

Banditry and Subversion in Croatia at the End of the Long Nineteenth Century

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Gradual decline of the Austro-Hungarian political power during the last phase of the First World War went hand in hand with the collapse of its, previously solidly established, repressive mechanisms. This “empire of bureaucrats”¹ with a population of about 52 million people who were being monitored and sanctioned by a network of gradually modernized instances, such as complex judicial organs and police, had to face an obvious discontinuity in terms of wartime surveillance and repression of its subjects. That phenomenon can be largely explained by the fact that the Monarchy mobilized nearly 8 million men between 1914 and 1918,² crippling its well-defined administrative structure in many aspects by sending people of all professions, including police officers, to the battlefield. On one hand, this obviously raised a question of public security and increasing crime rates in some cities, including those in the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia. For example, according to certain data, almost 70% of policemen in Osijek, then the second largest Croatian city, were recruited by the military when the war broke out. Moreover, scarcity of the working force and different provisions affected general productivity, while lack of certain materials, such as paper, posed a great challenge to authorities in their attempt to establish an effective communication network with their subordinates, or print new legal regulations. As Pieter Judson explains, the state was facing a severe crisis of legitimacy. Giving extra-large, almost dictatorial authority to the military marked a turning point in the history of the Habsburg Monarchy, radically drifting away from the usual *rechtsstaat*, i.e. “rule of law”.³

In return, wave of socialist revolutions across Europe (Russia, Germany, Hungary) undoubtedly made a significant impact on some members of the partially industrialized Croatian society between 1917 and 1919.⁴ Following the decades of ideological and organiza-

¹ Johnston, *The Austrian Mind*, 45.

² Judson, *Povijest Habsburškog Carstva*, 425.

³ *Ibid.* 426, 433.

⁴ According to the last Austro-Hungarian census in 1910, Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia had a population of 2,6 million people and only 8% of them inhabited cities. Great majority of people were engaged in agriculture, while wood processing industry represented the most developed industrial sector on the Croatian territory, backed by foreign investors interested in exploiting local forest resources. Some authors saw this as a cause of “structural deformation of industrial economics” in Croatia, since most factory complexes were situated near sources of raw materials, i.e. in the countryside. Consequently, among other things, this resulted with a relatively low number of city factories and a slow-paced formation of the urban proletariat. Vranješ Šoljan, *Stanovništvo gradova Banske Hrvatske na*

tional development of the domestic labor movement, number of Croatian activists supported or participated in the communist uprising in Russia and Béla Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic at the very end of the long 19th century.⁵ It is fascinating that even some attempts were made to form short-lived socialist republics on the Croatian or the neighboring Hungarian territory.⁶ Concerning that, the return of soldiers from the Eastern Front, where they were exposed to the Bolshevik ideology, made the distribution of such subversive ideas even stronger, despite authorities' rather ineffective attempts to stop it. In their early writings following the war, some Yugoslav communists referred to the disintegrated Monarchy as "an old fortress of injustice and most awful tyranny [that] crumbled to several states, while its statesmen drowned in their own bog". Calling it "a representative of the imperialist bourgeoisie and noblemen"⁷ they unequivocally advocated a proletarian revolution during and after the *Great War*.

As it was becoming clear that the war defeat was inevitable, and while the concept of a new South Slavic state was getting closer to its political realization, defection hit the Monarchy's army en masse. Groups of army deserters and other radicalized individuals, known as the Green Cadre (*zeleni kadar*), took part in collective banditry that lasted for years in Croatia-Slavonia. According to Jakub S. Beneš, in 1917 81,605 deserters were arrested in the Hungarian half of the monarchy. It is estimated that this number almost doubled to approximately 150,000 in 1918.⁸ Some of these deserters turned to banditry and eventually became well-known historic figures in the Balkans, most notably Jovan Stanisavljević Čaruga who was hanged in 1925 but is still remembered as the "Slavonian Robin Hood".⁹

In short, this paper will question the correlation between the collapse of the Monarchy's repressive mechanisms and economy during the period of significant sociopolitical transformation and the spread of subversive socialist ideas as well as banditry, using the Croatian context as a specific case study. In doing so, author hopes to make a brief contribution to the Southeast European history from below at the end of the long 19th century. The arti-

prijelazu stoljeća, 47, 49.; Karaman, "Društveno-ekonomski uvjeti razvoja Kombinata Belišće do 1918. godine", 225.

⁵ Surely, these were not first manifestations of socialist internationalism among activists who operated in the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia. For example, multiple sources tell us that contacts with the Budapest branch of the International Workingmen's Association were established as early as 1871. This was followed by various events related to the wider context of the labor movement, such as declaring support of the Paris Commune, distributing illegal leftist press (communist, anarchist and social democratic), participating in international socialist congresses, organizing strikes as signs of protest related to some significant events in other European countries (e.g. 1909 demonstrations in Split after the execution of Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer), etc. See more: Pejić, *Historija klasičnog anarhizma u Hrvatskoj: fragmenti subverzije*.

⁶ For example, Serbian-Hungarian Baranya-Baja Republic, a short-lived, Soviet-oriented mini-state, proclaimed in Pécs on 14 August 1921.

⁷ Očak, "Povratnici iz Sovjetske Rusije u borbi za stvaranje ilegalnih komunističkih organizacija uoči Prvog kongresa SRPJ (k)", 17.

⁸ Beneš, "Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918", 9.

