

THE CROATIAN FRATERNAL UNION ZAJEDNIČAR AND THE SECOND GENERATION

P e t e r J . R a c h l e f f

ZAJEDNIČAR AND THE SECOND GENERATION

Ethnic identity is not some sort of biological fact, rooted in genetics. It is the product of multiple influences, which interact in complex ways. My paper explores the role of one such influence. *Zajedničar*, the newspaper of the Croatian Fraternal Union, in contributing to the evolution of the ethnic identity of the American-born children of Croatian immigrants.¹

Croatian immigration to America reached significant proportions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rather than a single flow, it consisted of diverse streams: Bosnians, Hercegovinians, Montenegrins, Slavonians, Dalmatians, and the Croats. Within each group were numerous provincial and even village-based identities. Dialects and loyalties followed fragmented lines of demarcation.²

The demand for unskilled labor in America at this time created a diaspora of Croatian immigrants. They were drawn primarily to mining, steel, and meat-packing, industries which were dispersed across the United States. Some ended up in large cities like Pittsburgh and Cleveland, while others found new homes on the industrial frontier of northern Michigan, Minnesota and Montana, and in the coal camps of Pennsylvania.³

Work was hard in these industries, and the immigrant laborers found few services provided by their employers or their larger communities. Serious injuries and even sudden deaths were all too common. As a result, these immigrants organized fraternal benefit societies which provided insurance, together with some social life for them. Initially, these mutual insurance organizations followed the diverse lines of village, provincial, and regional identities.⁴

Starting in 1894, a process of merger brought more and more of these organizations together. This was part and parcel of the process of building a 'Croatian-American' identity. Over the course of three decades, community activists advocated unity and worked to bring organizations together. By the early 1920s, the Croatian Fraternal Union stood as the culmination of this process. Its very name - *Zajedničar* - translated as 'unity'. It concluded some 60.000 adult and 30.000 child members, organized in more than 900 local lodges, from New Orleans to Butte, Montana, and from New York City to San Pedro, California.⁵

No sooner had CFU activists found the solution to the problems of internal diversity and organizational unity, however, than they were confronted by another set of problems. The sources of these problems were both internal - the aging of the immigrant generation and the coming of age of their American-born children - and external - the collapse of the American economy in the Great Depression. Together, these dynamics threatened the very lifeblood of the CFU - the membership dues which its existence was based.⁶

By the late 1920's, CFU leaders began to worry about the prospects for maintaining, let alone expanding, their membership. Croatian immigration to the United States had been disrupted by World War I. In the immediate postwar years, emigration was slow to resume its prewar proportions. Most of the new immigrants consisted of family members of those already settled in the U.S. Then, in 1924, the U.S. government enacted highly restrictive immigration regulations which cut further into the numbers of new Croatian arrivals. By the later 1920s and early 1930s, Croatian communities in the U.S. consisted of an immigrant generation which was reaching old age, and an American-born generation which was growing in numbers and significance.⁷

Initially, the CFU had brought this second generation into the fold through a system of 'junior nests'. These were children's organizations, directly controlled by the adult CFU lodges in each community. Most children were enrolled as members by their parents, typically long before they had an opportunity to make any choice about the matter. It was expected that, by their late teens, they would make a transition to the adult CFU lodges.⁸

While this system may well have worked in the prewar period, it was clearly breaking down in the 1920s. Many young

Croatian-Americans were choosing not to join their parents' CFU lodges. They felt a wide range of influences from outside their ethnic communities. Many large industrial employers had begun to provide benefit packages themselves, under the rubric of 'welfare capitalism'. American mass culture, through the vehicles of radio and television, had begun to undercut this younger generation's identification with their parents' ethnic culture. American team sports, dating practices, and popular music further dissolved old loyalties. The 'traditional' was becoming 'oldfashioned'.⁹

CFU activists realized by the late 1920s that they were in a war for the loyalties of the American-born generation, and that, if they lost this war, they would lose the entire organization which they had built. They made two critical adjustments: the creation of 'English-speaking lodges' and the publication of an English language section of *Zajedničar*, the CFU's weekly newspaper.¹⁰

