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THE REPRESSION OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN YUGOSLAVIA AGAINST POLITICAL OPPONENTS IN THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF CROATIA IN THE 1970s – THE EXAMPLE OF TOMISLAV DRŽIĆ'S GROUP

Wollyf KRAŠIĆ*

The paper analyzes the arrest and trial of a group of opponents of the communist regime in Yugoslavia in the mid-1970s in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, who were convicted of founding a terrorist organization that collaborated with Croatian anti-Yugoslav émigrés in the West. The verdict is compared with the investigative documents of the Yugoslav intelligence service, but also with the authorized record of the conversation that the author of this paper had with the first defendant Tomislav Držić in 2019. It is argued that this was a group of regime dissidents whose activity consisted of anti-regime conversations, writing anti-regime texts that were not disseminated, reading Croatian émigrés' propaganda materials and Držić's occasional contacts with émigré in Canada Stjepan Dubičanac, rather than a terrorist organization that could seriously shake the regime.

Keywords: communist Yugoslavia, Croatian Spring, repression, Tomislav Držić, Croatian émigrés

Introduction

The communist regime in Yugoslavia in Croatia faced various forms of Croatian national resistance and opposition throughout its existence (1945-1990). Since it was a totalitarian one-party system, the term opposition should not be understood in the sense of political, parliamentary opposition, but in

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the sense of that in intellectual and cultural circles.¹ In the first years after the World War II, the regime succeeded in crushing the guerrilla resistance, called the Crusades, which consisted mainly of soldiers and officers of the armed forces of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH), which collapsed after the World War II as a protectorate of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.² The Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, HSS) had overwhelming support among the Croatian population of Yugoslavia before the World War II and, although significantly weakened, attempted to operate after its end. However, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, KPJ) completely monopolized political life and destroyed the HSS through various machinations (arrests, recruitment for informant services, threats, election rigging, etc.).³ While the Crusader guerrilla movement and the HSS were destroyed, the third and biggest opponent of the communist regime in Croatia – the Catholic Church – continued to exist despite widespread and brutal repressions (trial of the head of the Catholic Church in Croatia, Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac, murder and arrest of clergy, confiscation of property, prohibition of the religious press, religious education in public schools and religious events, destruction and damage to church property, etc.) and its restricted activities continued to function and retained its influence in a significant part of the Croatian nation. Although the regime's hostility towards the Catholic Church decreased from the second half of the 1960s, in the eyes of the regime the Catholic Church remained its most powerful ideological opponent in Croatia until the collapse of communist Yugoslavia.⁴

In the postwar period there were also a number of small groups, some somewhat better organized and some informal, that operated or intended to operate against the regime. Some helped the Crusaders by collecting weapons, military equipment, medicine, and food, or tried to operate on their own like Crusaders. Others spread anti-regime sentiment by writing and distributing leaflets and writing slogans. In a number of cases, friends or acquaintances met only occasionally and criticized the regime. The regime in turn tried to nip any potential threat in the bud and severely punished political dissidents for what it called "hostile conversations." The term referred to conversations between two or more people in which any criticism of the regime was voiced.

¹ Spehanjek, Cipek, "Disidenti, opozicija i otpor – Hrvatska i Jugoslavija 1945.-1990." ["Disidents, Opposition and Resistance – Croatia and Yugoslavia 1945-1990.": 255 – 293.

² Radelić, *Križari – gerila u Hrvatskoj 1945.-1950.* [*Crusaders – guerrillas in Croatia: 1945 – 1950*].

³ Radelić, *Hrvatska seljačka stranka: 1941.-1950.* [*Croatian Peasant Party: 1941 – 1950*].

⁴ Akmadža, *Katolička crkva u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj: 1945.-1980.* [*The Catholic Church in Communist Croatia: 1945-1980*].

Such organizations and groups, from the mid-1950s onwards, consisted almost exclusively of young people, students and high school students, and some of them even wrote extensive action programs in which they envisioned an independent Croatia exclusively as a democratic state. The trend that the number of opponents of the regime increased among Croatian youth intensified towards the mid-1960s, which proved that the communist regime in Yugoslavia, through a highly ideologized school system and other levers, such as the media, could not prevent an anti-communist and anti-Yugoslav sentiment from spreading among the youth, i.e. an adherence to the idea of an independent Croatian state among people who had been born and raised in communist Yugoslavia and who had not participated in the political and military events of the World War II.⁵

In the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s, however, there were almost no illegal Croatian national organizations and groups. It was a period of limited liberalization, when the pressure of the regime, especially in Croatia, eased somewhat, so that some of the discontent and criticism of the authorities could be expressed in various public events, media, etc., but in a twisted and disguised way. A part of the Croatian communist leadership demanded greater Croatian autonomy from the federal center in Belgrade, which led some supporters of Croatian independence to tactically support this part of the communists, as they saw in the desired reforms the first step towards the creation of an independent Croatian state. *Matica hrvatska*, the oldest Croatian cultural institution, by publishing numerous books and magazines, organizing various events and lectures, and establishing its branches throughout Croatia, brought into the public sphere a number of previously banned and undesirable elements of Croatian national identity, which the regime previously considered an expression of nationalism and fascism and severely punished those who practiced them. This activity of *Matica hrvatska* was also a kind of outlet for the anti-Yugoslav and anti-communist feelings of a part of the Croatian people. In the last phase of this period, popularly known as Croatian Spring, the student movement emerged, which became the third fundamental element of Croatian Spring alongside the reformist part of the Croatian communist leadership and *Matica hrvatska*. The student movement was an independent factor, which on the one hand did not want to come into conflict with the reform part of the Croatian communist leadership and also expressed tactical support, but the student leadership demanded sharper and more concrete reforms that would lead to an even higher degree of liberalization and Croatian autonomy. Such an attitude led to the organization of a student strike in late 1971. Unitarian and centralist forces, as well as the

⁵ Krašić, *Hrvatski pokret otpora: Hrvatske državotvorne organizacije i skupine: 1945.-1966.* [Croatian Resistance Movement: Croatian National Organizations and Groups: 1945-1966].

unchallenged Yugoslav leader Tito, who until then had maneuvered between reformists and centralists, could not tolerate such an erosion of the power of the League of Communists (*Savez komunista*, SK) in Croatia, but neither could they tolerate the reforms that led to a reduction in the power of centralist structures and, in their opinion, to the disintegration of the state.⁶

Thus, the reformist part of the Croatian communist leadership was forced to resign, mass purges swept SK of Croatia, student protests were violently suppressed, and their leaders and a number of prominent members of *Matica hrvatska* were convicted and sentenced in politically motivated trials for carrying out a “counterrevolution”. Although there is no comprehensive research on the extent of the repressions in late 1971 and throughout 1972, it can be assumed that tens of thousands of people were affected by some form of repression (in addition to trials and expulsions from SK, people were dismissed from their jobs, harassed, socially excluded, etc.).⁷ Such developments led to the re-emergence of Croatian illegal national organizations and groups in the 1970s. Significantly, a number of members of such anti-regime groups were active in some capacity during the Croatian Spring. The persecution they were faced with was thus partly a continuation of the regime’s showdown with the supporters of Croatian Spring, since most of the charges against them, such as preparing an uprising and overthrowing the government, were trumped up.⁸

The group that attracted the most attention was the so-called Croatian Secret Revolutionary Army (the name was a complete fabrication of the Yugoslav secret service), also known as the “Miloš group”, according to the first defendant Tvrtko Miloš. Namely, the group allegedly planned attacks on streets and vital state facilities, but also detonated explosive device on September 17,

⁶ Čuvalo, *The Croatian national movement: 1966 – 1972*.

⁷ During the nonviolent protests in mid-December 1971, in which most of the demonstrators were students, 866 students were arrested, and 35 of them were criminally charged. The extent of the repression is also shown by the fact that between 1969 and 1971, 1,449 “criminal acts against the people and the state” were registered, and as many as 3,606 in the first half of 1972 alone. It is estimated that within three years, about 5,000 people were dismissed from various political and economic positions. Radelić, *Hrvatska u Jugoslaviji: 1945. – 1991.: od zajedništva do razlaza [Croatia in Yugoslavia: 1945 – 1991: from unity to separation]*, pp. 454-461.

