

The Jugoslavs of Cleveland

With a Brief Sketch of their Historical
and Political Backgrounds

By

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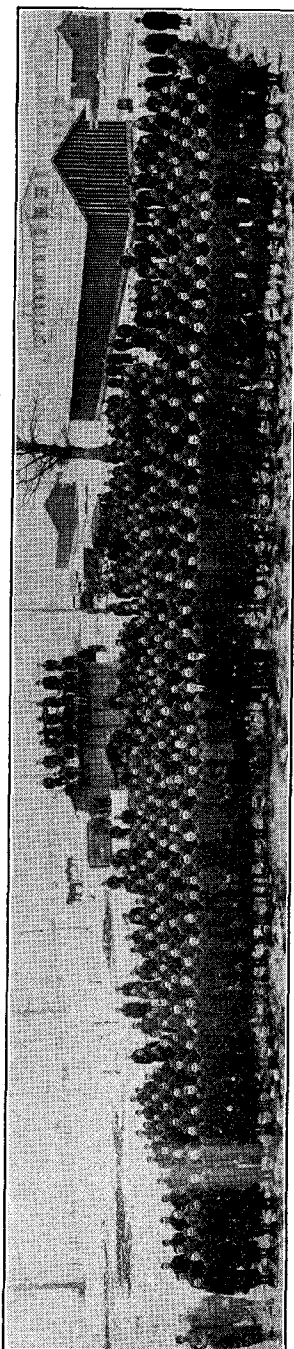
A. C. S.

Foreword

THE dissolution of the ancient realm of the Hapsburgs is giving to the American people a bit of long neglected instruction in European nationalism. With the breaking of the bonds of dynastic rule there have arisen several nations rich in historical traditions and full of significant influence in the formation of a new Europe. The Czecho-Slovaks were the first to arrest our attention; the Jugoslavs have become equally famed. Both groups are very largely represented in the foreign born population of the United States, but few of us distinguished them from the other races of Eastern Europe. The surprising lack of knowledge among Americans of the peoples who have sought homes in this country may be the chief reason why assimilation has been so long delayed. When sympathy and understanding were not to be found among Americans the newcomers sought it among their own kind. Hence, "foreign colonies" and the widely heralded failure of the melting pot.

The Cleveland Americanization Committee deems the dissemination among the native born of accurate information concerning the foreign groups one of the first steps in Americanization. In working out the process of making a new nation out of many diverse groups the intelligent sympathy of Americans is needed first of all. Before we can teach we must understand. To the end that this understanding may be based upon accurate and accessible information the Americanization Committee has undertaken the preparation of a number of studies of the national groups residing in Cleveland. The first of these dealt with the Slovaks; the one presented herein with the Jugoslavs. The cordial reception accorded the first of them justifies a belief that this series may be a real contribution in the interpretation of the foreign born to Americans.

RAYMOND MOLEY,
Chairman.



Jugoslav Young Men at Camp Sherman

The Jugoslavs

ONE of the real benefits which the people of America are deriving from the Great War is an increased interest in world politics. Isolated by our geographical position, we have hitherto been provincial in the extreme, and our international relations have not been intimate enough to cause us to realize the depths of our ignorance.

Now that Fate has forced us into a place where we must take note of European politics, we are adding to our stores of knowledge by leaps and bounds. Knowledge produces sympathy, and we are fast losing the smug complacency with which we regarded ourselves as the original patrons of liberty. We are learning that there are in Europe many peoples who for centuries have struggled for liberty, whose struggles have been infinitely greater in proportion to their numbers, and to the odds against them, than ours was, and have lasted for centuries instead of years. We have not known of them before for the tragic reason that they have never been successful.

Hapsburg and Hohenzollern stand for political despotism, and only since the war opened our eyes have we begun to realize how unhappy has been the lot of the freedom-wishing peoples who have been among the subjects of these tyrants.

"Gerrymander" is an American word, but the idea was old in Central Europe before this republic was founded. Austria systematically kept her subject races impotent by subdividing them so that they would be powerless. And then by Machiavellian methods which we are just beginning to appreciate, she secretly instigated jealousies and dissensions among those artificially created divisions.

The fiery furnace of the present conflict has melted away these artificial causes of dissension, and has brought the leaders of every race to a clear and unprejudiced view of the essentials of its own situation, and of its relations to its kindred, to its neighbors and to its masters.