'English-speaking lodges' were meant to attract the American-born generation as they graduated from the 'junior nests'. These new lodges went far beyond the modification of conducting business in English. They were a significant opening to American culture, an opening through which a creative process of cultural syncretism - of interweaving traditional Croatian culture with the new American culture - would take place over the next decade. These lodges would use American sports, such as bowling, baseball, basketball, football, and hockey, and cultural entertainments popular among American teens and young adults, such as weenie roasts, beach parties, and amusement parks. In their very first year of existence, forty lodges were created.¹¹

A CFU activist from the Joliet, Illinois, lodge explained:

"We realized that sports, although it is not the sole object of our organization, is a contributing factor when the desired interest of youth is considered. For our older people, we know, it is sufficient to have an entertainment, a dance, or perhaps a few mass meetings with good speakers who will recall the old traditions of our people. The elders, of course, are loyal listeners, and this method of campaigning has proved successful in days gone by. The old days, of course, are being relegated to the distant past, and we know more now that to interest youth something more than lectures and addresses is necessary,

*something more than the promise of a sound insurance, and certainly a lot more than the mere suggestion that by belonging to the Croatian Fraternal Union the youth of America is perpetuating the organization founded by their fathers and mothers."*¹²

English speaking lodges also promoted the preservation of Croatian language and culture. They offered language classes and taught Croatian history, geography, and culture to "average younger CFU member, whose knowledge of conditions over there is somewhat limited". Croatian folk songs like "Oj ti vilo, vilo Velebita", and traditional games, like "Igraj kolo", were also popular, and plays about the old country were performed by lodge groups. No social activity more promoted traditional culture among the second generation than the tamburica orchestras which many lodges organized in the 1930s. All in all, members of the English-speaking lodges got a considerable exposure to their ethnic culture.¹³

At the same time these English-speaking lodges were developed, *Zajedničar*, the CFU's widely read weekly newspaper, was also modified. An English-language section was included, under the direction of a separate editor, Michael J. Horvath. Over the next decade, Horvath was the leading advocate for modifying the CFU's relationship to American culture.¹⁴

This English section was not to consist of translations of articles from elsewhere in the paper. Rather, it would present news of particular interest to the younger generation. Its pages (two, as of 1929, and four, after 1932) were full of reports of activities from the new English-speaking lodges - athletic contests, dances, socials, and the like. It also reported on the academic and athletic accomplishments of Croatian-American youth. The first two college football "All-Americans" - Starcevič and Basrak - received great attention. *Zajedničar* also pointed out that they were both members in good standing of English-speaking lodges.¹⁵

Like the English-speaking lodges, the English section of *Zajedničar* did not merely pander to American culture. The 1932 CFU convention voted to expand the section from two pages to four and to promote the publication of Croatian historical essays. Such articles soon became regular features. *Zajedničar* also sponsored essay contests in which younger members were asked to write about their "Impressions of Yugoslavia" and "Why Should

Every Child of Croatian Parentage be in the Croatian Fraternal Union?"¹⁶

The English section of *Zajedničar* was particularly active in promoting the renaissance of tamburica music that went on in the 1930s, especially among the American-born generation. Matt Gouze, the key national figure in this musical movement, wrote a regular column in the English section, entitled "On Tamburica Interests". It quickly became one of the most popular features in the paper, and many letter writers wrote in to comment on it. Gouze himself noted that this column

*"...is read and re-read in hundreds of towns and cities in this country, not only by our older people who are more closely linked to the instrument because of their birth in the old country, but also by the younger people, who were born and raised in this country, far away from the origin of the tamburica. Today, there are hundreds of tamburica orchestras in all parts of this country and Canada. Many of them, and perhaps the greater number of them, are composed of young people, boys and girls of school age who were born in this country, who have taken to the tamburica recently. Day after day, they can be found in wide-awake Croatian colonies, strumming tunes of the land, of their parents, national airs, folk dances, kolos. And these seem to kindle in the hearts and minds of these youngsters a certain measure of love and respect for the land, the country, and the people from whence they came. We know of nothing better that will link our American-born youth to the traditions of their people than the strumming of native instruments, the singing of age-old songs, and the recitation of Croatian verse so familiar to their parents."*¹⁷

Here, then, was the CFU activists' strategy to recruit the American-born generation: develop English-speaking lodges, which would adapt to much of American culture in the late 1920s and 1930s, yet would also nurture a sense of identity with the Croatian people; and produce an English language section of *Zajedničar*, which would reflect the activities of these new lodges but also teach the history and culture of the old country.