⁹ Čaruga has been rather thoroughly investigated by Croatian historians and various authors interested in this subject. The most recent books I can name are Boris Rašeta's *Čaruga. Legenda o Robinu Hoodu* (Zagreb, 2019), and Vlatko Smiljanić's *Čaruga: životopis slavonskoga razbojnika Jovana Stanisavljevića 1897–1925* (Zagreb, 2020).

cle mostly relies on secondary sources written in Croatian and Serbian, as well as on certain unpublished archival and press materials.

On the brink of collapse

Although it had seemed at first that the war could offer different options for redesigning the Austro-Hungarian Empire – as conservatives hoped to use it to “turn back the clock on the political democratization of recent years”, or as nationalist saw it as a chance of attaining desired regional autonomy, greater linguistic rights, etc. – it eventually marked the last chapter of the Dual Monarchy. Narrative of patriotic sacrifice could not mask the fact that the war was radically transforming society, whose state was continuously failing to provide adequate nutrition, heating fuel or other benefits for families of its soldiers. “A state that could not ameliorate its peoples’ intense and dramatic suffering imperiled its popular legitimacy”, Judson explains. Also, authorities on all levels encountered a serious problem of personnel deficit – ranging from policemen to teachers. Moreover, problematic individuals such as black-market merchants, illegal prostitutes or politically radicalized soldiers returning from the front started to appear in places all across the monarchy. In addition, food supplies drastically decreased during the war as production collapsed and import was blocked. The fact that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy lost to the Russians agriculturally indispensable region of Galicia, with its one-third of all Austrian farmland, served as a new blow to the state. Malnutrition caused a rise in tuberculosis rates in cities such as Vienna, while police reports in Prague “noted the increased dangers of violent incidents thanks to the practice of all-night queuing”.¹⁰

Even though the territory of the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia was not directly caught by the war, i.e. it was not encompassed by any of the fronts, Croatian military and civilian casualties surpassed approximately 200,000 people.¹¹ Ivo Goldstein emphasizes that urban life was devastated as many newspapers ceased publication and businesses were forced to close down. “The economy was a shambles. [...] Apathy was everywhere”, he writes.¹² The war economy which implied requisitioning in the villages created a great number of impoverished peasants, while popular discontent was rising. On the other hand, food shortages arguably sharpened the conflict between the urban and the rural population. Some peasants only temporarily used an increase in prices to their advantage, since mass mobilization, relentless requisition, speculative trading, and state’s monopoly on buying certain goods evidently burdened them. Accumulated food was mostly stored in inadequate spaces where it was easily spoiled, while wealthier individuals used bribe to acquire larger portions of supplies. Mobilization also enormously affected rural families considering the fact that most able-bodied men were recruited, leaving farming obligations to women, elderly and chil-

¹⁰ Judson, *Povijest Habsburškog Carstva*, 425–427, 439, 443.

¹¹ For example, Ivo Goldstein argues that during the First World War there were about 137,000 military and 109,000 civilian casualties from Croatia. Most civilian victims can be ascribed to hunger, bad living conditions, epidemics and diseases such as the Spanish flu. Goldstein, *Hrvatska povijest*, 324.

¹² Goldstein, *Croatia. A History*, 108.

dren. In general, according to Branka Boban, majority of Croatian politicians at that time were not able to grasp the gravity of prevailing economic and social problems.¹³

Zagreb, the largest city of Croatia, was forced to deal with a certain increase in crime rates during the war period, determined by deficits in police force¹⁴ and decline in the standard of living. Among the conscripts who were coming to the city for training, there were some who had been previously registered as criminals. Military personnel caused the most problems for the safety of citizens and their property on weekends, as soldiers on leave got drunk and initiated fights. Marko Vukičević elaborates that criminality in Zagreb during the *Great War*, with the occasional occurrence of serious crimes such as murder, according to articles from the local newspapers, was marked by a large number of frauds, thefts and burglaries. Frauds often took place as naïve customers gave charitable contributions to false humanitarian initiatives, while stealthy pickpockets operated on trams and city streets.¹⁵ In 1915 a newspaper reported that “various pickpockets and conmen” had been rarely tracked, blaming them for a growing sense of insecurity in town.¹⁶

In addition to their usual duties, such as investigating and sanctioning various offenses, the outbreak of war gave policemen a number of new tasks. Thus, the city police had a responsibility to prevent circulation of unverified war news or rumors that could potentially trouble the population. Therefore, all passengers who arrived by train were checked at stations in order to prevent smuggling of any undesired press from neutral and enemy countries. Police officers also had to keep an eye on illegal prostitutes, child beggars, prisoners of war and their movements, as well as they had to control adherence to the prescribed maximum prices and defined working time (decision was made to close stores earlier in the winter to save firewood and lighting materials).¹⁷ On top of that, on 24 July, the Land Government issued a warrant to the Royal Police Committee of Zagreb for making a list of “politically suspicious persons”.¹⁸ According to Vukičević, exact crime rate in the city of Zagreb during the *Great War* is still not known. He adds: “However, according to newspaper articles, there was a steady increase in the number of crimes and misdemeanors committed each year”.¹⁹ In her research, Valentina Kezić came to a conclusion that snippets about thefts in the Croatian capital were prevailing in crime columns of the wartime press.²⁰

Swelling numbers of crimes against property can be attributed to the generally unfavorable social environment outlined by the rise in prices of goods and household necessities, severely affecting the poorest urban classes and resulting in high child mortality. The city authorities could no longer ensure normal functioning, especially in the field of supplying

¹³ Boban, “Socijalni problemi i njihov utjecaj na raspoloženje najširih slojeva u Banskoj Hrvatskoj prema stvaranju jugoslavenske države 1918. godine”, 211–228.

