

Vice John Batarelo: “A Troubled Relationship; the Croatian Diaspora in Australia between 1963 and 1973”

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Abstract

This paper will focus on particular events between 1963 and 1973 in which the Croatian diaspora community in Australia was directly or indirectly involved and which caused it to have a troubled relationship with the host country, a distinguishing factor of diasporas, especially stateless diasporas. The chain of events include two military incursions into Yugoslavia (1963 and 1972), Australian state and security direct intervention into the lives of ordinary Croatians and the subsequent Senate Select Committee Inquiry of the Australian Federal Parliament in 1973 to investigate Croatian claims of discrimination. The Croatian diaspora civil rights grievances were aired through the National Croatian Civil Rights Committee which transcended internal Croatian diaspora differences.

Key words: Croatian diaspora Australia, Australian multiculturalism, stateless diaspora, Senator Lionel Murphy, National Croatian Civil Rights Committee, Senate Select Committee on the Rights of Migrant Australians

All immigrant groups experience in varied ways a sense of difference in the host countries that they arrive and settle in. This difference can be of a subtle sort, a sense of alienation or more overt discrimination by various groups in the host land. This difference, alienation or discrimination can be both on an individual and a group scale. The experiences of the immigrant group influence their behaviours, stances and reactions but also inadvertently in the end influence the political culture and society of the receiving country.

On one level, Croatians in Australia received similar treatment as all other immigrant groups who came to Australia after World War Two into an environment of the 'White Australia' policy in which all non-British migrants were tolerated but viewed with a certain degree of suspicion. On the other hand, the first Croatians who came to Australia in the post war period set about creating a community and community structures for the purposes of self-help and solidarity, and for the ultimate aim of promoting and helping to establish a politically independent Croatian nation state. In an inadvertent manner they were creating an incipient diaspora, where the interests of the homeland would take precedence over their integration into the host land. This would surely lead to tension with the host society which, in time, was to devolve the 'White Australia' policy into assimilationist and integrationist policies which expected migrants to forget their old homeland and become good Australians.

Croatians could also be considered a victim diaspora as they felt they were forced from their homeland due to political repression from the communist authorities.¹ Taking the Safran² criteria into account, it can be seen that they shared several of the following characteristics:

1. They were dispersed from a centre
2. They had a collective memory of homeland
3. They had a feeling of never fully being accepted in the host society
4. They longed for an eventual return home.
5. Service to homeland: they believed that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity

¹ Cohen (1997).

² Safran (1991).

6. They nurtured a personal relationship to the homeland, with their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity defined by the existence of such a relationship.

All of these characteristics can be applied to the first generation Croatians in Australia after World War Two. For the purposes of this paper though, attention will be paid specifically to the third point of, *never being fully accepted in the host society*, according to which they believe that they are not and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it.³ Cohen elaborates on this point in his characteristics of a diaspora by arguing that it involves: “*a troubled relationship with host societies suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least, or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group*”.⁴ This feature is present among most diasporas which have experienced antagonism and legal or illegal discrimination.

This is only partly true, as some members, especially the core leadership of *stateless diasporas*⁵ spend more time, effort and financial resources in attempting to establish national states than sometimes into their own well-being. This could directly influence the upward social mobility of a migrant, who, with an eye to ‘returning to the homeland’, spends more time in homeland affairs than a state linked diasporan who has a recognised homeland, a sense of security, and thus more time for personal matters. A diaspora geared towards a national liberation movement has a different kind of organisation, as well as stronger boundaries and structures which deal with political issues pertaining to the ‘imprisoned’ homeland. Social structures and integration into the host country are slower as the motivation of the homeland is greater than amongst those who belong to a state linked diaspora.

The ultimate goal of (stateless) diasporas is to establish or re-institute sovereign states in their homelands.⁶ Conversely, to the embarrassment or dismay of new migrants, the well-established diaspora communities in the country of destination might promote ‘long-distance nationalism’,⁷ and believe in some of the most right-wing and reactionary forms of ethnic

³ Safran (1991).

⁴ Cohen (1997): 26, after Safran (1991): 83.

⁵ Riggs (2000).

⁶ Sheffer (2003): 158.

⁷ Anderson (1983).

exclusivism and patriotism.⁸ Croats in Sydney and elsewhere in Australia were very much involved in long distance nationalism.

From a security point of view (that is, regarding the possibility that members of stateless diasporas might support and actually engage in subversive acts and terrorist activities), diasporas that pursue or support secessionist and separatist movements in their homelands have the greatest potential to cause trouble for those in control there. By the same token they pose real and potential threats to their host societies and governments, to international organisations, and, through their occasional participation in terrorist trans-state networks, to fourth and fifth parties.⁹

Militant leaders and members of such stateless diasporas know full well that clandestine terrorist and guerrilla activities per se cannot win independence for their homelands. The main purpose of their violent activities is to draw the greatest possible general attention to their national plight and struggle. These activities are also intended as public expressions of their unequivocal determination to see the establishment of their independent national states. Sometimes such signals are particularly directed at their own people back in their homelands and are intended to encourage them to escalate their struggle for independence.¹⁰ Another goal of these activities is to exert pressure on host governments and societies, as well as on international organisations, to respond to the diasporas' demands or to act in their support.¹¹

This paper will focus on particular events between 1963 and 1973 in which the Croatian diaspora community in Australia was directly or indirectly involved and which caused it to have a troubled relationship with the host country, more than what is experienced by ordinary immigrants or those diasporas who are linked to a state they recognise. The events will be followed through newspaper articles and editorials of the day, as well as official Australian government documents, documents produced by the Croatian community in Australia and interviews with prominent Croatian diaspora actors. The Croatian diaspora before 1991 considered itself to be a stateless diaspora. Diaspora Croats in Australia very much idealised their homeland and constantly nurtured a feeling and determination to return

⁸ Vertovec (2005).

⁹ Sheffer (2003): 158.

¹⁰ Sheffer (2003): 158.

¹¹ Sheffer (2003): 154.

back. Their sojourn in Australia was seen as being temporary. Their leaders and groups were vehemently against the Yugoslav state and government regime and they wanted the establishment of a Croatian nation-state. To this effect, in their plethora of activities they also engaged, like other stateless diasporas, in terrorist and/ or violent activities to put direct (symbolic) pressure upon Yugoslavia itself and to turn international and host state attention to their message.

