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Nikola Milivojević (Serbia)
University of Novi Sad
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

RELATIONS AND CONNECTIONS AMONG CENTRAL EUROPEAN PEOPLE DURING THE GREAT WAR DEPICTED THROUGH THE FATES OF RESIDENTS OF A BAČKA TOWN

Abstract

The main focus of this paper are the fates of the residents of three Palanka municipalities (Old, New and Bačka Palanka): Serbs, Germans, Hungarians, Jews and Slovaks, participants of the Great War 1914-1918. Relying on scarce sources and on the available literature, the author of this paper tries to explore the correlations between citizens of Palanka, as well as their relations and connections with other Central European people, before, during and after the Great War; observed through their participation in the combined forces of Austro-Hungary and revolutionary movements from 1917 to 1919. The author also depicts the role of the citizens of Palanka in the shaping of the Central European post war creations of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians and the First Czechoslovak Republic, as Serbian volunteers, members of the Czechoslovak Legion and as peoples' representatives at the Great National Assembly of Serbs, Bunjevci and other Slavs in Novi Sad on the 25th November 1918.

Keywords: the Great War, Bačka Palanka, Central European people

The territory of the town of Bačka Palanka, at the beginning of the 20th century spread across Bács-Bodrog County (Bács-Bodrog vármegye) within the Hungarian part of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Three sister municipalities: Stara (Old, Alt, Ó Palanka) Palanka, Nova (New, Neu, Új Palanka) and Nemačka (German, Deutsch, Német, Palanka) were inhabited by different Central European and Balkan people: Germans, Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks, Jews, Roma, etc (Јовин, 1988, 21.). A sudden socio-economic and cultural-political strengthening of Palanka municipalities happened at the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries. Many factories, schools, religious, cultural and administrative institutions were built, and Palanka municipalities got connected with the heartland of Austro-Hungary by rail and by the river Danube. The greatest share of industrial plants, workshops and stores was owned by Germans, a smaller share by Hungarians and Jews. Serbs were mainly agricultural population, while Slovaks engaged in small crafts, trade and wage employment. As holders of Central European culture and as the majority population of Palanka, Germans left the greatest impact on their neighbours. With their work they contributed to the general socio-economic progress, and by opening first culture institutions they also contributed to the culture elevation of

Palanka municipalities (Pap, 1988, 17, 24, 27, Janjetović, 2009, 46, 53-55, Milutinović, 1962, 36-46, Antolović, 2009,183-188.). Following them, Hungarians had great influence attempting, as a leading people of the Hungarian part of the Monarchy, to maximally emphasize the importance of their culture in relation to non-Hungarian people through administration and schools (run exclusively in Hungarian language from the beginning of the 20th century), as well as through the politics of assimilation (so called "Hungarisation") during the second half of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century (Rokai P., Đere Z. , Pal T., Kasaš A., 2002, 281-284, Mikavica, 2011, 201-203.). The consequences of the politics of assimilation in Palanka municipalities could clearly be observed in the sudden increase of the number of Hungarians from 583, according to the 1880 census to 1561 according to the 1910 census (Jovin, 1988, 21.). Insufficiently nationally aware German and Jewish population were more intensively subject to assimilation than highly aware Serbian and Slovak population, and the transfer to "Hungarians" was considered a great way to keep social position. Palanka Germans and Hungarians possessed features of bourgeois class, while only some elements of bourgeois class appeared with Serbs in this period and with a very small percentage of Slovaks and Jews (Šosberger, 1998, 29, Janjetović, 2009, 58, Rokai P., Đere Z. , Pal T., Kasaš A., 2002, 281-284). Serbs became a relevant factor of culture life in Palanka municipalities after the foundation of Serbian reading room in 1875 (Pap, 1988, 27, Kosovac, 1910, 435/36.). On the other hand, a great importance was given to Palanka Slovaks and Jews in the pre-war period by religious services, bringing people with extraordinary education and reputation to their religious institutions – Evangelical priest Igor Štefánik and rabbi Benjamin Fischer (Beniamin Fischer) (Pap, 1989,34, Šosberger, 1998, 44,59,199.).