⁸ The most numerous group of political convicts in the 1970s of up to sixteen people was the so-called Croatian Liberation Revolutionary Army (*Hrvatska oslobodilačka revolucionarna armija*, HORA) known as the Zadar group. In the indictment they were accused of crimes they allegedly committed from 1970, during the Croatian Spring, until their arrest in mid-1974. Two members of the group, Petar Šale and Petar Vuleta, were sentenced to prison terms after the collapse of the Croatian Spring as members of the student movement, and others, such as Davor Aras, took part in various events that the regime later described as hostile. Hrvatski državni arhiv (HDA) [Croatian State Archives], fond [Record Group] 1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 90795 Aras Davor, pp. 3-10, 23-25, 74-103.

1975, in the center of Zagreb on the occasion of the awarding of the Order of the People's Hero to the city of Zagreb. Since Tito was also in Zagreb at the time, the theory that it was an assassination attempt was carried into the public domain. Adding to the drama of the events, five defendants were sentenced to death. Later they were commuted to time sentences, and on this occasion, information came to light that confessions about planning attacks and planting explosives in Zagreb had been coerced by terrible torture. The historian Josip Mihaljević has recently written a detailed and high-quality scientific monograph on the above events entitled *Kako je operirala UDBA?: Operacija "Paromlin" i sudbina Vinka Markovića* [How did the UDBA operated?: Operation "Paromlin" and the fate of Vinko Marković].⁹ The arrests involved a large number of people, and what is much less known is that they led to the discovery of two other alleged terrorist organizations. In the first group, three people were convicted – Mato Batinić, Tomo Dumančić and Stjepan Lugarec. The other was called the Croatian Revolutionary Movement (*Hrvatski revolucionarni pokret*, HRP) by the regime, while it was known to the public, again according to the first accused, as Tomislav Držić's group.¹⁰

The aim of the paper; sources and methodology; previous research

This paper is based on the documents of the State Security Service of the Republic Secretariat for Internal Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, which were not consulted for scientific purposes until now, and on information obtained through the interview made by the author of this paper with Tomislav Držić, as well as on scientific and journalistic books and articles. The aim of the paper is to compare the extent to which the anti-regime attitudes and activities of the members of the so-called Držić groups correlated with the criminal acts of which they were accused by the repressive institutions of the communist regime in Yugoslavia and for which they were eventually convicted.

The central part of the paper begins with a reconstruction of how the aforementioned regime critics were discovered and arrested. Among other things,

⁹ Mihaljević, *Kako je operirala UDBA?: Operacija "Paromlin" i sudbina Vinka Markovića* [How did the UDBA operated?: Operation "Paromlin" and the fate of Vinko Marković].

UDBA is the acronym for the Yugoslav intelligence service State Security Administration (*Uprava državne bezbednosti*), which was called State Security Service until 1966.

¹⁰ HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 0, šifra [Code] 19, broj [Number] 74, Osnovni podaci o nekim terorističkim grupama koje su od 1972. do 1976. djelovale u Zagrebu, Splitu, Zadru i Lici [Basic data on some terrorist groups that operated in Zagreb, Split, Zadar and Lika from 1972 to 1976], pp. 24-27.

it supports the thesis from the introduction that the individuals from the so-called Držić group were arrested as part of a broader wave of repression that began with the arrest of the so-called Miloš group. This part of the paper also contains basic biographical information about those arrested. The next part briefly describes the sentences against members of the so-called Držić group. Then follows the most important and extensive part of the paper, in which the verdicts are challenged on the basis of the documents of the State Security Service and the testimony of Tomislav Držić. The verdicts largely portrayed the convicts as well-organized enemies of the regime, linked to Croatian émigrés and ready to commit terrorist acts. However, the other sources mentioned above refute such a picture and indicate that these were regime critics who, under the impression of the widespread oppression by the regime after the violent suppression of the Croatian Spring, thought and discussed for a while the ways of passive resistance to the regime, by expanding the circle of like-minded people who would debate current issues, by distributing anti-regime leaflets, and by writing articles for a magazine of Croatian émigrés published in Canada. In the conclusion, the previously established theses are reiterated and the activities of Držić's "group" are placed in the context of resistance and intellectual opposition to the Yugoslav communist regime in Croatia, the violent suppression of the Croatian Spring and the repression that followed, as well as the new wave of arrests in 1975.

Considering the structure of the paper and its content presented earlier, but also the regime's claim about the existence of other alleged terrorist groups in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, a certain statement by one of the leading Yugoslav communists and dissident since the mid-1950s, Milovan Đilas, can be referred to. In his popular book *Nova klasa: Kritika savremenog komunizma* [*The New Class: Critique of Contemporary Communism*], he wrote that in communist systems people are persecuted not for breaking the law but for being opponents of the regime. Đilas added that most of those punished are innocent from a legal point of view.¹¹

Taking into account the large number of people who were persecuted by the regime in Croatia between 1945 and 1990, either for organized "hostile" activities or for independent actions (e.g., purchasing, reading, and distributing books, newspapers, and magazines published by Croatian émigrés) and expressions (e.g., expressing anti-regime views in public, singing "nationalist" songs) of certain individuals, the number of historiographical works dealing

¹¹ Đilas, *Nova klasa: kritika savremenog komunizma* [*The New Class: A Critique of Contemporary Communism*], p. 86.

The book was first published in English in 1957 under the title *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*.

with this subject is not nearly satisfactory. However, a few years ago, a large number of documents of the State Security Service of the Republic Secretariat for Internal Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Croatia became available to researchers, which was very quickly reflected in the appearance of books and articles dealing with the regime's repression and various forms of resistance and opposition to the regime. Due to the limited space in this article, only three books are mentioned.

The monograph entitled *Hrvatski pokret otpora: Hrvatske državotvorne organizacije i skupine 1945.-1966.* [*Croatian Resistance Movement: Croatian National Organizations and Groups: 1945-1966*] provides an overview of several dozen Croatian organizations and groups with an anti-Yugoslav orientation that were active during the period indicated and an analysis of their similarities and differences. Special attention is given to the Croatian resistance movement founded by the then young student Jakša Kušan, who later became one of the most prominent Croatian émigrés with a liberal-democratic orientation and editor of the popular émigré magazine *Nova Hrvatska* in London.¹² The year 2021 saw the publication of the book *Usta širom zatvorena: Delikt mišljenja u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1980.-1990.* [*Mouth Wide Shut: The Crime of Opinion in Communist Croatia 1980-1990*], which analyzes the criminal and misdemeanor proceedings conducted by the courts against a number of individuals whose only "crime" was to express views that the regime considered dangerous and hostile.¹³ This book is important, among other things, because it dispels the widespread myth that after Tito's death in May 1980 there was a liberalization in Yugoslavia and a relaxation of the regime's pressure on society and thus on dissidents, which was partly true for the Yugoslav republics of Slovenia and Serbia, but not for Croatia. Moreover, the book is full of valuable and numerous facts. The last one in the series was mentioned and presented earlier – *How did the UDBA operated?: Operation "Paromlin" and the fate of Vinko Marković.*¹⁴ This book can be a great model for future researchers, for example students and young historians, how to approach scientifically the topic of the existence of some Croatian anti-regime organizations, in terms of the structure of the article/thesis, the methodology chosen, the sources used and the objective approach.

It is not out of place to mention at the end of this part of the article that since the collapse of the Yugoslav communist regime, numerous testimonies of former political prisoners have been published, which constitute indispen-

¹² See note 5.

¹³ Miškulin, *Usta širom zatvorena: Delikt mišljenja u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1980. – 1990.* [*Mouth Wide Shut: The Crime of Opinion in Communist Croatia 1980 – 1990*].

¹⁴ See note 9.

sable sources for the study of this subject. In addition to a number of books and far more numerous articles, the testimonies published in the journal *Politički zatvorenik*, the bulletin of the Croatian Society of Political Prisoners, deserve special mention. In the aforementioned journal one will also find a large number of useful texts on the subject (for example, reviews of books by former political prisoners), tirelessly written by its long-time editor-in-chief Tomislav Jonjić.

