

## An Account of the First World Roma Congress Held in London in 1971

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1 They met at a small boarding school in a suburb of South London, most unknown to each other before that long April weekend in 1971. By the end of it, delegates to the First World War Congress had set a nation-in-birth on a new political path. What occurred at Cannock House has been obscured by the now legendary status of that gathering, today celebrated by communities scattered across four continents.

A participant at the Congress, I here attempt, fifty years later, to reveal something of its intent and achievement, and of the personalities of the delegates themselves. Separated by the Cold War and the Iron Curtain, they travelled to this unique event to affirm a common ethnic identity. They had to contend with a diversified culture; a language half could not speak and a wished-for unity that still today proves elusive.

Yet decisions taken at Cannock House are now deemed irreversible. For those currently active in the movement that coming together is the foundation stone. Tentative steps had been taken at pre-war Bucharest congress. But of tries then and since, London is the one that counts. Decades later, Margareta Matache, Director of the Roma Program at Harvard, could confirm that was when Roma chose the mantle and symbols of nationhood; adopted a unifying flag, an anthem and a national day. Zeljko Jovanovic, head of the Open Society Foundation's Roma Initiatives, has written of the Congress as historic for every one of twenty million Roma in a global diaspora. Nothing, he has written, could oblige us to mark April 8 [its opening day] more than the moral imperative and hunger for self-definition.

The Romani flag has become ubiquitous and the conviction that the London Congress marked a vital stage in the emergence of the Roma Nation rests unshakable. People must have their symbols and their heroes. A rule perhaps the more indelible for a nation without claim to homeland. Nowadays April 8 has become the occasion for the European Union's Roma Summits; for debate in the British House of Lords. Statements have been made on this date by Hillary Clinton while US Secretary of State. And there is much other official fanfare. However, within the fulsome recognition lies hidden a subtle downgrading of what Congress intended. For the ownership of Roma Nation Day is frequently replaced by a tamer, subsidized International Roma Day. Or even simply a Roma Day. As if for those 24 hours, an amnesty applies, and officialdom sets aside black prejudice.

Thus, I am one to conclude that whenever and wherever the flag flies for International Roma Day, there is the danger that the heritage of the founding Congress is weakened; the Roma Nation denied.

Let's examine this further. In post-war West Germany it was denied *Gypsies* had faced collective extermination under Nazi race laws. Courts rested their case on the classification of Roma as *asocials*. Claims were summarily rejected. Is the situation much better today when it's argued Roma pose primarily a social problem? The word Gypsy may have been banned from the conference table and published research. But the designation Roma Nation rarely features. Thus, collective aspirations continue to be thwarted. Politicians want to see the arrival of the Roma Nation stalled. In an era that has seen the cause of human rights fade and neo-fascism flourish, such politicians are emboldened.

Nevertheless, it's evident the significance of 8 April expands each year. Whilst ideas born of the Congress have a centrifugal force on the World Wide Web. An intention to pursue self-determination; a declaration of nationhood by a nation without borders and no claim to territory may sound like impossible ideals. But in an age of ethnic-identity politics and the blurring of ideologies, a nationalism which challenges orthodoxy and reaches for collective civil rights might expect to meet tolerance. In these novel circumstances, plenty believe the day of the Roma nation will come.

Suffice to acknowledge in 1971 process was set in train. For a start the Congress set about sweeping away misnomers which have signified for centuries denigration, marginalization and exclusion. The words *cigani*, *Zigeuner*, *gipsy*; each has been a pitch-cap, a torture tool suffered for generations enslaved in Balkan Europe, man-hunted in Prussia and Tudor England. They may continue to disfigure the Roma profile, but no longer go unchallenged.

At the time of the Congress, movement in Europe was hampered by barbed-wire and ideologies at a war-footing enmity. Behind the Iron Curtain, wheels had been taken from wagons and nomadism outlawed. In the West too, Gypsies were being banned from the road and their camps destroyed. Except for a brief period in the Soviet Union, the promotion of Roma as a recognized nationality had become taboo. In the West the notion was unknown. Instead, folklorists featured the Romanies as a dying breed.

So it is that this humble affair in an obscure private school, that at the time garnered minimal media attention and of which few photographs exists, has been elevated in importance. The Congress sessions, its projected commissions, an excursion to Birmingham to protest the death of children in a trailer fire, and a culminating pre-billed *Gypsy* Festival featuring Raya, a former artists of the Moscow Romen Theatre, have since been parceled up, of necessity, into a people's epic. For activists in the Romani movement today (back then the term "activist" hardly existed) the Congress is the greatest happening yet. Nothing quite like it had happened since the exodus from India.

