

The Struggle of Istrians in Zagreb for the Preservation of Croatian Identity in Istria in the 1920s and 1930s

The course of events in Istria after World War I drove many Istrians into exile in the 1920s. The intellectuals Matko Laginja, Ivan Cukon (Zuccon), Matko Brajša Rašan, Josip and Mate Demarin, Tone Peruško and Matko Rojnić were among the most significant persons who left Istria because they could not put up with the Italian authorities, nor accept the fact that they were not allowed to work and communicate in the Croatian language.

Before establishing his own office in Pula, Ivan Cukon (Zuccon) perfected his skills as an attorney with Matko Laginja's firm. He was a representative at the Regional Parliament in Poreč and assessor to the Country Committee. He was also a member of the People's Council in Pula and, being a Croat, he served as Vice-president of the Pula Municipality. He expressed his patriotism and the power of the Croatian word in Istria by writing the lyrics for the song "Krasna zemljo, Istro mila" (Beautiful Land, Dear Istria) which was set to music by Matko Brajša Rašan. Due to his openly pro-Croatian activities, he was forced to emigrate to Yugoslavia in 1929, where he continued his political work. From 1924 to 1925 he held the position of the Grand Prefect of the Zagreb District. Having moved to Zagreb, he continued to write analytical, specialist and political papers, which he published in newspapers and periodicals such as "Naša Sloga", "Omnibus" and "Hrvatski list", always directly or indirectly pointing out the position of Croats in Istria.

Josip Demarin, a prominent educationist, lexicographer and translator, emigrated to Yugoslavia in 1926 after threats to his life had been made. There he continued his education and later worked as an educator and scholar. His work on Istria gives an overview of the cultural and historic events related to the education and school system in Istria.

The educator and writer Mate Demarin was removed from office because of his steady commitment to the preservation of the Croatian language in school and church. He emigrated to Yugoslavia in 1923. His work always remained connected with Istria, especially his analytical and popular articles, published in different newspapers, which dealt with the role of the teacher in the course of the Croatian National Revival.

The examples of prominent Istrians Matko Laginja, Ivan Cukon (Zuccon), Matko Brajša Rašan, Josip and Mate Demarin, Tone Peruško and Matko Rojnić, who emigrated to Yugoslavia after 1920 illustrate Italy's political attempts to eradicate the Croatian national identity in Istria, as well as the determination of Istrians to contribute through their professional, scholarly and political activities to the popularisation of the question of life in Istria between two world wars.

Key words: Istria, fascism, emigration, Matko Laginja, Ivan Cukon (Zuccon), Matko Brajša Rašan, Josip and Mate Demarin, Tone Peruško, Matko Rojnić, Croatian identity