

DOKUMENTI

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
John Dyneley Prince⁴⁹²
John Dyneley Prince,
American Minister.

Enclosures:

- 1.- Translation of extract from an article in the VREME of May 18th entitled: "Raditch and the Crown".
- 2.- Translation of extract from an article in the HRVAT of May 19th entitled: "News in the Constitution".

File No. 800-Quintuplicate

Copy to E. I. C., Paris.

86. 1926., lipanj 16., Izvješće poslanika Johna Dyneleyja Princea State Departmentu o „Bijeloj ruci“ u kojem se iznosi mišljenje da je utjecaj ovoga društva sada puno manji negoli je to bio u prošlosti, kada je osnovano kao protivnik organizacije „Crna ruka“. Ono postoji i sada, a u svojoj srži radi se o „srbofilnoj vojno upravljanoj skupini koja nastoji ostvariti i ojačati srpsku dominaciju nad ostatkom sadašnje Kraljevine, odnosno isključiti što je više moguće novopripojenih nacija Hrvata i Slovenaca od obnašanja previše visokih funkcija koje imaju utjecaj na kontrolu države.“

NARA, M 358, R 4, 860h.00/287

[...] ⁴⁹³

LEGATION OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Belgrade, June 16, 1926.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Despatch No. 24

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,
Washington.

⁴⁹² Vlastoručno.

⁴⁹³ Državni pečat.

Sir:

I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of the Department's instruction No. 1, May 18, 1926, containing a query regarding the alleged activities of the White Hand military group (Bela Ruka) at the Court of Belgrade and in this country in general.

I had for some time previous to the receipt of the Department's inquiry been trying to obtain trustworthy information on this subject and I had already seen the reports of the former Military Attaché at this post, Colonel Shallenberger⁴⁹⁴, (No. 1628), and the more recent report of Military Attaché, Colonel Godson (No. 2169), regarding this movement. At the present time, it is extremely difficult to obtain very positive data covering the White Hand, because, as already indicated in my Despatch No. 8, the Serbs are not only reticent, but even evasive, whenever the subject is mentioned by a foreigner. It may, however, be of interest to the Department to have the following report of our investigations to date, with the understanding, however, that the opinions herein expressed are made with some reservation, owing to the paucity of available material, a lack which is naturally partly due to my as yet brief incumbency at Belgrade. On the other hand it is doubtful, whether even a prolonged stay could produce much more satisfactory data owing to the extremely illusive nature of the subject.

According to our most trustworthy present sources, the report of Colonel Shallenberger, mentioned above, seems to be substantially accurate regarding the origin, influence and activities up to his date of the White Hand, which began in a negative fashion; viz., as a movement in opposition to the former Black Hand military organisation (Crna Ruka) which played the leading role at the time of the dynastic change from Obrenovitch to Karageorgeovitch and which subsequently largely controlled affairs in Serbia during the first years of the reign of the late King Peter. The White Hand group was originally founded with the sole object of eliminating the criminal Black Hand, which as the Department is aware was successfully accomplished and culminated in the famous trial and execution of the principals of that organization, the proper name of which was the "Union or Death Society", in the year 1917 (Legation's Despatch No. 109 of August 18, 1918, (922.108/1)⁴⁹⁵). After the overthrow of the Black Hand clique the White Hand acquired great influence in Belgrade and throughout Serbia, an influence which was manifested during the Balkan War of 1912 and also very considerably during the World War, during all which time, the new association was engaged in acquiring power for itself by extirpating the former membership of the Black Hand, practically none of which is extent to-day. In other words, the White Hand surrounded and protected the Karageorgevitch throne by means of a group of military officers who endeavored to form themselves into a species of Janizaries⁴⁹⁶ for the King and Dynasty.

⁴⁹⁴ Shallenberger, Martin C., pukovnik, vojni ataše u Beogradu (? – 1924.)

⁴⁹⁵ Dopolisano rukopisom.

⁴⁹⁶ Janjičari.

I am unable to assure the Department that this White Hand Group was ever really organised, that is, into Lodges, as is the custom in secret societies, or that it ever had recognised statutes or archives. In fact, all our information points to the contrary conclusion. It must be remembered that the Slavonic soul never tends to any ordered movement, but always prefers to work in more or less haphazard fashion, unless, as in the case of the Russian Bolsheviks, the movement is steered and controlled by an alien race (in that case the Jewish) which happens to be better equipped for the management of affairs.

The White Group undoubtedly still exists, but so far as we can discover, in a much modified and even weaker form than it previously enjoyed during the heyday of stirring events caused its inception. Now, it appears to be a purely serbophile military tendency group which seeks in a somewhat indefinite manner to emphasize the fact of Serb domination over the rest of the present kingdom, that is, to exclude so far as possible the newly attached nations of the Croats and Slovenes from obtaining too strong an influence in the control of the state. At this point, I must modify my own statement made in Legation despatch No. 8 that the White Hand "permeates" the entire army. This, according to more recent and apparently more accurate information, is true only in so far as purely Serbian officers permeate the entire army, as it seems impossible to verify the existence of White Hand tendencies among Croatian or Slovenian officers. In fact, the very nature of the apparent objects of the White Hand's ambition, to establish a purely Serbian state -- Velika Srbia Great Serbia, instead of Yugoslavia, with a centralised control unit dominated by the White Hand -- would preclude the adherence to this movement of any racially loyal Croats or Slovenes. Here it should be noted that Serbian officers and troops have been most judiciously distributed throughout the entire country, quite patently with the intention of promoting a military unit on a purely Serb basis. The pattern for this policy would seem to have been the Italian army system which has now been many years in vogue of sending southern regiments to the north and conversely, save that in the case of Italy the real object is chiefly to familiarize the troops with the widely variant and mutually unintelligible different parts of the kingdom. As such a marked dialectic differentiation does not generally exist in Yugoslavia, the distribution here must be regarded as principally having a political Serbo-tendential object in view.

