

THE YUGOSLAV IDEA AND THE WEST: 1900-1920

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ABSTRACT

The political movements whose goal was to form an unified southern Slavic state seemed to be facing an impossible task in the first years of the twentieth century. However, with the onset of World War I and with the consequent land losses suffered by the imperial Ottoman and Habsburg states, the prospects of would-be unifiers improved immensely. Both Croat and Serb politicians and leaders saw the golden opportunity for the realization of their dreams, and pursued a vigorous campaign with the winners of the Great War: Britain, France, Russia and the United States of America. At the same time, the Balkan experts from Britain were active in giving their own interpretation of the situation on the ground.

The aim of the present work is to examine the key players and their motivation in the promotion of the Yugoslav idea to the western public. The focus will be on the evolution of the cooperation between the various camps who promoted the Yugoslav idea, and its reception in the West Europe, chiefly the United Kingdom. The inherent problems of the Yugoslav state, and its uniting ideology, Yugoslavism, will be examined. The sources used are the contemporary essays, articles and books, as well as the literature on the subject published in the period since the creation of Yugoslavia to the present day.

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INTRODUCTION

For a new idea to catch on and become popular it takes a lot of work and a long time. The idea of Yugoslavia, that is, the country in which all of the southern Slavs would be united, has been around in one form or another for centuries. The problem that those envisioning such a state had always encountered was that the lands in which the southern Slavs lived were divided among the two empires; the Habsburg Empire in the west and the Ottoman Empire in the east. The beginning of the 20th century saw the weakening of these two empires, and the Yugoslav enthusiasts saw an opening, an opportunity to act and to make their dream become a reality.

The aim of the present work is to examine the key players and their motivation in the promotion of the Yugoslav idea to the western public. The focus will be on the evolution of the cooperation between the various camps who promoted the Yugoslav idea, and its reception in the West Europe, chiefly the United Kingdom.

The Yugoslav enthusiasts embarked on a campaign of lobbying for and promoting the Yugoslav idea in all the major European capitals. Their activities took them to Paris, London, Rome and Washington. They promoted the feasibility of a new state in the Balkans to all the politicians and influential men whose attention they could obtain. At the same time they went to great lengths to extol the cultural virtues of the southern Slavs to the European public in general. The reception in the west was warm, if cautious, but most importantly, the Yugoslav idea was no longer an obscure concept whose existence was familiar only to the informed few or to the specialists in foreign policy.

The idea of Yugoslav unity, as appealing and logical as it appeared to those hearing of it, was not a simple concept. Nor did all the parties promoting it agree on just how should the new state might work. One faction, originating from the multinational Habsburg Empire, advocated the federalist idea. The other side, hailing from the newly independent and militarily successful Kingdom of Serbia, was focused on the westward expansion of the new state.

It fell to the British experts on the region to try to arbitrate between the two factions, trying to help them to come to a unified plan of action and a coherent strategy that would be acceptable to the majority of the population of the future Yugoslavia. These British experts were by no means disinterested observers. Their enthusiasm contributed significantly to the acceptance of the concept in Britain, western Europe and, indeed, the world. Chief among them was Robert William Seton-Watson, whose writings and activities are taken as a case study to illustrate this point.

The structure of the present work could have taken several different forms. The key events could have been narrated in chronological order, and the various players participating could have been introduced as they appeared on the scene. However, since each one of the four main contributors to the development of the Yugoslav idea is not a simple entity appearing out of thin air at a given moment, the chronological order would have been disturbed by the explanation of their origins and history.

I have opted for the format in which the key players are introduced and expounded upon separately. Given that they were shaped by various events which occurred in a span of two decades or more, the chronological order of the events

described is definitely disturbed. Moreover, various events could have appeared in a chapter of more than one entity. For example, the Corfu Pact could equally have been a part of the chapter about the Yugoslav Committee and the one dealing with the government of Serbia, for it was the representatives of these two bodies that signed it. As things turned out, the event was expounded upon in an entirely different chapter, the one dealing with the British expert Robert William Seton-Watson. The reason for this is that it was his writings that was taken as the basis for the commentary of the event. Similarly, the Seton-Watson chapter contains some musings and detailed linguistic explanations on the origins of the standard Serbian and Croatian languages and identity, as well as the detailed description of the political situation in Hungary prior to the onset of the World War I. I ask the reader to kindly indulge my wandering through time and space and try to see the link between the events described with those in their immediate vicinity. The reflections on the Croat and Serb identity, it will be seen, are closely related to Seton-Watson's own struggling with these two concepts, and the detailed description of the political situation in Hungary prior to the outbreak of war narrates the evolution of the Croat-Serb coalition, for which Seton-Watson had the greatest admiration and about which he wrote copiously.

Finally, as may be concluded from the above, the length of each individual chapter is not to be taken as an indication of the importance of its subject matter, or rather, its title. Indeed, given that the chapter on Seton-Watson is almost as long as that on the three other entities put together, a wrong conclusion would be drawn. As mentioned earlier, Seton-Watson's publications and private papers – kindly made available to me by its custodians at the School of Slavonic and East European

Studies in London – were the basis of much of what I write in the present work, and their location in the chapter bearing his name seem only natural.

In the first chapter of the present thesis I will focus on the Yugoslav Committee, a lobbying organization manned by politicians and prominent men from the Habsburg Empire. Most of them were of Croat descent, but several key members belonged to the Serbian population from the same area. The political parties they represented and themselves in person had already collaborated on the Croatian political scene, in the form of Croat-Serbian Coalition in the Croatian Parliament.

The immediate political goal of the Croat-Serbian Coalition had been to generate the greatest possible degree of autonomy within the already weakened Habsburg Empire. In the long run, that degree of autonomy would allow Croatia to gain in stature as a political unit autonomous and independent enough to be on an even keel with the already independent Kingdom of Serbia, should the desired outcome of unification ever materialize.

The members of the Croat-Serb Coalition, most prominent of whom later joined the Yugoslav Committee, promulgated the idea that the Croats and the Serbs were a single people, coequals with two names, but with differing political and cultural traditions. By maintaining the political distance from Budapest and Vienna, and at the same time guaranteeing the equality to Serbian population in Croatia, Croatian politicians thought that they would set the stage for similar treatment of Croats in the Kingdom of Serbia, and in the future southern Slavic state.

The Second chapter will deal with the Croatian and Serbian emigration in South and North America and their participation in the promotion of the drive for the creation of a single Southern Slav country. The emigrants and the associations and organizations they founded in the new world contributed, both politically and financially, to the activities of the Yugoslav Committee.

The greatest wave of the emigration from the Southern Slav lands occurred between 1890 and 1910. Virtually all of the emigrants came from the Slav lands under the Habsburg rule, and their majority were Croats. Such great resulted in large concentrations of Southern Slavs in both the Americas, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. Given their origin, that of the Habsburg lands, they identified with the Yugoslav Committee more readily than with the government of the Kingdom of Serbia, and that irregardless of whether they themselves were Croats or Serbs.

The third chapter will be devoted to the Kingdom of Serbia and the activities of its government. In a few short decades of its existence the Kingdom of Serbia had seen a major expansion of its territories, which nearly tripled just prior to the onset of World War I.

The internal situation in Serbia will be briefly reviewed, as well as different drives for its expansion; would the new state be the hegemonic “smaller Greater Serbia”, less hegemonic “bigger Greater Serbia” or multinational federal Yugoslavia.

The fourth chapter of my thesis will study the activities of the British advocates of the formation of the new state. Chief among them was Robert William Seton-

Watson, a Scotsman who dedicated himself to finding a just solution for the nationalities in the Habsburg Empire.

At first Seton-Watson believed that the future of the Southern Slavs could be within the Habsburg Empire, but by 1914 he changed his mind and considered the formation of Yugoslavia to be the best option for Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. At the same time, as a British subject, Seton-Watson always considered the geopolitical interests of his government. The Yugoslav idea was also attractive to the British government, in whose interest was to form a strong, stable and populous state which would block the Germanic *Drang nach Osten*.

The main principle that Seton-Watson wished to apply in defining the boundaries of the future Yugoslav state was an appeal to the national sentiments and allegiances of the local population. For example, on April 23, 1915 he published a long letter in *The Times*, in which he argued that Dalmatia clearly had Slavic character, and that the plans to have it ceded to Italy would cause great resistance among the Croats, who may then end up siding with the Habsburg Monarchy. On the other hand, when Yugoslavs made claims on Austrian towns Villach and Klagenfurt, whose majority population was German, he was quick to dismiss the idea as excessive. In the same vein, when Prince Alexander of Serbia showed him the map for the westward expansion of Serbia, Seton-Watson could not approve of the plans which included the Nagykanizsa and Pécs districts of Hungary into Serbian territories.

However, a bit of bargaining, or a more practical approach was also acceptable to Seton-Watson, who suggested to Serbs to accept the Romanian gains in the Banat, in spite of the fact that they included pockets with Serbian population. His view was that any loss of territory in Banat would be well

compensated in the union with the Serbs of the Habsburg Monarchy. This indicates that Seton-Watson – while his chief motivation was to find a just solution to the nationalities of the Habsburg Empire – did not shy from overlooking some of the finer details in order to find practical workable solutions.

During Seton-Watson's travels in the south Slav region, which started in 1909, he was introduced to key Croatian and Serbian political figures. He maintained contact with them throughout the years, accumulating a vast body of correspondence. From 1915 on he also published a weekly journal, *The New Europe*, on whose pages he promoted the Slav cause. He was also a founding member of the Serbian Relief Fund and the Serbian Society of Great Britain. From 1916 he worked for the Intelligence Bureau of the Department of Information, and was in February 1918 transferred to Crewe House, otherwise known as the Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, which reported directly to the War Cabinet.

Carrying his program from the pages of *The New Europe* to the Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, Seton-Watson influenced the British Foreign and War Offices. In the end, the activities of a single dedicated person influenced the foreign policy of Britain to a great extent.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In revisiting the events leading to and relating to the creation of Yugoslavia one has to study the various interpretations of the historians who wrote on the topic in the previous epochs, and filter out the biases or preferred ways of viewing the events they might have had. The first such period came immediately after the new state was formed, and the leaning of most of the Yugoslav historians was that of victors who were euphoric that the sought-for goal of the southern Slav union had been achieved. The second period came after World War II, during which the official communist-sponsored historiography touched on the formation period only superficially, entirely de-emphasizing the differences of which the Yugoslav Committee and the Government of the Kingdom of Serbia had an abundance. That particular approach was rooted in the desire not to draw attention to the contrasting ideological and pragmatic motivations of those two major players in the formation of Yugoslavia, some of which were echoed in the ethnic clashes and atrocities committed during World War II. The final period – that of disillusionment with the Yugoslav project – was ushered in in the 1980's and fully blossomed at the onset of the conflicts which resulted in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. While Serbian historians had more complaints about the post-World War II period, their outlook onto the 1910's and 20's was not entirely positive either. The Croatian interpretation, however, offered equally negative and scathing interpretation of both Yugoslavias: the inter-war constitutional monarchy and the post-World War II communist regime.

While wading through such emotionally and politically charged material, the researcher is certainly required to preserve his or her proper judgment and integrity, which, at times, poses a challenge. However, the sifting of the interpreter's attitudes

from the secondary sources is merely a fraction of the difficulties one encounters while attempting to interpret history. In István Rév's words, "the historian might fail, even if he or she tries to be truthful, faithful to the two virtues of truth: sincerity and accuracy, which become essential virtues and guarantees of serious scholarly work, especially in the absence of easily formalized rules of historical reconstruction."¹ Furthermore, sheer objectivity will not necessarily lead to the desired result; some of the facts recorded in the original documents may be missing, or may be misrepresented. Some important details may never have been recorded, or the document which contained them does no longer exist.

Then there is the question of the objectivity of the documents themselves. Indeed, it is not only the historians who may fall short on the objectivity scale, but the men who "make" the history may also fall prey to the lure of data tempering. R. J. Evans raises the issue of the objectivity of documents. He proposes that the "documents are always written from somebody's point of view, with a specific purpose and audience in mind."²

Having reviewed the difficulties that a researcher may encounter in dealing with the primary and secondary sources, let us turn back to the historian's role. Earlier it was established that a historian is not a judge, and now I wish to return to his or her role as a commentator. Put simply, the airing of personal opinion or interpretation should not be a taboo for a historian, provided, however, that such an opinion is not disguised as a historical fact.

Indeed, given that there had been three major periods in the interpretation of the studied events, perhaps the time has come for a new look, a fourth

¹ Istvan Rev, *Afterthought, The only thing the historian can offer*, (draft, March, 2007).

² R. J. Evans, "Historians and Their Facts", in R. J. Evans *In Defence of History*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000. p. 80.

interpretation. And even if this author succeeds in making that new look objective, it will not be without commentary. It will not be the simplistic “we won, and to hell with the rest” attitude of the post-World War I period, nor the selective communist interpretation which would not allow for dissent or difference of opinion, nor yet the hysterical unleashing of emotionally charged accusations between the Croat and Serbian side of the late eighties, but a calm reassessment of the idea of Yugoslavia on its own merits, from today’s perspective.

Yugoslavia as a country seemed to have been plagued with internal problems from its very creation. The political events and decisions which influenced the course it took all seemed to contribute to and lead to its final demise. But does that negate the merit of the idea itself, the value of the vision of the members of the Yugoslav Committee? It should not. It is entirely disrespectful to dismiss the members of the Yugoslav Committee as merely duped men who were sincere, but sincerely wrong. Among them there were some of the foremost Croat poets, writers and artists. How dare we dismiss them as mere dupes of some Serbian plot, as the Croat historians are now keen to? The reasoning as obvious as it is simplistic; Krleža and his likes compromised themselves by having aligned with the Yugoslav idea, and since that idea was bad, they were simply duped, inebriated, intoxicated. But the Yugoslav idea – the Illyrian idea, if you will – should not be dismissed off hand. It has stirred the imagination of some of the most prominent Croatian artists and politicians over a period of nearly two centuries, and as such deserves to be treated with respect. After all, the desire for unification of all the lands inhabited by the southern Slavs was the most popular political agenda both in the Kingdom of

Serbia and in the Slav lands of the Habsburg Empire, as manifested in the success of the Croat-Serb Coalition for a decade starting in 1905.³

In discussing the Yugoslav idea and the process of unification I aim to understand how the models of unification were implemented and negotiated. Each of the two models had its own backing party; the majority of the Croats supported the federal model, the Serbs an extension of the already existing Serbian state. Elie Kedourie claims that nationalism imposes homogeneity,⁴ and the model introduced by the prevailing side certainly went hand in hand with those forces in Yugoslavia who sought to achieve the homogeneity of the population; not the creation of a new Yugoslav identity, but the absorption of that identity into the already existing Serbian identity. This idea was succinctly expressed by Nikola Pašić, the president of the ruling Serb Radical Party: "Serbia does not want to drown in Yugoslavia, but to have Yugoslavia drown in her."⁵ Pašić's vision for the new south Slav state was that it would be a mere continuation of the pre-war Serbian kingdom whose territorial gains resulted in the unification of all Serbs. In fact, the Serbian government had two solutions in mind. The "little solution" would include the union with Bosnia-Herzegovina, part of Dalmatia, the Vojvodina, Srijem and a part of Slavonia with Serbia. This also included union with Montenegro and Macedonia. The "bigger solution" included all Croat and Slovenian lands. The other south Slavs who lived in those areas were to be subordinated to the leading role of Serbia. Indeed, the very name Yugoslavia was opposed by the Radical Party to which Mr. Pašić belonged. The so called Vidovdan Constitution, drafted by the Radicals and

³ Denis Rustinow, "The Yugoslav Idea Before Yugoslavia", in Dejan Djokic, ed. *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, London: Hurst and Company, 2002. p. 23.