Two major obstacles loomed in the path of this strategy: the resistance to such innovations put up by other members of the immigrant generation; and the economic hardships caused by

the Great Depression. CFU activists struggled to overcome these obstacles.

The immigrant generation's outlook on life had been shaped by hard work and sacrifice. A 1931 editorial in *Zajedničar* entitled "The Making of a Man" conveyed this in a compelling fashion:

"The pattern of life is not worked out by vastful contemplations and idleness. It comes into shape by dint of hard work. The man who is forever busy, working so hard that he and his may be fed and housed and clothed, is closer to the ultimate secret than any philosopher in his study. For it is only by toil and sacrifice that a man ever gets a realization of life's nobility and purpose."

It was little wonder that this generation had difficulty understanding their American-born children's interest in recreation and entertainment.¹⁸

A *Zajedničar* correspondent offered this thoughtful analysis in early 1931:

*"Our people in America are all just ordinary working people, without sufficient means of affording even the slightest let-up in work of family economy. As we all know, the majority of our people who came from the old country are from farms and rural districts where they had to work from early in the morning till late at night and even then they had all they could do to keep body and soul together, and playing was a most remote matter in their young lives or thoughts. Here in America, the only way our older people could even earn a living was by the hardest kind of work. How could they then look with favor upon games and recreation for the young, when they themselves have had the hardest kind of life, and that is their personal view of almost nine out of ten of our people? Games and sports are looked upon as unnecessary waste of time and detrimental to the youth's hard work and study."*¹⁹

Although long-time members of the CFU could understand the need to attract the younger generation to the organization, they were uncomfortable with the innovations. They preferred the model of the "junior nests", as much for the control they had allowed the older generation as for the cultural content of their activities. The English-speaking lodges seemed to sanction a dan-

gerous breakdown in community control over its youth. The English language section of *Zajedničar* seemed to encourage the younger generation to forget the language of their parents.

CFU activists emphasized the role of the English-speaking lodges in keeping the younger generation within the parameters of its community. Although the dances and socials facilitated unchaperoned dating outside the traditional supervision exercised by the parental generation and portended the decline of arranged marriages, they did help insure that merital choice would be made within the Croatian community. A similar line of argument followed the organization of athletic teams. All Croatian teams were formed, and they were to play other Croatian teams. Organizers even sought to mute competitiveness and promote the "ethnics of true fraternal sportsmanship". Baseball, basketball, and even football teams became common elements of the English-speaking lodges. English editor Horvath credited sports with *"the addition of new members in many of our lodges ... and the prevention of many suspensions"*.²⁰

Sports were even used to create new bridges between the generations. In the mid-1930s, bowling became an absolute rage. Interest in the sport spread to senior lodges, and soon there were hugely successful tournaments that included both regular and English-speaking lodges. Immigrants also found that the success of the younger generation in American sports brought the entire community some positive recognition. When two Croatian-American boys became football All-American in the late 1930s, the entire community took notice. The immigrant generation even claimed that its traditional strength and skills were finding new outlets on the football field. *"In the U.S., the men of Lika took precedence over others in all occupations requiring unusual strength and endurance"*, argued the *Jugoslavia Kalendar* in 1939. Now it was the children of the Ličani who made the best football players.²¹

Immigrant resistance to these innovations was further softened by the very success experienced by the English speaking lodges. The number of lodges grew, and they brought thousands of new members into the CFU. In December 1935, *Zajedničar* profiled Cleveland's "American Croatian Pioneers", one of the most successful English-speaking lodges in the order. They consistently attracted 1000 or more to such events as an annual anniversary dance, a "spring frolic", a "blue hour" dance, a baseball

dance, an Easter dance, and a fall dance. Each member was required to maintain a record of good attendance at lodge meetings in order to be admitted to these social activities. The lodge also sponsored baseball and basketball teams. Through their diverse activities, this lodge had kept the lifeblood flowing in the Cleveland CFU.²²

