A Personal View of the Early Left in Pittsburgh, 1907-1923
by Frieda Truhar Brewster

My parents, turn-of-the-century immigrants from Croatia, were already socialists when I was born August 4, 1911, in rented rooms on the second floor of a house at 337 East Ohio Street on the North Side of Pittsburgh. As I grew up among those who had participated in the events recounted here, I listened to their stories, their discussions, and their arguments; I asked questions and received answers. Their beliefs have had a lasting impact on my life, and I have tried here to give my personal impressions of those times.

Croatian Socialism and Radnička Straža

As devout Catholics, it had not been easy for my parents to change their views and accept the novel ideas of the very different people introduced into their lives by my mother’s brother, who lived with them when they settled in Allegheny City in 1906. Following the path the Germans had taken with their Turnervereins, the Croatians began to

As she recounts, Frieda Brewster was born in 1911 to socialist Croatian immigrants in Pittsburgh. The reminiscences printed here follow her and her family through the turbulent early twentieth century: the organization of foreign-born socialist organizations, the founding of the Radnička Straža, World War I, the factional strife within the socialist movement, and the Red Scare. It ends with Mrs. Brewster’s adolescence in the mid-1920s. She went on to high school and college in Pittsburgh, attending the University of Pittsburgh until the Depression’s effects forced her to leave. She remained active in the causes and organizations of the Left, and married a Scots communist labor organizer. He was deported in 1931, and Mrs. Brewster has lived in England (with the exception of brief periods in the Soviet Union and China before World War II) ever since. Mrs. Brewster attended college in Britain during the 1950s and became a teacher. Now retired, she describes herself as a “Euro-communist,” with a firm belief in a democratic path to socialism.

Mrs. Brewster has written these reminiscences over great removes of time and distance, using sources primarily from her experiences on the Left. While her recollections sometimes vary from the “facts” as described by professional historians, this document must be viewed as a most valuable and remarkably detailed account of a period very little studied in Pittsburgh. We are grateful for the opportunity to print it.—Editor

1 [Turnervereins were secular, rationalist athletic clubs in Germany. In the United States after about 1880, they were divided among leftists and people who wanted the organizations to be non-ideological. Verein translates as club or association.]
form their own social societies. Many were attached to the church, some to the National Croatian Union (later the Croatian Fraternal Society, or Zajednica). My father had joined Sloga (Harmony) Choral Society.

But Bratsvo (Brotherhood), which my uncle Peter first attended, was very different. This social and cultural club was the creation of a group of Croatian radicals, some of whom had been socialists in the old country. An integral part of its activity was a discussion evening when debate and argument ranged widely over many subjects, especially the need for a more just society and ways to achieve it. Much of what my uncle heard touched closely on hardships he had experienced. He could no longer accept the old explanation of poverty as part of one's fate. Uncle Peter agreed with the views of these new friends that "the world must be changed," and he joined them.

My father was persuaded and transferred to the Bratsvo choir, but Catholicism remained my mother's stumbling block. Though she joined Bratsvo in 1907, it was not until 1909 that she declared, "I have freed myself of religion." In later years, she used that phrase often telling me about the old times. The belief that socialism and religion were incompatible was held by many before World War I. The socialists enthusiastically welcomed the new ideas proposed in this era of ferment. Darwinism, with its implied attack on fundamentalist religion, was attractive to those young Croatians who saw it as an exciting alternative to a faith in "God's will" which they believed so hampered struggles for change and improvement. They were also aware of the power of the church when priests, primarily Catholic, entered the industrial battlefields on the side of the employers.

For example, during the 1902 miners' strike, in the Church of the Annunciation of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, Father Filey told the miners:

You should have the manhood to go back to work and defy the United Mineworkers of America. It is a bloodstained organization and will be bloodstained until it ceases to exist. It was formed to promote crime and protect criminals. Everybody was happy and contented here until Mitchell and Fahy came.2

Among Croatian socialists, Prosveta stood for spreading culture and education. There was a liberal spirit abroad as public arguments took place between priests and professors. My father attended one such

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2 Mitchell and Fahy were union organizers. Ella Reeve Bloor, We Are Many (New York, 1940), 63. [Other historians might argue that the church was always anti-socialist but not always anti-union.]
debate in the old Lyceum Theatre in Pittsburgh. Clarence Darrow spoke to thousands. Bratsvo members went to hear Robert Ingersoll, the "great Agnostic," when he toured the country. They read the works of "muckrakers" such as Lincoln Steffens, who concluded in *Pittsburgh, A City Ashamed* that in Pittsburgh, privilege controlled politics.¹

To the delight of the Croatian socialists, the ideas and theories of socialism were publicly proclaimed in this heady atmosphere, but there was also a feeling of frustration that their numbers were so few. Years later, my uncle Peter explained to me that in all of Pittsburgh, there were only some twenty young Croatian men and women who thought of themselves as socialists at that time. Most were from the cities of the old country and tailors by trade. Uncle Peter was a barber, however, and my father was a bricklayer. The group lacked contact with the thousands of their countrymen from the villages who worked as unskilled laborers in the mills. Many worked twelve-hour shifts with a full twenty-four hours every sixth day. Hundreds were killed or injured: in the United States in 1905 alone, ninety-five members of the National Croatian Union were killed in accidents, and eighty-five were permanently disabled.⁴

The reports of the National Croatian Union (which had a membership of 22,384 in 1904) gave only a small percentage of all accidents and injuries involving Croats. Many more young immigrants did not belong to any organization. We do know that over 80 percent of the Croatian immigrants were peasants, and that many of them lived in Pittsburgh. Eventually, the group in and around the area became the largest in the United States.⁵

But few of these young steel workers came to the radical club Bratsvo, despite its Tamburitza (mandolin) Orchestra, choir, and dramatic society or its events such as dances and picnics. My family said that these men spent what leisure time they had in saloons and their boarding houses, rarely venturing outside their immediate neighborhood.