⁴ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, London, 1960.

⁵ Nikola Pašić to Jovan Jovanovic Pizhon in London, October 5, 1918, quoted in Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993. p. 132.

introduced on the 28th of June 1921, deliberately avoided the name Yugoslavia, seen by the Radicals as a Croat ploy whose aim was to weaken Serbian identity. And so the new state was christened the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.⁶

The idea of the supremacy of one nation above the other, however, was not confined to the Serbian side alone. As early as 1834 a Croat poet expressed his views on the identity of the Slavic nations adjoining the Croat territories in these words: "... that loves all Croats of old; Serbs, Bosniaks, Herzegovinians brethren... all they have Croats been..."⁷ On the other hand, speaking in the last decade of the 19th century, the eminent Croat Bishop Strossmayer expressed his readiness to accept the political rule of the Serbian dukes just as long as the internal makeup was federal in nature.⁸

The political reality in the period of the closing of World War I was that the Serbian side was taking a leading role in defining the new state. Most of the Croat politicians tried to confine the Serbian domination by arguing for a federalist organization of Yugoslavia, in which each nation should preserve its national identity and political autonomy. Their belief was that the Yugoslav nation was to be formed as a result of a gradual molding of still strong separate south Slav national identities.⁹ Though imbued with the idea of South Slav unity, theirs was the view that the differences in the national consciousnesses of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs required a federal structure, and that the Yugoslav identity would gradually grow with time.¹⁰ But Yugoslav identity as such never took root,¹¹ as predicted by

⁶ Banac, pp. 168-169

⁷ Vjekoslav Babukić, published in *Danica Hrvatska*, October 1834.

⁸ Joseph Frankel, "Federalism in Yugoslavia", in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 49, No.2. (Jun., 1955), p. 417.

⁹ Tihomir Cipek, "The Croats and Yugoslavism", in *Yugoslavism: Histories of Failed Idea 1918-1992*, ed. Dejan Djokic, London: Hurst and Company, 2003. pp. 74-75.

¹⁰ Dragovan Sepić, "The Question of Yugoslav Union in 1918," in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 3, No. 4: 1918-19: *From War to Peace*. (Oct. 1968), p. 40.

the Croatian opposition leader Ivo Frank, who dismissed it as “nebulous, mystical, insatiable hold-all concept,”¹²

Indeed, it appears that one of the reasons Yugoslavia was not a successful project is that both the Croats and the Serbs had had their own national identity and conscience developed to a high degree before any Yugoslav idea had a chance to evolve. While recognizing the proximity to one another, they merely sought to absorb each other, each in their own peculiar way. Now, the very strength of each of these two movements was the reason for the failure of the Yugoslav project. Ernest Gellner makes a simple calculation to see what the odds are for national projects to succeed.¹³ The result shows that “most potential nationalisms must either fail, or, more commonly, will refrain from even trying to find political expression.”¹⁴ However, both the Croats and the Serbs found their political expression, perhaps against all odds, and that in itself prevented them from defining a common political language for a successful union.

In fact, two different strands of Yugoslavism were already present by the time the new state was formed. One of these was “‘integral Yugoslavism’, which recognized no differences between Yugoslav ‘tribes’ (at that time Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) or superseded any differences between them which might have existed.”¹⁵ The other version of Yugoslavism recognized the already existing nationhoods and accepted them as such, seeking to provide a multi-national federal platform which would encompass them without infringing on any of them.

¹¹ Ljubomir Antić, “Nacionalne ideologije Jugoslavenstva kod Hrvata u dvadesetom stoljeću”, in *Hrvatska Politika u XX stoljeću*, Zagreb, Matica Hrvatska, 2006. p. 55.

¹² Kosta St. Pavlowitch, “The First World War and the Unification of Yugoslavia”, in Dejan Djokic, ed. *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, London: Hurst and Company, 2002. p. 27.

¹³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.

¹⁴ Op.cit. p. 47.

¹⁵ Dejan Djokic, Introduction, in *Yugoslavism: Histories of Failed Idea 1918-1992*, ed. Dejan Djokic, London: Hurst and Company, 2003. p. 5.

The basis for the differentiation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – the basis for the selection of the ‘core’ population for any group identity – varies in the scale from being defined on narrowly local parameters on the one end of the spectrum to large continental or even global identities on the other. Thus a person may have a strong feeling of allegiance to a town, a region, a state or a continent; he or she may be a Ragusean, a Dalmatian, a Croat, a Yugoslav or a European. However, when it comes to the state allegiance, neither of the two extremes of this continuum can be applied, and in the given case the choice has to be made between the Croat or Serbian and the Yugoslav identity. As we have seen, the smaller units – both Croat and Serbian – eventually prevailed against the unifying Yugoslav identity. This, however, need not have been the case.

One example of the unifying identity that managed to take root and survive is that of Germany. Formed from countless dukedoms and city-states and organized as a federation, the new state provided a ‘higher’ level platform on which the Germans could affix their identity, without losing the already existing local or regional sense of belonging. Thus one may retain a fine Nordheinisch identity while being a German nationalist. Interestingly, the other similar examples of multi-level nationalist identity can be found also in federations or in similarly organized states: the American citizens with strong belief in adherence to the United States may and do preserve a perfectly viable New England, Alabama or Pennsylvanisch Deutsch identities which are not conflicting with their American identity in any way. The same can be said of the francophone population of Quebec, most of which has no problem in identifying itself as Canadian while at the same time retaining a strong and proud Quebecois identity. The United Kingdom provides another example, where the relatively new identity of a Briton supersedes but does not annul the pre-

existing Scottish, English or Welsh identity. Indeed, Prime Minister Lloyd George was a Briton first of all, and only then a Welshman.

On the other end of the spectrum are the states which do not allow diversity. The former Soviet Union, while organized as a federation and therefore in theory similar to the above examples, was a totalitarian state in which one ethnic group, Russian, imposed itself and its culture onto the numerous peoples who found itself within the USSR's borders. The Russian Cyrillic alphabet, for example, was imposed onto the Turkmenic languages, which had thereto used Arabic script. This was done in the name of forging a closer Soviet identity, but was seen by the recipient nations as the continuation of the former Russian Czarist colonization. The extent of the Russian cultural and indeed physical colonization – under which the large ethnic Russian population was moved to the outlying Soviet Republics – became apparent once the Soviet Union was dissolved. The Soviet identity disappeared in a moment, and the emerging national states, of which Lithuania may be used as a prime example, showed very little tolerance towards the lingering Russian cultural influence or to the Russian population settled within its own borders. Another example of failed imposition of state identity may be found in Transylvania, in which the relatively large Hungarian population vigorously resisted Ceaușescu's policy of forced resettlement, which was seen as a concentrated effort to disband the pre-existing local Hungarian identity that was slow to accept the Romanian character. China's invasion and strict rule of Tibet did not yield a change in the identity of the Tibetans even after five decades.

From the examples above it may be concluded that the looser the state organization the better the expectations of success for a federal state to unify its citizens under a new identity umbrella. Conversely, the more centralized, totalitarian

or oppressive the state is its citizens are less likely to identify with it. In applying this formula to the case of Yugoslavia, a conclusion may be drawn that the strong centralized state organization contributed to the polarization between the Slovenian, Croat and Serb identities, which then led to the long term failure of the Yugoslav identity.

THE YUGOSLAV COMMITTEE

The Yugoslav Committee was founded on April 30, 1915 in Paris, by Croatian, Serbian and Slovenian political emigration from the Habsburg Empire. Its main goal was the liberation of Croatian and Slovenian lands from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and their unification with the Kingdom of Serbia and Montenegro. This also meant the active participation in the resistance to the Italian irredentism – embodied in the London Agreement – and to Hungarian drive to incorporate parts of Croatian lands into Greater Hungary. One of the key organizers and initiators of the Yugoslav Committee was the sculptor Ivan Meštrović, and its first president, elected at the Paris plenary session, was dr. Ante Trumbić. Immediately after its foundation the Yugoslav Committee moved its seat to London, and established its representatives and missions in various European capitals.

By promoting the idea of unity of the Southern Slavs the Yugoslav Committee subscribed, at least partially, to a variation of the Pan-Slavic ideas that had been promoted since the mid nineteenth century. The Pan-Slavic principles, as promulgated by František Palacky, were a close match. In the first Pan-Slav Congress, held in Prague in 1848, Palacky propagated the idea of the unity of all Slavs who were at that time under the Austrian rule. That obviously included Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, but not those Serbs living in what would shortly become the Kingdom of Serbia, and certainly not the Bulgarians or Russians. The impracticalities of the implementation of such an idea, stemming from the geographical fragmentation of the lands occupied by the Slavs, for example, did not stop the enthusiast Pan-Slavs from envisioning a north-south Slav corridor connecting what Czech and Slovak lands with Slovenia and Croatia.

A different species of Pan-Slavism was promoted by Russian Fadeyev, who held that it was Russia's mission to liberate the Slavs from both Austrian and Ottoman domination, and to then found a Slavic federation which would be dominated by Russia. In the years leading to World War I, when the relationship between the Serbs and Austria worsened, this type of Russian-sponsored Pan-Slavism was popular among the Serbs. The Croats, however, saw it as Russia's long-sought imperial expansion toward south, which, accompanied by strong Orthodox undertones, held no appeal whatsoever. The triumph of the Bolsheviks in 1917 brought any support for the Russian type of Pan-Slavism to an abrupt end. The reasons for that were internal, for the internationalist Soviets did not seek to promote a single nation above the other, and external, since all of Europe now feared the exportation of the revolution into its parts.

The type of Pan-Slavism to which the members of the Yugoslav Committee subscribed was limited only to the southern Slavs, and thus hardly deserves to be called Pan-Slavism at all. The idea was practical because it sought to include the contiguous swathes of land, populated by three Slavic peoples – Slovenes, Croats and Serbs – who could easily understand each other, peoples who were long oppressed by foreign empires. At one point, and only in the theoretical models, the Bulgarians were included among the constituent nations of the southern Slav state, but the history of conflicts they had had with the Serbs starting in 1885 and ending with the Second Balkan War in 1913 made that option unfeasible.

The Yugoslav Committee, therefore, adopted the Pan-Slavic idea to its local situation. Territorially, it meant the inclusion of the Slavs living between the Alps in the west and the Danube in the east, between the Adriatic in the south and Drava River in the north. Politically, the Yugoslav Committee also had a clear goal. The

proposed unity of the three peoples would be based on democratic principles and federalist idea.

Various federal ideas had been proposed earlier in order to save the ailing Habsburg Empire. At first the Croatian politicians were interested in the federal solution within the Empire, but later saw that Croatia had nothing to expect from remaining its part. The federalist idea, however, survived, and the Croatian politicians now sought to apply it to Croatia's position in the projected Slavic State.

Already in 1914 Frano Supilo and Dr. Ante Trumbić, the founding members of the Committee, received a formal mandate from the national deputies to represent the Southern Slavs of the Habsburg Empire in Allied countries, and in 1915 the same body of deputies sent more of its own members to join the Committee, giving it thus further endorsement. Similarly, the Croatian émigré circles deputized the Committee to speak in their name. At the congress that was held in Antofagasta, Chile in January 1913 the delegates of the Yugoslav colonies of South America empowered the Committee to represent them at the Allied courts. The same assembly provided the financial means to the Committee. The congress that was held in Pittsburgh in November 1916 gave similar authority to the Yugoslav Committee. In further building of its case as the bona fide voice of the oppressed Southern Slavs the Yugoslav Committee calls on such endorsements as was the Congress of the Yugoslavs of North America, which had been held in Chicago only months earlier, and which had adopted the Yugoslav Committee's program as their own. That the Congress attended by 563 delegates should vote unanimously on such an affair was indeed an extraordinary endorsement. Furthermore, various declarations issued by the Southern Slav representatives in the Austria-Hungary, as

well as manifestations of the public opinion gave further endorsements to the Committee.

The declared goal of the Yugoslav Committee was the unification of all the Southern Slavs into a single state. The Southern Slav nations they sought to unify were Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. The idea that these three peoples – or, depending on one's viewpoint, one people with three cultural variants – should be unified was not new in 1915. In fact, it had been introduced to the Croatian public more than 80 years earlier, in the Illyrian movement of the 1830's.

One of the main and immediate goals which the Yugoslav Committee had to reach in order to achieve its ultimate goal of the Southern Slav unity was to raise the public awareness of the very existence of their cause. The Southern Slav lands had thereto been parts of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, and in the western Europe only the initiated few were aware of the demographics of the lands in question, straddling, as they were, the peripheral areas of both empires.

Thus one of the first official statements of the Yugoslav Committee was addressed to the British nation and Parliament¹⁶. In the statement the Yugoslav Committee accuses Germany and Austria of forcing a fratricidal war onto the Southern Slavs, compelling them to fight in the Habsburg army against their brothers from the Kingdom of Serbia. The Committee pointed out in the declaration that many of the Southern Slavs from the Habsburg lands have defected and have joined the Serbian and Montenegrin armies, thus declaring them the allies of the Triple Entente. "The principle of Nationality" was also mentioned in the opening lines of the declaration, establishing thus the Southern Slavs of the Habsburg empire not only as the allies of Britain, but also as the rightful claimants for the

¹⁶ To the British Nation and Parliament, issued by the Yugoslav Committee on May 12, 1915, London. One such printed declaration is held among the Seton-Watson Papers, at the archives of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL, under: SSEES, SEW 5/1/4.

governance of the lands they inhabited, regardless of whether those lands already achieved independence, as was the case with Serbia and Montenegro, or were yet to do so. Besides, “the unanswerable laws of geography” were also evoked, though not expounded upon. The further partition of the Southern Slav lands was described as the “flagrant violation of our ethnographical, geographical and economic unity.”

The Committee assured the British public and politicians that the new unified state would be an element of order and of peace in the volatile Balkans. It would draw on the strengths of its sea-faring population, making its ports open for trade not only for the Slavs, but also for the hinterland of the new state, the Magyars and the Czechs, and not the least, the leading world trading nation, the Britain.