Not every English-speaking lodge enjoyed the success achieved in Cleveland. But, on the whole, this innovation brought thousands of new members into the CFU and kept many other young members from dropping out. *"Dances, parties, socials, picnics, and the like not only are inducements for getting new acquaintances and new applicants for our lodges"*, one CFU local activist wrote to *Zajedničar*, *"but are also great tonics for keeping those already members in the societies."* The resistance of the immigrant generation melted away.²³

But CFU activists also had to overcome the obstacles posed by the Great Depression itself. *"Youth Movement and Depression Arrive Simultaneously"*, noted a *Zajedničar* columnist. A Pennsylvania local activist reported on the "Trials of an English Speaking Lodge: Economic Conditions Prevent Progress". *"After four months of endeavoring to increase the membership of Croatian Youth Lodge 806"*, he admitted, *"we have finally come to the conclusion that this is a task of the most difficult nature. Lack of adequate income to support one's self and family is the basic reason for this difficulty."* Without an adequate income, *"one can hardly expect any of these unfortunates to become members of any beneficial organization in which even the lowest dues is required."*²⁴

The consequences of the Great Depression almost destroyed the strategy of reaching the second generation before it had gotten off the ground. Individuals ceased paying their dues. Some began clamoring for the paying out of their accrued accounts. As the membership and the treasury lagged, the CFU's collective resources diminished. In 1933, it was decided to reduce the size of the English language section of *Zajedničar* from four to three pages. Only the impassioned pleas of Editor Horvath saved it from being cut even further. Money for social activities dried up.²⁵

But CFU activists developed a complex strategy, one which operated on several fronts, in order to weather the storm created by the Great Depression. One key, as we've already seen, was to

reach out to the American-born generation and attract them to the organization. Many of the new activities either did not cost very much or were self-financing. Dances, social, even athletic teams relied on the regular contributions of participants. But this alone was not enough.

CFU activists encouraged members to become politically active around the agenda of federal government responsibility in social welfare and job creation areas. *"It needs no argument to prove"*, contended an editorial in the English language section of *Zajedničar* in late 1931, *"that if anything is to be done to help the unemployed and the needy, it must be done by strong government action and assistance. Charity and voluntary contributions will not suffice."*²⁶

Zajedničar promoted the ideas that would be taken up by the New Deal, and urged Croatian immigrants and Croatian-Americans to help advance these ideas. In March 1933, the very month of Roosevelt's inauguration, *Zajedničar* called for a protest of the Mc Leod - Norris Bill, which would have allowed cities to scale down their debt to municipal bondholders. Like most fraternal orders, the CFU and its local lodges had invested heavily in municipal bonds. Its agenda, like that of the federal government, grew over the next years. In 1936, *Zajedničar* editorialized:

*"More and more, we are led to believe that there is a spark of justice in the demands for old age pensions, for unemployment insurance, so that men, after their three score years in the mines, factories, and forests of this country may cease bending their backs to fill the bottomless coffers of the money barons."*²⁷

CFU activists did not look only to the government. They also advocated the formation of new unions to address *"they very unfavorable situation existing among the working class in the present industrial depression, the reduction of wages and extension of working hours"*. Over the course of the 1930s, *Zajedničar* promoted the resolution of the 1929 CFU convention urging the American labor movement

*"... to develop in the direction of modern industrial unionism, regardless of trade, nationality, or race, and encompass more unskilled workers, including members of the CFU who work in factories and mines, and thus lead them in the struggle for better and more humane lives."*²⁸

Many of the American-born generation had followed their fathers into basic industry, and they were now confronted with the problems which challenged industrial workers across America: wage cuts, speed ups, pressure and discrimination on the job. As an industrial union organizing drive got underway in the mid-1930s, the second generation - among other ethnic groups as we as Croatians - played a major role.²⁹

The CFU and *Zajedničar* provided valuable support to these efforts. CFU halls were used as meeting places by organizing committees, and some lodges became even more directly involved by paying out strike benefits or expelling strikebreakers. In 1933 and 1934, *Zajedničar's* English language section educated its readers about the working conditions in the clothing, textile, and steel industries, and criticized the inadequacies in the National Industrial Recovery Act. In English editorials, it presented theoretical justifications for unionism - that better earnings and working conditions would improve the health of Croatian workers, that higher wages would make it easier to afford CFU dues, and that increased working-class income would increase demand, which would, in turn, stimulate production and employment.³⁰

