

DOKUMENTI

All in all, I am forced to conclude that the situation is, psychologically, steadily becoming worse, – the Croats acting rather like spoiled children, and the Serbs refusing to take the situation seriously. The change of a compromise would be ever so much greater if the Italians would again begin their former policy of “pin-pricking” Yugoslavia, – a sport which Rome has been clever enough not to indulge in since the internal situation has become so satisfactory, – that is, from the Italian point of view.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

Carl A. Fisher⁶¹⁴

Carl A. Fisher.

Chargé d’Affaires ad interim.

File No. 800-Quintuplicate.

Copies to E. I. C., Paris.

115. 1928., prosinac 6., Izvješće konzula u Zagrebu Leslieja A. Davisa o privremenom otpravniku poslova u Beogradu Carlu A. Fisheru, o nasilnim prosvjedima u Zagrebu na desetogodišnjicu ujedinjenja 1. prosinca 1928.

NARA, M 358, R 4, 860h.00/376

[...]⁶¹⁵

LEGATION OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Belgrade, December 17, 1928

Despatch No. 532.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington.

Sir:

In transmitting herewith a copy of Consul Davis’ account of the recent disturbance at Zagreb, I have the honor to report that there is still nothing in the local situation

⁶¹⁴ Vlastoručno.

⁶¹⁵ Državni pečat.

to encourage the belief that a peaceable solution of the acute dispute between Serbia and Croatia is in the offing.

While one would get the impression from Mr. Davis' account that the riots in Zagreb were provoked by the Serbian officers, the local version naturally paces the onus on the Croatians. While probably both sides were partly responsible, one can not help feeling that the military authorities were rather tactless in permitting a torchlight procession of troops in Zagreb, – public feeling being aroused as it is, – on the anniversary of the National Union.

After being severely criticized by the military authorities for not preventing the disturbances, the Prefect of the Zagreb District resigned, and was replaced by a Serbian military officer, Colonel Bozho Maximovitch.⁶¹⁶ Many observers regarded this appointment as the beginning of a "mailed fist" policy on the part of Belgrade, and there was naturally great resentment in Zagreb. The Regional Council, on which the Prefect sits, adjourned its sessions when the representative of Colonel Maximovitch attempted to take his place in the meeting, and has made a protest to the Council of State against the appointment on the grounds that Maximovitch is not a person of "legal training", – as the Constitution rather ambiguously provides.

If the present Government intended the inauguration of a policy of force in appointing a military office to fulfil the normally civil office of Prefect, it was undertaken in only a half-hearted manner. For instance the Democratic Party, the principal support of the Radicals in the present Government, was not consulted, which led their leader, Mr. Davidovitch, to object to the installation of what is regarded as a semi-military dictatorship over Croatia. It appears since that the Government has removed Mr. Davidovitch's scruples by promising him certain support in his desire for agrarian reform in Dalmatia. The Croatians have become further infuriated at this apparent tendency of Belgrade to trade Croatia's wrongs for political advantages in other spheres.

It seems clear that the present indecision and lack of a constructive program is permitting the crisis to go from bad to worse. By following a negative policy each incident seems to lead to a more serious retaliation, and unless a statesman sufficiently strong to handle the situation appears, more serious friction can be expected.

The present tension seems to find a certain parallel in our own crisis in the autumn of 1860 and spring of 1861, when the passivity of President Buchanan and the disability of President-elect Lincoln to act, allowed the North and the South to drift into civil war.

Up until lately many people have thought that King Alexander would as a last resort prove himself able enough to matter the situation, – failing a direct settlement. However, there is no evidence that the King has any constructive program in mind. At no time since the death of the late Nicholas Pashitch has the lack of a real statesman been so apparent, – while at no time has the necessity for a constructive leader been so vital.

⁶¹⁶ Radi se o pukovniku Vojinu Maksimoviću koji je 1928. godine postavljen za Velikoga župana Zagrebačke oblasti.