¹⁴ According to some authors, mobilization decreased the number of policemen in Zagreb by 60%. See: Jurić, “Zagreb u Prvome svjetskom ratu: povijesne novine kao izvor za istraživanje socijalne povijesti”, 128.

¹⁵ Vukičević, “Kriminalitet u Zagrebu 1914–1918.”

¹⁶ “Nesigurnost od raznih žepara i varalica”, *Jutarnji list*, Zagreb, 4 January, 1915.

¹⁷ Vukičević, “Kriminalitet u Zagrebu 1914–1918.”

¹⁸ Vukičević, “Aspects of Personal Freedom During the First World War in Zagreb”, 99.

¹⁹ Vukičević, “Kriminalitet u Zagrebu 1914–1918.”

²⁰ Kezić, “Urbani kriminal u zagrebačkom dnevnom tisku”, 57.

basic necessities and securing public safety of its citizens and their property.²¹ Everyday life was also obviously determined by the state of emergency introduced on 27 July 1914 which suspended civil rights or, as it was described, “modified constitutionality i.e. legality”. It limited the freedom of movement and commerce, flow of information, public gatherings, etc. Vukičević reminds us that “disturbing the public peace and order” became a criminal act, as did “insulting His Majesty” or speaking out against the army.²² (Appendix 1.)

In a time of nationalism and militarization, those who did not belong to the dominant ethnic group, such as the Romani people, were pushed even further to the margins of society. Timothy B. Smith states that this was particularly the case in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.²³ Being discriminated against as disease carriers and thieves, “Gypsies” were the target of several repressive solutions aiming to restrict their mobility and activities in the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia. Most notably, the Land Government issued an order on 23 August, 1916 that forbade the “ordinary wandering” of the Roma and obliged the city authorities to keep lists or “registers” of all “Gypsy wanderers”. Horses, mules, donkeys, foals and carts were confiscated from the Roma, while everyone between the ages of 18 and 50, “or who looked that old” had to be sent for recruitment.²⁴

Situation in other Croatian cities at that time was as equally demanding as it was in Zagreb. For example, in Osijek, the administrative and economic center of the eastern region of Slavonia, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of police officers were mobilized. Prompted by this, in the fall of 1914 city authorities organized the so-called Civil Guard of Osijek, a squad of volunteers willing to patrol the streets and maintain order. Understandably, their purpose was to assist the regular police, that is, to take care of public safety in places such as the main town square, during appropriations, at ceremonies, etc. They also helped with transports of injured soldiers, secured high officials or even engaged as firefighters. Despite all challenges, the Civil Guard of Osijek remained to be the only organization of this kind in the Monarchy that operated in full scope throughout the war, along with a similar squad in Vienna.²⁵ (Appendix 2.)

The largest Croatian city in the east was flooded with thousands of new faces – wounded people, soldiers and their families, prisoners of war, civilians from war-torn areas, and others. Arrival of captured Russians from the Eastern Front posed a challenge to the local authorities who had to find an adequate location to set up a camp in which members of the enemy army could be detained. The capacity of the existing prison was simply not suitable for an emergency situation like this. Therefore, in the spring of 1915, about 1,500 Russians were placed in an improvised camp in the southern part of the city. Shortly afterwards, given the economic crisis and uncultivated fields, with the permission of the government it became possible to use prisoners as an additional labor force during mowing, harvesting, or in various private enterprises.²⁶ Around 1,200 Russians, who worked on the

²¹ Jurić, “Zagreb u Prvome svjetskom ratu: povijesne novine kao izvor za istraživanje socijalne povijesti”, 129, 140.

²² Vukičević, “Aspects of Personal Freedom During the First World War in Zagreb”, 97, 110.

²³ Smith, “Marginal People”, 183.

²⁴ State Archives in Osijek, City government of Osijek (HR-DAOS-10), box no. 6454, “Cigani skitalci”, letter of ban Ivan Skerlec, no. 69.270/1916, 23 August, 1916.

²⁵ Grubišić, “Osječka građanska garda u Prvom svjetskom ratu”, 114–117.

²⁶ Pejić, “Crime and Repression in Osijek within the Framework of Modernization (1868–1918)”, 292.

bishop's estate in the nearby town of Đakovo, were described as hard-working "strong, healthy and well-built blonde men" who were helping the locals to gather crops.²⁷ Extraordinary conditions of the First World War surely compelled the state to come up with impromptu measures such as these.

Despite previously developed control mechanisms, during the war Osijek was swept by illegal prostitution which boosted the spread of venereal diseases, widely among soldiers. For example, it is recorded that the Royal Hungarian 28th Home Guard Infantry Regiment complained that more than one hundred of its soldiers had been infected in brothels across Osijek between October 1915 and January 1916.²⁸ Of course, there were numerous arrests for secret prostitution, and the local newspapers described the phenomenon as a "plague" accompanied by "litters of immorality" in which "bestial orgies" took place.²⁹

