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**Josip Smodlaka on Conditions in Dalmatia, 1910**

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**Josip Smodlaka on Conditions in Dalmatia, 1910**

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[This translation is from R.W. Seton-Watson, *The South Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy*. London: Constable and Co., 1911. The pagination of the original has been retained.]

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THE CONDITION OF DALMATIA

In allen Wipfeln spurest du  
Kaum einen Hauch . . . .  
Warte nur. Balde . . . .  
GOETHE.

It was my original intention to include in this volume a separate account of the political situation in Dalmatia, instead of treating it in close relation with Croatia. But I have decided to leave this task to a more eloquent and competent spokesman than myself. The following speech was delivered in the Austrian Parliament on December 3, 1910.(496) The speaker, Dr. Joseph Smodlaka, the founder of the Croat Democratic Party in Dalmatia, and member of Parliament for Spalato, is one of the ablest and most attractive Southern Slav politicians, and what is still better, "a modern of the moderns" in the midst of medieval conditions. The well-known Austrian novelist, Hermann Bahr, in his *Dalmatinische Reise* (pp. 109-117), gives an admirable character sketch of Dr. Smodlaka. He tells us how he had learnt of Dr. Smodlaka as

(496) Translated from the Stenographische Protokolle of that date.

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"the general pride of Dalmatia, the new St. Blaise (497) of the Dalmatian youth," and how he expected to find a kind of miniature Croat Gambetta. "And here in front of me sits a kind of Roosevelt, a lover of fresh air, an engineer, showing in his ideas strong traces of the peasant, one who wastes no words, but sets his hand to the work, one who does not dream but calculate, who cares less for phrases than for real needs, who listens to no programme save distress, a road-builder who begins before his own front door, one who is bent on cutting down and letting in light and air."

Dr. Smodlaka is no lover of panegyrics, and I must apologize to him for thus revealing him to the reader. I value Dr. Smodlaka's friendship too highly to add words of my own, such as would be superfluous to all who know him.

"Vox clamantis in deserto, I am tempted to exclaim, as I look upon the empty benches. If it were a question of my private affairs, I would naturally withdraw; but as my duty as a patriot, and the defence of my country are at stake, I must remain and speak. . . .

I may say at once that I shall vote against the Budget, not from tactical reasons, but on purely practical grounds, irrespective of the Government which may chance to be in power. For just as I feel bound now to vote against this Budget of the Bienert Cabinet, so I would have to do the same, as representative of Dalmatia, if a similar budget were introduced by Bienert's bitterest enemy.

My reason . . . is the neglect of Dalmatia, on the part of all Austrian Governments, including the present, the way in which my native land's most vital needs are ignored. . . . The crumbs thrown to Dalmatia are still scantier in this Budget. But even were they larger, and even if Dalmatia received richer alms I should still have to vote against the Budget: for in Dalmatia's present serious condition neither crumbs nor alms can help. Besides, I am firmly convinced, and with me, I believe all Dalmatia, that the policy of Crumbs cannot help us materially, while it kills us morally.

Since the desperate condition of Dalmatia forces me to treat this important matter of State from the standpoint of Dalmatian interests, I can hardly expect to succeed in arousing general interest in this cause.... One request only I make: let me not be reproached with a narrow local patriotism or 'Campanilism.'<sup>(498)</sup> Let it not be said that we Dalmatians are petty egotists, without comprehension for the general well-being. Apart from the fact that exceptional conditions prevail in our country, unlike those in any Austrian Crown land,<sup>(499)</sup> Dalmatia occupies, thanks to its geographical, political and strategic position an exceptional place in the State, so that we can fairly say that the Dalmatian question is not local but Imperial, and should be so regarded both by Government and Parliament.

(497) The patron saint of the Republic of Ragusa.

(498) The Campanile or Church tower is the Southern equivalent of our "village pump."

(499) Dalmatia is only one of seventeen Austrian provinces or Kronlander.

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To return to the Budget, which this year is far more unfavourable and meagre for Dalmatia than last year's. . . . Let me quote a few figures and add comments upon them.