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I have the honor to be. Sir,
Your obedient servant,
Carl A. Fisher⁶¹⁷
Carl A. Fisher.
Chargé d'Affaires ad interim.

File No. 800-Quintuplicate.

Copies to E. I. C., Paris.

ENCLOSURE NO. WITH DESPATCH NO. DATED
(COPY)

AMERICAN CONSULATE

Zagreb, Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.
December 6, 1928.

Carl A. Fisher, Esquire,
Chargé d' Affaires ad interim,
American Legation,
Belgrade.

Sir:

I have the honor to submit to the Legation the following report in regard to the demonstrations in Zagreb on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the union of Serbia and Croatia (December 1, 1928), much of which was witnessed by the Consul personally:

It should be first stated that the political situation in Yugoslavia has not changed noticeably during the past few months, although it appears that the Opposition expected a great deal from the sudden visit of the King to Paris and from his conferences there with the French statesmen. The ranks of the opposition, especially SDK (Seljacko-Demokratska Koalicija – Peasant Democratic Coalition), expected that there would soon be some noticeable results of the King's visit to Paris, pointing to recently published articles in the London TIMES and the semi-official TEMPS of Paris, which have announced a change in the situation in Yugoslavia.

The SDK firmly insists on the demands which it formulated after June 20, 1928, above all on the dismissal of the Skupstina and the formation of a new, neutral

⁶¹⁷ Vlastoručno.

Government, as well as on free elections, and upon not entering into any negotiations regarding the revision of the Constitution to give legislative and executive autonomy to all the former provinces (Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Dalmatia) until these demands are granted. It is understood that the politicians in Belgrade admit that the Constitution might be altered, but that they do not accept all the conditions of the SDK. The result of this has been that in spite of the apparent peace the tension in the provinces in this part of Yugoslavia has actually been growing stronger.

This was proved in a startling manner by the happenings [in] Zagreb on December 1, 1928. The Government had given orders that the 10th anniversary of the Union should be celebrated in a specially festive manner, which under the circumstances this year was felt by the people of Zagreb to be an additional cause of provocation. The first incident that occurred was the hoisting by three young men of three large flags on the tower of the Cathedral at 9 a.m. when the military, church and civil authorities, including the consular corps, were about to enter the Cathedral. One of these flags was in Croatian national colors with the Croatian coat of arms. The other two were black flags, one of which had the inscription "December 1, 1918", and the other the inscriptions "December 5, 1918" and "June 20, 1928". The killing of many young Croatians on the public square in Zagreb and that of "June 20, 1928" was a remainder of the shooting in Skupstina at Belgrade of the Croatian leaders and representatives. The consular corps commented on this while waiting to enter the Cathedral. The civil authorities entered the Cathedral, as usual, and the consular corps followed them, but noticed at once that none of the military officers had entered. The Archbishop and all of the other church dignitaries entered the Cathedral from a side-door and went on at once with the *Te Deum*, although one-half of the church, which was reserved for the military officers, was entirely empty, which was very noticeable and could not have been escaped the attention of the church dignitaries. It is not thought by anyone that they had anything to do with the placing of these flags on the Cathedral, as the towers are accessible to anyone upon the payment of two dinars and it would not seem to have been necessary to have placed any guard there, nor is it probable that they even knew exactly what have happened, but they must have noticed that something unusual had happened. It would seem to a neutral observer that the military authorities could have taken the matter less seriously, knowing that it could not have been a deliberate insult on the part of any responsible officials, no matter what the public sentiment here might be, and that after seeing that steps were being taken to remove the flags they might have quietly entered the Cathedral, but instead of that they marched away in anger.

In the meanwhile the police and detectives ascended the tower of the Cathedral and arrested the youths who had placed the flags there. They tore down two of the flags, but one of them caught on the facade and was still there when the civil authorities and foreign representatives left the Cathedral at 9.30 A.M. It was taken down shortly after, however, as when one of the employees of this Consulate passed the Cathedral an hour later it was no longer there.