Tentative steps had been taken at a pre-war Bucharest congress, where a blue and green flag had been displayed. However, it is London that counts.

2 As to its proceedings, a dearth of records hamper the historian. Drawing on memory and notes taken at the time, I here attempt to reconstruct some of what occurred during the four days of the First World Roma Congress.

Under the New Order in Europe, Nazis and their allies tried to exterminate Gypsies. Racial laws as harsh as any against the Jews were deployed. Huge numbers murdered. Adolf Eichmann is heard to say in an audio transcript before his trial in Israel that half a million were rounded up between 1943 and the end of the war alone. The figure suggests the oft repeated estimate of half a million deaths was in reality far exceeded. Survivors carried both physical and psychological scars. In the immediate post-war years, public organization had been rarely seen. Exceptions included the Phralipe (Brotherhood) in Macedonia and the Pan-Hellenic Roma Association in Athens which survived the war. In western Europe there existed a few Gypsy Missions.

As to the Gypsies in Britain, the Nazi menace drew closest in 1940 after the defeat at Dunkirk. Invasion under Operation Sea Lion would have brought systematic round-up and mass killings. The Gypsy Council, which hosted the London Congress on behalf of the Paris-based *Comite Internationa Roma*, came into existence in 1966, drawing on local activism in Kent. Frederick Wood, its first president, had been with a British Army unit at the liberation of Bergen Belsen. Singer and prominent Kent Gypsy Jasper Smith, Nelson Fener, Solly Brown, Abe Cooper and others camped alongside the nearby arterial A2 road made up the Council's attendees, perhaps fifty in all at the final plenary session. Financed out of private pockets (not by the Indian Government, or the World Council of Churches as sometimes reported) the Congress owed its accommodation and victualling needs to Bryan Raywid, a Welsh Traveller who occasionally wrote for the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*. Raywid had broken off his itinerant life and taken a job as cook at Cannock House School. He prevailed upon headmaster Mr. Baker to allow this unique gathering take place in his school free of charge. Thus it was Raywid fed us all, leaving himself little time to attend sessions. He is owed recognition for his contributing to these decisive days in the political history of Roma. Raywid lives today in retirement in Houston, Texas.

Another key actor in London was Panjabi Weer Rajendra Rishi, then an attaché at the Indian High Commission. He had served in Moscow, acting on occasion as interpreter in a meetings between Nehru and Khrushchev. Here he attended in a private capacity. Later Rishi senior published works on the Romani language, in 1983 arranged the first Roma Festival in India and involved Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the Roma cause. He has been succeeded by his son Veerendra Rishi as director of the Indian Institute of Romani Studies and editor of the occasional journal *Roma*.

3        Expectation for a congress had been building in Paris and London. The French capital had in the post-war period become a magnet for Roma. Refugees from Franco's Spain, from Romania and Hungary. The biggest influx came from Yugoslavia. Nonaligned Yugoslavia had begun to allow travel to the West. Thousands of the Roma migrants lived in the *bidonvilles* of the suburbs. One of the largest camps existed in Montreuil-sous-Bois. Here Vaida Voevod, *nom de guerre* of Ionel Rotaru, founded *Communaute Mondiale Gitane (World Community of Gypsies)*. Rotaru had arrived illegally in 1947 from Moldova, sustained initially by publication of a novel *La Rhapsodie Roumaine*. Vaida, as he was known, had lost parents, three brothers and two sisters in the war. He preached unity and aimed to create a CMG that could represent Roma on a global level. He recruited wherever he went; Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, possibly Mexico. There is speculation in Bulgaria Vaida met with Shakir Pashov, founder of *Ekhipe (Unity)*, a group with ambitions as great as his own. In 1964 Vaida Voevod, now a paramount figure in the reborn Romani movement, visited us at the large encampment on the outskirts of Dublin, known as Cherry Orchard.

Here, itinerants as they were then known in Ireland, were making a final stand after years of evictions and displacement. I had joined them, a youth on the run from compulsory National Service in the British Army. At a London press conference I attended with Vaida, he announced that the First World Roma Congress would be held at the UNESCO Palace in Paris; that the CMG was seeking recognition by the United Nations and was campaigning for block reparations from West Germany in compensation for the Roma genocide. Following the example of Israel, such reparations would be utilized to establish Romanestan, a homeland for the Romani people.