Therefore we see two great coalitions formed in the Austro-Hungarian empire, the Czecho-Slovak in the north, and the Jugoslav in the south. (Jugo, pronounced you-go, means south.)

The Slav Race.

The Slav race is divided into two main divisions; the first, called the western division, includes Bohemians, Slovaks, and Poles. The eastern and southern division includes Russians, Ruthenians, Bulgarians, Serbians, Croats and Slovenians.

It is the last three who constitute the Jugoslavs, the Bulgarians having, through their Coburg monarch and his misplaced ambition, forfeited all Slavic fellowship.

The Serbians, the Croatians, and the Slovenians are racially the same people, but have long been divided into these three groups through the political conditions to which they have been subject.

The districts inhabited by them in Austria-Hungary alone, are split up into eleven provincial administrations, coming under thirteen legislative bodies. Railroad construction has not been permitted along the natural trade routes which would have facilitated intercommunication among the Jugoslavs. Instead, all railroad and road construction has been aimed at increasing their subjection to Austria and Hungary, creating an economic dependence as artificial and unnecessary as the political. Add to the disadvantages of these conditions, the denial of free speech and political representation, and one can easily see why these people have not hitherto been able to achieve concerted action.

Religion, too, has been a source of separation, the Serbians and Montenegrins having retained church traditions and practices as received from Byzantium, while the Slovenes and Croats came under the influence of Rome, and became Roman Catholic. This involves the secular differences incident to the use on the part of the Serbs of the Cyrillic alphabet and the eastern calendar, fourteen days behind the Roman. These are the only differences between the Serbs and Croats; the terms Serbo-Croat is often used to indicate their unity. The spoken language is identical for the two races. The written languages look different because of the different alphabets.

Political Conditions in Europe.

It has been the policy of the Austro-Hungarian government to foster every possible source of difference among these people in order to prevent any unity of action. For she has always known that their united strength would be too much for her. The attack upon Serbia which formed the pretext for the beginning of the war, had its motive in the increase of South Slav sympathy, which Austria feared would develop into a union of effort.

In America we are just learning the meaning and the possibilities of propaganda, but the whole world has been influenced by Austrian propaganda regarding her subject races and their brothers, who, as Austria's independent neighbors, have been objects of jealousy and fear. Serbia was hated, not so much for her own sake, as because of the Serbs within the monarchy, whose desire for liberty and political freedom was constantly stimulated by proximity to brother Serbs in a free state.

Even the quarrelsomeness of the Balkans, which the world at large has been inclined to accept as evidence of political unfitness, becomes a much less serious matter when one sees how much of it has been "made in Austria".

The truth of the matter is that the whole world owes an unrequitable debt to the Balkan Jugoslavs, who have been for thirteen centuries the outposts of Christian civilization.

The Jugoslavs the Bulwark of Christendom.

In the year 620, the Emperor Heraclius invited their settlement south of the Danube, to form a barrier between Byzantium and the rushing hordes of northern barbarians. After the fall of the Byzantine empire and the shifting of civilization's center to the north, their work remained still to protect civilization and the Christian religion, but now from the Turks, who were assailing it from the east.

From the surrender of Byzantium to the very present, the Yugoslav peoples have been the bulwark of Christendom, protecting it at all times; when not able to protect completely, still taking the first shock, and so breaking the force of the Turkish attacks upon central Europe. They have spent and been spent in the service of Christendom, not once only, but through the constant struggles of a thousand years. Until 1869 a large part of Croatia was organized as a "Military Frontier," its residents formed into military units, always on call for the protection of the border from the Turk. It was not until 1881 that this system was completely done away with, and Croatian men permitted the ordinary civil life of other men.

It is impossible in this brief sketch to outline the history of the various South Slav states, interesting as it would be. We can only indicate a few of the most striking events.

History.

The Slovenes were the first to develop an independent state, the heart of which was in the present province of Carinthia. Conquered by Charlemagne in 778, they were never again able to establish themselves in a commanding position, and eventually came under the control of the House of Hapsburg. Napoleon's Kingdom of Illyria, uniting all the Slovene lands, and including with them some Croats and Serbs, was a true Yugoslav state, and fired national ambitions never since extinguished. Napoleon's astuteness led him to form this state as a check upon Austria, and a link between France and the East, a mission which is still open and still needed.

Croatia was among the nations of the earth during the ninth and tenth centuries, but brought oblivion upon herself when she elected Kolomon, King of Hungary, as King also of Croatia, in 1102. From that time, Croatia, while ostensibly an autonomous kingdom, was gradually reduced to practically the condition of a vassal state.