In the single declaration, therefore, the Yugoslav Committee established itself as the representative of the oppressed Southern Slavs, its own position akin to that of a government in exile. It also made an attempt to show that the peoples whom it represented, though formally the enemies of the British Empire by the virtue of being governed by the Habsburg crown, were in fact the British allies. This point would be reiterated numerous time throughout the duration of the war.¹⁷ The natural rights and laws were invoked to support the Southern Slav aspirations, and the interests of the British Empire – stability in the Balkans, and open ports for the British trade – were also stressed upon. This well composed declaration made it abundantly clear to any reader that the Yugoslav Committee was not made up of lightweights but of seasoned politicians who were not out of their depth.

Indeed, the list of signatories of the declaration was also designed to impress the reader. It contained (mainly former) members of the Croatian, Bosnian, Hungarian and Austrian Parliament, Southern Slav academics in the United States

¹⁷ SSEES, SEW 4/2/3.

of America, presidents of various Southern Slav émigré associations, and celebrities such as the renown sculptor Ivan Meštrović.

Another lengthy list, this time of the Southern Slav lands the Committee wished to unite, was also published. It was probably more a matter of setting the record straight rather than expecting the British public to understand and relate to the situation all the various Southern Slav regions found themselves in:

The Yugoslavs (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) inhabit the following countries: the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro; the Triune Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia (with Fiume and district); the provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Carnolia; considerable portions of the province of Istria, Trieste, Gorizia-Gradisca, Carinthia and Styria; and finally the Yugoslav zone of Hungary proper.¹⁸

Among the first set of tasks the Committee embarked upon was the publication of the *The Southern Slav Bulletin* in London, and of the *Bulletin Yougoslave* in Paris. The first numbers were released on October 1, 1915 in both cities. Most of the content of the first numbers, and of all the consequent releases, was nearly identical. The cover pages contained a map of Yugoslav lands, in order to make it easy for the readers to identify so many various small provinces that were to be incorporated into the unified state. The *Bulletin Yougoslave* did not print the map in its several subsequent numbers, but realizing that its single publication in the first number of the *Bulletin* would not suffice, the editors did what their colleagues in London have been doing all along, and placed a small map of Yugoslav lands on the front page of every number subsequent of the *Bulletin* thereafter.

One of the most prominent members of the Yugoslav Committee was Frano Supilo, described as “one of the ablest political brains, not merely of his own nation,

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 2.

but of warring Europe as a whole.”¹⁹ Born in Cavtat, near Dubrovnik in southern Croatia, Supilo had been involved in the politics from his youth. He had been the editor of *Novi List*, a journal published in Fiume [Rijeka], a member of the Croatian Parliament and a leading politician of the Croat-Serbian Coalition of 1906. His lack of formal education, which was the result of a youthful political prank and subsequent barring from all the Austro-Hungarian schools, was well compensated in the natural abilities, the chief among which was the proclivity for language learning. After the Croat-Serb Coalition lost its ally in the Hungarian Parliament, Supilo lead forty Croat delegates in obstructing the Parliament’s work for nearly two months. The Coalition had been in the Hungarian Parliament for merely one year, but by its end Supilo had “found the time to master unaided the Magyar language to such a pitch as enabled him to use it for his speeches in the Budapest Chamber.”²⁰

Supilo’s eloquence and clear insight into complicated political matters enabled him to write in a persuasive way. In a memorandum written to Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Minister, Supilo stated: “A glance at the map shows that these Southern Slavs stand as the chief natural obstacle across the path of Germanic Drang nach Osten, the great political concept that links Hamburg and Berlin with Vienna and Budapest, crosses the Balkans to Asia Minor and extends thence towards Baghdad, the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean.”²¹

Specific questions relating to Italy’s claim on the Dalmatian coast were also addressed by Supilo in the same memorandum. Knowing full well that the Britain was committed to Italy’s claims through a secret agreement, Supilo points out that Italy would not lose of its won were she to restrict her desired acquisitions to the areas which were predominantly Italian. To the contrary, she would gain an ally,

¹⁹ *The New Europe*, vol. IV. No. 51, October 4, 1917.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ SSEES, SEW 5/1/10.

since the Southern Slavs of the Adriatic coast were “predisposed toward the Italian spirit and inclined to open all our gates to the Italian language”²² forming thus an extension of the Italian culture which would in effect be a counterbalance to the eastward penetrating German *Kultur*. Supilo proceeded to state that:

“It is therefore a question of helping us to build on solid foundation our national unity and freedom, and to form the 12,700,000 Southern Slavs into an organized, well-coordinated and independent state... Herein lies the great and reciprocal interest of us Southern Slavs and England who, by ensuring the redemption of our people, would ensure our and her own well being”²³

There is no talk of “unanswerable laws of geography” or of “ethnographical, geographical and economic unity” in this letter, as was the case with the declarations designed for general consumption. Here one seasoned politician is telling another that it is in the interest of the strong to help out the weak, in order to keep one’s enemy, German states, from expanding eastward.

As the end of the war approached and the victory of the Allied forces seemed secured, the Yugoslav Committee again put an emphasis on the fact that the Yugoslavs were their ally throughout the war. In a document entitled “Draft Suggestions by the Yugoslav Committee for a Declaration by the Entente Governments Regarding Jugoslavia,” released in October 1918, the Yugoslav Committee wished the Allies to declare that

Since the beginning of the war the Yugoslav people (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes of Austria-Hungary), has resisted the common enemy by every means in its power. Even in the Balkan Wars and also as soon as the present war broke out, thousands of Yugoslav volunteers from Austria-Hungary fought in the Serb and Montenegrin armies. Numerous Yugoslav volunteers have enrolled themselves in the Allied Armies. An army corps composed of two Yugoslav volunteer divisions was formed in Russia in 1916-1917 and fought in the Dobrudja and on the Roumanian front as an integral part of the Serbian army. A considerable number of Yugoslav

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

volunteers are fighting at this moment in the Serbian army in Macedonia, as also on the Murman coast, in Russia and in Siberia.²⁴

Similarly, a report by the Ragusan prisoner of war, one Antonio Sesan, gives the account of the rebellion in the Austro-Hungarian fleet's bases of Pola (Pula) and Boche di Cattaro (Boka Kotorska). The fleet's officer core was comprised of Germans and Hungarians, but the vast majority of the crew came from the Dalmatian coast and islands, from the islands of Quarnero and shores of Istria. After the rebellion was put down the "discontent did not disappear, but remained latent, smouldering under the ashes. All the Slavs made common national cause, with the object of freeing themselves from Austria and achieving independence."²⁵ Although the reasons for the rebellion ranged from the immediate complaints about the quality of food and the treatment the crew received from the officers, the Yugoslav Committee cast the belligerence as motivated almost exclusively by political factors. The truth was somewhere in between, for Sesan, one of the leaders of the uprising stated that "the whole rebellion was fundamentally of political-national character against the existence of Austria-Hungary, to achieve the emancipation of the oppressed Slav people. We used the general discontent which existed among the troops on sea and land by reason of food, bad treatment, and Socialist opinion, to enforce the movement of revolt."²⁶ Upon realizing that the rebellion stood no chance Sesan, a navy aviator by training, commandeered a plane and escaped to Italy where he was imprisoned for several weeks.

It is hard to determine how effective were such representations for the forming of the Allied policy towards the lands of the Southern Slavs. Serbia's alliance with the Entente powers very likely bore the greater part of the credibility of

²⁴ SSEES, SEW 4/2/3.

²⁵ SSEES, SEW 5/1/6.

²⁶ Ibid.

the Southern Slav's claim of being a belligerent ally, while the Southern Slav volunteers in foreign corps and the rebellions in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces contributed but a little. Yet the propaganda apparatus of the Yugoslav Committee failed not to emphasize such instances in an effort to approximate the Southern Slav cause to that of the Allies.

THE SOUTHERN SLAV EMIGRATION

By the beginning of the 20th century the lands of the Southern Slavs had been peripheral parts of two major empires for centuries. The Slovenian provinces were incorporated into Austrian part of Austria-Hungary. Croatia and Slavonia found themselves under the Hungarian rule, while Dalmatia, further to the east and physically separated from the Austrian half of Austria-Hungary fell under the Vienna governance. Bosnia, recently “liberated” after four centuries of the Ottoman rule was under the provisional rule of Austria, but was about to get annexed. Further to the east, the Kingdom of Serbia had obtained freedom from the Ottomans only decades earlier, and was about to embark on a southward expansion which would gain it massive lands that would first be referred to as the Southern Serbia and later as Macedonia. Nestled between Bosnia, Serbia and Albania laid the poorest area in the Balkans, the Kingdom of Montenegro, which avoided the Ottoman conquest through a combination of its warlike traditions, mountainous remoteness and the Ottoman’s express disinterest in the region due to its poverty.

Dismembered as they were, the Southern Slav areas were also the remotest regions in their respective empires. This meant greater effort and expense was required in attempting to sell its products to the other parts of the empires. However, the geographic disadvantages were minor when compared to protectionist policies adopted by Austria-Hungary. For example, prior to being annexed by the Austria, Dalmatia had been a major exporter of wine, while its shipping industry was one of the strongest in the Mediterranean. After the incorporation into the Habsburg Empire the custom schemes made it unprofitable for the Dalmatians to continue with the production of wine, since the Austrian tariff regime directly supported the winegrowers of Trentino. In the similar vein, the

Budapest government was not interested in extending the railroad system anywhere to the east or west of the established Budapest-Zagreb-Rijeka axis, which was necessary for the foreign trade conducted by Hungary. This eventually resulted in the underdevelopment of Slavonia, for example.

All these factors contributed to a significant emigration from the Southern Slavic lands, which increased dramatically after 1890. The main destinations were the United States of America, the Latin American countries and the remote areas of the British Empire, such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. In the United States the preferred destinations were California, whose northern shores resembled Dalmatia by its climate, and Pittsburgh and Cleveland, which at that time were experiencing the economic boom and seemed to have insatiable appetite for cheap unskilled labor.²⁷ In the period between 1890 and the onset of World War I more than half a million persons emigrated from the Croatian lands of the Habsburg Empire.²⁸ Among them were not only the Croats but also the Serbs who lived in the Habsburg lands, and they accounted for virtually the whole of Serbian emigration in this period, since there was almost none of it coming from the Kingdom of Serbia.

A large proportion of the emigrants was not intending on staying in the New World. Their sojourn across the ocean was merely a fundraising trip, ranging in time between several months to several years, at the end of which they would return to their homeland and make an investment with their hard earned money. Consider a letter written by one Dalmatian activist to British historian Seton-Watson:

Dalmatia gives the largest proportion of Austrian emigrants. Of these 90% are farmers... Our farmers go abroad in search of work, always

²⁷ Anić, J. *Vanjske migracije i naturalizacija migranata iz Hrvatske (ratna perspektiva)*, Migracijske teme, 7, 2: 115-125, Zagreb, 1991.

²⁸ Čizmić, I. (1996): *Emigration and emigrants from Croatia between 1880 and 1980*, GeoJournal, vol. 38, br. 4, 431-436.

intentioned, when debts paid and savings made, to come back...
Emigrants, earn and send yearly large sums of money...²⁹

The majority of the emigrants, however, did stay in their new locations. In most cases they maintained contact with other emigrants from the same area, helping one another and establishing associations and newspapers in their native languages. No less than 15 Croatian and Serbian newspapers, as well as 5 societies are recorded on a list compiled in 1914.³⁰ These organizations by and large had a regional tone to their activities, but were not unaware of the happenings in the Old Country, and generally adjusted their activities accordingly. Consequently, when the Yugoslav idea reemerged in the Croatian lands of the Habsburg Empire in the years leading to World War I, it was quickly picked up, promoted and supported by the emigration.

The underlying tensions in European relationship which eventually exploded in continent-wide conflict gave hope to the Yugoslav enthusiasts that they can perhaps achieve the generation-long dream of forming a single state for the Southern Slavs. One of the results was the formation of the Yugoslav Committee in late 1915. Its members were predominantly the Southern Slav politicians and activists who emigrated from the Habsburg Empire. The goal of the Committee was the formation of the Southern Slavic state which would include the Serbian and Montenegrine kingdoms. Such an idea was not tolerated in the Habsburg Empire, and the members of the Yugoslav Committee had to carry out their activities abroad. They worked in Paris, London, St. Petersburg, Rome and Washington. Right along their side were the representatives of the Government of the Kingdom

²⁹ Ivo Lupis-Vukić to Robert William Seton-Watson, February 1914. The letter is kept in the Seton-Watson collection at the archives of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies of the University College, London, under: SSEES, SEW 17/15/2.

³⁰ SSEES, SEW 5/2/4.

of Serbia. While the political agenda of these two groups varied in certain aspects, from time to time resulting in open conflict between their members, it can be stated that they generally worked for the same goal, the unification of the Southern Slavs into a single state.

Perhaps it was the situation in which they found themselves, that is, away from their homeland and in need of support, that made the members of the Yugoslav Committee turn for help to various émigré organizations. The help and cooperation they received was manifold; some contributed with financial means, others worked on organizing the volunteers who were to join the Allied Forces, and others worked on the furtherance of the Southern Slavic cause with the media, in the public opinion and, importantly, through lobbying with plenipotentiaries in various countries.

For example, at the congress that was held in Antofagasta, Chile in January 1913 the delegates of the Yugoslav colonies of South America empowered the Committee to represent them at the Allied courts. The same assembly provide the financial means to the Committee. The congress that was held in Pittsburgh in November 1916 gave the similar authority to the Yugoslav Committee. Furthermore, various declarations issued by the Southern Slav representatives in the Austria-Hungary, as well as manifestations of the public opinion gave further endorsements to the Committee.

A passage from Seton-Watson's letter to Herbert Fisher, dated 9 October 1916, gives a clear picture of the unanimity of the response by the Croat and Serb émigrés from places very remote from one another:

Meanwhile the Croat and Serb colonies in the United States of America are being thoroughly organized. Several attempts, with which I had something to do, have been made to obtain recruits among them, but of course the delicacy of our relations with Washington made it difficult for

our government to act, and without its help the difficulties of transport etc were too great. In South America the Croats are even more enthusiastic and unanimous, and large subscriptions have been sent to Antofagasta and Valpariso.

In Auckland, New Zealand where there are numerous Croat emigrants from Dalmatia, the Austrian flag was publicly burnt before the Austrian consulate during the first weeks of war and for the last eighteen months there have been over two hundred Croats fighting in the New Zealand contingent of our army. Some are now here in London wounded. In July I met a Croat in the uniform of the Cape Town Highlanders.³¹

The military contribution of the emigration was perhaps not as significant as were the public demonstrations and appeals to politicians to support the Southern Slavic cause, and their related publishing activities. The *Bulletin Yougoslave*, published in Paris, and dated October 15, 1915, reports of the "Hrvatska Narodna Zajednica" (Croatian People's Community), an association from Cleveland, Ohio, with membership claims of 35,000, as declaring that it wished to participate in the "propaganda in favor of the idea of Yugoslav emancipation from the Austrian yoke."³² The same article describes other activities of the Croats and Serbs in the area, of the cooperation of their various organizations who "represent in all more than 150,000 organized Yugoslavs in the United States."