In the years before the outbreak of World War I the tensions in domestic politics of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy grew. The atmosphere towards its Slovenian subjects got fairly negative, while the straining of foreign policy relations with the neighbouring Kingdom of Serbia led to the deterioration of relations between Austro-Hungarian authorities and Serbian people within its borders (Rokai P., Đere Z. , Pal T., Kasaš A., 2002, 283.). With the approaching war, national awareness of Palanka Slovaks and Germans strengthened as well (Janjetović, 2009, 78/79, Sirácky, 1996, 10.). The visit of priest Igor Štefánik's brother, Milan Štefánik, one of the major patrons of the cooperation between Czechs and Slovaks with the aim of realization of independence from Austro-Hungary, to Stara Palanka and the neighbouring village Pivnice in 1912 had a great influence on Slovaks (Kuzmanović, 2010, 40.).

The murder of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 26th June 1914 threw Europe and the rest of the world into the arms of a new war of up to then unheard-of scales and consequences. The winds of war, as well as its initial euphoria, did not affect people of Palanka, whose fates turned into a component of the huge puzzle of war events. Palanka men fit for military service found at home, were firstly mobilized in the summer of 1914 (Đurišić M. Dr Ratković, B. Dr Skoko S. Dr Živojinović D., Dr Vojvodić M., 1976, 15-20, 30.). By joining Austro-Hungarian Imperial Royal Army, they served in the same units as many other Central European people. They met some of them for the first time, particularly those who lived in other parts of the Monarchy (Slovenes, Romanians, Czechs, Subcarpathian Rusyns, Ukrainians, Italians, Poles, etc.). All the above mentioned was best observed in the war diary by Borislav Uvalić. Describing the structure of the unit he joined and the people he contacted with, he listed: Hungarians, Germans, Croats, Serbs, Slovaks, etc. (The diary of Borislav Uvalić).

In the two-year long research 556 names and almost as many war biographies by Palanka participants in World War I were collected. Out of the total number of the collected names, 377 are German, 128 Serbian, 32 Hungarian, 8 Jewish, 5 Slovak, 5 Croatian and 1

Rusyns. As for military corps, the greatest percentage involved infantry: 253, then follow cavalry 6, navy 2, aviation 3, artillery 3, ambulance 2, and due to the lack of documentation it is not possible to determine which corps the rest of the listed soldiers belonged to. Based on war biographies we conclude that Germans and Hungarians in most cases joined the war as under-age volunteers or after military training, and Slovaks, Serbs and Jews less. Families Stein, Reszely, Horváth, Cserveny, Beinstingel etc. give interesting examples. All men fit for military service volunteered for military service during the war. Family Stein gave 6, and family Reszely 3 soldiers, Horváth 3, Cserveny 2, Beinstingel 3 soldiers, and some of them acquired higher officer military ranks at the end of the war. The biggest number of register officers (32) and non-commissioned officers (12) were Germans and Hungarians. Only two Serbian officers and one non-commissioned officer are known, also one officer of Ruthenian origin, three Jewish officers and one non-commissioned officer of Slovak origins (David, Koscy, Lendavy, 1942, 11-15,33 /34, 56, 58, 64, 80, 84, 86, 147, 173).

