

# BETWEEN HUMANITARIANISM AND POLITICS: SOME ASPECTS OF THE RELIEF EFFORTS BY YUGOSLAV IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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## ABSTRACT

### **Between Humanitarianism and Politics: Some Aspects of the Relief Efforts by Yugoslav Immigrants in the United States**

The article examines specific aspects of the humanitarian engagement of Yugoslav immigrants in the United States during World War II. In addition, it aims to highlight how particular ideological, political, and ethnonational views were expressed through the organization, cooperation, and engagement in humanitarian actions. The article reviews the engagement of the United Committee of South-Slavic Americans (UCSSA), an organization whose one activity was sending aid to vulnerable compatriots in the old homeland. It also sheds light on a specific endeavor, namely, the process of loading the Yugoslav ship with humanitarian aid for the partisans and civilians in the liberated parts of Yugoslavia.

**KEYWORDS:** United Committee of South-Slavic Americans, War Relief Fund of Americans of South Slavic Descent, Yugoslav immigration, humanitarian aid

## IZVLEČEK

### **Med dobroteljstvom in politiko: nekateri vidiki prizadevanj jugoslovanskih priseljencev v ZDA za pomoč domovini**

Članek se ukvarja z različnimi vidiki humanitarnega angažmaja jugoslovanskih priseljencev v ZDA med drugo svetovno vojno. Poleg tega si članek prizadeva predstaviti določene politične, ideološke in etničnonacionalne poglede, kot so se razkrivali skozi proces organiziranja, sodelovanja in angažmaja v humanitarnih akcijah. V članku so predstavljene aktivnosti Združenega odbora južnih Slovanov Amerike, organizacije, ki si je prizadevala za pošiljanje pomoči porušeni domovini. Posveča se tudi vprašanju natovarjanja jugoslovanske ladje s humanitarno pomočjo partizanom in civilistom v osvobojenih delih Jugoslavije.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** Združeni odbor južnih Slovanov Amerike, Vojni fond pomoči Američanov južnoslovanskega porekla, jugoslovansko priseljenstvo, humanitarna pomoč

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## INTRODUCTION

War years testify not only to the worst presentations of human nature but also to expressions of true nobility and solidarity. News and images from the war-torn areas and individual experiences of the war events summon a sense of empathy and humanity with a clear need to move from verbal expressions of support to precise ways of assisting the victims. The ingression into active work through individual engagement or institutional organization meets the current or immediate needs. It lays the foundation for long-term work for the benefit of those who need help. Humanitarian activities, particularly in the war years when the need for them is undeniable, primarily bear the stamp of philanthropy and humanity. However, they also make room for expressing other contents and interests (political, ideological, economic, personal) that do not necessarily exclusively contain principles of humanity and humane actions. These contents do not have to distort the positive context of engagement in providing assistance, but they can certainly indicate the complex nature of humanitarian work. Their recognition makes room for and offers a new, or at least, a different perspective of perceiving and understanding various social phenomena, contents, and occurrences at a particular historical moment which find their expression through the process of organizing and participating in various forms of humanitarian actions. In this regard, research related to the humanitarian activities of migrants, in this case of Yugoslav immigrants in the United States, is becoming interesting for several reasons. Besides a particular contribution to understanding the complexity of humanitarian activism, organizational forms, and the force of individual initiatives, the opportunities to acquire valuable knowledge in the context of research on migration as a social phenomenon, consideration of particular aspects such as the relationships between emigrants and the states of emigration or immigration, identity issues, and transnational connectivity are undoubted. Indirectly, this type of activism analysis offers a specific and somewhat different angle for observing the encounters or conflicts of diverse political interests, ideologies, and values during a crisis such as World War II.

In the context of the analysis of the relief efforts of Yugoslav immigrants in the United States, the field of assistance to the old homeland during the war became a place of visible political and ideological occurrences whose character was not exclusively that of a humane endeavor. In other words, the activities of émigrés and other Yugoslav factors in the field of providing/seeking assistance, in their final meaning, remain as an expression of empathy for vulnerable compatriots. In an almost undisguised form, these humanitarian activities also reflect the then-current political affiliations and attitudes toward the ethnonational issue and political and ideological subjects and perspectives related to the Yugoslav space. Some aspects of the relief efforts of Yugoslav migrants during World War II have been the subject of analysis, however, primarily as part of broader analyses of different issues related to Yugoslav emigrants (Čizmić, 1978; Hacin et al., 2018). The