The problem which faced the Croatian socialists was how to approach these young people and to expose to them the sharp practices of the proprietors of the saloons and boarding houses. Most importantly, they wanted to talk to them about the high incidence of deaths

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⁵ Prpić, *Croatian Immigrants*, 124, 179, 340; Balch, *Slavic Fellow Citizens*, 442.
and accidents in the mills and the necessity for the enforcement of safety standards. The blame for injuries, they argued, lay with an utterly callous disregard for life and limb on the part of their employers. After much debate and discussion, they did find an answer, echoing — perhaps unknowingly — the opinion of Eugene V. Debs, the best-known socialist in America. He believed that a workers' socialist newspaper was a vital part of the working-class movement, a means of "waking the workers from their sleep, teaching them the power of thought, creating solidarity among them, showing them where their economic interests lay." 6

George J. Prpić attributed the founding of the socialist paper Radnička Straža (Workingmen's Guard) to Chicago socialists, but my family and other "pioneers" I knew well never doubted that this happened in Pittsburgh. 7 On the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the paper, its last successor, Narodni Glasnik, reported that

The groundwork and main thrust for the publication of a workers' paper for the Croatian and Serbian immigrants in America came from Pittsburgh, or as it was then called, Allegheny, Pennsylvania, now known as the North Side. In that place the idea of the workers' paper was not only born but ripened and bore fruit. All necessary decisions were taken by a group of socialist, class-conscious workers. One of the main problems was an editor. To this end they wrote to the leadership of the Social Democratic organization in Croatia seeking a man with not only the ability to edit but also the willingness to share the hardships to which immigrant socialists are subject. 8

Tomo Besenič from Pittsburgh was the leading spirit in this venture. He made contact with Josip Ječmenjak, one of the founders of the Slovenian socialist paper Proletarac (Worker), already in publication in Chicago. Ječmenjak readily agreed that a Croatian paper could be printed on his press. (This probably confused subsequent historians.) Once they had a press, the Pittsburgh group, including my uncle Peter, wrote to the Zemlorađnički Savez Hrvatske i Slavonije u Zagrebu (The Agricultural Workers Association of Croatia and Slavonia in Zagreb) asking for help in finding an editor, but that organization could spare no one.

Years later, I asked my uncle why they needed to get an editor from the old country. He explained that although the socialists had more education than many of their countrymen, none of them was capable of editing a paper. Statistics show that there were very few profes-

6 Eugene V. Debs, The Aims of a Workers' Press (1907). [See also: Nick Salvatore, Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist (Urbana, 1982).]
7 Prpić, Croatian Immigrants, 205.
ionals among the Croatians in the United States: of 30,000 immigrants between 1900 and 1903, only thirty were listed as “intellectuals.” Of the 367,239 Croatian and Slovenian immigrants who arrived by 1910, only 270 listed a profession; 17,601 declared themselves skilled, and 128,438 were illiterate. 9 When a letter arrived from Milan Jurišić Glumac saying he was willing to come to the United States to edit the paper, there was jubilation among the Pittsburgh socialists, despite whatever misgivings they might have had about hiring someone unknown to them. 10

Now money had to be found to bring Glumac over and to create a sound financial basis for the paper. A meeting was called in early summer of 1907 in the Czech Hall, Vinial Street, on the North Side of Pittsburgh. Fifty or sixty people attended. Thirty of them pledged a dollar a month to the fund for the paper and donated a dollar on the spot. The fund got a surprisingly good start when Tomo Sokač donated one hundred dollars — which he had borrowed. Amid great enthusiasm, committees were set up and picnics, dances, and concerts were planned. The coming months proved it was possible to raise money for a Croatian workers’ paper. 11

At the same meeting, another critical action was taken: the first Croatian Socialist Party in the United States was formed. It was called The Croatian Workers’ Organizational and Political Association (Hrvatski Radnički Prosvjetni i Politički Savez). The Serbs and Slovenes also organized and somewhat later formed the Yugoslav Socialist Union of Allegheny (Yugoslavenski Socialistički Savez u Allegheny), the organization of all socialist Croatians, Serbs, and Slovenes in Allegheny. Of course, my uncle Peter attended the meeting, but my father did not, choosing instead to help my mother. She was pregnant and running a household containing herself and husband, two children, Uncle Peter, and two boarders. However, Papa immediately pledged his monthly dollar, and independently, Mama saved her dollar from the housekeeping and regularly delivered it to my uncle. 12

Glumac more than measured up to the expectations of his American

9 Balch, Slavic Fellow Citizens, 442; Stjepan Gaži, Croatian Immigration to Allegheny County (Pittsburgh, 1956), 18; Statistical Review of Immigration, 1820-1910.
12 Peter Pichler to author, 1961.
comrades as the first editor of *Radnička Straža*. They had known little about him except that he was a twenty-three year old Serb, a student who because of his views had been imprisoned for some time in Mitrovica. He was given a great welcome, and as he requested, he was taken to steel mills, coal mines, and Croatian boarding houses. He got on well with people, and his knowledge of German was very useful in Pittsburgh, where the language was still widely spoken. The large oval, framed photograph of him hanging in our dining room showed him to be a very handsome man with large dark eyes, black wavy hair, and a drooping mustache.

After a few months, Glumac left for Chicago. On December 25, 1907, the first issue of *Radnička Straža* appeared. Even the Christmas and New Year holidays did not stop the Croatian socialists from going out to sell it as soon as it reached Pittsburgh. Mama told me that when Papa and my uncle Peter went out together with that first issue, they triumphantly announced, "Idemo na agitaciju," which literally translated means "we are going out on agitation." In later years, it became a commonly used phrase, but on this occasion, their objective was to make contact with the young Croats living in boarding houses on a section of East Ohio Street known to Croats as "Jaska Street." 13

My pregnant mother feared for my father and uncle as these boarding houses were notorious. They were reputed to be the worst in Allegheny, run by tough "burstingbosses" who kept tight control over their boarders. My uncle wrote me about this period many years later.

