

RECIPROCAL INDICTMENT OF SERBIAN COMMUNIST AND NATIONALIST INSURGENTS

BY

IMRE PROKOPY

During the course of the mopping-up operations begun on May 15th. the Chetnik and partisan bands which have for the past two years been committing deprivations in Croatia — particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the province of Lika and Montenegro — suffered such serious losses that, *according to the various official reports, the definitive liquidation and complete annihilation of the scattered remnants still left seems likely to be very shortly accomplished.*

In the struggle to overcome the ruthlessly cruel and destructive insurgents the detachments — German, Italian and Croatian, and indeed in some places Bulgarian — have very frequently found themselves faced with an extremely arduous task in the impassable mountainous districts. The Bulgarians distinguished themselves particularly in the work of occupying the *Durmitor*, the highest peak in Montenegro. In recognition of their effectual co-operation in this exploit, the Bulgarian flag has also been hoisted on the peak thus occupied side by side with the German and Italian national colours, — a circumstance described by the "Bulgarische Rundschau", in its June 29th. issue, as *the symbol of the final and definitive conciliation of the Balkans.*

The mopping-up operations carried out with such persistence and so systematically have to some extent been facilitated in all parts of the threatened territory by the feud — constantly growing in bitterness — between the Serbian nationalist Chetnik formations serving under the command of Drazha Mihaylovitch and the Communist partisans fighting under the leadership of "Comrade" Tito, as also by the circumstance that the ranks of both groups of insurgents

have been decimated by privations and by epidemics due to the weather conditions.

Disunion has arisen among the Chetniks fighting for Pan-Serbianism also as a result of the fact that *after June 20th. their leader, General Drazha Mihaylovitch, abandoned them and retired to London* for the purpose of taking over the portfolio of Minister of War in the new "Yugoslav" Government that had meanwhile been formed. This procedure on his part has resulted in the still remaining remnants of his army, once numerically so strong, surrendering to the Axis troops. *This was the course taken by the whole group of Chetnik insurgents serving under Captain Michael Koprivnik, who, when he was taken prisoner, made the following statement: — "Mihaylovich has betrayed us and has fled, after having plunged the Serbian people into catastrophe. We are laying down our arms, because we are not prepared to continue this senseless struggle for foreign interests"* ("Donauzeitung", June 26th., 1943). We would note by the way that Mihaylovich's flight must have been due to other motives than mere cowardice, — the real motive being probably that the Allies badly need the local experience of the Serbian insurgent leader.

As to the treatment meted out to the territories occupied by them for longer or shorter periods by the insurgents divested of all human inhibitions, may be seen authentically disclosed in the reciprocal indictments hurled at one another's heads during the feud which developed into a veritable "fratricidal war" by the Chetniks and partisans respectively.

In December, 1942, Mihaylovich's followers issued a pamphlet referring to the action of the partisans which contains the following data and allegations: —

1. The bulk of the Yugoslav Communists are recruited from elements without homes, occupations or families, — "shirkers", university and other students who have been ploughed and whose knowledge has been acquired in cafés rather than in schools, depraved women and girls who have lost all sense of morality or decency. *The ranks of the Communists include also a few thousand convicts originally sentenced for serious crimes or murders.*

2. The commander-in-chief of all the Communist forces

is "Comrade" Tito, *one of whose chief adjutants is a former convict of the name of Vlada Segart.*

3. During the short term of their rule in Montenegro and Herzegovina *the Communists burned down 8029 houses and murdered 20,380 persons.*

4. In Montenegro, in East Bosnia and in Herzegovina the Communists *set fire to 381 elementary schools, 115 gendarme barracks, 3 infant schools, 18 churches and 2 monasteries and murdered 182 priests.* They destroyed 30 bridges and caused other serious damage.

Early in July, in a speech made at Ragusa, M. Vjekoslav Vrančić, Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia, referring to these horrible devastations and the terrible havoc wrought, made the following statement: — "Wherever partisans had set foot, I found nothing but villages that had been plundered and reduced to ashes, bridges that had been blown up, and homeless inhabitants." (Croatian papers and "Délvidéki Magyarország", July 9th., 1943).

5. The Communists have ravished more than 400 girls and women, many of their victims having committed suicide rather than survive the shameful humiliation inflicted on them.

6. On one occasion, when well-meaning inhabitants visited the headquarters of the Communists with the complaint that the whole people was doomed to destruction if the partisans continued to act as they had done, "Comrade" Tito smiled sneeringly and replied: — "That is of no importance and is of no concern to us. *If the population of this place (Catholics and Mohammedan Croats) perished, there are Chinese enough and to spare for us to import and settle here.*"

The above is an abstract in a literal translation of the main counts of the Chetniks' "Bill of Indictment".

Of the crimes committed by the Communist partisans an account was given also by a Croatian war-correspondent in the March 18th. issue of the "Hrvatski Narod". When the partisans had occupied the village of *Maja* and had reduced it to ashes, at the same time demolishing the Catholic church, the drunken "heroes" took their stand in an intoxication of triumph on the ruins of the statue of the Virgin Mary and sang the following song: — "*We are fighting against God,*

against churches and altars, against priests and nuns". — *Verb. sap.!!*

Other documentary evidence was published in the June 1st. issue of the "Hrvatski Narod" revealing the ruthless and unbridled atrocities committed by the Communist partisans. In the paper issued by them ("*Borba*") the latter branded as spies and members of the "Fifth Column" all persons connected in any way with the organs of the Croatian State or the Croatian Army. Such persons — they said — must be brought before the tribunal of the people (sc. partisan bands), which would soon settle accounts with them. And Order of the Day No. 3 of the command of the "Zeta — i. e. Montenegro — partisan formation" instructs all the bataillons under its command that members of the "Fifth Column" (i. e. members of the Ustasha movement and all persons sympathizing with that movement!) need not be handed over to the law, but must be executed on the spot. These instructions were naturally carried out most zealously by the partisans, who *waged a veritable war of extermination against the Catholics and Mohammedans of Croatia*. The measure of the work of assassination may be gathered also from the official Croatian report which tells us that *down to the early days of June the nuns had to find homes for 7000 orphans from Bosnia, Herzegovina and Lika-Krbava; while the Mohammedan head imam has provided for the future subsistence of 300 orphaned children of the kind whose parents were murdered by the bloodthirsty partisans.*