Deterioration of the administrative and repressive structures under the pressure of the *Great War* was also visible in other areas. In the region of Syrmia, in 1914 official county reports stated that there was a lack of the teaching staff since many teachers had gone to the battlefields "performing a sublime civic duty, fighting for the king and the homeland".³⁰ The consequences of the war were also noticeable within the police force. According to the county report, professional policemen had to be temporarily replaced with "other physically less capable persons". Consequently, an "abundance" of different violations happened during this period.³¹ The problem of the untrained and incompetent police force, composed predominantly of the local population, remained apparent throughout the war-period. "Supervision of foreigners, politically unreliable persons, internees and evacuees was conducted intensively. An accurate list is kept of all of them, as well as of changes related to foreigners", reads the 1915 county report.³² In any case, the economic situation in Syrmia in 1917 became almost unbearable: "Great demands were placed on the masters, and especially on the farmers. [...] With countless troubles, they had to master economic affairs. Labor shortages, lack of working animals, scarcity of industrial and handicraft products, disparity in prices [...] and the fact that certain sections of the population feel the plight of the war too much, while others become richer as a result".³³

Coastal regions of Istria and Dalmatia, which belonged to the Austrian part of the Monarchy, faced challenges of their own between 1914 and 1918. In Istria, neither the military nor the civilian authorities could ensure an orderly and adequate supply of necessary goods. Apparently turbulent situation was used by frauds to their advantage as there were cases of individuals presenting themselves as soldiers conducting requisition.³⁴ At the beginning of April 1918, Emperor Charles I visited the peninsula. The occasion was used by the inhabitants of Kanfanar to inform him that they were getting too little food, that they had not re-

²⁷ "Ruski zarobljenici u Hrvatskoj", *Jutarnji list*, Zagreb, 6 August, 1915.

²⁸ Filipović, "Reguliranje prostitucije u Osijeku na prijelazu iz 19. u 20. stoljeće", 154.

²⁹ "Škandalozno otkriće", *Hrvatska obrana*, Osijek, 18 September, 1915.

³⁰ *Izveštaj kraljevskog podžupana Županije srijemske...*, Vukovar, 1914, 213.

³¹ *Ibid.* 231.

³² *Izveštaj kraljevskog podžupana Županije...*, Vukovar, 1915, 208.

³³ *Izveštaj kraljevskog podžupana Županije...*, Vukovar, 1917, 165.

³⁴ "Opomena", *Hrvatski list*, Pula, 15 June, 1916.

ceived fat for six months and matches for seven months, etc.³⁵ Being near the Italian front and under numerous air raids,³⁶ both rural and urban residents had to leave their homes during the war and move to the Monarchy's interior territories (the Czech lands, Hungary). Desolate towns, ruined crafts, abandoned fields and requisitioned cattle threatened to destroy the already fragile Istrian economy.³⁷

Filip Škiljan states that "Dalmatia in the First World War was not on the brink of starvation, but deeply in it". Dalmatians were affected by the news coming from the frontline, informing about captured soldiers or their deaths. Furthermore, barren land made hunger and malnutrition omnipresent. While families of the mobilized soldiers received help, it was not nearly sufficient for living since basic goods were either unavailable or were highly expensive. Over the last two years of the war, hundreds of Dalmatian children were deported to Croatia or Slavonia, where living conditions were a bit better.³⁸

How harsh the situation was is illustrated by the fact that during 1917 Dalmatian soldiers began sending food back home, as well as various stolen items from the occupied lands, to help their relatives. Ante Bralić writes that families could afford meat only once a week, bad bread and various unhealthy food surrogates. At the beginning of 1918 problems related to supply peaked, undermining the general morale of the population. "When we add to this the policy of the Soviets after the October Revolution of 1917 and their proposals for just and immediate peace without annexation and compensation, as well as Wilson's thesis on the autonomy of the Austro-Hungarian peoples, we get the preconditions for resistance to the former Austro-Hungarian state", Bralić argues.³⁹

Deserters, bandits and revolutionaries

As Beneš puts it, major desertions within the Austro-Hungarian crumbling military force can be perceived as some sort a low-level resistance manifested through non-compliance and symbolic subversion of hierarchy. "Lacking any obvious political or revolutionary content, the act of escaping from most coercive state of institutions and hiding in one's home district amounts to a rejection of the state and its authority," suggests the same author. As the war lingered, sources tell us, the number of apprehended deserters and violent clashes between them and the gendarmerie increased. By April 1918 the Habsburg empire had seven infantry divisions deployed in the hinterland to quell unrest and insubordination," writes Beneš, adding that there was a sharp rise in desertion in the Hungarian half of the state.⁴⁰ For many, especially for Slavs of the empire, the war started to seem like a lost

³⁵ Mandić, "Pulski Hrvatski list (1915–1918) – zapisi o 'evakuircima' s područja Pomorske utvrde Pula", 804.

³⁶ For example, the city of Pula was bombed 41 times during the First World War. Vranješ-Šoljan, "Prikaz knjige Davor Mandić, Istra u vohoru Velikog rata".

³⁷ Dukovski, "Istra XX. stoljeća (1900–1950)", 146.

³⁸ Jovanović, "Gladno lice ratne Dalmacije". Also see: Škiljan, *Prvi svjetski rat u Dalmaciji (1914–1918)*.

³⁹ Bralić, "Zadar u vrtlogu propasti Habsburške Monarhije (1917–1918.)", 244.