The schedule at the battlefield for Palanka people during World War I depended on the general need for personnel, as well as on the opening of new battlefields in Austro-Hungary vis-à-vis their enemy. During the first year of war the greatest number of Palanka people was staggered on the Eastern Front, and less on Balkan (Serbian) Front. By opening battlefields with the Kingdom of Italy in 1915 and the Kingdom of Romania, Palanka people could be found in military corps at Italian and Romanian fronts, and from 1917 in artillery units at the Western Front (Đurišić M. Dr Ratković, B. Dr Skoko S. Dr Živojinović D., Dr Vojvodić M., 1976, 49, 63, 94-103, 123, 136, 170, 175, 191, 194, 203, 255, 266, 318, 336, 349.). Even though three neighbouring municipalities belonged to the IV Army corps headquartered in Budapest, it frequently happened that its inhabitants served in the units of the neighbouring Army corps headquartered in: Zagreb (XIII), Timisoara (VII) and Graz (VII) and Sarajevo (XV), such as, for example 16th Bjelovar infantry regiment, 6th National-ustasha home-guard artillery regiment in Zagreb, 7th Imperial-Royal field-artillery regiment in Osijek, 27th Honved infantry regiment in Sisak, 27th Imperial-Royal infantry regiment in Graz, 7th Honved infantry regiment in Vršac, on the ship S.M.S. Szent István, etc. (David, Koscy, Lendavy, 1942, 11-15, 33/34, 56, 58, 64, 80, 84, 86, 147, 173.). More than 50% of the listed soldiers spent the better part of their service at the Eastern front. The biggest number of fallen and wounded soldiers, as well as prisoners of war, was also registered at this battlefield. The next front when it comes to the numbers of the imprisoned and killed was the Balkan front (Der toten und lebender Kriger von Bač-Palanka, David, Koscy, Lendavy, 1942, 11-15, 33/34, 56, 58, 64, 80, 84, 86, 147, 173).

Based on soldiers' biographies and available archival records it cannot be claimed that the war divided the population of Palanka municipalities into "Germans and Hungarians on the one and Serbs and Slovaks on the other side". Three Palanka municipalities and their population continued with normal functioning during the war, each of the municipalities as a whole, and the contacts among their inhabitants were on everyday basis and as close as before the Great War. There is no data on any incidents and violence of a part of Palanka population, for instance, German and Hungarian over Slovak, Jewish, Roma or Serbian population in this period. Also, so far, there have not been found any documents on repression against the families of war deserters, nor on the crossing of the Danube by Palanka people to the neighbouring Srem, the then stronghold of Austro-Hungarian deserters, the so called "green personnel" or "logoši" (Petranović, 1980, 22.). The degradation of general inner circumstances caused by heavy war losses, growing inflation and the corruption of bureaucracy in the Monarchy (Rokai P., Đere Z. , Pal T., Kasaš A., 2002, 525.), affected all the people of Palankas in the same way. So, for example, Austro-Hungarian authorities took

down church bells from all Christian religious institutions, because of the lack of metal and other raw materials to lead the war, and sent them to processing during 1916 (Bizotssági velvétetett a cs. És kir. Hadűgyminiszterium 1916. évi aprillis 15-én, Abt. 8.HB, Nr. 3380. számurendelete alapiján, Ópalanka 17 October 1916, Pap, 1989, 42.).

As for Serbian inhabitants of Palanka, it cannot be claimed that they behaved less loyally than their German, Hungarian, Jewish or Slovak neighbours. Austro-Hungary, where they and their ancestors were born, where they were growing up and starting their families, was seen as their country, and serving the homeland during the Great War was considered to be honourable. There are well-known examples of great heroism of Palanka Serbs during the war, as for example, heroic behaviour of DrMilorad Zavišić during the battles around Obrenovac and Belgrade in 1914 (David, Koscy, Lendavy, 1942,15.) or, for instance, soldier Panta Vlakov, who died after successfully completed sabotage operation at the Eastern front. The number of Serbs killed in Austro-Hungarian uniform, particularly during 1914 and 1915 was significant (Регистар протокола умрлих, 1850-1930). The reprisals during World War I were felt only by the family of Igor Štefanik. Due to "Slovakness" and their relations with the representatives of Czechoslovakian national movement Štefanik was first sentenced to house arrest, and few months later he was exiled to Zric. Just after his departure the treasury of Evangelic church was closed, and on the 2 July 1915 the church was declared a mission. Igor returned to Palanka from exiles on 25th June 1916. Cultural and spiritual life of Palanka Slovaks was revived with his return (Pap, 1989, 42/43, Kuzmanović, 2010, 40.). It is interesting to mention that 1915 marked the beginning of the political engagement of Palanka Slovaks in the political life of South-Hungarian Slovaks via journal Dolnozemský Slovák. During the war the following authors published in the journal: Štefan Pribiš and Martin Čelnek, as well as teachers Julijus Rudolf Cavar (Júlijus Rudolf Cavar) and Pavel Gallo (Kováč, 2013, 70, Ján Sirácky, 1996, 10).

