

NEWS FROM CROATIA

BY

IMRE PROKOPY

Months ago the centre of gravity of the Serb insurrection moved from Serbia to the areas of the independent Croat State. Of late the situation there has become particularly serious, because the Serb rebels have been joined by dissatisfied and rebellious Croat elements who, together with their Serb comrades-in-arms, have found refuge chiefly in Bosnia and Hercegovina, but also in the forests and mountains of Lika, Dalmatia and the regions between the Save and the Drave, which they use as operational bases. The extent of the havoc and destruction wrought by these wild and well-organized bands of rebels may be gathered inter alia from the fact that more than 2000 refugees, many of them orphan children, from the burnt out village of Stolač in Hercegovina and the ravaged surrounding district alone have had to be settled in the little town of Hrvatska Dubica on the river Save and the neighbouring villages, where after their terrible sufferings they have at last found homes and means of support. (Croat newspapers and "*Délvidéki Magyarország*", Dec. 17.)

The Croat Government is naturally straining every nerve to free the country as radically and quickly as possible of the murderous and predatory bands that are a constant menace to the lives and security of the population and threaten the very foundations of the political, social and economic order of the new State. A great mopping-up campaign has been planned, and will probably be launched in the spring. From the preparations on foot it may be expected to be thorough and final. To ensure its success

the training and equipping of the army and the Ustasha militia, which is no organic part of the former, is being carried through with increased energy. *Parallel with this, volunteer legions to combat Bolshevism are being organized, and some of them have been fighting bravely against the Russians for more than a year.* On New Year's Day the head of the Croat State, M. Pavelić, reviewed in Zagreb one of these volunteer legions that had just returned from the Russian front. In his speech to this regiment the Poglavnik told the volunteers that "never in the past had the Croat soldier fought for so great and sacred a Cause as now in this greatest and most terrible war. You are fighting for humanity, for civilization and the rights of man, but you are also fighting for your own nation, for the future and security of the independent Croat State... Now that you have returned — continued the Poglavnik — you will — if you must — fight against the enemies of the State who threaten its vital interests within its borders." (*"Donauzeitung"*, Jan. 5.)

Mention was made of these domestic enemies, the Serb and Croat so-called "partisans", by Dr. Anthony Nikšić, Minister for Home Affairs, at a mass meeting of the Ustasha organizations held at Vukovár. "Let no one imagine" — he said in a speech offering reconciliation and promising an amnesty to the repentants — "that old conditions will ever return again. *Do not believe those who say that Croatia may one day again be member of a State similar to Yugoslavia. We have paid dearly for experience; and no lie, however wily, will ever again be able to delude the Croat nation and its leaders. To those who have fled to the forests to fight for a Bolshevist State I say: 'Return to your homes and all will be forgiven; but do not bring your leaders with you, for this promise does not apply to them'. We can now look forward to the future of the Croat State and the Croat nation*

with confidence. We have an excellent army that has acquitted itself well on the Eastern front and will defeat our enemies at home too." (Croat newspapers and "*Délvidéki Magyarorság*" Dec. 24.)

M. Nikšić's speech is also interesting because in it he rejects the idea of a new Yugoslavia. Another interesting fact is that almost simultaneously the Serb Premier, Neditch, also warned the Serb people against trying to resurrect Yugoslavia, which political formation — he said — had ruined and beggared the Serb nation. *This abhorrence of a Yugoslav solution obviously has its roots on the one hand in pan-Croat and on the other in pan-Serb aspirations.*

The irreconcilable nature of the antagonism between Serbs and Croats, now more acute than ever, is clearly mirrored in the comments of the Croat Press on the news of the formation in London of a Serb "refugee" Government. Croat opinion was most pithily expressed in an article in "Hrvatski Nord", where, amongst other things, we read:— "As we see, with the approval of King Peter Karageorgevitch a Government whose aims are *wholly pan-Serb* has been formed. These barren aims of the new puppet "Yugoslav" Government are no less pan-Serb because it contains two Croats, Krayević and Shutei. These men, who have sold themselves to the Serbs, cannot be considered as Croatians. The nature of this Government is clearly shown by the fact that they hastened to send greetings to Drasha Mihailovitch, the leader of the Serb insurgents, assuring him of their complete confidence in him and their appreciation of his work. On the subject of what Mihailovitch's bands have been doing the London Serb Government is discreetly silent. *The sorely tried Croats of the towns and villages laid waste by those wild bands, — of Foca, Rogatica, Jajce, Stolac, Przedor and many, many other Croat villages of Bosnia, Hercegovina, Lika, etc., — could tell the tale of their deeds.*"

Among the news of a political nature mention must be made of the Poglavnik's speech on 28th December before the Sabor, in which he announced that the mandate of the Sabor convened by himself expired at the end of the year. The Sabor had done its duty despite the fact that its work of legislation had been greatly hampered by present conditions. Today the main tasks were to defend the country and supply it with food. Croatia was part of the front that stretched from the Baltic to Africa, and the Croat nation was unshaken in its confidence that Europe would win. Enemy propaganda was powerless to undermine the confidence of a single Croat. The centuries-old traditional martial and heroic spirit of the Croat people was alive in the Croat army today. *To reassure public opinion the Poglavnik added that the soil of Croatia was able to produce enough food for the entire population of the country. In 1942 not only had 30% more land been cultivated than in the previous year, but even 15% more than in the last 10 years of peace.*

As these few extracts show, despite war conditions and the terrible havoc wrought by the insurgents inspired by an implacable hatred of the Croats, Government circles are very hopeful. With a firm belief in the future of the Croat nation and with unflagging zeal they continue to work on the reconstruction of the country and on the organization of its military, economic and cultural resources.