⁴⁰ More precisely, these are the numbers for the Hungarian half of the Monarchy: a) *deserters apprehended*: 1914: 6, 689, 1915: 26, 251, 1916: 38, 866, 1917: 81, 605, Jan. – Mar. 1918: 46, 611, 1918: 150,000; b) *armed clashes*: 1914: 7, 1915: 93, 1916: 129, 1917: 464, Jan. – Mar. 1918: 275, 1918: 1,200. Beneš, "Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918", 7–9.

cause as concrete political arrangements, focused at formation of the first Yugoslavian state, were made. In Goldstein's words, "world politicians increasingly accepted that Austria-Hungary would not survive the war".⁴¹

*"More or less from the beginning, Entente members energetically discussed possible territorial gains after their victory at the expense of Austro-Hungarian lands, including Croatia. Both Serbia and Italy were interested in acquiring large portions of Croatia. In the secret Treaty of London of April 1915, the Entente powers promised Croatian territories deeper inland, as a reward for breaking off its alliance with the Central Powers and joining the Entente. On the other hand, Serbia knew that it too would obtain much Austro-Hungarian territory to its west and north if it emerged on the winning side in the war. Croatian politicians seem to have been aware of the games that were being played with the Croatian territory, but they were wrong in imagining that they would have any serious say in postwar decision making. Some of them turned east because they thought that Croatia would have a better future in a common state with Serbia and Montenegro that if it remained part of Austria-Hungary. To implement this idea, the Jugoslavenski odbor (Yugoslav Committee) was formed in Paris in April 1915."*⁴²

Along with noticeable national and social problems, living conditions became even more difficult at the end of the long 19th century, especially in the South Slavic territories of the Monarchy. Villages were overwhelmed with requisition commissions, moneylenders, and municipal notaries. Bogdan Krizman described the atmosphere using the following words: "*It creaks on all sides. It is felt in the air that war and the state of war will not and cannot last long. At the front, the number of deserters is growing day by day. Dissatisfaction and misery are becoming more and more apparent, as well as the inability of the authorities to govern and command*".⁴³

In newly-created cracks of the dying state, discontent, banditry and revolutionary prospects were emerging. Several months before capitulation, Austro-Hungarian authorities concluded that "Green Cadre" is used as a common expression in the language of deserters when referring to a free life of roaming and poaching. Eventually, these forest roving bands and insubordinate individuals, that were about fifty thousand strong among Croats, Serbs and Bosnians by September 1918,⁴⁴ became a significant factor in the imperial disintegration, combining nationalist, internationalist and revolutionary impulses in their activities. Beneš points out that the Green Cadre "represented a more active form of desertion than a mere escape from military duty". He even argues that the Green Cadre was probably the

⁴¹ Goldstein, *Croatia. A History*, 109.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Krizman, *Raspad Austro-Ugarske i stvaranje jugoslavenske države*, 17–18.

⁴⁴ Tomislav Bogdanović reminds us of different estimates related to the outspread of Green Cadre. For example, Bogumil Hrabak writes about approximately 250,000 deserters from the South Slavic states, 50,000 of them in Croatia and Slavonia. Another author, Dinko Čutura, concludes that there were between 60,000 and 70,000 Green Cadre deserters at the same territory. See more: Bogdanović, "Kategorije zelenog kadra 1918. godine i osvrt na njihovo djelovanje u Podravini i Prigorju", 97, n. 8.

last major rural insurgency in East Central Europe.⁴⁵ It included deserters from the Austro-Hungarian army, but also impoverished peasants in northern Croatia and in regions outside of the gendarmerie's control.⁴⁶

Merchants, landlords, various local leaders and priests constituted usual targets of their attacks. These acts of violence were often a mixture of plain robbery and ideologically more specific rebellious goals, partially derived from the Russian Revolution and founded in a belief in a new world of redistributed land, unburdened by officials, nobility, greedy tradesmen and moneylenders. Although the Green Cadre did not have any central leadership or a program, some larger groups possessed basic forms of organization. They chose peculiar yet defiant names ("mountain elves", "green commune", "mountain birds", etc.), created primitive laws that included severe corporal punishment and executions, elected leaders (often called *dukes* or *harambashas*, just like the ancient Balkan outlaws) and provided them with specific symbols of power. When the core of the Green Cadre had been strengthened by the influx of local peasants, the term outgrew its original meaning and became synonymous with any form of rural rebellion.⁴⁷

Some authors, like Tomislav Bogdanović, suggest that there were at least four categories of the Green Cadre in Croatia, each with a different agenda. One of them is described as an antiwar movement whose members, in most cases, did not participate in robberies. They usually returned to their villages and hid with the help of relatives and locals, waiting for the end of the war. It is necessary to note that desertion was punishable by death, so a good shelter was of significant importance. Second category can be attributed with revolutionary traits, as the movement of the rural poor, encouraged by prisoners returning from the Russian front, sought a solution to the fundamental question of the agrarian reform.⁴⁸ The third category consists of robbers and criminals, most active after the establishment of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs,⁴⁹ or at the very end of the war and after the general amnesty of all prisoners. Returnees from the front represent the last category. These individuals repeatedly encountered difficulties when trying to reach home (e.g. poorly organized rail transport, hunger, thirst and diseases) and did not abstain from robbing huge warehouses of flour, sugar, and coffee, burning shops and hospitals, etc.⁵⁰

In the "wet and cold" autumn of 1918,⁵¹ riots spread throughout the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia as district officials were talking about "frightening images of looting and destruction", and "times of great riots and horrors".⁵² Bogumil Hrabak described these lands

⁴⁵ Beneš, "Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918", 2, 4, 6, 10–11.

⁴⁶ Goldstein, *Croatia. A History*, 109.

⁴⁷ "Zeleni kadar", Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža.

