

# No 'normalization' in Croatia

*Following a recent visit to Croatia, Michael Liebig analyzes the domestic and foreign policy conundrum in which the Tudjman regime has placed itself.*

On March 31, the United Nations Security Council voted to extend for six more months the mandate for Unprofor peace-keeping troops to remain in Croatia. In doing so, the Security Council rejected Croatia's demand that the U.N. mandate be substantially altered, and that these troops be moved back to Croatia's internationally recognized national borders. Since the beginning of 1992, the Unprofor troops have been stationed on the demarcation line defined by the Serbian-occupied regions of Croatia.

Thus, de facto, the U.N. is securing the Serbian conquests in Croatia, which comprise approximately 30% of its national territory. At those locations, the Serbs can now thin out their troop presence, in order to beef it up elsewhere for further aggression against the Republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina. And to add insult to injury against Croatia, the United Nations decided to take control of military airspace over all of Croatia.

## The negotiations in Zagreb

One may wonder how the government of Franjo Tudjman in Zagreb can possibly swallow all this without a whimper of protest. More amazing still, is that during the second half of March, the Tudjman government for the first time conducted direct negotiations with the Belgrade-controlled quisling regime of the Serbian-occupied areas of Croatia, headed by Mate Boban. These "normalization" negotiations, which took place in the Russian embassy under the guidance of Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Vitaly Churkin, were even presented by the Tudjman government as a "great success," even though, as expected, absolutely no progress was made on the question of Croatia's actual sovereignty over its occupied areas and provisions for genuine minority rights there. No better prospects were achieved for those who were driven out of these areas and want to return. The agreed-upon pull-back of heavy weapons from the demarcation line is militarily insignificant, outside of its effect of weakening Croatia politically. And now, a "Yugoslavian Liaison Office" has been set up in Zagreb, complete with a de facto "ambassador" who reports to the dictator in Belgrade, Slobodan Milosevic.

It is equally amazing how actively the U.S. government is going along with the Zagreb negotiations. Although the

United States continues to insist that Bosnia's territorial integrity be maintained, in practice it is also pushing for the application of the "Cyprus model" to Bosnia. Cyprus has been a divided country ever since 1974, and is overseen by the United Nations. To its credit, the Clinton administration did take the initiative to end the hostilities between Muslims and Croats in Bosnia-Hercegovina. With the agreements signed in Washington on March 18, the Muslim-Croatian federation was (re-)created in Bosnia. But Washington's maneuvering room to negotiate was apparently reduced by the British-run Whitewater "scandal," which has been an enormous drain on the Clinton administration's political energy.

## The Tudjman government's jockeying

There are three reasons for the Tudjman government's behavior. First, Croatia was subjected to an "unofficial" credit embargo by the International Monetary Fund and the Anglo-American megabanks. Croatian acceptance of the "Cyprus model"—packaged for public consumption as Croatian-Serbian "normalization"—was a conditionality for the lifting of the financial embargo.

But it would be a fantasy to assume that now Croatia can actually expect effective reconstruction assistance from Anglo-American financial interests. Nothing will even come of the financial aid which Zagreb hopes to obtain for the hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Serb-occupied areas, whom the government has wanted to politically pacify with such assurances. The actual economic situation in Croatia is worsening: Industrial production and living standards continue to drop. To turn the situation around, what Croatia needs is not an International Monetary Fund "adjustment program," but rather a national, physical-economic reconstruction program modeled on Germany of the 1950s or France under President Charles de Gaulle.

The second reason for the Tudjman government's behavior is rooted in the fact that it wants to make foreign policy "arrangements" with Great Britain, Russia, and France, even if this be at the expense of Croatia's own national interests.

Thirdly, the Tudjman government's internal vitality has been depleted, so that jockeying for holding onto power in the short term is getting the upper hand. Tensions are on the

rise within Tudjman's party, the HDZ. Josip Manolic and Stepan Mesic, the presidents respectively of the upper and lower house of parliament, have openly broken with Tudjman. Manolic is a former high police official, and his potential influence is not to be underestimated. Also in the Catholic Church, which plays such a prominent social role in Croatia, there are signs that it may be distancing itself from Tudjman. One of the leaders of the "dissident" grouping of former HDZ leaders is Fr. Tomislav Pavao Duka, a member of a state legislature and one of the founders of the ruling party. He stands for the Catholic tradition of the Croatian freedom struggle against the Serbs, a tradition linked to the role played before and after World War II by Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, whose writings have recently been republished.