The *Southern Slav Bulletin* of London reports in October of 1916 of the plans to organize the "Second Monster Congress of Yugoslavs in America" noting that the activities of the various Yugoslav organizations in the United States have already "succeeded in arousing for our cause the sympathies and the support of the American public opinion and of many influential Anglo-American papers."³³ The meeting was held on November 29th, and the reports of the correspondence between the Yugoslav Congress and the Serbian Prince Regent Alexander, Serbian Prime Minister Pašić and the delegation sent by the London based

³¹ SSEES, SEW 17/7/3.

³² *Bulletin Yougoslave*, Nr. 2, October 15, 1915, Paris.

³³ *The Southern Slav Bulletin*, Nr. 22, October 16, 1916, London.

Yugoslav Committee shows a high level of organization and of cooperation between all the various Croat and Serbian organizations from the United States and from South America.³⁴

The South American Croat organizations from Chile showed some ingenuity in latching their propaganda goals to an event that had nothing in common with Croatia, Yugoslavia nor, indeed, the ongoing World War. To wit, the famed British Polar explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton had run into some trouble in the Strait of Magellan and had to be rescued. The southern Chilean city of Punta Arenas, which at the time had the largest Croatian community outside of Croatia, lay within the sight of the Strait and of the Tierra del Fuego. The Croats held a banquet in the honor of the rescued explorer, and in the press release regarding the rescue and the banquet they failed not to put in a good word for the Yugoslav cause: "...expressing their joy over the fortunate rescue of the members of the Expedition and the devotion of our colony to people of Great Britain, that illustrious friend and champion of the rights of all Yugoslavs."³⁵

Not all printed propaganda attracted the attention of those to whom it was addressed to. Consider the article that appeared in *L'Echo de l'Adriatique*, which boldly addressed the U.S. President Wilson. A French language weekly published in Rijeka, Croatia struggled with the fine points of the English language: "Sir, That you may know the people of Jugoslavia... observe your arrival as the coming of their liberator. As such they greet you. Their fondest hope is to justity to the world, history and to you, the great trust you have placed in them."³⁶ Whether President Wilson was hard pressed to understand the meaning of this obviously friendly article we shall never know, though we may safely speculate that this particular

³⁴ *The Southern Slav Bulletin*, Nr. 26, December 16, 1916, London.

³⁵ *The Southern Slav Bulletin*, Nr. 25, December 1, 1916, London.

³⁶ *L'Echo de l'Adriatique*, Nr. 2, December 14, 1918, Rijeka.

publication never came to his attention. Indeed, it was addressed more to the regular readership of the paper than it was to the American President. However, Wilson did on occasion read and respond to the petitions sent to him by the Yugoslavs. His reply to the letter of assurance and loyalty by the Yugoslavs of the United States that was sent by his press secretary J.P. Tunulty read: "The President greatly appreciates the noble words of your dispatch. Likewise, he expresses his warm gratitude for your friendly and agreeable assurances which have been a source of encouragement."³⁷ Obviously a run-of-the-mill response to a formal brief that did not require any specific response, this correspondence nonetheless achieved a brief recognition by the President or his office and a significant public relationship success for the struggling Yugoslav cause.

A different Southern Slav organization addressed itself to the President Wilson. In a formal Resolution issued by the Southern Slav Clergy of America, who held their meeting in Chicago in August 1915, the assembled clergymen of two Christian denominations, Orthodox and Catholic, impressed upon the President, that "the Southern Slavs were a nation of the blood ... not one foot of their land should stay abroad" of their new state, that "the confessional differences which have been the main hindrance to national unity are not real hindrance for aim of a nation in a state, etc."³⁸ The Resolution was signed by 28 clergymen present at the meeting, and by the president of the assembly Rev. Maxim Relich.

In an editorial published in January 16, 1917 edition of *The Southern Slav Bulletin* R. Gjorgjevic takes a brief look at the Yugoslav press. He asserts that "the entire respectable Yugoslav Press is an enthusiastic preacher of Yugoslav unity."³⁹ Out of not less than eighty Southern Slavic newspapers 35 were published in the

³⁷ *Bulletin Yougoslave*, Nr. 1, October 1, 1915, Paris.

³⁸ SSEES, SEW 5/1/10.

³⁹ *The Southern Slav Bulletin*, Nr. 27, January 16, 1917, London.

towns that eventually became the integral part of Yugoslavia. An amazingly high number of publications was printed in Trst and Gorica regions, totaling in 17 various weeklies and monthlies. Out of the rest of the 28 newspapers that were published abroad 12 were based in the United States, 9 in various west European capitals, 3 in South America, one in New Zealand, and one each in the unexpected Bucharest, Sofia and Odessa.

The versatile activities of the Southern Slav emigration show that upon leaving the old country the émigrés did not burn their bridges behind them. To the contrary, many of them returned back home after making their fortunes. Others, who remained in the new world, maintained the traditions and the language of the land of their ancestors, as well as keen interest in the political developments affecting it. The organizations formed by the émigrés provided the support to the most active of the Southern Slav political organizations, the Yugoslav Committee, and participated in the dissemination of the propaganda whose aim was the furtherance of the Southern Slav cause.

The multiplicity of organizations and publications resulting from such activities attests to the level of commitment maintained by the Southern Slav emigration, and its full impact, particularly of the Southern Slav associations and individuals basing out of the United States, is yet to be researched and established.

THE KINGDOM OF SERBIA

The Kingdom of Serbia gained independence in 1882. It used various military campaigns to slowly expand its territory, chiefly at the cost of the retreating Ottoman Empire. The greatest territorial gains were achieved following the Second Balkan War of 1913. However, in the same juncture it became obvious that Serbia would not gain the port of Saloniki, nor the access to the Aegean Sea, as it had hoped.

To the north and west, large Serbian populations were to be found in the Habsburg lands. The Habsburg Serbs were organized in political parties and very active in resisting the homogenizing policies of Budapest and Vienna. At this point the Kingdom of Serbia focused on including its kith and kin from the Habsburg Empire under one state and under one Serbian monarch.

Most of the lands inhabited by the Serbs and falling outside of the Kingdom of Serbia were also inhabited by the Croats. Slovenian lands on the eastern approaches to the Alps were inhabited almost exclusively by the Slovenians. To the extent that they all wanted to form a unified state for Southern Slavs, the goals of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians were similar. However, while Croats and Slovenians hoped for a federal state in which the equality of the constituent states would be on the level, the Serbian government simply desired to extend its already existent centralized state to include the Slavic lands further to the west, although this ambition was not always proclaimed in such simple terms.

Already having gained the international diplomatic recognition at the Congress of Berlin, the Kingdom of Serbia now actively lobbied and worked on awaking the public opinion of the Western countries to the need for the existence of a large Slavic state on the Balkan peninsula.

Given its goal of the extension of the authority of the already existing Serbian state to its western neighbors, the relationship of the Serbian government with the Yugoslav Committee was not very good. The Serbian government did not wish to give recognition to the Yugoslav Committee as the representative of the Southern Slavs in the Habsburg Empire. Had it accorded the recognition to the Yugoslav Committee, the Serbian government would have to deal with it as with an equal, which is not what the preferred arrangement.

The gradual abandonment of the Serbian original plans was taking place during the war. Whereas at the beginning of the war the Yugoslav idea was looked at with suspicion and was rejected, with time it came to be more accepted in the Serbian circles. At the same time, even those who refused to accept the Yugoslav and to forsake their plans for Greater Serbia saw with time that paying a lip service to the Yugoslav concept would be a worthwhile political maneuver.

The most important single person in the Serbian politics at the time was Nikola Pašić. A veteran politician and the leader of People's Radical Party, Pašić served as the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Serbia for nearly 20 years. Because of his tenacity in holding onto the reigns, his cabinets were often troubled by internal strife. One of the occasions when such tensions were evident related to Pašić's refusal to name a Foreign Minister and insistence that he should be the one to carry out the diplomatic duties, much to the chagrin of the Opposition, who demanded that one of their own ranks should fill the post. -The coalition government having been formed early on in 1914 and lasting through to June 1917.

As a skillful politician, Pašić was able to use his state visits to Britain enhance his own standing at home. Mindful of the precarious political balance in

Serbia, British analysts noted in a secret document issued prior to Pašić next visit that “it is therefore important that there should be no official action taken towards him such as might enable him to repeat the same tactics.”⁴⁰ However, Pašić many years in office enabled him to boldly claim – with some plausibility, it has to be added – that his government and his person were the only sure and steady ally of the Entente.

On a different level, that of the possible enlarged Serbia or the creation of the new Southern Slav state, Pašić was also active in propagating himself as the safe choice for the Allies to put their trust in. The British analysts wrote in the same document that “Allegations are being put about from Serbian governmental circles to the effect that the recent Slav Congress at Leibach was an Austrophil and Trialist manoeuvre.” This piece of propaganda was designed to cause a rift between the Yugoslav Committee and the Allied powers, who would ostensibly then turn to the government of the Kingdom of Serbia to lead the new state. However, the analysts compiling the strictly confidential document commented that “in reality it [the Slav Congress] was perhaps the most striking of all the demonstrations in favour of Yugoslav unity and independence which had hitherto taken place inside Austria.”⁴¹

Whereas Pašić had already entered into negotiations with the Yugoslav Committee at this time, the leaking of the disinformation such as the above shows the reluctance which accompanied any cooperation with the Committee. However, in spite of his hostility towards the policy for the creation of a heterogeneous state for the Southern Slavs, Pašić was realistic enough to recognize when to bend with the wind and to adapt his policy, even if only in name.

⁴⁰ *The Policy of Mr Pashitch and the Yugoslav Problem*, SSEES, SEW 4/2/3.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Not so with some of the more nationalist elements in Serbia. A Special Memorandum on Serbian Internal Politics⁴² was compiled in June 1917. It provided a two decades worth of review of political movements and military cliché in Serbia. In it Seton-Watson pointed out the policy of those opposed to the Yugoslav union with the following passage:

My informant summed up the situation as the struggle of a narrow military caste to maintain an absolute control of the internal situation – the leaders of that caste realizing that their aims could only be realized in a small Serbia, and not in a big Southern Slav State where new democratic and healthier influences would swamp them.

The attitude of some of the military leadership summed above was of course reflected elsewhere in Serbian politics, notably among those who thought that the “smaller Greater Serbia,” including only those Croatian lands in which there was some Serb population, would be preferable to the creation of “bigger Greater Serbia,” which would also include purely Croat and Slovenian lands, and which therefore had less reasons to be called “Serbia.”

This concept was abandoned after the events in the October 1917, as the result of which Russia withdrew from the international scene and was no longer the protector under whose wings Serbia hoped to find shelter. –The Russian Orthodoxy having been the chief proponent of the purely Orthodox “smaller Greater Serbia” policy.

Meanwhile, Pašić continued courting the Yugoslav Committee and the ideas espoused by it. Consider the official telegram sent to the Yugoslav Committee by Pašić on the occasion of his visit to London in June of 1916.

Dr Biankini, Chicago.

⁴² SSEES, SEW 4/1/3.

Availing myself of the opportunity of my stay here in the capital of the mighty and to us so friendly British nation, I send you, as the president of the Yugoslav Committee in America, and through you to all Serbians, Croats and Slovenes in free America, my hearty greetings.⁴³

In this telegram Pašić recognized Biankini, a Dubrovnik Croat and a member of the Yugoslav Committee in the United States, as the representative of *all Serbians, Croats and Slovenes* in free America! This appears to be a radical departure from the earlier policy of wishing to minimize the influence accorded to the Yugoslav Committee. Of course, the publication of one such endorsement in *The Southern Slav Bulletin*, which is read by all the Yugoslav enthusiasts, is not the same as endorsing the Yugoslav Committee with the western governments. And yet, Pašić is showing signs of moderating his views. At the same time, his words may be considered to be merely the appeasement of the competition in the race for the eventual leadership in the new state.

A similar rhetoric was used by the Prince Regent Alexander in his address to the Yugoslav Congress in Pittsburgh, held in November 1915. In a telegram to the assembled Prince Alexander stated that he

Fervently wish[ed] that the joyful and sincere cry of our soldiers may find a profound echo with you over yonder; I wish that beneath that standard all our brothers, all Croats, all the Slovenes, and all the Serbs from all America may be gathered together.⁴⁴

It would be unfair to say that such declarations were all meant to mislead those they were addressed to. A dose of sincerity is definitely present in them, and it is only with the hindsight and with the knowledge of the policies introduced in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and later in the post-1929 Yugoslavia, that we may doubt their sincerity.

⁴³ *The Southern Slav Bulletin*, Nos. 13 & 14, June 6, 1916, London.

⁴⁴ *The Southern Slav Bulletin*, No. 26, December 16, 1916, London.

Be that as it may, a degree of cooperation in various joint projects existed between the Yugoslav Committee and the government of the Kingdom of Serbia. One such event, for example, was the exhibition of the Croat sculptor Ivan Meštrović held in London in 1915. While both the Yugoslav Committee and the government of Serbia contributed to the event and used the publicity wave to further broadcast the idea of the Southern Slav state, the main driving force behind the event and the publicity were the British enthusiasts of the Yugoslav idea.

However, even this particular event did not go without some friction. The Serbian Minister in London, Mateja Bošković, was suspicious of all things Yugoslav and insisted that Meštrović should be introduced as a Serb or else he, Bošković, would not attend the opening of the exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Meštrović, who had no problem putting his Croat identity under the umbrella of the wider Yugoslav identity, refused to be categorized as a Serb. The result was that the Serbian Ambassador in Paris was hastily summoned to take place of Minister Bošković at the grand opening.

Bošković's narrowly Serbian views and suspicions of even the Orthodox Serbs coming from the Habsburg Monarchy resulted in his obstructions to the meeting that the Yugoslav Committee was to have with the British Foreign Minister Grey. After some delays the Yugoslav delegation was received by the Foreign Office, not by the Minister himself, but by his deputy, Lord Crewe.

An entirely different story may be told as regards another Serbian diplomat, Ljubomir Mihajlović, the Serbian Ambassador to the United States. Upon his recall from Washington, a speech was held by Don Niko Gršković, the director of the Yugoslav Office and the president of the Croatian Union. In it this Catholic priest called the Serbian minister a person with "honorable name, golden honesty and

enlightened mind.”⁴⁵ The oratory flourish notwithstanding, the friendly and cordial relationship between the two men is obvious.

