PLO representatives from visiting Australia? What would Freney do if the Australian government banned Fretilin representatives on the grounds that the East Timorese terrorise Indonesian troops by shooting them?

Why do they do it?

What is behind the CPA vendetta against the HDP? Why have *Tribune*’s writers been willing, even eager, to stoop to such depths

of slander and falsification? Why has no responsible body of the CPA taken alarm at the justification of attacks on civil liberties, or the defence of transparent police frame-ups, and called *Tribune*’s editors to order?

There are two factors involved. The most important is the CPA’s search for a place for itself on the Australian left.

For years, the Soviet Union provided the CPA with its “model” of socialism. But as the less attractive features of this “model” — beginning with the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia — were forced upon its attention, the CPA began to evolve views that amount to throwing out the baby along with the dirty bath water. As time passes, it sees less and less in the Soviet Union that it regards as worthy of support. The CPA’s present role in the peace movement, where it pushes a line of at least partial Soviet responsibility for the war danger, is only the most visible aspect of this evolution.

This process of developing a deliberate blindness to the gains that have been won and maintained by the Soviet peoples had inevitable consequences. It has necessarily been accompanied by an open turning away from Marxism and the search for substitutes, from radical feminism to pacifism to “radical” Keynesianism.

The CPA’s evolution to the right has picked up speed in recent years, and now has placed the party before a dilemma. Because immediately to the right of the CPA, the ground is already occupied by the ALP. And the relationship of forces between the two is such that the ALP is under no great pressure to move over and make room for the CPA.

As the politics of the CPA become more and more indistinguishable from those of the ALP, there is less and less justification for the former’s separate existence. There is a current in the CPA’s leadership that wants to draw the logical conclusion from this situation and liquidate the CPA into the Labor Party. Another current wants to approach that end more slowly, passing through an intermediate stage in which the CPA will maintain a separate existence under a new name. Meanwhile, a growing layer of members — John Halfpenny being the best-known example — has decided individually to take the plunge, resign from the CPA, and join the ALP.

For the still-dominant current of CPA leaders, who want to maintain a separate party, there is therefore a need to find a new socialist “model”. This “model” must be as free as possible from obvious connection with the legacy of Stalin; it must be sufficiently non-social democratic to make its followers clearly different from the bulk of the ALP; and commitment to the “model” must not require the CPA to make a major break with its increasingly conservative and class-collaborationist policies. The recent discussions between a CPA delegation and the Chinese Communist Party may indicate a desire to explore other possibilities, but the prevailing opinion in the CPA appears to be that Yugoslavia is the “model” that comes closest to meeting the three requirements.

And then along came the HDP, calling attention to the fact that the Yugoslav workers state also has its deformities, that the crimes of its leaders mark them as in no way qualitatively superior to Stalin and his followers.

Refuting these charges — or rather, covering them up, because they *can’t* be refuted — was thus quite literally a matter of life and death for the CPA. Since the HDP couldn’t be silenced or ignored, it had to be branded as “Ustasha” to stop it from being heard. No

other explanation could account for the increasing hysteria and indecency of the CPA campaign against the HDP.

The second motive is of relatively small significance compared to the first, but it will be mentioned if only for the sake of completeness.

The last 18 months or so have not been good ones for the CPA, even aside from the difficulties just described. Through *Tribune* and in the person of AMFSU leader Laurie Carmichael, the CPA played an important contributory role in bringing about Labor's social contract — or prices and incomes accord, as it is now known. This appears to have been a move to the right “too far too fast” for many in the CPA. There have been reports that the CPA leadership agreed to support the social contract only under the threat of a split by Carmichael and his backers, and *Tribune* itself has admitted that the ranks are unenthusiastic about the accord.

Since the stage at which the social contract was still in preparation, the SWP and *Direct Action* have been campaigning against it and warning of its consequences for the labour movement. This has had some impact, especially on those in the CPA already inclined to view the social contract suspiciously. *Tribune* and CPA spokespeople have had to retreat from presenting the whole accord as a step forward for the labour movement, now arguing that the movement should “fight for” the “progressive aspects” of the accord (as though signing a social contract were like being invited to a smorgasbord — where you can choose what you will swallow).

So when the SWP publicly welcomed the development of an anti-imperialist, pro-socialist wing in the Croatian nationalist movement, the CPA saw an opportunity to shore up the social contract and revenge itself on the SWP. If the HDP could be branded as Ustashi, that would make the SWP into supporters of the Ustasha, and might prejudice the labour movement — and CPA ranks in particular — against listening to their attacks on the prices-incomes accords.⁵

And even if this aim doesn't succeed, the smear may still have some other uses. It is already serving as a pretext for the CPA's increasingly sectarian role in the peace movement: Their opposition to united action can now be explained as unwillingness to associate with the “Ustasha supporters” of the SWP; for many in the CPA this must be less awkward than telling the truth, which is that the CPA doesn't want a campaign that opposes the US bases.

The smears must stop!

There is admittedly an element of speculation in the above explanation of the motives for the CPA campaign against the HDP: I have no “inside” sources of information on the CPA, but have merely provided an explanation based on the facts as they are generally known on the left.

But whatever the precise details of how and why CPA leaders decided on this campaign, there can be no doubt that the campaign itself is thoroughly dishonest and reactionary. Any objective analysis of the substance of the anti-HDP campaign leads inescapably to the conclusion that it is based on something other than ignorance scandalous as it would be to level such charges against the HDP without troubling to learn the reality.

The authors of the campaign are guilty of a deliberate and conscious smear job. Their methods are poisonous and their goal disastrous for the entire labour movement.

They can do untold harm unless they are stopped.

The smear campaign can be stopped only by the labour movement. The slanderers will find out that their lies are not believed, but only discredit themselves.

Conclusion

The question of Croatian nationalism is a new one for the labour movement in Australia. For many years, the right-wing character of many Croatian emigre organisations, the specific features that distinguish Yugoslavia from other East European countries, and the propaganda of the Yugoslav regime all combined to create a knee-jerk reaction against the very suggestion of Croatian nationalism, and indeed against the Croatian people themselves. The HDP has performed a real service for the labour movement by forcing it to begin to confront the real issues instead of relying on stereotypes.

The process of arriving at a better understanding of the realities of Yugoslavia and of the political issues raised by the HDP comrades will of course take time. Different trends in the labour movement will approach these issues from different premises and so reach different conclusions, or take different lengths of time to reach similar conclusions. This was also the case with the attitude to Solidarity in Poland, and is inevitable given the diversity of the labour movement in Australia.

The SWP's longstanding support for the nationalism of oppressed nations and for the struggle for socialist democracy in the workers states undoubtedly made it easier to abandon the old stereotypes and begin investigating the reality. In our collaboration and discussion with the HDP we have learned much about the specifics of Yugoslav socialism and about the national struggle in a postcapitalist society, and we hope to continue this learning process in the future.

On the other hand, there is nothing surprising if others on the left take somewhat longer to understand the new development represented by the HDP. Those who view any nationalism with suspicion will of course be suspicious of Croatian nationalism. Those who idealise Yugoslavia will disagree with its critics. Those who consider the Soviet Union expansionist will fear that the HDP is playing into Soviet hands. And those not familiar with the activity of the HDP, or familiar with it only at second or third hand, will naturally find it difficult to appreciate that activity.

For these reasons, there is need for a real discussion in the labour movement, covering both the facts and the political issues: Is Croatia nationally oppressed? If so, how can that oppression be overcome? Does the fight against national oppression weaken or strengthen socialism in the Balkans?

No one expects the labour movement to accept the views of the HDP on faith. But neither should the positions of the Yugoslav regime and its defenders be accepted uncritically. The conflicting views can be tested only in the course of an open and free debate.

That is why smear and slander must be rejected. Their aim is to prevent one side being heard. ■

Notes

1. The July 13 article itself contains an example of this sort of sleight of hand. It begins with an editorial note describing Freney's previous frame-up effort in these terms: "in *Tribune* (June 29) Denis Freney showed the terrorist links of the Croatian Movement for Statehood"! In fairness, it should be acknowledged that *Tribune* did not invent this method of using one lie to "prove" another: In the Moscow trials of the 1930s, Stalin often used the "confessions" extracted from his victims as "proof" that later victims whom they implicated were really guilty.

2. Probably the only thing more abysmal than the CPA campaign against the HDP is the effort of a small sect, the Socialist Labour League, to convince the world that left groups which disagree with its bizarre views are controlled by police agents. But it is probable that the CPA's slanders of the HDP will do the left more harm than the antics of the SLL: first because of the SLL's insignificant influence; and secondly because the SLL's absurd charges have simply made it a laughing stock. In a pamphlet he published last year, Denis Freney aptly characterised the SLL as "Moonies of the left". Now, however, it appears that the SLL have the last laugh against Freney. Not only have the SLL predictably seized on Freney's slanders to buttress their claim that the SWP is "run" by the CIA and KGB, but Freney has also approved their methods with the sincerest form of flattery: imitation.

3. A typical speech, this from a radio broadcast on August 31, 1944: "We know that Dai Nippon [Japan] will win, but we side with Dai Nippon not because it is winning. We struggle with Dai Nippon because right and justice are on the side of Dai Nippon: because the war aims of Dai Nippon are right and just: to sweep Asia clean from foreign imperialism and to return Asian countries to Asians."