As many as fifty or sixty men lived in one boarding house. They slept in three shifts, using the same beds, after hours had been reduced to eight from the previous twelve-hour shifts. In one room there was a long table. They sat on benches to have their meals. The boarding boss made wine and bottled beer. He sold beer checks on payday and each man would buy his liquor until the next payday. Some of these people couldn't read or write. They were uprooted and did all the hard menial labor in the mills. So they spent their free hours drinking. I might add that in many cases the boarding boss lady was also a wife to the boarders on payday. There were boarding houses on both sides of "Jaska Street" in those days. We heard about a policeman known as Ryan who made the rounds of these houses on Saturday nights. He'd put the men to bed from where they had fallen in their drunken stupors.

Your father and I were thrown out of many boarding houses when we tried to introduce the paper. The boarding bosses denounced us as "cincilisti," their way of saying syndicalists. 14

13 Gaži, *Immigration to Allegheny County*, 14. Most of the men were from Jaska, south of Zagreb, which had been devastated by a *Phylloxera* epidemic about 1883. The disease of grape vines destroyed the area's income from the wine trade.

14 Peter Pichler to author, Sept. 1961.
United States Immigration Reports for 1911 commented, as well, that "the Croatian boarding houses are overcrowded, dirty, verminous, and unsanitary."  

It was to such places, then, that the Croatian socialists went to sell their new paper. Sometimes they got nowhere as truculent proprietors stopped them, but on other occasions the young men intervened and insisted on seeing the paper or having it read to them. They were especially interested in the reports of terrible accidents, with the names, dates, and mills listed. The paper always stressed issues of safety and compensation.

Outside the boarding houses, the immigrants met in saloons run by fellow countrymen. The saloon met a social need, of course, but it also was a center for important transactions for the men, performed by the saloonkeepers at a price. One such service was the provision of steamship tickets for the relatives of immigrants. Frequently, saloonkeepers charged much more than the actual cost of the tickets for the sweethearts, wives, and families of the men. (After 1900, two-thirds of immigrants came over on prepaid tickets or money sent from America.) The socialists set out to expose this racket in shif karte (ship tickets).

A family legend tells that my father and uncle went to sell the paper in a "Jaska Street" saloon. As the saloonkeeper ordered them out, Papa shouted, "He doesn't want you to know what a steamship ticket really costs. You're paying too much." This so interested the men that more than half followed my father and Uncle Peter out of the saloon. They sold out all their papers except one which they read to a group who were illiterate. As the now angry men tramped back into the saloon, Papa and my uncle did not wait to see what happened to the proprietor. When they returned later with the next issue of the paper, they were welcomed by the men, and the surly bartender did not order them out.

Hard, slogging work brought its rewards as the paper became more widely known. The page which featured industrial accidents and the suffering of uncompensated workers and their families became a very popular feature. Employers thus exposed, and steamship companies

15 The Immigration Committee, Immigrants in Industries (Washington, 1911), vol. 1, 664: social conditions of Croatians.
16 Gazi, Immigration to Allegheny County, 41-42. [See also: Steven B. Vardy, The Hungarian-Americans (New York, 1986) and John Bodnar, The Transplanted (Bloomington, 1985), for similar accounts of the lives of immigrant workers.]
17 Prpić, Croatian Immigrants, 108.
which used saloonkeepers as their agents, were outraged, and even the press attacked *Radnička Straža*.

Gradually, the Croatian socialists added more members as they became known as honest people. They started evening classes to teach immigrants to read and write, and they waged a campaign against deburred attorneys and defrocked priests who came to America intent on exploiting their less-educated immigrant countrymen. The paper's circulation steadily grew.¹⁸

But the young, talented editor of *Radnička Straža* drove himself to the limit. Glumac wrote, edited, proofread, did layout — in fact, he did everything. The old "pioneers" have told me that his articles were brilliant, forceful, and written so simply that everyone could understand. As editor, he became a very popular guest speaker at fund-raising events for the paper, and the lucidity and directness of his speeches had great appeal. His health suffered. No one, including Glumac, realized he had tuberculosis, probably contracted in prison. By 1912, he was exhausted, and on doctor's orders, he went to the milder climate of California. Tudor Chetkov took over, but Glumac's touch was greatly missed.

In 1913, he returned to Chicago. My father, who had great regard for him, wrote to welcome him back. He received this reply:

26 November 1913

Dear Comrade,

I was pleased you thought of me. My health is now no better than in February, 1912. During the first months in California I improved considerably and gained nearly twenty pounds in weight. Then I regressed. Your advice that I should not work too hard I will not be able to follow. We have not a single person who could carry out the editing of *Straža*. Comrade Chetkov helps me but I have to work every night till ten or eleven o'clock and sometimes all day Sunday. I shall perish.¹⁹

In January 1914, Milan Jurišić Glumac died at the home of his friend, Peter Pirić, in Cedar Lake, Indiana. He was thirty years old.²⁰

The following years were difficult for the paper; it was banned during World War I. It reappeared in April 1918 as *Znanje* (Knowledge), and then as *Radnik* (Worker) in 1922, *Glas Radnika* (Voice of the Worker) in 1935, and *Radnički Glas* (Workers' Voice) in 1936. The names were changed over the years to meet the needs of the times.

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¹⁸ Discussions with my mother during her stay with me in London; she was seventy-five at the time. Additional information from my uncle Peter Pichler's letters.

¹⁹ Published in *Narodni Glasnik*, Oct. 16, 1957; author's translation.

²⁰ Prpić, *Croatian Immigrants*, 205.
The final change to *Narodni Glasnik* (People’s Voice) was made in December 1940, when, in the face of fascism in Europe, it was felt that the appeal of the paper must be broadened to include all people, not just the working class. It was published at 1916 East Ohio Street, on Pittsburgh’s North Side.*Narodni Glasnik* ceased publication in 1978. The old Croatian-speaking pioneers were dead, and the younger generation was Americanized. Most important, however, was the lasting impact of the anti-communist repression of the McCarthy era which left deep marks on many communists and socialists who, along with their children, suffered greatly for their beliefs.

