



POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF CROATIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE USA AND THE CREATION OF AN INDEPENDENT CROATIA

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Croatian immigrants participated in the political life of both their old country and of their new homeland. At their conventions and other meetings, the Croatian organizations unequivocally expressed their demand for the full freedom of the Croatian people in Austria-Hungary. During World War I Croats, Serbs and Slovenes in the USA were very active in the movement against Austria-Hungary and the creation of a common state of the South Slavs. Between the two world wars the unfavourable political situation in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had a significant influence on the political activities of American Croats. Their program was to fight for the just political position of Croats in the Yugoslav state, to inform the American public about the political demands of Croats, and to provide material and moral aid. At the beginning of World War II, American Croats distanced themselves from the events in Yugoslavia by stressing that Croats were loyal citizens of the USA. In the first post-World War II years, Croatian political émigrés started to arrive in the United States. These émigrés quickly organized themselves into Croatian political associations. They played an important role in uniting the Croatian political diaspora, which in turn prepared this diaspora for jointly supporting the creation of an independent Croatian state in 1991.

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES BEFORE AND DURING WORLD WAR I

Croatian national issues and their solutions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire were prevalent in all their complexity as early as the first half of the last century. Croatian resistance towards the Hungarian nationalistic program, conducted under the motto *Hungary from the Carpathians to the Adriatic Sea* and the centralistic politics of Austria lasted until the fall of

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the Empire. In order to withstand the aggressive politics of Austria and Hungary, Croats spoke in favour of the Yugoslav idea and program, and from the beginning of the First World War were in favour of the formation of a common state of South Slavs.

After the First World War, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, subsequently called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929 did not solve the Croatian national problem. As a result of this Croats in 1941 proclaimed the state of Croatia as independent. However, due to inauspicious international circumstances, this state did not meet the aspirations of the majority of Croats. As a result of this they participated in the Partisan anti-Fascist movement on a large scale. After 1945, the newly formed Federation of Yugoslavia was another disappointment for Croats, who were opposed to Yugoslavia and Communism.

From the end of the last century, a few hundred thousand emigrants, in most cases, have been the interpreters and intercessors of the national objectives of the people in the abandoned homeland. This article will address these issues i.e., the activities of Croats in the United States, where Croatian emigrants have been by far the most numerous and the most active.

Croatian immigrants participated in both the political life of their old country and of their new homeland. Their political leaders had been active in Austria-Hungary even before their emigration to the USA. Political immigrants from Austria-Hungary were joined by a number of mostly young immigrants (salooners, *šifkartaši* and others) whose interest in politics was aroused after their arrival in the USA. Among the immigrants a special group of people emerged who, by the end of the 19th century, determined the political goals of the Croats in America, offering their political program to Croat immigrants.

American Croats had neither an official nor a completely developed program before World War I. However, they expressed their opinions and took every occasion to express their dissatisfaction with the political situation in Croatia. At their conventions and other meetings, the Croatian organizations unequivocally expressed their demand for the full freedom of the Croatian people in Austria-Hungary. In the Memorandum of the Pan-Slavist Congress held in St. Louis in 1904, expressing the aspirations of some Slav groups, they demanded, "Freedom and independence for the state of the Croats, union of those territories that belong to Croatia according to historical and national rights, and in the present circumstances, constitutional rights, in particular the institution of the jury for political and press offenses".¹

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Although the Croatian immigrants as an individual national community undertook some successful political actions, it has to be emphasized that their chances would have been better within a broader Slav political action. This is best illustrated by the 1910 Census and the scandal caused by the Hungarian Count Apponyi.

According to the regulations of the 1910 Census in the USA, immigrants of Slav origin had to be listed either as Austrians or Hungarians. As a symbol of their indignation with these regulations, a protest meeting of the Slavs was held on March 7, 1910 in Pittsburgh at Morehead Hall. It was attended by representatives of 14 Slav organizations and 13 Slav newspapers. The Croats were represented by Josip Marohnić, president of the National Croatian Society, with the newspaper editors of the *Zajedničar (Fraternalist)*, the *Hrvatski glasnik (Croatian Herald)*, and the *Hrvatski svijet (The Croatian World)* also in attendance. At the Pittsburgh conference, a delegation was elected which was to go to Washington and ask the President of the USA to correct the injustice done to the Slavs. The Croats were represented by Josip Marohnić. After the delegation had talked to President Taft, to Senators and Congressmen, an urgent proposal for an amendment of the Census Act was made. It was forwarded to Senator Oliver of Pittsburgh and to Congressman Sabath of Chicago. According to Senator Oliver's information, the urgent proposal was unanimously adopted by the Senate.²

Meanwhile, Slav immigrants in the USA decided to protest their difficult political situation in Austria-Hungary when Hungarian Count Albert Apponyi came to America in 1911. He was known to American Slavs as a supporter of the laws and decrees of the Hungarian Parliament according to which the schools of the non-Hungarian population were closed. He was also known for thwarting the work of the Slovak Central Cultural and Publishing Society (*Matica slovenská*) and for bearing the chief responsibility for the massacre of Slovak peasants in Černová.³

Count Apponyi came to America as an advocate of peace. The real object of his visit, however, was propaganda. Through his lectures in American cities, he hoped to convince politicians and the public of an allegedly high level of democracy in Hungary. His attempt to hold such lectures was vigorously opposed by the Slav immigrants in the USA, including the Croats. At the Cleveland conference of the Slav immigrants organized by the Slovak League of America, Niko Gršković spoke on behalf of the Croats saying, "When the voice of the oppressed, deceived, exploited and the expelled is heard, it has to be joined by the voice of the Croats."⁴ Another conference was organized in Kansas City by the Croatian priest Davorin Krmpotić. For this occasion he wrote