historian Lorraine Lees offered important insight into the complexity of relief work among Yugoslav immigrants in the United States during the war, including the attitude of US authorities toward the issue (2007: 173–193). Historian Matjaž Klemenčič (1987) offered a more detailed account of the relief efforts of Slovenian migrants in the United States. Given the number of actors, individuals, and organizations that organized, collected, and distributed humanitarian aid, this paper concentrates on those aspects and examples of humanitarian activities that offer a paradigmatic example of the complexity and ambiguity of this engagement. Therefore, the relief efforts of the United Committee of South-Slavic Americans (UCSSA) in the direction of assisting the Yugoslav people and the partisan movement, with an emphasis on the attempt to send a ship with humanitarian aid in the second half of 1944, will occupy the primary place of analysis.

## YUGOSLAV IMMIGRANTS AND RELIEF EFFORTS—AN (UN)EXPECTED FIELD OF DIVISIONS

Despite the experiences of the migrants' attitude toward the Yugoslav state in the interwar period, marked by cooperation but also misunderstanding, conflicts, and even open hostility, the Yugoslav community in America showed almost undivided readiness to offer help to the old homeland in times of new challenges.<sup>1</sup> Immediately after the first days of the occupation in April 1941, they organized themselves to collect and send aid to vulnerable compatriots in and outside the occupied state. These activities will incessantly go in step with the public engagement of immigrants until the end of the war and immediately after. Through organizing humanitarian events, donations, also supporting the US war industry by buying US war bonds and personal involvement in the US military (Šotra, 1990: 373–381), the Yugoslav ethnic groups made a direct or indirect contribution to the Yugoslav struggle against the occupiers. Still, the complexity of inherited political and ethnic relations within the Yugoslav state, the continuity of conflicts in emigration that took the form of ethnic divisions and hostility after the news of atrocities committed against the Serbian population in the Independent State of Croatia, and the new challenges posed by

1 A number of different migrant societies existed in the United States. Yet, the largest, and most influential were the benefit societies established to provide protection and support to members during times of distress. However, they also articulated the political views of different ethnic groups. The biggest Croatian organization, Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) was a firm supporter of the Croatian peasant party and its leader Vladko Maček. The Serbian national federation (SNF) established numerous channels of cooperation with the Yugoslav state during the interwar period. During World War II, the Serbian National Defense was formed, advocating the establishment of a Serbian state instead of Yugoslavia. Slovenian migrants were members of several Slovenian organizations (jednote) with different political views ranging from socialist to clerical (Klemenčič, 1987). More on the history of CFU (Čizmić, 1994) on relations between Yugoslav immigration and Yugoslav state in the interwar period, see Brunnbauer (2016); Đikanović (2016); Miletić (2012).

the inclusion of military and political alternatives with the emergence of the partisan movement in Yugoslavia eventually marked this humanitarian aspect of the public engagement in emigration. The political life of Yugoslav émigrés mirrored the one in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before and during the war. Ethnicity played a crucial role when the question arose about the future of the Yugoslav state. Ethnonational political leaders from the old homeland were supported. Most Slovenian migrants endorsed the idea of all Slovenians in a united Slovenia as part of federal Yugoslavia. Representing the majority of Croatian migrants in America, the Croatian Fraternal Union advocated the policy of the Croatian peasant party. This policy included insisting on the agreement that resulted in the formation of Banovina Hrvatska. A large part of Serbian immigrants at the beginning of the war supported the Yugoslav state. However, news from occupied Yugoslavia, and the Independent State of Croatia, influenced the attitude toward the idea of a common state, shifting their support toward the idea of an independent Serbian state. The news from the occupied homeland also affected relations among different Yugoslav ethnic groups, especially among Serbs and Croats. An atmosphere of open hostility, accusations, and open conflicts marked relations between the two immigrant groups.