There were several events in the 1960s and 1970s in Australia which involved diasporan Croatians. They are linked in a chain of events and include two military incursions into Yugoslavia (1963 and 1972), Australian state and security intervention in the Croatian community and the subsequent Senate Select Committee Inquiry in 1973 which was used by the Croatian diaspora to air its grievance about discrimination. This was achieved by its official mouthpiece called the National Croatian Civil Rights Committee which created official reports for the Senate Committee.

A Military Incursion into the (occupied) Homeland, 1963

1963 represents the year that diaspora Croatians and their message came onto the public and political scene in Australia for the first time in such an overwhelming and public manner. The ruling conservative Liberal Party under Prime Minister Robert Menzies was still in power and the cold war between the West and the Soviet Bloc was reaching full momentum. The Communist Party was seen as a negative influence and in Australia was perceived as a fifth column in a possible future clash between the two blocs. It was rigorously spied upon and kept in place by Australian secret service organisations, such as ASIO (Australian Secret Intelligence Organisation).¹² These intelligence organisations made connections in the anti- communist Eastern European migrant groups, including the Croatians, to counterbalance the infiltration of communist agents in these communities. The Yugoslav secret police operated in Australia and also infiltrated and spied upon Croatian diaspora individuals and organisations, with one report in the 1970s stating that ASIO had positively identified five Yugoslav intelligence agents and 17 suspected agents.¹³ ASIO tended to protect these groups not only against communist agents but also against any Australian

¹² Hall (1978): 57.

¹³ Cain (1994): 205.

criticism and scrutiny.¹⁴

*Terrorists 'Trained in Sydney', Charge by Yugoslav Government*¹⁵; *Terrorists Trained in Sydney 'School', Marked for Murder?* (with a large scale photograph of Yugoslav president Josip Broz);¹⁶ these were the headlines of the two big newspapers in Sydney in regard to Croatians and their attempt to enter illegally into Yugoslavia for subversive actions in 1963. For the next three decades, Croatians were often to make the front pages of Australian newspapers for negative extremist events and activities, be that for military/terrorist undertakings or violence at soccer matches in which the 'Croatia' team would play against a Yugoslav team. In 1963, diasporan Croatians demonstrated that the main action of stateless diasporas was to put the bulk of their efforts into freeing their homeland from subjugation and in this case to not only idealise the homeland but try and free it by military means so as to return to a liberated homeland. They were practising 'long distance nationalism' in a very practical manner.

In early July 1963, nine men had entered illegally into Yugoslavia and were allegedly caught with explosives, radios and pistols. The report from *The Sun* article also stated that the Yugoslav communiqué had stated that all nine had travel documents issued in Australia and two had Australian passports.¹⁷ The most important part of the Yugoslav communiqué was that the "*members were prepared for future 'terrorist-diversionary activity' at courses held in a building in Queen Street, Woollahra*".¹⁸ As it so happens this building was managed by the Croatian Roman Catholic Church and was used as the first social gathering and welfare place and point of reference for new incoming Croatian immigrants to Sydney. Many Croatians of divergent political persuasions frequented the premises. The report continued that the accused men were "*recruited by an Ustasha emigrant organisation named the Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood (HRB - Hrvatsko Revolucionarno Bratstvo)*"¹⁹ The *Daily Mirror* report of the same date does not mention that

¹⁴ Hall (1978): 57.

¹⁵ *The Sun*, 5/9/1963 (Sydney): 1.

¹⁶ *Daily Mirror* 5/9/1963 (Sydney): 1.

¹⁷ The nine men included, Josip Oblak, Ilija Tokić, Rade Stojić, Vladimir Leko, Branko Podrug, Dražen Tapsanija, Krešimir Perković, Stanko Zdrilić and Mika Fumić.

¹⁸ *The Sun*, 5/9/1963 (Sydney): 1, 'Terrorists "Trained in Sydney", Charge by Yugoslav Government'.

¹⁹ *The Sun*, 5/9/1963 (Sydney): 1, 'Terrorists "Trained in Sydney", Charge by Yugoslav Government'.

the nine were members of the HRB but rather that they were “*members of Ustasha, a terrorist organisation believed to have been disbanded after World War II*”. This was to become a common theme - associating Croatian diasporans who wanted a Croatian nation state with the Ustasha group of World War Two. Again, however, this was inevitable to some extent as some of the early diasporans openly supported the Ustasha regime and its leaders. The Sydney based paper for the first time presented: “*one of Sydney’s most prominent Yugoslavs (who) agreed today that a terror organisation could be training in the city*”.²⁰ The leader was Fabijan Lovoković, who was secretary of the (less extreme) Croatian Liberation Movement (HOP - *Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret*) of Australia. He stipulated in the article that it would not be hard to find men for the task of infiltrating Yugoslavia and that there could be a terrorist organisation in Australia. He went on to explain the role of the HOP as: “*service to the homeland*” (Safran’s point six), saying that: “*our main purpose is to keep the idea of the liberation of Croatia from Communist rule*”. In the article, the so called ‘Wodonga Affair’ in January of 1963 was brought up, in which 100 Croatians organised by the HOP dressed up in a uniform of blue shorts and white t-shirts with the Croatian national emblem for a weekend tent gathering near the Victorian outback town of Wodonga. It just so happened that the Australian military (officially called the Citizen Militia Force) was training in the vicinity and the Croatians posed in military fashion on tanks. The Australian military personnel and the Croatians played sports games, including swimming across the Murray river.²¹

The next day the newspapers had more sensationalist news - *Look Here, Mr. Cramer! Croats pose with Australian Arms*²² - showing members of HOP sitting on an armoured vehicle belonging to the Australian Army and one member holding a sub machine gun. On page 2 the headline read, in line with Safran’s point 4 about returning to the homeland: “‘We will return,’ say Croats. Oust Tito Plan.” Fabijan Lovoković was again quoted, and this time he was much more candid in speaking about the stateless homeland and their objectives: “*Our object is to return to our homeland and*

²⁰ *Daily Mirror* 5/9/1963 (Sydney): 3, ‘Terrorists Trained in Sydney ‘School’, Marked for Murder?’

