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NEWS

CROATIAN TELLS REASON FOR HIJACK AT TRIAL

Ivanko Basic, one of five young people accused of hijacking a TWA 727 in September 1976, testified in Federal Court in Brooklyn, New York on April 12, 13 and 14 concerning his role in the affair.

Seeking independence from the multi-national state of Yugoslavia, the Croats wish to establish a free Croatian state based upon the ancient Croatian nation which existed as a kingdom from 925 AD until 1918.

Although Croatia is an independent "Republic" of the Yugoslav Federation according to the Yugoslav constitution, a wave of suppression starting in 1971 reimposed the harsh regime founded by Marshal Tito in 1945. From 1966 through late 1971, the "Croatian Spring" saw a liberal trend with growing freedom for the Croats. A massive purge starting in late 1971 saw thousands of Croatian communist party officials, publishers, teachers and students removed from their positions and arrested by the People's Police (UBSA).

The accused hijackers took thousands of leaflets in English, French, and Croatian aboard the aircraft and demanded the publication of another document in American newspapers, both called attention to the plight of the Croatian people. Basic said that his friends still in Yugoslavia expected him to "...do anything in the western world and western democracy to help these Croatian students who were in prison in Yugoslavia. He added: "...the American government was supporting 100 percent the Yugoslavian government and was in fact secretly working with Yugoslavian Secret Service, and we should open the eyes of the American people" to this cooperation.

Since the hijacking, President Carter's administration has cited Yugoslavia for violations of Human Rights and restriction of free speech. Yugoslavia is the only communist state to receive U.S. military assistance.