While the total State expenditure shows an increase of over 37,000,000 (1,155,000 [pounds]), Dalmatia not only receives no increase of contribution in favour of its cultural and economic progress, but on the contrary the balance is restored to the Budget largely at the expense of my poor and neglected country. In order to cover the increased demands

for police, gendarmerie, reorganization, etc., almost all the items from which Dalmatia might have gained something have been cut down. For instance, for harbour works we are to get 728,000 crowns instead of 856,000 in 1910, or 127,900 less. . . . For the encouragement of fishery we get barely a third of last year's sum, only 25,000 instead of 82,000 crowns. For lighthouses and signalling stations only a quarter, or 75,000 instead of 300,000 crowns. For roads Dalmatia gets a clear 4,000 less than last year. In short, not to be wearisome, almost all expenses in favour of Dalmatia have been cut down, even the sum for agricultural improvements, for combating phylloxera, for nautical education--and that in a budget which shows an increased grant for all other schools in the country, and in a state which aims at seapower, at least on a small scale.

I may be told that other provinces are also cut down, under Mr. Bilinski's proposals.(500) But I answer: no other province is in such a condition as Dalmatia. The others lack many things, we lack every thing . . . indeed, all the conditions of life. Have you noticed, gentlemen, that at the debate on the increased cost of living, four out of the five Dalmatian deputies present voted for the unlimited import of Argentine meat? And do you know what it means when the representatives of a peasantry vote on this question with the Social Democrats and the town representatives? (Deputy Gostincar: In Carniola we have not even enough potatoes, far less meat!) Potatoes are in Dalmatia a luxury, they are only eaten by the better classes. I invite you to come to Spalato, and you will be able to convince yourself that we have no meat, no potatoes and no bread. If the question of the free importation of corn should be raised in the House, you will find that all Dalmatian deputies will vote in favour of it, and yet Dalmatia is almost exclusively inhabited by peasants and has no industry. But we not only have no bread, but no drinking water; out of 600 Dalmatian villages more than half have none. The people drink what you might call mud.

But we also have no wood. If our peasants are not to die of cold, they have to steal wood in the woods of their own commune, and the townspeople, not only workmen but officials . . . have to shiver with cold in winter, for with us a stove is a luxury.

But we not only have no wood, no water and no bread, we also have no land for agriculture. The whole surface of productive land

(500) The Austrian Finance Minister in the late Bienerth Cabinet.

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is flooded--the plains of the Narenta, of Vrgorac, Sinj, Imotski, the so-called poljes . . . .We could even export corn, but our only fertile land lies under water.

We have no roads, no communications. The health of the population is being ruined. While the Dalmatians under French rule a century ago were a remarkably healthy and powerful race of men, the population is to-day decaying--especially in the north, where there is malaria--and is dying out.

We also have no education. Over 300 Dalmatian villages have no school at all; in half the country the number of illiterates is not 50 or 60, not 80 or 90 per cent., but 99 and 100 per cent.

I have the honour to represent the central district of Dalmatia, relatively the richest and most progressive of all; and in my constituency, gentlemen, there are forty-eight villages, of which twenty-eight have no school and no teacher, and only twenty a school with one class, and two or three a school with two classes. If that is the case in what is called the richest and most progressive district, you can imagine what it is like on the edge of the mountains, on the Bosnian frontier.

We also have other specialities such as the system of Coloni or Kmets, according to which the peasant, without getting anything from the owner of the land, has to see to all improvements and expenses and yet to pay the proprietor half or a third of his annual income. How can these people live anything but a wretched existence under such circumstances? The year 1848 freed the peasants of Austria, but the Austrian Government of that day forgot that Dalmatia also belongs to Austria. With us medieval conditions have survived to the present day. . . .

Besides all this there is the isolation of Dalmatia, which is not natural, since it is not an island, but part of the Continent of Europe, belonging to a Great Power. And yet we have been artificially made into an island. Not only Dalmatia, but also the neighbouring districts of South Croatia and West Bosnia have no railway connexion with the Monarchy or with the rest of Europe.

It is not a question of a tiny piece of land, but of territories larger than the kingdom of Wurttemberg, with more inhabitants than Istria, Carniola and South Styria. And the communications in this forgotten land are such, that if, for instance, we want to go from Spalato to Banjaluka, which could be reached in a quick train in three or four hours, we require forty-four hours, and can get quicker to St. Petersburg than to the immediate Hinterland on which our poor country depends for nourishment. It is just as if we were to go from Trieste to Laibach and were obliged to go first by steamer to Ancona, in order to reach Laibach via Bologna, Padua and Tarvis.(501) Just look at the map, and you will see that this is so.

(501) As if in order to get from Newcastle to Hull, it were necessary to take a steamer to Leith, and then go via Glasgow, Carlisle, Crewe, Rugby across to Hull, but taking twice as long as such a journey would actually take.

