

INTERVIEW

ZORAN PUSIĆ:

FASCISTS FROM MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

By Heni Erceg

Zoran Pusić, mathematician, is the founder and chairman of the Action Committee for the Victims of Fascism Square. Since 1990, he has been involved in activities for the return of the old name of the present Croatian Great Men Square. Once again, there will be a protest rally at the 'location in dispute' on 9 May. The Square has already been nicknamed the 'bulwark of Croatian anti-fascism'.

Mr. Pusić, professionally involved in the Civic Committee for Human Rights, explains to the editor of Feral why 'pro-western' pressure on Croatia because of the violations of human rights and the 'sympathy for fascism' is justified and welcome.

After seven years of vane attempts to return the name of the Zagreb Victims of Fascism Square, do you find your efforts absurd or useful regarding the CDU (Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ) provocations about the Ustashe movement and the Independent State of Croatia?

-Our efforts have never been absurd. We have just shown that we don't want to be sheep or donkeys led by the authorities to the historic and human dead-end road. Despite the opposition of the authorities, we managed to celebrate the Europe Day, the Victory Day just at the Victims of Fascism Square. I believe that the pride of a number of people is dedicated here to the most glorious parts of Croatian history and their relationship to the future.

What does such stubborn refusal of the Croatian authorities to return the name of Victims of Fascism Square mean?

- As the things are, the decision to rename the square was made by the political elite. It wasn't only renaming but also a political act that in a way marked the authorities' renouncement of the values opposed to fascism. This was the first step in a range of activities that, in the long run, made Croatia look bad.

What activities do you have in mind?

- It's not only some kids with swastikas, German nazi decorations on the Croatian Army uniforms or some units of the Croatian Army named after war criminals from the Independent State of Croatia. The fact is that one of the darkest periods of human history is being revived and justified. I think that these are the roots of many crimes committed against the Serb population that remained in Krajina in 1995. The crimes were committed because somebody was of a different religion or nationality. The same that had been committed both in this area and in Europe in the first half of the 20th century.

Minimizing the Crime

How do you comment the articles from *The New York Times* criticizing Croatia because of the Ustashe revival? Are they, too sharp as they may be, founded on real events?

- Unfortunately, those articles are based on some facts; it's true that there is a Croatian Army unit named after the Ustashe criminal Rafael Boban, it's also true that the pictures of Ante Pavelić can be seen everywhere, even in the offices of

some political parties leaders, it's also true that some highly placed state leaders lift their arms for the fascist salute. The crime committed here by the quislings and the regime that was everything but independent is being minimized. Minimizing crimes committed in the Independent State of Croatia is so obvious that the articles from *The New York Times*, are, regardless of their quality, based on some real facts. We could argue that the neo-nazis occur elsewhere and that's true. Such things occur in France and in Germany. However, those occurrences are marginal and are persecuted by the authorities. On the other hand, the call for national intolerance and ethnic cleansing are here considered a legitimate political position.

Why do the authorities respond to the foreign reactions only, while they ignore or even denounce warnings coming from Croatia itself?

- It is sad that *The New York Times* article stirred the boat, while our long-lasting warnings remained without any coverage by the official media, without any polemics. Moreover, we were called political dilettantes and flashers. So, when Croatia gets slapped by a superpower then it reacts and directs a delegation to Jasenovac. Everybody pretends to be very touched; how can one even think that the Ustashe movement is being revived in Croatia?!

Does it mean that such incidents would be more frequent had it not been for foreign pressure?

- I think so. There are fine examples in our neighbourhood, in Republika Srpska and in FR Yugoslavia. They are much less sensitive to foreign pressure and the situation there is much worse. Thank heavens that Croatia is exposed to foreign pressures. Otherwise it would be much worse here. The current authorities would definitely not tolerate a few "political dilettantes and flashers" who decided to oppose both the authorities and their harmful decisions.

How did you perceive the Croatian officials' statements at the recent commemoration at Jasenovac and putting Jasenovac on the same level with Bleiburg, Gradiška, Manjača, etc. ?

- It all looked rather bizarre. The Croatian officials have not said a word about the Jasenovac victims; they did talk about things that certainly can be discussed, but at another location and time. Bleiburg has certainly been the end of a brutal war, and the winners did the same things they had been exposed to for five years. This has shown that even good ideas act against themselves if followed by inadequate means. However, Bleiburg has nothing to do with Jasenovac. I think that Bleiburg would have never happened had it not been for the Independent State of Croatia, the Jasenovac Concentration Camp and other horrible crimes that the state had committed. That's why Jasenovac can by no means be justified by what happened at Bleiburg.

