

Are we going to send a commando team to London to avenge Joan of Arc? In Belgrade, the media are running a furious campaign in order to whip up bellicose feelings. Propaganda and the nationalist delirium turn into hysteria. You can buy the insignia and medals of ancient Serbia, over a century old, or buy cassettes with war songs on them. We are fully back in the Middle Ages, with television to boot.

It is a lie to claim that this war is the end result of an ancestral hatred of the Serbs for the Croats. The Slovenians, who have no historical contentions with the Serbs, also demanded to be freed of the Serbian yoke. Bosnia and Macedonia have clearly and democratically expressed that if Yugoslavia should one day explode, they wouldn't want to stay with the Serbs.

There is also a question of a war of religion: The Serbian extremists speak of a Croat-Vatican-German conspiracy. The phrase is so grotesque that it would be laughable if there were not thousands of dead in the background. The Serbs are Orthodox, whereas [most] Croats are Catholic. Certain Orthodox priests breathed life into dying embers in recalling that the massacres of 1941 had not been expiated. They are Serbs before being Christians. Why, if this is a war of religion, have the Macedonians, who are also Orthodox, disengaged themselves from the Serbs?

A hope for peace

To designate the actors in the conflict as Serbs and Croats is a ruse that distorts the truth. True, it is the Serbs (and their allies among the Montenegrins) who are currently invading Croatia. But whom do they represent? A handful of fanatics thirsty for conquest who have access to and largely make use of essential levers: the army and power. Everywhere numerous Serbs are raising questions about the legitimacy of this war. Desertions are not rare. One Serbian reservist killed himself rather than participate in the massacre. The Croatian resisters of Vukovar were commanded by a Serbian officer; there were Serbs fighting at the side of Croats, which should not only not be surprising, but comforting. In Croatia there are many villages where Serbs and Croats fraternized, at times inside the same family. When the enemy sent its bombs or its shells, it did not differentiate: Just as often, it was a Serbian house that could be hit, with its occupants—a curious way for an army to “deliver” its brothers.

Today, many peace movements are trying to make themselves heard and bring back peace. In the climate currently reigning in Belgrade, these efforts rise to the level of heroism. In fact, some of the peace leaders were called up and sent to the front lines, which is why it is the wives and parents of the soldiers who are most involved. It is not good to be a peace activist today in Serbia. They have just started recruiting at the workplace, and “volunteers” are pushed into combat with a rifle at their backs; recalcitrants are beaten, to then become the bodies that are served up as “victims of the Croats.”

Interview: Mersudin Pajo

Muslim Croats have been targeted

Mersudin “Mike” Pajo, is a Croatian, born near Mostar, the capital of Hercegovina, in 1937. He left his country in 1966 and has lived in Edmonton, Alberta, since 1968. In an interview with Umberto Pascali on Dec. 23, he charged that discrimination against Croats, especially Muslim Croats like himself, goes back to the beginning of Yugoslavia, which was artificially created by the Versailles Treaty in 1920.

The communist Yugoslavia of Marshal Tito—even though Tito was half-Croatian—continued to be this Serbian-dominated Yugoslav state. Even though there was no official support, as in Stalin's U.S.S.R., for the idea of a “guiding nation,” practically speaking, the Serbian nation enjoyed that position. Especially in Bosnia and Hercegovina, even the communists often found it really hard to be a Croat. In 1949, Mike Pajo reports, seven Muslim students were hanged by Tito in Sarajevo for having created the Young Muslim organization, among them a 22-year-old relative of Pajo's. He says, “I think people in the U.S. and Canada have been victims of a campaign of disinformation concerning the Croats of Muslim religion. The Greater Serbs try to propagandize the idea that Muslims cannot be Croats. I am a Muslim by religion and a Croatian by nationality and proud of both. It is clear also why the Greater Serbs want to maintain this false idea, so they can make their false calculations and their *divide et impera*” (divide and conquer).

“But, since the first moment I can remember, we Muslims always had good relations with the Catholics; there was never any problem. For example, now, in Edmonton, I can go to a Catholic mass and a Catholic can go to a mosque. We respect each other. And we are all Croats.

“It is different with the Greater Serbs. You cannot understand how much I love my native city, Mostar. But I had to leave: too much injustice! There was a policy of removing Muslims and Catholics from any important positions. We were, almost by definition, second-class citizens. And we Croats of Muslim religion are often ‘harder’ Croats than the Catholic. We speak the Croatian language better than they do in Zagreb, for example,” he says proudly.

We asked Mike Pajo to comment on the fact that the Greater Serbs have decided to create in Bosnia-Hercego-

vina a so-called independent republic supported by the Federal Army which will then be used to create an expanded Greater Serbia. The same had happened in Croatia, we recalled, where the Army conquered by force a large part of the territory and then recognized the territory's "independence" under Serbian rule.