*A Childhood on Mt. Troy*

In June 1916, my parents bought an old farmhouse, with a piece of land, on a hilltop where a number of Croatians already lived. For ten years my mother had looked after our family, my uncle, and two boarders, always socialist comrades. After a series of “rooms” in squalid streets, the new place seemed like heaven. To one side were woods and fields. From the other end of the small flat space, the factories lining the banks of the Allegheny River and the steel mills in Lawrenceville were visible. My father worked at one of these mills, Heppenstall’s, replacing bricks in still-hot furnaces, at one time. We perched high over Millvale and were linked to that small town by telephone number and postal address, but geographically over the boundary, we belonged for all other purposes to Mt. Troy, a part of Reserve Township above Troy Hill.

Within a few years, our farmhouse became important to the Croatian socialists in Pittsburgh. My gregarious father soon had his socialist friends at our place. They erected a bowling alley under our large barn. In these days, it was a happy escape from their crowded boarding houses for the single men especially, as they sat in the shade of our enormous linden tree. On some Saturday and Sunday afternoons, the back yard became an informal political forum for argument and debate. Many newspapers and magazines came into our home besides *Radnička Straža*. There was the German socialist *Vorwärts*, the national socialist *Appeal to Reason*, the *Rip Saw*, and the Pittsburgh *Daily Leader*. My parents and their friends discussed the murder of Jaures, the writings of August Bebel, and the views of such people as Scheidemann, Noske and Ebert, Stjepan Radić, the

Frieda Truhar, aged 3, with her father and friends at a Croatian picnic (courtesy of author)

The Truhar farmhouse on Mt. Troy, 1920 (courtesy of author)
Liebknechts (father and son), Rosa Luxemburg, and Prince Kropotkin, as they followed the political and intellectual life of Europe.²²

Because the leadership of the national Socialist Party was not interested in organizing the foreign-born, various ethnic groups created their own national socialist federations. The first was the Finnish in 1907, and the Croatians were part of the Yugoslav Federation founded in 1911 (along with federations of Italians and Scandinavians). Each federation had a national committee, newspaper, and cultural and educational institutions.²³ In Pittsburgh, Bratsvo was one of those cultural institutions. A vigorous social and cultural life contributed to a better understanding among the Croatians of what the socialists were seeking. My brother, nearly five years older than me and thus active earlier in its affairs, described this club:

Our Bratsvo started early in the century in a warehouse on Chestnut Street, North Side Pittsburgh (then Allegheny) near the old wooden covered bridge. The young socialist Croatians transformed it into a club house. There was storage space for the choir's piano, the mandolins of the Tamburitza orchestra, the props for the dramatic society. In the large main room self-standing reading frames displayed newspapers from Croatia and the States.

By 1914 it had become a flourishing society which held concerts, plays, dances and even Croatian operettas, such as "Voynicki Begunac" (Military Fugitive) and "Matia Gubac." Our father, who was a tenor, sang duets with Knebel, a baritone. These performances took place on a Saturday in the Teutonia Hall in Pressley Street near Chestnut Street and also in Turnerhall on South Canal Street on the North Side. People came from as far as Youngstown and Canton, Ohio. The show itself began at 2:30 p.m. and finished at 5 o'clock. On the floor below the cooks, including our mother, would have a goulash supper ready for the audience. Upstairs the chairs were cleared for dancing which started around 8 o'clock and went on till midnight. The orchestra was most often the Bratso Tamburitza, at this time conducted by a man named Belec. Our father usually applied for the liquor license which was valid for 48 hours.

We children were taken to all these Bratsvo entertainments and some-

²² [Jaures was a French socialist leader assassinated shortly before World War I; Bebel, the Liebknechts, and Scheidemann were leaders of the German Social Democratic Party, the largest socialist party in the world; Ebert was a German right-wing socialist and became the president of the Weimar Republic; Rosa Luxemburg was a Polish-born German Social Democrat and leader of the left-wing Spartacist faction; Prince Kropotkin was a Russian anarchist.]

²³ W. Z. Foster, History of the Communist Party (New York, 1952), 114. [Some scholars have indicated that the leadership of the Socialist Party was divided about organizing foreign-born socialists. The Slav federation was also known as the South Slav Federation; Yugoslavia did not yet exist. Joseph Stipanovich, "In Unity Is Strength: Immigrant Intellectuals in Progressive America: A History of the South Slav Social Democratic Movement, 1900-1918" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1978).]
times you recited. We stayed late so sometimes you fell asleep. We went to all the picnics too during the spring and summer months. At these picnics there was always lamb roasted on a spit in the open like in the old country. Many people came to these picnics where the kolo was danced as well as waltzes and polkas. There was always a speech about socialism. . . . Serbs came too for among socialists the old-country animosities had ceased to exist. It was a good childhood.\footnote{24 Letter, 1979.}

Money made from these affairs supported the political activities of the Yugoslav Socialist Party, but it also went towards instruments, music scores, props, and new mandolins. I remember that there were always socialist papers and literature on sale.

The Socialist Sunday School in Pittsburgh brought together immigrants of different nationalities whose children attended. My brother first enrolled in 1915, when the school met on the second floor of the Kenyon Theatre (on Federal Street on the North Side). In 1916, when Jewish comrades also acquired their Jewish Labor Temple in the Hill District, Americans, Germans, Croatians, Czechs, Hungarians, and others on the North Side joined to buy a building at James and Foreland Streets which was named the Socialist Lyceum. The Sunday School transferred there, meeting on the third floor.

