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YUGOSLAV POLITICAL EMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA AFTER WORLD WAR II

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the numerical status of the Yugoslav emigrants in Australia after the Second World War, who formed a diaspora connected by political and economic ideas and circumstances. The author focuses on three of the major national groups within the diaspora: the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, delineating individual characteristics of their activities and organisation. The communities of the Croatian and Serbian emigrants had the most dramatic effect, as they both launched extremist, paramilitary groups whose goal was to act against the Yugoslav regime.

Key words: migration from Yugoslavia, Australia, 1945–1972, paramilitary groups of the Ustaše

L'EMIGRAZIONE JUGOSLAVA IN AUSTRALIA DOPO LA SECONDA GUERRA MONDIALE

SINTESI

Nell'articolo l'autore all'inizio tratta la dimensione numerica degli immigrati jugoslavi in Australia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale. Si trattava di una diaspora che aveva connotati politici e economici. In seguito l'autore prende in esame le tre principali entità nazionali, gli sloveni, i croati e i serbi, e mostra le linee principali delle caratteristiche dell'attività e dell'organizzazione di ognuna di esse. L'immigrazione croata e quella serba avevano le più drammatiche dimensioni, poiché in ognuna di esse si formarono gruppi estremisti e unità paramilitari che intendevano prendere parte attiva nella lotta contro il regime jugoslavo.

Parole chiave: migrazione dalla Jugoslavia, Australia, 1945–1972, unità paramilitari degli ustaša

Among the papers of Vladimir Bakarić, the uncrowned king of Croatia between 1945 and 1982, there is a document, dated December 7th 1946, on Yugoslav emigration to Australia. In it, the activity of that emigration is presented as friendly towards the liberation struggle of the Yugoslav peoples and not hostile to the new socialist regime (HDA, 1). In the following years, this harmonious picture changed dramatically, due to a large influx of political emigrants flooding Australia after World War II. This was a direct consequence of the large scale migration program instituted by the Canberra Government in order to develop the population of the country and rebuild its war-strained economy. Half a million immigrants settled in Australia between 1947 and 1951. Of these 170,000 were refugees accepted under the Displaced Persons Scheme, following an agreement with the Preparatory Commission for the International Refugee Organisation. 23,816 of these displaced persons were born in Yugoslavia (McArthur, 1983, 14). This was only the beginning of the large migration that followed. In 1947, the Commonwealth Census of Australia recorded 5,866 people born in Yugoslavia, or 0.8 per cent of the overseas-born population. By 1966, the number of Yugoslavs had reached more than 71,000, or 3.3 per cent of the overseas-born population. In the mid-sixties, Yugoslavia inaugurated a policy favorable to temporary emigration of its workers to the West, in order to alleviate its social problems. The Yugoslav authorities allowed the opening of an Australian Migration Office in Belgrade in 1966, and in 1970 signed the Migration and Settlement Agreement with Australia. The agreement emphasized the objective of permanent settlement rather than a guest worker concept. The effects were striking. In the five-year period to 1971, the Yugoslav population had almost doubled and reached 130,000, or 5 per cent of those born overseas. Arrivals declined in the Seventies, because of difficult economic and employment conditions in Australia. The Yugoslav born community in Australia increased from 130,000 in 1971 to 149,000 in 1981 (McArthur, 1983, 14).

To speak of the Yugoslav community is actually misleading, since, once settled in a foreign country after World War II, the 250,000 odd Yugoslav political émigrés organized themselves along their ethnic affiliation, abandoning completely, or nearly so, their Yugoslav bond. Therefore, it is more correct to speak of Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Muslim, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Albanian emigrants who had in common the dislike - sometimes hatred - of the Yugoslav state. Although, according to the available data, a major share of the emigrants to Australia originated from Croatia and Macedonia, this paper will focus on Croats, Serbs and Slovenes, considering that they were the three groups whom the Yugoslav Ministry of Internal Affairs dedicated special attention in its reports and analyses, closely

monitoring them. Among the three, the Slovenes were considered the least dangerous to Tito's regime and therefore ranked second among the enemies of the State; the privilege of first place was shared by the Croatian and Serbian political diaspora (AS I, 1; Mikačić, 1983, 22–31).