For several years, such plans were discussed with varying degrees of reality. Coopted to the CMG, I was party to such talk, both with Vaida and his successor Vanko Rouda (an alias of Jacques Dauvergne). The possibilities for creating a Romani colony, or token mini-state, were pursued with diminishing prospects. Canada, Soviet Siberia, Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, and lastly the Kingdom of Bhutan, arose and dropped away as conceivable locations. Looking back, this debate might seem futile. However, the idea of a recognized territorial homeland held a strong attraction for homeless and often stateless migrants. After all, miniature-states existed. Even Vatican City has a seat in the United Nations. Moreover, the concept of Romanestan has deeper meaning, as pointed out by Maria Sierra, professor at the University of Seville. Vaida was projecting in inspirational terms the right of Roma to a civic and collective existence. He sought the acceptance of Roma into the family of nations. I believe the spirit of Vaida Voevod and his lost Romanestan were present, unacknowledged, at the prestigious 5<sup>th</sup> Congress in Prague in 2000 when delegates sought recognition for a Roma Nation without territory, and without borders. A collective existence which continues to challenge conventional norms.

By the summer of 1970 meanwhile, the CIR, now led by Rouda, had radically modified Roma aims. The model had become the Black civil rights movement in America; the demand, equal rights for everyone. Vaid Voevod, his CMG, declared illegal, prosecuted and finally driven out by the French authorities and the Catholic Church, had taken refuge in Austria. With his departure the ideal of Romanestan faded from view. A personal and ideology rift between Vaida and Vanko Rouda became inevitable. The small publication *La Voix Mondiale Tzigane (Voice of the Gypsy World)* which had first appeared in 1961 became the organ of the CIR. Individual compensation cases continued to be filed in the Germany courts, and information thus obtained became a resource for research into Nazi crimes.

By then, a township existed which could provide a spiritual and cultural home. Suto Orizari, built on the outskirts of Skopje after the 1963 Skopje earthquake, had expanded to a population of 30,000. Matching by Sliven and perhaps Sulukule in Istanbul, Shukta alone owned its own municipal council and elected a member of parliament. This gave the township a status no other Romani *mahala* enjoyed. Half in jest, Yugoslav media referred to Shukta, as the Roma state.

4 Thus it was that prominent in the delegation coming to the Congress from Yugoslavia was the MP from Suto Orizari, Fajk Abdi. The others were Slobodan Berberski, a member of the League of Communists, and Cuna Bedzet, from Kosovo. The party led by Vanko Rouda from Paris included his brother Leulea, Zharko Jovanovic, composer and balalaika player, a migrant from Yugoslavia; and Mateo Maximoff, novelist and evangelical preacher. With them, and whom I embraced most warmly, arrived Dr. Jan Cibula. Now a defector from Slovakia, he had travelled from Switzerland.

We had gotten to know each other three years earlier during the Prague Spring of 1968. Cibula, a house-doctor at a state-owned factory, had believed in that brief permissive era it was going to be possible to form a legal Romani union. Our meeting in the home of civil engineer Anton Facuna, in Bratislav, however, proved tense. Behind drawn curtains we talked like conspirators of the spreading Romani movement which must defy the division of Europe. Days before the Slovak capital had been the venue for a Warsaw Pact conference condemning liberalizer premier Dubcek. Now, in these perilous conditions, Cibula, Facuna and university

dissident Milena Huschmannova, who had brought me to the meeting, were desperate to know what to do. I could propose no definite plan, only hope of the delayed Congress. Back to Prague and I boarded a train to Germany just before the Russian tanks rolled in.

Now Cibula stood with me at the door of Cannock House. Someone was guiding Rouda and others to an upstairs dormitory. Cibula had spotted a second party for he suddenly dropped his case and ducked out of the porch. I watched him join the newcomers. Then they veered out of sight. From the raised voices I gathered these new arrivals were in a violent dispute with Cibula. Later I sought out the Czech delegates and learned how the communist-approved group had hotly objected to Dr. Cibula's presence. Eventually ethnic loyalties prevailed. Late that night the first clash of the Congress resolved itself.

