

U.S. civil rights leader vows effort to save condemned Croatian soldiers

by Paolo Raimondi

Amelia Boynton Robinson of Tuskegee, Alabama, the author and civil rights leader, visited Croatia as the invited guest of "Bedem Ljubavi—Mothers for Peace" over the week of July 1-6, and pledged to lead worldwide efforts to block the execution of three Croatian soldiers imprisoned in Belgrade. Mrs. Robinson headed a delegation from the Schiller Institute to the war-exhausted republic, which has been battered by Serbian arms ever since it declared its independence last year. She was accompanied by Schiller Institute representatives Elke Fimmen from Germany and by Paolo Raimondi from Italy.

Now 80 years old, Mrs. Robinson is a veteran of the civil rights battles which caused her husband's premature death as a result of persecution, and she herself was beaten and left for dead in the famous Selma March of 1965. But Amelia Boynton Robinson is not resting on her laurels. She has committed herself to forming what she calls "an international civil rights movement," in the context of the Schiller Institute, founded by Helga Zepp-LaRouche.

The organization that hosted her visit to Croatia, Bedem Ljubavi, ("Bastion of Love") consists of mothers of mostly non-Serbian soldiers drafted by the Yugoslav Federal Army and forced to fight for Serbian aims. It began in June 1991 throughout all the republics of former Yugoslavia, to organize mothers in a peaceful mobilization to get their sons out of the communist Federal Army and to stop the genocide against unarmed populations whose only crime has been to aspire to national self-determination. These mothers' actions have set a high moral standard for the resistance, especially in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, against the aggression of the "Yugoslav" Federal Army, under the control of Serbian communist leader Slobodan Milosevic, and the Chetniks—the Serbian terrorists.

Mrs. Robinson—whose book, *Bridge Across Jordan*, describes the voter registration battles in Selma, Alabama where she risked her life alongside Dr. Martin Luther King—brought a message of hope to Croatia, where the expanding war and its toll of refugees, displaced people, dead, wounded, and sick, poor, and destroyed families, have begun to produce desperation. She spoke about her experiences in

Alabama, fighting to educate blacks and whites, too, to win for themselves the right to become first-class American citizens. "Do not be afraid, do not fall into hatred, be brave and courageous as you have been, fight for the respect of all fundamental human rights, do not despair, have trust in God and pray to Him. He is the same God of the miracles of the Bible. Be with Him and you will win," Amelia told everybody she met.

Robinson opened her visit with a press conference held at the Zagreb office of the Bedem Ljubavi movement. She sharply criticized the policy of the George Bush-James Baker-Henry Kissinger administration, which she accused of having egged on the Serbian military against the other republics seeking independence from the communist dictatorship. The news of her visit and her message were reported several times on Croatian national television and radio on the same day. The two main dailies, *Vecernji List* and *Novi Vjesnik*, covered the press conference on the next day. The media coverage continued with several articles and radio reports, including a high-profile interview with the Sunday issue of *Novi Vjesnik* (see *Documentation* below), and an English-language broadcast of another interview into North and South America and Australia, where there are large Croatian communities.

On July 3, Mrs. Robinson addressed a public forum organized in the offices of the Matica Hrvatska, the Croatian national cultural organization, which was attended by 70 people. After a warm introduction by Mrs. Slavica Bilic, the president of Bedem Ljubavi, Mrs. Robinson reported on her experiences in the U.S. civil rights fight, as she had documented them in *Bridge Across Jordan* (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1991).

Appeal for three condemned to death

At the press conference, Robinson had her first closeup encounter with the horrors of the war when she was introduced to relatives of three Croatian soldiers—Nikola Cibaric, Zoran Sipos, and Martin Sablic—who resisted the Federal Army attack against their hometown of Vukovar (see box). They were imprisoned after the fall of the citadel and are now

condemned to death by a military tribunal in Belgrade. The brother of Nikola Cibaric reported, in tears, that he lost his parents on Sept. 14 when they were taken by Serbian forces, and have been missing ever since. His other four brothers are very probably dead. Nikola Cibaric has a wife and four children. The wife of Zoran Sipos said that her husband was captured in November in Vukovar while defending his home. Martin Sablic has a wife and two children, the youngest a daughter of 14 months.