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a text in English addressed to the American public. He reproached the American authorities for having received Apponyi with benevolence even though in his own country, he was no representative of either peace or freedom.⁵

The Apponyi fiasco aroused great public interest in Austria-Hungary. The entire press reported on Apponyi's misadventures, and the opposition newspapers did not hide their contentment. For example, the *Narodni list* of Zadar wrote, "The Hungarian idea has never received a stronger blow in foreign countries than this time and it is the first time that an open conflict between the Slavic and the Hungarian idea gained international significance outside Europe and on neutral territory".⁶

The problems that American Croats faced on the occasion of the 1910 census and Apponyi's visit clearly reminded them of the necessity of establishing a strong political organization. On such occasions it would have the authority to represent Croatian interests both in America and at home. The reaction of the Croats was very sharp. The largest political organization of American Croats, the Croatian League, was founded in Kansas City on September 15, 1912, a day after the Eleventh Convention of the National Croatian Society. At that moment all the delegates of the Society were present, and they represented a large part of the Croatian communities in America.

The by-laws of the Croatian League adopted at the meeting determined its objectives very clearly. The aim of the Croatian League was to assist all national Croatian undertakings in both Croatia and in America. Article 2 stated that the aim of the Croatian League was "spiritual, moral, political and social education of the Croatian people so that it should not give up its struggle for self-preservation, but would be equal to other developed nations."⁷

The establishment of the Croatian League found a strong echo among American Croats. Branches were founded in almost every Croatian community. American Croats were well aware that the news about its foundation would also be heard at home. It was clear that an organization with such a large scope would become an important factor on the Croatian political scene. The work of the League had, therefore, to be aimed at encouraging hundreds of thousands of Croatian immigrants to become strong supporters of the Croatian people in their struggle for freedom.

During World War I Croatian immigrants in the USA continued their political actions against Austria-Hungary. Croats, Serbs and Slovenes in the USA became very active in the Yugoslav immigrant movement against Austria-Hungary and the creation of the common State of the South Slavs.⁸

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The initiative came from Europe. In the first months of the war émigrés from the South Slavic Austro-Hungarian countries gathered first in Paris and then in London to found the Yugoslav Committee. Immediately after its creation, the Committee decided to establish contacts with the immigrants. They decided to recruit volunteers among the immigrants and to raise funds necessary for the work of the Committee. A connection with the American Croats was soon established through Franko Potočnjak, a defense attorney in Croatia. He arrived in the USA in January of 1

15. He then invited, through the immigrant press, all the South Slavic immigrants to attend a Yugoslav Conference in Chicago. As a result, the first National Conference of South Slavic immigrants was held in Chicago on March 10 and 11, 1915. Four hundred and sixty-eight authorized delegates from different organizations and a number of communities in the USA and Canada attended. Aside from the delegates, the Conference was attended by about a hundred prominent immigrants, which brought the total to 563. The Croats accounted for half of all the participants, the others being Serbs and Slovenes. It was the first united conference of South Slav immigrants which proclaimed for the first time a program of national liberation from Austria-Hungary and of Croatia's union with Serbia and Montenegro into one state.

After the Chicago Conference a large number of Croats accepted the idea of unification of the South Slavs into one state. Some though, opposed this political program. The problem was that Croats and Slovenes proposed a federative or confederative concept for the future state. The Serbian government refused, and tried to impose a centralized state. This was the reason why in Chicago, at the beginning of February, 1916, fifteen Croat and Slovene priests signed "Our Declaration," in which they condemned the movement for the creation of a Yugoslav state. Instead, they argued for the creation of an autonomous Croatian state which Slovenia could join. After the war Croatia could decide whether it would remain within Austria-Hungary or become independent.⁹

BETWEEN TWO WORLD WARS

Some leaders of the Yugoslav movement were very dissatisfied with the politics of the Serbian government during and after World War I. Later, the unfavourable political situation in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had a significant influence on the political activities of American Croats. They received news from home through letters and newspapers sent by their relatives in Croatia. When word

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came from Europe about Italy's extensive territorial demands on the Croatian and Slovenian Adriatic coast, there was great disappointment. Even greater disappointment for Croatian immigrants was caused by the news that the Serbian government viewed the creation of the future state as the extension of Serbia, i.e. as the creation of a "Great Serbia". The fiery partisans of South Slavic unity were left without any ground to stand on.¹⁰

A new phase of political work then began among Croats motivated by the wish to help their compatriots in the old homeland. This new movement was headed by two Croatian priests, M.J. Domladovac of St. Paul's Parish, and M. Hranilović, of St. Nicholas' Parish in Cleveland, Ohio. On 8 December 1918 they called a meeting in the church hall of St. Paul's at which the latest situation in Croatia was discussed. People with the most diverse views attended. Most of them were Croats who had supported South Slavic unity during the war. There were also those who had been reserved, but what was unusual was that there were also some Croatian socialists present. Although great discord could have been expected, the serious nature of events in Croatia resulted in a common resolution which said: "Croats, gathered at their public meeting in Cleveland on 8 December 1918, protest in the name of justice and national rights against the illegal demands of Italy on Croatian and Slovenian lands that have belonged to them for centuries (...). We place our hopes in the proud defender of small nations, President Wilson".¹¹

The two Croatian priests continued their political and charity work for their old homeland. A plea was sent to President Wilson from a large rally in Cleveland, which they organized to "protect the right of self-determination for Croats in their homeland". Rev. Domladovac accused the Italians of imperialist pretensions over Dalmatia, but also the Serbs for their obvious attempts to make the future state an "extended Serbia". The main points of the resolution were:

1. To carry through Wilson's 14 points,
2. To oppose the attempts of foreign powers to determine the principles of national self-determination to be applied in the case of Croats as well.