While Bošković of London was not held in high regard by neither the members of Yugoslav Committee nor by Seton-Watson⁴⁶, Mihajlović of Washington received abundant praise. This in doubt had something to do with the individuals themselves, but also reflected the changing attitudes of the Serbian government and its *corps diplomatique*.

⁴⁵ *Jugoslovenski Svijet*, August 29, 1918, Washington.

⁴⁶ In a letter to Ronald M. Burrows of September 8, 1915, Seton-Watson called Bošković “incapable of handling anything.” SSEES, SEW 17/3/2.

ROBERT WILLIAM SETON-WATSON

Any attempt to describe the evolution of the British foreign policy and the public sentiment towards the Southern Slavs must of necessity be a complex undertaking involving many individuals and events. However, the life and work of Robert William Seton-Watson offers a blueprint, a shortcut perhaps, which, if followed, leads the researcher to meet all the significant Serb and Croat political leaders, as well as many British men of influence who had a part in this process. In the words of Arthur J. May, Seton-Watson was “no doubt the most knowledgeable British private citizen on the affairs of south-central Europe just prior to World War I.”⁴⁷ It may be added that he was also the most involved and the most active. His talents and knowledge were eventually put to use by the government of the United Kingdom.

Robert William Seton-Watson was born in August 1879. Perhaps it was his Scottish identity, inherited from both of his parents, that inclined him to sympathy with small nations in their struggle for independence.⁴⁸ However, he was also a firm believer in the Union of 1707, and held the view that Britain was a good example of a state in which a multiplicity of nations could live peaceably, sharing a common allegiance and maintaining their distinctive national cultures and heritage. In fact, his views and commentary on the situation in the Habsburg Empire was based on the comparison of that state to the United Kingdom. The solutions he promoted for smaller nations of Austria-Hungary also had their basis in the British system of

⁴⁷ Arthur J. May, “Seton-Watson and the Treaty of London.” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 29, No. 1. (Mar., 1957), p. 42.

⁴⁸ Indeed, the similarities between Scotland and Croatia must have been discussed at length between Seton-Watson and Frano Supilo, for example. Upon Supilo's visit to Edinburgh in January of 1917, he enthusiastically wrote to Seton-Watson and spoke of “the Capital of your great north ... Croatia and ... your Agram [Zagreb].” The original letter is kept among Seton-Watson Papers collection at the Archives of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL, under: SSEES, SEW 17/27/9.

governance. However, the overall goal of his undertaking was the retention of the balance of power, as was in the British interests.

Having inherited his late father's fortune, Seton-Watson was free to pursue his interest in European history and politics without the constraint of having to work to earn the living. By the time he came into his fortune, in 1903, he had already mastered French, German and Italian, and had traveled extensively throughout Europe and Turkey. He arrived in Vienna in 1905 and in the same year he developed an interest in the history and politics of the Habsburg Empire, and by extension that of Central and South East Europe.

The knowledge of the 1848-49 Hungarian struggle for the independence gave Seton-Watson an inclination to be favorably disposed towards the Hungarians, since Kossuth and the Hungarian revolution had obtained a favorable press in Britain at the time of the revolution, and the positive echoes were still reverberating in the early twentieth century England. Kossuth's harsh and unbending policy towards the minorities of Hungary had not been emphasized, all the focus having been placed onto the romanticized struggle for freedom that eventually got quenched by the involvement of the Russian army. However, nearly 60 years later, the strict approach that Kossuth had adopted was still favored by the Hungarian political elite. Seton-Watson arrived to Budapest in May of 1906 and immediately realized that the Hungarian journalists, politicians and intellectuals with whom he met completely ignored and avoided the question of minority peoples who lived on the territory of Hungary, and treated any inquiry on the subject with disdain and contempt.

In the course of his travels in the following two years Seton-Watson visited Transylvania, Vojvodina, Croatia and the Upper Hungary (Slovakia) – all parts of

the old Kingdom of Hungary. During this time he experienced about-face as regards his attitude to the Hungarian government's policy towards the minority population. The single most dramatic instance that lead him to such a drastic change of the opinion regarding the Magyars was the event he witnessed in the Upper Hungary. The local elections were stifled by the Hungarian authorities, who had taken all the possible measures to ensure that the Slovak representatives would not get voted in. When the Slovaks carried a victory – partly because of Seton-Watson's request to remove the cordon which separated them and their supporters from the voting urns – the Hungarian authorities had the gendarmes fire at the victorious Slovaks as they were leaving. The Slovak representatives and several of their supporters were killed. Just as abruptly, any hesitation that Seton-Watson had in abandoning his predilection towards the Hungarians vanished.

It is worth noting at this point that, as became evident from the census of 1910, ethnic Magyars accounted for a mere 49% of the general population, and that over three-quarters of Hungary's non-Magyar population did not speak or understand Hungarian.⁴⁹ Furthermore, 49% was the number shown in the official consensus, but was in fact tweaked and inflated to include the "Slovak speaking Hungarians" of Upper Hungary, while the real proportion of Hungarians in the whole of the Kingdom of Hungary was closer to 43-45%. The Hungarian government had sought from the 1880's to rectify this situation by imposing a harsh regime of Magyarization, which consisted of the banning of the use of minority languages in schools, the name-changing campaigns, etc.

Hand in hand with Magyarization went the resistance to the reform in the electoral laws that Vienna wanted to introduce. In the Austrian part of the Habsburg

⁴⁹ T. D. Kramer, *From Emancipation to Catastrophe: The Rise and Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry*, University Press of America, 2000. p. 21.

Empire the nearly universal suffrage was introduced with a dose of enthusiasm. In the Hungarian half, however, the political elite did not wish to empower unlanded men from its own territory, since the majority of them belonged to various minorities. Budapest feared that giving them the voting rights would lead to their total loss of the control of the Parliament, since the minorities were very likely to vote for their own representatives. All this could eventually lead to demands for more freedom and autonomy by the minorities, which could finally result in the dissolution of the Hungarian state.

Upon his return to Vienna from Upper Hungary Seton-Watson wrote his first full length study entitled *Racial Problems in Hungary*. The book focused on describing the situation in which Slovaks found themselves and the oppression they experienced at the hands of Magyars, and some references were made to the fate of Romanians and Serbs.

Championing the Southern Slav Cause

The South Slav question was first taken up by Seton-Watson in February 1908. It was during this time that he first made the acquaintance of Frano Supilo, whom he met at the house of Henry Wickham Steed, the Vienna correspondent and future editor of *The Times*. Supilo was at that time one of the political leaders of the Croatian-Serbian Coalition who held the absolute majority at the *Sabor* in Zagreb. During his visit to Zagreb in May 1908 Seton-Watson met other Croatian politicians as well, the most prominent among whom were Stjepan Radić, leader of the Peasant Party; Ivan Lorković, a member of the Progressive Party; and Dr. Medaković, chairman of the Serbian Independent Party, which also belonged to the

Coalition. After this Seton-Watson visited Belgrade, but was unable to meet any of the members of the Serbian political elite.

The timing of the visit in 1908 was very important, because the Southern Slav lands were in an upheaval. The increased frequency of the calls for the reform of the dual Austro-Hungarian state into a tri-part state, in which the third entity with the equal rights would be comprised of the Slav subjects to the Habsburg crown, was one of the brewing political questions. As appealing as this idea was, not everyone in Croatia thought it a workable solution, since the Czech lands were far removed from the Southern Slav lands, which would impede effectiveness. Furthermore, Croatia and Slavonia had a working Parliamentary system, although it was limited by Budapest in its authority. The immediate goal, some Croats proposed, was the unification with Dalmatia, which at that time was still under the Vienna governance. Furthermore, the annexation of Bosnia was under way, and the prospect of yet another Southern Slav land becoming a part of Austria-Hungary and yet remaining separate from its sister Slav lands through administrative sidestepping⁵⁰ was bewildering to the Croatian public.

Another momentous change was happening in the Croatian political scene, where the Croat and Serb politicians from the Croat lands were starting to unite in order to be able to fight Vienna and its policies. The Rijeka Resolution was drawn in 1905 by Frano Supilo, who hoped that the Croat-Serb alliance would be joined by the anti-Habsburg Hungarian parties. The Rijeka Resolution was signed by all Croat parties on October 4, 1905. Following in its steps was the Zadar Resolution, composed by Svetozar Pribičević, the leader of the biggest Serb political party in Dalmatia, and signed by all Serb parties from Croatian lands. The Zadar Resolution

⁵⁰ Bosnia and Herzegovina were to be administered jointly by Budapest and Vienna through the Ministry of Finance, which, as a joint ministry, did not answer directly to either of the governments.

called for the cooperation with all the signatories of the Rijeka Resolution in their struggle against Vienna and Budapest. The Croat-Serb Coalition that was the result of these two Resolutions dominated Croatian political scene.

By this time Seton-Watson had already formed the view that the true oppressor of the nations of the Habsburg Monarch was Budapest rather than Vienna. The reason for this view may well have laid in his own witnessing of the Hungarian brutality in the Upper Hungary and in the manifest Magyarization favored by Budapest. However, while Vienna neither pursued the Germanization nor tried to restrict the voting rights of its subjects in Dalmatia, it certainly was an accomplice in maintaining the administrative division between the Southern Slavs, thus continuing the millennia-long imperial tradition of *divide et impera*, and, most cunningly, allowing Budapest to take the brunt of the blame for it.

While Seton-Watson sympathized with the Serb-Croat solidarity, as espoused by the Rijeka and Zadar Resolutions, he was of the opinion that the Croat and Serb leaders were wrong in expecting true cooperation from the Hungarian 48 and Independence Party. He was right in this assessment, for as soon as the Independence Party gained majority in the Budapest Parliament it abandoned the principles of national equality it had thereto advocated and reverted back to the policies of oppression that its predecessors had applied.

Seton-Watson's views, not only of the daily political maneuvering of the Hungarian Independence party, but of Hungarian policy overall, were succinctly expressed in the following excerpt published in *The Morning Post*:

For a whole generation Magyar control of Croatia had rested on the mutual bickerings of Croat and Serb; and it was with alarm and astonishment that the Magyars discovered during the crisis of 1907 that the coalition between the two races was no mere political manoeuvre, but a new stage in South Slav development, supported by whatever culture and idealism the younger generation possessed. The Hungarian

Government, clearly realizing that the reconciliation of Serb and Croat must in the end prove fatal to the Magyar hegemony, determined to restore discord at all costs.⁵¹

The combined effect of the wires such as the above and the publications such as *Racial Problems in Hungary* and later *Absolutism in Croatia* gained Seton-Watson – also known by his pen name of Scotus Viator – a degree of notoriety in the Hungarian press. This is evidenced by the following excerpt from the article published in Hungarian daily *Független Magyarország*.

Scotus Viator does not need an introduction to Hungarian readers. The most that needs to be said about him is that he has again raised his head: he is back again here in Hungary and, naturally, he is again shamelessly lying and slandering, to the detriment of Hungary and of Hungarian nation.⁵²

In addition to the public denunciations, the Hungarian authorities also threatened Seton-Watson with prosecution. In *The Morning Post* of November 26, 1909, in a footnote after Seton-Watson's article entitled *Repression in Croatia: The Southern Slavs as a European Factor*, the following was published:

Mr. Seton-Watson's letter may be regarded as of especial interest at a moment when a telegram from Agram to the *Neue Freie Presse*, of Vienna, announces that the Public Prosecutor in Croatia is contemplating proceedings against him for the publication of a pamphlet, "*Absolutismus in Kroatien*," which appeared in Vienna last summer.⁵³

Activities such as these identified Seton-Watson as the champion of the oppressed peoples of Austria-Hungary. This was not met with enthusiasm by the Croatian or other authorities from Austria-Hungary, as already seen above. Yet, the prosecution never materialized. However, the notoriety that his name already enjoyed in the

⁵¹ *The Morning Post*, June 17, 1909.

⁵² *Független Magyarország*, June 12, 1910. The original text: „Scotus Viatort nem szükséges bemutatni a magyar olvasóközönségnek. Legfeljebb azt lehet róla újságotlani, hogy ez az ember megint felütötte a fejét: megint itt jár Magyarországon és persze hogy megint galádul hazudik és rágalmaz, Magyarország, a magyar nemzet rovására.”

⁵³ *The Morning Post*, November 26, 1909.

Austria-Hungary by 1912 was not to be underestimated. It was creatively used by some Croats during the elections of December 1911: The Opposition newspaper announced that none other than Scotus Viator would be present at the elections in the town of Ogulin in northern Croatia. Vote rigging and the police interventions during the elections were the usual fare of the day in Croatia during that time, and Scotus Viator's presumed reason for a visit was to report to the British media any abuses in the process. The event was reported in the Viennese newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung* as follows:

In actual fact there did appear in Ogulin ... on the day of the election in a puffing motor-car a gentleman whom the people of Ogulin were at once convinced could only be Scotus Viator. For firstly, he came in a car, secondly he spoke no Croat – as a matter of fact he did not speak at all – and thirdly he looked genuinely English ... Scotus Viator came, saw and kept silence, and the people of Ogulin also saw and respectfully kept silence, for as no one in Ogulin understands English no one ventured to address the distinguished foreigner. Under Scotus Viator's control the fighting election in Ogulin passed off in the best order, and neither one party nor the other had the courage to swindle under the eyes of the English-looking gentleman. And now comes the point. The Ogulin Scotus Viator was not Scotus Viator at all, but a bogey, the garage proprietor Leitgeb from Agram, who understands no English and yet played the part of the full-blooded Englishman with such effect.⁵⁴

The background of the story was that on the day before the elections the orders came from Zagreb that the Opposition representative Dr. Nikolić should under no circumstances be allowed to win. He was running against the Ban of Croatia, Dr. Tomašić, who was up for the elections in the same district. The police promptly put Dr. Nikolić under surveillance and made it nigh impossible for him to communicate with his constituents. And yet Nikolić won, which was all the more significant since, as Seton-Watson points out, he defeated the Ban himself.⁵⁵ It is obvious that Seton-Watson wished to take no credit for the events that took place in Ogulin on that

⁵⁴ *Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 13, 1912.

⁵⁵ R. W. Seton-Watson, *Absolutism in Croatia*, London: 1912. p. 36.

eventful election day in December 1911. It is just as obvious that he deserves some credit for it, for it was the Seton-Watson's renom   that was so deftly used by Leitgeb  l and his accomplices.