²¹ *Spremnost*, 7/2/1963 (Sydney): 1.

²² *Daily Mirror* 6/9/1963 (Sydney): 1. Mr. Cramer was the Australian Minister for Defence at the time, in the Menzies Government.

overthrow the Communist regime, but we must wait until we are strong enough". Lovoković denied that the nine young Australian Croats who were arrested in Yugoslavia were sent by his organisation and said that "*they were courageous but not sensible. What could such a small group hope to achieve*". In regards to the Wodonga Affair he stated "... *the exercise had been no more than a happy coincidence – the young Croats at the camp had proudly posed with the weapons and on the tank, but it had not been an organised affair*".²³ In reality the Wodonga gathering was an organised affair with Croatians arriving for the weekend from Geelong, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Newcastle, Perth, Wollongong, Bonegila, Benalla and Wodonga,²⁴ but the HOP did act more in a symbolic manner and was never actually involved in sending Croatians into an actual military incursion into the (occupied) homeland, unlike the more extreme HRB.

The Wodonga camp had been held between 3 – 7 January 1963, while photographs of the event were presented on the front page of the *Spremnost* newspaper in February 1963, owned and run by Lovoković. The caption for the photograph read in clearly militaristic overtones: "*Our members are happiest near tanks*" and "*Today on the Murray - Tomorrow on the Drina*".²⁵ Lovoković continued in the *Daily Mirror* article of 6th of September, several months later after the incursion into Yugoslavia; "*our camps are not organised on military lines*", he said, "*not yet, anyway.*" After this he continued and openly admitted that "*although his movement followed the principles of Dr. Ante Pavelić (the wartime Nazi collaborator), it was neither Nazi nor Fascist. We are simply anti-Communist, he said*". An important point that Lovoković made in his interview to embolden his anti-communist stand and his cooperation with the Australian intelligence community was the following: "*We have reported hundreds of Communists in the past couple of years*". These Yugoslav communists were incidentally, as the article continues, reported to ASIO, which quite clearly verifies the cooperation between ASIO and anti-communist immigrant groups.

Lovoković, exploiting the media interest, stated openly that even though they were not training 'saboteurs' yet, if anyone was to do this it was to be *his* organisation: "*If anyone in Australia trained saboteurs, it would be*

²³ *Daily Mirror* 6/9/1963 (Sydney): 2, 'Look Here, Mr. Cramer! Croats pose with Australian Arms'.

²⁴ *Spremnost*, 7/2/1963 (Sydney): 1.

²⁵ *Spremnost*, 7/2/1963 (Sydney): 1.

our organisation - but we're training no saboteurs yet". He also denied that any of the men caught in Yugoslavia were at the HOP camp. With this comment, Lovoković inadvertently affirmed that there were other Croatian diaspora groups which had different strategies and actions towards the homeland. The HOP organisation never did send any of its members for military/terrorist incursions into Yugoslavia. Lovoković was a diasporan leader who constantly provoked the Yugoslav regime and maintained the image of Croatians being anti-communist which was in line with official Australian state policies.

Events such as the Wodonga affair were possible due to the overall anti-communist atmosphere which was present in the upper echelons of the ruling Liberal Party and in ASIO. In response to the Wodonga affair, and later the military incursion into Yugoslavia, Prime Minister Robert Menzies stated quite openly in the Australian Parliament regarding Croatians that: "*it could be expected that they should hope for the establishment of an independent Croatia*".²⁶

Even some of the newspaper articles of the time, though condemning the incursion, displayed some sympathy with the Croatian diasporan cause especially since it was also anti-communist in its intentions:

"This is the story of a man who went home ... home from the comforts, prosperity and sunshine of Australia ... He was sending money back to his family to keep them from starvation, but he also wanted to be with them again ... to help free our country from the Communists and make Croatia an independent state".²⁷

On the other hand this diasporan urge for a homeland at any cost caused friction with the host land and created the stereotype of Croatian 'terrorists' which lasted for decades. This can be gauged in an editorial of a major Sydney daily newspaper with the title, 'Terrorism':

"Here is another jolt to our Australian complacency - the disclosure that European political activists have

²⁶ Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies, Kt, CH, QC, MP in the House of Representatives on Thursday, 27 Aug. 1964. Document A1 in Croatian Terrorist Activities on Australia, papers tabled as Ministerial Statement by Senator Murphy, Australian Parliament, 27 March 1973.

²⁷ *Sunday Mirror* 8/9/1963 (Sydney): 7.

been preparing HERE to return home as terrorists ... fanatical right-wing Croats, sworn to overthrow the legitimate government of Yugoslavia ... The fact remains that in Australia, untouched by security, untroubled by any sort of authority, a para-military group has been plotting for action ... these Croat shock troops, these strength- through- joy merchants, ... What a disgrace to Australia this is, that we the people, should unwittingly give shelter and opportunity to mad cap adventurers from Europe who are compulsively embroiled still in their tired and odious feuds. What an insult, and what harm, to the great mass of European migrants who have come here to find peace and make a home!"²⁸

The same newspaper on the same date in their cartoons section had one of the first satirical drawings and comments which were to plague the Croats for the next three decades: "*Overthrow Your Government NOW, Terrorist Lectures, Bomb Throwing Simplified, Dagger Courses, all by- Croat Experts, Strictly Confidential*".²⁹

The Incursion in Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 25 July 1972 the Yugoslav Government released to the Press in Belgrade the names of 19 men killed during an armed incursion into Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nine of the men had lived in Australia at one time. The men were all believed to have been members of the HRB. The event was termed 'the Bugojno³⁰ action', 'the Bugojno group', or 'the Bosnian-Herzegovinian incident'. The nineteen men crossed the Yugoslav-Austrian border between 21 and 22 June 1972. Their plan was to start a Croatian revolutionary uprising, and they chose the western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina because of its large Croatian majority. Their 'adventure' ended on 27 July, in a battle with the Yugoslav People's Army and police forces, in Bosnia and Herzegovina; 15 were killed during the battle while four were

²⁸ *Daily Mirror* 6/9/1963 (Sydney): 3, 'Look Here, Mr. Cramer! Croats pose with Australian Arms'.