Robinson, who fought all her life against capital punishment and is one of the promoters of a resolution to stop the use of the death penalty in the United States, promptly issued a worldwide appeal to draw attention to this injustice, and to mobilize lawyers to take up the defense of the three condemned men.

As the leading daily *Novi Vjesnik* put it in a July 5 article, the "fierce human rights advocate" stressed: "The fate of the three Vukovar captives, sentenced to death by the Serbian military court, will become known throughout the whole of America. We shall rouse all opponents of the death penalty." She continued, "We have only 10 days or so! We'll urgently engage international lawyers, notify all our branches around the world. We'll take all measures." The paper said, "The four-day visit of Mrs. Robinson—a woman who was fighting against racism, known to the world public as a police victim, for during the 'Bloody Sunday' of 1965, she marched at the head of the protest column and was furiously

abused and beaten—is a proof of how deeply she was touched by the struggle of Croatia for freedom. Mrs. Robinson is a member of the voter registration fight for African-Americans."

Robinson was approached several times by groups of mothers from Vukovar desperately looking for their sons, many of them wounded Croatian soldiers who were taken by Serbian forces from the Vukovar hospital at the end of November and have been missing since then. Their names do not appear on any list of prisoners or dead under Serbian control. Some of these mothers lost their husbands just a few days before being separated from their sons. Robinson promised that the Schiller Institute will do everything possible to find their relatives and return them to their families. "What you have to do is to make the whole world aware of this crime," she advised the mothers. "Create a mothers' delegation to travel to many different countries and build up international pressure for freedom."

Mothers of Bedem Ljubavi also related stories, confirmed by several priests, about some of the most horrible crimes against humanity committed by groups of Chetniks and soldiers. Currently, there are several hundred girls and women from 12 to 40 years of age in the hospitals of Zagreb, 117 of them alone in the Petrova Hospital, who are pregnant as the result of being raped by Serbian soldiers. These girls and women were kept in concentration camps until advanced pregnancy and then sent back to Croatia. Nobody wants

The 'disappeared' from Vukovar

Dr. Vesna Bosanac, head of the Vukovar Hospital and currently adviser to the minister of health of the Republic of Croatia, on June 29 released the following information about the captured and missing persons of Vukovar.

"On Nov. 16, 1991, at the negotiations in Zagreb, the European mission signed, together with Prof. Dr. Andrija Hebrang (for the Republic of Croatia) and Gen. Andrija Raseta (for the Yugoslavian National Army [JNA]), an agreement for evacuation of the hospital under the supervision of the International Red Cross.

"During Nov. 19-21, 1991, the JNA under the guidance of Gen. Zivota Panic, Colonel Mrksic, and Maj. Veselin Sljivancanin put me, as head of the hospital, in prison and let only part of the wounded and the medical staff go to Croatia. In this way, from the hospital itself, the following people were taken prisoner: 189 wounded persons, 18 medical workers of the hospital, 25 auxiliary

workers of the hospital, plus 45 patients and civilians. The problem is made even more difficult by the JNA's not recognizing these persons as prisoners. Nor have they been recorded by the International Red Cross.

"After seven months from the fall of Vukovar into the hands of the JNA, we have still not managed to find out whether the wounded, the medical staff, auxiliary workers, and patients are alive or not.

"There are still 3,100 persons from Vukovar missing, who were taken over by the JNA under the direct command of Gen. Zivota Panic. We fear the worst massacre to have occurred, because the testimony of the released persons and of the civilians who have fled describes horrible tortures that the captives and civilians in Vukovar, which is now controlled by the Unprofor [U.N. forces], were exposed to."

On June 20, the first talks on this case were held in Budapest with Serbians, Croatians, and the International Red Cross. A Commission for Vukovar has been formed in which Dr. Bosanac is also a member. So far, the Mothers for Peace organization has obtained an affidavit of one person who saw a woman from Vukovar in one of the Serbian camps, which has been denied by the Serbians.

to speak openly about these crimes due to the precarious psychological state of the victims, but it is feared that there are now several thousand girls and young women from Bosnia kept in the concentration camps controlled by the Chetniks and facing the same fate.