Palanka contributed to the victory of the Kingdom of Serbia in the Great War 1914-1918 and to the unification of all South Slavic people into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes by volunteering in the Serbian Army and by sending their representatives to the Great Folk Assembly of Serbs, Bunjevci and other Slavic People on 25th November 1918 in Novi Sad. The exact number of volunteers from Palanka is not known due to the lack of sources. The names of 66 volunteers are known. The biggest share of the listed on the Serbian side transferred during military operations to the Eastern Front in the period from 1914 to 1917, and the smaller part did the same at the Balkans front in 1914 or 1915. Out of the total of 66 volunteers the names of the four "American volunteers" are known: Sava Milić, Stevan Janić, Joca Šijakov and Cvetka Miškova. The following text will briefly look into the war fate of one of the 54 "European volunteers" – Sima Pešić.

When the war broke Sima Pešić was only 22 years old. He was mobilized right after the outbreak of July Crisis, and at the beginning of the war his unit was sent to Srem, to the front line at Sava by Šabac. Risking his life, as well as a safe return to his family after the war, Sima takes the first chance to surrender to Serbian army. He joins Serbian volunteers only after a few months of detailed checkout and waiting together with a group of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war of South Slavic origin at the turn of 1914 and 1915 in Niš. He crossed to Albania and at the end of 1915 and the beginning of 1916 and again joined the first battle lines on Salonika front. After front breakthrough he participated in operations for the liberation of Serbia and South Slavic region, taking off his uniform finally at the end of 1918 (Arhiv Vojvodine, Fond 496).

Apart from volunteers, Palanka people contributed to the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes by sending their representatives to the Great Assembly of Serbs, Bunjevci and

Other Slavs in Banat, Baranya and Bačka held on 25th November 1918, just a day after the unification of Srem with the Kingdom of Serbia and Montenegro. The number of participants at the Assembly was 757, they were sent from 211 municipalities (Petranović, 1980, 23.). Palanka people sent five representatives from Stara Palanka, who had high reputation among people and were highly educated: teacher Jevrem Milošev, industrialist Ljubiša Marcikić, Stevan Vlajkov, Jaša Bozotski and officer and physician Borislav Uvalić. After the adoption of the Resolution Banat, Bačka and Baranya joined the Kingdom of Serbia. A few months later Igor Štefanik was elected the member of the Temporary national branch of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, while Ljubiša Marcikić was elected his deputy. Marcikić continues his political career after this by taking part in the Great folk council.

The biography of one of the folk representatives from Stara Palanka, Borislav Uvalić, deserves special attention. He was born on 26th October 1879 in Kula. He finished School of Medicine in Innsbruck in 1904, and got his first physician position in Bačka Palanka in 1906. During World War I he served in the 6th homeguard ustasha artillery regiment as a main medical officer for 52 months at Balkans, Eastern and Italian fronts. He was chosen to be municipality physician in Stara Palanka on 22nd January 1918, and he was awarded several decorations for his war merits by Franz Joseph, with Order of the Red Cross and Officer order. The significant fact about him was that he left an important historical source – war diary where he recorded his war path from his mobilization on 25th August 1914 to the last resettlement to Bukovina on 28th September 1918 (Dnevnik Borislava Uvalića, Pap, 1988, 29, Немет, 2014, 62).