My parents urged us to go in order to gain an understanding of socialist aspirations. Under the German superintendent, Reinhard Werner, children were taught sitting in “circles” according to age. The “Round Table” was a discussion group for the over-sixteens, conducted (I believe) by Emil Limbach, who had been to the Rand School in New York. I was five in 1916 when I first rode the streetcar from Troy Hill to the school with my brother and sister. I remember the large airy room and the illustrated books we were given, \textit{The Cave Dwellers} and \textit{The Tree Dwellers}, by Catherine Dopps.\footnote{25 Catherine Dopps, \textit{The Cave Dwellers} and \textit{The Tree Dwellers} (Chicago, circa 1916).} We learned how early man had lived, improvising tools and implements first for hunting and then for agriculture. This led to a humanist approach — the color of a person’s skin might be different, or slant of the eyes, but we were all part of the great brotherhood of man. [Today such gender-exclusive expressions would certainly be challenged.—Author]

Not until 1925, when Clarence Darrow defended John T. Scopes, who had been arrested for violating the Anti-Evolution Law, did I understand how advanced such teaching in our Sunday School had been. The Tennessee “Monkey Trial” was, of course, national news,
and we followed intently the newspaper accounts of the court preliminaries and the battle between Darrow and William Jennings Bryan.\textsuperscript{26}

In one of the upper classes at the Sunday School, we were taught in a simple way what socialism meant. Our teacher contrasted a world which might come into being with the unjust society in which we lived. And always we sang; how we sang! It was great fun and a good way to end the morning. Among many similar songs, my favorite was:

\begin{quote}
We stretch our hands across the sea
To men of every clime
While human hearts in harmony
Strike a universal chime
Around the world we stretch our hands in solidarity
With brothers stand in every land for human liberty.
\end{quote}

At Easter and Christmas we had parties with games and favors. Evening entertainments where we performed were very popular, as nationalities forgotten, the audience became a united group of proud socialist parents.

With the Socialist Party split in 1919 and emergence of the Communist Parties,\textsuperscript{27} control of the Sunday School went to the left. Our gentle, wise teachers were replaced by far less knowledgeable young people. Rudi Blum, in his early twenties, became superintendent. Though full of enthusiasm, he knew very little about children. Although the Round Table lasted until 1927, the Socialist Sunday School had ceased to exist by 1923. I remember with gratitude and pleasure my years in Sunday School. I learned much I could not learn in school or at home. The school was also an oasis for the children of immigrants where we were treated with equality and dignity.

\textit{World War I and the Russian Revolution}

My parents were greatly concerned at the outbreak of World War I. As socialists, they opposed the war, but as Mama explained to me, they had personal reasons for concern as well. Mama’s mother and my father’s parents, brothers, and sisters were still in Croatia. Their letters became few and far between.

In August 1914, the Socialist Party adopted a resolution denouncing the “senseless conflict” and expressing its “opposition to this and all other wars.”\textsuperscript{28} When Woodrow Wilson took the United States into


\textsuperscript{27}See page 359 for further discussion of split. [“Left” and “right” here refer to factions within the socialist movement.]

\textsuperscript{28}Foster, \textit{Communist Party}, 130.
the war in 1917, the Socialist Party again went on record as "un-
alterably opposed to American entrance into the war." Socialists
were confused, angered, and outraged as the United States Congress
passed the Espionage Act, making it a crime to speak or otherwise act
against the war. From mid-June 1917 until July 1918, about one
thousand people were prosecuted, including Eugene Debs. He ran for
president from prison in 1920, and received just under a million votes.
My father served as a Debs/Socialist Party poll watcher in that
election.

My family was also affected by the Espionage Act. In late June, I
performed in a Croatian entertainment in the Slovene Hall in
Lawrenceville. I was nearly six at the time, and for some years I had
been a popular "reciter" of verse which I declaimed with gusto (in
three languages: Croatian, German, and English) and with all the ap-
propriate emphases and gestures taught me by my mother. That
evening, I recited the anti-war poem, "I did not raise my boy to be a
soldier." We were on our way home when, as we later learned, a
patrol wagon had rolled up to the hall, and the police asked to see the
parents of the child who had spoken against the war. Some weeks
later, my father was taken from work and interrogated. He readily
agreed he was a socialist but said he knew nothing about this very
recently passed Espionage Act. Perhaps because a child was involved,
they let him go with the strict warning that they would keep an eye
on him. Papa was told he should be ashamed of himself and as an
American citizen, should bring up his children to be good Americans
and not teach them such things. Fortunately for all of us, he kept
his temper.

This episode in no way curtailed his future anti-war activities.
Despite the harsh penalties of the act, the socialist Croatians in
Pittsburgh continued to push anti-war leaflets printed in English
through letter slots. I remember going to Troy Hill after dark with
Papa. To me it was a game, but Mama always worried until we re-
turned. Even as a young child, I felt the charged atmosphere in our
home as Mama implored Papa not to argue at work against the war.
The "rah, rah, rah and Liberty Bonds" feeling, as he scornfully called
it, was beginning to take hold.

29 Herbert M. Moria and William Cahn, Gene Debs, the Story of a Fighting
American (New York, 1948), 95, 96.
30 Ten thousand dollar fine and twenty years in prison: Samuel Eliot Morison
and Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of the American Republic
(Oxford, 1962), vol. II, 364. [See also: William Preston, Jr., Aliens and
In the midst of this anxiety came the news of the revolution in Russia. It was greeted with fervor by foreign-born socialists who welcomed what appeared to them as "the dawn of socialism" and a promise for their own future. My mother had suffered great hardship as a child. At age eleven, she was sent from her village into service far from home. It was important to her that peasants as well as workers were part of this revolt. Normally a reserved woman, she was near tears as she lifted me high and then sat me on her lap to explain how "ordinary people like me and Papa have taken things into their own hands." Six years old then, I did not understand, but I felt happy because she was so happy. The incident remains vividly in my memory.

Few sophisticated Marxists were to be found in the ranks of the Croatian socialists in Pittsburgh. Most saw the revolution in simple terms — the corrupt, exploitative society with its barbaric treatment of workers and peasants would now become a world of equality and abundance for all. There was little understanding of the tremendous problems as the Bolsheviks faced famine, civil war, and foreign intervention. Some even believed that somehow, almost overnight, everything would be changed.