Regarding this diaspora, it is necessary to stress its international, or intercontinental, character. In fact, the displaced persons who fled Yugoslavia after the victory of Tito's partisans and decided to continue their opposition to Communism from the countries where they found refuge conserved strong mutual ties in their exile. In the following years and decades, they created a net of cultural, sport and charity organizations, newspapers and publications, which allowed them to build an Anti-Titoist international, split into various wings, according to the different ideologies and nationalisms they professed. Their leaders were quite efficient, considering that they were able to capture in this net a large number of economic migrants - the so called *Gastarbeiter* - who abandoned Yugoslavia in the sixties and seventies, contaminating them with their hostile attitude towards the old country and preventing them from integrating with the society of the new one. In fact, cultivating the old scores, linked to the experiences of the *Ustaša*, *Četnici* and *Domobranici* during World War II, they preserved *in vitro* a state of belligerence, which found its fullest expression during the tragic experience of the Yugoslav wars in the last decade of the 20th century.

Let us consider more closely some aspects of the Slovenian, Croatian and Serb diasporas in Australia. The first was characterized by the presence of a large group of *Domobranici*, who collaborated during the war with Italians and later with Germans. After the war they settled mostly in the Sidney and Melbourne areas, developing a dynamic cultural and political activity, tinged by conservative clericalism, which was typical for the Catholic Church in Slovenia before and during World War II. These hard core emigrants from central Slovenia, with strong ties in Argentina and North America, had problems in finding a common language with the pre-war Slovenian community in Australia, but were later joined by an economic emigration, springing from the regions of Prekmurje and Primorska. Those regions were hit after the war by heavy economic depression, which compelled numerous young men to abandon the country. They dodged both the draft into the Yugoslav Army and unemployment, and induced their girlfriends to join them, after they found a job. Their first approach towards the new country was greatly facilitated by the Slovenian Franciscans, who met them at their arrival, helped them to cope with the new reality, enrolling them at the same time in their registers. The borderline between political emigration on one side and economic on the other therefore remained blurred. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that among the three Yugoslav diasporas

considered here the Slovenian one was the readiest of all to accept the values of Australian multiculturalism and even to integrate into the surrounding environment. In fact, of the 25,000 Slovenes who settled in Australia after World War II, only 5,000 stuck to their nationality, whereas the others and their successors blended with the new cultural and local environment (AS I, 2; AS 1931, 1; Zbornik, 1985; Zbornik, 1988).

The story of the Croat and Serb emigrants, whose extremist fringes were unable to overcome the traumas of the past, is quite different. Whereas the Slovenians stressed the necessity to reach their political aims – an independent Slovenia – peacefully, and even sought contacts with the old country, the Croats and the Serbs continued to fight each other and the Tito regime with fanatical determination (AS I, 3). By 1972, the Australian Commonwealth Police had detailed more than fifty significant Croat-Serb incidents over the previous ten years, including at least 15 bombings and what were described as "professional assassinations", suspected of being the work of Ustaše or Chetnik organizations or individuals (Aarons, 2001). The first signs of the reemergence of terrorist activity among the Croat diaspora were detectable already in the mid-fifties, when the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) issued warnings of the existence of nationalist groups training in the Australian bush (Aarons, 2001). A 1963 article in the Australian Bulletin detailed the paramilitary activities of a Croatian Liberation Movement (HOP), a story no one denied. This early concern was not far off the mark, considering the virulence of the propaganda led, for instance, by the newspaper "Nova Hrvatska" (New Croatia), which in 1964 openly incited Croatian communists to join the nationalists in order to liberate the country from Belgrade rule (HDA, 2). Their political credo was eloquently summarized by the following slogan, formulated by Vjekoslav Lugurić-Maks: *"Our attitude is clear: destroy any Yugoslavia. Destroy it with the help of Russians and with the help of Americans, with the help of communist and anti-communists, destroy it with the help of everybody who is destroying it. Destroy it with the help of the dialectic of words and of dynamite, since if there is a State without any right to exist, this State is Yugoslavia."* (AS I, 3)

