

THE FOUNDATION OF THE YUGOSLAV EMERGENCY COUNCIL IN NEW YORK

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It is well-known that the history of the Slovenes in emigration is one of those subject-areas which is still owed a fair amount by Slovene historiography. To this statement should be added the fact that some of the questions about Slovene emigrational history, in comparison to others, have received a most thorough treatment: I have in mind, above all, those studies which present the history of the Slovene émigrés in the USA and, *inter alia*, their relationship to their native homeland during the Second World War.¹

The present note is intended as a modest addition to the account of the activity of Slovene and other Yugoslav émigrés during the period immediately following the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia and until the beginning of armed resistance. It provides a brief overview of the activity of the *Yugoslav Emergency Council* [henceforward, *YEC*] in New York during the period April 14 through June 12, 1941, in the light of records from its meetings. The Council's activity amounted in many respects to a continuation of the actions of a similar organization, the *Defence Alliance for Yugoslavs in Italy* [henceforward, *DEYI*], which had been set up, in the same way, by Yugoslav émigrés in 1935: many members of that organization are met later in the *YEC*.²

The members of the future organization had their first meeting on April 14, 1941 in the 'Balkan' coffee-house in New York. Their goal was to organize a committee which would be duty bound to work in all possible ways to render assistance to the homeland of Yugoslavia, now under attack. There were 35 participants at this meeting, which was chaired by R.F. Hlacha; he it was who was elected Chairman of the committee, though the committee had not yet been named. Those present at the meeting further gave Hlacha the right to select the members of the administrative and executive committees.

One of the participants at this meeting was Jiří J. Niznanský, the delegate from the Czechoslovak National Council; those present decided that on April 18 Rayner Hlacha, Rudolf Trošt and Donko Curić would attend the meeting of the Czech organization, at which the earliest possible call for a mass meeting would be discussed. At the conclusion of the meeting \$10.14 was collected for the requirements of the newly formed committee; of this sum, \$5.00 was contributed by "old man" Anton Vilovich.

The committee (which was at first called the *Yugoslav Emergency Committee*) consisted of the following, apart from Hlacha, its Chairman: three Secretaries—Mary Vidošić (who kept the minutes just as she had kept the minutes of the *DEYI* mentioned above), Donko Curić and Marica Vlahovich; one Treasurer, Emil Blazevich; and Ilija Bratina, Ivan Mlinarich, Leo Zakrajšek, Jozo Markov, Rudolf Trošt, Professor Kobal, T.S. Dominis, V.S. Vlahovich, F. Marich, Vladimir Stupar, Giša Jovanovich and Raša Stefanovich.

Although at the end of that first meeting it was agreed that the next meeting would be on April 28, they actually met again on April 21. At this meeting, again, there was a delegate from the Czechs, on this occasion Frank Balik. They adopted the Chairman's proposal that they should be called the *Yugoslav Emergency Council*, and also after several minor amendments adopted the text of a proclamation with which the committee would be made known to Yugoslav émigrés, especially those in the immediate vicinity. They also passed a motion that they would attend the mass meeting which was to be held on May 2 in the "Česká národní budova" [Czech National Building] in New York, and that they would organize this meeting together with the Czechoslovak National Committee. For a

Program Committee to organize this meeting they elected V.S. Vlahovich, Professor Kobal and Milorad Milovanovich; to the Publicity Committee they elected R.F. Hlacha, Ivo Moderčin, Rudolf Trošt and Emil Blazevich. They resolved to call the whole Yugoslav émigré society to the upcoming meeting; and those in attendance called the Chairman's attention to the fact that they should attend the "Freedom Rally" on May 7 in Madison Square Gardens, and should collect from the Secretary, Mary Vidošić, the necessary entrance tickets.

In the above-mentioned proclamation it was emphasized that, "given the terrible shock of the current tragedy in Yugoslavia," it was necessary to organize a central body in New York which would initiate co-ordinated common action in connection with the present and future situation in Yugoslavia, and would be composed of American citizens of Yugoslav, i.e., Croatian, Serbian and Slovene descent. The members of the *YEC* should thereby be guided by two fundamental ideas: "a deep love for the trinomial Yugoslav people," and a pride in that people's determination "to die free rather than to live as slaves;" and second, "a strong belief in the final victory of democracy, freedom and human integrity." The committee called for the participation of all organizations and individuals who agreed with these ideas, whatever their opinions otherwise. It emphasized also that at that moment American Yugoslavs—who now more than ever before were aware of all the advantages offered to them by their second, American home—were one of the largest groups of Yugoslavs who could speak and act freely in the name of their blood brothers in Europe, and that they thus had "a sacred duty and a great responsibility."