4. After the war, the Japanese put the number of Indonesians who had served as *romusha* at more than 4 million. The number who died will probably never be known even approximately, since records were kept poorly, if at all, and many of these were subsequently lost during the war against the Dutch. It is known, for example, that of 300,000 Javanese *romusha* sent to the Outer Islands, only about 70,000 ever returned home. But there is no way now to discover how many of the missing 230,000 died during their forced

labour, how many were killed in the war of independence, and how many settled — either by choice or force of circumstance — in the area to which they had been sent.

However, there is no disagreement over the fact that the *romusha* death rate was staggering. The Indonesian revolutionary Tan Malaka spent most of the war years at the *romusha*-worked coal mine at Bayah in south-west Java. In his autobiography he wrote: "Each month some 400 to 500 of the 15,000 or so *romusha* in Bayah would die, and this did not take into account those who died on the road or back home as a result of their stint at Bayah." (*From Jail to Jail*, translated by Helen Jarvis [manuscript], Volume 11, Chapter 6) Even this may underestimate the toll: Former *romusha* interviewed by Jarvis reported that the local hospital recorded 42,000 *romusha* deaths during the mine's three years of operation, and that a more accurate figure would have been 60,000. In the course of attempting to justify his role, Sukarno himself acknowledged some of the horrors of the *romusha* program: "In fact it was I — Sukarno—who sent them to work. Yes, it was I. I shipped them to their deaths. Yes, yes, yes, yes, I am the one. I made statements supporting the recruitment of *romushas*. I had pictures taken near Bogor with a tropical helmet on my head and a shovel in my hand showing how easy and glorious it was to be a *romusha*. With reporters, photographers, the Gunseikan [Japanese] Commander-in-Chief—and Civil Authorities I made trips to Banten, the western tip of Java, to inspect the pitiable skeletons slaving on the home front down deep in the coal and gold mines. It was horrible ... To me, giving the Japanese what they want in return for more concessions that I need is the positive way to freedom ... Forced labour for Freedom. That was the bargain." (*Sukarno: an autobiography as told to Cindy Adams* [Hong Kong: Gunung Agung, 1966], pp. 192-4)

5. It is one of those ironies in which politics abound that Denis Freney should be a leader of the CPA smear campaign. Freney joined the CPA for the second time as a "Trotskyist", arguing that the CPA had broken with Stalinism and become a revolutionary party. Today Freney tries to revive the Stalinist slander of the '30s — "Trotskyites are agents of the Gestapo" — in the form: SWPers are agents of the Ustasha.

Interview with Dinko Dedic

‘Our liberation is not some limited, exclusively Croatian, question’

[Dinko Iedic is the editor of *Hrvatski Tjednik* (Croatian Weekly), the newspaper of the Croatian Movement for Statehood (HDP). He was interviewed in Melbourne concerning some of the accusations raised by Denis Freney in the latter’s articles in the June 29 and July 13 issues of *Tribune*.]

Question: The *Tribune* article (June 29) mentions a Professor Mirko Vidovic and says that both the HDP and the Croatian National Council (HNV) claim him as a member. Could you comment on that?

Answer: Most of the *Tribune* article comes from arguments that Mark Aarons used in the interview with me on ABC radio. And although *Tribune* had access to the whole interview, they chose to make a completely false statement. Because in the interview I said that Mirko Vidovic is the president of the Croatian National Council and the person in the centre of the dispute which resulted in a section of Croats leaving the HNV and out of which the HDP was later formed.

In an article in *Croatian Weekly* I explained that Vidovic was a person from whom we would not even buy a second-hand car.

I think that in very simple terms the difference between the HDP and Mirko Vidovic is that he could be described as a typical Americanophile, in love with the West, and without any belief that the Croatian people could ever fight for their liberation without superpower help.

That is in complete contrast with our view. We believe in the Croatian people, we believe that the people are the biggest force there is, and that the people will decide the fate of their lives and their country.

Vidovic is closely linked to the US, and he is also linked to the Belgrade supporters of the so-called “Third Yugoslavia”, such as Milovan Djilas, Mihailo Mihailov, and their generation. We do not regard them only as the opposition — we regard them as enemies.

So you say that the HDP does not claim Vidovic as a member. Do you believe that *Tribune*’s editors know that?

I am sure they know that, because I explained it in detail in the interview I gave to Mark Aarons, though he chose not to include that bit in the ABC program.

This was obviously another attempt to link us with reactionary forces, because Vidovic is in Australia at this moment, and he will probably make statements that conflict with what the HDP thinks.

In general what do you think of the way in which *Tribune* has dealt with the HDP?

The article in *Tribune* was just an extension of what the ABC program was all about.

The whole of the article seems to be a desperate attempt to discredit our organisation by one single point.

That is the attempt to link up a two-year-old organisation with a time in history that is now long past. It is an attempt to link the HDP with crimes that occurred during that time.

In my interview with Mark Aarons I said that to the HDP a crime is a crime, wherever it happened — whether it happened in Tasmania, where there was genocide against the Aborigines, or in Auschwitz, or Jasenovac, or any other concentration camp.

But Mark Aarons talked about hundreds of thousands of civilians killed in Croatia during the Second World War. We are in possession of an official document, a final analysis of the original research on wartime crimes committed on Croatian territory. The analysis was done by the Institute for Research on the Labour Movement in Croatia, under the leadership of Dr Franjo Tudjman, who at that time was a Yugoslav general. He had the help of the then general of the army, General Rukavina, and of General Kajic. They found that in the whole of Croatia, in all the concentration camps, 59,600 non-military personnel died. I stated this in the interview with Mark Aarons, but he misused my statement and quoted me as saying these were *my* estimates. They are not my estimates, but documented, official Yugoslav estimates.

I am not trying to justify or minimise those murders. but to point out that this talk about war crimes is not directed towards finding the truth. It is directed at condemning all Croats by using exaggerated figures. That is the only reason I spoke about it.

I’d like to ask you about some of the people mentioned in Freney’s (June 29) article in an attempt to link the HDP with what he called “Ustasha terrorism”. One is Zlatko Markus. What do you know about him?

Zlatko Markus was mentioned simply to use one of his accusations against Nikola Stedul and Mladen Schwarz — that they wrote the article *With Death Until Life*, which was published about two years ago in the paper *OTPOR*. That point also derives from the interview with Mark Aarons, from one of the questions that I answered thoroughly but which he left out of the program. So I’ll repeat my answer:

Nikola Stedul and Mladen Schwarz could not have written the article. First, they themselves deny it. Second, the language of the article suggests that it might have been written by a grade-four primary school student, not by accomplished writers like Stedul and Schwarz. Third, all their lives, their way of thinking, their political stance. has been completely contrary to what the article talks about.

What is Stedul’s history?

In the ABC program Mark Aarons could not avoid mentioning that Stedul was involved in the formation of the Croatian Socialist Party in Germany. In the *Tribune* article that was left out.

The fact that Stedul was a member of HOP, the Croatian

Liberation Movement, is easily explained.

At the time when Nikola Stedul came to Australia the HOP was the only Croatian group here.

Just about everyone who was against Yugoslavia had their first political involvement through the HOP. Most of these people later left that organisation.

Stedul also explained why he later joined the Croatian National Resistance (HNO). The HNO was first formed around the idea of so-called national reconciliation.

You have to understand that the war era for us was a civil war. So the idea of the HNO was — forget the past, forget the differences, let's talk in a modern language of a modern Croatia, free of foreign domination and occupation.

Miro Baresic is mentioned in Freney's article as an HDP member who is in jail in Sweden for murdering the Yugoslav ambassador there in 1971.

Miro Baresic was only 20 years old when he carried out the assassination. He had only been outside of Croatia for a short time, and cannot be linked with the Ustasha or any reactionary force. He is the son of a Partisan.

The ambassador, Vladimir Rolovic, was a secret police official responsible for directing the assassination of many Croatian nationalists throughout Europe.

Baresic's act in assassinating Rolovic was welcomed by the majority of Croats inside and outside of Yugoslavia. Rolovic has to be described as a monstrous criminal who enjoyed the torture,

who enjoyed the Yugoslav prison camps.

Stara Gradiska was not only a concentration camp in Croatia between 1941 and 45, but continued to be a concentration camp after that.

Today in Stara Gradiska there are many Croatians. Some of them are socialists, such as Dr Marko Veselica who was a union leader, and Dr Franjo Tudjman who was a Partisan general.

These are just a few of the more obvious facts that Denis Freney gets wrong or distorts.