Ivan Molek, the editor of the Slovenian *Prosveta*, wrote that the issue of relief work for the old homeland was discussed at a meeting of Slovenian immigrants. The attendees emphasized the need to avoid all the controversial problems. Thus, the newly formed committee “would perform only humanitarian acts” (Molek, 1979: 251). Molek himself concluded, “it was not so,” citing the statement of the Slovenian Socialists “that every action pertaining to the old country must also be political” (Molek, 1979: 252). It was not possible to confirm the authenticity of this statement based on the available sources, but it certainly proved to be correct. Namely, the initial activities of the largest migrant organizations and the Yugoslav ambassador to the United States, Konstantin Fotić, left an impression of unity and togetherness. In May 1941, a joint organization of Yugoslav immigrants was established in Cleveland on the initiative of the Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) (Klemenčič, 1987: 169). Furthermore, Fotić’s initiative led to the founding of the organization American Friends of Yugoslavia (AFY), which included both prominent Americans and Americans of Yugoslav origin. A United Yugoslav Relief Fund (UYRF) was formed shortly after, under the auspices of the AFY, to consolidate the work of collecting aid for Yugoslavia (Fotić, 1995: 82–83; Lees, 2007: 173). It turned out that this unity was short-lived. The inherited contradictions, but also the new challenges, the divisions within the government in exile that took an unmistakable nationalistic character, the news on the formation of the Independent State of Croatia, and the mutual accusations of the rapid defeat of the Yugoslav state, shortly began to affect relief efforts in the United States. Accusing the Croatian factor in Yugoslavia of the quick defeat, the Serbian bishop Dionisije stated in a letter to K. Fotić, “I think that we should either wait for a little with the Yugoslav Relief Fund now, or continue not for the Croats and Zagreb, but for the reconstruction of Belgrade” (Dionisije, 1941).

On the other hand, professor Dinko Tomašić interpreted Fotić's action as an attempt to achieve full control over the work in America. Tomašić was a member of the Croatian Peasant Party and soon to become personal secretary to the Ban of Croatia,<sup>2</sup> Ivan Šubašić. Tomašić saw the establishment of the Fund as damaging "because the constitution of such a Fund will prevent relief efforts because all our migrant institutions in America are organized on the people's principle and not on the Yugoslav principle." He concluded that the Fund failed in collecting donations among Croats and was used "to break the Croatian Fraternal Union by the united communist and 'yugoslav' elements" (Tomašić, 1941). The Zagreb professor's message was a warning to the Yugoslav diplomat to respect the independence of the Croatian factor in his work also in America. It was a kind of articulation of the Croatian, that is, HSS policy. Already the first year of the war made it evident that humanitarian work was becoming a platform for political and nationalistic declarations at the same time. Even Fotić himself had no illusions about real unity, neither in terms of the cooperation nor the perception of the events related to the Yugoslav future. As early as June 1941, he stated that, when it came to the help of emigrants, they could count on the Serbian community in the first place because "the prisoners are exclusively Serbs and that the destroyed areas are mostly Serbian" (Fotić, 1941).

Both the news about the partisan resistance movement on the territory of occupied Yugoslavia and it becoming a political alternative to the existing Yugoslav Government-in-Exile (YGIE) by the decisions of AVNOJ in 1942 and 1943<sup>3</sup> instituted new divisions and content. According to one of the supporters of the National Liberation Movement (NLM), Martin Bogdanovic, the news of the conflict between Draža Mihailović and the partisans "affected all political and relief activities of every Yugoslav community within the United States" (Bogdanović, 1944). On American soil, the support for partisans and their leadership came from the Yugoslav communists, as expected, and from certain Yugoslav politicians (Sava N. Kosanović), public figures (the author Louis Adamic<sup>4</sup> and world-famous violinist Zlatko Baloković). With the formation of the United Committee of South Slavic Americans (UCSSA) on August 7, 1943, the support for the NLM gained its institutional visibility. This organization, led by Louis Adamic, undertook the obligation to represent the interests of the South Slavs from the occupied territories and to promote the unity of the South Slavic peoples on the territory of the United States to support the war efforts of the United States and its allies (The Bulletin, 1943). However, the UCSSA also came to concrete conclusions regarding the Yugoslav state that positioned the organization as open support for the NLM. Thus, the work of the committee went

2 In 1939, Banovina of Croatia was established by an agreement between the prime minister Dragiša Cvetković and the politician enjoying widest support in the Croat-inhabited lands, Vladko Maček. The first and only person to hold the title of Ban of Croatia was Ivan Šubašić.

