

Eyewitness to terror in Croatia

The Croatians and Bosnians are maintaining a fighting spirit of hope, in the face of Serbia's systematic policy of terror. Lynne Speed reports.

The Schiller Institute's Lynne Speed traveled to Croatia with Rev. James Bevel, Lyndon LaRouche's vice-presidential running mate in 1992, on Feb. 13-17 to get a first-hand look at the devastation both in Croatia and in Bosnia, and to talk with those struggling to bring peace to the region. The following is edited from a verbal report she gave to Schiller Institute members in Leesburg, Virginia on Feb. 26, 1993.

We spent about four days in Croatia and met with a number of people there, including the Mothers for Peace and leaders of the Catholic Church, and we interviewed a Bosnian woman who had been raped. Despite the real horrors that people have been through, the morale of the population was extremely high, and that was something that was very, very impressive. We were entirely in Croatia, although we did speak with a member of the Bosnian government and a member of the Bosnian relief forces.

Croatia is currently divided so that a third of it is occupied by the Serbians, one-fifth is made up of buffer zones for which the United Nations nominally has oversight: They call these "pink zones" and "gray zones." In the pink zones, the U.N. is supposedly in charge, but in fact, exercises absolutely no authority, and sits by idly while the Chetnik forces [Serbian irregulars] do whatever they please.

When we got there, we took a tour about 90 kilometers or so outside of Zagreb, to two cities—Lipik and Pakrac. Lipik is a town which had about 5,000—a very beautiful rural village. As you drive out, there are houses on either side of the roadway. You notice that *every* house is demolished. As you come closer to the center of town, you see *every single house* on either side of the road—one house right after another—is totally, *totally* destroyed—every house, every church, every school, every kindergarten. The graveyard was overrun by tanks so that every single gravestone was destroyed. Most of this destruction was done *after* the village was evacuated. This is a policy of wanton destruction of cities, so that they can *never* be renewed.

Lipik is where you have the famous white stallions, the Lipizzaners. There also is a very famous hospital, which was a center for women's diseases, and a rehabilitation-convalescent home; it was a resort area, where people who were recovering from serious illnesses could come, and there were

beautiful gardens. We walked around all the grounds, and saw where the indoor hot springs had been. The Serbs had parked tanks across the road and they shelled the place every day for a week, to make sure that all the equipment, all the pools, were destroyed. We met a family of seven who had been living in their basement for six months, because the roof had collapsed. Children were playing in the rubble.

Then we continued on to Pakrac, which was a slightly larger city—about 20,000—which is right on the border between the pink zone and the gray zone. We came up to a little roadblock manned by the Croatian police. The Croatian military is not allowed to be in this area, because the U.N. is supervising it. The Croatian police told us, "You shouldn't go in that area, up that hill." They said, "Do you see those two guys that are walking around? Those are Chetniks, and they've been up there all morning. We don't know whether they've mined the road, or whether they have machine guns, or what they're going to do, so we would advise you to stop." Now, this is an area which is acknowledged to be Croatian territory, which is supposedly under the United Nations mandate, where the Serbian forces are free to run amok.

There was a church, where we had stopped, where the images of Christ, the eyes, had been shot out—for target practice. The eyes, the nose, the mouth; Christ, the Holy Family, the Virgin Mary, the archangels, all the holy images. This is very important, because one of the myths in the press, which many Americans believe, is that this is a religious war, that the Serbs are defending Christianity against the Islamic hordes. A monsignor in Zagreb, who is very involved in relief programs in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, showed us how absurd this was. He emphasized that most Serbians are not Christians. In most of Serbia, 70-75% of the Serbians had no religious instruction; in some areas this figure is 95%. They had never been in a church; they had never been baptized. This is in marked contrast to the Croatian Catholics—95% of the population regularly attended church, even under communism, when it was expressly disapproved of. If Christmas came on a Friday, the schools would remain open. The Catholics would organize to have an early morning or late evening mass, and the majority of people, outside of the party hacks, always went to church. The Islamic population as well would regularly attend services. Not true with

the Serbians. The way the atrocities are being carried out is satanic: There are more than 500 Catholic churches that have been bulldozed, again, most of them after the cities have fallen, as have the cemeteries.