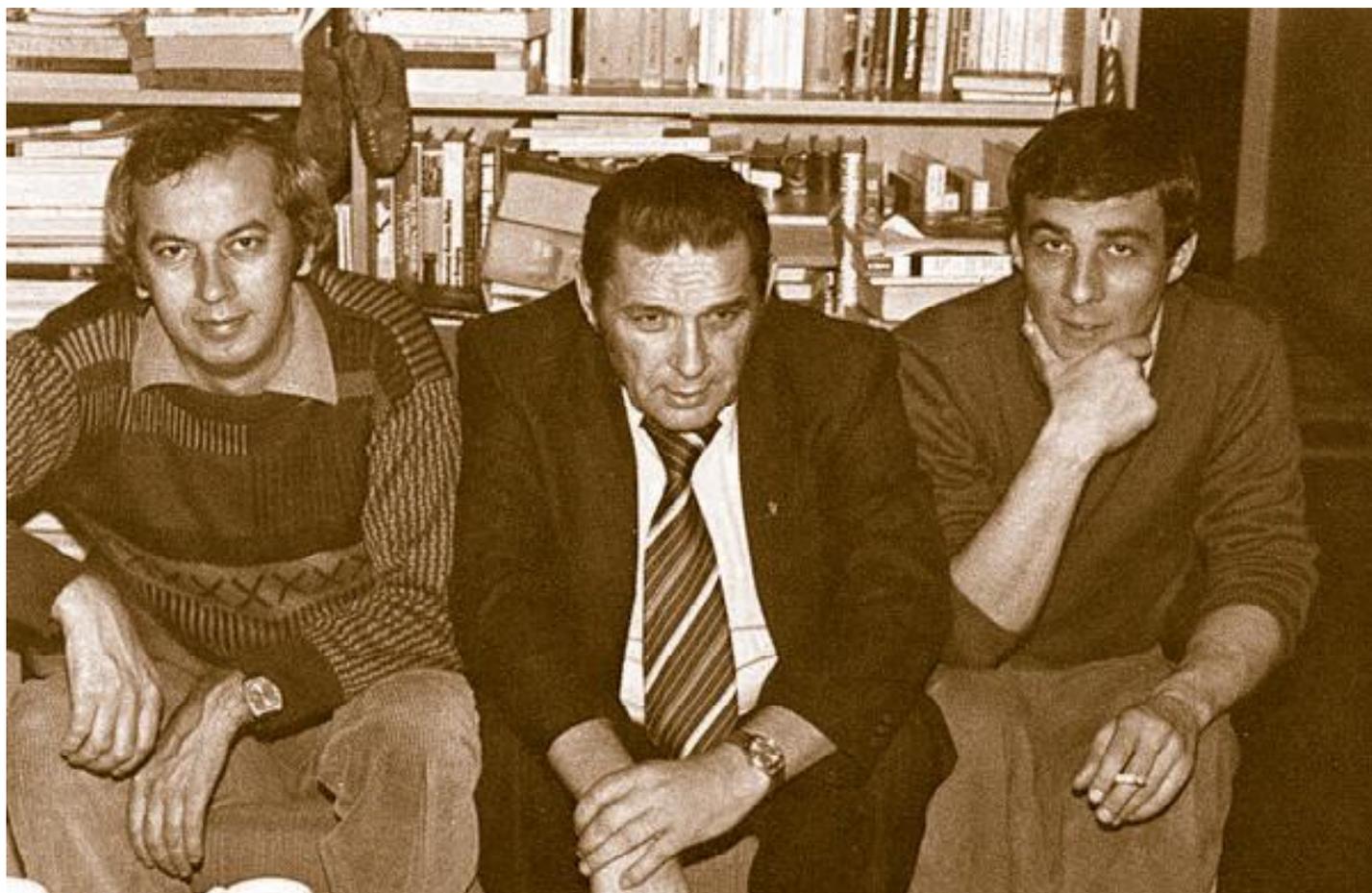
Something which is not well known in Australia is the extent of what has been called "Belgrade's murder machine" or the repression carried out inside Yugoslavia.

After the war, Yugoslavia continued to use most of the prison camps, except Jasenovac, and it opened some new ones, such as the island of Goli Otok in the Adriatic. That is where alleged Cominform supporters were held after Tito's break with Stalin. There were about 50,000 victims in that period.

Tito's methods were naturally adopted by the whole Yugoslav bureaucratic structure, so that even the policeman in the street wasn't reluctant to use his gun in any situation.

It is very difficult to get facts and figures on the number of political prisoners in Yugoslavia at any particular time, but there are sources, including within Yugoslavia, that claim it has more political prisoners per head of population than there were in the Soviet Union or in Chile.

Mainly we get information on the more prominent people



Bruno Busic, Frabjo Mikulic and Zlatko Markus. Busic was assassinated by the Yugoslav secret police in 1979; Mikulic died recently in a West German prison.

jailed and tortured, people like Bruno Busic, a man who helped to inspire the founding of the HDP. He was arrested for publishing articles in legal newspapers inside Yugoslavia. In his speech to the court when he was sentenced, Busic said that during his interrogation he had told the police that even Stalin never arrested and sentenced journalists for publishing articles in the legal newspapers. The policeman's answer was: "Well, something like that has to happen for the first time somewhere."

There are many cases of people simply being kidnapped and held in government buildings outside the populated areas for long periods of time, with nobody knowing where they are or what has happened to them. There is the case of a young Croatian of Jewish origin, Ernest Braider, who was arrested two years ago and thrown out of a window of the police headquarters in Zagreb and killed.

It is known that after the 1971 crackdown on the Croatian Spring, 30,000 Croats were interrogated, and many of them were sentenced. Also badly persecuted were the Muslims in Bosnia. This is an attempt to set off the Croatian population of Muslim origin and make some new entity of them. Arab leaders, including Libyan President Kaddafi, have many times spoken very bitterly of the Yugoslav government's treatment of Muslims.

The interrogations, prosecutions, heavy sentences, and killings did not stop with Tito's death. One of the worst crimes was carried out after Tito's death in Kosovo, where more than 2000 people were killed within two years, and 30,000 to 40,000 people were arrested and sentenced, some of them to more than 10 years.

What are the origins of the HDP?

The HDP was formed two years ago. The person who initiated the HDP, Bruno Busic, did not live to see the HDP in existence — he was executed, because he had very radical and progressive ideas, ideas that would be accepted inside Croatia.

Busic's ideas arose from the Croatian Spring of 1968-71, of which he was one of the central leaders.

There were other people crucial in the formation of the HDP. Franjo Mikulic, who died in a German jail recently, first discussed with Nikola Stedul the need to form another organisation because the Croatian National Council had become simply a Western puppet.

There were a number of people connected to the Croatian Spring movement who participated in the formation of the HDP.

Can you tell us a little about the Croatian Spring?

In part it was based on the nationalist teachings of Stepan Radic. But the best way to describe the Croatian Spring is to say that it was a movement under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia. There were also other forces such as the student movement, which was the most radical.

The Croatian Spring was supported by the masses of Croats. If ever after the war there was a plebiscite, a possibility for the people to express their wishes, it was the Croatian Spring.

At the time there was some liberalisation by the Yugoslav government, but then the movement was crushed in late 1971. But the desire of the Croatian people to have their own government, to have their own state, remains: it lives today inside Croatia. The HDP is the continuation of the decision made by the Croatian people at that time.

What do you think is the reason for the campaign against the HDP in Australia?

It seems as though we are being attacked for bringing progressive ideas to the Croatian migrants as though somebody is saying that these people should not be allowed to become radical, should not be allowed to progress.

We know that Yugoslavia is involved, that the HOP is going to be tackled very heavily by forces that are friendly to Yugoslavia. It is a historical fact that from the Second World War until today, Yugoslavia has always jumped on any radical or leftist development among Croats. The president of the Croatian Socialist Party, formed in West Germany, was extradited to Yugoslavia and placed in a mental institution. In the 1970s Dr Bronko Jelic established links with the Soviet Union: immediately afterward, although he had been in good health, he died of a sudden and mysterious illness.

After the first contacts we had with the SWP, a Croatian who visited the Yugoslav consulate in Melbourne warned us that he was told that if the HDP continues its leftward course we will be crushed by all the resources that Yugoslavia has. There was even a threat that an HDP leader, Ante Suto, and I would be assassinated.

What kind of social relations would the HDP like to see in an independent Croatia?

Like other liberation movements, the HD's major commitment is to national liberation. But the HDP allowed for the ideological basis of the future state of Croatia to grow inside the HDP. Today you can see the developing forces leaning towards socialism or openly advocating socialism.

For Croatia it would be impractical, really impossible, to bring about the restoration of capitalism. That would mean bringing back all the exiled old owners of the factories and giving them back the factories. The HDP is striving to create a much better political system, to take a step forward from the present status in Yugoslavia not to take a step backward.

The HDP is not an elite organisation. It was created to serve the needs of the majority of the population of Croatia: it intends to become a popular movement inside Croatia. And the majority of Croats are proletarians and peasants.

The future state of Croatia that we want to establish will be based on the principles of social justice, people's government, equality. There is a strong socialist tradition among Croats in the Balkans, socialist ideas were strongest in Croatia. The development of these historical tendencies also suggests the character of the future state of Croatia.

The national question is also a class question, a social question. We have a situation in which there is exploitation of man by man, exploitation of one nation by another. We want to abolish all such evils in the future state of Croatia.

Could you comment on *Tribune's* claim that the left wing positions of the HDP are a "trick" decided on last year in order to influence the ALP?

The claim that the HDP's views are cosmetic is ridiculous, because then our constitution, which was drafted the day the HDP was formed, would also have to be "cosmetic". The constitution states that it is our duty to establish cooperation with liberation

movements around the world. On that basis, we contacted representatives of some of the liberation movements, such as the Irish liberation movement, CISCAC in Australia, and the Palestinian movement.

How could an organisation form itself on the basis of something it doesn't believe in? How could such an organisation serve the right wing, serve supposed goals that are not helped by the organisation's actions?

If you look at what the HDP does, you will see that it is associated only with progressive and radical movements.

How can you serve reactionaries by working for progress?