The resolution said that the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians in the new state of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, had been carried out against the will of the Croatian and Slovenian people, and it proposed free elections to be carried out in the newly-created state under the control of a committee named by the American government.¹²

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This resolution resounded loudly among American Croatians and was adopted at assemblies organized in 25 Croatian settlements in the USA. Finally, a delegation of eight persons was formed (three from Cleveland, three from Youngstown, Pa., and two from Steelton, Pa.) to go to Washington. They were received by Senator Pomerene from Ohio and on 3 March 1919 he presented them to Gilbert Hitschcock of the Committee for Foreign Affairs. Senator Hitschcock informed the delegation that President Wilson had special committees to inform him about conditions in certain parts of the world and that the USA would do all it could to satisfy all nations. The delegation was also received by Senator Joseph Tumulty, to whom the resolution signed by 25 Croatian colonies was presented. Tumulty promised them that he would inform President Wilson about their visit.¹³

During the whole of 1919 the USA remained a centre of political activity, no longer of South Slavic immigrants, but exclusively of Croatians dissatisfied with the position of the Croatian people in their old homeland. For months the immigrant press, especially *Narodni list*, prepared the First Croatian Convention, held on 1 April 1919 in Cleveland. The convention was organized by a group of Croatian priests who were very skeptical towards the pro-Yugoslav program of the American Croatians during the war. In several statements made during the war they warned that no special good could be expected from life in a Yugoslav state. The Cleveland convention was to be a confirmation of their attitude.

Almost all the speakers at the convention stressed that the Croatians were not against the Serbians or any other South Slavic nation, but constantly emphasized the need for all the Croatian lands to unite first, and then to unite with Serbia and Bulgaria. The resolution adopted at the convention also condemned Italian pretensions to the Croatian and Slovenian Adriatic coast and proposed a federal organization of the Yugoslav state. The resolution ended by saying: "We are certain that the representatives of democracy at the peace conference will work on developing and strengthening democracy in Europe, which they will show best if they give small peoples freedom and independence, complete sovereignty, as the leaders of the great western nations solemnly promised".¹⁴

The Fund for Aid to Orphans in Croatia was formed at the first Croatian Convention in Cleveland. Until 1921 this fund was very active in giving financial aid to war victims in Croatia.

In April, 1921 an important representative gathering of immigrants was held in Cleveland, attended by delegates of Croatian colonies from 31 states of the USA. At the assembly

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the Croatian Republican League in America was founded. Its political program was identical to that of the Croatian Republican Peasant Party in Croatia, which fought for a republican state administration and a social program of peasant movements in the Balkans.

A resolution was adopted at the Cleveland meeting emphasizing that Yugoslavia was at that time in complete opposition to the principles of national self-determination propagated by President Wilson. The resolution was sent to President Harding of the USA.¹⁵

The work of the Croatian Republican League in Cleveland was continued by that of the Croatian Peasant Party, founded in November, 1923. The Croatian Republican League fought for the just political position of Croatia in the Yugoslav state, sought to inform the American public about the political demands of Croats, and provided material and moral aid for the Croatian Peasant Party.¹⁶

The American press and immigrant newspapers expressed unfavorable opinions with respect to the political situation in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In the journal *Our World*, Herman Bernstein explained that the Peace Conference had been a mistake for Yugoslavia. He personally traveled to Yugoslavia in order to learn more about the situation. According to him serious mistakes had been made, the people were uneasy, and disorder could break out at any time unless further misunderstandings were prevented in a country that was already at war. "The origin of disturbances lies in the fact that a part of the people supported a military state, while the others wanted to establish a republic. The Serbs strive for a powerful, military Serbia under the name of Yugoslavia, whereas the Croats and Slovenes want a republic in order to survive quietly as a nation."¹⁷

The American Croats were persistent in informing the public about Yugoslav problems. Their resolutions of disapproval were made public on different occasions such as through festivals, concerts, picnics and other celebrations held throughout American cities. They also addressed protests to American newspapers, Senators, Congressmen, and the American government.

American Croats, whose aim was to provide Americans with more information on the true situation in Yugoslavia, started in 1931 to publish *the Croatian Review*. Unfortunately, the journal did not last long.¹⁸

Another event in Yugoslavia drew the attention of America and the rest of the world. It was the assassination of Milan Šuflaj, the historian. The treacherous act was explicitly condemned, among others, by Albert Einstein and Thomas

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Mann who addressed their protest to the League of Human Rights in Berlin, asking that it be forwarded to the International League of Human Rights in Paris which was then expected to protest on behalf of the whole civilized world "against the Belgrade reign of terror and dictatorship". In Einstein's and Mann's letter, the assassination of Šufraj was described in detail, as well as the attempt of the authorities to hide the circumstances and protect the terrorists, and the "Mlada Jugoslavija" organization. The letter read, "In regard to the terrible situation, we demand that the International League of Human Rights undertake everything necessary to put an end to that interminable despotic regime (...) and that formal protest be raised against the reign of terror governing in Croatia."¹⁹

Towards the end of November 1933, a group of 41 of the most outstanding American men of letters, politicians, editors and other intellectuals directed their protest to the Belgrade government, emphasizing that the world press had often written about the terror and the dictatorship in Yugoslavia and demanded that arrests and tortures in prisons be stopped. Among other American literary men, Theodor Dreiser, John Dos Passos, and Upton Sinclair signed the protest.²⁰

