

IZIDOR CANKAR AND THE ROYAL YUGOSLAV LEGATION IN BUENOS AIRES

Andrej RAHTEN¹

ABSTRACT

Izidor Cankar and the Royal Yugoslav Legation in Buenos Aires

The article discusses activities of the Slovenian diplomat Dr. Izidor Cankar at the diplomatic representation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Buenos Aires in the period 1936–1942. The research of his activities is based on sources from the archives in Ljubljana and Belgrade, with a particular focus on his correspondence with leading Slovene politicians on the eve of the Second World War and during the War itself. Cankar asserted himself as a self-confident diplomat, while at the same time being the first Yugoslav envoy to set as a priority concern for the Slovene emigrants from the Primorska region.

KEY WORDS: Izidor Cankar, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Argentina, diplomacy, Slovene emigrants

IZVLEČEK

Izidor Cankar in Kraljevo jugoslovansko poslaništvo v Buenos Airesu

Članek obravnava delovanje slovenskega diplomata dr. Izidorja Cankarja na diplomatskem predstavništvu Kraljevine Jugoslavije v Buenos Airesu v letih 1936–1942. Raziskava njegovega delovanja temelji na virih iz arhivov v Ljubljani in Beogradu, pri čemer je še zlasti natančno ovrednotena njegova korespondenca z vodilnimi slovenskimi politikami na predvečer druge svetovne vojne in med vojno samo. Cankar se je suvereno uveljavil kot diplomatski predstavnik, hkrati pa je bil prvi jugoslovanski poslanik, ki si je kot prioriteto zastavil skrb za slovenske izseljence iz Primorske.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Izidor Cankar, Kraljevina Jugoslavija, Argentina, diplomacija, slovenski izseljenci

INTRODUCTION: A SLOVENE IN THE ROYAL YUGOSLAV DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

Dr. Izidor Cankar (1886–1958) is certainly not unknown in Slovenia, albeit not as alive and present in the consciousness of the Slovenes as his more famous cousin, writer Ivan Cankar. Even though he may have never boasted the writing talent of his relative,

¹ PhD in History, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Cultural History SRC SASA, Novi trg 2, SI-1000, and Assistant Professor, University of Maribor, Koroška cesta 200, 2000 Maribor; e-mail: andrej.rahten@zrc-sazu.si

he exhibited mastery at blending expertise from different spheres of creativity: from history of art and literary criticism to diplomacy and politics. All of his fields of work have already been subjected to scientific scrutiny, with the single exception of his diplomatic activity. This article discusses his activities as Royal Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary of Yugoslavia to Buenos Aires (1936–1942).

By then he had already had an interesting but short-lived experience of participating, as a priest and high-ranking Member of the Slovene People's Party, in establishing the Yugoslav state in 1918, and a longer and certainly splendid academic career. Cankar set the foundations for Slovene history of art as an academic discipline and his books continue to serve as a source of inspiration for Slovene experts. Moreover, a brief entry in the *Slovenski biografski leksikon*, which he himself edited from 1925 to 1928, merely defines him as an "art historian", although this was only one of his many fields of activity. There was much controversy regarding his marriage to Niča Hribar and excommunication from the Catholic Church.² Cankar's decision to enter the diplomatic service was not a result of long-term plans, but a spontaneous act when an opportunity presented itself. Changes of place and profession were an everyday practice in his life. But as is evident from the preserved correspondence, his appointment to Buenos Aires was a result of combinations among parties and efforts to strike a political balance in the diplomatic corps of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Argentina proved a major challenge for Cankar in every respect. However, he embarked on his diplomatic mission with the same emblematic perfectionist approach and zeal which he had maintained throughout his public service career. Except for a short note in the book on the Slovenes in Argentina published by Marko Sjekloča (2004) and based, among others, on archival sources, the descriptions of Cankar's work in Buenos Aires have so far drawn exclusively on memoirs. Therein one can find various evaluations spanning from extremely critical to amiably respectful (Hladnik 1978: 166–168; Brulc 1990: 115–143).

Cankar was one of the few Slovenes whom the Slovene People's Party's influence helped attain a high position in Yugoslav diplomacy. The lobbying for his appointment as Envoy to Argentina was coordinated by the two most influential politicians of the Slovene People's Party, Dr. Anton Korošec and Fran Kulovec. The then Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović obviously understood Korošec's hint and in May 1936 instructed Kulovec "to find an envoy position for two Slovenes." There were two openings at stake: Buenos Aires and Oslo. By that time Stojadinović had already taken notice of Cankar, and Kulovec only confirmed that Korošec's friend was "indeed the most suited" candidate. Stojadinović intended to send him to Oslo, from where he would cover five Northern European countries. Cankar was clearly more excited about Oslo than Buenos Aires, "because these Nordic countries have always been my dream." Nevertheless he had considerable doubts about the seriousness of the offer, at least in the beginning. He was paralysed by indecision and already "absorbed in a number of projects at home, but the worst of it is that you can never count on anything for certain."³

² Cf. Personal file of Izidor Cankar, Archives of the Slovene Biographical Lexicon.

³ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 26 May 1936, Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, Department

In early June 1936, when he visited Belgrade, he still received no assurances about his candidacy, even though he accepted it in principle.⁴ But on 18 June he finally received Stojadinović's notice that all formalities had been completed regarding his appointment as envoy – only not to Oslo, as he had hoped, but to Buenos Aires. Cankar found out why he had been assigned to Argentina in a conversation with the Ban of the Dravska *banovina* Marko Natlačen. He told him that he was once asked by Stojadinović whether he knew any candidate for Argentina. But when he reported to Korošec about it, the latter was determined: “You will seek no one; we will not let Cankar fall.” Stojadinović, however, pursued his inquiries further and suggested to the Ban that Cankar should be sent to Oslo or Brussels. But Korošec once again refused: “Cankar has already agreed to go to Buenos Aires, but his departure was hindered by certain intrigues; now we shall live up to our plan. We have a vested interest too; we have no business in Oslo and nothing to gain in Brussels; sending him there would merely mean not keeping him at home. Our people are in Argentina.” By insisting on his own way, the popular “Koro” rendered a poor service to his friend, who was looking forward to Oslo. But Cankar did not complain and informed his wife that he would loyally respect Korošec's wishes:

I have not given Stojadinović my answer yet. Tomorrow I am setting out for Belgrade to have a talk with Korošec. If he says that I should go, then I will even go to Argentina. The Ban told me that Koro would insist on it.⁵

After Korošec had his final say things went pretty smoothly. On 13 July 1936 the Royal Regents issued a decree appointing Cankar as Royal Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary of Yugoslavia to Buenos Aires.⁶ As early as 28 September 1936 Cankar asked his wife to send him her photograph, together with those of their daughter Veronika and housekeeper Nina Kulakova, who would accompany them to Argentina.⁷ He set out as late as October and arrived in Argentina on 2 November (DŽ 1936: 291–292). At the diplomatic mission he was received by the Counsellor, Dr. Stojanović, and assumed his duties on 7 November.⁸

A LEADER OF THE YUGOSLAV EMIGRANT COMMUNITY

The first Slovene families already began arriving in Argentina before World War I, during the days of its greatest economic prosperity. In the beginning of the 20th century

for Preservation of Archival Material of WWII, AS 1660, Personal collection of Izidor Cankar, [hereinafter: ARS, PCIC], fascicle 3.

⁴ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 2 June 1936, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

⁵ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 20 June 1936, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

⁶ Letter from Stojadinović to Cankar, sent 16 August 1936, Archives of Serbia and Montenegro [hereinafter: ASM], fund 334, fascicle 202.

