

Marjan Drnovšek. *Pot slovenskih izseljencev na tuje; od Ljubljane do Ellis Islanda — otoka solza v New Yorku 1880-1924*. Ljubljana, Mladika, 1991. [Knjižna zbirka *Iz roda v rod*] 224 p..

The book *The Journey of Slovene Emigrants Abroad; From Ljubljana to Ellis Island — the Island of Tears in New York 1880-1924* offers the reader an interesting look into the history of Slovene emigration at the time of the massive exodus of the Slovenes into “the wide world.” The subtitle of the book, although symbolic according to the author (6), is slightly misleading, since the book deals with the conditions and reasons for Slovene emigration in general, and thus also with emigrants who went to other parts of the world — Western and Eastern Europe, North Africa, and South America — not only to the United States. The fact that Drnovšek tries to shed light on the entire problem of Slovene emigration is undoubtedly one of the qualities of his book. Until now, there have been papers, books, etc., on Slovene emigration that dealt with one group of emigrants or another, or with one set of reasons for leaving or another, depending on the authors, their research interests, and their ideological persuasion.

According to the author, the book was written not so much for the historian as for the general public and its awareness of Slovene emigration as an integral part of Slovene history. This is also the criterion for this review.

The book has a dual focus. Firstly, it examines the conditions at home that forced or prompted Slovenes to emigrate permanently or temporarily. Secondly, it relates descriptions of who and how many emigrated and of the circumstances in which their numerous journeys took place. These descriptions range from the recruiting of prospective emigrants, the securing of travel documents and organizing the journeys, the journeys themselves with the numerous problems that unexperienced travelers faced upon leaving their native place for the first time, to the birth of new organizations (such as the Society of St. Raphael) to advise and help people in their ventures.

The author begins the book by describing exactly who is an emigrant (*izseljenec*) and what is a homeland (*domovina*). He acquaints us with the definition of emigrants from the Austrian “*izseljeniški patent*” of 1832, with Janez Evangelist Krek’s understanding of an emigrant (1913), Edvard Kocbek’s reflections on emigration (1938), and Josip Marič’s thoughts on homeland (1861). To these thoughts, he adds an explanation of the term “*zdomec*,” which has come into use in Slovenia after World War II to mean the economic emigrant as distinct from the political emigrant. In the introductory part of the book the author briefly scans through the earlier periods of emigration from Slovene lands. Thus, he mentions the emigration of Slovene peasants, craftsmen and others to more developed Italian states in the Middle Ages, the early 17th century exodus of many Slovene protestants to Germany and later to the United States (Ebenezer), and Slovene missionaries (Marko Kapus and Frederic Baraga), who were part of the so-called missionary wave and worked in America. For Drnovšek, emigration is not a new phenomenon that appeared in the 19th century, but

rather one that was present throughout the Middle Ages. He interestingly points out that the emigration of the Slovenes to the Italian states as early as the 15th century could be compared to the massive exodus of the late 19th century (14).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Slovenes were affected by emigration fever and, according to Drnovšek, every third Slovene emigrated either permanently or at least temporarily. The data indicate that emigration from Slovene lands was twice as strong as from the rest of Europe. The exact number of Slovenes who emigrated before World War I is unknown, but the estimate that around 300,000 Slovenes emigrated before 1914 seems to the author to be too high (45). The majority of the Slovenes who left were from rural areas, but there were also others such as miners, lumberjacks, craftsmen and intellectuals, who were seeking better lives in the world. Drnovšek describes the reasons for which people were leaving the Slovene lands. Although poverty and a desire for a better life were probably the prevailing reasons for Slovene emigration, there were also other, less known or obvious reasons, which Drnovšek brings to light, and documents. These were: evasion of military service or of serving jail terms, greed, longing for freedom, and also reasons of a political nature. Among the reasons mentioned, evasion of military service was nevertheless the most significant one. Drnovšek presents an interesting estimate, expressed by Baron Barbo in the Carniolian provincial council (1913), that there were at least 10,000 draft evaders in America from Carniola alone (31). Emigrants who escaped to America to avoid criminal prosecution were not as numerous as the draft evaders, yet there were enough of them to be reported often in Slovene newspapers, as documented by Drnovšek. He even found a joke (1902) on that theme: "A: Did the doctor suggest to your husband a trip to America? B: No, it was his lawyer" (33).

A fair amount has been written about Slovene emigration to America but little attention has been paid thus far to emigration to other places. Drnovšek presents important new and less known information about the latter. He devotes a chapter, "Slovenes in all corners of the world" (*Slovenci na vseh koncih sveta*), mostly to people who emigrated either temporarily or permanently to different West European countries such as Switzerland, France, and Germany (Ruhr area and Westphalia), and to East European countries such as Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Russia. He speaks also of those who found work in Egypt, and Brazil. Some data on Slovene emigration to the lands of the former Yugoslavia were a real surprise to me and to several people I spoke with after having read the book. I found this part of the book the most informative, although that is not to say that I did not learn anything new from the wealth of information that Drnovšek provides throughout the book.