The protests resulted in *The New York Times* and *St. Louis Star* referring extensively to the dictatorship in Yugoslavia, while *The Christian Science Monitor* continued to inform periodically about the difficult political situation in the country. In August, 1932, in a series of articles on Yugoslavia, *The Christian Science Monitor* pointed out that the basic cause for the political crisis was the striving of the Croats for a federal system in place of the Belgrade hegemony. The New York journal *Editor and Publisher* termed the Yugoslav politics as the "Slavic darkness". This is how *The New York Times*, in an article entitled "Yugoslavia, the Country of National Diversities", described Croatia, "It is like Ireland in a kingdom with the strongest government opposition in Belgrade itself. The exasperation with Serbian rule was obviously manifested in constant civil unrest, sometimes mild, but sometimes as violent as the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles was."²¹

In 1934, Branko Jelić came to the USA; he was one of the supporters of Ante Pavelić, leader of the Ustashe organization, who was at that time living as an emigrant in Italy. The arrival of Jelić led to some uncertainties among the Croats. These were particularly demonstrated in connection with the political organization *Croatian Kolo* which was a part of the membership that joined Jelić and his organization *Domobran* (Croatian Home Guard). But Jelić's activity prompted suspi-

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cion among the American authorities. The editor of *Hrvatski list* and *Danica Hrvatska*, Ivan Krešić, was informed that the State Department was not pleased with Jelić's stay in the USA. As a matter of fact, those responsible within the State Department were in possession of articles that Jelić had been publishing in the Pittsburgh newspaper *Nezavisna država Hrvatska*. The authorities also investigated whether or not Jelić had forwarded the money collected by the immigrants to Pavelić, and whether he had persuaded the American Croats to join the Ustasha movement. Eventually, Jelić was refused permission to stay further in the USA, and according to Krešić, the American authorities afterwards lost sight of him.²²

Powerful and absolute political support to the people of Croatia in the late 30's resulted from the fact that the American Croats felt and understood that the world situation was growing more and more dangerous, and therefore was leading directly towards a great war which would not spare their old country. They were also fully aware that they lived in America and that in turbulent times, their destiny would be closely linked with their new American homeland. That is why the Croatian leadership committed itself to American politics, which at the time assured them full democratic rights and stability in the years ahead. President Roosevelt's political option was supported by numerous resolutions passed during that crucial period of American history. Even before that, in March 1937, in a resolution of support by the Croatian Fraternal Union addressed to the President, the Supreme Board asked him to help put into practice the American Constitution and American legislation interpreted in favor of all American social classes.²³ In March, 1938, on the eve of World War Two, in the name of 80,000 Americans of Croatian birth or extraction, the Croatian Fraternal Union sent another resolution to the President, asking him to stick to his decision that American weapons would not be sold to enemy countries, which should be strictly distinguished from their victims.²⁴ After Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President for the third time, the Croatian Fraternal Union, in its letter of congratulations, emphasized the fact that more than 90% of the Croats in the US had cast their votes for him.²⁵

WORLD WAR TWO

Thanks to their correct evaluation of world policy, and of the situation in Croatia and America during the turbulent times of World War II, the leadership of the Croatian immigrants proved to have acted correctly. The news reached the USA that Yugoslavia had joined the Tripartite Treaty. On March 27

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1941, the American press reported under big headlines that the people in Belgrade had crowded the streets, demonstrating against the Tripartite Treaty. The German and Italian troops invaded Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941. Some ten days later, the news of the founding of the Independent State of Croatia was heard in America.

After the capitulation of Yugoslavia to the Axis, the Croatian immigrants had to wage a double struggle. First of all, they struggled against the right-wing organization of the *Domobrans* (Croatian Home Guard) who were very close to the Ustaša movement in Croatia. However, the activity of that pro-Fascist organization was suppressed by the American authorities at the very beginning of the war.²⁶ But the Croatian immigrants had to wage another fight, a much harder one and with incomparably more serious consequences. It was the struggle against a right-wing Serbian organization, the Serbian National Defense (*Srpska narodna obrana*) and its official organ the *Američki Srbobran*. This organization and its newspaper condemned all Croats for the atrocities of the Pavelić *Ustašas* and for the fall of the Yugoslav monarchy. The *Zajedničar* newspaper wrote, referring to the anti-Croatian propaganda, that after the break up of Yugoslavia, the enemies of the Croatian people had tried, using the world press, to present all Croats as fascists. In the USA, they wanted to provoke confusion and distrust of American Croats, condemning them as a Fifth Column and condemning the Croatian leaders for adhering to Hitler and Mussolini. All this was done in order to make the American Croats reject their nationality and national ideals. "The enemies of the Croatian people went so far as to try to accuse the Croats of the break up of Yugoslavia."²⁷

When the Pavelić Government declared war on the USA, the situation for the American Croats became worse. The *Zajedničar* pointed out that this was the reason why the American Croats found themselves in such an unfavorable position. It stands to reason that the declaration of war was not an act of the Croatian people either in Croatia or in America, because there was no basis for it.²⁸

In the meantime, A. Smith-Pavelić published in New York a booklet entitled *The Truth about the Croats*. The booklet was distributed to a great number of distinguished American personalities. It hoped to convince the Americans that the Pavelić regime in Croatia was established against the will of the people because, for the most part, the Croats supported V. Maček, president of the Croatian Peasant Party, who firmly opposed the Axis forces. Together with the booklet, a memorandum was distributed concerning general M. Nedić, president of the Serbian Government and his pro-Axis re-

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gime so as to convince the Americans that there were no differences between the two regimes mentioned.²⁹