⁴⁸ Miroslav Krleža, a prominent figure in cultural life of both Yugoslav states, never managed to overcome the regret for the lack of Leninist organization over the "peasant rebellious anarchy". For Krleža, the Green Cadre was "a missed revolutionary situation". Ibid.

⁴⁹ On 29 October, 1918, the Croatian Parliament (Sabor) declared the country's secession from Austria-Hungary. Croatia subsequently joined the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, which was united with Serbia to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on 1 December, 1918.

⁵⁰ Bogdanović, "Kategorije zelenog kadra 1918. godine i osvrt na njihovo djelovanje u Podravini i Prigorju", 99–104.

⁵¹ Martan, "Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata' protiv 'izrabljivačkih elemenata'", 600.

⁵² Bogdanović, "Kategorije zelenog kadra 1918. godine i osvrt na njihovo djelovanje u Podravini i Prigorju", 97.

as the center of “desertion movement”, adding that fugitives received help not only from the local population but occasionally also from some Sabor members, who threatened the Croatian government to obstruct parliamentary discussions if persecutions of deserters had not been stopped.⁵³ In any case, during the final months of 1918 notorious Green Cadre bands, such as Čaruga’s “The Circle of Mountain Birds”, were formed and continued to execute criminal activities well after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, indicating the repressive inabilities of the new state, as well as widespread disappointment with the post-Habsburg political system. Čaruga and his gang robbed the rich, mostly of German, Jewish and Croatian origin, throughout Slavonia, Sylvania and Baranja.⁵⁴ Although he had entered the realm of a legendary “noble robber”⁵⁵ while he was still alive, Čaruga was caught, tried and hanged after years of persecution in front of thousands of interested witnesses in 1925 in Osijek. (Appendix 3.)

However, active expression of dissatisfaction and opposition to the current situation was not limited to the exhausted and disillusioned soldiers or loosely organized bandits. Urban factory workers put on demonstrations, often embracing radical slogans of the Bolshevik revolution. The general mobilization took tens of thousands of Croatian workers to the battlefields, which somewhat passivated the socialist movement. Nonetheless, on 1 May, 1918 workers from Osijek went on general strike and prepared a statement declaring that just and permanent peace must be assured. The workers advocated independent national states, emphasizing how transition from capitalism to socialism would serve as the key precondition for preventing future wars.⁵⁶

According to the research by Mira Kolar Dimitrijević, in 1918 the workers made up a fifth of the total population of the city of Zagreb with a clear tendency of further demographic growth.⁵⁷ The end of the First World War and the establishment of a new state were greeted by some Zagreb workers, who were shouting revolutionary slogans as Karl Liebknecht’s proclamation calling on the proletariat to start a socialist revolution spread through the city.⁵⁸ On March 30, 1919, a public assembly was held and it was attended by approximately 4,000 people. The resolution which was adopted, among other things, claimed the following: “Bearing in mind that today’s world is openly divided into two fronts – on the one hand the united revolutionary socialist army of the whole world, on the other the united yellow and black army of the counterrevolution – our place is in the red revolutionary socialist ranks”.⁵⁹

⁵³ However, when the short-lived State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed, Bogdan Medaković, president of the Croatian assembly, criticized the deserters as “not only thieves and arsonists, bandits and killers, but also enemies of the people”. Hrabak, “Dezerterstvo i zeleni kadar u jugoslavenskim zemljama u Prvom svetskom ratu”, 20. Čulinović, *Odjeci Oktobra u jugoslavenskim krajevima*, 92.

⁵⁴ Smiljanić, “Zločin i kazna Jovana Stanisavljevića Čaruge”, 38.

⁵⁵ See: Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 46–62.

⁵⁶ Plečaš, *Prvomajske proslave u Osijeku*, 31.

⁵⁷ Kolar Dimitrijević, “Obrisi strukture radničke klase međuratnog razdoblja u svjetlu privrednog razvitka”, 117.

⁵⁸ Stipetić, *Komunistički pokret i inteligencija...*, 112.

⁵⁹ Sentić, Lengel-Krizman, *Revolucionarni Zagreb 1918-1945 (kronologija)*, 10.

In January 1918, a seven-day general strike was organized in Pula, Monarchy's main military port, under the slogans such as "WE WANT AN END TO THE WAR", "PEACE WITHOUT ANNEXATION AND WAR REPARATIONS", "PEACE WITHOUT HUMILIATING TREATIES", "PEACE WITHOUT OPPRESSION OF THE PEOPLE", "FREEDOM", "EQUALITY", etc.⁶⁰ About 10,000 people took part in the strike, and workers of various nationalities joined in, including the Germans from the shipyard. After the strikers had written their requests on special lists, public assemblies were held calling for improved living conditions, end of the war, return of refugees, and conclusion of a just peace without annexation. Various languages were spoken, while demands were made for the creation of workers' and soldiers' council.⁶¹ Catalogue of socialist ideas present among the workers in the Croatian cities included different ideological concepts, ranging from social-democracy, anarchism (especially in Istria) and communism, to vague leftist notions.