The Croatian diaspora did not, however, limit itself to words and paramilitary training. Already in the sixties, Australian media, police and intelligence began regularly to report on violent activities of extremist Croatian groups against Serb organizations and Yugoslav diplomatic or tourist offices in the main urban centers. (Aarons, 2001) The Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood (HRB) even went beyond these operations and tried unsuccessfully to launch armed uprisings in Yugoslavia in 1963 and again in 1972. This second attempt was carried out at the end of a significant chapter in contemporary Yugoslav history, characterized by a period of po-

litical and ideological liberalization during the years 1966-1971. Croatia was ruled during this period by a team of intelligent, mostly young politicians whose aim was to modernize the Republic and decentralize both the Yugoslav federation and the League of Communists. In spite of their intellectual status, they were unable, however, to keep under control the surge of nationalism among the Croatian masses, especially within the student population. This failure, which threatened the very existence of the State, alarmed many in the country and abroad, giving Tito the opportunity to politically decapitate the Croatian leadership after a dramatic show-down in December, 1971. In the following months, the Croatian elite were hit by a heavy purge. This was interpreted by the diaspora as a sign that the time for an armed uprising had finally come (Bilandžić, 1999, 553-656).

The illusion that a small group, coming from abroad, could spark the fire of a general uprising was not new in Croatian history, since similar attempts had already occurred in 1871 (the Rakovica uprising) and 1932 (the Lika uprising), both times without success. Having learned nothing from the past, the Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood, founded in 1961, decided to achieve Croatian independence by revolutionary methods. Led from 1964 on by Ambrozije Andrić, this group organized near Melbourne, Djilong, Balarata and other towns several training camps for its 80 odd affiliates. In mid-1969, its leadership decided to split in two: one party returned to Europe in order to start the uprising, whereas the other, headed by the "Commander of the General revolutionary Staff of the HRB", Jure Marić, remained in Australia in order to recruit and train other fighters. On June 20th 1972, the Andrić group, which made the necessary preparations in its strongholds in France, Germany and Austria, infiltrated a band of 20 heavily armed men into eastern Bosnia, where, according to their views, the local Croat and even Muslim population, spurred by national and economic dissatisfaction, was ready to join them. The operation resulted in a complete failure, the Bosnian and Croatian police and military forces, strengthened by the Territorial Defence, able in few days to round up the would-be insurgents and annihilate them. In any case, the episode did not happen without loss of life on their side – during the fights that engaged roughly 10,000 people, they lost 13 men, while another 13 were wounded (AS 1931, 2; AS I, 4; AS 1931, 3). The "Raduša" incident, as it was called, did not surprise the Yugoslav authorities, for one of their agents had infiltrated the Brotherhood. However, it alarmed them greatly when their suspicions seemed confirmed that it had received support from a number of western governmental agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and that it sought contact even with the Soviets. They ordered a thorough investigation of the would-be insurgency, stepped up their security, con-

tacted all the governments with large Yugoslav émigré groups on their soil and the Vatican, presenting them with a detailed dossier on their activity and asking them to curb it. It is interesting to note that they found sympathetic listeners everywhere. As Cardinal Casaroli, the Foreign Affairs secretary to the pope, aptly put it: *"We are interested in a stable and strong Yugoslavia and this is not just a question of sympathy, being the Holy See interested that Yugoslavia, as factor of peace, could peacefully work in Europe and generally in the world."* (AS I, 5; AS 1931, 3) Even the fact that the word "liquidation", used by the Belgrade authorities to describe the victory over the terrorists, suggested that some of them were captured alive and interrogated under torture, did not upset anybody (TNA, 1; AS 1931, 4).