However, the endeavors of South Slav immigrants to draw closer together were severely disturbed by Greater-Serbian propaganda in the USA. In October, 1941, an anti-Yugoslav campaign was launched in the *Srbobran* newspaper and within the Serbian National Defense of Chicago. Their aim was to furnish evidence that the Serbs were against Yugoslavia. They attacked everything that was Croatian, Slovene, or Yugoslav, using bitter chauvinistic arguments. The *Srbobran* and the Serbian National Defense tried to present themselves as the representatives of Serbian public opinion. The leaders of the Serbian National Defense of Chicago and the Serbian National Alliance of Pittsburgh were the same people. Many persons connected with the Yugoslav embassy in Washington were quite active in this matter. Ambassador Konstantin Fotić gave the action full support to its very end.³⁰

At the beginning of World War II, the American Croats distanced themselves from the events in Yugoslavia. On July 16, 1941, the Croatian Fraternal Union sent a message to President Roosevelt, underlining: that the Croats are loyal citizens of the USA; that they fully support the politics of the USA and of its Allies, convinced that the victory of the Allies will be the victory of their old country; that they do not recognize the Independent State of Croatia; and that they will co-operate with other South-Slav immigrants in the accomplishment of the US war program.³¹

The *Zajedničar* stressed that the American Croats would support to the end their new homeland and the American government in the struggle against the enemies of the Croatian and other Slavic peoples.

The policy of the American Government toward the activities of immigrant communities was based on the idea of the unity of the American nation. To this effect, immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the State Department issued a proclamation calling the immigrant communities to restrain from any political activities in the USA that might be linked with their old countries. Immigrants were, therefore advised to suppress their concerns about the future of their native countries. A major reason for issuing the proclamation, which largely determined the behavior of immigrants, was to promote national unity.³²

Another document of the American Government in 1941 states that, "The American Government accepts that, considering the same racial background, American citizens, acting as such and absolutely loyal to the USA may, nevertheless, sympathize with the national aspirations of their countries of

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origin, get organized to express their sympathy and support such aspirations."³³ The Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, on the occasion of the Slavic Congress in Detroit in 1942, stated the following, "Full support to our war efforts given by the American citizens of Slav origin, a considerable factor in our production programs, is of extreme importance. In these efforts, however, the differences ensuing from the racial background should be minimized in favor of the fundamental unity of this country."³⁴

The American Government, insisting on national unity in the interest of war, acted as a mediator in some disputes among the South Slavic immigrants. M. Elmer Davis, director of the War Information Agency, Mr. Berle, Undersecretary of State, and Allan Cranston, director of the Office of Foreign Languages, summoned representatives of American South Slavs to the State Department on September 18, 1942. On this occasion, E. Davis mentioned that the American Government knew about the misunderstandings and disputes among the American South Slavs which were detrimental to the American war program. He said, "The American authorities are well acquainted with the ongoing struggles among the Croats, and even more among the Serbs, concerning the inner structure of Yugoslavia. They have acquired undesirable intensity in the Srbobran attacks on all Croats in the old country and those living here as American citizens. These attacks are unsubstantiated because the State Department had confirmed proof that the majority of Croats in their old country were against Pavelić, giving resistance to and fighting against Hitler and Mussolini. At the same time, the vast majority of Croats in America, settled here, or as citizens of the USA, are loyal to this Government, although initially, there were some who sympathized with Pavelić, instigating hatred between the Croats and Serbs. Consequently, each attack by the American Serbs on all Croats because of the traitor, Pavelić, or an attack by the American Croats on all Serbs because of Nedić's betrayal of the Allies, is insubstantial and only detrimental to the American war efforts, an abuse to our cause and grist to Hitler's mill."³⁵

At the same meeting, the following resolution was unanimously adopted, "We shall all follow the American Government in its striving for the unity of Americans, irrelevant of their national or racial origin, in their mutual effort to win this war for freedom. We shall resist any attempts pushing the Americans of Yugoslav origin to mutual conflicts."³⁶

The Congress of American Croats was held in Chicago in February, 1943. It organized hundreds of thousands of Americans of Croatian origin to give support to the USA in the war against the fascist Axis forces, and also to provide moral

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and material aid to the war of liberation waged by the Yugoslav peoples against fascism. It was one of the greatest movements in the history of Croatian immigration. The Congress was represented by 716 Croatian-American organizations from around the USA and Canada. The anti-fascist program, as well as the program of moral and material support to the anti-fascist struggle of the Croats in Yugoslavia, were enthusiastically approved by the attending 927 delegates. Besides activating the American Croats, the Congress had a strong impact on American public opinion. A number of American Senators, Congressmen, Governors, Mayors and high officials from Washington sent their greetings to the Congress, expressing their support for the war of liberation in Yugoslavia. The governor of the State of New Mexico, John J. Dempsey, said, among other things, "The Croatian people are fighting a glorious struggle against the despotic intruders in their country. Their struggle is an inspiration not only for American Croats, but for all freedom-loving nations."³⁷

The Congress was attended by some distinguished American politicians. A member of the Senate Board for Foreign Affairs and a close collaborator of President Roosevelt, Senator Claude Pepper of the State of Florida, in his address to the Congress mentioned that, "...our dear Croatia will again be free and a member of the free nations of a new world."³⁸ In attendance were also the Mayor of Chicago Edward J. Kelly, President of the Pan-Slavic congress Leo Krzycky, and many others.