Discovery and arrest

As early as the end of February 1975, the State Security Service (*Služba državne sigurnosti*, SDS) received information that Želimir Čizmić, born in 1952 in Zadvarje near Omiš, was attempting to gather members for a branch of the anti-regime organization Croatian Liberation Army (*Hrvatska osloboditeljska vojska*, HOV), which was allegedly linked to Croatian anti-Yugoslav émigrés to the West and aimed, among other things, at assassinations and kidnappings of high-ranking communist officials. This statement was made to the SDS by Čizmić's friend Davor Žilić, born in 1946 in Polača, Benkovac municipality. He did so two hours after the altercation between Čizmić and himself, both of whom were intoxicated.¹⁵ It can be stated with great certainty that the organization mentioned did not exist. During 1972, some Croatian émigrés printed leaflets and proclamations of the so-called HOV, which allegedly opposed the regime. These propaganda materials explained how various anti-regime activities were to be carried out, called for the unity of the Croatian people, etc. This was a consequence of the spread of the revolutionary spirit in that part of the Croatian political emigration that was outraged by the widespread repression in Croatia after the violent end of the Croatian Spring.¹⁶ It can be assumed that the information from the aforementioned promotional materials reached Čizmić.

In his testimony, Žilić mentioned several people whom Čizmić allegedly tried unsuccessfully to recruit to the HOV, including Žilić's cousin Ratko Peraić, who was later convicted as a member of the so-called Držić group.¹⁷ Since these were young people who consumed alcohol during the conversation, and Čizmić was prone to excessive behavior, it can be concluded that during the anti-regime talks there was a competition for patriotism, "who is

¹⁵ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 96423 Čizmić Želimir, pp. 3, 5-7.

¹⁶ Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija* [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration], pp. 266 – 267.

¹⁷ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 96423 Čizmić Želimir, p. 6.

the better Croat”, “who is ready for action”, which led to the physical altercation. Žilić wanted to take revenge on Čizmić, so he told the SDS everything, but he regretted it, as he refused to cooperate during later interrogations, it was obvious that he was very sorry that his cousin Peraić was arrested because of his statement, which he retracted.¹⁸

After the explosion in the center of Zagreb, the SDS tried to reach Čizmić as a person for whom there was unconfirmed information that he was in contact with Croatian émigrés and that he advocated violent action against the regime. Čizmić was not arrested until 30 September, he was in pre-trial detention for three months, and although it was established that he was a person oriented against the regime, he was released for lack of concrete evidence of his illegal activity.¹⁹ It should be added that Čizmić participated in the student strike in 1971 and was briefly in prison.²⁰ The day after the explosion, the SDS arrested two people to whom Žilić had given information that Čizmić had tried to recruit for the HOV – Ratko Peraić, born in 1942 in Polača near Benkovac, and Roko Domić, an academic sculptor and primary school teacher, born in 1938 in Lovreć near Imotski. Blado Dobrašin, born in 1942 in Ljuta near Dubrovnik, and Ljubomir Antić, born in 1946 in Šepurine on the island of Prvić near Šibenik, were also arrested as work colleagues, acquaintances, and friends. Peraić was a student at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, who worked part-time at the media company Vjesnik, where Dobrašin also worked as an editor and Antić as a journalist. The criminal complaint filed against them on 19 September stated that they had been conspiring since 1971 to form an illegal group that had its programmatic principles and had written a series of leaflets calling for an uprising and the creation of an independent Croatian state, which were found during a perquisition of Peraić’s apartment.²¹

After lengthy investigations (Domić, for example, was in pre-trial detention for six months), Domić, Dobrašin and Antić were released. It is stated that this was due to lack of evidence, but there is no doubt that the regime considered them enemies. In Domić’s file, for example, a document from 1978 states that he is a Croatian nationalist.²² Josip Pavičić, another Vjesnik journalist, wrote in a diary published in 2010 that Dobrašin and Antić had been

¹⁸ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 96423 Čizmić Želimir, pp. 7, 9-12, 59. HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 248785 Domić Roko, p. 37.

¹⁹ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 96423 Čizmić Želimir, pp. 50, 61-64, 66-69, 94-95.

²⁰ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 248785 Domić Roko, p. 36.

²¹ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, pp. 4-5.

²² HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 248785 Domić Roko, p. 1.

arrested as part of an extensive investigation into the Zagreb explosion. At the same time, *Vjesnik* was conducting an internal investigation into how “hostile elements” could have been employed in such a sensitive area as the media. At the SK meeting on 3 October, Pavičić was described as a good acquaintance of Antić and criticized for not having warned those in charge that Antić was a member of the editorial board of the *Studentski list* magazine, which was marked as nationalist and was shut down after the collapse of Croatian Spring. Pavičić was also marked as suspicious because the information that his wife was the secretary of *Studentski list* became topical again. Ultimately, Pavičić claimed that the SDS was behind the explosion in order to get an excuse to deal with regime dissidents, some of whom were severely punished, while others, like him, Antić and Dobrašin, avoided prison sentences.²³

Tomislav Držić, another *Vjesnik* journalist and alleged leader of an illegal anti-regime group, claimed to the author of this paper that in 1973 a number of new, young and well-trained operatives came to head the Zagreb center of the SDS. They began to carry out well-organized and complex operations against political dissidents, and one of these operations was the 1975 rigged explosion in Zagreb in order to get a pretext for repression.²⁴ According to Držić, the regime wanted to deal with some *Vjesnik* editors and journalists who were not dismissed after the collapse of Croatian Spring. According to Držić, only some leading figures who supported the reforms were punished, such as Srećko Freundlich, Božidar Novak, Neda Krmpotić and Krešimir Džeba, while younger journalists such as Darko Stuparić or him, whose arti-

²³ Pavičić, *Ako smo šutjeli, što je ovo? [If we were silent, what is this?]*, pp. 193-196.

²⁴ Following up on Držić's remark, it should be added that Držić also testified to the author of this paper that he was in contact with SDS official Zlatko Lacković even before his arrest because, as *Vjesnik*'s journalist, he regularly had to hand over magazines and newspapers of Croatian émigrés delivered to *Vjesnik* to the SDS. Franjo Vugrinec interrogated Držić extensively during the investigation and insisted that he should have admitted to had been an CIA informant. Indeed, the regime frequently discredited its dissidents and opponents in Croatia with accusations of fascism, terrorism, and working for foreign intelligence services. It is Vugrinec whom Držić highlights as an example of a new, well-educated and trained cadre of the SDS. Intervju s T.D. [Interview with Tomislav Držić. June 18, 2019, Zagreb (hereinafter: Interview with T.D.)]. Born in 1944 in the municipality of Goričan near Čakovec, Vugrinec graduated from high school with a degree in economics and earned a diploma from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb. During his career, he completed several specialized courses, held several high-ranking positions in the security system of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (at the end of 1988, he was appointed Deputy Secretary for Internal Affairs), and received several awards for his work. In 1981, for example, he was awarded a sum of money for “proven expertise and above-average results in organizing and coordinating, as well as improving the execution of operational tasks aimed at suppressing enemy activities.” After the democratic changes in Croatia in 1990, he was briefly retired, only to rejoin the security system of the Republic of Croatia. “Registar tajnih službi” [“Secret Services Register”].

cles were written in the same tone, were not affected by severe forms of repression. Držić, however, was moved from his job as a punishment in the spring of 1975, a few months before his arrest, for writing a text about the declining birth rates in Croatia. A meeting of the SK organization was held in Vjesnik, where Držić's text was condemned as nationalistic.²⁵

Born in Zagreb in 1940, Držić was arrested on the basis of Peraić's interrogation. Peraić named Tomislav Polegubić as one of the like-minded people with whom, like Držić, he had anti-regime conversations.²⁶ In the first half of 1975, the SDS received several pieces of information about Polegubić, which portrayed him as an opponent of the regime, but also as a supporter of Croatian Spring, who was punished for such a political orientation. Polegubić was born in 1940 in Banjevci near Benkovac and graduated in Yugoslav languages and literature and comparative literature. Unable to find employment in his profession, he worked briefly as an editor at the journal *Novi list*, where he was dismissed in mid-1971. Very quickly, in early 1972, he found another job, but was fired even more quickly. During the investigation he claimed that he could not find a job, so he was fired because he was considered politically unsuitable. On 21 September, criminal charges were filed against him, followed by Jozo Lukač, an employee of waste management enterprise "Čistoća", born in 1944 in Liskovača near Tomislavgrad in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and high school teacher Emilija Pleša, born in 1941 in Delnice, on suspicion of forming an illegal group together with Peraić to overthrow the government in Yugoslavia.²⁷ Polegubić and Lukač were eventually convicted, while Pleša was released. In addition, Lukač was sentenced to four and a half years in prison in 1966 for being a member of the Croatian illegal national organization Croatian Liberation Movement (*Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret*).²⁸

Along with Držić, Peraić, Polegubić and Lukač, Stjepan Turek, born in 1940 in Sveti Đurđ near Ludbreg, was one of the accused after the investigation was completed. Turek graduated from medical school in 1973 but did not find

²⁵ Intervju s T.D. [Interview with T.D.]. Držić testified to the author of this paper that he served part of his prison sentence with Tvrtko Miloš, who claimed that he and his group were not responsible for the explosion in Zagreb.