⁷ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 28 September 1936, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

⁸ Telegram from Cankar to the Foreign Ministry, 16 November 1936, ASM, fund 334, fascicle 202.

there were only 200 Slovene families, mostly of engineers, stonecutters and technicians. The period of planned and mass Slovene settlements in Latin America started in 1923, as a result of the Fascist pressure in the Littoral (i.e. Primorska), which was assigned to Italy under the Treaty of Rapallo. Most emigrants found sanctuary in Argentina, although smaller numbers also settled in Uruguay and Brazil. The emigration wave was interrupted by the economic crisis in 1929. The research so far reveals differing numbers of Slovene emigrants settling Argentina during the interwar period. The most frequently cited figure is 25,000; however, it most likely also includes the occurrences of “return migration” to their home country (Sjekloča 2004: 76–79). Of all the Yugoslav nations, the Croats established the largest emigration community in Argentina.

At first the Slovene colony was concentrated in the Paternal residential district of Buenos Aires and later spread to other parts of the city, particularly Villa Devota, Saavedra, San Martín and Avellaneda (Hladnik 1978: 161). Most Slovene emigrants came from the Littoral, but large numbers also came from the Prekmurje province, formerly a Hungarian territory that became part of the SHS Kingdom after World War I. In spite of forming a small community, the Slovenes organised themselves into various associations which corresponded to their worldviews and reflected the variety of political identities in their home country. The consolidating role among the significant number of unorganised Slovene settlers was assumed by the emigrant clergy. This mission was initiated by Jože Kastelic, who founded the journal *Duhovno življenje* in 1933. In 1936 he was joined by Janez Hladnik, who became the editor of the journal after his arrival in Buenos Aires. That same year the group was further extended to include David Doktorič, a member of the Council of Priests of St. Paul, an underground anti-Fascist association of Christian Socials based in the Littoral. In order to escape the Fascist threat Doktorič first fled from Gorizia-Gradisca to Yugoslavia and then emigrated across the ocean. He was given the position of the emigrant Uruguay correspondent to the Yugoslav Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. On this basis and due to his appointment as a temporary attaché at the Legation in Buenos Aires with his seat in Montevideo, Doktorič became an official employee of the state (Mislej 1996: 17–33).

Even though Yugoslavia had a considerable emigrant community, Belgrade evidently failed to treat it as a priority. When Cankar’s predecessor Ivan Schwegel, a former Austro-Hungarian diplomat and deputy of Radić’s Croatian Peasant Party (notwithstanding his Slovene origin) before the imposition of Royal Dictatorship, arrived in Buenos Aires in August 1931, he found the Legation in utter anarchy. Later he described his impressions vividly in his autobiography:⁹

I found the Legation in a serious state of disarray and immediately set to shovel all that rubbish out, much to the disapproval of the office staff, in case they might be called to responsibility. A large part of the correspondence that had reached the Legation or its subordinate General Consulate was still left unopened or duly processed; letters were lying around, some also in the attic or under the staircase.

⁹ Ivan Švegel [Schwegel], *Avtobiografija*, Archives of the Slovene Biographical Lexicon.

The clients waited for a reply in vain as also the drafted letters were not reworked into fair copies, whereas those that actually were remained unsigned and unsent, cluttering the office. Little wonder that there were so many complaints. I remember a man who once came from Mendoza, a thirty-hour train ride from Buenos Aires, and protested about not having been issued the power of attorney by the Consulate. As a result, he was left without legal representation in his home country and ultimately lost his suit, just because the official issuing credentials was an incompetent illiterate, not even capable of putting a visa on a passport. He was apparently an old friend of the Minister and later Prime Minister Jevtić, and a school friend of King Alexander in Cetinje. He had the genuine appearance of a little Oriental, always walking around perfumed, explaining to everyone that ‘he would die for the honour of himself and his family’, and that his sole mission at the Legation was to supervise me. Perhaps there was some truth in it, because he was thrown out soon after I left. The Secretary of the Legation was one Pierre Neumann from Osijek, who renamed himself Zorislav Dragutinović after his father Dragutin and elbowed his way into Yugoslav diplomacy with the assistance of his wife, a native of Karlovac and an acquaintance of the fellow-citizen, Minister Dr. Lukinić. He never demonstrated any substantial knowledge, most particularly not in economics and trade. What the Charge d’Affaires would do instead is send to Belgrade at least one long, dim-witted report per week about the Croats’ anti-state atmosphere and activities, to establish himself as an outstanding official. As for those whom he denounced, the grandmothers of emigrants he did not like, they were tortured by the authorities or police somewhere in Lika or Dalmatia.

But what the methodical Schwegel, remaining loyal to the old Austrian methods of diplomacy, found most irritating was that his predecessor, Dr. Stražnicki, had exploited his position for his own private gain:

We were all well paid – I personally a little more than 1000 dollars per month, and my predecessors even more – but that would not suffice for the Envoy, Dr. Stražnicki, who tried to save the whole salary every month. The Legation had to let go of a man in charge of cleaning the building, which was bestowed on us by our wealthy compatriot, former Austrian General Consul and Baron, and a native of Dalmatia, Mihanović, because our Envoy paid that sum to his cook, even when he was away in Uruguay for several months at a time – a country to which he was not accredited – to avoid his diplomatic duties. He would complain to everyone that the state did not pay him enough. He went as far as to fool a wealthy Jew from Slavonia into lending him his automobile. Quite soon the Jew himself, as he would later recount, was unable to drive, because the Envoy needed the automobile for himself the entire day. To any such objection as: ‘Mr. Minister, you can afford all that with your own salary,’ he would say, ‘Excuse me, don’t talk to me about my salary, this is my private matter.’ Then he finally thought of a way out of ‘poverty.’ They introduced a special arbitrary fee which they called ‘administrative expenditure’. On the basis of that decree they would then levy a tax on every client that came to the office – most often in vain – according to some imaginary scale in their heads that used the victims’ clothes or