Anyway, subversive intentions were significantly multiplied by returnees from the Russian front who witnessed the October Revolution. War-weary people looked hopefully to the Russian "example" that "wind from the east".⁶² Ivan Očak estimates that there were roughly 200,000 Yugoslavian prisoners of war in 1917 Russia. He adds that thousands of those who took a direct part in the revolutionary events did not return to their homeland. However, many felt that the progressive ideas accepted by the Russian workers and peasants should be implemented at home as well. Accordingly, it is recorded that one Yugoslav participant of the October Revolution stated: "We promise you that we will not reconcile and that we will act to the last breath, as long as the last capitalist tyrant disappears from our country".⁶³ Due to this, when the war ended quarantines were established, through which the returnees had to pass. They were interrogated there by a special commission regarding their stay in Russia and potential exposure to subversive ideas. In other words, quarantine was to establish whether anyone was "infected with Bolshevism". These men, even after passing the quarantine, were under the watchful eye of the authorities who followed their movements very carefully.⁶⁴ Despite that, Yugoslav activists found ways to participate in socialist coups that took place in nearby countries as many, for example, went to Hungary to support the Soviet Republic of Béla Kun. At the same time, communists in Slavonia were preparing strikes of solidarity with the Kun's regime. Because of that, 49 people were arrested in Osijek in July 1919, including soldiers and railway workers. For the same reason, apprehensions were also made in the area of Valpovo and Belišće.⁶⁵ Since the authorities were told that an "underground council" had been organized in Croatia, in which the departments of the "future Bolshevik government" were already assigned, the first anti-communist trial in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes soon began before the military court in Zagreb.⁶⁶

We can certainly identify various influences of the October Revolution on the post-war events that took place in the territory of the new state. Obviously, the Communist Party of

⁶⁰ Crnobori, *Borbena Pula*, 80.

⁶¹ Ujčić, *Pula – od najstarijih vremena do danas sa okolicom*, 215–216.

⁶² Beneš, "Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918", 27.

⁶³ Očak, "Iz povijesti jugoslavenske emigracije u SSSR-u između dva rata", 117–118.

⁶⁴ Rajković, "Oktobarska revolucija i jugoslavensko radništvo", 84.

⁶⁵ Kovačev, *Na zajedničkom frontu revolucije...*, 148.

⁶⁶ Korać, *Povjest radničkog pokreta u Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji*, I, 275

Yugoslavia was formed in 1919. In spite of its initial success in elections for the Constitutional Assembly, the Party was banned by the authorities in 1920. Also, one of the most significant early manifestations of the impact made by the Russian revolution in Yugoslavia was the Labin Republic. This short-lived self-governing republic was established by workers who, motivated by the difficult economic situation and repressive politics of the Italian administration, took over the management of the mine in the spring of 1921. Over one month of the Republic's existence, red flags fluttered everywhere, while order was maintained by the established committees and guards of armed miners.⁶⁷ In the end, although it was crushed by the military intervention, the Labin Republic is still remembered as one of the earliest antifascist rebellions in the world. (Appendix 4.)

Notwithstanding the disintegration of the Austria-Hungary, there was no profound breakup with the past because of the apparent continuity of administrative structures and social discontent. Judson elaborates that radical cut with imperial institutions, practices, or legal systems was not done: "Nor did Austria-Hungary's disappearance change most people's lives. Ongoing crises of food provision, housing, and disease haunted Central Europeans for several years following the official end of the war".⁶⁸ The estates of rich peasants, old feudal lords and parishes, shops, municipal offices, post offices and railway stations were looted by, as contemporary sources describe them, "corrupt elements", i.e. war veterans accompanied by poverty-stricken peasants.⁶⁹ In the fall and winter of 1918, National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in Zagreb received numerous telegrams describing "the most awful anarchy" in Brod, "destruction and robbing" in Slunj, "riotous masses" in Rakovica, "nest of Bolshevism" in Daruvar,⁷⁰ "stinking sheep [and his] social-anarchist speech" in Biškupci,⁷¹ etc. On the other hand, as Beneš notes, masses in Croatia sometimes associated the Green Cadre with the principle of national self-determination, celebrating it, along with Woodrow Wilson and Tomáš Masaryk, in public demonstrations.⁷² Indeed, "it was boiling everywhere"⁷³ in 1919 and tensions went on. Merciless military response to social revolutionism left many issues unresolved, deepening the further instability of the new South Slavic political union.

⁶⁷ Rajković, "Oktobarska revolucija i jugoslavensko radništvo", 84–85.

⁶⁸ Judson, *Povijest Habsburškog Carstva*, 428.

⁶⁹ Martan, "Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata' protiv 'izrabljivačkih elemenata'", 593–594.

⁷⁰ Krizman, "Građa o nemirima u Hrvatskoj na kraju g. 1918.", 114, 120, 122, 127.