In January 1936, *Zajedničar* announced a CFU organizing drive aimed at the second generation. It received its greatest response in industrial cities like Lackawanna, Steelton, and Buffalo, communities where Croatian-Americans were already in motion from the union organizing drive in the steel industry. By October, more than 10,000 new members had joined the CFU.³¹

Union organizing drives got extensive coverage in both the Croatian and English language sections of *Zajedničar*. Letters from local lodges bore witness to the intensity of the feelings let loose. "*The poor working man*", wrote one correspondent, "*realizes today, better than before, that only through efficient organization can he cope with the might money*". Another called the Wagner Act "*the modern version of Lincoln's Emancipation Act*".³²

By the end of 1936, Roosevelt's landslide re-election and the impressive successes of the new industrial unions had combined to bring a new optimism to ethnic communities. Both letter writers and editors articulated this in *Zajedničar*. In a year-end editorial entitled "The Old and New", Horvath wrote:

"...we are placed slightly at ease by the efforts now being made to organize the workers in all industries during the coming year. The steel worker, the auto worker, and other toilers in unorganized industries are to be called to the colors, to be aligned into one great union, wherein a concerted effort is to be made, not only to bring improvement in the labor ranks, but to look after and care for the men and women, who through no fault of their own are deprived of decent and respectable employment. Evidences are manifest that a new day is about to dawn for the downtrodden laborer. Unlike the days of the past, we are heartened by the interest shown in the working population by the national administration... Almost our entire membership is composed of working men and women. Any moment, therefore, which aids the toiler, aids also the CFU. The two, for years, have been inseparable."³³

So the Croatian Fraternal Union, through its voice *Zajedničar*, promoted political and industrial unionism, through the vehicles of the New Deal and the CIO, as strategies for the immigrant and American-born generations. These, then, were the final pieces of the puzzle - the puzzle of rebuilding the organization's membership by recruiting the second generation during the economic hard times of the 1930s. English-speaking lodges, an English language section in *Zajedničar*, political activism, and union organizing, these were the ingredients. And it was the editors of *Zajedničar* who wove all this together and brought the CFU success in this troubling period. From a low of barely 50,000 members in early 1934, the CFU's rolls rebounded to nearly 100,000 by the outbreak of World War II. The strategy had worked.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 This is a part of a larger study on the history of the Croatian Fraternal Union, being prepared for its 100th anniversary in 1994. See also my essay, Class, Ethnicity, and the New Deal: The Croatian Fraternal Union in the 1930s, in Peter Kivisto, ed., *The Ethnic Enigma* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989).
- 2 Kate H. Claghorn, *Slavs, Magyars, and Some Others in the New Immigration*, Chrities (1904); Johann Chmelar, *The Austrian Emigration, 1900-1914*, in *Perspectives in American History VII* (1973); Branko and Mita Colakovic, *Yugoslav Migrations to America* (SF: R & E Pubs.,