Đuro Perica, another member of the so-called Miloš group, testified immediately after the fall of communism that he and his co-defendants had been convicted of acts they had not committed, and described the months of psychological and physical abuse of the investigator that preceded his "confession". Pavković, *Hrvatski mučenici* [Croatian Martyrs], pp. 177-179.

²⁶ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, pp. 6, 8.

²⁷ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 248789 Polegubić Tomislav, pp. 4-5, 7-9, 20-23, 33-35, 39.

²⁸ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 239496 Lukač Jozo, p. 1. On the Croatian Liberation Movement see in detail: Krašić, *Hrvatski pokret otpora* [Croatian Resistance Movement], pp. 140-146.

employment in the profession. In the first half of the 1970s, he held several senior positions at the Medicinska naklada publishing house. Turek's personal file, compiled from SDS documents, states that there is a "reasonable suspicion" that in 1971 he was extremely active at the forefront of the student movement, which allegedly acted in the direction of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.²⁹

Verdict

The court sentences against political opponents of the communist regime in Croatia, who were convicted of planning an organized violent attempt to overthrow communism and disintegrate Yugoslavia, were extremely tendentious. On the one hand, they were informal groups of dissidents whose "hostile activity" usually amounted to criticizing the regime in mutual conversations and associating with like-minded people in the hope that in a crisis situation they would be able to take advantage of the regime's weakness, which would lead to democratization and the creation of a Croatian state. In some cases, there was talk of planning violent actions, such as diversions or uprisings, but mostly everything remained in words, without drawing up concrete plans, let alone creating the necessary conditions for their implementation (procuring sufficient quantities of weapons, acquiring the necessary military capabilities, etc.). Some of the opponents of the regime also left written traces of their activities, for example, some of them wrote programs in which they discussed the position of the Croatian people in Yugoslavia, i.e. gave ideas on the organization of the future Croatian state. Sometimes the activities of such groups manifested themselves in stronger propaganda activity, i.e. criticism of the regime among larger groups of people (mainly pupils and students) or distribution of anti-regime leaflets, i.e. writing slogans. In order to break through the regime's censorship, at least to some extent, some opponents of the regime tried to obtain propaganda materials from Croatian émigrés, especially newspapers and magazines. On the other hand, such groups were portrayed in indictments and sentences as terrorist organizations that had precise plans to overthrow the government and wanted to implement them, often with the help of the "enemy emigration".³⁰ Tomislav Držić's "group", i.e. the "terrorist organization" of HRP, also fits this mold.

The court dated the beginnings of the convicts' anti-regime activities back to 1967, when Držić came into contact with émigré Stjepan Dubičanac

²⁹ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, p. 188. HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 237995 Turek Stjepan, pp. 68-69.

³⁰ Krašić, *Hrvatski pokret otpora* [Croatian Resistance Movement], pp. 25-39.

in Montreal, Canada, who had left Yugoslavia after the end of the World War II. According to the verdict of the District Court in Zagreb on 31 March 1976, Držić and Dubičanac communicated in the following years through letters, telephone and personal meetings and agreed on methods of action for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, including the printing and distribution of the émigré magazine *Jadran*, published by Dubičanac, and the establishment of an illegal anti-Yugoslav organization in Croatia. In addition, the court concluded that from 1971 until their arrest, Držić and Peraić worked on the creation of the illegal terrorist organization called Croatian Revolutionary Movement. They also wrote the programmatic principles of the movement, whose goal was to break up Yugoslavia through an uprising. They also compiled leaflets calling for the uprising and also obtained propaganda materials from Croatian émigrés, especially those that spoke about the methods of guerrilla warfare. In line with the intention to act violently against the authorities, Držić was supposed to obtain communication devices and weapons, as well as a machine for duplicating propaganda material. As for Polegubić, he was marked as the main author of program documents, together with Peraić. Lukač and Turek received much lighter sentences than the others. Lukač, in fact, was accused of being familiar with the “tasks, goals and program of the terrorist organization” in 1972, but although he refused to become a member, he did not report his findings to the security services. Držić offered Turek to write for the aforementioned magazine *Jadran*, which Turek refused, but he did not report Držić’s offer to the authorities.³¹

The convicts appealed against the sentence, so it came to a trial before the Supreme Court of Socialist Republic of Croatia, where the sentences on November 19, 1976, were somewhat lessened. Držić was sentenced to six years in prison, and Peraić and Polegubić to four. In the first instance verdict, Držić was sentenced to eight years in prison, and Peraić and Polegubić to six. The appeals of Lukač and Turek were rejected; Lukač was sentenced to one year in prison and Turek to eight months.³²

³¹ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, pp. 234-236.

³² Ibid, pp. 213, 230, 236.

Držić was convicted of “committing an offense against the nation and the state by participating in a hostile activity against Yugoslavia” (Article 109 of the Criminal Code) and the offense “against the nation and the state by conspiring against the nation and the state” (Article 117, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code). Peraić and Polegubić were convicted of committing the latter offense, while Lukač and Turek were convicted of “offenses against the judiciary by failing to report the preparation of an offense” (Article 279, paragraph 2, of the Criminal Code). Ibid, p. 233.

As for the time spent in prison (he served his sentence in the Lepoglava Correctional Institution), Tomislav Držić’s personal file states that he associated with political prisoners and continued his “hostile activities”, for which he was warned and punished with disciplinary

measures. According to the same source, he changed his behavior only in the last two years of his imprisonment and after his release no more “hostile behavior” was recorded. HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210055 Držić Tomislav, p. 5. In a conversation with the author, Držić described the numerous inconveniences he faced after his release from prison because he carried the stigma of being a former political prisoner, which was reflected mainly in the inability to find employment, social exclusion, and even demonization in the press. He concluded this part of the interview by saying that it was much worse for him in this “freedom” than in prison. Intervju s T.D. [Interview with T.D.].

The news about the judicial conviction of the members of the so-called Miloš group was published in a very short form in several newspapers and magazines in Croatia: *Borba* (Zagreb edition), *Slobodna Dalmacija* (Split), *Večernji list* (Zagreb), *Vjesnik* (Zagreb). The magazines and newspapers of the Croatian political emigration in the West wrote about it in much more detail, but with some inaccuracies due to the difficult flow of information from Yugoslavia abroad. Mihaljević, *Kako je operirala UDBA?: Operacija “Paromlin” i sudbina Vinka Markovića* [How did the UDBA operated?: Operation “Paromlin” and the fate of Vinko Marković], pp. 144-147.

The echo of the verdict of the so-called Držić group did not appear in high-circulation Zagreb magazines and newspapers such as *Vjesnik u srijedu* and *Večernji list*. Nevertheless, the news was published in *Mali vjesnik*, an internal bulletin for employees of the Vjesnik media company. The author of the text was Đorđe Ličina, a journalist who has written a large number of articles and books about Croatian émigrés, in which they are all portrayed as fascists, terrorists, criminals and mercenaries of foreign intelligence services. In addition to the basic information from the verdict, Ličina’s text is steeped in demonizing the convicts. Writing about the contacts between Dubičanac and Držić, he notes that the latter turned into “the most pathetic and poorly paid supporter of the enemy”. He calls the convicts “a weak bunch” and points out that they experienced “the fate of all their morally, humanly and politically degraded predecessors”. Ličina, Đorđe, “Držić osam, Peraić šest godina strogog zatvora zbog ilegalne neprijateljske aktivnosti” [“Držić eight years, Peraić six years in strict imprisonment for illegal hostile activities”], *Mali vjesnik* (Zagreb), April 1976, p. 3.