Next morning, after an unfamiliar English breakfast provided by Raywid, delegates assembled in the school's paneled library. Many were the embraces and warm words were exchanged. The delight in the faces of people from a dozen countries, long artificially separated, discovering in this room the ability to converse in a common language. My address subdued that happy mood. Our guests had to be told of racist hostility in the neighborhood. An anti-Gipsy sentiment was running high. A protest meeting had taken place in the parish hall. The vigilante faction had raised £4,000. They intended to clear roadside camps and erect barriers to Travellers returning. Many of those being targeted would be at the Congress next day. Meanwhile, I warned, the proceedings in Cannock House had as far as possible to be kept secret.

When Vanko Rouda rose to speak, his words caused deeper consternation. He said the CIR had authorized the conference simply as a preparatory forum. The topic would be the Congress to be held in Paris. All looked at each other, perplexed and unhappy. Their expectations frustrated. Then chairs were flung back, the desks rattled. I thought the books would jump off the shelves. Quiet returned when Juan de Dios Ramirez, a teacher from Barcelona (later the first Rom elected to the European Parliament) stood to respond. All saw he would express the general will though he did not speak Romanes. We had to wait for a translation of his rapid Spanish. He wanted the Congress now. Delegates applauded. Zharko Jovanovic took to his feet. He knew the score, as I did. Those long, inconclusive meetings in Paris. He urged us to declare this the opening plenary session of the World Congress. To chair someone proposed Slobodan Berberski. Berberski consented. Amidst the drama of that morning, we accepted him on trust. Later I learned that, like Jovanovic, he had fought in the ranks of Tito's war-time partizans. Now a Belgrade intellectual, Berberski thus became the first Congress president. He would prove an asset for a movement whose center was about to move eastwards.

Vanko Rouda sat in studied calm through the commotion. He departed himself always like a dapper Parisian and now bowed to the majority will. He looked as pleased as anyone. I believe inwardly he was satisfied that both Vaida Voevod and Romanestan had been excluded. I felt Vaida should have been there.

Berberski's delayed acceptance speech, taken from a published report, brought palpable relief and a renewed but now joyous thumping on the desks which set the tone for the coming sessions.

*The purpose of this Congress is to unite and activate Roma throughout the world; to bring about emancipation according to our own intuition and our own ideals – to make progress at our own speed. A great deal needs to be discussed and worked out and we cannot say at once what methods we shall use, or what direction we shall take. But whatever we do will have the stamp of our own particular personality upon it – it will be amaro Romano drom, our Romani road.*

*What we have to combat is exemplified by bureaucracy. Officialdom, now overgrown in every state, represents a monster whose job it is to squeeze out human feelings, monopolize decision-making and stifle initiative – qualities which are the very essence of our being. The administrative machine, concerned with standardization and control, cannot by its nature understand that national consciousness – the collective desire to be ourselves – is the well-spring that alone can refresh and re-new the world. Our struggle, to evolve according to our own genius, is the same struggle for liberation being waged all over the globe – aiming to prevent the continents being turned into deserts by war, expropriation and misgovernment.*

*Our people must combine and organize to work locally, nationally and internationally. Our problems are the same everywhere: we must proceed with our own forms of education, preserve and develop our Romani culture, bring a new dynamism into our communities and forge a future in accordance with our life-style and beliefs. We have been passive long enough and I believe, starting today, we can succeed.*

*The deliberations of this Congress are of historical importance to our people. It is for every one of us to bear our responsibilities with dignity and pride and henceforth to encourage, help and counsel one another in times of need.*

*I ask you now to rise and observe two minutes' silence for all of our people destroyed by fascism in the last war – and for all those who have suffered and died as the result of prejudice and persecution over the centuries of our dark past.*

5 Grief and loathing, prudence, pragmatism and a desire to find a way forward. All these elements, I believe, vied in the hearts and minds of delegates as they filed out of that first plenary session. Strong emotions had been stirred. Much showed in their faces. Melanie Spitta, a Sinti from Germany, who with Raya comprised the small female representation, had lost close family members in Auschwitz. Others too were children of survivors. At fifteen, Zharko had had a narrow escape from his hometown Batajnica, blockaded by fascist troops. Hundreds of Roma had been rounded up and delivered to their deaths. Mobile gassing vans had been dispatched from Berlin for that purpose. Mateo Maximoff, writer and evangelist, had been among Gypsies interned in France. Stories were shared over coming days and nights. The Congress had its hours of anguish as well as heights of joy.