Palanka people, apart from Serbian volunteers, could also boast with a Czecho-Slovakian legionary Jozef Bučka, a Slovak from the municipality of Bačka Palanka. During the first three years of war, Bučko's unit was stationed in the vicinity of Trent in South Tyrol. During a recounter with Italian and allied corps, he got taken prisoner by Italians. In captivity he met Czechs and Slovaks from the homeland, also Austro-Hungarian prisoners, through whom he was introduced to their revolutionary ideas of the cooperation of the two peoples with the aim of creating the independent Czechoslovak state (unpublished manuscript by Vladimír Kováč, grammar school teacher from Bačka Palanka, the grandson of Jozef Bučko. The manuscript still does not have its official name.) While being imprisoned, Czech and Slovak representatives struggled on diplomatic fields to form independent Czecho-Slovakian units on Italian ground (Becherelli, 2014, 328-340). Soon after the education of the first Czechoslovak units on the Italian ground, Jozef Bučko was recruited by the unknown Czecho-Slovakian officer and joined Czecho-Slovakian legion. There is insufficient information on his war activities. It is known that, after the Great War, Bučko continued his war service in the newly formed Czecho-Slovakian army. He probably returned to Bačka Palanka only at the end of 1919 or the beginning of 1920. He was ceremoniously handed a revolutionary medal for his contribution to the creation of the independent Czecho-Slovakian state in Prague on 29th January 1929 (Revoluční medali Jozefu Bučkovi, Čislo 00456.). Jozef Bučko contributed to the unification of two Slavic peoples through his war activities, and thereby also additionally strengthened the connections of Palanka Slovaks with the homeland (unpublished manuscript by Vladimír Kováč).

At the end of the second decade of the 20th century, Palanka people, scattered over different positions at the Eastern Front and along the background, on Hungarian territory, ended up in the focus of civil wars and revolutions. Based on the available data, three participants in the revolutionary events on the ground of Russian empire from 1917 to 1923 and Hungary in 1919 are known: Ivan Plavšić, Jovan Jamušakov and Géza Abelsberg. Unlike war fates of other Palanka people, participants in the Great War, the war fates of the two

participants in the Russian Bolshevik revolution, politically convenient for the authorities of socialist Yugoslavia, were preserved through articles in the local Sunday paper of Bačka Palanka, published on the occasion of the 50th and 60th anniversaries of October revolution in 1967 and 1977 (Šć., 1967, 1, Karanović, 1977, 6, David, Koscy, Lendavy, 1942, 3.).
Jovan Jamušakov and Ivan Plavšić were born in Stara Palanka. After the outbreak of war and the mobilization they were sent to military training. After the training they were sent to the Eastern Front, where, during a close encounter with the opponent army, probably in 1915, they surrendered to Russians and were imprisoned. It is known that Jamušakov was, via Serbian officers, transferred to Odessa where he joined Serbian volunteer division, with which he, during 1916, left to Dobrudža, and thereafter he returned to Russia, where he joined Bolsheviks in 1917, under the command of general Vasilij Ivanovič Čapajev (Василий Иванович Чапаев). As a Bolshevik he fought against counterrevolutionaries in the battles at Krakow, Kiev and at the river Don, being promoted to a corporal. In the interview he gave to the journalist of the Sunday paper in 1967 he affirmed that, on one occasion as a Red Army man, he was honoured to hear the speech of Vladimir Ilič Lenin (Влади́мир Ильи́ч Улья́нов). Plavšić joined Bolsheviks during the autumn of 1917 and participated in a few encounters with White Army Cossacks at the wide front from Saratov to Ural (Шћ, 1967, 1.). Jamušakov and Plavšić returned to Palanka after the end of the war in 1918 (Karanović C. (1977): I danas pamtim Lenjinove reči, Nedeljne novine, br. 665/6, Bačka Palanka, 6, 1879-1969, 79.). During the revolution and Russian civil war they were awarded medals, and the last medals were given to them at the 50th anniversary of October revolution in 1967 by Soviet ambassador Ivan Benediktov (Ива́н Алекса́ндрович Бенеди́ктов) in the Workers' home „Svetozar Marković" in Novi Sad (Šć., 1967, 1.).