### **The citizens' initiative 'Libertas'**

In late March, a citizens' initiative called *Libertas* went public with demonstrations in Zagreb and Split. This was a significant change, since for more than two years there had not been any demonstrations expressing opposition to Tudjman's government. The fact that they were allowed to occur testifies to the growth of a political mood that is fed up with Tudjman's negation of Croatia's national interest. There is a spreading sentiment that "enough is enough." Leading figures in *Libertas* include ex-foreign minister Prof. Zvonimir Separovic, ex-Defense Minister General Spigelje, journalist Srecko Jurdana, the former leader of Mothers for Peace Slavica Bilic, Christian Democrat Marko Veselica, and Franciscan priest Barnimir Kosec.

*Libertas* sees Croatia's very existence as a nation put at risk through the Tudjman government's passivity and kowtowing to Anglo-American geopolitics. The daily newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija* wrote that *Libertas* demands that Croatia stoutly oppose any "pax Britannica-Sovietica."

### **Anglo-American intentions**

In fact, the goal of British strategy is to create two "confederations" on the territory of former Yugoslavia: an "East Yugoslavia" with Serbia, the Serbian-occupied areas in Croatia and Bosnia, Montenegro, and Macedonia; and a "West Yugoslavia" consisting of the carcasses of Croatia and Bosnia. It goes without saying that the intent of this currently operating British plan is to make Serbia into the hegemonic military and political power in the Balkans. Anglo-American and Russian interests come together in the U.N. apparatus, which is the central vehicle for realizing this plan.

The fact must be faced that the actual situation in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina is farther away than ever from any "normalization" or "controlled crisis management." The "geopolitical cleansing" and "restructuring" of former Yugoslavia which Anglo-Russian interests have in mind cannot possibly be carried through to completion. Instead, the political and military situation will likely grow even worse in coming months.

# Hamas may be softening toward PLO

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The Islamic Palestinian movement, Hamas, which has led the bloody opposition to the Gaza-Jericho accord with increasing brutality over late March and early April, may be shifting its position toward accommodation with the agreement, and with Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization Fatah, which is leading it. If such a change in Hamas strategy were to be confirmed, it could open a new chapter in the saga of the Israeli-PLO negotiations.

The news broke on April 19, as Israeli Army units were conducting a vast sweep of hundreds of Hamas militants in the Occupied Territories, that a leader of the movement, Moussa Abu Marzouk, had issued a statement indicating willingness to talk to Israel for the first time. The statement, as carried by the Jordanian weekly *El Sabil*, ran as follows: "There could be a peace treaty, or a cease-fire on condition that the Zionist forces dismantle all the Jewish settlements of the Occupied Territories and withdraw completely from the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem." Although the Hamas speaker did not endorse the Gaza-Jericho approach for a transitional process of autonomy, he did not reiterate the traditional Hamas position to "liberate the whole of Palestine from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river." This has been interpreted to mean that Hamas may be altering its commitment to an Islamic state in the whole of historic Palestine, in favor of a "mini-state" composed of the Occupied Territories. Furthermore, Abu Marzouk is quoted as referring for the first time to "the international legitimacy of the resolutions" of the United Nations "regarding the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem as illegally occupied Palestinian territories." Whether or not such a view of the U.N. resolutions includes recognition of the state of Israel, is unknown.

According to Palestinian sources in the region, the shift is tantamount to acceptance by Hamas of the PLO Fatah position. Discussions going on between leaders of both formations in Jordan, are reportedly dealing with arrangements whereby Hamas will participate in the Palestinian police force which is to guarantee security in the autonomous areas. Furthermore, Hamas appears to have reversed its earlier opposition to elections slated for the autonomous areas, indicating its willingness to participate in a national state.

Hamas finds itself in an increasingly untenable position, militarily and politically. Although its violence against Israelis has attracted support from desperate Palestinian youth, the nature of the terrorist attacks reveals the presence of other