²⁹ *Daily Mirror* 6/9/1963 (Sydney): 26, Cartoon Comment.

³⁰ A town and surrounding area in southwestern Bosnia at that time with a significant Croatian population.

captured.³¹

In an interview given to this author, the unofficial head of the HRB in Australia, Jure Marić, stated that the Yugoslav secret police were not involved in the planning and implementation of the incursion. The HRB members who participated in the action knew that it would end in probable death, but they were willing to give up their lives in order to show the Yugoslav regime that the revolutionary spirit was not dead amongst Croats in the diaspora. They also intended to give hope and inspiration to the people of Croatia who were suffering much after Tito's hard-line clampdown on Croatia after the Croatian Spring in 1971.³² During the early 1970's, there were even great internal disputes within the Croatian hard-line political factions on whether to carry on with sending suicidal guerrilla missions to Europe or to conserve strength for a final struggle when the 'right moment' arrived, namely the battle for Croatian independence.³³

After the event the Yugoslav regime intensified its diplomatic efforts towards Western countries that harboured Croatian (diaspora) nationalist émigrés, stating that they were a threat to the stability and unity of the Yugoslav federation:

“In June, Yugoslavia was shaken to find its borders vulnerable to infiltration by Croat émigré guerrillas ... according to the Yugoslav Government, the attack was conceived by Croat émigrés in Australia, and was aimed at embarrassing the communist authorities at a time when they were still dousing the effects of student upheavals last year ... The mini invasion triggered a Yugoslav demarche against Western countries which have granted sanctuary to Croatian nationalists ... President Tito's Government sent vigorous protests to Australia ... and 'energetic

³¹ Horvat, Keskić, Pavlović and Buntić.

³² Interview held with Jure Marić at his home in Sydney, on 12/10/1992.

³³ Murphy Document, B Section, Memorandum of L.S.J Harper, Acting Commissioner, of the Commonwealth Police, 12/9/1972. On the basis of documents and letters seized from Croats by police in house searches. Blaž Kraljević from Australia, who was supposed to be in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian incursion, was prevented from doing so because of a minor arrest by police in May 1972. He waited for the right moment in 1992 when he became a leading commander of the Bosnian Muslim (Bosniak) and Croatian para-military HOS (Croatian defence forces) units in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was killed in very mysterious circumstances in 1992.

measures' were sought against anti-Tito exiles''³⁴

With public attention concentrated on the incursion and the outside threat to Yugoslavia, the focus was taken away from the political repression in Croatia and abuse of human rights. Accordingly, Yugoslavia gained more sympathy in the West, which helped the country uphold its precarious independence from the Soviet Union, from which it had broken away in 1948, which also meant that it could crack down even harder on Croatian dissidents within the country and in the diaspora, either through diplomatic pressure on countries where Croatians lived or assassinations and killings of prominent diaspora Croatians.

In regard to the Croatian diaspora in Australia, the Bosnian-Herzegovinian incursions or terrorist plots proved among other things that there were Croatian groups in the diaspora, which were undisguised in their 'revolutionary' spirit, and which were not interested in integrating into the host society, or building an emigrant Croatian community, but rather were focused on how to free the homeland from its stateless status. On the other hand, these hard-line or extremist moves discredited any moderate form of Croatian resistance and stereotyped all Croatians as being terrorists and Ustashe.

The extent to which Yugoslavia did not represent a home government to the Croatians could be seen when a number of naturalised Australian citizens of Croatian origin, who happened to be in Croatia at the time of the incursions for thoroughly legitimate purposes, were caught up in the general purge that took place within Yugoslavia at the time of the incursion.³⁵ All in all, from 1963 to 1972, with two military incursions into Yugoslavia including a sizeable and influential presence of diaspora Croats from Australia, as well as mysterious bombings and other violent events in Australia itself pointing to the Croatian stateless diaspora – Yugoslavia conflict, the Croatian diaspora was definitely in a precarious and difficult position.

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 20/9/1972 (Sydney): 7, 'Croatia: the restive republic'.

³⁵ The four most drastic examples were that of Nikola Raspudić and Ante Miličević, who were both killed in police cells, without trial, and Steven Čolig and a Nikola Gršković who were tried and sentenced at a military court in Sarajevo, in September 1972. Other cases of Croatian Australian citizens being mistreated, interrogated, jailed or killed while in Yugoslavia or at Yugoslav diplomatic missions, was presented at the Senate hearing in 1973, in the form of Statutory Declarations; SSC (1973): 12.

1973

For many diasporan Croatians in Australia the year 1973 was a watershed in relations between them and the state authorities of the host country. It is when their national name was degraded and became synonymous with terrorism, bombs, early morning police raids, political scapegoating and mass media frenzy. Their diaspora aspirations for an independent Croatia caused domestic and international controversy and went against the prevailing global political status quo. The following example of discrimination will clearly demonstrate that stateless diasporas are more likely to be mistreated than state linked ones, as they do not have a home government to defend their interests. Unfortunately, as in this case, they were exposed to legally sanctioned subordination from government agencies. It was also the first time that a united Croatian diaspora front, by way of the *National Croatian Civil Rights Committee* (NCCRC) was created, to document official Australian state discrimination against Croatians and try to combat the negative stereotypes. The amount of primary information available from Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD) in the Federal Senate and House of Representatives and daily newspapers is quite large, with literally hundreds of pages and reports referring to Croatians, of which only a small representative segment will be noted in this article.

In December 1972, a Federal election was held in which the Australian Labor Party (ALP) under the leadership of Gough Whitlam won and came into Government. One of the objectives of the new government was to show that the previous Liberal Party Government had been hiding 'Croatian terrorists'. The Croatian issue did not take a long time to surface. On 16 March 1973, the new Attorney General Lionel Murphy made an unusual early morning visit (or raid) with the Commonwealth Police to the main ASIO headquarters in Melbourne. The aims, it seems, were to gather more information for his parliamentary statement on Croatian terrorism, which he thought that ASIO was keeping secret, and express his 'grave concern' for the safety of the soon to be visiting Yugoslav Prime Minister Džemal Bijedić to Australia from the so called Croatian 'terrorist' threat.³⁶ The whole event caused an uproar in Parliament and in the press as to the

³⁶ *The Bulletin* 5/5/1973 (Sydney): 14-17, 'The Lionel Murphy Enigma'.

way in which the visits were conducted, and the manner in which Murphy, a Government minister, overruled the Director- General of ASIO, Mr. Peter Barbour, and the legal obligations according to which such evidence was to be given to no one, without the permission of the director general.