The U.S. State Department accepted the Yugoslav memorandum with interest but with some reservation, noting that it was full of unproven innuendo rather than facts. The attitude of the Canberra Government was much more assertive. In his letter to the president of the Yugoslav Federal Government, Djemal Bijedic, the newly elected Australian premier, leader of the Labour party, G. Whitham, thanked him for the memorandum related to the Croatian terrorists and repeated the proposition already presented by Canberra in 1971: Yugoslavia should send its experts to Australia in order to coordinate efforts to curb them (HDA, 3; AS I, 4). In fact, in the following years Whitham's government undertook a series of repressive measures against the Croatian extremists without satisfying, however, the Yugoslav diplomatic and intelligence agents in Australia, who asked for a more radical policy and waged against the "enemies of our self-management system" a war of propaganda and intimidation, sometimes even using illegal means (AS 1931, 5). How complex and ambiguous the situation was is confirmed by the suspicion that in 1978 the Australian secret services collaborated with the Yugoslavs in the hunt against seven members of the Croatian Republican Party in Sidney (Aarons, 2001). In any case, in spite of the fact that the activity of the Croatian nationalists continued in the seventies and eighties with the same virulence as in the past, it is striking that they were not able to repeat their exploit of 1972. The warnings that they would try it were quite loud in 1977, during the Second Session of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, convened in Belgrade, and in spring 1980, when Tito was laying on his deathbed. But these were false alarms (AS 1931, 6; AS 1931, 7; AS I, 3; AS I, 6).

The upsurge of Croatian nationalism at the beginning of the seventies, despite its failure, gave some impetus to both the Slovenian nationalists in Australia and especially to the Serbs. The latter were split into an archipelago of groups, though they were united by shared attachment to Serb national values and to the Karadjordje dynasty. Among their different associations, the most

extremist, the "Serbian cultural club Saint Sava", began functioning again in 1973, after a period of passivity. At the same time, the Victoria branch of the Serb National Defense (SNO) resumed its activity, trying to enroll in its ranks as many citizens of Serb origin as possible. To do so, its promoters did not put the emphasis on the fight against Yugoslavia but *"on the vivification of cultural, social and sport life, on the cultivation of Serb national traditions and on the organisation of Sunday schools for children."* (AS 1931, 8) This does not mean, however, that Serb emigration was completely tame, despite the fact that its leadership was riddled with internal fighting and rivalries. Its political program was eloquently summarized by Vladimir Bošnjak, president of the Serb National Defence of the Victoria State, who declared in December 1973 that the time for action was approaching *"Yugoslavia being in crisis and falling apart and being in disgrace both in the West and in the East /.../ Soon after Tito's death, the decisive time will come, and it should not find us unprepared"* (AS 1931, 8).

In this context, it is worth noting that the Serb emigration somehow anticipated the nationalistic tones later heard in Serbia, in the eighties, after Tito's death, as the Yugoslav state began to crumble under its contradictions. Already in the mid-seventies, for instance, the Serb diaspora started to criticize the constitutional reforms introduced in Yugoslavia by Edvard Kardelj, because in its opinion they were detrimental to the integrity of Serbia and for its hegemonic role within the frame of the Federation (AS I, 2). In spite of the fact that it harbored in its bosom some overtly terrorist groups, such as the "Serb Youth Liberation Movement" (Srbski oslobodilački pokret omladine), it was never able to mobilize the Serbs abroad as effectively as its Croatian counterpart (AS I, 2). It was, however, able to instill many immigrants who settled in Australia in the sixties and seventies with the memories and traumas of the older generation, linked to the experience of World War II.

The war mentioned is, of course, the one that erupted after June 25, 1991, when Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence. This decision provoked the intervention of the Yugoslav Popular Army, closely linked with Serbia, which was ruled by Slobodan Milošević. The result was a 10 day-long conflict, which led to the withdrawal of the Army from Slovenia, and a war which ravaged Croatia and Bosnia/Herzegovina for the following 4 years, because of the Serbian ambition to redraw the borders and to implement the ideal of a Greater Serbia. The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the subsequent violence, which hit Croatia and Bosnia/Herzegovina from summer, 1991, until autumn, 1995, galvanized the Croatian and Serbian diasporas in Australia, giving them a new sense of purpose and confidence. The old stereotypes of Serbs as treacherous Byzantines, eager to destroy Western civilization, and of Croats, seen as a genocidal nation, were felt by the two

communities with new vigor, compelling them to participate in the events with a strong emotional and objective determination. They engaged not only in marches on the Parliament House in Canberra or in vocal demonstrations in Sidney and Malbourne, but also in terrorist attacks against the buildings of the hostile community, especially against orthodox or catholic churches, not to mention the traditional football clashes. Their most active members meddled even in the political processes of the respective countries, collected money to foster the war effort of their nationalities and some even participated in the fighting on the ground. The names of captain Dragan, who organized in the Croatian Krajina the so called knjindjas, an infamous Serbian paramilitary force, and of Blej Kralavić, an officer of the irregular Croatian defence forces, responsible for the worst ethnic cleansing, are

eloquent enough to prove the ominous role played by some Australian Serbs and Croats during the recent wars in ex-Yugoslavia (Lateline, 2001).