The HDP believes strongly that our liberator is not some limited, exclusively Croatian, question. There are many similar cases. If we were an isolated case, then we wouldn't have a great cause or a great chance of success. But we believe that our liberation movement is a great cause because it fits into a pattern of international politics and the relations in the world today. Croatia

is in a very similar situation to that of the Palestinians, the Irish, and the Central American nations. We support these movements; we believe that these movements are justifying what we are trying to achieve.

The Nicaraguan revolution coincided with the idea of forming the HDP about four years ago. The *Croatian Weekly* was the first Croatian paper carrying articles sympathetic to the revolution and the Sandinistas. This met some resistance among the Croatian people, because it was the first case where we supported a cause that was also supported by Yugoslavia. But this was a just cause, and we do not make our principles on the basis of what Yugoslavia supports, we base our principles on justice. The Sandinista revolution was a just cause, regardless of whether it was understood among sections of the emigration.

That was four years ago, before the HDP itself was established. From there we went on supporting and learning and getting involved in similar revolutions. ■



A Reply to the Australian & Tribune

The Truth About the Croatian National Struggle

By Dave Holmes & Doug Lorimer

Rupert Murdoch's *Australian* carried a major attack in its July 12 issue on the Croatian Move-ment for Statehood (HDP) and the Socialist Workers Party.

Headed "How the ultra-Right may have finally suckered the ultra-Left", the article by journalist David Hirst smeared the HDP as a terrorist, pro-Ustasha organisation and claimed that the SWP had been taken in by a con trick operation by the HDP.

The *Australian's* attack marks a new stage in the smear campaign that has been carried out for some time by the Communist Party of Australia and some other left groups against both the HDP and the SWP.

Strange coalition

The anti-HDP coalition has brought together some strange bedfellows. They include:

- Denis Freney, a journalist for *Tribune* and a member of the National Committee of the increasingly right-wing CPA.
- David Hirst, the author of the *Australian* article, who seems to stand somewhere near the Labour "left". While attempting to project an air of amused detachment, Hirst sides with Freney's claim that the HDP is a fascist front.
- Mark Aarons, son of former CPA general secretary Laurie Aarons. An ABC radio-journalist, his June 19 program attempted without success to establish that the HDP and the right-wing Ustasha are virtually one and the same.
- The Spartacist League, a bizarre sect which declares the Polish Solidarity movement to be a CIA front and in the last election called for "No vote to Labor".

It denounces the HDP as "sinister Croatian nationalists".

- The odd-ball Socialist Labour League which six weeks ago wrote of Denis Freney: "... we know which side you are on — the side of counter-revolutionary Stalinism. The blood of the Indonesian masses is on your hands."

That was in an article which denounced East Timorese leader Jose Ramos Horta as a fascist and attacked Freney for supporting East Timor's independence.

Now the SLL offers an alliance to Freney — in their view a fascist supporter — against the HDP and the SWP.

Behind attacks

What are the motivations for the *Australian's* attack on the HDP and the SWP?

In its gutter attack, the *Australian* is undoubtedly reflecting ruling-class concern at the progressive direction of motion of politics in sections of the Croatian community in this country.

An effective left-wing nationalist organisation is winning a wider and wider audience for its ideas in the Croatian community. This goes against the interests of the ruling class on two counts. Firstly,

it much preferred the days when Croat support for the Liberal Party was a sure thing. Secondly, the bourgeoisie supports Yugoslavia as a part of its anti-Soviet campaign and hence is hostile to an anti-Belgrade separatist organisation.

But why is the left engaging in this campaign of slander and crude amalgams? For *Tribune*, the Spartacist League, the Socialist Labour League, and the ALP "lefts", the HDP question provides them with an opportunity to attack the Socialist Workers Party.

They are worried by the gains made by the SWP in the past year or so, in size and political influence, and a drive against a "Ustasha front" supported by the SWP seems a convenient opportunity to get at the SWP. After all, the cry of "fascism" and "Ustasha" is well-calculated to stir people up and inhibit rational consideration of the real issues.

Campaign

Well, slander can only succeed if it is not countered. The SWP and the HDP are going on a campaign to get out the truth and expose these slanders for what they are.

For its part the SWP has produced this broadsheet. Despite the cost and effort involved we think that it is important to refute the attacks that have been made against us.

While the Croatian national struggle is an important issue, it is not the central issue facing workers in Australia right now. But the SWP did not give this issue the prominence it now has in certain quarters.

But there is a positive side to this matter. This discussion will, we hope, do much to combat the stereotyped view of the Croatian national struggle which is quite prevalent on the left in this country. The present discussion is part of a real spring cleaning of the Australian left on this question and will help correct a real injustice which has been done to the Croatian community here. ■

What Is the Croatian Movement for Statehood?

The HDP — the Croatian Movement for Statehood — was founded on an international level in June 1981. Its aim is to fight for an independent Croatian state.

Within Yugoslavia, Croatia suffers national oppression at the hands of the Serbian-dominated Belgrade bureaucracy. As the October, 1981 introductory declaration of the HDP explains, the establishment of an independent Croatia “is the only solution to Croatia’s present day economic, political and cultural ruin”.

The HDP feels that all avenues for fundamental reform of the existing Yugoslav federation have been exhausted. The crushing of the 1968-71 reform movement by the regime shows that change within the system is impossible. The HDP argues that only a break from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia and the creation of a completely independent state will provide a framework for the full development of the Croatian nation.

The HDP’s struggle is not directed at the Serbian people but at the Belgrade clique whose policies not only oppress the Croats but sap “the vital energies of the Serbian people, and thereby hinders their political, economic and cultural development”.

The Yugoslav regime claims to be defending socialism. It tries to portray those who fight against national oppression as fascists, counter-revolutionaries, etc.

But, as the HDP points out, in an interview granted to *Direct Action* (see the October 5 and October 20 issues last year), “Hiding behind Socialist slogans, Yugoslavia is defaming Socialist ideals in the worst possible way.”

The Croatian national struggle “has nothing in common with Extremism-Fascism or Nazism of any kind ... and ... Yugoslav ‘Socialism’ has nothing to do with progressive Socialist ideology — at least not in practice ... Their ‘Socialism’ consists of selling one third of the Croatian nation to the West — as slave labour.”

The smear tactics of the Yugoslav regime against the Croatian national movement have been aided and abetted by the Western governments “because the West regards Yugoslavia’s existence as an important factor in its campaign against the Eastern bloc”.

Belgrade’s slander campaign against Croat nationalists has been made easier because for many Croats “socialism” is only the mask for the reactionary policies of the Yugoslav regime.

Smear campaign

The smear campaign of the Belgrade regime is retailed in this country, above all by the Communist Party of Australia newspaper *Tribune*. In *Tribune*’s view, it seems, the Croatian nationalist movement as a whole is forever damned by the wartime Ustasha experience and the long domination of the Croatian community abroad by rightist elements.

The grip of rightwingers, supporters of the wartime Pavelic regime, and so on was helped by the fact that many of the large number of Croats who left Yugoslavia at the end of the war were afraid of communism, many because they had given support to the Pavelic state.

The most progressive elements in the Croat nation remained in Yugoslavia, generally as activists in the Communist Party, and attempted to build the new state as the solution to national and social injustice.

As economic problems mounted in Yugoslavia, further waves of Croats were forced into emigration in the 1950s and 1960s. These economic refugees naturally tended to fall under the sway of the traditional rightist leaderships in their new countries.

Later, as hopes of national justice in the Yugoslav federation grew dimmer, especially after the crushing of the Croatian Spring reform movement (see accompanying article), many younger, progressive elements went into emigration. It is these elements who today play a key role in the leadership of the HDP.

Many of the present leaders of the HDP first belonged to conservative, rightist groups in the Croat community abroad. One such group was the Croatian National Council, the HNV. Many of the former Croatian Spring activists joined it. There really wasn’t much else offering. Later, it was clear that the HNV offered no solution and the HDP was formed in a split from it.

Manoeuvre?

Tribune claims that this split is not a move to the left but a con trick by Ustasha elements.

But the truth is that the real Ustasha and rightist elements don’t see the HDP in this light. They see the HDP as a real threat. The HDP’s growing influence in the Croatian community here has been established only through a fight against the traditional rightwing forces. This has involved physical attacks on HDP members on many occasions.

The current tour of Australia by HNV leader Mirko Vidovic is also an attack on the HDP. Contrary to *Tribune*’s claims, Vidovic, the head of the HNV, is not a member of the HDP but an opponent. He is pro-West and essentially pro-Yugoslavia. His tour is an attempt to counter the HDP’s growing influence.

Many HDP leaders come from Partisan families. Many were involved in the Croatian Spring reform movement. They look, at least in part, to communist and socialist traditions.

The positions taken by the HDP clearly show their left orientation. They are clearly on many issues far more left-wing than the positions taken by Solidarity in Poland — or by the CPA, we might add.

The HDP has come out clearly and strongly in support of the Irish and Palestinian freedom struggles; it supported Argentina against British imperialism in the war over the Malvinas, it supports the revolutionary processes in Nicaragua and El Salvador and Grenada. Many HDP leaders look to revolutionary Cuba. The HDP has come out for Labour in recent elections.

The CPA’s manoeuvre theory seems bizarre, both in the light of the facts and from more general considerations. What would a rightist organisation *gain* from undertaking such a manoeuvre? What is the effect of publishing all this progressive material in

Croatian Weekly (a paper edited by HDP leader Dinko Dedic). Is it in line with the aims of the right wing to educate Croatian readers of the truth about imperialist oppression around the world?