Horrors of Politicking

As a Croatian citizen, would you prefer to have seen Mr. Tuđman at the commemoration in Jasenovac instead of Mr. Šarinić and the others?

- I'm sorry that my President, although I did not vote him, lacks strength and political wisdom to go to Jasenovac. That would be an ethic act which would certainly appease the political damage that Croatia suffers; the damage like when we are treated as if we come from a semi-totalitarian country, or material damage like refusal of loans and other benefits. All Croatian citizens will feel the consequences of such an attitude.

Does the incredible adaptation of Tuđman's book 'Horrors of War' for the American market, I mean the extraction of a part about manipulations with Jasenovac, fit into his attitude?

- One could renounce a part of something one wrote and say that it was because of wrong information. But renouncing a part of it just for one market proves that Mr Tuđman's book is used for politicking only, which is the worst that can happen to a book.

Everything we say about the Croatian fascism ends with symbols. Can you tell me what's the real presence of fascism in the society?

- *Feral* once published a part of the discussion by Mr Goldstein in which argued the guilt of the Germans. He said that the Third Reich propaganda had managed to erase or considerably reduce the border line of moral responsibility in the majority of Germans. So they began thinking about Jews as about lower beings. They thought that it was their duty to denounce and evict the Jews, while a small number even thought that helping Jews to end up in concentration camps was also a part of the duty. Regardless of disputability of those assumptions, it is true that the majority of Germans turned their heads away in fear while their Jewish neighbours were taken away and that the majority did not want to know what was really going on. That's the syndrome we're talking about. I think that it emerged in Croatia after the Operation Storm, after the crimes committed in Krajina, the crimes people simply didn't want to know about. It is only now, almost two years later, that the public legal officer spoke about those facts. On the other hand, the Croatian authorities call traitors and enemies both us who talked about the crimes two years ago and you who wrote about them. Therefore, the Croatian propaganda managed to reduce the border line of sensitivity to such an extent that a woman and her child are evicted from their flat while the next door neighbor remains behind the locked door happy because it has not happened to him. Such an annoying situation is characteristic for totalitarian regimes; it's the basis for terror against the entire nation.

Cheap Thrills of the State

At the same time, the nation is accused of crimes?

- The Germans bore the responsibility for the crimes committed mostly by SS. The Yugoslav citizens bear the burden of demolished Croatian towns and villages as well as the crimes committed by paramilitary units. The Bosnian Serbs bear the consequences of the crimes committed by Ratko Mladić's army. The responsibility of a nation is always a tricky issue. It is my opinion that the guilt is always individual while the nation may be responsible.

We can argue that there is a natural streaming for freedom within a human being. On the other hand, there is the fear of bearing responsibility for one's actions. It's always better that someone else fights, so that we can avoid being responsible. This is a kind of escape from freedom, which is a common characteristic for the majority of people. However, the state is guilty - I'm speaking here about the Croatian state, because it incites cheap thrills. The state is responsible because it sublimates the passion that is finally transformed into hatred against the adverse team. It's like on a football stadium, where there is no more hatred between Dinamo Zagreb and the Red Star Belgrade, but between Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split. This can happen in any society, but good national administration strives to calm those 'football fan' behavior. My comparison to a football stadium isn't accidental. We all know that the people like Arkan have been recruited from the fans of the Red Star Football Club. The same is in Croatia; many militant individuals are often connected with some strong football fan groups.

**How do you feel about the actions of the Croatian Government in Krajina?
Could we call the manipulations regarding the return of the Croatian
Serbs the completion of 'humane relocation'?**

- How can you even say that the Croatian Government is trying to do something like that? The TV turns into the land of milk and honey and the Government claims that everything will be done for the people to return home. Unfortunately, we've had only bad experiences over the past two years of our efforts to bring the Serbs back to their homes. As a matter of fact, the responsible people for the return of refugees told me that only a small number will be allowed to return. In the beginning, we tried to bring elderly people only. We argued with the customs officers. One of them even asked me after several times we met: 'Mr. Pusić, why don't you do like other Croats and smuggle sausages instead of the Serbs. We did try to bring back only elderly people and only to towns, because the villages are still dangerous. Just one example. A man asked me to go with him to his village in Krajina because he had no news from his eighty-one-year-old father. When we got there, we found him dead in a well. He was so poor that he had a rope instead of belt on his trousers. This is a typical; he was murdered in a fascist manner in order to intimidate the others. This is just one example. I'm sorry that the Croatian authorities do not allow the Serb citizens to return. Instead, they argue that they can't come back because they committed crimes. They should be allowed to come back, and those who had committed crimes tried and sentenced.