As indicated above, the White Hand group has now, it would appear, lost much of its former influence, although the prestige of the name still remains. I have been most credibly informed that there is at the moment a split in the ranks of the leading White Hand officers, one faction leaning towards the aged leader Mr. Pashitch as distinct from the exclusively royal interests, while the other clique upholds the King in all his acts as director of the State which he really is (Legation despatch No. 8). This schism accounts for the statement of one of my sources that the White Hand people do not really know just what they want and that they are therefore more a dormant force than an active reality at the moment. One of my informants very strikingly remarked that were General Peshitch, the leader of the White movement, to be questioned as to its activities he would reply and with sincerity, that the White Hand does not exist, and that he would be

correct in making this statement, because in the opinion of many seemingly well informed persons, the group only exists now as an irredentist tendency clique.

Of Military Attaché Godson's⁴⁹⁷ implication in his despatch mentioned above that the White hand has become so powerful as to be irksome to the King, just as the former Black Hand become irksome to King Peter whom it placed upon the throne after the murder of King Alexander Obrenovitch, I can find no confirmation, although it is of course possible that the present King, who likes to keep a firm and free hand over the affairs of the entire country, might be annoyed if he were compelled to reckon with a very strong sectional organisation. Colonel Godson also reports that the King has joined the Freemasons who are opposed to the tendencies of the White Hand. This seems improbable to the Legation, although again not impossible. Short of asking the King directly, a manifestly improper procedure, whether he is a member of the Freemasons, it seems impracticable to verify or deny this rumour. The Yugoslav freemasons, concerning whose activities I have made careful inquiries, are said not to be very strong except in the cities. They are Masons of the Grand Orient variety, anti-religious like those of France and Italy and not in communion with the Masons of North America, Great Britain, Northern Germany and Scandinavia. The King who is necessarily a Serbian Orthodox Churchman of the most loyal type would scarcely offend his religious confessors by taking such a radical step as that of joining the Grand Orient Masons. I shall investigate this rumour further, but the Legation cannot credit it at present.

The Legation does not believe that the King is at all afraid of the White Hand group as King Alexander is not merely a Serb but professedly a Yugoslav, as he told me himself. It is obviously to his on interest to preside over a solidified state and not one which is to be exposed to the machinations of a clearly sectional tendency. The fact that he urged me, as I have already reported (Legation's despatch No. 1, May 5, 1926) to become familiar with "all parts" of his country and not change my Croatian Language for the rougher Serb idiom certainly does not seem to show that he belongs either actually or sympathetically to any irredentist local group. On the other hand, it would obviously be to his interest not to offend the group in question by becoming too un-Serbian, as such a body of loyal military adherents could readily serve him in case of future need, a possibility which is never excluded from consideration in studying a Balkan state.

The Department will perceive that this whole subject is so swathed in uncertainty that the following conclusions seem at the present to be the only ones acceptable.

The "Order" of the White Hand is now probably a widely extended, but loosely connected military group constituting the remnants of a formerly much more powerful politico-military circle. It is not the opinion of the Legation that the White Hand is a present bugbear, but rather a future potentiality. Certain articles which appear from time to time in the Press directed against the corruptionist Parliamentary system as a whole, may be inspired by the White Hand tendential clique as Colonel Godson believes, but it

⁴⁹⁷ Godson, William F. H., Lt. Colonel. (dopukovnik), vojni ataše u Beogradu (1924. – 1927.).

DOKUMENTI

is equally possible that such expressions may be merely the natural result of the disgust felt by the honest and politically submerged peasant class who are just beginning to realize and resent the fact that they must dance to the tune played by their corrupt leaders. The Legation has no desire to minimize the importance of the reports made by Colonel Godson, but we differ with him merely as to the immediate danger of the White Hand. We do not however deny that during a future crucial situation, this military clique may be called upon to resume its role of political importance, but no such situation appears to be imminent at present.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
John Dyneley Prince⁴⁹⁸
John Dyneley Prince,
American Minister.

File No. 800-Quintuplicate.

Copy to E. I. C., Paris.

87. 1926., srpanj 13., Izvješće poslanika Johna Dyneleyja Princa State Departmentu o pravoslavizaciji stanovništva te politici državne centralizacije.

NARA, M 358, R 4, 860h.00/291

[...]⁴⁹⁹

LEGATION OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Belgrade, July 13, 1926.

Despatch No. 46

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,
Washington.

⁴⁹⁸ Vlastoručno.

⁴⁹⁹ Državni pečat.