If the HDP's left line is a manoeuvre, what happens when the manoeuvre is stopped? Will all those Croatians who have had their consciousness raised on the progressive national struggles around the world just follow the rightist leaders back to traditional rightist politics? This is simply absurd. It would be simpler to take what is written in *Croatian Weekly* and what is said by the HDP leaders as good coin.

The other problem with the CPA's conspiracy theory about the HDP is that it completely misses the whole process that is going on right now in the Croatian community. This process is a profound shift in thinking whereby traditional conservative ideas are being replaced by new and progressive ones.

The HDP comrades have courageously taken the lead in this process and have set out to win support for a left orientation. *Tribune*, with its obsession about the Ustasha (whether held due to obtuseness or loyalty to Belgrade) just doesn't see any of this.

Ustasha experience

The HDP, like any serious organisation, is not building an ineffectual sect, but aims to become the recognised majority leadership of the Croatian national movement.

It is forced to confront the wartime experience of the regime of Pavelic and the Ustasha. This was a civil war which split the Croatian people. The HDP works in a community where many people come from the Ustasha tradition, or have been influenced by it, or have illusions in it.

Hence the HDP, correctly, discusses and debates the Ustasha tradition or aspects of it. This is essential to mobilise support for the HDP program.

This may mean interviews with former Ustasha leaders who for many in the Croatian community represent a militant nationalist tradition and who may be changing politically. This is certainly going to be the case in the framework of a paper like *Croatian Weekly*, which is the largest circulation Croatian-language paper in the country and which reflects to some extent the spectrum of the

nationalist aspirations of the Croat people.

This does *not* mean that the HDP supports all the ideas in *Croatian Weekly* or that it supports the Pavelic regime or what it did during the war. In fact, the HDP has made it crystal clear, for those who are capable of understanding, that it does *not* support Pavelic's crimes but condemns them.

What is the influence of war criminals in the HDP? Zero.

However, it is claimed by *Tribune*, among others, that because the HDP leaders in many cases once belonged to certain organisations which were founded by war criminals, this "proves" that the HDP is a fascist, Ustasha organisation.

But such "logic" means that the Croatian national movement abroad could never be progressive until a new generation of leaders emerged, with no links to the past, with no roots in history. Such a view is naive and such a phenomenon has no precedent in history.

It would be like expecting a new development of Marxism to emerge completely untainted by any connection with the monstrous crimes of Stalinism in the 1930s, which in purges and labour camps killed not only the revolutionary leaders but millions of Soviet workers and peasants. It is easy today to trace the links between the CPA and the CPSU in this period but it would be absurd to charge Denis Freney with complicity in these crimes because today he belongs to the CPA.

But lest one might argue that things which are allowable on the left in terms of antecedents are not permitted the HDP, let us point out that with the HDP we are involved with *a national struggle* which will involve alliances and overlaps with bourgeois elements, rightist elements, and so.

To illustrate this for people who cannot think about the Croatian question objectively due to long-held myths and the propaganda pumped out by Belgrade, let us consider an analogy which we hope will make people realise that the Croatian question should be treated on the same plane.

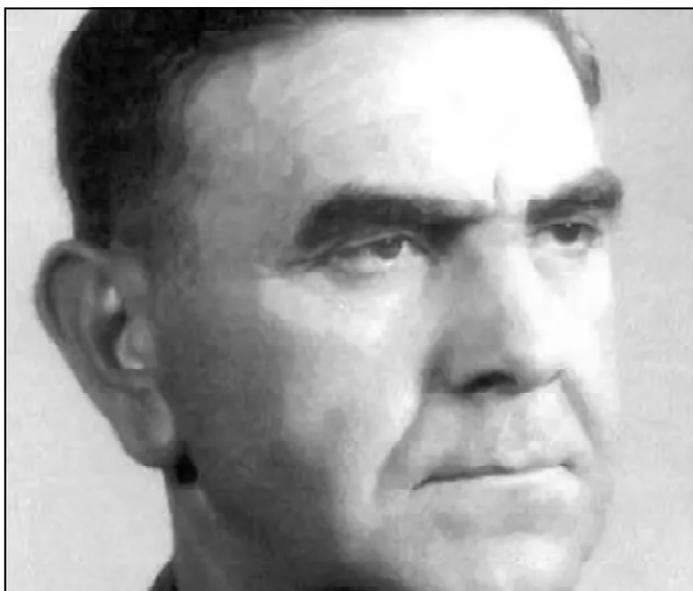
Indonesian example

Unfortunately, the history of the Indonesian national struggle during the war is not well known in spite of Indonesia's proximity to this country. And because there has been no consistent attack on the leaders of the wartime nationalist movement in spite of the fact that their crimes are on the same level as Pavelic's, the CPA and *Tribune* apply a different standard to the Croatian struggle than the one they applied to the Indonesian independence movement against the Dutch after World War II.

That movement was led by the nationalist leaders Sukarno and Hatta. These leaders were conservative, rightist figures. During the war they collaborated with the Japanese occupiers. Specifically, they helped mobilise a huge slave labour force for the authorities. Working in appalling conditions, tens of thousands of these slave labourers died. The Allies intended to try Sukarno and Hatta as war criminals.

But in the event these figures stood at the head of the postwar independence movement. They did not lead it to a complete break with imperialism by establishing a workers and peasants government, but political independence from Holland was won.

Did the CPA at that time say: We can't support this struggle because it is led by war criminals with the blood of their own people on their hands? No. It supported a living struggle whose cause was



Ustasha leader Ante Pavelic.

undeniably just, whatever the crimes of some of the leaders. Sukarno and Hatta will be judged by history for their crimes but it is they who will be judged, not a whole historical national movement.

Progressive vanguard

Why not apply this correct stand to the Croatian national struggle? And with far more cause, since today that struggle is not led by followers of Ante Pavelic but by progressive, socialist-minded elements,

It is certainly true that the views of the HDP leaders are still evolving. They are still discussing and thinking about the way forward. But they understand that there is no turning the clock back — capitalism in Croatia is finished. It is clear that in the future Croatian state envisaged by the HDP leaders, the system of public

ownership of the means of production will remain and the factories will be run by the workers.

Even the shameful attack on the HDP in the July 13 issue of *Tribune* provides testimony to the progressive orientation of the HDP in this regard. The photograph illustrating the article shows HDP supporters marching in this year's Sydney May Day carrying a banner reading "Struggle for an independent Croatia is the struggle for the rights of Croatian workers."

Exactly! The struggle for Croatian national rights is part of the working-class struggle for socialism. As such it should be supported by all socialists and progressive forces.

And the HDP should be welcomed in the labour movement as a progressive vanguard of the Croatian national movement. ■

The Ustasha & the Pavelic Regime

Following the assassination of Stepan Radic and the establishment of a Serbian-based military dictatorship, in 1929 the Croat leader Ante Pavelic fled abroad and created the Ustasha organisation. The name means "arise" and refers to traditional Croat rebels.

On April 10, 1941 the so-called Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was proclaimed. A government was set up under Ante Pavelic, resting on the Ustasha.

Appearing to many Croats as the realisation of national goals so long fought for, the NDH at first enjoyed considerable support.

But, established in the midst of the German invasion, the NDH from the outset was completely subordinated to German and Italian imperialism. Extensive territorial concessions were made to the Italians and German forces occupied the main towns.

Furthermore, Pavelic's regime carried out extensive repression and atrocities against its enemies — the Serbs, Jews, and supporters of the Partisans.

Scientific analysis

In order to avoid falling into stereotyped anti-Croat positions, it is important to have a scientific analysis of Pavelic and the Ustasha.

The first point to make is that the Ustasha was *not* a fascist movement, not, that is, in the Marxist meaning of the term.

Fascism is a term which is somewhat loosely used by many people. It is often applied to any regime whose methods of repression resemble the police-state techniques of Hitler. Thus, for instance, the term "fascist" is applied to Pinochet in Chile, to the El Salvadoran dictatorship, to Ronald Reagan whose government backs up so many brutal regimes, and so on.

But rather than use the term in this all-embracing sense, it is far more useful to give fascism the precise Marxist meaning which it carried in Leon Trotsky's masterly writings on the subject in the 1930s.

Trotsky explained that fascism is an agency of the big imperialist financial and industrial groups which aims to mobilise the masses of the petty bourgeoisie and lumpen-proletariat to smash the working-class organisations in order to preserve capitalism. That is exactly what Mussolini sought to do in Italy and Hitler in Germany.

The Ustasha movement, on the other hand, began in a

backward country, Yugoslavia — a country *dominated* by imperialism. It arose *in opposition* to the national oppression imposed on the Croatian people by the imperialist-backed Serbian regime in Belgrade.

It certainly didn't have the aim of smashing a powerful labour movement in the interests of Croatian imperialist capital! There wasn't any such thing.

A more accurate definition would be that the Ustasha was a rightist, nationalist-terrorist organisation which aimed at establishing a separate Croatian state.

It is often implied that the widespread repressions of the Pavelic regime show its fascist nature. This is dead wrong. In the period of capitalist decline all capitalist political systems are capable of barbaric repression. It was "democratic" US imperialism that dropped the atomic bombs on Japan and carried out the genocidal war in Vietnam. Fascists are not the only kind of capitalist barbarians.