- 1973); Adam S. Eterovich, *Yugoslav Migrations to the U.S.* (Salt Lake City: Mormon Church, 1969).
- 3 Frank J. Sheridan, Italian, Slavic, and Hungarian Unskilled Laborers in the U.S., *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labour*, no. 72 (September 1907); George J. Prpić, *The Croatian Immigrants in America* (NY: Philosophical Library, 1971); George J. Prpić, *South Slavic Immigration in America* (Boston: Twayne, 1978); Edward A. Zivich, *From Zadruga to Oil Refinery: Croatian Immigrants and Croatian-Americans in Whiting, Indiana, 18 -1950*, Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1977; Gerald Govorchin, *Americans from Yugoslavia* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961); Stjepan Gazi, *Croatian Immigration to Allegheny County, 1882-1914* (Pittsburgh: Zajedničar, 1956); Clement S. Mihanovich, *Americanization of the Croats in St. Louis* (St. Louis University Press, 1936).
 - 4 John Badinovac, *The Croats as Pioneers in the Field of Fraternalism*, *The American Slav*, September 1939; Joseph Stipanovich, *Collective Economic Activity among Serb, Croat and Slovene Immigrants*, in Scott Cummings, ed., *Self Help in Urban America* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1980); Margaret Galey, *Ethnicity, Fraternalism, Social and Mental Health*, *Ethnicity* 4 (1977).
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 - 6 *Hard Times*, *Croatian Review*, 1, 2 (December 1931); *Historijsko Statistički* (Cleveland: CFU, 1935), pp. 56-57.
 - 7 Prpic, *Croatian Immigrants*, op. cit., pp. 284-291; Joseph C. Brentar, *The Social and Economic Adjustment of the Croatian Displaced Persons in Cleveland Compared with that of the Earlier Croatian Immigrants* (SF: R & E Pubs., 1971).
 - 8 *Constitution and By-Laws of the CFU* (Chicago: CFU, 1926); *CFU Education Committee, Čitanka* (Pittsburgh: Nakladom, 1923).
 - 9 Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal* (NY: Cambridge Press, 1990).
 - 10 *Report of the English Editor of Zajedničar, Izvješća* (Milwaukee: CFU, 1935).
 - 11 *Zajedničar*, September 5 and November 11, 1928; September 4 and November 6, 1929; June 18, 1930; January 7 and 28, 1931; June 22, 1932; August 29, 1934; January 2, December 4 and 25, 1935.
 - 12 *Zajedničar*, April 28, 1937.
 - 13 *Zajedničar*, October 23, 1929; January 7, 1931; July 13, 1932; January 22, March 25 and May 6, 1936; *Zapisnik Treće konvencije* (Gary: CFU, 1932), pp. 29, 74-77, and 229-300; CFU, *Abecedarka* (Pittsburgh: CFU, 1932).
 - 14 *Report of the English Editor of Zajedničar, Izvješća* (Milwaukee: CFU, 1935).
 - 15 *Zajedničar*, January 20 and July 7, 1937; January 10 and April 3, 1940; *Jugoslavia Kalendar 1939* (Chicago: Palandech, 1939), p. 24.
 - 16 *Zapisnik Treće Konvencije*, op. cit., pp. 74-77; *Zajedničar*, March 18, 1933; August 29, 1934; May 18, 1935.
 - 17 *Zajedničar*, March 14, 1934; May 6 and 13, June 10 and 24, December 30, 1936; December 22, 1937; James R Baldrice, *Tamburitzza*

- Music, History and origin on the Iron Range of Minnesota, MA Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1978.
- 18 Zajedničar, March 18, 1931.
 - 19 Zajedničar, January 7, 1931.
 - 20 Zajedničar, February 4 and July 1, 1931; July 13, 1932; January 22, March 25, and May 6, 1936.
 - 21 Zajedničar, december 25, 1935; November 25, 1936; January , February 10, March 3, April 7, 21, and 28, July 7 and September 29, 1937; January 5 and 26, 1938; January 25 and May 12, 1939; January 10, April 3 and 17, 1940; Yugoslavia Kalendar 1939, op. cit., p. 24.
 - 22 Zajedničar, January 23 and December 4, 1935; January , April 15, May 6 and 20, October 28, 1936; January 25, 1939.
 - 23 Zajedničar, January 7 and 28, 1931.
 - 24 Zajedničar, March 27, 1933; May 30 and August 29, 1934; January 9, June 10, and December 4, 1935.
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 - 26 Hard Times, Croatian review, I, 2 (Dec, 1931); Zajedničar, December 10, 1930; April 22, 1931; September 14, 1932; June 7, 1933; May 29 and December 11, 1935.
 - 27 Zajedničar, March 27, 1933; November 11, 1936.
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 - 29 Peter Rachleff, The Croatian-American Left, in Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, eds., Encyclopedia of the American Left (NY: Garland, 1990); Peter Rachleff, Ethnicity and Class among Croatian-American during the Great Depression: Packinghouse Workers in South St. Paul, Minnesota, paper presented to Northern Great Plains History Conference, 1985.
 - 30 Zajedničar, June 7, 1933; July 20, 1934; May 29, 1935; May 20 and 27; June 17, 1936; January 6 and 13; February 10; March 10; April 7 and 14; May 5, 1937; The CFU and the American Labor Movement, op. cit., pp. 26-27.
 - 31 Zajedničar, December 5, 1935; January 8 and 22; February 19; April 1, May 6; July 8 and 22, 1936.
 - 32 Zajedničar, May 20 and 27; June 17, 1936.
 - 33 Zajedničar, December 30, 1936.