All in all the event was “*thoroughly propagandistic*”,³⁷ as it was the first step in creating Croatian terrorist hysteria, alluding that the former Attorney General Ivor Greenwood and ASIO had conspired to keep hidden the information on the Croatians thereby confirming that drastic ministerial control was needed on ASIO to gain the information. Murphy argued that he was searching for documents relating to Croatian activities in Australia, but as was later seen the Croatian issue was a red herring, and he was in fact trying to put ASIO under ALP control,³⁸ a fact which also disturbed the CIA and British intelligence.³⁹ The fact remains, however, that the Croatian issue was blamed for these unusual occurrences, and the Croatians were the scapegoats for higher political objectives.

Due to its anti-communist stance, the Liberal Government turned a blind eye to some of the activities of extremist Croatian diaspora groups: “*In the view of ASIO the organisation was not given proper ministerial directives in regard to Croatian terrorism*”.⁴⁰ But besides the political ideology behind each of the Australian political parties, there was also the fact that maybe there just was not any conclusive evidence to show that organised Croatian terrorism ever existed. All the fuss was perhaps simply unwarranted, as one Australian newspaper article stated:

“Croatian revolutionary groups in Australia are long on talk and short on action because they are torn by internecine strife, splits and personal hatreds. This is the overwhelming impression from documents the Attorney-General, Senator Murphy, tabled in Federal Parliament this week. Throughout long periods of their existence the Croat groups virtually failed to mount a successful operation. Agents sent to Yugoslavia were given false information and captured almost as soon as they arrived. There was no resemblance to effective terrorist

³⁷ *The Bulletin* 5/5/1973 (Sydney): 14-17, ‘The Lionel Murphy Enigma’.

³⁸ Shaw (1973): 91

³⁹ Cain (1994): 217.

⁴⁰ *The Bulletin* 5/5/1973 (Sydney): 14-17, ‘The Lionel Murphy Enigma’.

organisations such as the IRA."⁴¹

In regard to violent incidents in Australia in which Croatians were blamed, an ASIO report stated that:

*"... if they are indeed the work of Croatian nationalists, it must be the result of activity by isolated individuals or very small groups. Certainly the incidents themselves have been the type not requiring organisational support, but rather, limited ingenuity on the part of an individual to obtain explosives and construct a simple detonating mechanism."*⁴²

ASIO's report dismissed the perception of the Ustasha as "*the dominant force in the Croatian nationalist movement in Australia*" as a "*fascist conspiracy theory*", fed by "*elements in the Yugoslav community ... through receptive sections of certain Australian political organisations, as well as through university student publications and other radical channels*".⁴³

One of the most important issues that ASIO touched upon, but which the ALP through various reasons tended to ignore, was the very real possibility of Yugoslav secret police (UDBA) manipulation of the anti-Yugoslav opposition in Australia. An article in May of 1973 touched upon this theme, which most Australian newspapers did not even consider, and which, to date, has been a forgotten topic when discussing the issues of 1973:

"The sole beneficiaries of the Croatian liberation activity are the authorities in Belgrade. What Murphy has overlooked is the fact that the threat to Belgrade comes not from anti-Communist nationalists or reactionaries but from ethnic and factional rivalries within the ruling Communist Party in Yugoslavia and from the Russians. The people in power in Belgrade find it very helpful to have foreign based 'fascists' and 'counter-revolutionaries', being seen to make incursions. It creates in Yugoslavia a diversion, an atmosphere in which to call

⁴¹ *The Sunday Telegraph* 1/4/1973 (Sydney): 26, 'Croats long on talk but short on action'.

⁴² *The Bulletin* 6/7/1974 (Sydney): 12-17, 'Secret report blasts Murphy'.

⁴³ *The Bulletin* 6/7/1974 (Sydney): 12-17, 'Secret report blasts Murphy'.

for unity, and an outside evil with which internal dissidents can be associated in propaganda, prosecutions and suppression. That is why Yugoslav Government agents are involved in what is ostensibly anti-Yugoslav activity in Australia.”⁴⁴

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991 it was proved that a prominent Yugoslav secret agent, Vitomir Misimović, a Serb, had integrated into the Croatian community, acting as a double agent (for Yugoslav and Australian intelligence. He framed six Croatians in an alleged terrorist plan in 1979.⁴⁵

Senator Greenwood's early comments in regard to Murphy's allegations were that he was concerned with the effects that such public statements would have on Croatian and other migrant communities:

“One of the very regrettable features of last week is the real fear Senator Murphy's statement, and the press build up before it, has created in the minds of a lot of migrants. There are some terrified migrants who think that for no charge at all they may be sent back to the countries from which they fled. I think it is terribly unfortunate that the Croatian community is regarded as a terrorist community. The Croatian community itself was concerned that a few persons with criminal propensities had given the entire community such a reputation as a terrorist group”⁴⁶.

The April 1973 Raids on Croatian Homes in Sydney

Murphy was determined at all costs to show that Croatian terrorists did exist, as the political spotlight was on him. A direct consequence of the tabling of so many documents in parliament was the series of police raids on Croatian homes on 1 April 1973. Early on April 1, a squad of 260 Commonwealth and New South Wales police raided 68 Croatian homes in Sydney and Wollongong, making arrests and seizing explosives, weapons and documents. The raids also came before the former Attorney General had given his reply in parliament to the Murphy allegations. This was the largest single raid on Croatians in Australia, and caused terror amongst the Croatian

⁴⁴ *The Bulletin* 5/5/1973 (Sydney): 14-17 ‘The Lionel Murphy Enigma’.

⁴⁵ McDonald (2012).