Bolstering this fear is the report that out of almost 300,000 refugees from Bosnia in Croatia, most of them are children and elderly persons, but proportionally very few are girls and young women.

The Serbian war of aggression has perpetrated all types of bestiality and crimes. One of them has been the attack with heavy artillery and by the air force against hospitals and psychiatric centers. Amelia Robinson visited the Jankomir Psychiatric Hospital for children in Zagreb, and was received by the staff led by hospital director Dr. Biserka Markovic. Before the war, the hospital treated children affected by psychosis; since July 1991, some 53 children, refugees from the war zone, have been treated here. Most of them had problems before the fighting and had been in children's hospitals for psychiatric care in Vukovar or Osijek, but had to be evacuated. With many of them, the problems have worsened so much through the war as to produce destructive behavior never before seen by the doctors.

The Alabama civil rights leader met a 13-year-old boy from the city of Glina, 50 kilometers south of Zagreb, who suffered a severe shock after having lost his father and having been marched past aggressive Serbian soldiers and the bodies of local Croatian residents. Despite his own plight, the child told Mrs. Robinson that he most wanted her to tell American children what is going on in Croatia.

The refugee situation

The Schiller Institute delegation was received by Damir Zoric, secretary general of the Croatian government's office for displaced persons and refugees, who reported on the plight of hundreds of thousands of people and renewed his call for international aid and an immediate end to the war. At the beginning of July, he said, Croatia counted, according to official records, 670,000 persons who were either refugees or displaced persons. This total broke down into 270,000 displaced persons on the territory of Croatia (people who lost their homes and are still present on Croatian territory), 300,000 refugees mainly from Bosnia-Herzegovina who escaped into Croatia, and the rest, about 100,000 Croatians, who found refuge in other European countries. The data indicate that 34% of them are children.

At least another 500,000 refugees from Bosnia are expected in Croatia as soon as they can escape from the fighting. There are hundreds of thousands more refugees or displaced persons who do not appear in the government count because they have been given temporary accommodations by relatives or friends. Zoric reported that the situation has become more complicated, because other European countries are not willing to receive any more refugees. Slovenia closed its

borders more than a month ago and Austria closed its borders at the end of June.

Also, the aid being received is not enough. One person needs 18 kilograms of food per month. Only half this amount comes from international organizations and the Croatian diaspora. Most of the food is distributed through public kitchens. The government of Croatia spent \$62 million for the refugees just in the month of May, and it will be spend more than \$66 million in July.

There is also a critical housing shortage, even after hotels, hostels, military barracks, and sport centers have been filled to overflowing. There are many cases like the coastal town of Makarska, with 21,000 inhabitants, that received 46,000 refugees. The refugee office is now planning to build camps to receive more people. Zoric has sounded the alarm because the situation is worsening due to the increase in unemployment, which has already reached 300,000. But, he concluded, the other very big need is on the spiritual level, because all of these people have lost their homes and their relatives and are in need of a lot of attention.

Later, Mrs. Robinson was invited to St. Mark's Church in Zagreb to speak with priests who were forced to flee from the war area of Glina. She heard horrible stories of torture and of the destruction of hundreds of villages by Chetnik forces who systematically eliminate everything, beginning with the demolition of churches and cemeteries. St. Mark's parish is now caring for 6,000 people in desperate need of food, housing, and spiritual help. The American guest had the opportunity to address 300 refugees, who warmly greeted her when she told them not to despair but to remember the story of Gideon in the Bible who, trusting in God, defeated an army of 10,000 soldiers with only 500 men.

Visit to the war zone

On the morning of July 4, the leadership of the Mothers for Peace organization, together with Robinson and her Schiller Institute companions, drove to the war zone for a first-hand look. After an hour's drive east toward Slavonia, the group reached the little town of Kutina, just 100 kilometers from Zagreb. Kutina is the last town on this highway totally under the control of Croatian forces. Last autumn, Kutina was hit by 140 air attacks, some against the school and a local chemical plant, which fortunately did not create an environmental catastrophe. Under the escort of Croatian forces, the group reached the war zone and the area of total destruction within minutes. One little village after another had been completely bombed out; no human being, no animal, remains.