As for the magazines and newspapers of the Croatian political emigration, the magazine *Danica*, published by the Franciscans in Chicago, twice published “letters from the Homeland” containing information about some of the convicts from the so-called Držić group. The first “letter” speaks of “secret trials” throughout Croatia and contains, among other things, the information that Professor Tomislav Polegubić was sentenced to six years in prison. The “letter” also mentions Josip Lukač, who could not be recognized by his colleagues due to the alleged torture during the six-month investigation. The mentioned source says the following about it: “From his ninety kilos he has dropped to forty-five. His colleagues notice traces of severe torture, bruises, bald patches with torn out beard and hair, while he does not dare to socialize or talk to anyone.” “Samostalnost” [“Independence”], *Danica* (Chicago), June 2, 1976, p. 3. In the second letter, which is also about the oppression by the regime in Croatia, it is stated that the journalist Tomislav Držić from Vjesnik is also among those sentenced. It is reported that he was sentenced to eight years in prison for producing leaflets whose content was directed against the existing socio-political order in Yugoslavia. This article also contains information about the sentence against Ratko Peraić, and information about the sentence against Polegubić is presented again. “U Zagrebu” [“In Zagreb”], *Danica* (Chicago), July 28, 1976, p. 9.

A dangerous terrorist organization or an informal group of opponents of the regime?

Documents based on interrogations conducted during the investigation, which was carried out by SDS officials and the District Court, are kept in the personal files of the convicts. During the investigations, the arrestees were subjected to various forms of psychological and physical abuse, which was common, and the investigators also tendentiously recorded the statements. However, this documentation reveals a different type of anti-regime activity on the part of the convicts than that presented in the verdict, as does Držić's statement to the author of this thesis. The aim of this part of the text is not to address the question of whether the convicts were really guilty under the Yugoslav criminal law in force at the time, partly because it contained legal mechanisms for dealing with political opponents, especially in the form of the so-called verbal insult, but whether their anti-regime activities actually contained terrorist elements, i.e. whether they could have seriously threatened the regime.

Referring to the way the Yugoslav intelligence services acted against critics of the regime, as well as the use of laws and the Constitution for the same purposes, Mihaljević drew the following conclusion: "The State Security Service was only one of the instruments in the repressive system of the communist government. Although the Service also undertook illegal activities, and we saw in this example (the arrest and trial of the so-called Miloš group, ed.) that judicial bodies did so on occasion, the laws themselves and even the Constitution were problematic because they served as a means of maintaining the communist monopoly on power." In the following, Mihaljević explains that the broad application of the article of the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974, which states that freedom must not be abused to overthrow the existing socio-political order, was "the basis for the criminal prosecution of political dissidents." This point was supplemented by the 1951 Criminal Code and the 1976 Criminal Code (Chapter X of the 1951 Criminal Code and Chapter XV of the 1976 Criminal Code), "which de facto constituted the political-ideological instrumentalization of legislation." "With this, the legislator declared any oppositional activity to be hostile and counter-revolutionary and associated it with terrorism", Mihaljević concludes.³³

Miškulin has written more extensively about the legislative levers for dealing with regime critics in the book mentioned earlier. He notes that an entire chapter of the Federal Criminal Code (the XV entitled Crimes Against the

³³ Mihaljević, *Kako je operirala UDBA?: Operacija "Paromlin" i sudbina Vinka Markovića* [*How did the UDBA operated?: Operation "Paromlin" and the fate of Vinko Marković*], p. 310.

Foundations of Socialist Self-Governing Social Organization and Security of the SFRY) served to “put oppositional or simply (in comparison to the regime) different political activities on the other side of the law.” There were two articles in this chapter (133, entitled “Enemy Propaganda”, and 134, entitled “Incitement to National, Religious, and Racial Hatred, Discord, or Intolerance”), along with Article 157 from Chapter XVII (“Damage to the Reputation of the SFRY”) and several articles of the Criminal Code of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (80, “Exposure to Humiliation of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, Other Republics, Autonomous Provinces, Peoples and Nationalities of Yugoslavia”, then 197, “Dissemination of Fake News”, and 217, “Abuse of Religion and Church for Political Purposes”), as well as the Law on Misdemeanors “were specifically directed against nonviolent, i.e. propaganda (mostly oral, but also written and, to a lesser extent, caricature), oppositional or other activities”, Miškulin explains.³⁴

About his contact with Dubičanac, Držić told the investigators that he was an accredited journalist for the magazine *Vjesnik*, attending the 1967 World Expo in Montreal, and on that occasion happened to meet Dubičanac. The latter offered him to write articles for the magazine *Jadran*, which he edited, and sent some copies to Zagreb.³⁵ They continued their contact through correspondence, telephone conversations, and also meetings in London (Great Britain), Rome (Italy), and Zurich (Switzerland). Like almost all Croatian political émigrés, Dubičanac was interested in various uncensored information about the situation in Croatia and Yugoslavia, how stable the regime was, how it was coping with growing economic difficulties, inter-ethnic relations, etc., because of the regime’s control over the media in Yugoslavia. He was interested in the situation of political prisoners sentenced after the collapse of Croatian Spring and he offered to organize a collection of financial aid for them and their families. In order not to be convicted of espionage, Držić pointed out in the investigation that he presented the situation in Yugoslavia quite positively and with a very small dose of criticism, and that he refused almost all forms of cooperation offered by Dubičanac, such as writing articles for *Jadran* or obtaining addresses of dissidents to whom magazines could be sent. Dubičanac, on the other hand, told Držić that he had been a military doctor in the service of the NDH regime, that he had not been involved in any war crimes, but that he was afraid of communist revenge and emigrated. He also explained to him the relations between Croatian émigrés, claiming that he was in favor of the unification of most of the emigration, but also distanced

³⁴ Miškulin, *Usta širom zatvorena: Delikt mišljenja u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1980. – 1990.* [Mouth Wide Shut: The Crime of Opinion in Communist Croatia 1980 – 1990], p. 256.

³⁵ *Jadran* was occasionally published in the period 1967-1973 in Montreal, Canada.

himself from any use of violence in anti-Yugoslav activities. He devoted a lot of time to *Jadran* and to the question of its editorship and wanted to get useful advice from Držić, and he also expressed the wish that the printing should be moved to Croatia.³⁶

According to the investigation documents, Dubičanac left Držić with the impression of an extremely educated, wealthy and influential man who was disappointed by the actions of the Croatian émigrés, so he tried to act alone. He was inspired by the program of the Canadian Liberal Party (he was a member of parliament in the Canadian province of Quebec) and presented Držić with the idea of founding an organization based on the principles of liberalism that would grow from the illegal organization into a political party when the regime weakened. He believed that “liberal democracy” was the only true alternative to Yugoslav socialism, that liberalism was “the most vital political philosophy”, and that the establishment of Croatian Liberal Party should be the next stage in Croatian political life. He stressed that the program must also address the Serbs in Croatia in order to overcome the poisoned relations from the first Yugoslav state and the severe conflicts and bloodshed from the World War II, i.e., to guarantee them all civil rights in accordance with liberal ideology. Dubičanac also gave Držić suggestions on how to organize such an organization, which was to be illegal at first. One gets the impression that Dubičanac, like many other political émigrés, believed that the collapse of the Yugoslav communist system would lead to interethnic conflicts and that at least part of the Croatian people would have to be organized to some degree in order to wage a political struggle for the creation of the Croatian state, but also the real war to preserve the physical survival of the Croatian people. Držić said that he had told Dubičanac that he would try to organize a group of people according to the principles he had presented. According to SDS investigation documents, Dubičanac also offered Držić the opportunity to obtain weapons and a duplicating machine, and they agreed on a communication code.³⁷

In further contacts, Dubičanac encouraged Držić to organize a group as soon as possible, to write a program, but also to participate in the editing of *Jadran* and write articles. On the other hand, Držić replied that the group was in its infancy and was working on writing the program, while Dubičanac expressed increasing dissatisfaction with such answers. Držić explained that he had not achieved much because of his busy schedule, but also because of the unfavorable political situation in the country.³⁸ In the manner described,

³⁶ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210055 Držić Tomislav, pp. 92-95, 102-118, 145-156.