In spite of the criticism that Seton-Watson continuously laid at the Vienna and Budapest governments' doors for their mishandling of the minority population and heavy-handedness in governance, at this time he believed that the solution for the Southern Slavs was to be found within the Habsburg Monarchy. It was therefore the reform of the existing structure that he propagated. In his letter to Ivo Lupis-Vuki   he made this abundantly clear by stating that "Croato-Servian unity ... can be only realized within the bounds of the Habsburg Monarchy, and that its realization outside those boundaries would be desirable neither in the interest of the Croats and Serbs, nor in those of Austria and of Europe as a whole."⁵⁶ He went on to list three main reasons why the Southern Slav unity outside of the Habsburg Monarchy would not be easily attainable or desirable. First, that such a unity could only be achieved through a general European war. Second, that the areas which were at that time in the Austria-Hungary would in effect take a step backwards, both politically and culturally. Finally, the economic situation of such an independent state would not be on the level sufficient to maintain true independence. Instead, Seton-Watson suggested that all possible means should be used in order to make trialism a reality.

Who was Who

The policy of Budapest, and of Vienna, was to exploit the differences between the Croats and the Serbs living in the Habsburg Empire and to use their opposition to one another in order to weaken them. However, with the political successes which

⁵⁶ SSEES, SEW 15/5/2.

followed the Rijeka and Zadar Resolutions the Southern Slavs of the Habsburg Empire had learned that cooperation was their best weapon against the imperial absolutism they were experiencing. This was best exemplified by the reception Seton-Watson received upon his visit to Dubrovnik in February of 1912. Somewhat embarrassed Seton-Watson wrote of the occasion:

This is the first time in history that all the parties of Ragusa have come together to a banquet organized by men whom they had cut in the street a week before. Most wonderful of all, the three bands – Croats, Serbs and members of the Party of Pure Right – massed together at the end and played first the Croat, then the Serb hymn – a little as if an Orange band in Belfast were to play Nationalist airs, for the Party of Right's programme does not recognize the existence of the Serbs.⁵⁷

The program of the concert Seton-Watson wrote about is located among his papers.⁵⁸ There indeed were three bands who played, but they were all Croatian bands. Out of nine tunes performed two indeed were Serbian, though neither of them was the Serb hymn, or the anthem. –Unless, of course, he was referring to *Hej Slovani*, the Slav hymn, which does not appear on the program but was performed upon their departure from Dubrovnik's port of Gravosa. The reconciliation between the Serb and Croat political was indeed underway in Croatia for some time by the Seton-Watson arrived to Dubrovnik, but it was perhaps the excitement and the wish to see the cooperation and reconciliation go a step further that made him recount these events with a dose of enthusiasm and overstatement.⁵⁹ In any event, there is no record of Croats and Serbs cutting each

⁵⁷ SSEES, SEW 17/25/8.

⁵⁸ SSEES, SEW 5/1/4.

⁵⁹ The three bands that played were "Hrvatska Opća Glazba – Croatian General Band," Dubrovačka Gradska Muzika – Dubrovnik City Band" and "Gundulićeva Glazba – Gundulić's Band," none of which at any time could had been described as Serbian in character. However, this does not deny the Serb presence in Dubrovnik, for, incidentally, the program pamphlet itself was printed in "Srpska Dubrovačka Štamparija – The Serbian Printshop of Dubrovnik."

other down in the streets in Dubrovnik at any time prior to Seton-Watson's visit, and the expression he used could only be taken as a metaphor for political quarrels.

Or perhaps Seton-Watson was not always clear as to who was who? His sympathy for the Southern Slavs and his wholehearted engagement in the promotion of their causes did not automatically mean that he had a clear picture. Indeed, having traveled a great deal in the Habsburg empire, and having published numerous books on the region, one would expect Seton-Watson to have had a well defined opinion as to who were the Serbs and who were the Croats. In particular, to have had a formed idea of whether they are a single people or two different, albeit closely related, peoples. But this was not quite as simple a matter. Consider his musings on the Serb and Croatian languages:

Serb and Croat, it must be remembered, are two names for one and the same language, the sole difference being that the former is written in a reformed Cyrilline alphabet, the latter in Latin characters.⁶⁰

This excerpt perhaps indicates that by the virtue of the language being one and the same the peoples should also be considered the same. The following quote from the same publication casts doubt whether Seton-Watson really thought that.

So far I have spoken mainly of the Serbs. But I want to emphasize the fact that Serbia is only a fragment of a far bigger question, the Southern Slav Question, which can only be treated and understood as a whole, and which this war has got to solve as a whole, unless we are to have fresh wars in Europe. Serbia is not merely fighting for her independence and existence, but also for the liberation of her kinsmen, the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes of Austria-Hungary, and for the realization of National Unity.⁶¹

Finally, he spoke of the distinction between the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The distinction, he was happy to report, that was rapidly fading:

⁶⁰ R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Spirit of the Serb*, London: 1916.

⁶¹ Ibid.

What is most remarkable of all, the old dividing-line of religion between Orthodox Serb and Catholic Croat has been well-nigh effaced ... I may quote my own last meeting with Southern Slavs on Austrian soil, barely a fortnight before the fatal crime of Sarajevo. My three friends were a Slovene Catholic priest, an Orthodox Serb from Bosnia, and a Croat Catholic student from Agram [Zagreb]; all three were equally emphatic in their assertion that the old distinctions between Croat, Serb, and Slovene, between Catholic, Orthodox, and Moslem, were part of an evil past, and that in future all would be Southern Slavs. This incident is in no way remarkable, but it is thoroughly typical.⁶²

These excerpts may serve as an indication that Seton-Watson did not have a clearly defined idea of who the southern Slavs were; whether they were one people divided merely by religion and current geopolitical situation, or smaller related nations, joined by “the unity of race.”⁶³ This last element, the unity of race, is perhaps the only one that all the constituents of the debate would have agreed on, providing that the word race in this case indicated one’s belonging to the wider Slavic stock.

As far as the language was concerned, the Serbs claimed that if the Štokavian [shtokavian] variant of the Croatian language was spoken by a given Croatian region, then its residents were really Serbs, since the Serbian language used the Štokavian exclusively. Some Croats retorted that since the Serbs spoke Štokavian then they must be really Croats. As regards the differences within the religion, this was overcome simply by the inclusivists: the Croats called the Serbs the “Orthodox Croats” and the Serbs called the Croats the “Catholic Serbs.”

The origins of the standardization of the Serb and Croat languages provide some explanation to the above question. The Serbian linguist Vuk Stefanović Karadžić standardized the Serbian language in the second decade of the 19th century. He used the Cyrillic script for the writing, and the German model of

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs, *Correspondence 1906-1941*, Vol I. London-Zagreb: 1976. p. 180.

adhering to the strict phonemic principles, creating several new Cyrillic characters for language-specific sounds. Karadžić spent considerable time traveling through the Serbian lands and gathering folk songs and traditions. He also traveled through Bosnia and Dalmatia and all the way west to Istria. The language of the people he encountered was very much one and the same, albeit with some regional differences. The religion was not the same, but Karadžić, as the linguist that he was, put the religion in the second place of importance, simply designating the Catholic population speaking the Slav language as the Catholic Serbs.

Most importantly, Karadžić chose the language spoken in southern Herzegovina as the basis for his standardization of the Serbian language. The all inclusive category of the Catholic Serbs included of course the city of Dubrovnik and the rich literary tradition it possessed. The geographical proximity of Dubrovnik to southern Herzegovina, expressed in tens of kilometers, and the linguistic similarities between Dubrovnik and Herzegovina dialects made Karadžić's standardized Serbian sound nearly identical to the Croatian language that had been used by Dubrovnik writers and poets for centuries, and established in a vast body of literary volumes.

Now, the question has to be asked whether Karadžić sought to claim the Dubrovnik literary tradition as Serbian tradition, in the same way he described the Catholic population of Croatia as Catholic Serbs. By choosing the southern Herzegovina as the epicenter of the Serbian language he was close enough to Dubrovnik to lay claim to its tradition, and yet not doing so outright, nor setting it as the center of the Serbian language, which would have been too bold a step even for him. As things worked out, the Serbs of Serbia refused Karadžić's proposed standard usage of the sound *j* [y] and opted for its omission from most linguistic

forms, as was the norm in what would soon become the Serbian mainland, the Serbian lands east of the river Drina. On the other hand, the Croat and Serb population of Croatia, Dalmatia and Bosnia alternated between the sounds *ije* [eeyeh], *je* [yeh] and *e* [eh].

Why did Karadžić chose the obviously non-Serbian variant as a standard for the Serbian language? Was he trying to tweak the language in order to prove his point about the Catholic Serbs, and provide the linguistic basis for Serbia's expansion westwards? His translation of the New Testament, for example, reads as the perfect, if somewhat archaic, Croatian, not Serbian. It cannot be missed that his inclusivist linguistic approach bears some resemblance to the latter expansionist policies of the Nikšić government of the Kingdom of Serbia.

The dichotomy surrounding the usage of *ije* [eeyeh], *je* [yeh] and *e* [eh] is not the only feature of the Croatian and Serbian that provides a major differentiation between the two. The already mentioned Štokavian [shtokavian] dialect – named so after the Slavic word *što* [shto], meaning *what* – was, and still is, used by both Serbs and Croats. The Croats, however, had, and still have, two other versions of the word: *kaj* [ka'y] and *ča* [cha], resulting in two additional dialects, Kakjavian [kaykavian] and Čakavian [chakavian]. When the Croat language was standardized in the 1830's the linguist and politician leading the drive, Ljudevit Gaj, sought to place the standardized Croatian as close as possible to the already standardized Serbian. Gaj had no problems identifying Dubrovnik as the cradle of the literary Croatian. This in itself was a logical linguistic choice, but Gaj in it saw the additional political advantage of the proximity to Serbian. To wit, Gaj had been one of the leaders of the Illyrian Movement of the 1830's for some years. The Movement sought the unification of all the Southern Slavs in one state, originally wishing to

unite only the Croatian lands under the Habsburg rule, but soon expanding its goals to include Bosnia and Serbian lands further east. The name itself, the *Illyrian* Movement, was chosen as a neutral name which would include both Croats and Serbs, without the need of either of them to renounce their already existing Croat or Serb identities. The similarities between the Illyrian Movement and its tentative approach and the Yugoslav idea of the early twentieth century are quite obvious.

By the virtue of being a late entrant into the already ongoing contest between the Croat and Serb identities, the Illyrian-Yugoslav identity did not stand much of a winning chance. The Serbs in particular did not identify with either Illyrian or Yugoslav idea, while the Croats showed some enthusiasm. The Croats were, after all, the originators of both drives, and were willing to abandon their own Croatian identity for the wider, inclusive and almost neutral Illyrian and Yugoslav identity.

The age old questions of who is who, who speaks which language and how important the religious affiliation in determining one's ethnic belonging are far from being resolved even today. For this reason Seton-Watson may be forgiven for having struggled with these definitions from time to time.

The Treaty of London

As we have seen, in spite of his view that the Austria-Hungary should continue to exist, Seton-Watson had fallen out of favor with its authorities for expressing his criticism of the state policy. Yet later, quite absurdly, he was accused of being an Austrophil. In a reply to the accusations laid against him by a Mr. Piccoli, one of the Italian irredentists bent on using any means to discredit political opponents, he wrote the following:

I plead guilty to having long remained an Austrophil, until the oppressive policy of Vienna, and, above all, Budapest, dispelled one illusion after

another and drove me to despair of Austria ever tackling in earnest her problems of nationality, least of all the Southern Slav question. So long as the late Archduke was alive I hoped against hope that he might introduce the necessary reforms. From the day of Sarajevo I knew that war was inevitable. If Mr. Piccoli blames me for not realizing sooner, I can only plead that I was a month ahead of most people.⁶⁴

It has to be remembered that the Austrophil accusation originated from the Italian side, enraged at Seton-Watson's attacks on the Treaty of London of April 26, 1915. In the same vein and for the same reasons, which is his defense of the cause of the Southern Slavs, Seton-Watson was during this period often accused of being anti-Italian. In a letter to a friend he wrote that "if it is anti-Italian to object to Italy occupying large tracts of Slav country ... then I plead guilty to the charge."⁶⁵

Upon first getting a wind that a secret agreement with Italy might be in the works, Seton-Watson wrote a memorandum⁶⁶ in which he gave a lucid analysis of the ramifications of such a deal. The agreement itself, the contents of which later became known to the public, would have given Italy a large portion of Dalmatian coast and virtually all of its islands. In return for the prize Italy would enter the war on the side of the Entente Powers.

Seton-Watson criticized this idea from two different angles. He first exposed that such a deal would not be in accordance with the declared abstract principles, since it had been conducted in secrecy and without consultation with a British ally, the government of Serbia. He also pointed out that various British statesmen, such as Herbert Asquith, Sir Edward Grey, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, had repeatedly declared that the principle of nationality is one of the foundations of British policy in the present conflict. Given that 96% of the population of Dalmatia was of the Slavic stock, Italy should lay no claim to it. Finally, Seton-Watson

⁶⁴ *The Pall Mall Gazette*, December 15, 1916.

⁶⁵ SSEES, SEW 17/17/11.

⁶⁶ *The Secret Agreement with Italy*, SSEES, SEW 5/1/6.

concluded, if Britain were indeed to let Italy occupy Dalmatia, it would lose all the moral grounds to give any kind of opposition to Germany's desire to conquer Belgium. As he put it rather eloquently on another occasion: "In a word, Italy has as much, or as little, right to Dalmatia as England has to Bordeaux."⁶⁷

The other approach in his analysis of the ramifications of the secret deal with Italy concerns the concrete that it carried. The implementation of the agreement would lead to the triumph of Austro-Hungarian policy since the Serbian government would be forced to enter into armistice with them, and the Croatian population would also side with Austria-Hungary in order to resist the Italian occupation. Additionally, if Serbia were robbed of the prospect of expanding westwards it would then most certainly look southwards to Salonika again, and by doing so bring into question the Serbo-Bulgarian agreement that was concluded under the auspices of the Entente, and in the process destabilize the eastern Balkans. Points relating to Romania and Russia were also sounded upon by Seton-Watson, as was the effect that such a deal would have on the American public opinion. Finally, the question whether Italy's contribution to the war effort was really that valuable was also raised.

Seton-Watson's principled and enthusiastic motivation for participating in the political disputes relating to the small Balkan nations was accompanied by his confirmed concert for the wider stability and security of Europe in the aftermath of the inevitable changes any peace settlement would entail:

Without Dalmatia there can be no Serbo-Croat Unity, no Yugoslavia; and if we give this up, we renounce the creation of a really effective barrier to German expansion in the Balkans and the *Drang nach Osten*.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs, *Correspondence 1906-1941*, Vol I. London-Zagreb: 1976. p. 181.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 219.