After reaching the first checkpoint held by U.N. (Unprofor) troops, and being informed by Croatian soldiers about a massacre of civilians by Serbian Chetniks, Amelia Robinson led the group in prayer at the mass grave, recognizable only by a small cross in the middle of the woods.

From there the group moved to Lipik, a town famous

for its hot springs spa, which has a big hospital, a resort center with hotels, and an old historic building. Spared even in World War II, Lipik did not survive the fury of this year's war. Before the current fighting, 12,000 people, 95% of them Croats, lived there; today, there are about 400 desperate people who refuse to leave their homes and risk their lives every day. There is no building which has not been hit in the fighting. Lipik was also world-famous for the Lipizzaner breed of white horses. The stable has been destroyed and a large number of horses killed. A systematic artillery and air bombardment did this, and the land mines are still in place. In hundreds of other towns and villages the cemeteries, churches, hospitals, and schools were destroyed even before the family dwellings.

Whom is the U.N. protecting?

The newly created Croatian Army was able to free Lipik, as well as many other territories, which then had to be abandoned to U.N. troops after the United Nations decided to intervene. Currently, Unprofor occupies one-fourth of Croatian territory, preventing the Croatian troops from moving to regain the areas (one-third of Croatian territory) occupied by Serbians. This has allowed the Serbian forces to consolidate their positions and move additional heavy military equipment into these areas. While the Serbians do not respect the so-called U.N. demilitarized region, the Croats are operating only within the U.N.-established limits, knowing that there is an international campaign ready to be launched against them as criminals if a single violation were to be proven. For this reason, it is widely believed in Croatia that the use of U.N. troops is only intended to justify the partition of the nation on the Cyprus model, an idea long promoted by the British "peace negotiator" Lord Carrington.

At the same time, the recent story alleging the creation of an independent Croatian republic on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which may be a manifestation of the desperation of the people in this area, or a more conscious provocation by some groups, has been denied by Croatian President Franjo Tudjman and by Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic. It is obvious to everyone who wants to gain national sovereignty over the whole territory of Croatia, that an action like this would justify the ongoing Serbian occupation of Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Vojvodina—formerly constituent republics and autonomous regions within Yugoslavia where some Serbs also live—and would open the floodgates for the kind of international campaign against Croatia exemplified by the July 8 *New York Times* editorial entitled "Croatia, the Butcher's Apprentice."

At the end of the tour of the war zone, during a lunch offered by Croatian officers and the mayor of Kutina, an older officer told Mrs. Robinson: "We are very honored and proud that you, from the U.S.A., have come here to give us words of comfort and courage and to invite us to join with you in the fight for civil and human rights."

Documentation

'I'll support Croatia,' vows Amelia Robinson

Below are excerpts from an interview conducted by Miroslava Kreca, printed by the Zagreb daily Novi Vjesnik on July 5, and translated from Croatian by Steven Corkovic.

● *What is the reason for your visit to Zagreb?*

My visit to Croatia is one of a series of attempts to provide a moral and humanitarian support to your war-torn country. I have been invited by members of Bedem Ljubavi [Bastion of Love] and I wish very much to support the struggle for peace of these brave women. All my life I have fought for peace among men, for dignity, for justice, for civil and human rights. I felt this to be a call I ought to obey. Every time I talk to unfortunate people deprived of their rights, I feel I leave them at least a ray of hope. It is a great satisfaction for me to aid people, and more so since I am an optimist and believe in success. When the Schiller Institute asked me if I'd be willing to go to Croatia, I agreed to right away. However, I must admit that many people were afraid to come to a war zone. I know that I am not alone in my struggle; I am here and whatever I can do, I will certainly do for the benefit of your people, for the saving of lives and return of peace.

● *What did you, in this short time, see in Croatia?*

I visited a hospital in Jankomir [a suburb of Zagreb] and the government Refugee Office. I saw a 15-year-old boy who had witnessed the death of his father and brother. That boy is emotionally completely crushed. I talked to people who had some of their relatives killed, with the ones whose closest family members had disappeared in this war. After hearing their soul-stirring testimonies, I notified the president of our institute about all of that, asking him to undertake all in his power to help you. We do not ask them to send somebody to "bargain" with the other side, but somebody who will come to fight for justice. We enlisted international lawyers who are to represent your Vukovar soldiers condemned by the military court in Belgrade. I hope we shall succeed in saving their lives. If need be, we shall rouse the American public. . . .