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 158, 166-176.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 178-185.

Držić presented his contacts and the nature of his relationship with Dubičanac, and he also spoke about it during the interrogation before the district judge. Without pressure from the investigators, he changed his testimony somewhat, so with regard to the determination of the beginning of the Liberal Party in Croatia, he said that he had given Dubičanac neither a positive nor a negative answer. He presented Dubičanac's offer to send weapons differently – he claimed that as a hunter he wanted to get a high-quality rifle, and Dubičanac offered to help him in this sense. He also said that the agreed encrypted method of communication was not used, except in a telegram sent to him by Dubičanac and signed with the name Mirjam.³⁹

From the documents in Dubičanac's personal file, it appears that the Yugoslav intelligence services did not have much information about Dubičanac before Držić's arrest. Moreover, it can be concluded from the aforementioned documents that Dubičanac did not belong to the circles of those Croatian émigrés who treated the legacy of the NDH uncritically. For example, in the early 1950s he collaborated with Dr. Jure Petričević from Switzerland, who was a fierce critic of the Ustasha regime and the former leader of the NDH – Ante Pavelić. The Yugoslav authorities have not received any information that Dubičanac advocated the use of violence in anti-Yugoslav activities.⁴⁰

Moreover, some of his texts and actions indicate that he believed that Croatia would gradually, in the course of evolution, become independent and that the more liberal Croatian communists would have to be part of this process. The Croatian "liberal democrats" needed to encourage such communists in order to support the idea of creating an independent Croatian state.⁴¹ Thus, on December 18, 1970, he sent a memorandum in English on behalf of Americans and Canadians of Croatian origin to the American, Canadian, British, French, and Soviet governments, as well as to Savka Dabčević-Kučar, then president of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia (*Savez komunista Hrvatske*, SKH) and leader of the reformist group in the SKH, to whom the memorandum was primarily addressed. In it, Dubičanac wrote about the growing disagreements in the Yugoslav Federation and stressed that it is only acceptable to resolve them peacefully by allowing all peoples to exercise their right to self-determination.⁴² It should also be noted that no documents have been found indicating that the Yugoslav authorities

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 219-220.

⁴⁰ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 42957 Dubičanac Stjepan, pp. 1-57.

⁴¹ Stjepan Dubičanac, "Mogućnosti političkog razvoja u Jugoslaviji" ["Possibilities of Political Development in Yugoslavia"], *Jadran* (Montreal), September-December 1969, pp. 7-29.

⁴² HR-HDA-1220-SKH. CK. Kutija [Box] 42. Rezolucija [Resolution]. October 18, 1970. Washington, D.C.

attempted to take action against Dubičanac after Držić's arrest, for example by requesting his extradition to the Canadian authorities or by passing a sentence in absentia.

In a conversation with the author of this paper, Držić revealed that his acquaintance with Dubičanac was not accidental, as he said in the investigation. Namely, Držić knew Dubičanac's son, who had emigrated to Canada after graduating from school. Therefore, knowing that Držić was going to Canada on business, he sent him a message asking for a meeting, at which his father Stjepan appeared. He confirmed to the author of this paper that he had remained in contact with Dubičanac. He said further that he had written an article for *Jadran* under the pseudonym Trpimir, which he did not reveal in the investigation, adding that he was not interested in writing for *Jadran* but was looking for people who would. Referring to Dubičanac's ideas about the need to create the core of the future liberal party in Croatia, but with a strong national Croatian touch (which he also, understandably, did not say in the investigation), Držić confirmed to the author of this paper as true, and that he was trying to achieve the creation of such a group through contact with Peraić.⁴³

The next point of the verdict referred to the activities of Držić, Peraić and Polegubić with the aim of establishing an illegal organization, enlarging it and writing a program. According to Peraić's testimony in the investigation, his earlier acquaintance with Držić from work intensified in late 1971, as they were both dissatisfied with the violent end of Croatian Spring and the subsequent purges in Vjesnik. Since the beginning of 1972, they began to meet in Držić's apartment, commenting on the political situation, which they considered unfavorable for Croatia and the Croats, and concluded that some kind of study should be made on the subject. In the spring of 1972, Peraić presented Držić his idea of a "self-management party-less society" or "party-less socialism". He envisioned the abolition of party and political institutions that were superior to society. According to Peraić, society should be organized exclusively through the organization of labor. Peraić argued that only those institutions that coordinate work should exist, which meant abolishing the SK that "usurped power over society".⁴⁴

The utopian ideas of Peraić can be understood in part as a reaction to the collapse of reform movements in the Croatian Spring. It should be remembered that it was SK that constantly claimed to lead the working class in the creation of a classless society and to seek, in Marxist terms, the abolition of the state. With the suppression of Croatian Spring, SK became an obstacle for Peraić

⁴³ Intervju s T.D. [Interview with T.D.].

⁴⁴ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, pp. 6-11.

on this path. Communist Yugoslavia developed a special version of socialism, self-management, after being expelled from the Soviet block in the late 1940s. In theory, workers' councils ran enterprises, which were declared social property. However, the SK continued to play a dominant role in running the state and the economy. It is clear from Peraić's texts that he considered the actual implementation of self-management to be the most optimal social solution. Finally, it should be noted that Peraić, although he avoided admitting it, saw the realization of a "self-management party-less society" within the framework of an independent Croatian state and not Yugoslavia, which is evident from various texts seized by the SDS during the search of his apartment.⁴⁵

Apart from the *Red Bulletin* (*Crveni bilten* of the agency Tanjug), Držić also brought to Peraić copies of Croatian emigrant journals that émigrés sent to *Vjesnik* (*Slobodni dom* from Melbourne, *Hrvatska država* from Munich, *Hrvatska borba* from Washington). Among the books and magazines Držić gave Peraić to read were the texts that talked about various forms of guerrilla warfare, and Držić allegedly mentioned that they would need this knowledge at some point. Peraić claimed that he immediately stopped any involvement in the violent actions because he was under the impression that Držić believed that violence should be used in the action after gathering a group of like-minded people. Peraić, in fact, kept Držić believing that he had a group of like-minded people ready to engage in anti-regime activities, but later it turned out that he meant primarily Polegubić, probably Domić, and possibly some other colleagues from *Vjesnik*.⁴⁶

Držić also testified before the investigating judge, but also to the author of this paper, that he had only once jokingly mentioned the possibility of providing weapons to Peraić.⁴⁷ He explained his interest in texts about guerrilla warfare to the author of this paper by researching the Irish Republican Army (IRA), that he wrote articles about and even interviewed a member of that organization, which was published in *Vjesnik*. He also had friends in Ireland, and one of them was a member of IRA. Držić and Peraić were reading articles about the activities of the IRA and other similar organizations, as well as the booklet about illegal organization and guerrilla warfare written by Croatian émigrés, because they wanted to get as much information as possible about the forms of resistance. That the use of weapons was out of the question is confirmed by Držić's statement about their goal. Although he and Peraić were supporters of the creation of an independent Croatian state, they believed that

⁴⁵ Ibid, Prilog 1 [Annex 1].

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 12-16.

⁴⁷ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, p. 242. Intervju s T.D. [Interview with T.D.].

in the current geopolitical circumstances the most that could be achieved in such a manner was the Yugoslav confederation. The use of weapons to achieve such a goal would be counterproductive. When asked by the author of this paper how they envisioned the path to the creation of an independent Croatian state, Držić replied, "We kept returning to '71", referring to the events in the period of the of Croatian Spring.⁴⁸ The goal, then, was to revive political processes that would lead to the highest possible degree of Croatian autonomy in Yugoslavia and to a political and social atmosphere in which the manifestation of various forms of Croatian national identity would not be sanctioned.