The committee greeted every Croatian, Serbian and Slovene organization in the USA like itself, both those in existence and those which were to be formed, which were in harmony with the above goal, especially the *Hrvatska Bratska Zajednica*; and to all it offered the most sincere co-operation. It further called on all who were united in "our love for our kindred brothers in the Old Country" and with a firm belief in their own future and that of the whole democratic world, to shake off all faint-heartedness and embark on common, lasting action. Simultaneously the committee called on all Yugoslavs in New York and its environs to participate in the above-mentioned mass meeting announced for May 2 on the premises of the Czech National Building.

The May 2 mass meeting was the main item for discussion at the meetings of the committee on April 28 and on May 5. At the first-named they agreed first of all to send congratulatory telegrams to the following organizations to mark their actions for the assistance of Yugoslavia: the *Jugoslavenski Pomoćni Odbor*; the Slovene Section in Chicago; and the *Hrvatska Bratska Zajednica* and the *Srpski Narodni Savez* in Pittsburgh. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to arrangements for the mass meeting, i.e., "popular manifestation." Appeals for co-operation were sent to the Yugoslav, Czechoslovak, Polish, British and Greek general consuls; to the violinist Zlatko Baloković; to John C. Adams, the historian at Princeton University; to Paul Prodromedis, manager of the Greek radio station; to Ludwik Krzyzanowski; and to S.O. Sigmund, parish priest of the Norwegian Protestant Church.

They directed the committee to compose a resolution which should be adopted at that meeting and forwarded to the representatives of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Washington and New York; to the US President; to the Head of the State Department; to La Guardia, Mayor of New York; to the governors of the states of New York and New Jersey; and to the American and Yugoslav press. Louis Adamic informed them in writing that he could not respond to the invitation to talk at the meeting, and Father Petrič and Dorothy Thomson excused themselves in like manner; the last-named had a speaking tour in Canada at the

time. Finally, they collected \$4.00 for the expenses of the congratulatory telegrams already mentioned at the beginning of the meeting.

At the May 5 meeting, mentioned above, they first of all stated that the mass meeting of May 2 had achieved a full moral and quite unexpected success. The resolution, which was passed, had been sent out to the addresses as arranged, and they had collected \$87.20, of which \$25.00 had been paid for the rent of the hall.

The resolution had been signed by—apart from Hlacha and Frank Balik, President of the Czech National Committee—Rudolf Trošt; Paul Prodromedis; Zlatko Baloković; John C. Adams; Karel Hudec, the Czechoslovak General Consul in New York; and Borivoj Brkić, the Serbian war veteran. In it, “the assembled American citizens of Yugoslav descent, in accord with assembled Czech, Polish and other American friends” expressed their conviction that the self-sacrifice and suffering of the Yugoslav people would finally prove that it could make a significant contribution to the final victory of democracy, of freedom and for a better world tomorrow. They again emphasized their unconditional loyalty to the United States and to the principles of “loyalty, freedom and human worth, which are the true soul of our country,” and declared that they were ready to make any sacrifice which that country might demand of its citizens in order to safeguard those principles. This complete loyalty to their adopted homeland should also be the best way of contributing to the liberation of their native homeland, and of the whole world, from the current oppression that was threatening everything that was worth living for. The participants at the mass meeting had then sent their expressions of respect to “our great President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whom benevolent Providence has raised in these critical times to a position of world leadership for the cause of democracy.”

The *YEC* then debated plans for its future work, and charged its Chairman Hlacha with preparing a kind of program; it then called on all others present to individually prepare a program of the same kind; then they would meet and choose the most suitable one.

On May 13 at the fifth regular meeting of the *YEC*, there was no discussion of that program; rather, they debated the kind of reception suitable for the possible arrival in New York of members of the Yugoslav Royal Government. Also, committee members Rudolf Trošt and Šime Dominis reported about their participation at the *Slavonic American Democratic Club of Queens* banquet, at which “a sad national atmosphere” was said to have reigned, for there was not a single person among the numerous speakers who considered it necessary to say any words of comfort with respect to the liberation of the oppressed homeland of Yugoslavia, or of free Europe and the world. The committee members received the report “with indignation.” A different spirit was said to have animated the mass meeting in Cleveland, attended by Ivo Moderčin, where among the Croats, Serbs and Slovenes present there was said to have reigned a brotherly harmony “in the cause of restoration and assistance of the old homeland.” It was also agreed that they should make contact with the *American Friends of Yugoslavia* for the sake of the closest possible co-operation in the future. The Chairman also named the committee which should prepare a plan of action for the future; its members were, apart from himself, Ivo Moderčin and Rudolf Trošt.