3 On different aspects and decisions of AVNOJ see Petranović (1992: 526–534).

4 On activities of Louis Adamic during the World War II (Novak, 1998; Klemenčič & Mrdenović, 2020).

in the direction of giving "moral and (as soon as possible) financial support to the National Liberation Army and Partisans of Yugoslavia..." (Adamic, 1943). After the military recognition of the NLM by the allied countries at the conference in Teheran in November 1943, the committee's primary task became the work on the political recognition of the NLM and the denial of the legitimacy of the old political forces, i.e., the YGiE. It soon became apparent that the field of humanitarian engagement would be within reach of new political and ideological divisions and conflicting interests. Sava Kosanović, a former minister in the Yugoslav government and then one of the most active supporters of the partisan forces, emphasized the close or almost unbreakable link between the political and the humanitarian aspect. He welcomed the decision made in Teheran, but he also emphasizes the importance of political recognition as a gesture of respect for the actual events on the ground and the mood of the Yugoslav people, which would also "find immediate expression in increased aid through lend-lease and other channels" (Kosanović, 1944a). Kosanović made this remark at the beginning of an ongoing fight of the UCSSA for obtaining the license of the American state for the collection and distribution of humanitarian aid. Alongside news about the successes of the partisan forces and the liberation of parts of the occupied country came news about the tragic situation of the people in the liberated territories. Therefore, one of the UCSSA's work priorities in 1944 became creating conditions to send aid to partisans and the people of Yugoslavia. The condition for initiating relief efforts was the possession of a license from the American authorities, i.e., War Relief Control Board, which, in addition to collecting, was also supposed to enable the distribution of humanitarian aid. To obtain the permission, the representatives of the UCSSA used an argument aimed at confirming the justification of their requests. Apart from emphasizing the grave situation in Yugoslavia, at the same time, these arguments went toward discrediting the work of the existing UYRF. Namely, there were allegations as to the poor performance and achievements of the fund, which was believed to be under the control of the Yugoslav Ambassador Fotić (Marković, 1945: 280). To underline the claim about the essential inefficiency of the fund, they emphasized the complete absence of cooperation between this body and the Yugoslav community in America. Zlatko Baloković stated, "It is evident that the present board of the United Yugoslav Relief Fund remains adamant in their refusal to cooperate with the representatives of the vast majority of Americans of the Yugoslav descent" (Baloković, 1944a). Yet again, on another occasion, emphasizing the readiness of Yugoslav emigrants to help the people in the liberated parts of Yugoslavia, Baloković, justifying their refusal to cooperate with the fund, concluded, "They do not have confidence in the United Yugoslav Relief Fund" (Baloković, 1944b). Hence, the UCSSA asked the US authorities for permission to run a relief campaign "until such time as the United Yugoslav Relief Fund is reorganized so that it draws strength from all Americans of the South Slavic Descent" (Baloković, 1944b). Indirectly, such an argument conveyed the message that even those forces that stood behind the work of this fund no longer enjoyed

any support from the Yugoslav people, certainly not those who lived in the United States. S. Kosanović went a step further and was more expressive in using the issue of humanitarian aid as an argument for political and moral disqualification of political rivals. In a statement to the *New York Times*, as reported by this paper, Kosanović pointed out that YGiE, during a crucial time in the fortunes of the fight against the Nazis, had “misrepresented” the state of affairs to the United States Government and the relief agencies. As a result, lend-lease, UNRRA, and Red Cross aid “were being used against the Yugoslav people” (*Balkan Unity*, 1944). In his Memorandum to the American authorities, Kosanović emphasized that the humanitarian aid distribution policy was erroneous not only for the Yugoslav side “but also for the American.” As he stated, one million Yugoslav-Americans were living in the United States, and “the greatest majority of them are pro-Tito.” He concluded, “the Yugoslavs in Yugoslavia are under the impression that official America is backing Fotić and all the enemies of the Yugoslav people” (Kosanović, 1944b). The American side was also aware of the potential political implications of granting permission to the United Committee. Lorraine Lees concludes after quoting an American official “War relief (had) become a principal arena in the United States for discussion and agitation of foreign political questions; [...] The Yugoslavs were a case in point” (Lees, 2007: 173, 174). The issuance of the license could have introduced additional divisions and conflicts in the otherwise complex relations within the Yugoslav factor in America. However, after several months of negotiations, but also in somewhat changed political circumstances resulting from the formation of the Tito-Šubašić government in July 1944, the American authorities decided to grant a license to the UCSSA on August 24, thus enabling the collection and distribution of aid (Control Board, 1944).