By February 1973, based on his conversations with Polegubić a year earlier, Peraić had written a program of the movement, which he called Croatian Liberation Movement (Peraić's and Polegubić's documents give different names for the organization they envisioned). In further contacts, they discussed possibilities for organization and action, and it was obvious that they disagreed on the future desirable political order, as Držić saw it as multiparty democracy rather than Peraić's vision of a society without parties and state institutions.⁴⁹

In the summer of 1973, Držić called Peraić and told him that the situation was dangerous and that he should destroy all materials related to their anti-regime conversations. After another call from Držić of the same content a little later, they did not see each other again until the beginning of the spring of the following year, when Držić borrowed Peraić's *Croatian Ortography*.⁵⁰ It was an ortography, almost the entire edition of which was destroyed in 1971, after the collapse of Croatian Spring. However, the smuggled copy was printed in London by Croatian émigrés who gathered around the magazine *Nova Hrvatska*, and some copies also reached Croatia.⁵¹ Peraić further stated that he did not have frequent contact with Držić in 1974, especially regarding anti-regime activities. According to Peraić, they met again in February 1975, and Držić was unhappy that Peraić was allegedly avoiding him. In the months that followed, Držić persuaded Peraić to write a text on a topic of his choice that would have to do with the current political situation, i.e., the national and social problems of the Croatian people. Just as, according to SDS documents, he would not tell Peraić where his émigré magazines and articles from foreign newspapers came from, he would not specify for which magazine Peraić was to write the text, vaguely replying that it was a magazine printed abroad. Despite Držić's

⁴⁸ Intervju s T. D. [Interview with T. D.].

⁴⁹ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, pp. 17-25.

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 27-28.

⁵¹ Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija* [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration], p. 386.

repeated requests, Peraić did not write the text.⁵² Držić, on the other hand, revealed to the author of this paper that he had told Peraić to write an article for *Jadran* and who its editor was, which he concealed in the investigation.⁵³

Referring to Držić's request addressed to Peraić to destroy all written materials and to rather rare encounters from the summer of 1973 until his arrest in September 1975, it should be noted that Držić testified to the author of this paper that this was a consequence of the regime's political pressure on any criticism, even potential criticism. Fear and insecurity prevailed among the regime's dissidents. Držić, as well as some others, such as Peraić and Dobrašin, were convinced that they were being monitored and followed by the police and that their phones were being tapped.⁵⁴

Peraić also testified at length about his relationship with Polegubić, whom he had met in a student dormitory in Zagreb in 1969. He described Polegubić as a supporter of reformist movements in Croatia who was fired from the position of editor in the journal *Novi list*, published in the city of Rijeka. He believed that this happened because he insisted on using words from the Croatian literary language when editing texts, to the detriment of those from the Serbo-Croatian, a mixed language that was the result of political pressure from the authorities who wanted to strengthen the Yugoslav identity. Polegubić rejoiced in the student strike, hoping that the young generation could radically change the position of the Croatian people, and similarly to Držić and Peraić, Polegubić began to interact more intensively with Peraić after the collapse of the Croatian Spring.⁵⁵

Before continuing to describe his contacts with Polegubić, Peraić explained that during the student strike he began to write concepts for the "pamphlet content" and then thought about the possibility of creating leaflets based on the aforementioned texts. He explained his motivation for such an action by the violent suppression of the student protests by the police and the rumors that army forces were gathering near Zagreb to take part in the repression against the Croatian people in its capital. He assessed that the centralist forces in the SK were responding with repression to the positive and progressive reformist political movements, both in terms of the welfare of the Croatian people and social progress, which revolutionized him and encouraged him to write several texts calling for resistance. While writing about the desirable

⁵² HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, pp. 32-51.

⁵³ Intervju s T. D. [Interview with T. D.].

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ HR-HDA-1561, osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, pp. 53-55.

social system, by his own admission, he found that he had neither the knowledge nor the time to deal with such a complex subject, so he almost gave up.⁵⁶

Just as in the discussions with Držić, a disagreement soon arose between Peraić and Polegubić over some important topics. The latter was of the opinion that it was not so much the issue of social order that needed to be addressed, but the national question, i.e. the problem of the liberation of the Croatian people and the creation of an independent Croatian state. According to Peraić, Polegubić suggested that the focus of their work should be on creating an organization by gathering like-minded people. Peraić, on the other hand, believed that the first step was to write a high-quality and comprehensive program that would provide answers to all the key questions that were important for the future of the Croatian people. The next step was to strive for the program to reach as many people as possible, which meant developing in regime dissidents the ability to critically analyze the Yugoslav communist regime. Peraić called this the development of “political consciousness”, probably in reference to the Marxist concept of class consciousness, which envisioned the need to raise the consciousness of members of a particular social class in a society.⁵⁷ In a conversation with the author, Držić also confirmed that Peraić envisioned anti-regime activity exclusively as critical conversations in smaller groups of like-minded people.⁵⁸

Peraić and Polegubić tried to reconcile these two different views and wrote the concepts of the political action program and discussed possible forms of action – through a conspiratorially acting organization on the principle of loosely connected troikas or informal circles, which were to debate the program and develop “political consciousness”.⁵⁹ In the investigation Polegubić also described his relationship with Peraić in an almost identical way, the na-

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 57-59, 63-68, 70.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp 71 – 75.

⁵⁸ Intervju s T.D. [Interview with T.D.].

However, even such a conceived activity entailed criminal responsibility. Since its inception, the communist regime in Yugoslavia has used legal measures to persecute its critics. For example, the 1946 Law on Crimes Against the People and the State criminalized propaganda and agitation insofar as these acts contained a call for the violent overthrow of the existing social order. Crimes against the state were grouped in a separate chapter in the Federal Criminal Code from 1951. The 1959 amendments created Article 118. It is important to note that this article also introduced an innovation, namely the offense of “malicious and untrue representation of socio-political conditions in the country.” Since 1977, the offense of enemy propaganda has been described in Article 133. See more in: Miškulin, *Usta širom zatvorena: Delikt mišljenja u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1980. – 1990.* [Mouth Wide Shut: The Crime of Opinion in Communist Croatia 1980 – 1990.], pp. 24-56.

⁵⁹ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, pp. 81-83.

ture of their contacts, but also their disagreements.⁶⁰ He stated that he stayed in Federal Republic of Germany from February to July 1972 because of the impossibility of finding a job, and that after his return to Croatia he did not discuss with Peraić any political issues or possibilities for anti-regime activities.⁶¹ Peraić and Polegubić also described Lukač's role quite similarly in their conversations in January 1971, and Lukač's testimony largely matched theirs. Indeed, Lukač was once invited to Polegubić's apartment and asked for his opinion on the texts they had written. Lukač advised them to refrain from any form of organized action against the regime, believing that they would eventually be discovered and convicted without making any difference.⁶²

The nature of Turek's association with this anti-regime "organization" was almost the same as Lukač's role. The statements of Držić and Turek differ in detail, but both indicate that at the end of July 1975 Držić offered Turek to write an article for *Jadran*, which was not realized. He has also mentioned that a certain group of people exists in the country, which is connected with the publication of the magazine and has its own program.⁶³ Držić also testified to the author of this paper in the same sense – knowing that Turek was "pro-Croatian", he also offered him to write a text for the *Jadran*, to which Turek answered neither yes nor no, but the offer intrigued him.⁶⁴

There are three things to be pointed out at the end of this section of the text. Firstly, the individuals convicted as members of the so-called Miloš group and the so-called Batinić group had been under SDS surveillance for several years prior to their arrest.⁶⁵ After the explosion in Zagreb, the SDS had an excuse to deal with them.⁶⁶ In the large wave of arrests that followed, the SDS

⁶⁰ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 248789 Polegubić Tomislav, pp. 39-40, 81-82, 86.

⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 40, 43.

⁶² HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 248789 Polegubić Tomislav, pp. 40, 52-53, 83, 85-86. HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210546 Peraić Ratko, pp. 85-87. HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 239496 Lukač Jozo, pp. 240-242.

⁶³ HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 237995 Turek Stjepan, pp. 74-78. HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 210055 Držić Tomislav, pp. 240-242.

⁶⁴ Intervju s T.D. [Interview with T.D.].