Meanwhile, in relaxed good humor, we divided ourselves between classrooms for meetings of commissions. They would discuss education, war crimes, social issues and language. I followed Abdi Fajk to the room allocated for the Social Commission. The spring sun glinted through the windows. You could feel a fresh optimism. Here a reconstruction might begin. Chosen to chair, Fajk, the son of a blacksmith, told of achievements in the municipality of Suto Orizari. How the township had achieved self-governance and become a focal point with wide links; to Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. He himself had relations as far away as Izmir, in Turkey. From Shutka men migrated to Germany, France and Belgium, Italy. They sent remittances. They brought back money to build more houses. A new organization, new

institutions, had to be created capable of draw everyone together, stimulating self-reliance. Faik's catch word was emancipation. He would head a political party with that name. For now, the Social Commission tasked itself with drafting reports to the Council of Europe and the United Nations. If in retrospect expectations of these institutions were naïve, we were lifted in that sun-lit classroom by a newly minted common endeavor.

The reaction to Fajk had been immediate. He had the presence of a leader. He displayed fresh, confident energy. He had a vision that instilled confidence. Listening, one could compare Abdi Fajk with the older Vaida. Later in Shutka I witnessed his sterner side. At Cannock House, Vanko Rouda, who had known him longest kept silent about Vaida. In private conversation he reminded us discussion of a Romani state had to be avoided. I wished Ronald Lee, then an advocate of Romanestan, was there to keep that debate alive. He had left London for Toronto before the Congress.

That afternoon, Rouda sat in another room attending the War Crimes Commission. Donald Kenrick, whose extended Jewish family had suffered great losses in the Holocaust, contributed both as interpreter and scholar. I had made my choice to follow Fajk and by evening already hankered to know who now might provide the leadership the movement needed. I remember Fajk chided Berberski for his incessant smoking and consumption of black coffee. Frequently laced with slivovitz, a Yugoslav plum brandy. Berberski was middle-aged and in poor health. He died at seventy in 1989. Over forty years, he created an abundance of literature and was a pioneer of Romani poetry. He is due our respect. The night after Berberski's election, Fajk did cruel caricature of Slobodan tripping, tipsily across the dormitory in loose pyjamas.

Reports circulated the second night from the other commission meetings. A full account appeared an issue of *Race Today*, journal of the London-based Institute of Race Relations. No-one could yet say how the Congress would fulfil its role. It would be seven years before the next. Secure in the knowledge that this once East West division had been successfully circumvented, I wrote there was nothing now to stop Roma everywhere uniting in common cause.

After I turned in, I was roused from bed by a phone call from Pop's Johnny Connors, who had been at Cherry Orchard camp in Ireland. He was now leading the Gypsy Council campaign against evictions in the Birmingham area. He expected us next day in this black-spot of anti-Traveller activity.

6 Aboard a lurching coach on the new M1 Motorway, we burrowed through mist towards our destination. I had booked the bus weeks before determined the Congress would be more than a talking-shop. No time had been found to explain to all the present mission. Now they would learn for themselves of the daily harassment suffered at the hands of council and police. Jackboot justice Johnny called it. He had been beaten and locked in police cells. Birmingham City would not even tolerate those who tried to settle. They had evicted fourteen families from houses in Sparkbrook. A Labor Party leader had been quoted as bragging he might go as far as exterminating the *impossibles*. Harassment is the order of the day. Three children have been burned to death in a caravan fire following an eviction. Walsall town lies at the epicenter of this ethnic cleansing.

The coach driver is navigating by the cat's eyes on the road ahead. The yellow smog has not cleared. I wonder at the risks I am I taking. The delegates are a disparate crowd. This

is no coach outing. I have learned the approved delegates from the socialist bloc regard nomadism as outdated at best. No place for it in the workers' republics. They have as yet seen little of the poorest on the roadsides in the neighborhood of Cannock House. I join Zharko Jovanovic and the Yugoslavs on the back seat. I want to explain. Zharko has taken up his balalaika. His strumming frequently stops, as if interrupted by the pitching of the vehicle. He is writing in a notebook. "Shun!" he says. "Listen to this!" Standing up in the gangway, he sings his fresh lyrics. He wants us to sing along. By the time the bus reaches Balsall Heath *Dzelem Dzelem*, composed to traditional melody, is ready to be adopted as the Roma Nation anthem.

We pile out onto a hilly piece of waste ground dotted with trailer caravans. A few horses are grazing. On rise the buildings of Birmingham University. A crowd is waiting. We are cheered, and jostled by the children. A bender-tent has been erected and Congress delegates gather about it as someone sets the canvas alight. An age-old traditional mourning for the dead. The flames leap up. We sing the new anthem, a tribute to the child victims of Walsall. Along with all who have perished under persecution. No time to eat the sandwiches laid out in a local hall. We press on to Walsall.