Further on, Drnovšek deals with several other important issues for the emigrants, such as their protection, and in connection with it, he describes the Society of St. Raphael (*Družba sv. Rafaela*), a private organization

which served as a counseling service for emigrants, and the Catholic Church, which tried to protect emigrant workers from, among other things, the liberal ideologies to which workers were exposed. He also challenges the wide-spread assertions in the professional literature on immigration in the United States that South Slavs who immigrated were, apart from everything else, also illiterate. That might have been true for some groups among the South Slavs; it seems very unlikely, however, that this evaluation could have applied to the Slovenes, in the light of the evidence that exists and is also provided in the book. Unfortunately, there is cause to criticize several historians, among others, for example, Bodnar, who performed a great deal of research on Slavic but not specifically Slovene immigrants; and Hogan, who researched Polish immigrants in Chicago, and extrapolated his findings to the entire group of South Slavs.¹

Drnovšek's description of Ljubljana as an important crossroads not only for Slovene emigrants, but also for those from Croatia, who intended to go to America, is richly illustrated with reproductions of original documents and other relevant materials. Ljubljana, the capital of the province of Carniola, was a relatively small town (with a population of about 50,000 in 1910) but had, according to Drnovšek, at least seven competing travel agencies, several hotels and inns for tired, thirsty and anxious travelers. It seems that was quite an "industry" in Ljubljana in those days. Drnovšek describes in detail the operations of travel agencies, with numerous run-ins with the local police as their work often violated the law.

Drnovšek concludes his book with the chapter "Across the Atlantic to Ellis Island — Island of Tears in New York," the destination the majority of Slovene emigrants wanted to reach. Although the emigrants were somewhat prepared for the arrival at Ellis Island, the author brings to light their fears that they would not be allowed to enter the United States. The reader learns how the relatives of the newcomers, already in the States, had written to them with precise instructions on how to behave and what to say to the officials at Ellis Island. The newcomers were also equipped with handbooks to help with their English at the arrival. There were also Slovenes among the officials at Ellis Island — all so that the Slovene emigrants could enter the promised land of that time.

Drnovšek worked in Ljubljana for several years as an archivist and local historian, and he is eminently qualified for the research he undertook. His thorough knowledge of primary sources is deeply evident from the text. It imparts to it a special charm as well, and with numerous statistical data, and photographs of people, places, and historical documents included in the text, stimulates the reader's interest in the topic. He focuses on individual life stories, episodes of emigrants, and other details important for reconstructing their history, but often neglected.

¹ John Bodnar, "Immigration and modernization: The case of Slavic peasants in industrial America," *Journal of Social History*, 10 (1976), p. 44-70; David Hogan, "Education in the making of the Chicago working class, 1880-1930," *History of Education Quarterly*, 18 (1978), p. 227-270.

But sometimes there is too much of a primary source included directly in the text, and it disturbs the fluency of reading. As an example, in the chapter on "Traveling and emigration agencies in Ljubljana," there are eight pages (134 through 141) entirely taken up with the reproduction of an advertisement about the steamer "George Washington," bound for the United States, enticing potential customers. Interesting and relevant but lengthy materials should be placed in appendices, rather than inserted in the main body of the work, where they can create lengthy breaks in the actual text. They cannot be a substitute for description and analysis of concrete data within a broader framework of a historian's pursuit, even for the general public. This is the impression that the reader, unfortunately, receives from time to time.

This is, of course, not to detract from the tremendous accomplishment that Drnovšek achieved with his work, or from the undeniable usefulness of the data he assembled and analyzed, through which Slovene emigration, almost without precedent in the history of small nations, can be better understood.

Pot slovenskih izseljencev na tuje is a well-designed and well-written book on Slovene emigration, and makes inviting and stimulating reading for the general readership as well as for professionals who are interested in the topic. In addition to the notes, an index, and a bibliography, the book also contains résumés in English and German.

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Miran Hladnik, *Slovenska kmečka povest*. Ljubljana: Prešernova družba, 1990. 205 pp.; illustrations, map, tables.

Such a concise and lucid exposition of the genre's century-long development (1859-1945 to be precise) is to be admired. One surprise is that a succinct definition of Slovene rural prose of the type found in literary dictionaries fails to emerge. Yet this minor point but attests to the author's wisdom.

He contents himself with manageable guidelines — historical, national and quantitative (i.e., works of 10,000-words or more) — explaining that a summary definition of the genre would be either too broad and thus empty or leave out important individual writers and works. His disclaimers regarding the genre's Sloveneness aside, students of other literatures may derive much from this study. It is surprising to note that standard literary reference works, including Slavic ones, often omit rural prose altogether.¹ (This, of course, cannot be said of German reference works.) Hladnik's

¹ If anywhere, one would expect to find an entry in *Slovar'* (Moscow, 1987); but this has no entry for *derevenskaia proza* (rural or village prose) on the pages where one finds *detektivnaia* (detective) and *detskaia* (children's) literature. Victor Terras's definition of "country prose" is extremely limited, and the term itself awkward (1985). A respected American handbook lacks any mention of such literature (Holman 1980).