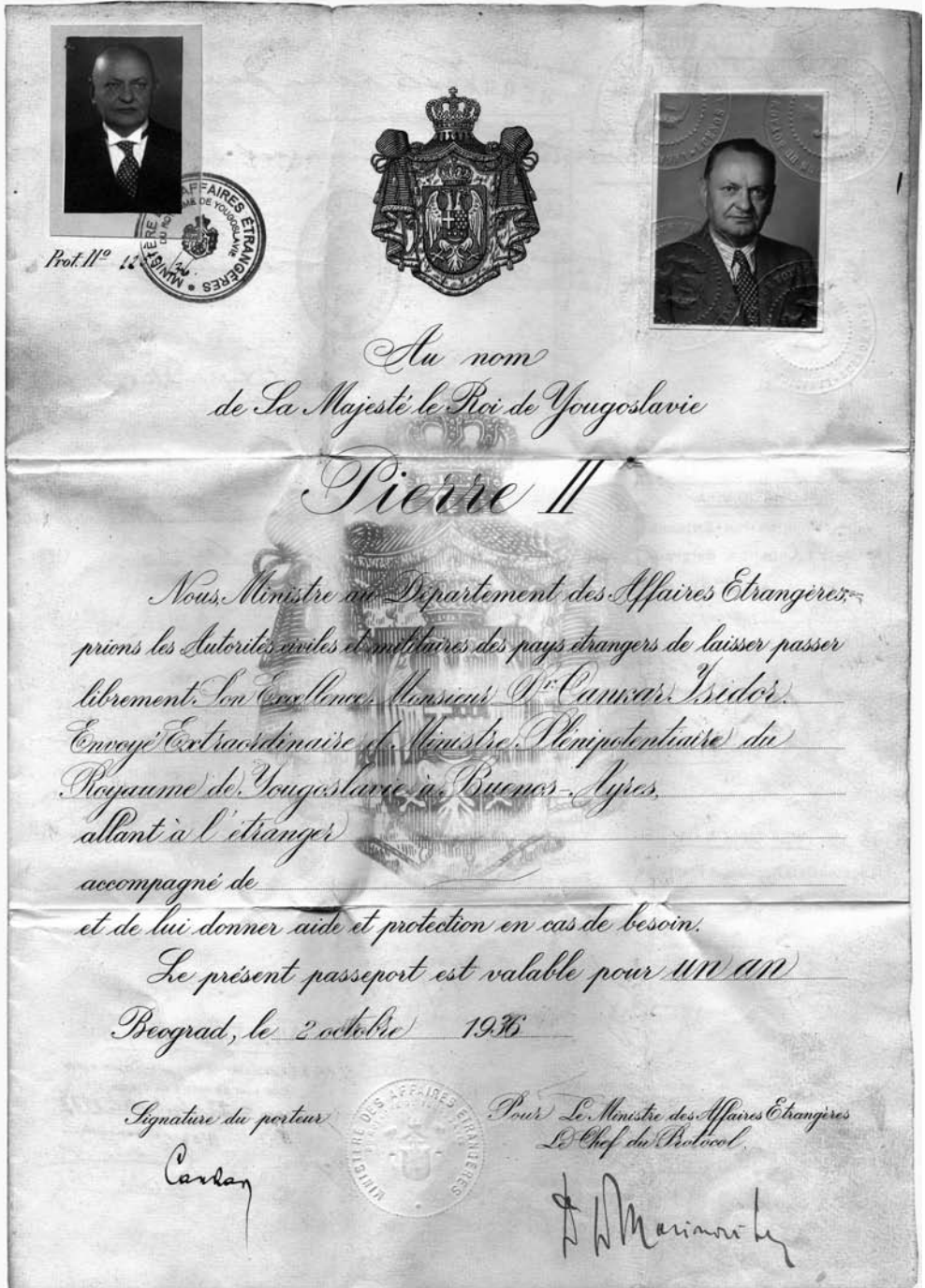
appearance as the basic criterion of their fortune. The bad experience has led us to blame the Balkans for such incivilities. But there are no Serbs here, only prejščani (Serbs from the former Austria-Hungary – transl. note). So much money has been accumulated in this manner that the Envoy or Charge d’Affaires could easily live off those assets, while setting the salary and other savings aside. This also explains why Envoy Stražnicki thought, when setting out for a holiday and rest from not working, that he could propose to his secretary to renounce the Charge d’Affaires bonus from the Envoy salary and live off the ‘administrative expenditure’. They argued and became enemies.

The Government in Belgrade had no idea about what was happening. Schwegel realised that only when he decided to send the money accrued from the “administrative expenditure” to Belgrade and the Secretary Dragutinović asked him not to. Schwegel nevertheless informed the Ministry about the misconduct of Stražnicki, who was in the meantime rewarded with the position of Charge d’Affaires to the Hague, but received no answer from Belgrade. Little wonder that he left the Legation after only one year and a half and returned to his home country.

When Cankar disembarked from the “proud transoceanic ship with a Yugoslav national flag hoisted on the mast” in the early hours of 2 November 1936, he most likely did not know what the situation was at the Legation. But he was certainly pleased to read the comments in the emigrant journal *Duhovno življenje*, stating that the Slovenes received the arrival of the “cousin of the famous writer Ivan Cankar” with “great satisfaction” and confidence that they would “find him as a man deserving a place in high society.” Cankar’s qualities that were particularly highlighted in the weekly were his editorship of the journal *Dom in svet*, which had “reached a peak of greatness under his editorial direction that has neither before nor since been seen again,” and his outstanding service during World War I, when “he considered it his most important duty to prepare the Slovenes for the creation of the new state of Yugoslavia, co-founded the *Jugoslovan* weekly and stayed with it during the most trying of times” (DŽ 1936: 291–292).

The exalted greeting of the weekly, whose editor was favourably disposed towards Cankar (the new Envoy gave him 50 pesos for every single issue of *Duhovno življenje*, covering 25% of printing expenses), certainly said nothing about the dilemma facing the Argentine ecclesiastical circles when it became clear that the new Yugoslav Envoy was a “renegade priest”. The Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Santiago Luis Cardinal Copello, therefore came to Hladnik for an explanation, but the latter reassured him that Cankar had “the support of Dr. Korošec himself, who knew well why he assigned him to Argentina.” Following the assassination in Marseille in 1934 the situation within the Yugoslav colony in Argentina was becoming more and more serious with the intensifying activities of a strong group of Ustaše. As Hladnik wrote in his memoirs, Korošec knew that the Croato-Serbian aversions made Argentina “a hard nut” that could only be cracked by a person of strong authority (Hladnik 1978: 167).

In addition to nationalists of every stripe the emigrant community also included a



Photograph 1. The Royal Envoy: diplomatic passport of Izidor Cankar, issued in 1936 in the name of King Peter II Karadorđević (Source: Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts)

strong group of anti-monarchist Communists whose revolutionary mentality also made them extremely unpopular with the Argentine authorities. The Argentine Legation thus reported in Belgrade in October 1933 that most Yugoslav emigrants “objected to Serbian hegemony” and that the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry “deem Buenos Aires too harsh an environment for a Yugoslav diplomat, for the incessant attacks which the Argentine Yugoslavs commit against the representatives of their country are so brutal that they may also be the true reason for their unhappiness” (Sjekloča 2004: 245–249). Having distinguished himself as a co-founder of Yugoslavia, Cankar was unquestionably best suited and ambitious enough for such a demanding task.

Cankar immediately threw himself into his work. Owing to his efforts, the Coordination Committee for Yugoslav Education was established on 30 January 1937 (DŽ 1937: 2). With Cankar’s substantial financial support the school sisters from Maribor organised a Slovene primary school and kindergarten in the Paternal (Hladnik 1978: 164–165; Sjekloča 2004: 160). He fostered the consolidation of Slovene weeklies and took the initiative to launch *Slovenski list*. He commissioned the architect Viktor Sulčič to design the plans for the Jugoslovanski dom cultural centre which was planned to unite the entire Yugoslav community (Mislej 1989). On 25 June 1939, the foundation stone was laid by Cankar as part of the St. Vitus’ Day celebrations.¹⁰

Cankar established a considerably more equitable relationship with the Littoral Slovenes than his predecessors, who had strictly treated them as Italian citizens (Mislej 1994: 86). Still mindful of his experience from the days of the Paris Peace Conference, during which he and other Slovene politicians could only helplessly observe the Great Powers bending to the Italian claims to the Littoral, he invested every effort as a diplomat in demonstrating his solidarity with compatriots who had fled from the Fascist brutality to Argentina. During World War II it was precisely the question of the Littoral and Trieste that most crucially affected his decision on which political option to support.

Cankar’s satisfaction with his new challenges, however, was soon marred by dissatisfaction with the working conditions. This is also evident from a letter sent to his friend, the poet Pavel Golia, dated 11 April 1937:¹¹

We are still residing in Martínez and shall remain here until the end of this month, when autumn finally and truly sets in. When I come to the cabinet at 10 o’clock, I become so absorbed in the work that I’m not even able to read the newspapers as a man of my current position is obliged to. It is consular work, for the most part, but also diplomatic, with all sorts of visits that do not bring any good. When I arrived here the Consular office was in such disorder that, compared to it, the Ljubljana Theatre sets an example of professional diligence. The archives from the previous years, which should be available at all times, are a shambles: there were piles of pending

¹⁰ Cf. Cankar’s note to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 12 June 1939, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Argentina, fund Yugoslavia, P. No. 2377/39.