The charges and allegations contained in the pamphlet compiled by the Chetniks to which reference is made above were replied to by the Communist partisans in No. 20 of the "*Borba*", their official organ. The article in question brands the persons present at a conference held at Gacak, — a conference at which Mihaylovich himself is said to have presided —, simply as "criminals" and as the authors of the massacre of Mohammedans in Herzegovina, asserting *inter alia* that *Drazha Mihaylovich's Chetniks had murdered 10,000 women, old men and children, and that in the territories subjected to the rule of the Chetniks nearly 70,000 civilians had disappeared.*

In its broadcasts the secret radio station of the partisans

known as "*Slobodna Jugoslavija*" (Free Yugoslavia) repeatedly protested against the charge brought by the Chetniks which accused the partisans of murdering Croats *en masse*. On the contrary — so we are told by the partisans' radio — it was the Chetnik bands of General Mihaylovitch that had razed large numbers of Croatian villages to the ground and had murdered hundreds of Croats — women, children and old men.

"So" — to quote the closing passage of the article in the May 29th. issue of the "Hrvatski Narod" entitled "Between Moscow and London" from which we have cited, for the information of our readers, the above characteristic data throwing a daring light on the "deeds of heroism" of the insurgents — 'these are the henchmen of Moscow and London, of whom the Croatian people can have only *one opinion*'.

As for the opinion of the vast majority of the Serbs of Serbia and of the Belgrade Government circles respecting the activity of the two groups of insurgents so menacing to the future and the very existence of the whole Serbian people, we have already on several occasions informed our readers in these columns. On the present occasion we shall confine ourselves to adding to what has already been said on the subject a few statements made recently by competent quarters.

At a conference of the district sheriffs of Serbia held early in July at *Leskovac* Colonel Gruitch made a long speech dealing with the aspirations of Serbia. The cardinal aim of Serbian policy — he declared — was to provide for the Serbian people to survive in its own country... "The colossus is dying which threatened to completely destroy our national, social and moral values. In this struggle the Serbs too must take part, if they would enjoy the fruit of the future" ("*Délvidéki Magyarország*", July 11th., 1943).

On the second anniversary of the declaration of war against Communism General *Neditch*, Prime Minister of Serbia, addressed to the Serbian people a proclamation, from which we quote the following more important passages: — "A war is raging in Europe and Communism is at our very door, ready to wipe out European culture. *Communism knows no God and desires to plunge everything into ruin.*

But Europe has sensed the mortal danger; her peoples have risen in arms against the danger: and our Continent is now engaged in a life-and-death struggle. This is a Holy War. I call upon you, my brothers, to join in the fight against the Red Terror . . . You have in your ranks, however, some who refuse to understand me. You must exterminate them or hand them over to the authorities. I once more appeal to you all to follow me; for that is the only way to save the people, to safeguard order and ensure the future of the "Serbian people" ("Délvidéki Magyarság", July 2nd., 1943). — This was indeed resolute plain speaking, — just like all Premier Neditch's former declarations!!

Special interest attaches also to the speech made by M. *Nedelkovitch*, Serbian Minister for Economy, in a town in Old Serbia in which he dealt with the ambitions of the two groups of insurgents and most severely condemned the anti-national conduct of the insurgents who had become the mercenaries of foreign Powers. "The Serbian people" — he said — "at the very outset of the war realized that they were being plunged into a terrible catastrophe. After the capitulation they had two roads open to them, — either to follow Premier Neditch or to enter the service of foreign interests . . . *Do not allow yourselves to be cajoled; for Drazha Mihaylovitch cannot be a genuine patriot, seeing that, after first making common cause with the Communists, he then fled the country, leaving the Serbian people in the lurch. We shall destroy everyone — no matter who he may be, whether Communist or a follower of Mihaylovitch — who turns against the Serbian people. You must therefore decide which is the right road. Surely not that which must lead to the complete extermination of the Serbian people. Not that, but the other. You must therefore remove from among you all the tempters; for that is the duty imposed upon you by your own interests and by the interests of your children and of the nation at large. Death to the evil ones who have plunged the Serbian people and the country into the valley of destruction*".

In another speech M. *Nedelkovitch* severely condemned Yugoslavia. "At the time" — he said — "when Yugoslavia was created, the peoples living in its territory were all measured with *one and the same bushel*. Now, however, I

would ask you, — do you really believe that the Croatians are our brothers? In Yugoslavia we had to renounce the Serbian national colours and the cult of St. Save; the names of towns had to be written in the Latin way, so that the Serbian peasants were unable to read the inscriptions on the coins. That was Yugoslavia. Awake, then, my brethren, and *try to realize what fate would be in store for you, if you were to assist in securing the triumph of this idea.*"

Only a few years ago who would ever have imagined or believed that a Serbian statesman would be found prepared to make such statements respecting the Yugoslav idea or the Yugoslavia which was the embodiment of that idea?

OSZK
Országos Széchényi Könyvtár