POVZETEK

**HRVAŠKA BRATSKA ZVEZA, ZAJEDNIČAR IN DRUGA
GENERACIJA***Peter J. Rachleff*

Prispevek obravnava vpliv Zajedničarja, glasila Hrvaške bratske zveze (HBZ), na razvoj etnične identitete druge generacije hrvaških priseljencev v ZDA. Leta 1894 se je začel proces združevanje hrvaških bratskih podpornih društev, katerega cilj je bil oblikovanje "hrvaško ameriške" identitete. Do začetka dvajsetih let je HBZ kot rezultat takšnega združevanja obsegala že okoli 60.000 odraslih članov in 30.000 otrok, organiziranih v več kot 900 podružnicah širom ZDA. Proti koncu dvajsetih let pa so se morali voditelji HBZ soočiti s problemom upadanja članstva. Članstvo HBZ so po prvi svetovni vojni sestavljali predvsem starejši priseljenci, vse številnejši pripadniki druge generacije pa so zaradi močnega vpliva ameriških javnih medijev ter zaradi boljših pogojev socialnega zavarovanja s strani njihovih ameriških delodajalcev izgubljali interes za včlanjevanje v podružnice HBZ.

Da bi pridobili čimveč novih članov iz vrst mladih, so voditelji HBZ ustanovili "angleško govoreče podružnice" in angleški del Zajedničarja tedenskega glasila HBZ. Obe novosti sta spodbujali prepletanje tradicionalne hrvaške kulture z ameriško. Angleško govoreče podružnice so organizirale športne in zabavne dejavnosti, kakršne so bile tedaj priljubljene med ostalimi Američani, poleg tega pa so organizirale tečaje hrvaškega jezika, poučevale hrvaško zgodovino in zemljepis ter oživaljale hrvaške ljudske pesmi in družabne igre. Angleški del Zajedničarja je poročal mladim bralcem o kulturnih in športnih aktivnostih angleško govorečih podružnic. Uspeh takšne strategije sta zavirali dve okoliščini: odpor prve generacije članov HBZ proti omenjenim novostim in nastop ekonomske krize v ZDA. Starejša generacija hrvaških Američanov, ki se je spričo težkega gospodarskega položaja s trdim delom bojevala za golo preživetje, ni imela razumevanja za "neresne" interese mlade generacije. Delovanje angleško govorečih podružnic HBZ in angleški del Zajedničarja sta po njihovem mnenju spodbujala tratenje časa njihove mladine za športne in zabavne igre ter jih odvracala od hrvaškega jezika in kulture.

Takšne ugovore pa je kmalu zadušil uspeh nove strategije pri novačenju članstva HBZ, saj so angleško govoreče podružnice pritegnile na tisoče novih članov.

Drugo oviro pri krepitvi HBZ je povzročila ekonomske kriza v ZDA, zaradi česar številni člani HBZ niso več mogli plačevati članarine. Del razvojne strategije HBZ, katere namen je bil pridobivanje novih članov, je bila vključitev političnega delovanja v podružnice HBZ in v glasilo Zveze. Zajedničar je podpiral boj delavskih sindikatov proti brezposelnosti, zmanjševanju plač, novim pritiskom na delavce in diskriminaciji v kadrovske politiki. Angleški del Zajedničarja je seznanjal bralce z delavsko problematiko v različnih industrijah ter objavljaj teoretične utemeljitve sindikalnega gibanja. Pripadniki druge generacije hrvaških Američanov, ki so bili sredi tridesetih let večinoma že zaposleni in so se soočali z enakimi problemi preživetja kot njihovi starši, so se zdaj množično včlanjevali v HBZ, saj jim je Zveza ponujala eno od poti organiziranega boja za izboljšanje položaja delavskega razreda. Uspeh strategije krepitve članstva HBZ je bil očiten: od 50000 članov, kolikor jih je Zveza obsegala v začetku leta 1934, se je število članov povečalo na skoraj 100000 do druge svetovne vojne.