Another very unfortunate thing was that the detectives, instead of taking the young men whom they had arrested to the police station by some back streets to avoid attracting attention, took them directly through the crowd which was waiting in front of the Cathedral and in the large market square a few hundred feet away. This provoked the crowd to utter cheers for the leaders of the SDK and to cry out against the regime. Suddenly there was an exchange of shots, with the result that one boy 18 years of age was killed. Another boy was seriously injured and a policeman was also severely injured. This all happened while the service was going on in the Cathedral, and when the consular corps marked down through the market square about five minutes later to the Pravoslavna (Serbian) Church three or four blocks away, passing almost by the spot where the shooting had taken place, they knew nothing about it, although it was apparent that everyone was excited.

The military authorities had already left the Cathedral, as stated above, and had proceeded directly to that Church. They were very excited and it is said that when they saw the crowd in the square one of the generals gave orders to fix bayonets and disperse the crowd, which seem like an unnecessary drastic measure. It is an unquestionable fact that another of the general approached Veliki Zupan (Prefect of the County of Zagreb) in front of the Serbian church and unbraided him for not having prevented such an incident, telling him that he should resign at once. It is difficult to see how the Veliki Zupan could have prevented it. He made no answer, however, but went into the church. The following day the Veliki Zupan and the Chief of Police were summoned to Belgrade by the Minister of the Interior. The result has been that General Uzun-Mirkovic has now been transferred and the Veliki Zupan has been pensioned. The appointment of a military officer from Belgrade as Veliki Zupan here is naturally resented by the people, as it places them practically under military control, but there has been no opportunity yet to ascertain the reaction from that.

The incidents during the morning of December 1st increased the general excitement and nervousness, so that during the course of the afternoon there were further demonstrations in various parts of the city, and especially about 7 P.M., when a company of soldiers marched through the streets carrying banners and torches and with the band playing, which had been the custom at the close of every celebration on December 1st. The writer passed them in the main street on his way home from the consulate and saw the crowds on all sides hissing the soldiers and hooting. The writer also saw one shot fired about 100 feet back of him after he had passed, but does not know whether it was fired by the police or by a civilian, and did not wait to find out. There were a number of other shots fired about that time and stone and bricks were thrown from a new building which is being constructed in the market square, as this torchlight procession was held to be a further provocation. It is not thought that anyone was killed, but several were seriously injured, including one bystander, who is not expected to live.

Black flags were displayed on some of the houses in the city during the afternoon, and, although it is reported that the police ordered them to be removed, the writer

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noticed that they remained there. It is understood that the owners of the houses where they were displayed are to be punished in some way by the authorities. Another indication of the feeling of the people in this city was the voluntary closing of most of the coffee-houses and restaurants as a sign of mourning rather than keeping them open as a day of gayety, although the police subsequently made them reopen. Some prominent social functions in the city were cancelled and a gala performance at the theater was stopped by the manager owing to the demonstrations of disapproval on the part of the people and the fear that further demonstrations and riots might occur.

The impression that an outsider forms is that the whole affair on the morning of December 1, 1928, was most unseemly and that little tact or sense was shown by either the military or civil authorities here. It is believed that nothing serious would have happened if the authorities had been less excited and had ignored the demonstrations on the part of the irresponsible students and other young boys in this town, for, although the people are practically unanimous in resenting Serbian domination here, it is only young boys who attempt to create any kind of disturbances and if they were left alone these would be quite harmless. The writer has noticed on numerous occasions that when they march around the streets without the police interfering with them they do a little harmless shouting and after a few moments disperse and nothing further happens, whereas demonstrations have always been much worse when the police have interfered and aggravated the crowd.

There is no question but that the general feeling in Zagreb is becoming more and more bitter against Belgrade, and it would seem that everything that is done by the authorities tends to increase the bitterness rather than to lessen it, and tends to further postpone the final settlement of the Serbo-Croat conflict.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
(Signed) Leslie A. Davis,
Leslie A. Davis,
American Consul.

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