The sixth and seventh meetings of the *YEC*, held on May 22 and May 29, were dedicated in the main to working out the by-laws for the future. The proposed preamble was composed before the meeting by the small committee mentioned above. The by-laws were to be approved, at a general meeting of the *YEC* on June 2, by representatives of various émigré societies and by individuals. It was agreed that a special appeal for participation should be sent to Frank Keržet, who responded that he was not the only influential person

among the Slovenes and in general among Yugoslav émigrés, but that he was a nationalist and ready for action. The committee members proposed that they should establish contact by postcard with all individual Yugoslav émigrés who were considered to be potentially prepared to co-operate in that national and humanitarian movement; and that they should get in touch with the larger settlements with Yugoslav immigrants (Chicago, Cleveland, Joliet) and explain the intentions and goals of the *YEC*. Emil Blazeovich, the Treasurer, informed those in attendance that there was \$57.51 in the account.

At the seventh meeting, the last one before the mass meeting of the *YEC*, the committee adopted the preamble to the by-laws as devised by Ivo Moderčín, and also the remainder of the by-laws, which were prepared from other members' notes by Rudolf Trošt. Among others at that meeting, in attendance for the first time, were Mr. and Mrs. Krasna.

The first general meeting of the *YEC* on June 2 meant a reorganization and widening of the activities of the organization, which was now conceived not only for the area of Greater New York, but also, as far as possible, for the whole of the USA and also for Canada. After Ivo Moderčín had read out the proposed by-laws of the organization, which were written in English, M. Angjelinovich joined in the discussion; this member, of whom we find no trace in the activities of the *YEC* hitherto, sharply criticized "the non-use of our mother tongue" and expressed the desire and the demand that "we should be led by people of the working class, not only by intellectuals, as it has appeared up to now." S.T. Dominis commented on the statement by the Yugoslav Royal Government in Exile about the envisaged Federal State of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; he was of the opinion that it was fitting for the *YEC* to adopt a similar name.

Both of these interventions caused acrimonious debates, which were brought to a close by the Secretary Donko Curić with the statement that Yugoslav émigrés—who were free to speak out in the name of their enslaved brothers in their homeland—were obliged, as sons of that people, to help in its liberation; but that they did not have the right, once this goal was attained, to dictate to their suffering brothers at home what kind of government they should choose; although it should be the desire of Yugoslav émigrés that the chosen model would be similar to the democratic system which obtained in their new homeland, the United States.

One of the participants at the general meeting, naval Captain Ivo Beatović, saluted the actions of the *YEC* and emphasized that the Yugoslav seafarers were, with their ships, in constant co-operation with their allies; while his maritime colleague, Niko Ivanović, criticized the lack of harmony among the émigrés, and appealed for the harmony which would be the only way that they could, with renewed efforts, help their now downtrodden homeland. Those in attendance at the general meeting, with the exception of M. Angjelinović, adopted the by-laws. The agenda also included a resolution to elect a standing administrative committee instead of the temporary committee; the latter consisted of R.F. Hlacha, Donko Curić, Mary Vidošić, Emil Blazeovich, Ivo Moderčín, Leo Zakrajšek, V.S. Vlahovich, Ilija Bratina, Captain Ribich, Mr. and Mrs. Krasna, Mrs. H. Bogdanovich, Rudolf Trošt, Milan Trošt, Captain S. Trošt, D.K. Jovanovich, Vladimir Stupar, Marica Vlahovich, Captain V. Mikulich, Captain Niko Ivanović, Ana Vlahovich, Šime Bozovich, Captain I. Divanović, Captain Ivo Beatović, Matt Gracich, Anton Vilovich, R.I. Stefanovich and Ivan Mlinarich. Leo Zakrajšek proposed that the election be postponed to the following meeting, which only registered members of the *YEC* would attend. Since there were some individuals present at the general meeting who refused to become members of the organization, his proposal was approved. On a motion by Rudolf Trošt, it was agreed that good wishes be sent to the artist Ivan Zorman in Cleveland.