To summarize, it is obvious that the post-World War II decision of by the Canberra government to open its doors unselectively to European émigrés and to allow even war criminals to settle in Australia still breeds its poisonous fruits. During the Cold War, Australian intelligence was obsessed by the fear of left wing sympathizers, while considering with benign indifference the activities of right wing refugees, allowing them to perpetuate their policy of hate in the new environment. It is, on the other hand, a sign of the strength of Australian society and its professed multiculturalism that those dangerous influences have been kept in check and not allowed to degenerate beyond tolerable limits.

JUGOSLOVANSKA EMIGRACIJA V AVSTRALIJI PO DRUGI SVETOVNI VOJNI

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POVZETEK

Popis prebivalstva Avstralije iz leta 1945 navaja samo 5866 ljudi po rodu iz Jugoslavije. Leta 1966 se je ta številka povečala na 71000, leta 1981 pa kar na 149000. Med temi je bilo največ Hrvatov, ki so se v Avstralijo začeli izseljevati že sredi 19. stoletja. Šlo je za diasporo, ki je imela politične in ekonomske razloge, pri čemer so prvi prevladovali ob koncu druge svetovne vojne, ko je avstralska vlada v sodelovanju z Mednarodno organizacijo za begunce sprejela skoraj 24000 ubežnikov iz Jugoslavije. Pozneje je prišlo do sporazuma med vladama v Adelajdi in Beogradu, kar je imelo za posledico val legalne ekonomske emigracije in je med leti 1966–1971 podvojilo število priseljencev jugoslovanskega izvora.

To so seveda samo okvirni podatki nadvse kompleksnega problema, ki ga ni mogoče razumeti, če diaspore iz bivše Jugoslavije ne razdelimo na njene etnične komponente. V razpravi avtor namreč posveča pozornost trem poglavitnim narodnim skupinam, Slovincem, Hrvatom in Srbom, in prikazuje na podlagi objavljenega in arhivskega gradiva v glavnih obrisih značilnosti njihovega delovanja in organiziranja. Glede Slovencev opozarja na dejstvo, da se je vodstvo domobranskega gibanja po vojni zateklo v Avstralijo, predvsem v državi New South Wales in Victoria, kjer je organiziralo živahno politično-kulturno dejavnost. Opozarja pa tudi na ekonomsko emigracijo, posebno iz primorskega in prekmurskega prostora, ki je bila dolgo časa ilegalna. Ljudje so bežali pred bedo in služenjem v jugoslovanski armadi ter prek Italije ali Avstrije emigrirali v Avstralijo. Tako se je na tej celini nabralo okrog 25000 Slovenk in Slovencev. Kljub temu, da so se slovenski emigranti vključili v dobro organizirano kulturno-religiozno strukturo, je bila v naslednjih desetletjih asimilacija velika. Danes se jih izjavlja za Slovence samo še kakih 5000.

Bolj dramatične razsežnosti sta imeli hrvaška in srbska emigracija, saj so se v eni in drugi oblikovale ekstremistične, paravojaške skupine, ki so nameravale aktivno delovati proti jugoslovanskemu režimu. Na podlagi dokumentov, ki jih je avtor dobil v arhivu Vladimira Bakarića v Zagrebu in v Arhivu Republike Slovenije, analizira nekaj poglavitnih etap tega delovanja, ki je doseglo svoj višek leta 1972, ko je skupina ustaških emigrantov iz Avstralije poskušala organizirati ljudsko vstajo v Bosni in Hercegovini.

Ključne besede: migracija iz Jugoslavije, Avstralija, 1945–1972, paravojaške skupine ustašev

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