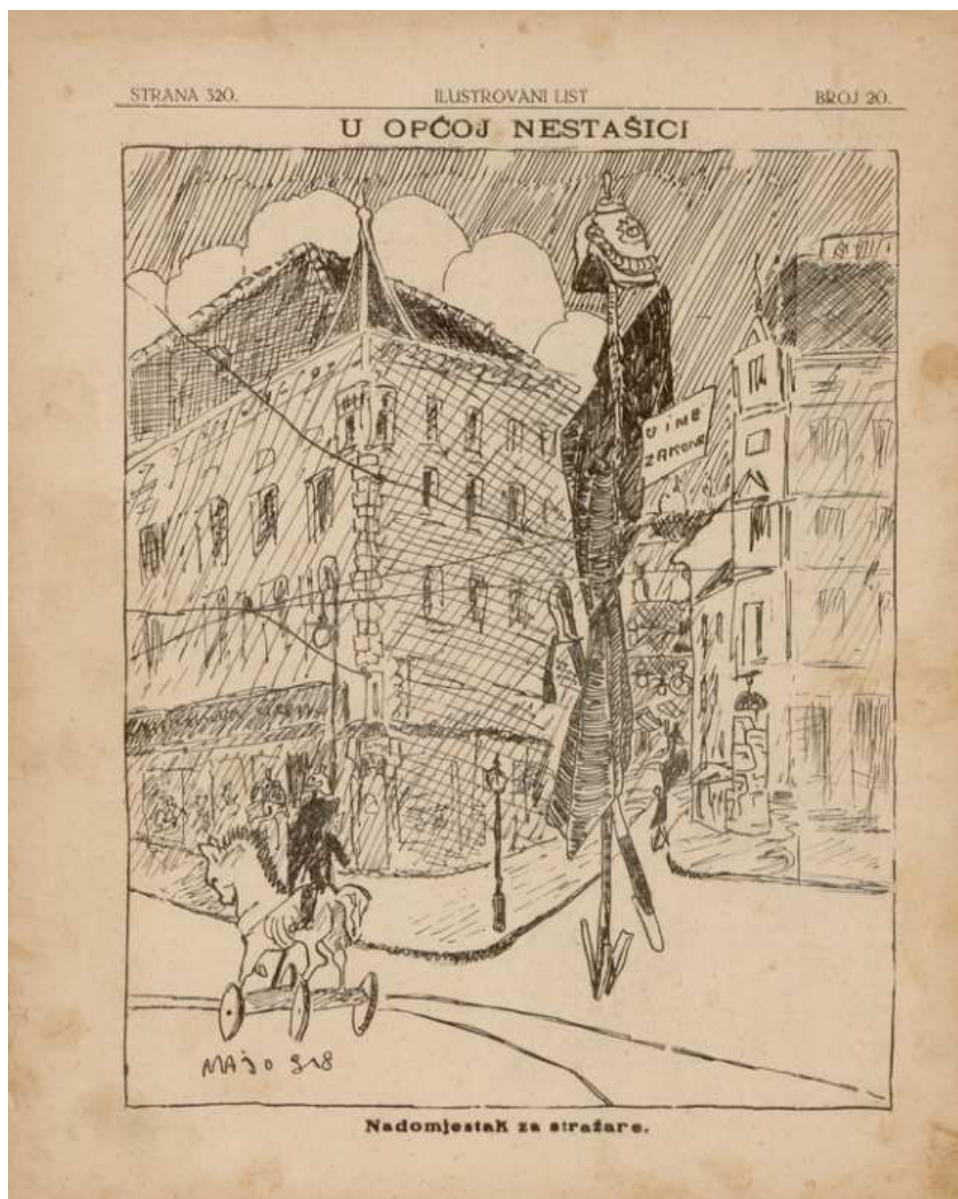
⁷¹ Vidmar, "Prilozi građi za povijest 1917–1918", 165.

⁷² Beneš, "Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918", 25.

⁷³ Čulinović, *Odjeci Oktobra u jugoslavenskim krajevima*, 435.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: A caricature published in the weekly newspaper *Ilustrovani list* (Zagreb, 21 July, 1918), depicting an improvised police officer holding a sign that says: “In the name of the law”. Text above: “In general scarcity”; text below: “A substitute for a watchman”.



Appendix 2: Flag of the Civil Guard of Osijek, formed in the fall of 1914. Museum of Slavonia, Osijek.



Appendix 3: A photo published in *Hrvatski list* (Osijek, 13 January, 1924), with a description: "Čaruga's gang of robbers". Čaruga (marked with X in the photo) and his accomplices were finally arrested in December 1923.



Appendix 4: Miners' red flag (Labin, 1921). Strčić, *Radnički pokret i NOB općine Labin*.



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Banditry and Subversion in Croatia at the End of the Long Nineteenth Century

The gradual decline of the Austro-Hungarian political power during the last phase of the First World War consequently led to the collapse of its, previously solidly established, repressive mechanisms. On one hand, mass mobilization of police officers that were sent to the battlefield raised a question of public security and increasing crime rates in some cities, including those in Croatia. For example, according to certain data, almost 70% of policemen from Osijek were recruited by the military when the war broke out. Moreover, scarcity of the working force and different provisions affected general productivity, while lack of certain materials, such as paper, posed a great challenge to authorities in their attempt to establish an effective communication network with their subordinates, or print new legal regulations. Wave of socialist revolutions in Europe (Russia, Germany, Hungary) undoubtedly made a significant impact on some members of the Croatian society between 1917 and 1919. Following the decades of ideological and organizational development of the domestic labor movement, some Croatian activists actively supported or even participated in the communist uprising in Russia and Béla Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic at the very end of the long 19th century. It is fascinating that several attempts were made to form short-lived socialist republics on the Croatian or neighboring Hungarian territory. Concerning that, the return of soldiers from the Eastern Front, where they were exposed to the Bolshevik ideology, made the distribution of such subversive ideas even stronger. As it became clear that the war defeat was inevitable, while the concept of a new South Slavic state was getting closer to its political realization, defection hit the Monarchy's army en masse. Groups of army deserters and other radicalized individuals, known as "Green Cadres" (*zeleni kadar*), took part in collective banditry that lasted for years in Croatia-Slavonia. This presentation will question the correlation between the collapse of the Monarchy's repressive mechanisms during the period of significant sociopolitical transformation and the spread of subversive socialist ideas as well as banditry, using the Croatian context as a specific case study.