¹¹ Letter from Cankar to Golia, 17 April 1937, The Legacy of Izidor Cankar, Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts.

documents lying in various corners, so that I could only recently sign the solutions for 1935; clients would wait for three days to have their passports signed; the Legation's negligence placed many a compatriot on the list of deserters, and one hundred legacies lying around, with no one to take notice, except for the unfortunate heirs in their home country, restlessly expecting the gifts from their uncle from America.

The chaos at the Legation notwithstanding, Cankar applied himself to clearing the office with great efficiency, much to the dismay of the officials. The only exception was Dr. Viktor Kjuder, a native of Trieste, employed at the Legation as a low-level clerk, with whom Cankar established a sincere friendship. This is also demonstrated by their extensive correspondence and the photography of Kjuder's wedding in 1938, published in *Duhovno življenje* (Hladnik 1978: 168). Kjuder was Cankar's "second self, a reliable and discreet man of sound judgement". Cankar knew that the Yugoslav "colonies were anxiously expecting their new state representative, all the more so because none of my predecessors has ever paid them a single visit." In his letter to Golia he proudly mentioned that as soon as he "saw our children drifting away from their own culture, thus destroying the very basis of our existence here, I started pressing the question of our schools, and I have advanced it so far as to see the opening of the first Slovene school last Monday, whereas the first Serbo-Croatian is soon to follow." What irritated him was that "during the preparations our Communists were walking from house to house, agitating among the parents not to send their children to the school, because it was a Fascist institution." The Communists, who according to the Czechoslovakian Envoy, Dr. František Kadeřábek, enjoyed strong support among the Slovene community, and whose parties "would always attract larger crowds than any other," were extremely well organised. Consequently, Cankar subsidised a left-wing newspaper called *Njiva* with the Legation's funds, although they were causing him a great deal of trouble (Brulc 1990: 121–122).

But in general, Cankar was, as he admitted to his friend Golia, tired and weary of the diplomatic life:

My personal life has never been as empty as it is now. As far as people are concerned, we are how we are, spoiled and choosy. This is why I don't find the offer here particularly inviting. Most friendships are certainly made with the Balkans and the Little Entente; kind people to the last, but worlds away from our interests and styles. And, also, the hardest part of what my new profession requires of me is to attend parties, talk about things and people that I have no knowledge of, but which is the very essence of the ever so important sociability. On the other hand, the consequence of that and the fact that every drink made here is a nasty poison, is the unprecedented solidity of my current life, in which an evening at the cinema constitutes an excess in the extreme, and not even the abundance of French wines stored in my cellar can make me fall into immoderation, so desperately needed at times, but devoid of God's blessing if nourished secretly in solitude. And just imagine, thanks to this boring life and laying my spiritless body to rest every evening in resignation, I am now in better health than I have been for years; I'm almost able

to sleep, my little duodenum is at complete rest, and I seek no doctor or medicine. Perhaps horse riding has something to do with it too, which I impose on myself three times per week, together with Niča, although my ribs still hurt from it. *En somme*, I would not shed a single tear if I am recalled tomorrow, under the condition, of course, that I was not summoned to return to Ljubljana. The fear from that city is lodged so deep in my bones as rheumatism in an old hunter. When I'm assigned a diplomatic clerk I will perhaps be able to return to my real work. But I fear he will not find the necessary assistance here.

Despite his initial pessimism, Cankar adjusted well to his new environment. In his memoirs Hladnik described the Envoy's work as follows: "In the diplomatic circles he enjoyed great reputation as a man of broad views and complete command of French and English. Under his guidance the Cuban Envoy, a poet I hear, translated several Prešeren's poems, particularly the magnificent 'O Vrba, srečna vas domača,' which I also perceived as an expression of home-sickness afflicting Dr. Cankar as a result of his break with the Church" (Hladnik 1978: 167).

Cankar's "defection crisis" also occupied the thoughts of others at the time. Ruda Jurčec (1969) described it thus:

When he [Cankar] was appointed Envoy to Buenos Aires, he was a confusing enigma to all his friends and acquaintances. In the morning he was a completely different person than at noon, and whoever had lunch with him at noon would have never recognised him in the evening. The curtain behind him would not be raised until his death; everything might have been completely different if he had lived to see the Second Vatican Council and its conclusions on cases such as his.

Due to his intense engagement in the emigrant community Cankar soon won their support. When he set off on a three-month holiday to Yugoslavia on 24 September 1937,¹² *Duhovno življenje* issued a very emotional description of his temporary farewell:

11 months of his [Cankar's] work and life among us. Volumes could be written about the deeds and sacrifices made from the last year's First December solemnities to the King's birthday this year, which has become a day of honour for Yugoslavia, in the light of such a numerous diplomatic attendance. How could it not be so? Every last one of the Ministers and representatives of states in this city came and made a bow to our flag. The love of our compatriots for Mr. Minister speaks more eloquently than words about his successful efforts among us. Despite the late hour hundreds of people and some 80 children had gathered to bid him a good journey. He was moved to see so many hands waving little flags to greet him and wish him a speedy return, hoping that he would deliver what our colony needs the most.

The entry clearly testifies that within the emigrant community Cankar found the

¹² Cf. letter from the Head of the Department of Personnel to the Legation in Buenos Aires, 9 December 1937; telegram from Cankar to the Foreign Ministry, 3 January 1938, ASM, fund 334, fascicle 202.

strongest support for his work precisely among the readers of Hladnik's journal *Duhovno življenje*. In the minds of this particular circle there was obviously no doubt that Yugoslavia was a monarchy, which is also evident from the poem *Bog čuvaj Jugoslavijo* (DŽ 1938: 4), published in 1938:

God save our Yugoslavia,
Our little land of grace,
God save our triune nation,
May it serve Your reign in faith.

God save our Sovereign,
Place the power in his hand,
To sail our state with wise command,
May he be our nation's guide,
A judge of a mind most fair,
To defend our home and
The glory of Your name.

A VISIT TO *ESTADO NOVO*

On 16 July 1937 the Government adopted a decision to also appoint Cankar as Envoy Extraordinary to the Brazilian Government.¹³ However, an entire year had to pass before the transfer of credentials took place, which also brought about minor complications, as in the meantime the Yugoslav Government opened a Legation in Rio de Janeiro. Cankar learnt about it from the newspapers and wrote to the Ministry inquiring whether he should set out for the Brazilian capital at all.¹⁴ Eventually he attended the inauguration of the new President of Uruguay¹⁵ before the transfer of credentials in Montevideo took place in June 1938 and journeyed to the Brazilian capital as late as August to present his credentials to Getúlio Dornelles Vargas (DŽ 1938: 33).

Cankar was obviously amused by the visit made to Vargas's *Estado Novo* to attend the presentation of credentials, which is also evident by a letter written to his wife on his return on 24 August 1938. He summarised his impressions from listening to the Yugoslav national anthem as follows:

¹³ Decision signed by the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Stojadinović, 16 July 1937, ASM, fund 334, fascicle 202.

¹⁴ Cf. Telegram from Cankar to the Foreign Ministry, 11 July 1938; letter from the Foreign Minister Cabinet, 18 July 1938; instruction of the Deputy Director of the Department of Administration, 21 July 1938; letter from the Head of the Department of Financial and Accounting Services to the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, 7 October 1938; Decision of the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Stojadinović, 14 November 1938, ASM, fund 334, fascicle 202.

¹⁵ Letter of the Head of the Department of Personnel to the Department of Financial and Accounting Services, 23 June 1938, ASM, fund 334, fascicle 202.