At the moment of the outbreak of the Rose Revolution in Hungary on 20th March 1919 (2002, 302/3.), Géza Abelsbergs return home was delayed due to the serious illness. After his recovery, as an experienced war veteran – reserve lieutenant of the 20th Imperial Royal Artillery regiment and the participant of battles at the Eastern, Romanian and Italian fronts (David, Koscy, Lendavy,1942, 3.), like many other war veterans, he opted for one of Hungarian national fractions lead by Gömbös Gyula. By voluntarily joining the Hungarian National Defence Association (MOVE–Magyar orszagos vederő egylet) he became a passionate fighter for the preservation of the heritage of thousand-year old Hungarian state from "socialist-Bolshevik danger" by Béla Kun (Rokai P., Đere Z. , Pal T., Kasaš A., 2002, 301.). He probably returned to Palanka after the suppression of revolution.

It can only be assumed how many more Palanka inhabitants participated in these events. At the end of this chapter, it is important to mention that the outbreak of revolution in these two countries influenced the return of many Palanka people who were Austro-Hungarian war prisoners or regular soldiers. So, for example, there is the example of Lajos Reszely, imprisoned at Zborovan in Galizia 1917, liberated in 1920 or István Horváth, who was imprisoned by Russians during the withdrawal from Pšemisl in the direction of Lemberg 1915, and was released only in 1923. On the other hand, there is the example of József Beinstingel and József Brenner, imprisoned after the fall of Pšemisl 1915 and at Karpati 1914, who were freed from Russian imprisonment with the crash of the front and the getaway from the camp, and they returned to their homes during the spring of 1918 (David, Koscy, Lendavy, 1942, 11, 73, 54, 24.).

Leaving gloomy days of the four-year long bloody war and revolutions behind them, after returning to their homes, Palanka people got back to their normal lives. The coexistence of Central European and Balkan peoples on the ground of Palanka municipalities during the interwar period continued its former course. In this period socio-economic and cultural

development of Palanka municipalities continued as well. Economic connections with the interior of the country were getting stronger, and the exchange with their old partners at the ground of the former Austro-Hungary and German empire went on as well. A big part in the further shaping of Palanka municipalities and in the establishing connections was played by war veterans of the Great war (Pap, 1988, 29, Тоша Искруљев, 1937, 6, David, Koscy, Lendavy, 1942, 3.). The greatest part of the industry was still in the hands of Danube Germans. The war left considerable consequences on them. Fighting across huge vastness of Eastern Europe they stayed in or crossed many German settlements realizing that German language was *lingua franca* of Eastern and Central Europe. This influenced the final crystallizing of their national awareness, which led to the greater care of the preservation of their national identity and culture during the interwar period and the organization of Kulturbund (Janjetović, 2009, 82.). On the other hand, there was also a considerable cultural activity of Sokol society, in whose manifestations, apart from Serbs, also many Slovaks, Jews and other peoples took part. The activities of Palanka Slovaks also did not lose strength, together with their connections with the homeland, while Jews became equal with other peoples of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Šosberger, 1998, 25.). The memories of war events and the fallen have been kept alive by each of the communities in their own way. Germans and Hungarians remember them in memorial services and publishing tableaus with the names of war participants, where they also listed some Slovaks, Šokci and Jews (Der toten und lebender Kriger von Bač-Palanka), and Serbs remember them through the Association of war volunteers and by putting up memorial board on the western wall of Serbian orthodox church in 1928 (Iskruljev, 1937, 6.)

Conclusion

Summarizing all of the above, based on fairly insufficient materials and literature related to this narrow topic, we can conclude that, although in a fairly small area of three Palanka municipalities there lived several different Central European and Balkans peoples, among whom, before, during and after the Great war were good relations. Palanka municipalities and their inhabitants were exposed to the same problems, their inhabitants served together under the same Royal-Imperial army of Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and during the same period the strengthening of relations with Central European and Balkans people with their homelands occurred. During the war, some of them (Serbs and Slovaks) contributed to the creation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the first Czechoslovak Republic, as well as to the outcome of the revolutions at the Hungarian and Russian grounds. In further work and research it will be attempted to add to our knowledge on interrelations and connections of these people in the war period.

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