Lilliputian Imperialism

Do you think that the authorities would succeed in making Croatia ethnically clean state if it were not for the pressure of the international community and request that the Government allow the Serbs to return?

- Yes, that would happen without international pressure. There is a clear plan to create an ethnically clean state as well as the plan for the partition of Bosnia. It's the clear plan of Lilliputian imperialism to annex a part of Bosnia. We should fight against this because it harms the Croatian people. The authorities have overtly called the Serb refugees optants who ran away from Croatia. That's immoral; it is the same as if we call the Croats who had to leave Vukovar were optants. That's why I think that the pressure on the Government is necessary.

Are you afraid of the outcome in the Danube region? Do you believe that international arbitration in the region would be necessary even after the return of Croatian displaced persons to Eastern Slavonia?

- I think that the arbitration is necessary but I don't know whether it will be sufficient or not. It would be natural that the Croatian Government seeks assistance from the international community. Not only financial but also logistic and all other assistance so that the process could go on calmly in the oncoming years. It is evident that there will be violations of human rights and that the people will be leaving the area because there is a great tension and the people feel insecure. The Croatian Government says that all Serbs will be allowed to return but I know an example from Gvozd. A man from Vukovar returned and found his house locked up but empty. He went to the local commissioner, told him that he had Croatian documents and that he would like to get his house because it was empty. The commissioner told him that they could discuss the matter but he wanted to know his attitude about the Independent State of Croatia and the Ustashe. Then the Serb packed his suitcases and returned to Vukovar. Unfortunately this is reality although the authorities try to make it look better on TV.

Are there any positive examples?

- Yes, they deserve to be mentioned just because they are rare. However, they confirm that the return can be organized if the local authorities want to do so. Mr. Nikola Ivkanec, chief of police in Pakrac is a very good example. It's because of him that there are no serious violations of human rights in that area. He protected everybody, regardless of nationality. He also took care that the people who haven't seen each other for four years finally meet. Only the police did the field work. They were well armed but did not terrorize anyone. After a while, the people realized that the police protected them. Therefore, the people can return if there's a will to do so. The national media and TV could of course help to reduce the tensions in those areas. The Catholic Church could also help because it has a great influence in those villages. It seems to me that spreading tolerance is a part of the Church's 'job description'. This is a great opportunity for the Church to be more active in treating the wounds of war and to protect the rights of each and every individual.

A Shock for Returnees

Do you know how many Serbs wanted to return to Croatia since Mr. Jure Radić and his ministry constantly keep changing the figures in their statements?

- The Government should certainly have better information than a small NGO like the Civic Committee for Human Rights. Nevertheless, according to our data, about 30 thousand refugees from Krajina made requests for return. Then there are another 30 thousand from FRY. That's about 60 thousand people. Yet, only a small number really returned.

But the Croatian officials tell that more than ten thousand Serbs have returned.

- That's certainly not true. Only about one or two thousand people have returned. In addition, the people come and go because their houses are either demolished or someone else lives there. This first shock is such that they just give up and leave. Unfortunately they end in Republika Srpska, which finds it convenient in order to complete the project of ethnic cleansing. Namely, those people are moved into villages and towns from which Croats and Muslims had been evicted.

STATE COVERED ROBBERY

What do you say about the Government's Act on Temporary Disposal of Property? Is Mr. Jure Radić right to say that not even European Tribunal for Human Rights can abolish the Act?

- The Croatian Serbs who left Krajina should be given their houses and land. I do agree with Mr Galbraith who called the Act illegal and subject to cancellation by the European Tribunal for Human Rights. Also, the Civic Committee for Human Rights has already brought charges against the Act at the Constitution Court. After all, it's about time that a sovereign state begins minding its own business and lets the Constitutional Court decide on the non-constitutionality of the Act. It is quite clear that the Act opposes the Constitution because no civilized state legalizes the robbery of private property. Such care for displaced persons is fake. We know that the Serb houses were usually sold cheap. In most cases, these were just criminal acts, not the assistance to the displaced persons. The Act of Law that allows robbery is against European civilisational achievements.