I was calm there, healthy and happy, and it was quite a treat to hear the military band, black mostly, blow the 'Bože pravde' in the karaoke rhythm. How they glowed, with black cheeks under that sun, all blown out to their capacity.¹⁶

Niča, having left to see her country for a few months, later informed him from Belgrade about a rumour that he was going to become the new Envoy to Brazil. But Cankar was not at all impressed by the idea of moving to Rio de Janeiro:

For the past few days I have given much thought to whether we should do something, move there, and ultimately decided that we would not run: the summer climate is unbearable and the cultural desert even more desolate than here. And most importantly, if we leave, we'll stay there for the rest of our lives. As long as we remain in Baires, we still have a chance to move to a nicer country one day.¹⁷

In the end, Cankar's wish became true: on 1 March 1939 the new Envoy, Frano Cvjetiša, presented his credentials to Vargas.¹⁸

BEFORE THE STORM

On his return to Buenos Aires Cankar continued to pursue the life busy with receptions, dinners and festive events. On 10 September he described one such event to his wife in a letter written just one hour after they had spoken on the telephone. By way of introduction he first stressed that he felt uncomfortable with telephones and that he preferred to write her a letter:¹⁹

Dear Niča, phones are of no use. The tremendous excitement I could sense between us, not knowing whether we understood each other, and finally, the feeling that we hadn't said anything to each other. Veronika, still here with me, complains that she couldn't understand what you were saying, because your voice was 'too low' or, as we would say, not loud enough.

Having explained his scepticism about the use of telephone, Cankar turned to describing the last reception:

6 September was a great success, over 200 people, the President's representative, Foreign Minister, Minister of Justice and Education, Minister of the Navy, and the rest of the diplomatic circle. The concert was an excellent idea and masterfully

¹⁶ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 24 August 1938, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

¹⁷ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 5 October 1936, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

¹⁸ Cf. letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 15 October 1936, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

¹⁹ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 10 September 1938, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

performed, everyone was satisfied; I particularly enjoyed the Lipovšek Quartet, which many found too modern.

From time to time the cosy diplomatic life was interrupted by disputes in the Slovene colony. On 17 September 1938 Cankar wrote to his wife about one meeting he held with the author of the plans for the Jugoslovanski dom cultural centre:

A few days ago Sulčič unexpectedly resigned his membership from every society, which naturally caused a great deal of confusion. His wife was pressing him really hard, he said, to give her a divorce or relinquish cooperation with me. Last night we had dinner together at Chickenhouse, and he is willing to work again, but that won't last long. As much as Sulčič shies away from the colony, I'll seize every opportunity to keep away from any fashionable society whatsoever. Last night the Paraguayan held a reception, but I didn't go; I have also been invited by Georgijev to have lunch with him and the Topoljan family tomorrow, but I declined his invitation too: I'm so terribly exhausted of empty talk.²⁰



Photograph 2: The leader of the Yugoslav colony in Buenos Aires: Izidor Cankar with his wife Niča (in national costume), members of the Royal Mission of Yugoslavia and emigrants attending the 20th anniversary of the Yugoslav state in 1938 (Source: National and University Library Ljubljana).

Cankar spent much time away from his wife, a fact which caused him occasional embarrassment within the diplomatic corps. This is, for instance, evident from a letter dated 24 September 1938:

Darling Niča, it has been one month today since you came home, and I haven't re-

²⁰ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 17 September 1938, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

ceived any word from you yet. Conversing over cocktails, I'm turning into an object of ridicule, because everyone is naturally asking about you.²¹

His fellow diplomats were obviously not disturbed by the ancient history of the former priest's marriage. However, there is one account according to which Cankar only met with the Papal Nuncio alone. On such occasions "Niča would 'fall ill' and remain at home."²²

As is evident from a letter dated 27 October 1939 Niča's journeys home were also intended to lobby to secure her husband's position as Envoy:

here is this sinking feeling in me that I will not stay here long, and I sometimes wonder whether you should come to America at all. The latest issue of 'Argentinske novine' has also announced that you secured my place on your last year's trip, and that you have now set out for Europe with the same purpose; only that this time your intervention will be in vain. O may the words that came from the mouth of the waiter who wrote them become the voice of a prophet!²³

While Cankar moved from one tedious diplomatic salon to another, storm-clouds were gathering over Europe. On 29 September 1938 Great Britain and France signed the Munich Agreement, permitting Hitler to occupy the Sudetenland, which soon caused Czecho-Slovakia to disappear from the map. Immediately preceding this latest of Hitler's diplomatic victories, Cankar wrote about his concerns to his wife:

As one can gather from the news here, the situation in Europe is grim; the war is threatening to start tomorrow. Local newspapers are trying to reassure us that Yugoslavia will remain neutral, and so it shall be. No other alternative seems possible. Nevertheless, there is much disquiet here: at present, I have to keep a closer eye on the Czech, who is completely unable to eat or sleep, while she [the Envoy's wife] continues to pursue her business and talk politics with Ankica [Sulčič].²⁴

But on receiving the news from Europe, Cankar felt sorry for his Czecho-Slovakian colleague: "This week has been horrible: the war. It is better now, but I deeply sympathise with [Czecho-Slovakian Envoy] Kadeřábek, who's already anxious and faint-hearted enough."²⁵ However, the amputation of Czecho-Slovakia, which, like Yugoslavia, formed part of the disintegrating French alliance system, from the map of Europe, did not thwart Cankar's preparations for the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of Yugoslavia. The festivity held on 3 December 1938 was attended by 2,500 people, including the Czech, Rumanian, Bulgarian, and Greek diplomats. The author of the article in *Duhovno življenje*

²¹ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 24 September 1938, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

²² Letter from Angelika Hribar to the author, 20 February 2009, Archives of Studia diplomatica Slovenica.

²³ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 27 October 1939, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

²⁴ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 24 September 1938, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

²⁵ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 1 October 1938, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

(1939: 5–6) particularly highlighted the “moving” speech of the Czech representative. The expressions of solidarity with their “brothers the Czechs” continued into the following day, when the members of the Slovene choir attended a Czech celebration and met with “immense enthusiasm”

In the early days of 1939 Niča received a letter from Korošec, informing her with satisfaction that he had taken a three week holiday in Greece. The Slovene national leader was already an aged man, whose health was becoming seriously impaired by diabetes.²⁶ The annexation of Austria and the dissolution of Czecho-Slovakia caused a great deal of uncertainty in Korošec’s party, as no one knew what Hitler’s further plans were with regard to the reorganisation of Central Europe. Away from Hitler’s blitzkrieg in Europe, on the other side of the ocean, Cankar continued to spend his time at festivities and receptions. On 25 June 1939 he addressed his compatriots during the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of Sulčič’s Jugoslovanski dom cultural centre. The celebration passed “in faithful observance of the Yugoslav custom”, which the reporter of *Duhovno življenje* (1939: 5–6) described as follows:

Pretty soon our lambs and pigs started their fire dance, filling the air with the delicious smell of grilled meat – a way to spread propaganda or send an invitation that no paper pushing exercise can match.