The UCSSA was expected to form a new organization that would work exclusively on relief work. Thus, they established the War Relief Fund of Americans of the South Slavic Descent (WRFASDD) with Zlatko Baloković as its president. In this manner, they made a distinction between political and relief actions. Moreover, the new organization, WRFASDD, was expected to take “all measures necessary” to achieve cooperation with other Yugoslav organizations having a license to collect aid.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, obtaining such a license was a great victory for the UCSSA and the entire partisan issue; its procurement represented political legitimacy and acknowledgment. Unquestionably, the objective Yugoslav needs prompted the effort to secure a permit for relief work. Obtaining a license was welcomed by the leaders of the NLM (Velevit, 1944b). It was important to NLM since its negotiations with UNRRA on receiving humanitarian aid, also with political implications, produced no result at the time (Ajlec, 2020: 131; Velevit, 1983: 314, 345). Alternatively, relief work provided an opportunity to exercise activities of a much more pragmatic nature. An additional sphere of political propaganda that favored the new military and political forces on

5 Support was primarily sought from organizations that obtained a license to collect aid on US soil (CFU, JPO-SS, SND, UYRF).

the territory of the Yugoslav state was entered. Despite the regulations forbidding humanitarian organizations from entering the sphere of political activism through direct contact with the migrant community and the promotion of a new narrative centered on a positive image of the NLM, the supporters of Tito's leadership had new opportunities for propaganda work opening to them. Zlatko Baloković highlighted the fact that "a successful relief campaign on such a great scale will automatically be of great value in arousing sympathy and interest in Tito and the entire liberation movement" (Baloković, 1944d).

## WAITING FOR THE SHIP TO COME—BETWEEN RELIEF EFFORTS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

The news from London would soon bring new dynamics into the work of WRFASSD. Namely, the Yugoslav government in London informed the Yugoslav consulate in Montreal about its intention to send a ship to the United States to deliver humanitarian aid from Canada and the United States directly to the people in the liberated parts of Yugoslavia (Pijevac & Jončić, 2004: 456). This information was also forwarded to the WRFASSD leadership. It was specified that the ship with a carrying capacity of 5,000 tons should arrive in New York in mid-November 1944 (Maletić, 1944c). The Yugoslav government appointed Toma Babin, the president of the Yugoslav Seamen's Club in New York, as the official organizer of the ship-loading action (*Poziv za davanje pomoći*, 1944). As the leadership of WRFASSD was informed by Ivan Šubašić, the ship *Timok* was designated for the loading of goods, but for security reasons, the name and date of arrival of the ship were supposed to be kept secret (Šubašić, 1944). Only two weeks after its founding, the WRFASSD leadership faced a great challenge that tested the organization's ability to meet the needs and expectations of the NLM and to confirm its status as a true representative of the Yugoslav people in the United States.

Although immigrants from Canada were involved in the action, and a few organizations from South and Central America also contributed, the highest expectations were still associated with the United States, given the number of immigrants of Yugoslav origin. Certain expectations from WRFASSD were also present among the partisan leadership. These circumstances created a need to provide broad support, which included all relevant Yugoslav organizations, as necessary. It also meant seeking support from those organizations and individuals who held opposite political perspectives about the future of the common state. Gaining support was essential for several reasons. Primarily, a decisive advantage is reflected in the success of the humanitarian actions themselves, that is, in the increased volume of collected aid, which was only attainable through achieving masses. Reaching unity, however, also had a significance that entered the field of proving authenticity and political grounding. One of the main arguments supporting the UYRF's failure thesis

was the lack of support from Americans of Yugoslav descent. Therefore, the new organization had to demonstrate its authenticity and justify its existence by uniting immigrants behind combined actions. Namely, as it was indicated, "The fraternal cooperation of all South Slavic Americans in the relief action is the strongest manifestation of our unity and the best guarantee for successful work" (Appeal, 1944). The accord behind the work of WRFASSD conveyed a clear political message. The inclusion of more migrants, and more importantly, major immigrant organizations sent a message to the United States and all other allies that the military and political force in the country had the sincere support of the Yugoslav people.

In an attempt to increase the network of associates and due to the answers WRFASSD received, the words of the president of the Serbian support society *Jedinstvo*, Milo Marinković, sounded almost like political excess. Agreeing to take a seat on the board of the new organization, Marinković added

I think that it is NOT a QUESTION OF WHETHER I PERSONALLY AGREE COMPLETELY WITH THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF ALL OTHER OR INDIVIDUAL BOARD MEMBERS. My conscience DOES NOT ALLOW me to inhibit or disable help to the people from my place of origin due to incongruities with some insignificant political points (Marinković, 1944).