Terming the Ustasha movement and the Pavelic regime "fascist" only *obscures* its origins as a *response to national oppression* — albeit a right-wing, procapitalist response and thus one which could not overcome that oppression for the mass of the people.

Betrayal

Some critics of the Ustasha raise the question of its links in the 1930s to Italian imperialism. But in itself there is nothing wrong in a national movement taking aid from wherever it can get it. The Irish freedom fighters quite correctly accepted support from German imperialism in World War I in order to further their struggle.

And again, there was nothing wrong in Croatia utilising the falling out of the two imperialist gangs to try to seize its independence. Croatia owed nothing either to Belgrade or its British backers.

Pavelic's real betrayal of the Croatian national cause was his *subordination* of that struggle to the interests of German and Italian imperialism. It was for this reason that the NDH could not bring real freedom to the mass of the people or establish anything but a mockery of independence.

Real national liberation involving genuine economic and political

sovereignty can only be won by struggling to break from the imperialist system — as, for instance, Cuba in its revolution has done.

But Pavelic wasn't prepared to travel on that road, instead he led the Ustasha movement along the road of dependence on imperialism and massacres of the Serbs and Jews and supporters of the Partisans.

'Burden of guilt'

An aspect of the national oppression suffered by the Croats in Yugoslavia is the labelling by the Belgrade regime of all nationalist activity as "fascist" and pro-Ustasha. Even the scale of the Ustasha crimes, real and horrifying as they were, has been deliberately and massively exaggerated.

This is an attempt to make the Croatian people feel they bear a "burden of guilt" for the wartime Ustasha crimes. As the Croatian historian and Partisan leader Franjo Tudjman puts it, this campaign aims to make the Croatian nation feel "that it does not have any right to protest but only atonement, regardless of the things which have happened to it."

This campaign, moreover, obscures the fact that as well as being the base of the Ustasha, Croatia was one of the firmest strongholds of the Partisans in the wartime struggle.

An instance of this hysterical exaggeration in this country is to be found in the current campaign against the HDP and the SWP. In the July 12 *Australian*, David Hirst writes that "on one occasion the SS was forced to disband the Ustasha's Black Legion." And a headline in the article reads "Zealous ideas for genocide that scared even the Nazis".

Scared even the Nazis! This is an amazing contention! To suggest that the Nazis were inhibited by anything when it came to atrocities

is to display profound illusions in Hitler fascism. If the Nazis disbanded Black Legion units it was only for tactical reasons.

But the purpose of such claims is to suggest that the scale and barbarity of Pavelic's repressions was beyond anything ever seen in the war. But such a claim has to be proved with facts and figures. It is precisely these facts and figures that historians like Tudjman claim the Belgrade regime is massively exaggerating and inflating for political reasons.

The Croatian national movement today is a new one. It is something quite different from the wartime Ustasha which, it should be stressed, *never* represented the Croat national movement as a whole. It has been shaped by different experiences, such as the reform movement in Croatia in 1968-71. There is widespread recognition in the Croatian community abroad that Pavelic's road was a complete dead end.

To suggest that the Croatian people bear a "burden of guilt" for the wartime Ustasha crimes is simply racist. There are undoubtedly — in some sections of the Croatian community, as a result of their present situation — illusions about what the NDH regime was like.

But so what? A big point in favor of the HDP is that it is combatting these illusions and pointing a way forward. Should we charge these sections of the Croatian community who have illusions about the NDH with wanting to reproduce Pavelic's atrocities? Wouldn't that imply that it is the inherent dynamic of the Croat national struggle to produce pogroms and so on?

Among socialists this can't be a serious proposition. And the more the Croatian cause develops a dynamic socialist-minded leadership and the more support it receives from progressive forces around the world, the more will any such illusions be shattered. ■

Tito's Friends in the White House

Communist Yugoslavia has enlisted the aid of US armed forces to help it out of its foreign debt crisis.

Sources said Yugoslavia had agreed to offer vacation accommodation to half a million Europe-based US servicemen and their families.

The above item reporting on the Yugoslav government's offer to provide rest and recreation facilities to US military personnel appeared in the Melbourne *Sun* of May 23.

It exemplifies the close relations between the "communist" regime in Belgrade and US imperialism.

What is the reason for this seemingly incongruous relationship?

To find the answer it is necessary to look at the Yugoslav Communists' break with Stalin in 1948.

While Tito broke definitively with *Stalin*, he did not break with *Stalinism*. Tito and the rest of the Yugoslav Communist party leadership had been trained in the Stalinist political outlook and methods, and continued to adhere to them after their split with Moscow.

When the Yugoslav Communists came to power they sought to emulate the Soviet model. The same kind of privileged bureaucracy that had come to power in the USSR under Stalin was



established in Yugoslavia under Tito.

However, the interests of the Yugoslav bureaucracy conflicted with those of the Soviet bureaucracy. This was the cause of the split between Tito and Stalin in 1948. Like Stalin, Tito followed a policy of seeking accommodation with imperialism at the expense of revolutionary movements abroad. This policy, was pursued under

the guise of seeking “peaceful coexistence”, or “detente” with the imperialist powers.

In this framework the Titoists became extremely servile in their attempts to win favor with Washington.

Thus, during the Korean civil war Tito branded the North Koreans as “aggressors” and endorsed the imperialist invasion of Korea which was carried out under the cover of a United Nations “police action”.

Around the same time Tito also stabbed the Greek revolution in the back by closing Yugoslavia’s borders and halting all aid to the

Greek Communists because the latter supported Stalin.

Belgrade has continued to follow a conciliatory policy toward the US and the other capitalist powers.

In 1978 when Tito visited the US he was praised by President Jimmy “human rights” Carter as a symbol of the “eagerness for freedom, independence, and liberty that exists throughout Eastern Europe and indeed throughout the world”.

Carter also lauded the 80-year old dictator for his “advice and constructive reports” on foreign affairs contained in “frequent and personal communications” with the White House. ■

Terrorism & the HDP

One accusation made against the HDP is that it supports terrorism.

The charge of “terrorism” has, of course, been used against almost every national liberation struggle by its opponents.

The Nazis for example, branded as “terrorist” the armed resistance movements in the countries occupied by German troops.

Palestinian and Irish liberation fighters have been subjected over the years to massive media campaigns vilifying them as “terrorists”.

In this country Croatians who defend their national rights against Belgrade’s oppression are smeared with this charge.

Branding liberation movements as “terrorist” is an attempt to cut off any serious consideration of the justice of their cause and legitimise their suppression.

The Communist Party of Australia’s support for the Serb-chauvinist regime in Belgrade, leads it to fall in behind the the campaign by the imperialist press and the Yugoslav government to smear all Croatian nationalists as “terrorists”.

Marxist attitude

Before looking at the supposed evidence for this accusation against the HDP, it is worth reviewing the Marxist attitude towards terrorism.

Marxist oppose the use of terrorism, not because of moral or pacifist considerations but because it is not an effective method of struggle.

Individual terrorism seeks to disrupt or overthrow oppressive systems of rule through acts of sabotage or the assassination of hated officials rather than through the political mobilisation of the broad mass of the people.

The great Russian revolutionist Leon Trotsky succinctly explained the Marxist position on terrorism: “Individual terrorism in our eyes is inadmissible,” he wrote, “precisely for the reason that *it lowers the masses in their own consciousness, directs their glances*

and hopes toward the great avenger and emancipator who will some day come and accomplish his mission.”

Even though Marxists may disagree with individual terrorist acts this does not affect our support for the overall cause of those who may resort to it.

The ‘evidence’

What proof do David Hirst and *Tribune* present to support their allegation that the HDP supports “terrorism”?

Very little. Most of the “evidence” consists of the oft-repeated lie that Croatian separatists are automatically tied to the right-wing Ustasha organisation and that the HDP and the Ustasha are one and the same thing.

In pages of attacks on the HDP *Tribune* journalist Denis Freney has only cited one case where a HDP member committed a terrorist act.

This was an assassination carried out in 1971 by Miro Baresic, a 20-year-old Croat who had just left Yugoslavia. He shot Vladimir Rolovic, the Yugoslav ambassador to Sweden.

In denouncing Baresic’s action Freney doesn’t mention that Rolovic was a member of the UDBA, Belgrade’s secret police agency. He had been personally responsible for the torture of many Croatian dissidents, *including dissident Croatian Communists*.

Rolovic was also responsible for directing Belgrade’s campaign of assassinating exiled Croat dissident leaders in Western Europe.

Given this, and the background of national oppression suffered by Croatian people in Yugoslavia, genuine supporters of democratic rights, and certainly those who call themselves Marxists, while disagreeing with Baresic’s action, can certainly get his motives in perspective.

In any case, methods such as this are not supported by the HDP. Even if they were it would have no bearing on whether the HDP’s cause is just. ■

The Real Terrorists

Much has been made by the *Australian* and *Tribune* of the supposed “terrorism” of the HDP. However, neither has made any mention of the real terrorist campaign mounted against exiled Croat and Albanian dissidents by the UDBA, the Yugoslav secret police. These

have been well-documented.

In its May 24, 1982 issue *Newsweek* pointed out that in “West Germany alone at least 40 Yugoslavs, most of them Croatians, have been murdered since the late ’60s for political reasons.”