As the Congress of the American Croats was in favor of the territorial integrity of all Croatian regions, the following resolution was made, "In the regions occupied by Italy, the Croats are subject to the severest, criminal exterminations. The Congress, is, therefore, protesting against any annexation to Yugoslavia's disadvantage; it is against the former annexation of Dalmatia and Hrvatsko Primorje to Italy..."³⁹

One of the most significant and immediate results of the Congress was the establishment of a standing committee, popularly called the Council of the American Croats. Its task was the implementation of the conclusions of the Congress, so it became a coordinator of all actions of the American Croats in providing moral, political, and financial aid for the old homeland.

Along with moral and political support, the Croatian immigrants also offered generous material and other assistance to the USA: they volunteered for the American army, purchased American War Bonds, and engaged in the self-sacrificing work in the American war industries. When the war broke out, the American Government founded the President's War Relief Control Board whose task was to collect aid

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for the countries of the Anti-Hitler Coalition. The Board created a special fund for each country which received financial resources from the general fund. By using his Washington connections, K. Fotić succeeded in organizing for Yugoslavia the so-called United Yugoslav War Relief Fund, headed by a Committee comprising many prominent Americans. The Fund informed the public of its activities via *The New Bulletin United Yugoslav Relief Fund* published in New York. As the Croatian immigrants unanimously refused to cooperate with the Committee of the Fund, it had no influence on Croatian immigration.⁴⁰

The Supreme Board of the Croatian Fraternal Union elected a special relief board for the Yugoslav people. It met with the Serbian and Slovene Boards in Cleveland, on May 10, 1941, to found the Yugoslav Relief Board. However, due to political misunderstandings among the Yugoslav immigrants, the Board disintegrated, and with the approval of the American authorities, three separate boards were founded, a board for Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia respectively.⁴¹

It was as late as the second half of 1944 that a united relief fund was proposed. So, the War Relief Fund of Americans of South Slavic Descent was founded on December 14, 1944. It was headed by Zlatko Baloković, famous Croatian violinist, who later wrote that in no board founded by the American Slavs had there ever been so many distinguished Americans as in that one. The Honorary President was Eleanor Roosevelt. The Board's meetings and performances were attended by Senators, Congressmen, Mayors, Governors, artists, scientists, and writers. Money was collected in churches, synagogues, and schools for aid in clothing, medicines, food and other necessities. Until 1949, when its work was terminated, the Fund had collected a total of \$3,264,649 in clothes and money.⁴²

The Croatian Fraternal Union alone invested six million dollars, almost half of its assets, in War bonds. In addition, a campaign was launched among the immigrants for the purchase of War Bonds. Therefore, more than \$4,000,000 worth of War Bonds were sold. Almost every Croatian worker also purchased War Bonds at his or her workplace. Members of the board in charge of the campaign received high decorations from the American Government for their work.⁴³

Since the attack on America in 1941, all lodges of the Croatian Fraternal Union and other Croatian organizations and institutions invested almost all their assets into War Bonds and the American Red Cross. There was hardly a member of the Society or an American of Croatian descent who did not invest the largest part of his or her savings into War Bonds. Although an exact assessment of the amount

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invested by the Croatian immigrants is not possible, the data collected by the Council of the American Croats was impressive. Among all national communities launching war Bond drives, the Croats ranked first. Two heavy bombers, bearing the inscription Spirit of American Croatians and Croatian Fraternal Union, were bought with their money. The Council of American Croats in Detroit bought another bomber, and the small Croatian community in Monessen, Pennsylvania, bought the equipment for an American Military hospital. With the CFU's money invested in War Bonds, one American hospital was built and equipped. A copper plaque was fixed at its entrance with the following inscription, "Built and equipped with the resources of the American Croats." The extent of the Croatian immigrants' involvement and their immediate participation in the war America was waging attracted nationwide attention.⁴⁴

The exact number of Croatian immigrants and their sons fighting in the American armed forces is not known. There were tens of thousands of them known for their courage. Among them there was a large number of volunteers, and many received high decorations. Among the members of the Croatian Fraternal Union, 15,000 fought in the American forces, in other words, 23% of the total membership. Of these, 308 were killed in action.⁴⁵

With the war drawing to a close, the activities of the American Croats grew in intensity. At the Second Slav Congress held in Pittsburgh in 1944, one thousand delegates represented numerous Slavic organizations. The Croatian delegation was the largest one and was given credit for its devoted work. The Second Congress of the American Croats, held in April 1947, was attended by 600 delegates. The Second Congress marked the end of the political activities of American Croats following World War II.

AFTER WORLD WAR II

In the first post-World War II years, Croatian political émigrés started to arrive in the United States and Canada. These émigrés were former functionaries of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). There were also émigrés from other political persuasions, such as members of the Croatian Peasants Party (HSS), Catholic lay intellectuals as well as cultural and public figures who left Croatia for fear of communist repression. The president of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vlatko Maček, was also among those émigrés.

These émigrés were, on the whole, well-educated, and on arrival organized themselves into Croatian political émigré associations. These groups formed the nucleus of the

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new Croatian immigrant life and set the stage for the future division of the post-war immigrants into two separate blocks.

Ante Pavelić, meanwhile, also and again found himself in émigré circles. In 1946 he arrived in Rome and started to gather sympathisers. He formed the Croatian State Committee (HDO). Calculating that he would have more room for maneuver in Argentina, he moved to Buenos Aires, where the Ustasha-orientated Croatian *Domobran* organisation had existed before the war. This organisation had active branches in the US and Canada.⁴⁶

Due to unfavorable political circumstances in Argentina, Pavelić moved to Madrid in November, 1957. He immediately set up contacts on the continent, in the USA and Canada. In 1958 he issued a declaration to all of his followers to fight for the re-establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. But already at this stage there were divisions within the Ustasha movement, and this process of disintegration intensified after Pavelić's death in December, 1959.