Events in Europe such as the Spartacist rising in Berlin, and unrest and strikes elsewhere, led many to believe that here, too, a revolutionary situation was developing. Their belief was strengthened by a wave of strikes prompted when employers attempted to withdraw wartime benefits. In January 1919, the Seattle shipyard strike led to a major general strike. Thirty thousand textile workers closed the mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts; 350,000 steel workers walked out; 500,000 coal miners stopped work. But except, perhaps, in Butte, Montana, where a Workers', Soldiers', and Sailors' Council was created, and in Portland, Oregon, where some leaders formed a soviet whose stated aim was "to strike the final blow to the capitalist class," the battles were fought not for revolution, but to save the wartime concessions industrialists were now trying to pull back.31

31 Albert E. Kahn, High Treason (New York, 1950), 8, 9. [The rising was a communist rebellion against the Social Democrat government in Germany. Luxemburg and the younger Liebknecht were arrested and killed. In Hungary, a brief soviet republic was formed under the leadership of Béla Kun in 1919. In the United States, the strikes of 1919 were a culmination of a decade of working-class activity. The four million workers on strike in that year were the largest percentage of the total workforce on strike in any single year in American history. See: David Montgomery, Workers' Control in America (Cambridge, 1979), esp. 91-134. Causes of the strikes probably included the end of immigration as a source of cheap labor, inflation, the
Nevertheless, as news of these strikes became known, enthusiastic Croatian socialists in Pittsburgh distributed leaflets in English headed “Workers Arise.” A special meeting of Pittsburgh’s Croatian socialists was called with but one item on the agenda: the proposition that Bratsvo be disbanded and its assets sold so the money could be used to help the coming revolution in America. In a heated debate, the main argument against this was that the American workers must take the lead. As foreigners, the Croatians, some not yet citizens, could influence only their own. Bratsvo was one of their lifelines to such people.\textsuperscript{12}

Perhaps the argument which carried most weight was that the highly respected John Reed, who had actually witnessed the Russian uprising, did not agree that this was the time for revolution in the United States. This was explained by Hanas and Mokrović, who both read everything and knew about socialist national affairs. Those who were against disbanding their social and cultural society won the day; Bratsvo was reprieved. But the decision was by no means unanimous — my uncle laughingly teased my father, who had supported it. At any rate, the Croatian socialists in Pittsburgh agreed that their time for revolution had not yet come. Nor was it imminent, for this was America, a highly industrialized country, untouched by the devastation of the European war, where capitalism was more powerful than ever. The total number of communists or socialists in the country was a tiny two-tenths of one percent of the adult population, and most of them were foreign-born.\textsuperscript{33}

The news that 5,000 American soldiers had joined the intervention forces against the Bolsheviks prompted an outcry, not only from the left, but from others who believed that the Russians had the same right the American colonist had had: to choose their own government. I helped Papa distribute posters and leaflets bearing the slogan “Hands Off Russia.” We also began to collect funds for the victims, especially children, of the famine in Russia caused in part by the blockade, the “cordon sanitaire.” We children from the Socialist Sunday School called ourselves “famine scouts,” and we went from door to door with our tins explaining to people that little ones like their own were dying of hunger. Many people gave, and my tin was often full as I hurried home from Millvale.

\footnotesize{wartime experiences of workers (including the realization that they would never return to Europe), and the stimulus of the Russian Revolution.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} Discussion with my father and uncle.

\textsuperscript{33} Kahn, High Treason, 34. [See also: James Weinstein, The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925 (New York, 1969).]
Similar activities around the country prompted the creation of a group called the Friends of Soviet Russia. My parents belonged to the Pittsburgh chapter. They firmly believed that there was now one land in the world run by people like themselves, and they gave it their loyal support. But life was more complicated; modern Russia is a far cry from the hopes and desires of those early Pittsburgh socialists. Its contemporary failings do not, however, lessen the tremendous impact the Russian revolution had on them at the time.

Socialists Become Communists

Early in June 1919, when we returned home from Sunday School, we missed the usual shouts and sound of falling ninepins from the bowling alley. Instead, we found a serious and at times bitter discussion going on beneath the linden tree. I sat down beside Mama. The talk was about the shattering news that they had been expelled, through their federation, from the American Socialist Party. All foreign-born socialists organized in such ethnic federations had been expelled, as had state and local groups where the left had majorities. Some fifty-five thousand members were driven out of the party; forty thousand of them were federation members.

Pavel Hanas tried to explain how such a thing could happen. The left in the Socialist Party made rapid advances after the Russian Revolution and won the national elections in early 1919. Such outstanding leaders of the socialist right as Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit were decisively defeated by Kate O’Hare and John Reed. A majority of the new executive were now of this leftist group. The old incumbent executive acted swiftly to retain its power. At its May 1919 meeting, without trials or charges, it made the expulsions. When Hanas explained that John Reed was among the expelled, there was an explosion of wrath. Ten Days That Shook the World had very recently been published, and, to many, John Reed was a hero.

I was eight then, and I understood little of what it all meant. When I protested that no matter what had happened, we were still socialists, Mama laughed and agreed. We would always be that; there was no need to worry. But it was a time of doubt and uncertainty. My father attended meeting after meeting at which the decisions of a hurriedly convened conference of the left, held in New York on June 21, were

34 Foster, Communist Party, 163. [Weinstein, Decline.]
35 Ten Days That Shook the World was John Reed’s eye-witness account of the Russian Revolution.
discussed. Papa favored immediately setting up a party like the Bolsheviks. Uncle Peter agreed with John Reed that an attempt must first be made at the August convention to win back the Socialist Party.

When the convention opened August 30, 1919, in Machinists’ Hall, Chicago, delegates from expelled branches in a dozen states appeared. Their credentials were refused. John Reed led them into the hall where they tried to take their seats. The party officers called the police, who threw them out. The next day, the John Reed group, mostly native-born Americans, formed the American Communist Labor Party; September 1, the federation groups set up the Communist Party of America. Along with many foreign-born socialists, my parents joined this party.  

The Palmer Raids — We Go Underground

The newly-born Communist Parties and the trade unions soon became targets of attacks of a scale not previously experienced in America. On January 2, 1920, on the order of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, some 6,000 people in the larger cities of the United States were arrested and jailed. The suddenness and magnitude of the arrests on that single day gave January 2 special significance in Palmer’s crusade, but in the spring and summer of 1919, plans had already been afoot for an all-out offensive against the “radical movement.” Hundreds of informers infiltrated organizations of the foreign-born left and the unions, and sent their reports to the Justice Department. In January 1920, The New York Times reported, “during the steel strike, coal strike . . . secret agents moved constantly among the more radical of the agitators and collected a mass of evidence.”