Sir Edward Grey's sent a matter of fact reply to Seton-Watson's impassioned letter. The Foreign Secretary stated that Serbia would be able to merge with all the adjoining Serb territories but also that it would be most unreasonable to deny Italy any reward in the event she cooperated with the Great Powers. Grey assured Seton-Watson that Serbia would have a "wide access ... to the Adriatic."⁶⁹ In this he echoed Seton-Watson's own words from a letter to the Foreign Office, in which he referred to Serbia's "desperate need of an economic outlet to the sea."⁷⁰ This particular line of thought was later expressed in U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points.⁷¹

The members of the Yugoslav Committee arrived in London on May 9, 1915. Seton-Watson held it against Trumbić for not arriving earlier, and for not having been able to visit Grey with him on May 4. Nonetheless, the Committee worked frantically and already by May 12 issued a declaration entitled "To the British Nation and Parliament."⁷² In it the principles of self-determination, democracy, self-defense and liberation were put forth as the basis for the Committee's activities and the goals of the struggle currently waged in the lands of Southern Slavs. Seton-Watson used all his influence to have the declaration published in as many newspapers as possible, and succeeded in having it printed in whole, in part or at least commented on in a total of 30 dailies and weeklies.⁷³

The vehemence with which Seton-Watson fought against the Treaty was not only based on his belief in self-determination for the Southern Slavs, nor yet upon the expediency of the creation of a Southern Slav state which would put a brake on

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 221.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 180.

⁷¹ In a speech delivered to the US Congress on January 8, 1918, President Wilson stated in Point 11 that Serbia should be "accorded free and secure access to the sea."

⁷² SSEES, SEW 5/1/4.

⁷³ R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs, *Correspondence 1906-1941*, Vol I. London-Zagreb: 1976. p. 223.

the Germany's eastward expansion, but also on the utter lack of consistency and common sense that some of the aspects of the Treaty and those participating in its drafting manifested. In his letter to William Miller, dated June 12, 1915, he criticized the Entente negotiators who were

...so ignorant that they thought they were saving Spalato in a thoroughly satisfactory way for Serbia, quite failing to recognize that Vranjica (Piccolo Venezia) is the future port of Spalato not the existing harbour, and that it would be in Italy's power under such circumstances to bottle and control the trade of Spalato at every turn.⁷⁴

The above comment expresses the frustration of the person who is well acquainted with the area and therefore understands the ramifications that arbitrarily drawn borders may cause to local trade and politics. More importantly, such borders would destabilize the whole region and bring into question the future peace in the Adriatic, the feasibility of the state of Southern Slavs and the stability of the already proverbially⁷⁵ volatile Balkans.

Promoting the Serbian Cause

After the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 and the failure of the subsequent protracted series of negotiations, ultimatums and mediation efforts, Austria-Hungary declared the war on the Kingdom of Serbia. Soon thereafter most of Europe was engulfed in conflict. After some initial victories of the Serbian army, the course of war changed and the Serbs found themselves retreating further and further south. Public opinion in Britain at this time backed Serbia, but the positive inclination was not being transferred into specific aid. As the situation on the front deteriorated, the Serbs had to retreat through the Albanian

⁷⁴ SSEES, SEW 17/17/11.

⁷⁵ The British military witticism coined at this period went: "Never march on Moscow, never get involved in the Balkans, and never trust your luggage to the Royal Navy."

mountains towards the Ionian Sea, where they found refuge on the Greek island of Corfu.

The Serbian Relief Fund was set up in September 1914, its mission being the provision of every kind of help to the Serbian Army. Seton-Watson was honorary secretary of the Fund and his wife May was one of the leading organizers, while its first chairman was Bertram Christian. The Serbian Relief Fund cooperated extensively with the Scottish Womens' Hospitals for Foreign Service, which worked on the ground and operated field hospitals in southern Serbia and later on Corfu. As the war progressed the Serbian Relief Fund expanded its operations to aid Serbian refugees and prisoners of war. Later it was also involved in the education in Britain of a number of Serbian refugee boys. A similar matter which was also attended to by Seton-Watson and his colleagues was the setting up of a Fund "in aid of necessitous Serbian students in Switzerland."⁷⁶

The Serbian Relief Fund's men on the ground helped in forwarding any type of relief to the stranded Serbian army. Božo Banac, a Dalmatian ship-owner and one of the Fund's representatives in southern Italy wrote to Seton-Watson informing him of the difficulties they had had in the shipping of the large consignment of flour that had been sent by the French Government for Serbia; two out of three vessels taking the shipment on to Durazzo in Albania were sunk by the Austrians who were based out of Cattaro.⁷⁷ Banac grew frustrated with the inefficiency of the operation, with the uselessness of the British legation and the general state of disorganization, in which "nobody cares a straw, they are all happy at the Grand Hotel waiting for Italy to regain '*il mare nostro*.'"⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Seton-Watson to Jovan Cvijić, *R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs, Correspondence 1906-1941*, Vol I. London-Zagreb: 1976. p. 259.

⁷⁷ Božo Banac's to Seton-Watson, November 26, 1915. Ibid. p. 252.

⁷⁸ Božo Banac's to Seton-Watson, December 9, 1915. Ibid. p. 255.

While not shying away from the practical questions and minutiae on the ground, Seton-Watson's most significant contributions to the Serbian cause were on a greater scale. Consider the letter he received on September 22, 1915 from Nikola Velimirović, Bishop of Ohrid and an active Serbian propagandist in Britain during the war:

The Serbian Flag Day was splendid... It was a real joy for me to look everybody in London, in the Centre of the World, with a Serbian flag on the breast. A hundred years ago nobody in this great town did know even that there is a nation with the name "Serbs". What a change! ... Thank you. Mr Seton Watson, thank you in my own name and in the name of our poor people in Serbia.⁷⁹

Indeed, organization of great scale events which garnered a lot of publicity seems to have been Seton-Watson's special talent. The Serbian Flag Day was one such event. The commemoration of the Battle of Kosovo of 1389 was another. Earlier that year Seton-Watson organized the exhibition of Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović, which was held at the Victoria and Albert Museum near London's Knightsbridge. Meštrović had produced a whole series of sculptures commemorating the Battle of Kosovo, and a smaller but related Prince Marko Cycle, and Seton-Watson was enthusiastic about "organizing the Meštrović exhibition, as a presentation of the Southern Slav idea in stone."⁸⁰ Immediately preceding the exhibition Seton-Watson ran an extremely effective press campaign, encouraging even a dose of personality cult around Meštrović, whose lowly peasant origins, early recognition and success in art and admirable engagement in the politics made him a romantic and larger than life character.

For years Seton-Watson had been trying to publish an independent magazine that would deal with the European political questions. In 1916 he was

⁷⁹ Nikolaj Velimirović's to Seton-Watson, Ibid. pp. 243, 244.

⁸⁰ Seton-Watson's to Mabel Grujić (the American wife of a Serbian diplomat), March 15, 1915. SSEES, SEW 17/9/1.

finally successful in launching the publication entitled *The New Europe*. The aim of this journal was to raise public awareness of European politics and the possibilities for post war reconstruction. Seton-Watson was editor of *The New Europe* and wrote many articles for it. Closely related to the journal was the New Europe Society. Its goals were parallel to that of the journal, and were thus expressed by one of its cofounders:

If the coming peace, however, is to afford an opportunity to the peoples of Europe to apply the remedy called "prevention", then it is obviously necessary to recognize and diagnose the ills from which the European community is suffering, to understand the desires and policies of other nations, and to know where injustice usurps the seat of justice. One of the aims of the New Europe Society is to spread such message.⁸¹

The dissemination of reliable information declared as its first goal was embarked upon with the hope that "in the future ... men will not be led to battle with slogans, catchphrases and cheap oratory, or driven into mortal strife by the word of an autocrat."⁸²

Most importantly, however, Seton-Watson continuously sent letters and memorandums to the Foreign Office and even to the Prime Minister himself. In a letter to David Lloyd George he urged that "Honour and interest alike ... demand that the British Government should take in hand without delay the work of succouring the Serbian Army and, as far as possible, the Serbian people."⁸³ In the same letter Seton-Watson and his cosignatories requested the Prime Minister to take the opportunity that presented itself in the Russian proposal for the revision of various Treaties to have their new versions adapted to the declared policy of the Alliance. The policy referred to was, of course, the principle of nationality or self-

⁸¹ SSEES, SEW 2/2/2.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Letter of the Serbian Society of Great Britain to David Lloyd George, June 25, 1917. *R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs, Correspondence 1906-1941*, Vol I. London-Zagreb: 1976. p. 299.

determination, declared by the Allies to be the guiding principle in any redrawing of the borders. Importantly, the reversal of the treaties, notably the one with Italy, is not characterized here as an anti-Italian move. To the contrary, the interests of Italy are also advocated in the letter, as her right to “recover from Austria-Hungary unredeemed regions inhabited by majorities of (her) own race.”⁸⁴

In what appears like a writing campaign, only four days later the Serbian Relief Fund sent a letter to Lord Robert Cecil, Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. The subject matter of this letter is much more on the practical level than the one addressed to the Prime Minister. The conditions in Serbia were first reviewed, followed by a recapitulation of previous attempts to offer assistance. The letter concludes with specific suggestions which, if applied, would greatly improve the dismal conditions under which the population of Serbia was suffering.

It is evident that Seton-Watson and his colleagues used a three-pronged approach to propagating and furthering the Serbian and South Slav cause in Britain. One was the offer of practical help, manifested in the collection of donations for the purchase of food for the Serbian army and populace, as well as cooperation with other volunteer organizations, such as the Scottish Women’s Hospitals and the setting up of a fund for Serbian students in Switzerland. Another front was British public opinion and awareness of the existence of the Serbian or South Slav cause as such. What would today be termed a media campaign was staged masterfully by Seton-Watson. And finally, the limited access he had to the leading British politicians of his day was used to convey to them his penetrating analyses and specific suggestions of what is to be done in regard to the Southern Slavs.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Working for the British Government

As seen earlier, Seton-Watson's activities relating to Austria-Hungary and its minority peoples, and later the Kingdom of Serbia and the European political situation in general, were based on his own interests in history and current affairs. Due to the wealth he inherited he was able to freely travel and devote himself to his studies. With time he became an authority on the question of nationalities of the Habsburg Empire. At the outbreak of the First World War he offered his services as the specialist on Central Europe and the Balkans to the Foreign office, without pay and for the duration of the war. He was refused initially, but through his old friend Henry Wickham Steed was able to establish a working relationship with the Foreign Office. This is documented in numerous detailed memorandums and letters addressed to the Foreign Office. Once such letter, dated October 1, 1914,⁸⁵ was thus endorsed by Sir Arthur Nicholson, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office: "I venture to subscribe to all Mr Seton-Watson's conclusions... If the Secretary of State has any leisure, I would strongly recommend a perusal of Mr Watson's memorandum."⁸⁶

In May 1917 Seton-Watson was conscripted and mobilized as a private in the Royal Army Medical Corps, but managed to avoid active service through intercession by friends. After only a month he was appointed to the Intelligence Bureau of the Department of Information. The function of the Bureau was to compose weekly political intelligence reports for the War Cabinet, and similar other reports on specific subjects that might be required by the Government. A special Memorandum on the Question of Separate Peace with Austria⁸⁷ was one such document that Seton-Watson prepared. In it he made a strong case for not entering

⁸⁵ Ibid. pp. 180-186.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 402.

⁸⁷ SSEES, SEW 4/1/3.

into negotiations leading to that end unless it was certain that (a) Austria-Hungary would not continue being subservient politically to German ambitions, and (b) the Dual Monarch would agree to change its own internal structure so as to grant full freedom to the Slav and Latin nationalities within her borders. The Latin element, relating to the Italian and Romanian minorities in Austria-Hungary, was for the first time mentioned by Seton-Watson in this document. This can be seen, in particular, as his striving to remain unbiased in the ongoing Southern Slav – Italian diplomatic dispute regarding the future of Dalmatia. Additionally, the Russian proposal to end the war without annexations, which inherently means no redrawing of the borders and therefore no accommodation of the demands of minority nationalities in the Habsburg Empire, should not be subscribed to. Seton-Watson offers a clear alternative to the temptingly simple and apparently fair “no annexations” policy. It was, in his own words, the proclamation of “our determination to secure to every single nationality in Europe (whether as yet autonomous or not) *the right to self-determination*.”

In March 1918 the Intelligence Bureau became the subject of inter-departmental wrangling and Seton-Watson moved to a post in the newly created Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries where he became co-director of the Austro-Hungarian section. His task there was to create the propaganda policy. Among other matters he reported the following:

II Aeroplane Propaganda. The Jugoslavs are also very anxious that prompt steps should be taken for the distribution of their own particular literature by aeroplane in Dalmatia, Bosnia and Istria. If this could be arranged, they already have literature admirably suited for the purpose (in Serbo-Croat), prepared in Switzerland: and they could intimate the most suitable parts at which it could be dropped.”⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Report on the work of the Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries. November 1918. SSEES, SEW 4/1/3.

Earlier in the year several such propaganda air raids had been conducted over Ljubljana and Zagreb, to which the Austro-German press responded with bitter complaints. Seton-Watson concluded that “we have at least this proof that our propaganda has had the effect of angering the enemy.”

The Corfu Declaration

The Pact of Corfu was signed between the Yugoslav Committee and the Government of the Kingdom of Serbia in exile on the Greek island of Corfu in the Ionian Sea on July 20, 1917. The Declaration, or Pact, laid the foundation for the unification of the Southern Slavs, that is, the Southern Slavs which had thereto been a part of the Habsburg Empire, the Kingdom of Serbia and the mountainous statelet of Montenegro.

This was a new development in many aspects. First of all, the Serbian Government had thereto been keen on avoiding direct or official contact with the Yugoslav Committee or its representatives, because it did not want to give the Committee too much legitimacy. Secondly, all the way to this point Serbian politicians entertained the idea of having only partial integration of the Southern Slavic lands into their Kingdom, that is, only those lands which had at least some Serbian population, thus creating predominantly Orthodox Greater Serbia. The signing of the Corfu Declaration put an end to this particular plan. Part of the reason was in the strength of the appeal for the union of all the Southern Slavs, excepting the Bulgarians, which had by that time reached an enviable level of popularity. The other reason for the abandoning of the “smaller Greater Serbia” policy was that its chief foreign sponsors, the Russians, were shifting their focus onto their internal situation, which was at time coming to a boiling point.

Most significantly, the joint declaration of these two entities was a clear sign to the Allies, who were already making preparations for the peace treaties pursuant to the victorious outcome of the war, that the two chief constituents of the Southern Slavs are in one accord in their expressed desire to form a single state.

The legitimacy of the representatives of both sides was well established. In spite being in the midst of the scandal and a change in the ruling coalition, the Serbian government had representatives of both the outgoing and the incoming government among its ranks, giving thus a degree continuity to any of the decisions it reached. The Yugoslav Committee sent six representatives, whom the general assembly previously authorized to make binding decisions. The Yugoslav Committee had a good track record with the Croat and Slovene public with its previous declarations, for in both instances when such declarations were published not one voice was raised against them, nor have they ever been “repudiated or disavowed by any party or individual in the political life of Croatia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Istria, etc.”⁸⁹

The Yugoslav Committee, and its by now former chief member Supilo, welcomed the Declaration, for it brought the question of the unification on the international level, where it could face up for the challenges and the counter-claims of the Treaty of London, for example.