In time, out of the original Croatian Liberation Movement (HOP) which Pavelić headed, there emerged a variety of Ustasha-orientated groups, such as: the United Croatians (UH), Croatian *Domobran*, societies using the names dr. Ante Pavelić, Dr. Ante Starčević, Jure Francetić and so forth. Though these groups were fragmented, they had one singular aim: the re-establishment of a Croatian state within its historical boundaries.⁴⁷

The Croatian Peasant Party under the leadership at V. Maček also continued its political life among the immigrants. After a short stay in Paris, Maček arrived in the United States, where at the beginning of September, 1946, an all American-Croatian Congress was held. The Congress in Chicago was attended by nearly all Croatian émigré and immigrant groups. Maček demanded that the Ustasha regime acknowledge responsibility for the occurrences in war-time Croatia. A large proportion of the delegates could not accept such a view and demanded a more objective approach to the war-time events.⁴⁸ Due to this disparity of views no common union of Croatian émigrés and immigrants was achieved in the US and Canada. The CPP continued its work with numerous party branches in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. After Maček's death in 1964, the party was led by Juraj Krnjević who lived and worked in London. The CPP had its own newspaper called the *Hrvatski glas* (Croatian Voice), which was published in Winnipeg, Canada.

Numerous Croatian intellectuals, after arriving in the immigrant communities, aligned themselves with Croatian intellectuals born in the diaspora. They worked together in

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many cultural and scientific fields, and printed their works and observations in a variety of Croatian newspapers, almanacs and journals. There were also many active Croatian Catholic parishes, cultural and scholastic institutions, as well as Croatian social clubs. The new wave of immigrants also formed new Catholic parishes as well as new and modern Croatian social clubs. An especially important role was played by the Croatian Academy of America, founded in New York in 1953, which put out its scholarly *Journal of Croatian Studies*. The Croatian Historical Institute was formed in Chicago in 1955. The cultural-political journal called *The Croatian Review* came out regularly for over 40 years, first in Buenos Aires, then in Barcelona. In the postwar period many hundreds of intellectuals of Croatian descent worked at universities and related institutions.⁴⁹

After the suppression of the 1971 Croatian "spring" movement in Yugoslavia, Croatian émigrés in the diaspora came to the conclusion that political differences among Croats had to be put aside and all should join in a common cause. To this effect the Croatian National Congress (HNV) was formed in 1974, in Toronto, as an umbrella association of all Croatian émigré groups dedicated to the independence of Croatia.⁵⁰ Though there were émigré groups that did not join the CNC cause, the Congress played an important role in uniting the Croatian political diaspora, which in turn prepared this diaspora for jointly supporting the creation of an independent Croatian state in 1991.

The proclamation of the independent Croatian state marked the end of a period in the political history of the American Croats which began late in the 19th century when the first Croatian immigrants tried to introduce the Croatian people and its struggle for freedom to the Americans. Fighting against Austria/Hungary and later against the anti/national regimes in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and later communist Yugoslavia, the American Croats were credited for acquainting the world and the American public in both Croatia and America. In this way, they won over American politicians, American media and the American public and made them aware of the aspirations of Croats in the abandoned homeland. We can safely say that without the absolute and unreserved support of the Croatian emigration the independent Croatian state could never have been established.

NOTES

¹ *Narodni list*, Zadar, October 19, 1904.

² *Hrvatski glasnik*, Pittsburgh, March 19, 1910.

³ The Central Slovak Cultural and Publishing Society was banned in 1875. The massacre in Černova occurred on October 27, 1907, when Hungarian police killed 15 peasants because the village refused to accept the Hungarian parish priest to replace the suspended priest,

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A. Hlinka. For more extensive information see: Jaroslav Šidak, "Razvoj slovačkog nacionalnog pitanja od 1860 do 1914. godine", *Historijski pregled*, No. 4, Zagreb, 1963, p. 258-266.

⁴ *Narodni list*, Zadar, April 1, 1911.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ By - Laws of the Croatian League, Allegheny, PA, 1913, p. 3.

⁸ See I. Čizmić, *Jugoslavenski iseljenički pokret u SAD i stvaranje jugoslavenske države 1918* (Yugoslav Immigrant Movements in the USA and the Creation of the Yugoslav State in 1918), Zagreb, 1974.

⁹ *Naša izjava i K našoj izjavi, stanovište hrvatskog i slovenskog svećenstva u Americi gledom na jugoslavensku, bolje veliko-srpsku propagandu u Americi* (Attitudes of the Croatian and Slovene priests in America concerning the Yugoslav, or rather the great-Serbian propaganda in America), published by the *Narodni list*, New York, 1916.

¹⁰ *Narodni list*, New York, December 14, 1918.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, April 9, 1919, p. 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Ivan Čizmić, *Hrvati u životu Sjedinjenih Američkih Država* (Croats in the Life of USA), Zagreb, Globus, 1982, p. 285.

¹⁶ *Souvenir book, 35th Anniversary of the St. Nicholas Society, Lodge 22, CFU, Cleveland 1930.*

¹⁷ *Hrvatski glasnik*, Chicago, October 12, 1922.

¹⁸ Ivan Čizmić, *Hrvati u životu Sjedinjenih Američkih Država* (Croats in the Life of USA), Zagreb, Globus, 1982, p. 291.

¹⁹ *Zajedničar*, Pittsburgh, May 27, 1931.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, December 6, 1933.

²¹ *The New York Times Magazine*, October 21, 1934.