There in the town's police station, a senior officer is summoned. Faced by strangers from he knows not where, the superintendent is confronted by Miroslav Holomek, Czech military prosecutor. He is accused of the death of the children from Slackey Lane. Connors tells the police it was an illegal operation towing occupied trailers onto George Street, where one had caught fire. In a fury, he promises as he leaves that his curse will fall *on your jackboot mob*. Later, released from prison to travel to London, Pop's Johnny Connors repeats the account of these deaths to members of the European Commission for Human Rights.

7 Back at Cannock house, the Congress draws to a close. The final plenary session brings Gypsies from the Kent roadsides. Jasper Smith, Abe Cooper, Solly Brown among them, all prominent in the Gypsy Council. The women bear babes in their arms. The Assembly Hall fills. They are a generation who lost their old winter-quarters at Corke's Meadow. They have had their wagons towed out of Darenth Wood. They greet an account of the Walsall protest with satisfied smiles. They are fighting such battles themselves. The attempt to close the Star Lane caravan site while families are absent in the hop fields. Those on the podium, except myself, have no direct experience of Traveller life; these roadsiders know they must in their daily lives defy the law, not from choice but necessity.

The adoption of the Roma Nation flag is better understood by the *foreigners*; for them it means a nationalist defiance of the single-party state. Rouda has brought a flag from Paris and exhibits it aloft. It has a fringe of gold. From the podium, Dr. Cibula adds his authority, recalling that such a blue and green flag had been displayed at the pre-war Bucharest Congress. Rouda had brought one from Paris and now exhibits it aloft. Two plain fields, blue and green, divided horizontally. It has a fringe of gold. He tells us this is the flag he had carried [with Vaida] to the Arc de Triomphe in the first commemoration on French soil of the Roma genocide. From the podium, Dr. Cibula adds his authority. It was, he says, such a flag that had been recognized by the pre-war Bucharest congress. A hubbub of discussion arises. From the back of the hall, a woman's voice is raised. She understands the symbolism of sky and earth but wants a flame added. A fire signifying a new start. The civil rights campaign. I recognize the flushed face of Louise Brown, seated by her husband Solly. They have recently moved back onto the Star Lane site. However, other delegates want to hear from

Rishi, the attache from the Indian High Commission. They are looking for a symbol which will link Roma with India. Berberski argues their case. He is sure of his ground. Yugoslavia and India are allied in the nonaligned bloc. Roma need the protection of their ancient motherland. Rishi proposes the Congress embellish the Romani flag with an Ashok Chakra, the wheel of fortune featured on the Indian flag. He says politicians will recognize the intention immediately. A wave of approval is felt. Hands are raised. Whether a vote has been taken, no one knows. Fajk is on his feet. He proposes a red wheel. The fitness of this is instantly comprehended. All hands are again in the air. No one need count. Something exalted is happening. Almost metaphysical. The magic of the moment grips all. A profound collective faith is being placed in this flag. A standard raised to rally millions. It will fly now in the vanguard. Around it the Roma Nation will muster.

Before departure on that final morning, Abdi Fajk sought me out. He has reports to write and needed assistance. We took mugs of coffee from the kitchen and found an empty classroom. Delegates were milling about in the lobby saying their farewells. Outside a police car is parked on the drive. Fajk had been surprised by my know of Serbo-Croat. I told him of my several visits to Yugoslavia. As we walked to the entrance lobby among the departing throng, he urged me to come and visit him in his township constituency. I wanted to return to Yugoslavia. Perhaps I could move permanently in Suto Orizari. Fajk laughed in pleasure at this and we said goodbye.

*The author, Grattan Puxon, a writer and activist, was in large part responsible for organizing the Ist World Roma Congress and elected its general-secretary. Today April 8<sup>th</sup> is widely celebrated as Roma Nation Day. In 1972, Puxon and Donald Kendrick co-authored the first comprehensive account of the Roma genocide, under the title "Destiny of Europe's Gypsie"[Published by Basic Books, New York, as part of the Columbus Centre Series edited by Norman Cohn]. It has since appeared in eight languages, the Romani translation by Puxon in two editions, the second in the Interface Collection produced by University of Hertfordshire Press in 1995. Puxon is chair of the Democratic Transition, working to introduce a new electronic voting system to increase the legitimacy and political clout of the International Romani Union and the broader pro-Roma movement.*