Such specialities would also frequently appear on the menus of dinners hosted by Cankar, which soon became commonly known as “Balkan dinners”.²⁷ How such evenings unfolded, Cankar described in a letter of 4 November 1939 to his wife, who was visiting Belgrade at the time:

El día social: the Balkan dinners continue on Fridays – only that the Balkan menus have obviously been exhausted and we have shifted back to the French ones. ... There was also a Greek lady singer and guitarist at the dinner, whose repertoire also included the one and only ‘Moja dekle je še mlada,’ which she sang as a genuinely Greek song.²⁸

But all these comforts of life notwithstanding, Cankar yearned for a change and made his desire known to the Slovene Member of the Yugoslav Government Miha Krek through his wife. On 9 November 1939 Krek requested from the Foreign Minister Aleksandar Cincar-Marković that Cankar be transferred to a “corresponding position in Europe”. He justified his request by claiming that Cankar had remained in his post in Buenos Aires for more than three years, “more than any of his predecessors had done.” In Krek’s opinion,

²⁶ Letter from Korošec to Niča Cankar, 20 January 1939, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

²⁷ Letter from Nina Kulakova to Niča Cankar, 28 October 1939, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

²⁸ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 4 November 1939, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

Cankar had demonstrated “that he is fitted to excel in performing his duty even in the most critical positions in our diplomatic service.”²⁹

After receiving no positive answer, Krek sharpened his diction in the correspondence with Cincar-Marković on 10 January 1940.³⁰

The personnel policy of the Foreign Ministry has certainly not been pursuing the best course, due to its absolute failure to recognise that the Croats and Slovenes too should have adequate representation in our foreign policy service. Not only in observance of the principle of equality but also the special needs of the Yugoslav, mostly Slovene and Croatian minorities in the neighbouring countries, as well as the needs of our expatriates abroad, among whom there are, again, more Croats and Slovenes than Serbs – be it in America, France, Germany, Belgium or the Netherlands.

The Slovene Minister notified his Serbian colleague that the Croats had already put the question of an adequate percentage of the Croats in the Foreign Ministry on the agenda. He urged him to distribute diplomatic positions following the formula 5 : 4 : 1. Besides Cankar, another two Slovenes should be appointed as envoys abroad. In addition to the existing Slovene officials employed in civil service groups III and IV, comprising chiefs, counsellors, General Consuls and heads of departments, such status should also be granted to another five Slovenes. The number of Slovenes in groups V to VIII should, likewise, increase by six. Krek was confident that the Slovenes did not lack “qualified people”, although he was aware of the “political difficulties, which could only be solved by taking one step at a time.” He repeated Cankar’s appeal to be transferred to a European country and closed the letter with the hope that Cincar-Marković would understand the “justified wish of the Slovenes to become actively engaged in foreign policy service of our common state.”

But Cankar did not live to see the transfer. On 14 December 1940 he lost his great ally – Anton Korošec. The Slovene People’s Party, the Slovene nation and Yugoslavia were left without their most experienced leader precisely at the time when Europe became completely swallowed in the darkness of the Third Reich. Now the party was in need of every single man of competence. Cankar, after having retreated from high politics after the establishment of the Yugoslav state, responded to the call of the party’s leaders to join them in the struggle for what the generation of putschists had failed to obtain at the end of World War I. To Cankar the new war thus posed as much a threat as an opportunity.

IN THE WAR

On 27 March 1941 a group of Serbian officers carried out a putsch under the leadership of Air Force Brigadier General Bora Mirković. Air Force Commander Dušan Simović

²⁹ Letter from Krek to Cincar-Marković, 9 November 1939, ASM, fund 334, fascicle 202.

³⁰ Letter from Krek to Cincar-Marković, 10 January 1940, ASM, fund 334, fascicle 202.

became Prime Minister and Momčilo Ninčič Foreign Minister. Prince Paul was deposed and the heir to the throne, Peter II, was declared of age before time. The leader of the Slovene People's Party, Fran Kulovec, and the leader of the Croatian Peasant's Party, Vladko Maček, ultimately entered the Government, albeit with mixed feelings. On 2 April Kulovec realised in dismay that, "the Serbs did not create Yugoslavia but broke it to pieces" (Jurčec 1969: 304). Simović tried to convince German diplomats that this would not change the course of Belgrade's foreign policy, but Hitler refused to listen. The Nazi leader, who had never had a good opinion of the Serbs and Slovenes, felt betrayed and decided to destroy Yugoslavia. Immediately after receiving the first news of the Belgrade putsch, he issued Directive No. 25.

Just eleven days into the Axis Powers attack, during which the Ustaše Movement led by Dr. Ante Pavelić had restored the Croatian state, which now proclaimed itself "independent", it was all over. Miha Krek and Franc Snoj, who had entered the Government after Kulovec's death, embarked on a plane with the other Ministers fleeing the country. Even prior to the attack of the Axis Powers the leadership of the Slovene People's Party also decided to send Dr. Alojzij Kuhar and Msgr. Franc Gabrovšek abroad. The former, a graduate of the School of Political Science in Paris and foreign-political editor at *Slovenec*, was recognised by his fellow party members as the foremost authority in international politics. The latter had already had a long party career, which also included numerous visits to France (Jurčec 1969: 120, 278, 282).

Some Slovene politicians, such as Krek, managed to flee together with their wives and children. Others were not that lucky, including Snoj. On his arrival to Cleveland in October 1941 he asked Cankar to have the Argentine diplomacy intercede in Rome for his wife and three minor sons, whom he had left in Ljubljana.³¹ Cankar took action immediately, but his enquiries were delayed at the beginning, because the Ambassador to Rome happened to be on holiday at that time.³² A few months later Cankar sent another note to the Argentine Foreign Ministry³³ and, again, received no useful information.³⁴ In the meantime Snoj himself had received the news that his wife and children were in Ljubljana, whereas his sixty-eight year old father, mother, two brothers and sister-in-law with her barely ten-day old baby were driven by the occupiers to Široki brijeg in Herzegovina.³⁵

Krek felt that the Slovene politicians in emigration should intensify the propaganda particularly in Washington and London. In both the capitals they were to strive to achieve "the restoration and expansion of Yugoslavia over our entire national territory and, respectively, the inclusion of all Yugoslavs into a Transdanubian or Balkan federation or union, if England were no longer favourably disposed towards small nation states." But such a task proved too great for the numerically weak leadership team of the Slovene People's Party. Krek immediately thought of Cankar. After the Simović Government held its first

³¹ Telegram from Snoj to Cankar, 23 October 1941, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

³² Letter from Cankar to Snoj, 31 January 1942, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

³³ Note from Cankar to Undersecretary Robert Gache, 2 February 1942, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

³⁴ Letter from Cankar to Snoj, 3 April 1942, ARS, OZIC, fascicle 6.

³⁵ Letter from Snoj to Cankar, 18 February 1942, ARS, OZIC, fascicle 6.

session in Jerusalem on 28 April 1941 (Krizman 1981: 13), he sent him an invitation to join him in spreading the propaganda. He also informed him that he had written to Foreign Minister Momčilo Ninčič to arrange his transfer to Washington or London.³⁶

On 21 May Krek wrote Cankar another letter, this time seeking his support for raising the Yugoslav army in exile. Krek particularly endeavoured for the formation of air force units following the example of the Czechs and Poles. He asked Cankar whether there was any possibility that the expatriates in Latin America might warm to the idea. They would complete their training in Canada and then sent to the battlefields to defend their homeland.³⁷ But owing to interrupted postal connections Cankar never received the letters from Jerusalem. He finally established communication with Krek on 21 July 1941, when the latter sent him a telegram to Buenos Aires. Cankar was genuinely happy to receive the telegram and wrote a letter to his colleague³⁸:

We are all in good health, but only after months of living in overwhelming fear and constant hope that things would eventually turn out the way they are now. And we are even more saddened to learn that you have faced an ordeal much worse. But, thank God, you are in the place where you should be right now.

Cankar immediately provided Krek with a few words of advice on how to act under the demanding circumstances in which the Government in exile had found itself:

From the way the wind was blowing in the beginning, I can say that it is important for you to stay as close to the Government and King as possible. Refrain from fault-finding; let go of the past, and let us all concentrate on what can be done to make the day of victory come at last. I think every discussion on internal issues should be postponed and duly addressed in peacetime, and any partisan friction evaded as far possible. Now is not the time for minor concerns, but to make sure that our Nation rises from the dead. All I can say for my part, I am ashamed of being provided for and safe (please, stay away from danger!), and of so little use.