"The Serbians do whatever they want," Pajo replied. "First they claim Croatia's independence is against the Yugoslavian Constitution, but then, in 24 hours, they create a new state.

Bosnia-Herzegovina on the chopping block

"I see a very bleak future for Bosnia-Herzegovina. The way things stand now, on Jan. 15 there will be war in Bosnia. All of Bosnia is full of military concentrations now. The Federal Army that was in Slovenia and Croatia, is all in Bosnia. According to the Bosnian President, Alija Izetbegovic, there are going to be 200,000 to 300,000 dead.

"I know how this escalation happened. Around three months ago, so-called 'reservists' began to arrive there from Montenegro. They were Chetniks. They wore long beards and Chetnik insignia. A thousand of them came to Mostar—Mostar became de facto an occupied city. My youngest sister, who lived close to the airport, was forced to move; her house was taken by the soldiers. More recently, these Chetniks started a series of provocations.

"Mostar is important for the Army. It has a large military industry. There they produce the jet fighters, the ones that bomb the Croatian cities. I used to work there when I was younger. I experienced unbearable discrimination."

He said that during his childhood, the population in Mostar was 60% Muslim, 35% Catholic, and 5% Orthodox. "The Serbian Orthodox there were not like the Serbians in Serbia; they spoke Croatian and used the Latin alphabet. In Bosnia-Herzegovina today you have 44% Muslims, 17% Catholics, and 44% Serbian Orthodox. From 1945 to 1968, the Serbian Orthodox went from 5% to 30-40% of the population in Mostar."

Although Pajo, his wife, and their triplet daughters had tried to return in 1983 to their homeland, after only six weeks in Mostar they came back to Canada, unable to deal with the severe discrimination. "I was told, for example, that my daughters had to lose a year in school because they knew only the Latin alphabet. It was like when I left the first time, or worse."

He explained, "After Tito took over, there was a policy to bring in Serbians from Serbia in every key position. When I went to school, my teachers were all from Serbia. When I was looking for a job, my application ended up regularly in the garbage can. I couldn't write I was a Croatian. From 1945 to 1960 I couldn't write I was a Muslim, only 'neutral.'" Pajo's wife, who worked in the post office, saw every non-Serbian employee gradually replaced by a Serb, and then was fired herself.

Ustasha and Chetniks

Pajo is particularly outraged by the coverup in the West of crimes committed by Greater Serbian chauvinists. "Why does everybody speak about Ante Pavelic, about the Ustasha in Croatia and repeat that they were on the side of Hitler, but nobody seems to remember that Gen. Draza Mihailovic, the boss of the Chetniks during World War II, was also on the side of Hitler?"

According to an official Croatian Ministry of Information publication, *Croatia from 1941 to 1991*, the breakup of Versailles Yugoslavia in 1941 was at first welcomed by Croats with the hopes that they could found a state for their own nation.

Yet it soon became clear that the Independent State of Croatia, proclaimed on April 10 of that year, was a mere puppet creation of the Third Reich "and was subordinate to the ideology and armed might of German Nazism, which had attempted from its very inception to achieve its global aims of building a 'New Order' in Europe by force and terror. . . . On the ruins of [Europe's] countries it erected its own satellite regimes, including that of Ante Pavelic, the Independent State of Croatia." Pavelic's regime did carry out fierce, Nazi-modeled repression of Serbs.

Croatia was tragically divided, the booklet goes on, in 1941 between the pro-fascist Ustasha and the anti-fascist partisan camp led by the communists, which led to a disastrous, bloody civil war.

"Also in Croatia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a distinct policy was carried out by the armed formations of the so-called Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland, or the Chetniks of Draza Mihailovic, who played two international cards during the war: They cooperated with the Axis forces, at the same time flirting with the western Allies in the expectation of being accepted by them as partners in the event of a western victory. In the meantime, during the four years of war, the Chetnik movement prepared the implementation of its own wide-ranging plan for the extirpation of Croats and Muslim from the Territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as also from certain historically pure Croat lands outside Bosnia-Herzegovina," all to prepare for "an ethnically pure Greater Serbia," the booklet states.

Among Serbs, Muslims, and Croats, the number of victims in Bosnia-Herzegovina is estimated at 13% of the entire population. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was "according to all accounts so particularly savage exactly because of its multinational, multiconfessional structure and because of the antagonisms that had been formed on this base over the centuries."

Pajo himself recalls a massacre that occurred when he was five years old, during the war. The Chetniks, he says, "came to my Muslim village, took 25 girls ages 18-25, tied them together, and set fire to their dresses. They were burnt alive. . . . We were looking from behind the windows, and nobody could do anything about it. Only because we left that town for Mostar, am I still alive today."