⁶⁵ See extensively about this in: HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 0, šifra [Code] 19, broj [Number] 72, Operativna akcija Paromlin. Also, see Mate Batinić's interview: "Zbog lažnog atentata na Tita odležao sam 8 godina u Lepoglavi" ["Because of the false assassination of Tito, I spent 8 years in Lepoglava"].

⁶⁶ A number of evidence, such as the testimonies of convicts from the so-called Miloš group, suggest that the SDS staged the explosion in order to have a pretext to put these opponents of the regime behind bars. So far, however, no evidence has been found in the documents from SDS that would confirm the aforementioned theory. Extensively about that see: Mihaljević,

attempted to obtain compromising evidence from people who had some connection with the arrestees from the aforementioned groups (acquaintances, friends, colleagues). However, the repressions of the SDS were also directed against persons who were not connected with Miloš and Batinić's group and for whom there was unconfirmed information that they were anti-regime. The aim was to put as many opponents of the regime as possible in prison. The expansion of the investigation into one such person, Želimir Čizmić, led to the arrest of a group of individuals, five of whom were convicted on the basis of anti-regime texts by Ratko Peraić and Tomislav Polegubić, banned Croatian émigré propaganda materials possessed by some of them, and Tomislav Držić's contacts with émigré Stjepan Dubičanac. Those who were convicted had no intention whatsoever to act violently against the regime, did not disseminate any written anti-regime texts, and did not establish any illegal organization that they envisaged in these texts or that was suggested to them by Dubičanac.

Second, Držić's statement that it was his and Peraić's intention to gather a group of like-minded people to write critical and uncensored texts and disseminate them in order to revive the reform process from the time of Croatian Spring perhaps best sums up the wishes and intentions of the convicts.⁶⁷ And third, the SDS documents give the strong suggestion that the convicts were passionate about anti-regime activities, which included the intention to carry out terrorist acts. In conversation with Držić, the author of this paper got exactly the opposite answers, from which it follows that the contacts with Dubičanac and conversations with Peraić were activities on the fringes of Držić's life at the time. The SDS documents portray the convicts as sinister conspirators and fanatics, while the author's conversations with Držić show that his attention, time and creative energy were primarily focused on work and other ordinary everyday activities. In the conditions of enjoying civil liberties, i.e. thirty years after the collapse of the communist regime in Yugoslavia, Držić could have tried to present himself to the author of this paper as a dedicated fighter for the "Croatian cause" who devoted his entire life to the struggle for an independent Croatian state. However, he did not do that, so his statement has a special value. He explained that he embraced the "pro-Croatian attitude", as he describes it, in his family circle, which he was able to practise in a certain form through journalistic work, while the repressions after the collapse of the Croatian Spring forced him to think about alternative ways to express his opinion. Just as the repression forced Peraić and Polegubić to write anti-regime texts and leaflets and to discuss the possibilities of non-violent (!) resistance to the regime.

Kako je operirala UDBA?: Operacija "Paromlin" i sudbina Vinka Markovića [How did the UDBA operated?: Operation "Paromlin" and the fate of Vinko Marković].

⁶⁷ Intervju s T. D. [Interview with T. D.].

Conclusion

Throughout the existence of communist Yugoslavia, a section of the Croatian people held strong anti-communist and anti-Yugoslav attitudes and hoped for the creation of an independent and democratic Croatian state. Individuals from those ranks expressed their views and desires in more concrete ways, exchanging ideas with like-minded people about ways to resist the regime, obtaining, reading, and distributing banned propaganda materials of Croatian émigrés, and sometimes writing and distributing anti-regime leaflets. The regime persecuted such groups and individuals in various ways, pushing them to the margins of society (pressure, threats, blackmail, harassment, inability to obtain scholarships, dormitory rooms, jobs, etc.) and punished some in court, portraying them as hardened nationalists, fascists and terrorists who were prevented at the last minute from seriously endangering socialist and progressive Yugoslav society and the state. The limited liberalization in the second half of the 1960s and especially in the early 1970s led to the emergence of small niches in which well-disguised criticism of the regime could be cautiously voiced. By nipping in the bud, the reform processes that allowed for a somewhat freer atmosphere in society, the regime once again forced opponents into secret meetings and discussions about the possibility of resistance. It also continued the earlier practice of persecution under the pretext of fighting dangerous nationalists and terrorists.

In the mid-1970s, the SDS used the explosion in Zagreb as a pretext to persecute people for whom there was clear information that they were opponents of the regime, especially the so-called Miloš group. In addition, numerous people were arrested who were suspected of being connected in some way with the so-called Miloš group. However, the arrests also concerned persons who were not connected with the so-called Miloš group, but who were also suspected of being anti-regime and potential perpetrators of various anti-regime actions. Thus, the SDS came across an employee of the Vjesnik media house, Ratko Peraić, whose anti-regime manuscripts were found during a friskiness of his apartment. The arrests involved some of his colleagues at Vjesnik, and the testimony of one of them, Tomislav Držić, as well as Josip Pavičić, suggests that in the mid-1970s the regime wanted to complete the purge of editors, journalists, and other Vjesnik employees that had begun in late 1971 with the collapse of the Croatian Spring. The SDS documents do not indicate that supporters of Croatian Spring were arrested intentionally. However, for those arrested, who a few years earlier had been seized by a “nationalist euphoria”, as the regime contemptuously called the Croatian Spring, this biographical information was undoubtedly an aggravating circumstance in the SDS investigation, the trial in court, but also in the SK investigation in Vjesnik. Some of those arrested were eventually not convicted, but the regime undoubtedly

continued to perceive them as enemies. Therefore, the arrests by the SDS and the SK investigations in Vjesnik can certainly be seen as a form of repression and further suppression of the “remnants” of the Croatian Spring. Three – Držić, Peraić and Tomislav Polegubić – were accused of founding a terrorist organization acting on the instructions of the Croatian “fascist” émigrés, and two others were convicted of knowing about the existence of such an organization without reporting it to the authorities – Jozo Lukač and Stjepan Turek.

The investigative documents of the SDS, as well as Držić’s testimony to the author of this paper, project a significantly different picture of the convict’s activities than the one presented in the indictment. First, part of the sentence on terrorism should be removed from the equation, as this type of anti-regime activity was not seriously considered by the convicts and is a consequence of the SDS and the court’s extremely tendentious interpretation of some of Držić’s statements about the possibility of Držić and Peraić acquiring weapons and possessing propaganda materials for guerrilla warfare. In addition, Držić’s “hostile activity” consisted of occasional contacts with émigré Stjepan Dubičanac from Canada. At Dubičanac’s request, he tried unsuccessfully to find people who would write articles for the émigré magazine *Jadran*, and the attempt to create the core of Croatian Liberal Party also failed. There were several reasons for this: disagreement between Držić and Peraić on some program principles (multi-party democracy versus “party-less socialism”), disagreement between Peraić and Polegubić on the approach (informal dissident circles where critical conversations about the regime would take place and a “political consciousness” would be developed versus the creation of an illegal organization), but also the daily life obligations of those involved and the atmosphere of fear caused by the regime’s political pressure on dissidents, which persisted since the collapse of Croatian Spring, including the fear of police surveillance. It can be concluded that the peak of this group’s “hostile activity” occurred in late 1971 and early 1972, when Držić and Peraić engaged in the most intense anti-regime conversations in response to the collapse of the Croatian Spring, as well as Peraić and Polegubić, who to this have written texts for pamphlets that were never produced or distributed, and a program of anti-regime activities that never came to life. At that time, Peraić and Polegubić showed the texts they had written to Lukač, who suggested that they abandon any kind of anti-regime activity. Since then, Peraić and Polegubić have not spoken about the aforementioned issue. Contacts between Držić and Peraić since the summer of 1973 were extremely rare and limited to the requests addressed by Držić to Peraić to write a text for *Jadran*. Persons from Tomislav Držić’s “group” were actually convicted for occasional reflections and conversations about the possibilities of breaking the aforementioned atmosphere of fear, i.e. the “Croatian silence”, as the period after the collapse of the Croatian Spring is called, by gathering like-minded people and breaking the regime censorship by publishing texts abroad.

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