This attitude proved to be an isolated incident within the Yugoslav emigrant community. Despite the previous experience marked by conflicts and disputes, WRFASSD sent an invitation to the Serbian National Defense and Bishop Dionisije to participate in the action of the ship loading (Maletić, 1944b; WRFASSD, 1944b). The call insisted on the apolitical nature of the organization and the exclusively humanitarian nature of the entire act. The WRFASSD is, as stated, "dedicated solely to the humanitarian task of alleviating the desperate suffering of the Yugoslav people." (WRFASSD, 1944a). The SND did not respond to the invitation. There were certain expectations about a possible positive reaction from Bishop Dionisije (Maletić, 1944d; Maletić, 1944e). However, the complexity of differences proved too great to overcome with a single plea to action.

There was not too much hope for the success of the inclusion of the largest Serbian organizations. Still, those expectations certainly existed in the case of such individuals and organizations that expressed support or at least sympathy for the NLM. However, it proved that even those in the diaspora who publicly supported the NLM and some USCCA members were not ready to unconditionally support the committee's actions, even when they were humanitarian. It was not a matter of the current situation but rather a matter of continuity in public performance and declaration, which could have had particular political implications. Specific interests would not allow unconditional participation in the action led by the WRFASSD. The Slovensko ameriški narodni svet (SANS, Slovenian American National Council), an organization established in December 1942 as a representative body of Slovenian

immigrants (Klemenčič, 1987; 214–266), provided support for the establishment of WRFASSD, sent a financial contribution, and expressed its readiness to participate in the action of loading the ship furthermore (SANS, 1944).

Conversely, the organization of Slovenian immigrants formed to collect aid for compatriots in the old homeland, Jugoslovanski pomožni odbor-slovenska sekcija (JPO-SS, Yugoslav Auxiliary Campaign-Slovenian Section), did not demonstrate equal willingness for combined action. They discussed participation in the joint effort at the meeting on October 19, 1944, and again a month later. The final decision was to set a sum of money without becoming a part of the new organization's work since they were not sure that the help would reach Slovenia (Klemenčič, 1987: 270). At the meeting held on November 14, the leadership of JPO-SS approved \$25,000 of aid to purchase medical equipment intended for a Yugoslav ship but "for use in Slovenia" (Cainkar, 1944a). This decision was certainly disappointing news for WRFASSD representatives. Zlatko Baloković, in a letter to Vincent Cainkar, warned, "To keep back money already collected and available for immediate relief for the people of Yugoslavia would be nothing less than murder" (Baloković, 1944e). This statement did not import that some Slovenian organizations and the members of JPO-SS would not participate in the work of WRFASSD. The SNPJ (Slovenska narodna podporna jednota – Slovene National Benefit Society), as the most prominent support alliance of Slovenian migrants to the United States, sent financial aid, and Vincent Cainkar, the president of both this alliance and the JPO-SS, openly promoted collaboration with this organization (Cainkar, 1944b).<sup>6</sup>

When Anna Traven asked V. Cainkar to make an influence on JPO-SS to join the action of the new organization, she stated, among other things, that the CFU would buy goods worth \$ 150,000 as well as that "they lost no time in deciding once they were sure of the ship" (Traven, 1944). However, Traven did not comment on the period of painful negotiations and uncertainty in connection with the involvement of the CFU in the combined humanitarian action. The leadership of the UCSSA indeed counted on this cooperation. However, at the time of launching the ship loading, in October 1944, the WRFASSD stated that the CFU was "separately conducting a relief action" (WRFASSD, 1944a). There is no doubt that one of the reasons for the behavior of the Croatian organization, similar to the Slovenian one, was the need to establish complete control over the collected money and its use. Agreeing to collaborate with WRFASSD meant that the priority in this sphere of activity was somehow conceded to another organization and leadership. However, some other reasons also shaped the behavior of migrant organizations, especially those that, given the number of members, were considered true representatives of the immigrant community. Alike the experience in the Great War, the years of the new world conflict, from the point of view of Yugoslav immigrants in America, made them a free and authentic voice of

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6 From 1941, there was a separate relief action conducted by the Union of Slovenian Parishes. As M. Klemenčič explained, the funds were delivered through the Vatican bank to occupied Slovenia (Klemenčič, 1987: 170–171, 293).