The letter above left no doubt about Cankar's solidarity with the leadership of the Slovene People's Party. He understood Krek's invitation as the call of duty that must be heeded and at the same time knew that he would not be as useful in Argentina as he might be in London or Washington.

After the attack of the Axis Powers on Yugoslavia, Cankar issued a public proclamation in a newspaper which prompted lively activity in the emigrant community. They restored the Yugoslav National Defence, a pro-Yugoslav suprapartisan nationalistic organisation that had been established prior to World War I and then ceased its operations. Rude Mikuličič was appointed President of the Central Committee for Argentina, while Sulčič

³⁶ Letter from Krek to Cankar, 5 May 1941, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

³⁷ Letter from Krek to Cankar, 21 May 1941, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

³⁸ Letter from Cankar to Krek, 22 July 1941, Archives of Studia Slovenica, fund ASS1, Collection of materials of the politicians of the Slovene People's Party, [hereinafter: ASS1, CMPSPP], box 51.

assumed the position of Secretary. Cankar's close associate Kjuder joined the Department of Propaganda, which spread information about the difficult situation of the Slovenes under the Fascist regime and strove for the revision of the Treaty of Rapallo. The Yugoslav National Defence welcomed Simović's statement that after the war Yugoslavia should also be given Trieste, Istria, Gorizia, and Rijeka. However, by voicing these demands the Yugoslav emigrants collided with the group led by Count Carl Sforza, who had assumed the role of a herald of the pro-Fascist, democratic Italy (Mislej 1994: 86–87).

The Axis Powers divided Yugoslavia into three parts. Slovene ethnic territory was partitioned among Germany, Italy, Hungary and NDH. Unlike Hitler, who was anxious to make Slovene Styria and Upper Carniola "German again" by mass deportations and executions, Mussolini initially pursued a more refined policy in the Ljubljana Province and refrained from drastic punishment measures. The former Ban Marko Natlačen and his colleagues, who remained in their homeland, most certainly remembered Korošec's prewar advice that it would be easier to wait for a new Yugoslavia under Italy. The situation also made an impression on the Slovene representatives in exile. In a letter to Cankar, Krek summarised his view of the differences between the two occupiers one sentence: "It is fine under Italy, but terrible under the Germans."³⁹

Cankar, however, who had excellent knowledge of Italy and its notabilia, was not in the least charmed by Mussolini's presumably "more civilised" approach towards his subjects in the Province of Ljubljana. When he learnt that Natlačen went to Rome to pay his respects to "Il Duce" on 8 June 1941 and ask him on the same occasion to intercede with Hitler to stop the German violence perpetrated against the Slovenes, he was enraged. He sent a telegram to Krek in London demanding that he condemn Natlačen's deed. Krek indeed protested, but the former Ban responded "that any condemnation should be delayed until it is known how difficult the situation is back at home."⁴⁰

In the same manner as he had faithfully adhered to Korošec's pro-Yugoslav course in 1918, Cankar continued to praise his connective role among various parties in 1941. Thus, for example, in a letter to Kuhar dated 7 October 1941, he criticised one of Krek's radio speeches in which the latter referred to Kulovec as "our President". While Cankar did recognise Kulovec as a hero who had given his life for the state, he felt that Krek should have reached beyond the mere emphasising of party identity. Rather, he should have spoken as the representative of all Slovenes: "Parties do not count in our actual situation; we can think of them, but we must not speak about them." He asked Kuhar, "Do you remember the last war when many reproached Korošec for sacrificing the party's interests in favour of the pan-national movement?" As it turned out, they were wrong, because after the war the Slovene People's Party continued its consolidation precisely due to Korošec's non-exclusive approach: "Everything that the party does for the nation is done for the party, and nothing that the party does only for itself is well done for the party."⁴¹

³⁹ Letter from Krek to Cankar, 9 August 1941, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

⁴⁰ Letter from Krek to Cankar, 24 July 1941, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

⁴¹ Letter from Cankar to Kuhar, 7 October 1941, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

Cankar was aware that his realistic appraisal of the Slovene chances in the postwar map drawing would hardly be heeded, but continued to advocate it nevertheless. In a letter to Krek, in which he presented his political programme, he defined his position on the affiliation of Trieste and the Slovene Littoral:

You know very well that the Slovenes as a nation cannot exist without the Littoral, therefore you should not lack the will to do whatever is in your power; and since the border demarcation with Italy is so evidently unjust, I hope that you shall also not lack the opportunity to convince the Allies of our rights. As far as Trieste itself is concerned I'm afraid that many of my friends will take me for a defeatist if I tell you that I would – for many reasons which are not appropriate to be discussed here – not claim it for Yugoslavia, but rather advocate the regime of a free port (which shall, in fact, be Yugoslav).⁴²

In Cankar's opinion the realisation of this objective required discreet action and cooperation with the emigrants from the Littoral. He therefore suggested to his diplomatic colleague at the Washington Legation, Councillor Vladimir Rybař, that a company of volunteers from the Littoral in America be formed, which would serve as the best propaganda. Despite the differing views of the status of Trieste, however, Cankar set the basic objective clearly: "A victory without the Littoral is not a victory for Yugoslavia."

Regardless of the war, unity in the Slovene community in Argentina was not always assured. Already within the first months of the joint building of homeland defence, Cankar's views began to diverge from those of Sulčič, whom he considered too pro-Communist. At the end of 1941 they ultimately severed their ties completely after Sulčič had appeared at the opening of the *Jugoslovanski dom* cultural centre "with the Communist symbol and an outrageously dim-witted speech" in which he emphasised "that he needed no 'decorations, public office, diplomatic post, photograph in gazettes and unmerited praise in newspaper articles'". During the applause of the Communists, whom Cankar found extremely irritating at the time, Sulčič assured "that the benefactors' plaque of the cultural centre excludes workers and labourers," making Cankar and others "open their eyes quite wide." Sulčič's wife Ankica too manifested her protest on 11 January 1942 by breaking the windows of the cultural centre, as a result of which she even sustained injuries. In view of the situation Cankar concluded that Sulčič's career had obviously come to an end.⁴³

Another major cause for Cankar's concern beside the Communists was the Croatian nationalists, who received financial support from the German Legation and also associated with the Franciscans. Cankar therefore regarded the latter as extremely harmful. But clearly he was less bothered by the Croatian Communists than their Slovene counterparts, "who were shouting against British imperialism yesterday as they are ranting against Nazism today, all smacking of paid agitators."⁴⁴ Sulčič's adherents later reproached Cankar with opportunism, referring to a letter in which the Czechoslovakian Legate Kadeřábek described his diplomatic colleague: "Dr. Cankar is extremely discredited and hated by the

⁴² Letter from Cankar to Krek, 30 August 1941, ASS1, CMPSPP, box 75.

⁴³ Letter from Izidor to Niča Cankar, 12 January 1942, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 3.

⁴⁴ Letter from Cankar to Krek, 30 August 1941, ASS1, CMPSPP, box 75.

people for his loyalty to the alliance. Rumours are spreading fast in the colony about his intimate friendship with von Thermann, the German Legate.” The head of the Department for Yugoslav National Defence in Mendoza, Ivan Črnadek, went as far as condemning Cankar as “the Satan from the Legation building”, sowing the seeds of discord among the emigrants (Brulc 1990: 122, 140).