⁴⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31/3/1973 (Sydney): 3, ‘Terrorism evidence “partially selected”’

community and alarm in the general Australian community as to what was happening in Australia. The newspapers screamed out the events: *Dawn swoop on 68 Croat homes: 10 held*⁴⁷, *Mass round-up of Croats, raids in two cities*⁴⁸, *Moscow?, Belgrade?, Prague?, Warsaw?, Peking?, NO - Sydney, Sunday Apr 1, 1973.*⁴⁹ It seems that more raids were planned as one headline had it; *Police reveal plot to kill Whitlam, More Raids.*⁵⁰ Immediately the threat of deportation was made by the Minister of Immigration; “*Mr. Grassby, said yesterday if any migrants were sentenced to more than one year's gaol, they would be liable to deportation.*”⁵¹ It seemed that the whole government apparatus had come down on the Croatian diaspora in Australia: “*Federal Government sources said the searches were part of the stepping up in investigations into Croatian terrorism which preceded the visit to Australia of the Yugoslav Prime Minister, Mr. Bijedić.*”⁵² Ordinary Croats were driven out of bed and their possessions were taken, while the police stated that they were seeking to break up a terrorist conspiracy. No one was arrested nor convicted for such reasons. When asked why the raids had been conducted at dawn on that Sunday 1 April the sarcastic and derogatory reply came from the police that: “*... well Croats are a church going lot. We had to get them at that time, otherwise they would have got away to early mass.*”⁵³ This was not only discrimination but psychological terror on a whole community, as can best be gauged in statutory declarations signed by Croats who had their homes raided, and which were presented to the *Senate Select Committee on the Rights of Migrant Australians*. The Premier of the State of New South Wales at that time, Mr. Askin, sensing the public disquiet at the introduction of police state methods, stated that: “*there will be no more knocking on doors at 5 am*”⁵⁴ and openly admitted that the Croats were being discriminated against when he stated: “*in my view the Federal Government is harassing the Croatian migrants.*”⁵⁵

⁴⁷ *The Australian*, 2/4/1973: 1, ‘Dawn swoop on 68 Croat homes: 10 held’.

⁴⁸ *The Daily Telegraph*, 2/4/1973 (Sydney): 3, ‘Police seize weapons in big swoop on Croats’.

⁴⁹ *The Sun*, 2/4/1973(Sydney): 1-2, ‘We go on the raids. Panic in many homes’.

⁵⁰ *Daily Mirror* 2/04/1973, (Sydney): 1, ‘Police reveal plot to kill Whitlam. More raids’.

⁵¹ *The Daily Telegraph*, 3/4/1973, (Sydney): 1, ‘Askin says: No more dawn raids’.

⁵² *The Australian* 2/4/1973 (Sydney): 1, ‘Dawn swoop on 68 Croat homes: 10 held’.

⁵³ *Nation Review*, 14-20/9/1973, ‘Labor’s Bigots’.

⁵⁴ Shaw (1973): 80.

⁵⁵ Shaw (1973): 80.

Most of the comments of the day came down hard on the police forces and on Murphy for initiating such actions:

“... eighty homes raided, Stalin style, in hours. God knows how many women and children waking in fear for each other. This- incredibly and shamefully- is Australia 1973. Senator Murphy's swoop in the night brought pathetic results. Eight men and one woman charged with assorted allegations. This is the sort of terror that belongs to Russia. To Uganda. To China. To Yugoslavia. This raid was an intrusion in liberty and decency. Who's next for a raid in the night - the Irish? The Arabs and their sympathisers? Is it wrong to hold views on other people's politics? Mr. Murphy owes the Yugoslav community an apology. And Australia an explanation.”⁵⁶

The raids upon Croatian homes resulted in 14 Croatians deemed for prosecution, of which five were up for the possession of explosives. Three of these were acquitted totally and only two were convicted, but given good behaviour bonds.⁵⁷

Several months after the Murphy and Greenwood⁵⁸ statements, Murphy had still not taken any actions against alleged ‘Croatian terrorists’:

“... is it the fact that he, the Attorney General, who so savagely denounced the previous Government for taking no action against extremist organisations, has himself been strangely inactive since the day of the dawn raids in New South Wales. Are we to take it that the menace has quietly faded away? Or, if it hasn't, that Senator Murphy is finding it just as difficult as his predecessors to obtain evidence of wrongdoing that would convince a court.”⁵⁹

Sensing that he had gone too far in his attacks on the Croatians, Murphy relieved their fears of suppression and deportation in a meeting that he held with prominent Croatians in Sydney stating that “no political organisation

⁵⁶ *The Sun*, 2/4/1973 (Sydney): 1. ‘Moscow? Belgrade? Prague? Warsaw? Peking? No – Sydney, Sunday, Apr 1, 1973’.

⁵⁷ CPD, Senate, 22/11/1973: 2047.

⁵⁸ Senator Ivor Greenwood, former Attorney General during the Liberal government, who gave his reply to Murphy's allegation in Parliament.

⁵⁹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10/8/1973 (Sydney): 6, ‘The ASIO Affair: Editorial’.

would be outlawed under the Crimes Act and no Australian citizen would be deported under that Act.”⁶⁰ Murphy would not have taken such steps if he had evidence to suppress and deport Croatians because of so called ‘terrorism’.

The conclusion of the whole affair was that Murphy needed to build up an atmosphere of hysteria surrounding the Croatian ‘terrorists’ and how the previous government had protected and been soft on them. He needed an excuse for the raid on ASIO, which exceeded his ministerial duties, so he blamed the so called Croatian terrorism issue; he had to build up the atmosphere surrounding the Bijedić arrival, hence the high security precautions, again, against the perceived threat of Croatian ‘terrorists’. After Murphy’s tabling in parliament of his ministerial statement on Croatian terrorism, raids were conducted in Sydney on Croatian homes to prove the existence of terrorists and terrorist activities. Two Croatians who were convicted of having some explosives were released on good behaviour bonds. The Greenwood reply showed Murphy to be irresponsible to his office, the Australian people and especially to Croatian diasporans: “... and a whole migrant community is virtually accused of guilt – because every Croatian born citizen tends to be regarded as a potential criminal.”⁶¹ The general feeling amongst the Australian public was something along the following lines:

*“Mr. Whitlam and Senator Murphy should be ashamed of themselves for the witches’ brew of suspicion and unsubstantiated allegations they have stirred up so irresponsibly in the past three weeks. It is time to abandon hysteria and get on with the job of governing.”*⁶²

The National Croatian Civil Rights Committee, A diaspora voice

The opposition parties in the Federal Parliament as well as other segments in Australian society were calling for an investigation into the dealings of Senator Murphy with regard to the ASIO affair and the civil rights of migrant Australians, especially the Croatian community. The opposition initially wanted a judicial inquiry to independently investigate the allegations with the full force of the law. When this was not achieved

⁶⁰ *National Times*, 7-12/5/1973 (Sydney): 4.