According to *Newsweek*, “Representatives of West Germany’s Federal Crime Bureau have tried to raise the issue in talks with Yugoslavia’s Bureau of Public Security — to no avail.”

The *Newsweek* article cited the case of Rasim Zenelaj, an Albanian living in exile in West Germany.

According to West German prosecutors, his case — now being heard in a Frankfurt court — provides proof of an ongoing assassination campaign directed by the Belgrade government against Yugoslav exile leaders ...

Shortly after the attack [Zenelaj] was able to name his would-be killer, who was arrested at Frankfurt’s airport waiting for a flight to Belgrade.

According to police investigators, she immediately confessed that she had been hired by Yugoslavian secret-police agents working through the Frankfurt consulate.

Amnesty International has also cited cases relating to Belgrade’s murder campaign in the West.

Amnesty’s 1982 report on Yugoslavia refers to the conviction of three men in July 1981 on charges of having attempted to murder

Yugoslav emigre Franjo Goreta.

According to evidence given in the course of the trial, they had been paid DMI00,000 by the Yugoslav secret police to murder Goreta.

These examples indicate that it is the Belgrade regime that must answer to the charge of “terrorism”.

The same Amnesty report also cited cases of forcible abduction of Yugoslav exiles and their imprisonment or murder in Yugoslavia.

The most notorious of these cases concerns Vladimir Dapcevic, a Yugoslav living in Brussels, who is reported to have been abducted by Yugoslav state security agents in August 1975 while visiting Romania. A former colonel in the Yugoslav army, Dapcevic had fled to Albania in 1958. In 1976 he was tried in Belgrade, convicted of a number of ‘criminal offences against the people and the state’ and sentenced to death, commuted to 20 years’ imprisonment. Two other Yugoslav emigres, Djoka Stojanovic and Alexander Opojevic, who were with him at the time of his abduction, have not been heard of since. ■

Belgrade’s Political Prisoners

There are a considerable number of political prisoners in Yugoslavia today. A useful review of political imprisonment there is given in Amnesty International’s 1982 bulletin on Yugoslavia.

The bulk of the Belgrade regime’s political prisoners have been jailed for criticising national oppression. It seems that Albanians jailed since the 1981 upsurge in Kosovo make up the big majority of all political prisoners.

Three of the most prominent Croatian political prisoners are:

Franjo Tudjman

A well-known Croatian writer and historian. During the war he was a Partisan general and a leader of the Partisan forces in northern Croatia.

Tudjman was active in the Croatian Spring movement. After Tito’s crackdown he was jailed for several years.

In 1981 Tudjman was charged with misrepresenting conditions in Yugoslavia in several interviews he had given to foreign and local journalists.

While rejecting the charges, Tudjman stood by the views he had expressed in the interviews. These, he said, were “an expression of my personal convictions, in accordance with the ideals for which I fought in the socialist revolution and in the war against fascism and based on the experience of my entire life.”

Tudjman was sentenced to three years in jail and a five-year ban on any public expression. He has been released from jail for health reasons but remains under house arrest.

Marko Veselica

An activist in the Croatian Spring. He was a leader of the Croatian trade union movement and a deputy from Zagreb to the Federal Parliament.

Following Tito’s crackdown, Veselica was dismissed from his posts and expelled from the Communist party to which he had

belonged for 18 years. He also served six years of a seven-year prison sentence.

In 1981, on the basis of frame-up charges, Veselica received an 11-year jail sentence and a four-year ban on any public expression.

Vlado Gotovac

A writer and poet, was a prominent activist in the Croatian Spring movement. He edited *Hrvatski Tjednik* (Croatian Weekly), the best known paper of the independent press that developed in this period.

Following the crushing of the reform movement Gotovac spent several years in jail.

In 1981, Gotovac was charged over several interviews he had given to foreign journalists. On the basis of these frame-up charges he was given a two-year jail term and a four-year ban on any public expression.

In the interviews Gotovac made it clear he believed Croatia’s problems should be solved in a peaceful way. ■

APPENDIX

Leftward-moving Croatian organisation answers questions on its views 'Yugoslavia is defaming socialist ideals'

[From *Direct Action*, October 5, 1982]

By *Jamie Doughney & Jim McIlroy*

In July, *Direct Action* obtained a lengthy written interview with the Central Committee of the Croatian Movement for Statehood (HDP), an organisation in the migrant community that has recently been noticed as an active participant in left-wing, labour movement, and solidarity marches and events.

For the information of our readers we will carry articles in this and future issues that quote from the interview. Because the Croatian and Yugoslav questions have been ones of interest among many in the labour movement, we feel it is important to present some details about the evolution of the views of this significant current in the Croatian community — both in exile in Australia and elsewhere, and in Croatia itself.

Two hundred thousand migrants from Croatia have settled in Australia in the past several decades. Croatia is one of the larger of the many nationalities incorporated in modern-day post-capitalist Yugoslavia.

Croatian workers, like workers from other European countries brought out after World War II to provide labour for Australian capitalism's postwar development, have done many of the hard and dirty jobs in this country. Croatians have been heavily represented in areas such as the building industry and the Snowy Mountains Authority.

Unfortunately, the image of Croatians in the minds of most in the left and labour movement in Australia is that of a people politically dominated by the far right, and linked to the Liberal Party here.

While the right wing has had predominant influence in the past, changes have occurred in the Croatian emigre community in Australia and elsewhere in the West. These changes led to the formation on June 5-7, 1981 of the HDP, which broke with the previous right-wing-controlled umbrella Croatian organisation.

Progressive positions

While the HDP remains a coalition combining a variety of political viewpoints, its progressive anti-imperialist political stands on many crucial international issues indicate its strong leftward evolution.

To give a few examples: The HDP has been a firm supporter of the Irish republican movement against British rule. The HDP paper in Australia, *Croatian Weekly*, carried a favorable interview with Sinn Fein representative Cristin Ni Elias during her mid-year tour of Australia.

The HDP, unlike many self-proclaimed left-wing organisations in this country and worldwide, took a resolute stand against British imperialism and for Argentina in that country's fight to regain the Malvinas.

The HDP strongly supports the struggles of the Salvadoran,

Nicaraguan, and other Central American peoples against the US-backed regimes of the region. The HDP in Melbourne is an affiliate of the Committee in Solidarity with Central America and the Caribbean, and in *Croatian Weekly* gave a prominent advertisement for the June 12 El Salvador solidarity rally. The HDP supports the antinuclear movement in Europe, and has joined the protests against the genocidal Israeli invasion in Lebanon. It strongly hacks the Palestinian people's right to return to their homeland.

HDP supporters have helped in raising funds in Melbourne for the Palestinian cause.

HDP members express strong identification with the revolutionary Cuban leadership, especially Fidel Castro and the martyred Che Guevara.

The HDP noted particularly the role of Castro in confronting former President Tito of Yugoslavia at the Non-Aligned Nations Conference in Havana in 1979.

Tito put himself forward as the main spokesperson for the conservative and counter-revolutionary views at the conference — especially against the Iranian revolution — while Castro spoke strongly on behalf of the poor and oppressed of the world.

Conflicts

The HDP paper *Croatian Weekly* has established itself as the most widely read Croatian publication in Australia.

This has not come about without conflict — including physical attacks on HDP activists by right-wing thugs.

In an important break with the domination of links with the Liberal Party in the Croatian community, the HDP openly campaigned for Labor in the Victorian elections earlier this year.

Despite this record, some in the labour movement insist on smearing the HDP — refusing to recognise the evolution in the Croatian community that its formation represents.

The September 8 *Tribune*, paper of the Communist Party of Australia, carries an article headed "Croatian group has dubious views".

Without taking up here the specific charges made by *Tribune*, suffice it to say that the writer selectively quotes from HDP documents, ignoring the overall progressive thrust of its views today. And, of course, *Tribune's* framework is that of slavish support for the "socialist" regime in Belgrade, which the CPA sees as a "progressive" alternative model to the Kremlin regime.

It is the HDP's view that "Hiding behind Socialist slogans, Yugoslavia is defaming Socialist ideals in the worst possible way."

Objectives

In 1971, Croatian Socialists and students were arrested or dismissed from their positions by the thousands for advocating greater autonomy for Croatia. Instead of greater autonomy the

Government of the Socialist Republic of Croatia was dismissed and replaced by puppets!

Since 1971, repression has been imposed to such an extent that any Croatian can be arrested at any time, without much bother by the authorities to even look for a plausible excuse. Only the very devoted servants of the Belgrade regime can now hold any position in the administration in Croatia. Today's President of the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia is a Serb. In the Federal Government there are nine Serbs, compared to four "Croatsians". Serbians, together with three Montenegrans, have the absolute majority in the Federal Government."

To expose this situation is what the HDP sees as central to its work in Australia.

Our group in Australia is trying to counteract Yugoslav propaganda in labeling our struggle as "reactionary and fascist elements of the past", and also trying to organise Croatian people in Australia into a modern, progressive political force, directing their efforts to the cause of Croatian national freedom and the establishment of the Croatian sovereign state.

To the left, the HDP asks for help in establishing the truth about the Croatsians' objectives.