The second general mass meeting of the *YEC*, held on 12 June in the New York coffee house 'Balkan', is the last for which we now have minutes at our disposal. From the list of those in attendance it is obvious that Angjelinović did not participate, but that present was Vasa Trivanović, executive director of the association *American Friends of Yugoslavia Inc.*, who explained in detail to the *YEC* members the aims of that association and emphasized the need for co-operation between the two organizations.

The Chairman, Hlacha, again read out the *YEC* by-laws; the Treasurer, Blazeovich, announced that the society had \$57.02 in its account, in cash; two letters to the Secretary were read out, one from Louis Adamic, in which he apologized for not having been able to come to the second meeting mentioned above; and the other from Ivan Zorman, who sent thanks for the good wishes "sent for his birthday."

Next the membership of the *YEC* elected to the standing administrative committee the following: as Chairman, R.F. Hlacha; as First Vice-Chairman, Ivo Moderčin; as Second Vice-Chairman, Leo Zakrajšek; as Secretaries, Mary Vidošić and Donko Curić; and as Treasurer, Emil Blazeovich. Jozo Erceg, Ivan Mlinarich, Ana Krasna and Marica Vlahovich became members of the Executive Committee; Ana Krasna's husband, Šime Bozovich and Vladimir Stupar became members of the supervisory committee. The Chairman, Hlacha, then proposed that only American citizens, or those who wished or could become the same, should become regular members of the organization, whereas the remainder should be supporting members. The participants at the meeting agreed to accept the proposal. Rudolf Trošt explained his idea to those present: that they should call a great mass meeting of Yugoslav national émigrés in the Fall, at which there should be representatives from Canada and South America as well as U.S. émigrés. Ana Krasna then proposed that the *YEC* by-laws be printed in as many copies as possible, and the others agreed to this. The above-mentioned Vasa Trivanovich then offered to print the by-laws at his own expense on his own press.

Before we conclude this note, let us take a short look at the by-laws so frequently mentioned above. As stated, they were written in English and indeed in a very fine 'constitutional'-sounding language. We have already mentioned that they were composed of a preamble and of the by-laws in a narrower sense.

In the preamble it was first of all emphasized that "at this very moment a large part of the civilized world is groaning under the most oppressive tyranny ever known to mankind." One of the last sacrifices to this tyranny had been Yugoslavia, in which "we were born, and were born our fathers and our grandfathers," and which had been most cruelly treated. Dastardly and brutal fascism, of both German and Italian origin, had too clearly shown with its many filthy deeds—past, present and promised for the future—that it would never forgive Yugoslavia its already-witnessed contributions, at the price of the greatest sacrifices, to the priority of freedom over the voluntary slavery which puts life before honour. The Americans of Yugoslav descent therefore emphasized that they must take pains to ensure that the contribution to the priority of freedom that was being made by their blood brothers and sisters in their old homeland, would attain the recognition in the USA that it deserved.

In the words of the preamble, this should only be one part of the task. Yugoslavia, now repressed (if only repressed physically, not spiritually), desperately needed assistance, and morally forbade its émigrés in the USA to be uninterested or pessimistic about its present and future fate. While the material side of assistance should be taken on by organizations which were most qualified therefor (the American Red Cross, the Yugoslav Relief Committee and others like them), others should mediate the equally necessary political assis-

tance, which would be organized on the basis of two fundamental principles. In the first place they must unceasingly work for the restoration of Yugoslavia as a state which should unite all the Southern Slavs, including those that lived in neighboring countries and wherever the political injustice of past times had forced them to go against their will. This kind of Yugoslavia would be part of the new, restored Europe. Secondly, there must insist that the future Yugoslavia be founded on political and economic democracy, whose best example was the USA under the inspired leadership of President Roosevelt. At the same time the preamble emphasized complete and fearless support for the existing external policies of the USA, which as their native or adopted homeland ceaselessly filled the émigrés of Yugoslav descent with deep love and loyalty.

Following these positions of principle the by-laws were devoted to organizational questions. In the first article they established the name of the organization as the *Yugoslav American Emergency Council*, [YAEC], which should be later changed to the *Yugoslav American National Council*, or whatever should be decided by its constitutional assembly. As we have seen, the adjective *American* was added to the old title. In the second article, which discusses the organization of the YAEC, provisions are made for branch societies, which could consist of individuals of a minimum seven in number, or else already existing Yugoslav émigré organizations could join as units and as such constitute individual branches. The delegates of a branch society should form a central executive committee; the members of the organization should accept a special membership committee, which would be appointed by the Chairman.