the people who had the opportunity, obligation, and duty to represent the interests of their own people. Thus, a message was sent from the Serbian Assembly in October 1941, that the Assembly was “the only free forum in the world where the word of our national religious feelings, desires, pain, and protests can, must and is to be heard” (Memorandum, 1941). In February 1943, one could hear from the lines of Croatian emigrants that “American Croats have the right and duty to interpret the feelings of the Croatian people in the old homeland ...” (Spomen knjiga, 1943). Despite some opposite views in that regard, it is actually that this fact gained an essential place in the attempt to understand the attitudes and actions of the immigrant public in relation to the events related to the Yugoslav state, in addition to the inherited situations and the need for a new position due to the changed circumstances made by the war. Then again, the UCSSA was the bearer of relief action (through WRFASDD), but this body was also an important political ally of the NLM in the United States, a factor to coordinate measures and plans with (Velebit, 1944a; Baloković, 1944c). Hence, the cooperation of migrant organizations with the WRFASDD could indirectly mean recognizing the new political situation and the idea of a new Yugoslavia. At a time when the future of the country was still not clearly visible, any such action carried the weight of political and/or ideological interpretation. Considering such possible implications, one could understand the care and attention when making decisions, accepting obligations, and entering various forms of collaboration.

It turned out that the realization of the cooperation with CFU would not be easy. On one occasion, WRFASDD leadership stated that “there are indications entitling us to think that all this has a very complex political background” (WRFASDD, 1944a). In the new political circumstances, the status of the Croatian Peasant Party’s leader Vladko Maček affected also the position of the CFU. By all odds, the news about the attitude of the new partisan forces toward Maček, the so-called “Maček controversy,” as Louis Adamic would put it, left a mark on the behavior of the Croatian element in America. Namely, the Yugoslav communists wanted the support of the migrants, which came from understanding the goals of the NLM struggle. In this respect, the issue of Maček had to be understood as a matter of creating a new society in which there was no place for a politician whom Yugoslav communists considered a “traitor” (Velebit, 1944a). Based on the insight into the available documents, the argumentation of V. Velebit did not find a place in the attempts to persuade the CFU to cooperate. Quite the reverse, it was precisely individuals from the ranks of Croatian political life in exile who were asked to support the negotiations with the Croatian organization. Thus, Rudolf Bičanić was asked to influence the president of the CFU, Ivan Butković, to join the action of the ship loading “even if they had to indicate with huge letters on the boxes that it is a special help from Butković and the Croatian community” (WRFASDD, 1944a). Finally, the support of the Croatian side was obtained, despite occasional stumbling, and according to Z. Baloković, the WRFASDD Fund, which amounted to \$200,000, also included the amount of \$175,000 provided by the CFU and the Croatian National Council (Baloković, 1944e). Following the idea

of Yugoslav unity and the policy expressed by the decisions of AVNOJ, there was a demonstration of openness declared for the inclusion of organizations that were not exclusively Serbian, Croatian, or Slovenian (WRFASSD, 1944c). The steps were taken to connect with the UYRF, but they did not yield results (Maletić, 1944a).

In addition to the primary goal of fundraising, they entered the sphere of political activism in favor of partisan forces and political leadership led by Josip Broz Tito. After all, there was a connection and interdependence of the success of the two actions, one conducted openly and the other more subtly. Receiving mass support was closely tied to the positive perception of those to whom help was intended. Through public appeals, in private communication with individuals and organizations, the message was conveyed about the authenticity of the partisan movement in the fight against Nazism in Yugoslavia and the correctness of the NLM leadership's policy. Across the United States, forms with an image of a young partisan woman with names of donors and the amounts of donations were issued. The political message was more openly accentuated in letters to individuals (Maletić, 1944f). It was difficult to refrain from political activism. Despite the clear instructions by the organizers of a Pittsburgh rally to refrain from mentioning Tito and political issues, Oskar Magazinović proudly informed Maletić, "I wanted to talk about Tito [...], and that is precisely what I did" (Magazinović, 1944).