⁶¹ CPD, Senate 4/4/1973: 807.

⁶² *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6/4/1973 (Sydney): 6, ‘Shame on You!’.

because of the ALP blocking such moves, on 10 May 1973 the opposition managed to establish a *Senate Select Committee on Civil Rights of Migrant Australians* (SSC), based on the original motion by Democratic Labor Party (DLP) Senator Vincent Gair, on 17 May 1973. The Australian Federal Senate was to inquire into these allegations and give its report. This Senate Select Committee was to inquire and report on:

“... whether the civil rights of migrant Australians and, in particular, members of the Croatian community, have been infringed by:

I: The unwarranted invasion of premises;

II: The unwarranted seizure of documents or property; and,

*III: The unwarranted deprivation of liberty, privacy or good reputation; and if so, what review or amendment of the law or administrative or judicial procedures is necessary or desirable.”*⁶³

Among other objectives, it had to investigate whether the Yugoslav government was intimidating Croatian migrants. The committee was run by seven Senators, three from the government (ALP) and three from the opposition parties (DLP and Liberal Party) and one chairperson. The first day of hearings of the SSC was held in Melbourne on 19 July 1973, with the hearings running from July to November 1973 and hearings also being held in Canberra and Sydney.

On April 1, 1973, the Croatian diaspora had established a Croatian Civil Rights Committee to gather funds and help the defence of Croatians who were threatened with deportation, after the tabling of the Murphy documents in parliament. The initiator of the group was not a Croatian, but rather an Australian, Les Shaw, who had sympathised with the diaspora Croats, and eventually became an official spokesman. With the police raids on Croatian homes in New South Wales, the jailing and killing of Croatian Australians in Yugoslavia and especially with the establishment of the SSC, the organisation quickly grew into a national organisation, namely the *National Croatian Civil Rights Committee*, (NCCRC). This included sub branches in all the major cities of Australia, to demonstrate how Croatians were being discriminated and slandered by the Australian polity and police

⁶³ SSC (1973): Appointment of Select Committee before page 1.

forces. This was the first time that the diaspora community had been organised in such a manner, to put forward its case and deflect attacks from the Australian and Yugoslav Governments and their police forces. A spokeswoman of the organisation stated that her motivation for involvement was when her six year old son came home in the midst of the media reporting about Croatians and asked “*Mum, what is wrong with being a Croat?*”⁶⁴

The NCCRC’s main role was to prepare a submission and represent the Croatian community at the SSC as the official voice of the Croatian diaspora community in the media. It also collected financial funds for its own existence and to pay for the expenses of Croatians in legal cases against the police, especially after the 1 April raids. The Committee lasted throughout the duration of the SSC and a little while after it had fulfilled its role. The NCCRC presented a homogenised view of the Croatian diaspora in defence of the community and presenting their facts to the SSC and the Australian public.

The ‘Objectives’ of the NCCRC as outlined in their constitution included amongst other things the following:

- a. To represent the Croatian Community and individuals in Australia or elsewhere as necessary;
- b. To uphold and promote the rights, justice, freedom and democracy of Croatian Australians, Croatian Migrants and Australia, to defend the Croatian name and identity within the framework of the Australian constitution;
- c. To speak, write and act on behalf of the Community as deemed fit and necessary etc.⁶⁵

It seems the more that Murphy, the police and the media attacked the Croatians, the more united they became and in the end the NCCRC had the full support of the Croatian community: “*as a result of the fact that we were not an organisation but only a body, not competing with any other Croatian organisation.*”⁶⁶, they had succeeded in overcoming factionalism. To get a feeling as to what the Croatian community faced in 1973 due to the political

⁶⁴ SSC (1973): 25.

⁶⁵ Constitution of the National Croatian Civil Rights Committee, given to the author by Mrs. Ljerka Bratković the former Sydney branch president of the Committee, in September 1992.

⁶⁶ Minutes from the NCCRC in Melbourne meeting, 19/11/1973.

affairs and the resulting SSC, Les Shaw (who played the most difficult part in defending the Croatian position against the Australian state and polity) stated in a personal letter to Ljerka Bratković:

“During those nine months, I did not stop to count the costs, because the work that I was doing required total attention on my part. It had to be done. Consider what it involved: in those court cases and throughout the long months of the Inquiry, we were in fact fighting the combined forces of the Commonwealth Police, the Attorney-General, and to a lesser extent the Government itself. We won- but not without cost. At times, to answer one single accusation made by the police has taken me a full week of research ... A lot of this work was not done at the public hearings, but privately, in back rooms, late at night ... It has not been easy, the strain has been so great, that three of our opponents on the Labor side suffered serious heart attacks during the course of the inquiry...”⁶⁷

Without the professionalism of Shaw (a non-Croatian) it is questionable to what extent the Croatian diaspora could have been properly presented at the hearings.

The fact is that an official report of the findings was never tabled in Parliament, because of an unusual political event which meant the dissolution of the Senate before its time (the so called double dissolution), and this meant that the Committee was no longer in existence. A secret and confidential draft report was, however, drawn up before the dissolution of the Senate in 1974, and was supposed to be the basis for the final recommendation to the Australian Parliament. This never did happen but the secret report was leaked and, amongst other things in summary, did take into account the following:⁶⁸

- Many of the Croatian immigrants aspired to an independent Croatia;
- Conflicts did occur with the Yugoslav oriented immigrants;
- That there were a number of Croatian political associations, some with international links, which had as their objective the formation of an independent Croatia. A small fraction of these groups did not exclude

⁶⁷ Letter by Les Shaw to L. Bratković, 6/1/1974, in possession of author.