● *What knowledge did you have about this country and this war prior to coming to Croatia?*

I have read a lot about your war in the Schiller Institute publications, but I must admit my awareness of these atrocities was inadequate. Already now I know much more, your truth about the war is horrifying. You know, the things I read in the publications of the institute were not the same

facts we were receiving by the official media. I do not know if you are aware that our organization was receiving the truth the way it was.

● *How can the Schiller Institute help Croatia?*

We will do our utmost, but our ultimate goal is to help stop the war in Croatia. We will persist in that for as long as necessary.

Death sentence against Croatians

Information supplied by the Committee for Legal Assistance to the Defenders of Croatia:

On June 26, the Military Tribunal in Belgrade passed death sentences on Croatian prisoners of war Martin Sablić, Zoran Sipos, and Nikola Cibaric, and sentences of long-term imprisonment against Bartol Domazet (15 years), Jure Marusic (12), Slavko Madarevic (8), and Ante Vrankovic (6). The convicted persons are all members of the Croatian Army involved in the defense of Vukovar.

The accusations and condemnations were based on the violations of two paragraphs of the old Yugoslavian Penal Code—Paragraph 124, armed rebellion against the Yugoslavian Federal Republic, and Paragraph 142, genocide against civilians.

● The convicted persons were members of the Croatian Army, one of the sides of an international armed conflict and so, according to the Third Geneva Convention, they could not have been punished for participating in armed conflict (“armed rebellion”). . . .

● This procedure has been started on the basis of rules of the former Yugoslavia, which meanwhile ceased to exist, with the same consequences for its Army and for the Tribunal which has passed the sentences.

● The mentioned Croatian defenders have been convicted for crimes against the civilian population on the basis of confessions and testimony obtained through torture during long periods of detention in concentration camps and prisons.

All the named circumstances lead the committee to conclude that this and other processes at the Military Tribunal in Belgrade are illegal and that the sentences passed represent a “legal crime.”

There are 178 more Croatian soldiers facing criminal proceedings at the Military Tribunal in Serbia.

Interview: Pavlo Movchan

The writer as a man of the nation

The Ukrainian poet Pavlo Movchan, as a secretary of the Kiev branch of the Ukrainian Writers Union, was one of the initiators of the Popular Movement of Ukraine for Perebudhova (known as Rukh) in 1989. He is a deputy in the national parliament of Ukraine. Jonathan Tennenbaum interviewed Pavlo Movchan on May 6 for the German periodical Ibykus, which has made the interview available to EIR. We have added footnotes.

Tennenbaum: How would you evaluate the role of the Union of Writers in building the Ukrainian nation?

Movchan: The role of the writer? Of the Union of Writers? . . . I cannot answer that it is uniformly positive, for the simple reason that the Union of Writers was an agency artificially created to control the activity of all writers, with an overt ideological bent and with attempts to regulate all spiritual processes in Ukraine. Therefore, I cannot say that the Union of Writers had a positive role in the past.

But at a certain period in time, precisely in the Union of Writers, as the last substance of national independence—because the Ukrainian writer was dealing with language, and language was the last sanctuary of national freedom; it denoted national freedom—there matured many initiatives. At first, societies were created such as the Ukrainian Language Society. The Memorial Society was created, and Greenpeace. And in a certain way, the Union of Writers gave the impulse to the creation of [the independence movement] Rukh. It was in the Union of Writers that the charter tenets of that organization were thrashed out and polished, regarding all forms of its activity.

For Ukraine, a writer is not only a writer. He is something more than a citizen in Russia. Since the time of Taras Shevchenko [in the early 19th century], the writer was the national ideologue, but in a positive sense. He was the preserver of traditions, related to language. . . .

Tennenbaum: A national poet. . . .

Movchan: He was a national poet, naturally. And a man of the nation, a statesman, because the idea of statehood was passed like a baton from writer to writer. From Shevchenko to Drahomanov. From Lesia Ukrainka to Franko. That is at the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century. Then later, in the revolutionary time, to Vynnychenko, the historian,