The third article spoke to the aims of the organization. The members should work as loyal Americans for the preservation and defence of American institutions and ideals, and reconcile their loyalty to America with the defense of democratic ideals everywhere in the world, and using all legal means initiate activities for the restoration of a free and independent Yugoslavia, which within its own framework should unite all the Southern Slavs in the hitherto existing border regions of neighboring countries.

The fourth and last article defined the kinds of actions required to attain those ends. These should be informational, cultural and educational activities in the mass media, with lectures, mass assemblies, concerts, and so forth; and co-operation with other American organizations, in particular with those that united Americans of Yugoslav or other Slavic descent and worked for similar goals. In the same way the organization should help in the defence of the privileges and state rights of Yugoslavs in the USA who might become the victims of illegal discrimination. All that activity should be financed by membership dues, by contributions and by profits from organizational activities. The by-laws also determined that the original branch of the YAEC should act as its central body, at least until there should be established a sufficient number of branches for the calling of a constitutional assembly.

Of course, this brief note on the foundation of the YEC amounts to no more than an extract from the history of the Slovenes, or the Yugoslavs, in emigration. Many questions of this nature remain which await fundamental historical elucidation. In my note I have also mentioned another, similar organization, which was in many ways a precursor of the YEC: the DEYI, which also might deserve a historical survey. As stated above, we meet several members of that organization later in the YEC; and, similarly, a comparison of the activity of the DEYI with the old Yugoslav organization of Littoral and Istrian refugees from Italy, the *Zveza jugoslovanskih emigrantov iz Julijske krajine*,³ would be interesting. In any case, a great deal of work still awaits the still very few Slovene researchers of the history of our people in emigration.

Translated by Tom Priestly

NOTES

- * Translated, with permission, from the article "Ustanovitev 'Yugoslav Emergency Council' v New Yorku," *Zgodovinski časopis* 41 (1987) 523-27. Readers should be aware that quotations from primary sources contained here have been translated twice (from English to Slovene and again to English) and very probably differ in some details from the originals.
1. The problems arising in the investigation of Slovene and Yugoslav peoples in emigration, and the works published on this subject hitherto, are dealt with by Matjaž Klemenčič in his contribution to the Round Table "Zgodovinske pisane na Slovenskem danes," *Zgodovinski časopis* 41 (1987) 164-66.
 2. Photocopies of the Serbo-Croatian records of both organizations were provided for me in 1982 by Tadej Labernik, at that time Tanjug correspondent in New York.
 3. On this organization, see Andrej Vovko, "Organizacije jugoslovanskih emigrantov iz Julijske krajine do leta 1933," *Zgodovinski časopis* 32 (1978) 449-73, and "Delovanje Zveze jugoslovanskih emigrantov iz Julijske krajine v letih 1933-1940," *Zgodovinski časopis* 33 (1979) 67-102.

POVZETEK

USTANOVITEV "YUGOSLAV EMERGENCY COUNCIL"-a V NEW YORKU

Po nemškem napadu na Jugoslavijo so se 14. aprila 1941, pred začetkom oborožene vstaje v domovini, predstavniki jugoslovanskih izseljencev v New Yorku zedinili, da ustanovijo posebno organizacijo v pomoč zasedeni Jugoslaviji. Delovanje te organizacije, nazvane Yugoslav Emergency Council, v mnogočem pomeni nadaljevanje starejše, leta 1935 ustanovljene Defence Alliance for Yugoslavs in Italy. Nova organizacija je v sodelovanju s Czechoslovak National Committee že za 2. maja 1941 pripravila masovno zborovanje v pomoč zasedeni domovini. Na svoji prvi skupščini, 2. junija 1941, je nato Yugoslav Emergency Council poskušal razširiti svoje delovanje in zajeti vse jugoslovanske izseljence, posameznike in organizacije po ZDA, v Kanadi in Južni Ameriki. Pravila, sprejeta na prvi skupščini so predvidevala politično podporo za obnovitev Jugoslavije kot državne tvorbe po vzoru politične in ekonomske demokracije Združenih držav.

Zapis o ustanovitvi Yugoslav Emergency Council-a v New Yorku se naslanja na sejne zapisnike te organizacije, prinesene iz ZDA.