This can be done mainly by recognising that the Croatian struggle has nothing in common with Extremism — Fascism or Nazism of any kind (as the Yugoslavs try to present it), and equally so, the Yugoslav "Socialism" has nothing to do with progressive Socialist ideology — at least not in practice. Socialists everywhere should accept the fact that imperialist aspirations of Great-Serbianism under the disguise of Communism and Socialism has done more to discredit the leftist movement than it has ever contributed, or ever likely to contribute, to the Socialist cause. Their "Socialism" consists of selling one third of the Croatian nation to the West — as slave labour. Those returning home are asked to buy their jobs with money they have earned in other countries. And even when they do buy their jobs they find they are only employed a short while because such shakey enterprises go into liquidation.

The interview explains that Albanians, Macedonians, Slovenians, Hungarians, "and to a certain degree, even the Serbs", are other nationalities within Yugoslavia seeking independence.

World issues

Because Yugoslavia has taken positions that have aligned it with Western imperialism — in particular the United States — in "its campaign against the Eastern bloc", the imperialists have "joined the Belgrade regime in its campaign against any effort of the enslaved nations in Yugoslavia to become free".

This has taken the form of jailings of Croatian activists in the US and harassment of Croatian socialists and others by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation here in Australia.

The HDP is particularly critical of the degree of indebtedness of Yugoslavia to Western banks. It believes this reinforces the pro-imperialist stance taken by the country on many international issues.

The US comes in for the strongest criticism by the organisation. In a march in Melbourne in 1980, for example, one placard read: "Better Soviet Croatia than American Yugoslavia."

When asked what connection the HDP sees between its struggle and those of other people fighting for independence, and with the international labour movement, the reply was "that we fight for the same principles — that is, for the right of national self-determination and for social justice."

On the revolutionary movement in Central America, the organisation commented:

We believe that the people in Central America, like people elsewhere in the world, should have the right to national self-determination and social justice. Central American peoples are now exploited by powerful economic forces from outside their borders, together with the internal collaborators of these factors. We believe the revolutionary movement's cause in Central America is just and should be supported by all freedom loving, progressive forces in the world.

In regard to Yugoslavia and world politics, the interview said that the country's economic problems would preclude any significant role.

Also, that which appeared as such a role during the life of Tito was predominantly a series of bluffs, which was only possible because of the West's belief that Yugoslavia can salvage the West from the spreading of Socialist ideals by discrediting the Eastern bloc with its own heretics. ■

'Socialists have played a very important part in Croatian struggle' Croatian HDP explains its views

[From *Direct Action*, October 20, 1982]

By *Jamie Doughney & Jim McIlroy*

In the last issue of *Direct Action* we presented for the information of our readers some of the views of an organisation in the Croatian community in Australia called the Croatian Movement for Statehood (HDP). Based on an interview with the Central Committee of the HDP and discussions with left-wing Croatsians in Melbourne, the article showed that there has been a significant leftward evolution of an important section of the Croatian community in Australia and internationally.

For example, since its formation in mid-1981 the HDP has

taken its stand on the side of the anti-imperialist fighters in the Middle East, Central America, and Ireland, and against the Liberal Party here in Australia. Those views are regularly reflected in the HDP's paper, *Croatian Weekly*, which is now the most widely read paper in the community. Clearly the right-wing pro-Liberal elements no longer maintain their absolute dominance among politically active Croatsians.

The HDP explains that its aim is to promote the view that Croatsians and other nations in present-day post-capitalist Yugoslavia are discriminated against by the bureaucratic regime in Belgrade, which is dominated by people belonging to the Serbian

nationality. Members of the HDP have told *Direct Action* that independence for Yugoslavia's nationalities would make possible genuine socialist cooperation in the future.

Another aim of the organisation is to unite Croatian migrants here "into a modern, progressive political force".

However, in carrying out its work, the HDP has often run into a prejudice within the labour movement that all Croatian migrants have a right-wing political outlook at best, or are pro-fascist at worst.

It is to help overcome this prejudice — which has as little basis as the racist view that Italians all belong to the Mafia — that we are giving *Direct Action* readers a chance to assess for themselves some of the political positions of the HDP.

Socialists in Croatia

Asked about the role of socialists in the national struggle in Croatia, the HDP Central Committee said that "From the beginning of this century Croatian socialists have played a very important part in the struggle for Croatian national independence.

"One such example is Ivan Krndelj, born 1888, who became a member of the Social-democratic Party of Bosnia and Hercegovina in 1911. Later, through his struggle for workers' rights and during a very active political life, he became [a] *founder member* of the Socialist Workers' Party of Yugoslavia which later became the Communist Party of Yugoslavia."

According to the HDP, "He never separated the struggle for workers' rights and social justice from the struggle for Croatian national freedom and the right to self-determination."

The Communist Party formally held this view throughout the 1930s.

Such a stand by the Communists was in line also with the First Congress of the Comintern in which it was emphasised that ...

"Yugoslavia was created with the use of force", and existing as a "vassal state of [the] Entente". The Fifth Congress of the Comintern (17.6.1924 to 8.7.1924), deciding on the situation in Yugoslavia has concluded that:

"... the universal cry for the rights of people to self-determination promulgated by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, must in practice be expressed in the form of separation of Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia from the composition of Yugoslavia."

The interview cites other examples of socialist and Communist involvement in the Croatian national struggle — both under the capitalist regime established by the victorious Entente powers after World War I and under the bureaucratic Tito regime in the workers state that was established after World War II.

It explains that even Croatian leaders of the broader Yugoslav Communist Party, including a former partisan general, have faced repression for speaking out against abuses by the Belgrade government and in support of national rights for Croatia. The most recent case was dismissal in 1971 of the local Croatian government for favouring too great a degree of independence. Thousands of Croatian socialists and students were arrested or dismissed from their positions at this time, the HDP says.

Pavelic regime

But given a history of left-wing support for Croatia's independence,

how can it be explained that the idea of an independent Croatia is associated in so many people's minds with right-wing views?

One major reason is that all supporters of Croatian independence are mistakenly identified with the forces that led the "independent" state of Croatia that existed under the German occupation between the years 1941-45. This regime was controlled by the pro-Nazi Ustasha of Ante Pavelic.

The HDP explains its view of the events accompanying Hitler's occupation of Yugoslavia:

A right-wing Croatian political movement, which was not a fascist movement in any sense, seized that opportunity and proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia. Within Croatia, however, there were other much larger democratic or left-oriented movements such as the Croatian Peasant Party, (led by Stjepan Radic and after, by Macek), as well as the Communist Movement.

Although they all advocated Croatian independence between the two World Wars, their policies and their priorities changed at the time of Hitler's presence there. The right-wing movement (together with substantial support from the Croatian Peasant Party), accepted the inevitability of the Axis power and did what it could to establish a separate Croatian State (which was only possible by collaborating with the Germans and the Italians), while the left-wing movement, led by the Communist Party, decided to fight the occupying force, with the emphasis on class war and on building a new Yugoslavia, which they hoped would be more just, democratic and socialist. The greatest majority of the Croatian people supported the right-wing government, however, because it represented the long-awaited Independent State of Croatia.

It is not clear what the HDP means when it says that the right-wing movement in charge of Croatia during this time "was not a fascist movement in any sense". Other HDP material suggests that although the government had a right-wing character, it did represent a form of independence that was until that time denied the Croatian people.

National question

If this is the case, we cannot agree. The question of national rights has to be looked at in broader political and class terms. It is not a matter of indifference to supporters of the fights of oppressed nations to self-determination how such goals are pursued—among other things, this can tell us whether the end product is genuine or not.

It is our view that the Pavelic regime was a quisling regime that owed its existence wholly and solely to the German imperialists. It could not be described as genuinely independent.

Moreover, its brutal policies are well known. By giving a semblance of "independence", the German occupiers exploited the national question in Yugoslavia for their own ends, using the Ustasha government as a weapon against the left-wing, workers', and partisan movements in Croatia and other parts of Yugoslavia.

It is our view that the overthrow of this government, and the subsequent abolition of capitalism in Yugoslavia as a whole, was in the interests of working people and farmers not only to improve everyone's standard of living but to grant genuine national rights and foster a spirit of cooperation among all the Balkan peoples.

The fact that the Yugoslav Communist Party sought not to do

this, but instead to increase the power and privileges of Serbian bureaucrats at the expense of other nationalities, is one of its greatest crimes. This is the reason the national struggle is perpetuated today.

Belgrade's distortions

However, it should be made clear that the HDP doesn't trace its traditions to the Pavelic regime. Its sympathies, members explain, are with the progressive and left-wing Croats who fought for national independence.

As our article last week pointed out, the HDP says that its struggle "has nothing in common with Extremism — Fascism or Nazism of any kind (as the Yugoslavs try to present it), and equally so, that Yugoslav 'Socialism' has nothing to do with progressive Socialist ideology — at least not in practice." But they explain that shaking off the right-wing tag has been made more difficult in-so-far as many Croats are wary of the label socialism because they were introduced to "socialism" in a distorted form under the domination of Belgrade.

Nevertheless HDP activists laugh at the charge that they favor a capitalist system and explain that one of their main criticisms of the Yugoslav regime is that it is insufficiently socialist; that its pro-US foreign policy, indebtedness to Western banks, commercialisation of tourism, etc., make it closer to a capitalist sort of society. They also point out that Yugoslavia's much vaunted workers' self-management is a fraud.

This type of criticism, and the counterposition by many HDP members of revolutionary Cuba to Yugoslavia, should give labour movement activists in Australia an idea of the progressive developments taking place among Croatian migrants. ■

Resistance books