We talked at length with a medical doctor, who has conducted a number of social actions throughout Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. When Dubrovnik was under siege, there was an attempt to evacuate all the women and children; he made the point that if they left, then the morale of the fighting forces would go to rock bottom, and they wouldn't be able to resist for very long. So he organized the women and children to stay with their husbands and sons, which allowed the resistance to go for much longer. In Vukovar, which has become a national symbol of resistance, he did something which very much shocked the Serbs, who expected Vukovar to fall very rapidly, rather than the long period of resistance. Many of the people of Vukovar lived for the last three or four months in their basements. Right after the heavy shelling, during which people had been unable to come out of their basements for a week or two, he would go to the center of town and organize concerts of Mozart, blaring out as a message to the Serbs, that the will of the population had not been broken. He did this in Dubrovnik as well.

Targeted terror

He said we have to be very clear on what's going on: The Serbians don't have a policy of rape as a sexual assault. What the Serbs have perfected is the maximum amount of psychological terror. If they go to a town of 50,000 people, they don't shoot everyone, because there would be an international reaction. What they did, is they went in with targeted terror operations, beginning with the men, not with the women. One of the first things they did in villages in Croatia and Bosnia was to line up all the men between the ages of 18 and 40—anybody that was able to have a family—and they would have Serbian women cut off the genitals of these men. Many of these men were then killed.

In Büko, in eastern Bosnia, there were 34,000 people, primarily Muslim. The Serbian forces went in, they took every single man between the age of 18 and 35, they inflicted these mutilations, and then they killed them. Then they put the older men into concentration camps. All the girls between the ages of 15 and 40—of childbearing age—were put into bordellos, where they were systematically raped for two to three months. The older women and younger children were put into concentration camps, as well. After two or three months, they would let the raped women out and the refugee agencies then come in and take the women away.

So, the policy was to destroy an area, leave everybody homeless, leave everybody without any type of family structure, but without killing everyone. And then the relief agencies, the United Nations and so on, are acting in collusion with the ethnic cleansing, because they come in and clear the area. They don't say that these people have the right to be

back in their homes; they're moving people someplace else. There are 2 million refugees throughout Europe; 800,000 are in Croatia and Slovenia. One of the towns that we visited, which has 20,000 people, also has 20,000 refugees. In Zagreb, a city of 1 million, approximately 600,000 refugees are there or passing through there.

The rapes are really uncountable. There was one report that gave the number of 10,000 Croatian Catholic women who had been raped, the youngest one being 7 and the oldest woman being 70. And there are no areas which are really safe: If you look at the two-thirds of the map that is supposedly controlled by Croatia, it is all within 30 miles of Serbian-occupied territory. We had had a plan to go to Karlovac, which had been peaceful for about a year, where we had wanted to see how the rebuilding was going. However, we learned that the Serbians had started heavily shelling Karlovac again. When we got to the maternity hospital on our second day in Zagreb, the doctor told us that their newest case of rape had been a 13-year-old girl in Karlovac, who couldn't even walk, because the Serbs had broken her pelvis.

Geopolitical perfidy

There's a real recognition that the United States has played a key role in manipulating and allowing this to happen. Virtually everybody that we met with brought up the reference to James Baker's trip there in June 1991, when he said the important thing is a unified Yugoslavia. The monsignor told us a story: When he had been at a bishops' conference and then went to an interview with the State Department in November 1991, and Cardinal Kuharic from Zagreb met with Ralph Johnson, who was the State Department expert on the Balkans. The cardinal told him, "All we want is recognition." And Johnson got very nasty, and said, "No! We never intend to recognize Croatia because there are legitimate complaints and problems with suppression of ethnic minorities." Later in the conversation, the monsignor asked Johnson about Sanjak in southern Serbia, which is 80% Muslim, where it is well-known that the Muslims were very poorly treated. Johnson had never heard of Sanjak!

Quite independently of what Lyndon and Helga LaRouche have been emphasizing, people who are not familiar with their analysis stressed how it is crucial for people to know that this is a geopolitical war. People we talked to emphasized that the cause of the war does not come from within the Balkans, and the fact that it continues is not coming from this area.