Many of our Croatian comrades participated in the steel strike which began September 22, 1919. It brought to a standstill almost every steel plant in Western Pennsylvania: Braddock, Rankin, Homestead, Butler, and Pittsburgh. W. Z. Foster, not then a socialist but an

36 Foster, Communist Party, 162, 163, 171. [The Communist Party of America is not the present day Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). That organization dates from 1922-23 (see p. 364), and was in response to directions from Moscow intended to eliminate factionalism and establish a unified party position under international communist control.]


38 Kahn, High Treason, 12, 36.
American Federation of Labor organizer, headed the national organizing forces from an office in Pittsburgh. He wanted to organize the mass of unskilled workers, mostly foreign-born, in these mills, but Samuel Gompers, head of the American Federation of Labor, preferred the craft unions, fearing that the industrial unions might be a menace to his power. The strike was sabotaged, indirectly, by a lack of funds, relief, and support from above. The bloody and long-fought battle was finally lost.39

The United States Department of Justice also contributed to this defeat. The Commission of Inquiry of the Interchurch World Movement recorded in its Report of the Steel Strike in 1919,

Federal immigration authorities testified that raids and arrests for "radicalism" etc. were made especially in the Pittsburgh district on the denunciations and secret reports of steel company "under cover" men, and the prisoners turned over to the Department of Justice.

According to one federal agent operating in the Pittsburgh area, "ninety percent of all radicals arrested and taken into custody were reported by one of the large corporations either of the steel or coal industry." 40

Strikers seeking to defend their living standard were called "reds" and "Bolshevik agents." The "Red Menace" replaced the wartime hatred of the "Hun." The effort to crush the labor movement, drive down wages, and restore open shops in heavy industry made life very dangerous for foreign-born activists. They made up the bulk of the workforce in the steel mills. One day, two men, Croatian comrades from one of the small steel towns, appeared on our front porch. They had been sent to our place so they could "rest up" for a few days before rejoining the strike. Their faces were so bruised and swollen that I was frightened until my mother explained. My father was working on an outdoor building site at that time, and was not involved in the strike, but he closely followed all that happened.

Not surprisingly, during the Palmer raids, almost all of those prominent in the steel strike were arrested. All but one of our Croatian

39 W. Z. Foster, From Bryan to Stalin (London, 1937), 117-25. [The work of some current scholars would not agree that the strike was lost because of Gompers' fear of industrial unions. They stress the power of the companies, a hostile press, and the Red Scare as critical to its failure, and think that Gompers was actually more sympathetic to the craft unions than Foster believed. For the standard account of the steel strike, see: David Brody, Steelworkers in America: The Non-Union Era (Cambridge, 1960) and Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919 (Philadelphia, 1965).]

40 Kahn, High Treason, 37.
comrades in one steel town (Rankin?) were taken into custody. The one who remained free was avoided forever after; many suspected that he had been an informer. Mama became more and more worried as increasing numbers of people we knew were picked up. My parents felt that they, too, might be hunted down just for being foreign-born and communist. Some of Palmer’s men were ignoring citizenship papers which my parents had long held. The word came to lie low and stay away from all meetings, halls, and offices.

As usual, however, my father did not wish to live quietly. He fumed, raged, wanted to fight back. More sensible, Mama persuaded him there was nothing he alone could do; he must go along with the party decision to remain silent. I listened to their arguments and Papa’s constant reiteration of the need for “someone to do something.”

Protest and action did come from many quarters. Louis F. Post, Assistant Secretary of Labor, dismissed the cases of hundreds who were wrongfully held for deportation. When impeachment charges against him were referred to the House Committee on Rules, the old Jeffersonian democrat sturdily stood his ground and rebutted the charges. In May of 1920, a brochure titled To the American People — Report on the Illegal Practices of the United States Department of Justice, was published and distributed by the National Popular Government League. It was signed by twelve of the most eminent lawyers in the United States, including Felix Frankfurter, later a Justice of the Supreme Court, and Roscoe Pound, Dean of Harvard Law School.41

My father read the evidence of the raids’ violation of law and Constitution. Excitedly, he insisted it was all over now, Palmer could not go on; but it was not so. The party was in difficulty; many of its leaders were in jail. The secretary, Charles E. Ruthenberg, had been sentenced to a long term. When my father learned that national communist headquarters were closed, he finally became more subdued and agreed with the steps being taken to protect the membership (as far as possible) from arbitrary arrest. Both the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party were busy reorganizing to this end. At their “underground” conventions later in 1920, they discovered to their dismay that they had held only about 10,000 of the 60,000 who had earlier been in their ranks. Among that 10,000 were my father, mother, and uncle.42

Our home, the old farmhouse, now became the headquarters of the

41 Louis F. Post, The Deportation Delirium of 1920 (Chicago, 1923); Dunn, The Palmer Raids, 37.
42 Foster, Communist Party, 176.
Croatian party in Pittsburgh. Meetings were held in the dining room or kitchen, according to numbers. The house could be reached from three directions, two paths from Millvale and the long winding road from Troy Hill. As neighbors were used to our many visitors, the comings and goings were not unusual. There is no doubt that these gatherings were dangerous, but for me, there was a funny side, too. Comrades I had known all my life were now called Mr. A, Mr. B, or by other letters of the alphabet. If I mentioned them by name, Mama reproached me. Yet I could not help laughing as she welcomed an old friend as “Mr. B.” Perhaps she realized what might happen if our home was discovered as a meeting place of communists, a thought which had never then occurred to me.

Our house was a kind of office, too, where letters, papers, and minutes were kept. Mama was in charge of leaflets and pamphlets. She kept them in three sacks, and hid them in the hayloft. It was clear Mama was bothered by it all, for I often helped her as she changed the hiding place to cellar or attic, then back to the hayloft, though I told her I was sure that if “they” came, they would find them, no matter where they were.