⁶⁸ Reid (1974).

violence;

- The civil rights of Croatians were severely violated by the tabling of names and organisations by the Attorney-General, causing unwarranted deprivation of good reputation, regardless of the validity and truth of statements. If there was evidence then it should have been used in a court of law and not in the Senate for political purposes;
- In regard to incidents such as bomb explosions, it was not discounted that Yugoslav agents could be responsible so as to discredit Croatian groups. Therefore, there were incidents which gave grounds for suspicion as to the involvement of Yugoslav agents;
- In regard to the police searches of August 1972 and April 1973, the Committee found that police actions in many cases were unnecessary and unreasonable (as the majority of cases were dismissed in court) and that a judicial inquiry should be made to examine the incidence in more detail;
- The small number of charges that were laid by the police raids in 1972 and 1973 created the impression that the real purpose was not to gain evidence of offences under Australian law but to intimidate Croatian-Australians at the request of the Yugoslav government, losing ground at home;
- The police searches in August 1972 were based on an aide-memoire of the Yugoslav Government relating to alleged terrorists, and that even if any of the alleged are found guilty (which they were not) the threat of deportation should not be used, so as not to give political opponents back to the Yugoslav regime;
- There were disturbing cases of Croatian migrants who participated in Croatian events in Australia, and when returning back to Yugoslavia for a visit were interrogated, imprisoned, or disappeared in mysterious circumstances.

One of the biggest setbacks of the whole SSC was that, after all the hard work that had been put into it by the Croatian community, the impact was not as anticipated because the findings of the Committee were never officially released through the Senate, and it did not lead to a judicial inquiry, which would have grounds for prosecution and compensation. On the other hand the Croatians had a public forum in which they presented their views and grievances in an organised manner and defended their Croatian identity to an official government body and in official government

records (Hansard). They established better political interactions and publicised their diasporan cause.

Much was achieved by a few dedicated individuals from a stateless diaspora, up against legitimate states and their structures. These were the realities of a people without a home government, who instead of integrating, were forced to defend their ethnic identity, which was for many on the same level as the protection of human rights:

“We have been described as a ‘violent extremist community’. The term ‘Croatian terrorist’ was smeared across the pages of every Australian newspaper. The radio and television media did not spare us their abuse either. Yet, as migrants, it is expected of us that we integrate into the Australian community and way of life. How is this to be feasible if we are subjected to the sort of pressures that have been applied? One only has to mention that one is Croatian and people either look with apprehension or ask, ‘where are the bombs?’ Children at school become subject to ridicule or abuse if it is known they are of Croatian origin.”⁶⁹

Croatian migrants and their children definitely had a troubled relationship with the host country and society.

The period between 1963 and 1973 was an extremely difficult one for the Croatian diaspora in Australia with two military incursions into the old homeland, allegations of terrorist activities in the host country, political scapegoating on a federal level, police raids and a Senate Select Committee. It was also a time of change in Australian society from a ‘White Australia’ policy to assimilation and then slowly towards a multicultural policy. Croatian diasporans and their troubled relationship with the host country definitely played a role in the Australian political elite reconsidering its relationship generally to immigrants and their descendants and the need for a different policy to avoid unnecessary social tensions which were reported in the mass media. The Croatians in the 1970s in Australia were considered the unwanted ethnic group, an epitaph bequeathed later in the 1980s to the Vietnamese immigrants who were termed the ‘yellow Croatians’.⁷⁰ This

⁶⁹ SSC (1973): 111.

⁷⁰ Joppke (2005): 267.

troubled relationship was created by at least three parties. Firstly, the Croatian diaspora insisted on, and orientated the whole community towards, the goal of the creation of a Croatian nation state, while some peripheral members were involved in violent activities. These activities were somewhat overlooked (and hence indirectly supported) by conservative Liberal governments due to the high anti-communist attitudes of the period. When the more left leaning ALP government came to power the Croatian issue was used against the former government. Finally, the Yugoslav state also played a role through its clandestine intelligence activities within the Croatian community and their agent provocateurs. The *National Croatian Civil Rights Committee* represents a unique show of homogeneity not only in the Australian Croatian diaspora but in the whole Croatian diaspora. It articulated diaspora grievances and objectives in official Australian government documents, created a platform and engaged the ruling elites. During this difficult period, Croatians would have found it difficult to integrate into the mainstream of society even if they had so desired because of a general public perception of violence and terrorism and, as a result, naturally turned to each other and their diaspora community which was placed to promoting and working for the political independence of the homeland.

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Sažetak

Hrvati u Australiji, kao i svaka dijasporska zajednica u svijetu, imali su svoj specifičan način razvitka i formiranje svoje dijasporske zajednice. Hrvatska zajednica nije stvarala emigrantsku odnosno useljeničku etničku zajednicu nego dijasporsku zajednicu sukladno kriterijima Safrana (1991). Ovaj rad se usredotočuje na teške i kontroverzne događaje u razdoblju između 1963. i 1973. u koje je na izravan ili neizravan način bila uključena hrvatska dijasporska zajednica u Australiji. Ti događaji pokazuju da je ta hrvatska dijaspora imala težak ili problematičan odnos sa zemljom-domaćinom (Australijom) što je jedan od ključnih faktora prepoznavanja dijaspora, posebno dijaspora bez vlastite priznate države. Slijed događaja obuhvaća uključenost pripadnika hrvatske dijaspore iz Australije u dva vojna napada u samoj tadašnjoj Jugoslaviji (1963. i 1972. godine); službenu australsku državnu i sigurnosno-policijsku represivnu intervenciju u živote običnih hrvatskih useljenika te stvaranje senatskog istražnog povjerenstva australskog parlamenta 1973. koje je istraživalo slučajeve diskriminacije protiv hrvatskih useljenika.

Iseljeni Hrvati u Australiji u svrhu obrane svojih građanskih prava, promocije političkih ciljeva o stvaranju hrvatske nacionalne države i predstavljanju pred senatskim istražnim povjerenstvom i drugim australskim državnim institucijama i agencijama formirali su

Nacionalni hrvatski odbor za građanska prava. Rad prati događaje kroz australske novinske članke i komentare iz navedenog razdoblja, službene australske vladine dokumente, dokumente hrvatskih skupina i intervju s hrvatskim dijasporskim akterima iz tog razdoblja.