²² See Immigration History Research Center, St. Paul, Collection of Josip Kraja. The collection contains the correspondence between Ivan Krešić, editor of *Hrvatski list* and *Danica hrvatska*, and Josip Kraja, president of the *Croatian Kolo*. The data have been taken from Krešić's letter to Kraja, written on October 25, 1934.

²³ Ivan Čizmić, *History of the Croatian Fraternal Union of America*, Zagreb, 1994, p. 272.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ The Federal Bureau of Investigation was ordered by Attorney General Francis Biddle to confiscate all documents of the *Domobran* newspaper suspected to be working for Germany. (See also *Hrvatski list* and *Danica Hrvatska*, No. 18, February 10, 1942).

²⁷ *Zajedničar*, October 22, 1941.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, January 7, 1941.

²⁹ Ivan Čizmić, *Croats in the Life of USA*, p. 312.

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- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 307.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, July 16, 1941.
- ³² 1944... *Crucial Year, The Need of Dynamic Unity in the Immigrant Group*, Two Addresses by Louis Adamic, The United Committee of South Slavic Americans, New York, N.Y., 1944.
- ³³ *Zajedničar*, January 21, 1942.
- ³⁴ Hrvatski narodni kalendar, Pittsburgh, 1947, p. 17.
- ³⁵ *Zajedničar*, September 30, 1942.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Spomen knjiga Američko-hrvatskog kongresa* (The Souvenir book of the American-Croatian Congress), Pittsburgh, 1943, p. 34.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ *Spomen Knjiga Američko-hrvatskog kongresa*, (The Souvenir book of the American-Croatian Congress), Pittsburgh, 1943, p. 73.
- ⁴⁰ Ivan Čizmić, *Croatians in the Life of USA*, p. 343.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Final Report of the American Committee for Yugoslav Relief*, New York, 1949, p. 11.
- ⁴³ Ivan Čizmić, *History of the Croatian Fraternal Union*, p. 282.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest nezavisne države Hrvatske* (History of the Independent State of Croatia), Zagreb, 1994, p.p. 207-214.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ George J. Prpić, *The Croatian Immigrants in America*, New York, 1971, p. 310.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 450.
- ⁵⁰ *Hrvatska revija* (Croatian Review), Barcelona 1978, Year XXVIII, V. 2, p. 340.

Političko djelovanje hrvatskih iseljenika u SAD-u i stvaranje nezavisne Hrvatske

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Hrvatski iseljenici sudjelovali su u političkome životu i svoje stare i nove domovine. Na njihovim skupovima i susretima hrvatske su organizacije nedvosmisleno izražavale svoj zahtjev za punom slobodom hrvatskih ljudi u Austro-Ugarskoj. U vrijeme Prvoga svjetskog rata Hrvati, Srbi i Slovenci u SAD-u bili su vrlo aktivni u pokretu protiv Austro-Ugarske i stvaranju zajedničke države Južnih Slavena. U razdoblju između dva svjetska rata nepovoljno političko stanje u Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca imalo je važan utjecaj na političko djelovanje američkih Hrvata. Njihov je

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program bio boriti se za pravedan položaj Hrvata u jugoslavenskoj državi, obavijestiti američku javnost o političkim zahtjevima Hrvata i pružati materijalnu i moralnu pomoć. Početkom Drugoga svjetskog rata američki Hrvati su se udaljili od događaja u Jugoslaviji, naglašavajući da su Hrvati odani građani SAD-a. U prvim godinama nakon Drugoga svjetskog rata hrvatski politički emigranti počeli su dolaziti u Sjedinjene Države. Oni su se ubrzo organizirali u hrvatska politička udruženja. Igrali su važnu ulogu u sjedinjavanju hrvatske političke dijasporu, što je pripremila dijasporu za pružanje zajedničke potpore stvaranju nezavisne hrvatske države 1991. godine.

Die politische Tätigkeit kroatischer Einwanderer in den USA und die Entstehung des selbständigen kroatischen Staates

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Die kroatischen Einwanderer in den USA beteiligten sich am politischen Leben sowohl ihrer alten als auch neuen Heimat. Auf Versammlungen und Treffen kroatischer Verbände wurde unmißverständlich die Forderung geäußert, daß die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie ihren kroatischen Bürgern volle Freiheit zugestehen solle. Während des Ersten Weltkriegs legten Kroaten, Serben und Slowenen, die in der gegen Österreich-Ungarn ausgerichteten Bewegung versammelt waren, eine rege Tätigkeit an den Tag, um einen gemeinsamen Staat aller Südslawen zu schaffen. In der Zeit zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen hatten die widrigen politischen Verhältnisse im Königreich der Serben, Kroaten und Slowenen einen maßgeblichen Einfluß auf die politische Tätigkeit der amerikanischen Kroaten. Ziel ihres Kampfs war, den Kroaten eine gleichberechtigte Stellung im jugoslawischen Staat zu sichern, die US-Öffentlichkeit von den politischen Forderungen der Kroaten zu unterrichten und der Bevölkerung materielle und moralische Hilfe zu gewähren. Zu Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs distanzierten sich die amerikanischen Kroaten vom Geschehen in Jugoslawien und betonten, sie seien loyale Bürger der Vereinigten Staaten. In den ersten Jahren nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg trafen die ersten kroatischen politischen Emigranten in den USA ein, wo sie nach kurzer Zeit bereits kroatische politische Vereinigungen gründeten. Diese spielten eine wichtige Rolle bei der Einung der kroatischen politischen Diaspora und schufen die Voraussetzung für ein gemeinsames Auftreten im Jahre 1991, als die Kroaten um die Gründung ihres unabhängigen Staates kämpften.