Despite the efforts and dedicated work by WRSSDF representatives and Yugoslav communists in the United States, the results were not satisfactory. Strahinja Maletić, recognizing the dire situation, appealed to "ask for help everywhere" (Maletić, 1944c). Hence, more intensive work was done to gain support from the American public, including prominent political and public figures. With the support of Russian War Relief, the Allen-Klarnet Associate had been hired to promote relief efforts among Americans. A special organization was established in mid-November, the American Committee for the Yugoslav Relief Ship, as part of WRFASSD (Basic information, 1944). An appeal to the Americans' pragmatism took place. American soldiers in Italy, as it was stated, were alive partly because of "Tito's Yugoslav Liberation Army [...] keeping large German forces pinned down in Jugoslavia" (To the Editors, 1944). It was also an opportunity to create a valuable network of allies among Americans. The accomplishment of gaining American support was even more significant. Josip Broz Tito stated, "The Ship with humanitarian aid that our friends from America want to send, will be a valuable support, not only as a sign of compassion [...] but as a manifestation of understanding our struggle from the great land of Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt, according to which Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and Macedonians have undivided sympathy and respect" (Marshal Tito, n.d.). Sava Kosanović, in a letter to the American Committee for Yugoslav Relief<sup>7</sup> concluded that besides the relief efforts, this board had "a deeper political meaning because it develops the friendship between the USA and Yugoslavia" (Kosanović, 1944c). However,

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7 This committee inherited the existing organization WRFASSD at the end of 1944.

this process also prompted to the surface the harsh reality of wartime. The satiety of the American public with the strong appeals for help came to the fore this time as well. Despite this, WRFASSD gathered 350 American sponsors for the American Committee for the Yugoslav Relief Ship, including popular radio presenters, public figures, and politicians (Basic information, 1944).

The sphere for political activism was opened, but the primary goal was to send aid. Despite great efforts and specific results, it was not enough. The ship intended to deliver aid was used to transport timber from Halifax to England (Maletić, 1944c). It did not entail that the collected aid did not reach the Yugoslav territory. Other ships provided necessary assistance to the Yugoslav people and army, followed by the final agreement with UNRRA in 1945 that made room for continuous provision to the country (Ajlec, 2020: 139).

## CONCLUSION

In the years of profound political transformations, changes, and tragic yet dynamic movements, it seemed that no aspect of public activism could remain outside the political content. The divisions and differences that accompanied the public life of immigration were too deep for this essentially humane aspect of public expression to remain intact. Alternatively, according to the actors of public life in America, the field of humanitarian work also became a political arena in which politics, ideas, and ethnonational interests were an issue for which to fight. Simultaneously, the networking of the political status of the actors in the Yugoslav drama and the approach to humanitarian aid in the complex world of international relations was perceived. One thing meant the other; that is, one issue was a reflection of the other. The efforts of the United Committee and the newly established relief organizations were directed at providing political support to the Partisan movement and supplying humanitarian aid. Despite the occasional failures and unimplemented plans, the latter yielded real and tangible results that reached those who needed help. As for political work, several other factors, primarily the reality on the ground, the political and military affirmation of the NLM, would settle the fate of the new Yugoslav state.

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## POVZETEK

### MED DOBRODELNOSTJO IN POLITIKO: NEKATERI VIDIKI PRIZADEVANJ JUGOSLOVANSKIH PRISELJENCEV V ZDA ZA POMOČ DOMOVINI

Vesna ĐIKANOVIĆ

Med drugo svetovno vojno se je zdelo, da se noben vidik političnega aktivizma ne more izogniti politični zaznamovanosti. V prvih dneh po razpadu Jugoslavije je področje humanitarnega dela ponujalo podobo enotnosti in sodelovanja. Humanitarno delo, pri katerem je takoj sodelovalo tudi veliko število priseljencev, je kmalu vključevalo številne aktivnosti, ki so se vse bolj spreminjale v izražanje političnih, nacionalističnih in ideoloških prepričanj. Nasprotujoča si stališča in politične preference so ponovno prišli do izraza, ko sta Združeni odbor južnih Slovanov Amerike (UCSSA) in novoustanovljena dobrodelna organizacija, Vojni fond pomoči Američanov južnoslovenskega porekla (WRFASSD) izvajali operacije pošiljanja pomoči osvobojenim delom Jugoslavije. Na pripravljenost posameznih etničnih skupin za sodelovanje v kampanji natovarjanja ladje s pomočjo so vplivali njihovi različni pogledi na prihodnost skupne države.

Na drugi strani je odbor UCSSA hkrati izkoriščal humanitarno delo za politično propagando v korist narodnoosvobodilnega boja (NOB). Kampanja natovarjanja jugoslovanske ladje s pomočjo jim je ponujala priložnost za uresničitev tako dobrodelnih kot političnih ciljev. Na koncu težko pričakovana ladja ni pristala v newyorškem pristanišču – vseeno pa so partizani in civilisti v Jugoslaviji pomoč dobili po drugih kanalih.