Sometimes on meeting nights, a visitor would be in the house when I got home from school. He was from a higher party committee and explained that if he did not come to us, he would be sitting in libraries or cafeterias all afternoon. Arthur, a tall thin man with a scarred face, was a Hungarian refugee who had taken part in the Béla Kun uprising in that country. He spoke Croatian, German, and reasonable English. He would sit drinking coffee as Mama worked at the stove making supper. Once she learned he was university-educated, she asked him question after question. Her special interests were Darwinism, the reign of Maria Theresa, and the Spanish Inquisition. She was also interested in Galileo and Giordano Bruno and wanted Arthur to explain their heresies. I sometimes wonder if she still needed to convince herself about Catholicism. Arthur shared our evening meal and then it was Papa’s turn to ask questions which were always political. In spite of his appearance, Arthur was what the Austrians call “sympathisch,” a congenial man, and I liked him. Later during the “underground” days, he came for a time to live in our house.

It was Arthur who informed the Croatian communists in Pittsburgh that the union of the Communist Party of America and Communist Labor Party was being discussed and asked for their views. I learned later from my mother that they had not been sure it was a good idea
because they did not want to lose their federation status which enabled them to have contact with Croatian socialists throughout the country and was necessary for the support of their paper. However, when in May 1921 this fusion took place, it was agreed that the federations were to come under general party control, and although they would be given considerable autonomy, they would now be subject to the general supervision of the central executive committee. Dues were to be paid directly to the party. 44

In late December of the same year, the American Labor Alliance, together with its affiliated organizations, called a conference at the Labor Temple in New York City. This was fully supported by the Communist Party and brought together practically all the communist forces in the country including delegates from our Yugoslav Federation. At this conference, The Workers’ Party was formed, an attempt to re-establish the democratic rights eroded by the Palmer raids. 45 When they heard this, my parents were certain that the Communist Party would also come into the open, but at the Communist Party convention in Michigan in mid-August 1922, the vote was to continue the “underground” existence.

The decision disappointed my parents and complicated life for the Croatian communists in Pittsburgh, many of whom, including my family, were by now openly defending their principles and continued to do so throughout 1922. It seemed a contradiction. The Communist Party meetings were still being held at our house. We children were firmly told that on no account must we mention the people who came or what was said. I wondered about this, for as I listened to the talk, they seemed to be discussing things they were already openly doing, like helping the campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti, assisting striking miners, and distributing leaflets. 46 These same comrades met and carried on in Bratsvo quite boldly. Our national paper changed its name from Znanje (Knowledge) to Radnik (Worker) in July 1922 and continued publication without a break.

In 1922, I clashed with my teacher, Miss Ross, at Mt. Troy School in a way which might have been bad for my parents. In answer to her

44 Foster, Communist Party, 181. [Origin of the CPUSA; See Weinstein, Decline, esp. 258-339.]
45 Foster, Communist Party, 194. [See also Weinstein, ibid.]
46 [Sacco and Vanzetti became a national cause during the 1920s. They were Italian anarchists charged with robbery and murder in Massachusetts. They were convicted and sentenced to death; many believed that they were innocent victims of anti-foreign, anti-radical prejudice. They were executed in 1927.]
request that we write about "The Best Country in the World," I stated in my composition that Russia was the best country because ordinary people ran it, and I went on to prove this from the things I had heard at home. As I stood facing my eleven-year-old schoolmates the next morning, Miss Ross said many things. But my father was most infuriated that she had denounced me as "immigrant scum." He angrily went to see our principal, Miss Manning, who told him she did not agree with my views but was firm in her belief that I had a right to state them regardless of my origins. However, Miss Manning warned my father that if Miss Ross chose to go to the school board, there might be trouble. Mama scolded me for being thoughtless since we were still underground, but nothing happened.

During the nationwide miners’ strike in 1922, our people regularly and openly helped with relief. Like others in Pittsburgh, we took two miners’ children into our home because there was no food for them at home. Victor and Joe were near my age and came from Westmoreland County. They had to go to school, so I took them to Miss Manning and told her why they were staying with us. The next day at recess, she walked through the playground with an arm around each boy, her way of showing other children, and some of the teachers, that these boys were welcome among us. We thought Miss Manning was a wonderful woman.

Underground or not, a great deal happened in which we were involved. In retrospect, I do believe that going "underground" was essential immediately after the Palmer raids, but I think that it continued far longer than necessary. My parents were delighted when on April 23, 1923, the united parties emerged into the open with a new name, the Workers’ (Communist) Party, and began to function publicly. My parents could once again call their old comrades by name and bring the books and pamphlets out of the attic. I entered adolescence as the socialist/communist movement entered what seemed to us to be a new era of activity.
NOTED WOMEN, 1955

January 3, 1955, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette noted the accomplishments of nine local women in science, civic work, and the arts in the previous year. Tusa Santo was reported to be singing at La Scala after her discovery by Ezio Pinza. She was a dramatic soprano. Jenny Lou Law, born in Pittsburgh and trained at Carnegie Tech, was opening in “Between Friends” on Broadway after years of experience at the Pittsburgh Playhouse. Poet Sara Henderson Hay Lopatnikoff published her first mystery fiction and was working on another book. In science, Sister Agnese, supervisor of the laboratory at St. Francis Hospital, was noted as having served two terms as president of the Pennsylvania Society of Medical Technologists and Laboratory Technicians. Dr. Mary Wanga traveled to Italy, Belgium, and France to study upper atmosphere phenomena under the auspices of the United States Air Force Cambridge Research Center. Melva B. Bakkie, associate professor at Carnegie Tech, served as 1954 president of the Pennsylvania Dietetic Association. Her contributions to the field of nutrition were described as important. Finally, three women were acknowledged for their volunteer civic service. Mrs. John H. Campbell, executive director of the Pittsburgh Garden Center, was cited for serving the 120 clubs who were members of the center and their 2,000 individual members. Mrs. Earle A. Brown was one of five women to serve on the Pennsylvania advisory committee on adoption standards, and Mrs. E. R. Weidlein, Jr., was serving as chairman of the Y-Teen committee of the East Liberty Branch of the Young Women’s Christian Association.

(Thanks to Stan Mayer for contributing a copy of the Post-Gazette from which this piece was drawn.—Editor)