The woman whom I interviewed, who had been raped, was originally from Gorazde, which has been in the press because it's been under siege, and she fled to Zagreb when she discovered she was pregnant. She and her husband were managers of a small business, together with two of their Serbian neighbors. She said that she had lived with them for 20 years as "brothers"; that's how she regarded them. These two Serbian neighbors—maybe under compulsion, it's hard to say—who

had joined the Serbian militias a bit earlier came with 10 men to rape her. They raped her for several hours, and she finally escaped by saying that she had to go to the bathroom and jumping out of the second story window and running through the woods in the middle of the night. She finally arrived at the village where her mother-in-law lived, and had never told her mother-in-law or any family members what had occurred. According to her understanding of Muslim law, once she was defiled, she could never have her husband look on her again. She said she realized her marriage was over the moment she was raped, and only hoped to be able to see her 10-year-old daughter again, one day. So you think about how this systematic policy totally destroys the family.

Many of the women who escape from these rape camps reported that the Serbian soldiers who came in to rape them, said, "I don't want to do this, but if I don't do this, I'll be killed." So you're not just talking about some madmen, but you have a policy of total terror.

I wanted to stress again the optimism that people have,

and particularly among people from the church, the relief agencies, and the Bosnian government. Rebuilding is going on with virtually no resources. In Osijek, in eastern Croatia only a kilometer from Chetnik outposts, the center of the city, which was 50% destroyed by shelling, has been almost entirely rebuilt in nine months. They were very hopeful and encouraged by the fact that we were there. Reverend Bevel made a proposal about some social actions that we might be able to take in the area to one of the church officials, and at first, he said, "This is all wonderful, but it's too late. I'm happy for your concern, but you should have come here a year ago." Then, at a certain point, his eyes started twinkling, and he said, "Well, you have really great faith to think that something can be done. And *maybe* God has sent this Jim Bevel here, with these wild proposals to salvage this situation." There was that degree of optimism that we found everywhere: That is what the enemy is trying to wipe out, any vestige of Christian civilization, human civilization from the area.

Victim of geopolitics tells her story

Rev. James Bevel was given the following written account by a 16-year-old Bosnian during his trip with Lynne Speed to Croatia.

After the attack to my village, I was the eyewitness of the massacre of civilians, which was the biggest tragedy I have ever seen before. I did not know that something even worse than death awaited me. My sister bore a baby in a basement where we were hiding during the mortar shell attack to the village. After the fall of [my village], and when Chetniks entered the village, I saw dead children lying near the house, aged between 3 and 8. I saw a destroyed mosque, and men taken away.

Some renowned persons were abducted from a column, and then killed with a gunshot in the head. They fell on the ground, and their bodies lay all around in grotesque poses. Everywhere, only chaos, panic, and death. They accused my grandfather of killing one Serbian, and then they killed him in front of my eyes in the doorway. A number of women and children remained in the village. We were hiding in basements of the destroyed houses. My house was untouched. A group of Chetniks arrived that day. They were looking for precious things, and information about men who were hiding in woods. One among them, about 30 years old, ordered me to follow him in a

house. I had to go. I was terribly frightened, and I did not expect the thing that would happen later. I knew that my resistance would have endangered the lives of my family.

When we entered the house, he asked for money, jewels, and other precious things. Everything in the house was at his disposition. He asked me where the men were. I did not answer. He ordered my to take off my clothes. I was terribly frightened; I took off my clothes in silence. I felt like I was dying. I closed my eyes. I could not watch him. He punched me, and I fell down. He lay on me; then he did it. I was crying, screaming, bleeding—I was a virgin. He ordered me to stand up. I wanted to gather my clothes to cover my nakedness and my desecrated body, but I was not even allowed to touch it. He ordered me to stand and wait. He warned me to be careful of what I was doing, because the destiny of my family depended on me. He left the house and invited two other Chetniks to enter the house. I cried. These two men did the same thing as he had done before. I did not feel anything, anymore. I did not notice when they left the house and for how long I lay on the floor alone.

My mother arrived and found me lying on the floor. She entered the house, and when she saw me in such humiliating condition, it was the worst thing. She supposed what had happened to me, and she felt it like the biggest sadness of our life. We cried and screamed together. She dressed me, and we went together to the basement. . . . My mother helped me a lot. I would like to become a mother some day. But how? Men represent to me now, violence and pain. I know that all men are not like this, but this feeling is stronger than me.