The accusations of Cankar’s sympathising with Germany obviously also reached London, where the Simović Government had moved from Jerusalem. Krek warned him in a letter dated 28 August 1941 that the Government had received reports “that Mrs. Cankar has been declaring herself in favour of the Axis policy. I hope that it will be possible for me to rein these attacks.”⁴⁵ Cankar dismissed the rumours of the pro-Nazi sympathies of his wife as a “headless intrigue” and sent Krek a clip from the *Desfile* journal, which Niča gave her only interview after the attack on Yugoslavia.⁴⁶

Cankar felt that Argentina’s “scrupulous neutrality” was rendering the local propaganda difficult. In a letter to Krek dated 2 September 1941 he complained that he had problems with publishing news of the persecution of the Catholic clergy. He tried to find a religious newspaper that would publish the data, but faced difficulties, because “a considerable part” of the Argentine clergy was “under the influence of the Fascist and particularly Franco’s ideology.” On top of that Cankar also felt that the Royal Government was too sluggish in “military organisation” and that no “serious” progress had been achieved in facilitating an agreement between the Serbs and Croats.⁴⁷

Cankar soon realised that the armed resistance against the occupation armies launched by the Communists was well received by the Western Allies. Therefore the passive stance of the Slovene People’s Party leadership towards the organisation of resistance was causing him much concern. When Krek asked him in September 1941 to prepare a propaganda article to assess the value of Slovene arts, his response was negative for two reasons. Firstly, because he did not dispose of appropriate materials and photographs in Buenos Aires, and secondly, because “the most effective way to wage our campaign is through armed propaganda.” He frankly warned Krek to pay attention to the expectations of the allies:

I’m certain that you feel the same way there as we do here, that the insurgencies throughout Yugoslavia – in my opinion several acts of sabotage have been carried out by the Communists – are saving our honour and strengthen our national position much more effectively than any article, no matter how well written. And just as you probably do there, we also find it regretful here that very little is heard of the Slovenes amidst this whole affair. If you receive from Slovenia any report on active or even passive resistance, it should be blown out of proportion and sent to the world.⁴⁸

Cankar believed that with the support of the US a “company could be built up” of the

⁴⁵ Letter from Krek to Cankar, 28 August 1941, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

⁴⁶ Letter from Cankar to Krek, 17 September 1941, ASS1, CMPSPP, box 51.

⁴⁷ Letter from Cankar to Krek, 2 September 1941, ASS1, CMPSPP, box 51.

⁴⁸ Letter from Cankar to Krek, 16 September 1941, ASS1, CMPSPP, box 75.

Slovene emigrants in Argentina that might be too small to be of consequence, but “large enough to be of significant political value.” In the ensuing months Cankar developed the idea of raising “a legion of the Littoral Slovenes” further, which is also evident from his correspondence with Snoj.⁴⁹ The basic purpose of the legion was to neutralise the endeavours of a group of anti-Fascist emigrants led by Sforza, which Cankar had already recognised as a threat in a letter to Krek dated 16 September 1941:

Italy is already playing a double game. Ever since the totalitarian sun has leaned into to the sunset, they continue with full force to strengthen the ‘Italia libera’ movement, which is anti-Fascist, but nevertheless as much Italian as Fascism. [...] This momentum, whoever may maintain it, will escalate until the moment when it will be declared: Hitler and Mussolini are vanquished, Italy is victorious, and claiming its rights and its God granted borders. [...] Our community here has refused to consider them our allies, but they receive many sympathies from the English, most probably from England as well. Come what may, it is not in our interest to uphold their game; what is in our interest is that all Italians are Fascists or Communists and that after the victory there will not be a group of gentlemen rising to their feet saying, ‘We have always been and continue to be Italy, Mussolini has never represented the nation.’ But because this is precisely what is going to happen, we need a company of Yugoslav Italians; one single rifle from the Littoral bears more significance for us than written propaganda and of more consequence than the articles of Count Sforza.⁵⁰

Cankar distinguished himself as a visionary in two regards. As early as two years prior to Italy’s capitulation he accurately predicted what kind of tactics the conspirators would use against Mussolini in relation to the Western Allies. At the same time he also suggested an effective way to neutralise it. At that time Cankar’s wife engaged in humanitarian activities, helping with the distribution of provisions that the Red Cross was shipping to Argentina.

On 9 February 1942 Cankar was appointed as the first Yugoslav Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to Canada. Hladnik described the end of Cankar’s service in Argentina in *Duhovno življenje* (1942: 93) with nothing but praise:

Buenos Aires is a precarious political post. Dr. Cankar knew that and showed wisdom in seeking the manner in which he could win each and everyone in our community to demonstrate their genuine patriotism. ... Now he has left. But he can take his leave in full awareness that he has done more than any of his predecessors.

According to Hladnik, Cankar was facing arduous tasks in Ottawa that could be described as laying the foundations for a peace conference:

In the wake of the maelstrom which has swept across our country, silence will once more begin its reign. Then the diplomats will sit at the green table to build the world anew. The Slovenes too will have to make sure that on that occasion we will have a representative,

⁴⁹ Cf. letter from Snoj to Cankar, 7 March 1942; letter from Cankar to Snoj, 20 March 1942, ARS, PCIC, fascicle 6.

⁵⁰ Letter from Cankar to Krek, 16 September 1941, ASS1, CMPSPP, box 75.

able to defend our rights, able to prove that Trieste is Slovene, that Gorizia is ours, that Istria and Rijeka are ours, that Gosposvetsko polje is the cradle of Slovenhood... For this reason it has been decided that a Slovene will assume the post of Envoy to Canada, which is close to Washington, where peace will be concluded, and close to London, where our adversaries too will exert all their efforts.

The next diplomatic mission certainly brought even more difficult challenges into Cankar's life. The Royal Yugoslav Legation ceased to exist three years later.

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POVZETEK

IZIDOR CANKAR IN KRALJEVO JUGOSLOVANSKO POSLANIŠTVO
V BUENOS AIRESU

Andrej Rahten

Dr. Izidor Cankar seveda v Sloveniji ni neznan, čeprav v zavesti večine Slovencev gotovo manj živ in prisoten kakor njegov slavnejši bratranec, pisatelj Ivan Cankar. Izidor se sicer ni nikoli mogel pohvaliti s pisateljskim talentom svojega sorodnika, a njegova značilnost je bila, da je znal povezovati vrhunsko znanje z več področij hkrati: od umetnostne zgodovine in literarne kritike do diplomacije in politike. Vsa področja njegova ustvarjanja so bila že podrobno znanstveno obdelana, izjemo pa predstavlja prav njegova diplomatska dejavnost. Cankar je mesto pooblaščenega ministra in izrednega poslanika v Buenos Airesu nastopil leta 1936. Za sabo je takrat že imel zanimivo, a kratkotrajno politično izkušnjo, saj je sodeloval pri ustanavljanju jugoslovanske države leta 1918, ter daljšo in nedvomno bleščečo univerzitetno kariero. Cankar je postavil temelje umetnostne zgodovine kot akademske discipline na Slovenskem, njegove knjige pa so še danes vir navdiha za slovenske strokovnjake. Poroka z Ničo Hribar leta 1926 in izstop iz duhovniškega stanu sta ga oddaljila od nekaterih dotedanjih zaveznikov v katoliškem taboru, vendar je še naprej užival zaščito dr. Antona Korošca. Z njegovo podporo se je zavihtel tudi na poslaniško mesto v Buenos Airesu. Argentina je bila spričo prisotnosti slovenske izseljenske skupnosti za Cankarja velik izziv. Dejstvo je, da se je tudi diplomatske dejavnosti lotil z njemu lastnim perfekcionističnim pristopom in značilno delovno vnemo, ki ju je ohranil vsa leta svojega javnega delovanja. Cankar se je suvereno uveljavil kot diplomatski predstavnik, hkrati pa je bil prvi jugoslovanski poslanik, ki si je kot prioriteto zastavil skrb za slovenske izseljence iz Primorske.