The one grave shortcoming of the Corfu Declaration that the Yugoslav Committee was not able to overcome was the question of federal makeup of the new unified state. Seton-Watson wrote in the Memorandum to Intelligence Bureau the following:

⁸⁹ Special Memorandum on the Pact of Corfu of July 20th, *R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs, Correspondence 1906-1941*, Vol I. London-Zagreb: 1976. pp 306-308.

They [the Serbian Government] depreciated any extreme form of federalism, but were quite explicit in the assurance that if for instance Croatia or other sections of the Jugo-Slavs insisted on a federal solution they would be prepared to accept this. In other word there was to be a settlement by amicable agreement and Serbia repudiated any idea of forcing her will upon other.⁹⁰

But a single Declaration by the members of the government of a minor Ally – the Kingdom of Serbia – and the representatives of the people who were the chief suppliers of manpower for the enemy navy – the Croats, who represented the majority of the crew in Austro-Hungarian naval force – did not automatically mean its wholehearted embrace by the Allies. In his speech of January 5, 1918, the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George stirred controversy by stating that “the Italians [had the legitimate claim] for union with those of their own race and tongue.”⁹¹ This was in turn interpreted by the Southern Slavs as strict adherence to the Treaty, and by Italians as the emphasis being shifted to the “race and tongue” element, which, under the banner of self-determination was one of the chief arguments the Croats had used when fighting against the Treaty and its principles. The result was that neither of the Italians nor the Southern Slavs welcomed this statement.

The Serbian Society wrote to the Prime Minister suggesting that:

...all public declarations of the war aims of the Allies in Central Europe should take the positive form of demanding the loyal application of the principle ‘self determination’ of the peoples and races concerned, rather than the negative form of refusing to dismember an enemy State. The former is an assurance to all the friendly subject peoples of Austria-Hungary that the powerful democratic States of the West are not unmindful of their interests...⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ As quoted in a letter by The Serbian Society of Great Britain to David Lloyd George, January 25, 1918. *R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs, Correspondence 1906-1941*, Vol I. London-Zagreb: 1976. pp. 309 – 311.

⁹² Ibid.

Judging how effective a letter like this may have been in swaying the opinion of the Prime Minister is simply impossible. The effectiveness of all the other various steps taken by Seton-Watson and the various organizations he was involved likewise cannot be assessed individually. It can be said, however, that their cumulative effect left a significant and lasting impact on the course of the political negotiations during and immediately after the war.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of the combined activities of the Yugoslav Committee, the Southern Slav emigration organizations, the government of the Kingdom of Serbia and of the various British associations whose members included Seton-Watson was the creation of a new state in the aftermath of World War I. Their efforts in propagating the Yugoslav idea in the west bore fruit; the public had been aware of the existence of the Southern Slavs and their plight, and the political elites of the Entente and of the United States governments decided that the creation of the new state in the western Balkans would be the right thing to do. The proclaimed policy of self-determination, after all, demanded the creation of such a state. Moreover, the victorious Allies would look less vindictive if the main reason for the redrawing of the old borders would not be perceived as the punishment of the vanquished, but rather the rewarding of the nationalities which had thereto suffered under the boot of oppressors.

However, the expediency, both geopolitical and local, had as much to do with the decision to create the new state in the western Balkans as did the adherence to the principle of self-determination. In 1918, the Southern Slavs had not yet been in control of their lands, with the exception of Istria and the islands of Kvarner. Had the Allies decided – once the hostilities have ceased and World War I was over – to strictly adhere to the deal signed with Italy in the Treaty of London and award large tracts of Dalmatia, Croatia and Herzegovina to Italy as promised, they would have met with stiff resistance from the local Slav population. The stability and peace that was just starting to slowly take root would have been jeopardized and further armed conflicts would have been not an unlikely outcome. Therefore, the preferred and expedient manner in handling that question was to

renege the terms set forth in the Treaty of London and proclaim the self-determination as the supreme principle of arbitration. This then resulted in awarding of large areas claimed by Italy on the basis of the Treaty to the Slavs, who represented the majority population. The exception was the Istria peninsula and the islands of Kvarner; while the towns on the western coast of Istria had majority Italian population, the same could not be said for the countryside surrounding them; still less for central Istria and its eastern coast and the islands of Kvarner. Yet the combination of the geographical position of the lands in questions – they were situated on the border to Italy – and the need to give at least some concession to the Italian claims resulted in these areas being assigned to Italy, and compromise was reached that kept both sides partially satisfied.

More importantly, had the whole of the eastern Adriatic area claimed by Italy on the basis of the Treaty of London been assigned to Italy, the entire region would have been rendered unstable over a protracted period of time. Even if the Italians managed to quell the initially rebellious Slavs, take the full control of the region and bring semblance of order to it, it would have been a precarious order and a volatile peace indeed. In particular, the Slavs, especially the Croats, would never have accepted the partition of their lands between two new foreign states; before World War I their lands were governed by Austria-Hungary and Turkey; now, in the aftermath of World War I, they would have been divided between Italy and Serbia. Furthermore, the new Southern Slav country – the “smaller Greater Serbia” which did not contain Croatian and Dalmatian coast nor western Herzegovina – would not have been populous and powerful enough to be an obstacle to the German *Drang nach Osten*. The Austria-Hungary which had thereto played that role – with less and less success as it became more and more dependent on Berlin – was no longer in

existence, and another entity had to assume its historical mantle. Therefore, the expediency mandated that a reasonably stable and sizeable state should be created in the area, and awarding large tracts of Slav lands to Italy would not contribute to that end.

Those were the essential reasons why the Southern Slav state was created, or allowed to be created. The propaganda efforts by various émigrés and British enthusiasts was necessary in order to provide the victorious Allies with something to build their case for the creation of the new state on, but it was not much more than that. And yet, as in every complicated and interdependent relationship, the importance of the smallest of contributions cannot be overestimated, because they are just as crucial ingredient as any other, and without them the outcome might have been quite different.

As regards the internal players who contributed to the creation of Yugoslavia, it may be said that they enjoyed a mixed success. The Yugoslav Committee did not succeed in securing Istria and Kvarner –

integral parts of Croatia – for the inclusion in the new Southern Slav state. More importantly, the Committee failed to obtain an unequivocal commitment from the Kingdom of Serbia to the federalist principles as the basis for the organization of the new state. Compromises such as these had resulted in a rift in the Committee, with Frano Supilo, one of its founders, deciding to cease being its member because of this very issue. The best that the less resolute Ante Trumbić could obtain from the Serbian government was a vague tentative statement that the federalist principles would be considered should the population wish for them to be implemented. That

was a reluctant commitment that was not enacted until 1939, by which point Yugoslavia was already on the brink of dissolution.

The epilogue of the Yugoslav Committee's activities may be summed up in the fact that Ante Trumbić had openly regretted the end of Austria-Hungary before he died in 1938. His grievances related to the fact that the Yugoslav government made too many concessions to Italy and stopped the reform in Croatia. In the similar way, Ivan Meštrović withdrew from politics and dedicated his time to his art, becoming a professor of the University of Notre Dame. Still, the outcome of the efforts of the Yugoslav Committee was largely positive and successful, regardless of the above. Indeed, they reached the best possible outcome under the circumstances.

It was the Yugoslav Committee's partner and competitor, the government of the Kingdom of Serbia, that achieved enviable results. The tracts of land to the west of the Kingdom in which the Serbs lived were annexed, while the gains from the Second Balkan War were preserved. The fact that Istria and Kvarner were not included in the extended state was not a great grievance. The Serbian monarchy retained the leading position, the Serbian political parties likewise, particularly Nikšić's Radicals. Their professed centralist unitary policy could be pursued without any legal limitation, for Corfu Declaration was as vague as it was weak in proclaiming federalist principles as the basis for the organization of the *enlarged* state, as they saw it.

Such policy eventually stirred a lot of resistance from the Croats and the Southern Serbs – who called themselves Macedonians – resulting in unrest, regicide, retributions and general upheaval that brought the state to a grinding halt. By the time the Yugoslav government in 1939 gave in to the demands for more

autonomy, positioning its policy closer to the federalist idea that had been promulgated by the Yugoslav Committee, it was already too late. Thus it could be said that in the initial federalist vs. centralist struggle between the Yugoslav Committee and the government of Serbia the latter prevailed, but that the difficulties in sustaining of the centralist position eventually turned the tables in favor of the federalists, who in 1939 all but achieved that goal under the leadership of Vladko Maček.

As regards the western governments signatories of Paris Peace Treaties, they were all too eager to leave the new state to its own devices, just as long as it showed a satisfactory degree of stability. After the initial difficulties relating to the creation and operation of state institutions, the Vidovdan Constitution was declared on June 28, 1921. While the Constitution reiterated the victory of the centralist policy, it also gave a basis for the state organization, which left the western European countries and the United States content that a semblance of stability had been reached, and consequently they rapidly lost any interest in the internal affairs of the new state.

Not so with Seton-Watson, who had maintained a keen interest in the new state and contact with its political circles until he retired in 1949. Throughout his campaigning for the Southern Slavs, Seton-Watson had always been of the opinion that they should be given greater autonomy. Originally he thought that this could be achieved within the Austro-Hungarian state, but once the World War I started he became of the opinion that outright independence and formation of the new state would be the desired solution. He had mixed feelings as regarded the Yugoslav affairs in the 1920's. On the one hand he was satisfied that the independence had been achieved, but saw the centralist government policies as oppressive of the

Croats. This earned him the “pro-Croatian” label in Belgrade. However, his standpoint was not Croatian but simply Yugoslav, for he held the view that the centralist Belgrade policy also hurt great many Serbs.

Seton-Watson’s political credo of a West European communitarian liberal and attitude towards the Southern Slavs are best expressed by László Péter:

We shall find him on the side of parliament rather than the crown in a constitutional conflict; he is likely to be on the side of a national minority rather than an oppressive government; he will be dismayed when he discovers a gap between a liberal façade and the underlying reality of intolerance; and he will offer plans to reform the institutions, bring about national harmony, and improve stability. ... A West European liberal, however, does not really believe in national self-determination. His attitude to small nation nationalism is always part of a wider speculative view of international relations to which the aspirations of small nations are subordinated.⁹³

With such political and ideological views Seton-Watson indeed had every reason to be content that the new state of the Southern Slavs had been created, notwithstanding some of its internal troubles. Indeed, in one fell swoop the self-determination principle had been satisfied and the British interests in maintaining stability in the Balkans have been preserved.

The idea of Yugoslav unity – a concept developed in Croatia in 1830’s – was initially an integral part of the process of the building of the Croatian identity. The Croatian lands in the early nineteenth century were separated politically and administratively, and the awakening of the Croat identity went hand in hand with the development of only slightly wider Yugoslav identity. During the same period the Serbs were discovering and developing their own national idea. By the beginning of the twentieth century the proponents of the Yugoslavism claimed that Serbs, Croats

⁹³ László Péter, “R. W. Seton-Watson’s Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy and the European Balance of Power”, in Laszlo Peter, *Historians and Their Vocabularies, The Collected Works of Laszlo Peter*, Miklos Lojko ed, Aldershot: Ashgate, work in progress.

and Slovenes were tribes of one *ethnic* nation with three names (*troimeni narod* – the three-named nation).⁹⁴ Given that separate Serb, Croat and Slovene national identities had by this time also been well formed, the Yugoslavism, which was supposed to contain all three, was an unitary concept as hard to grasp as the theological concept of the Holy Trinity. Indeed, the same question could be asked about each of the tri-part units (the choice of words itself containing an oxymoron): Do they contain three separate entities or is each a single unit? When it comes to Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in spite of many a theological treatise written to clarify the matter, it is still left to the believers to take it as a matter of faith, knowing, as believers do, that the infinite God's truth cannot be contained in man's finite mind. However, the Yugoslav idea, belonging to the temporal realm and yet containing the same apparent contradiction as the spiritual Holy Trinity, could never command such a degree of dedication and faith, and was thus becoming less and less credible.

Indeed, in the late 1920's it was becoming increasingly apparent that one would have to forsake one's Slovene, Croat or Serb identity in order to don on the all-inclusive Yugoslav identity. Consider the words of Želimir Mažuranić, a pro-Yugoslav Croat, who spoke in the National Parliament in 1933:

The feeling of being a Croat grows stronger and becomes more resolute when someone tries to prove to me that that I am not, or when they try to force me to admit that Croatdom does not imply a nation, but just a tribe... When someone tells me today that the Croats are a Yugoslav tribe, I have nothing against it because it is true [...] But if they tell me that Croat are not and have never been a nation, that they are just a tribe, then I feel resistance to it and I then insist that it is a name for a nation, not a tribe.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Dejan Djokić, "(Dis)Integrating Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of Failed Idea 1918-1992*, ed. Dejan Djokic, London: Hurst and Company, 2003. p. 141.

⁹⁵ *Stenografske beleške Senata Kraljevine Jugoslavije (saziv za 1932. i 1933. godinu)*, vol. 3, Belgrade, 1933, p. 50. Cited in Djokić, op. cit. p. 152.

Cast among the political and administrative prevarications of the 1920's, the Yugoslav idea was inevitably affected by the political struggle between the centralists and federalist currents. Since the centralists were mainly Serbs (though not always) and the federalists mainly Croats (again, not always) the Yugoslav idea, unitary as it was, was associated with the centralism, and therefore largely resisted and ultimately rejected by many Croats. Having no longer faith in the all-inclusive Yugoslav identity, the Croats feared that they would be Serbianized if they forsook their own Croat identity.

The introduction of dictatorship in 1929 by King Alexander did not help the matters. Designed to “foster higher synthesis of our national expressions and characteristics [and to show] the strength of unity and unyielding will of the same-blooded [Yugoslav] nation,”⁹⁶ it ultimately had the opposite effect. Indeed, the “unyielding will” the King spoke of was manifested in the vigorous resistance to the increasingly dictatorial policies he introduced, and ultimately resulted in his assassination.

Thus the political questions relating to the organization of the common state in the first decade of its existence polluted the Yugoslav idea, as precarious an idea as it was to begin with. After the initial success and wide acceptance, the unitary concept of the Yugoslavism was rejected because of its perceived similarities with the centralism promulgated by the successive Belgrade governments and royal dictatorship. But Yugoslavism – the ideology – was not the only victim; lacking centripetal ideological force to keep it together, Yugoslavia – the state – appeared predestined for defeat already in the first several years of its existence.

⁹⁶ *Arhiv Jugoslavije* (Archives of Yugoslavia, Belgrade) The Royal Court Papers: ‘Govor [Kralja Aleksandra ministrima] na večeri [na Dvoru] 31. dec[embar] 1929. g.’ Cited in Djokić, op. cit. p. 148.

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