Bosnia and Serbia were great kingdoms during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and between them included most of the Balkan peninsula. The Turkish tide, however, rose higher and higher—grew ever fiercer and more overwhelming, until on June 28, 1389, it swept over the Serbs at the battle of Kossovo, and their kingdom was submerged. Resistance, however, was kept up for sixty years longer, until in 1459, Serbia ceased to exist. Bosnia and Herzegovina fell before the end of the century, and the Christian Slavs of the Balkans disappeared for three hundred years.

Turkish Subjection.

They disappeared, but they did not cease to exist. The national church was fortunately spared them, and furnished a nucleus for the preservation of the national life, while a line of national bards, called *guslari*, passed on in epic form the great events of the national history. It is said to be extraordinary how much national history is known by even the poorest and most illiterate of Serbian peasants, simply because he has so often heard these oral recitals.

The nobility, exposed to the greatest persecutions, became extinct, and the Serbians became a race of peasants. In the latter part of the 17th Century, some accepted the invitation of the Hungarian sovereign and moved across the border into Hungary. But his promises proved insincere, and the migrating Serbs found themselves tricked, and consideration given to them only when they were needed to defend the country against the Turks.



Cleveland Yugoslav Ladies in Native Costume, with Proposed Flag of Yugoslavia

Throughout this whole period of subjection to the Turks, the Serbian people maintained organized bands called "Hajduks," who kept up a constant guerilla warfare, and sometimes checked but oftener avenged the cruel persecutions visited upon the civil populations by the Turks. These hajduks became national heroes, and their exploits were celebrated and perpetuated by the Guslari.

Thus passed four hundred years. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, liberty awoke throughout the world. The success of the American and French Revolutions aroused the oppressed in every part of Europe, and the surge toward freedom was manifest in every part of the Yugoslav territory.

The Struggle for Freedom.

Serbia was the first to rise. In 1804, under Kara George, the founder of the present dynasty, she began the struggle for independence, which, through many adversities, has known no more tragic years than the last four.

The renascence of the Slovenians and Croatians was greatly promoted by Napoleon's recognition of their strategic importance which resulted in his creation of their territory into the "Illyrian Provinces." If his fall had been postponed, it seems probable that a strong Yugoslav state might have developed at this time. The Congress of Vienna put an end to this possibility, but it could not destroy the stimulated national consciousness. Literary and political revivals followed, and from that time to this, the Slovenians have maintained a constant political struggle in Austria, the Croatians an equally bitter one in Hungary.

Montenegro, which had never been entirely conquered, secured complete emancipation from the Turk in 1830; Bosnia and Herzegovina, struggling continuously for fifty years, found their efforts frustrated by the Congress of Berlin, which ignored their claims to freedom, and simply gave them a change of masters. Between Turk and Austrian, they have found little to choose.

These are the historic backgrounds of the Yugoslav peoples. It is easy to see how attractive to them must have been the reports of political and economic freedom in America.



Slovenian Sokol

Emigration.

The first to make the great venture in any numbers were the Slovenians, who, in 1866, founded a farming colony in Brockway, Minn. Rev. J. J. Oman, pastor of St. Lawrence Slovenian Church, Cleveland, is a child of this colony. Other Slovenian groups followed to America, but the number was small until the late 80's, when the Slovenian tide began to set in, and Cleveland has ever since been an important center of Slovenian immigration.

Some Croatians also came about this time, but their number did not increase rapidly until about 1900. The Serbians have come much more recently, probably all since 1910, and they are from the oppressed provinces of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, not from the kingdom of Serbia.

The Yugoslavs at the Beginning of the War.

At the beginning of the present war, some of the Yugoslavs in the United States, like many of the rest of us, failed to see all the issues clearly. Among them the habit of obedience to the Austro-Hungarian government was still strong. Austro-Hungarian agents in this country took every possible advantage of this fact. They endeavored to recruit and send men to the Austrian army, and when that was not possible, extorted as much money as possible for the Austrian cause. These agents published their own newspapers and carried on extensive propaganda. They threatened American Yugoslavs with procedure under the Austrian martial laws, and frequently put these threats into execution against families and properties in Austria. The Yugoslav in this country, desiring to espouse actively the cause of the allies, was obliged to do so with the knowledge that it might mean exile or death to his nearest of kin.