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Under such circumstances, I ask, is it just, is it human, to save in the way in which this Budget saves? Was this to be expected from the Government which recognized that Austria has great duties towards Dalmatia, and that as it has been neglected by the State for a whole century, something must be done to help it? Will it be helped by reducing still

further the crumbs and alms which it receives? In the programme of this Government and of the last, is included the Reconquest of Dalmatia. I must remind the House that one cannot speak of a reconquest, since Dalmatia was never conquered by Austria. After the collapse of the Venetian Republic our fathers voluntarily recognized the Emperor Francis I as their sovereign, and invited him to send his officials and his soldiers. We were not conquered, then. But even if one talks of a reconquest in a good sense, everything remains merely in words; in practice programmes and promises are laid aside. . . . What does the State or Government do to help the country? . . . I must admit that of late years there has been a lively interest for Dalmatia, and ways of helping it have been sought, but the right way is still not found. Committees sit for months and years, but there is no result. They make excursions to Dalmatia at Easter, and the best season of the year. New bureaucratic posts are created, and a few new sinecures, but Dalmatia gains nothing. I will not deny that money has been spent on the country in recent years. It has, but how! The agricultural school at Spalato may serve as an example: it has cost the State 400,000 crowns, but it has no land for agricultural instruction and only twenty pupils. Instead of building it in an agricultural district like Sinj or Knin, it is built in a town. . . .

In years of distress the Government buys hay and sells it to poor people, but not to the poor peasantry, but to the poor moneylenders, who buy at 8 heller, in order to sell to the peasants at 16. . . .

We have agricultural teachers, who, to put it mildly, act as clerks in the Prefectures; we have eight secondary schools, but in over 300 villages not a single elementary school. Every year 200 to 400 more youths from Gymnasia and Realschulen, and 100 per cent of illiterates in hundreds of villages. Are those not unhealthy conditions? In the little town of Zara, with hardly 18,000 inhabitants, two upper Gymnasia and one Upper Realschule--two Italian and one Croat; and in all Dalmatia, only two industrial schools, and a single lower commercial school. . . .

Not merely is the Diet refused the means for improving the country, but the system is also bad. There is no plan, no organization, the needs of the country are not put first or are not understood.

Here is a classical example. In Spalato a private company has been founded, to build an electric tramway line from Spalato to the little town of Trau. The Government also wants to build a useless railway from Kastel-Sucurac to Trau, which will cost 2,000,000 crowns. The two towns hold together economically as mutatis

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mutandis Vienna and Klosterneuburg.(502) . . . This private company applied to the Government for the concession. The railway would, it said, only run twice a day at the most, and this is no use for the people, who want a proper service. . . . Besides, the railway does not run along the shore, where the villages are, but high up on the side of the hill. . . . What happened in Vienna? The company (who do not belong to my party, but

are business men in the town) were told they would not get the concession even for prospecting! In astonishment they asked why, and were told, 'because it would compete with the future State railway!' At this rate, gentlemen, all the trams running from Vienna to the suburbs would have to be done away with, because they can compete with the State railways. . . . The real reason is, if we get the tram connexion the railway is superfluous; therefore, they won't grant the concession, because they want to build the railway. It is not a question of State money; we have the money, the commune would join the company, and the small local banks would do so too. We don't ask a farthing from the State, only the concession, but we cannot get even this. . . .

Near Spalato we have a waterfall, which apart from Scandinavia, is the highest in Europe--over 100 meters high, with 75,000 horsepower. Here a company formed mainly of Italian capitalists has built water-works and invested millions. From this not only Spalato but the whole province expects a great future; it might supply tramways, aqueducts and so on, with electricity. What happens? All at once the work is stopped. Spalato, my native town, is greatly embarrassed; for our contract with the Augsburg Gas Company runs out next year, and we don't know what to do. From these water-works we might get the necessary power for lighting the town, but the work is suspended for months. . . . Why? Once more there are reasons of high politics. The capitalists are Italians. I repeat, we do not mind; we are not in love with Italian capital, we would certainly prefer our own capital or help from other Crownlands. But it does not come, and the help of foreign capital has come. And for Dalmatia a question of life and death is at stake. . . .

A further point must be considered. From so great a distance Dalmatia cannot be governed on centralist lines. I do not wish to speak from a constitutional standpoint or to break a lance for Federalism. I merely refer to the administration in its economic aspect. . . . I can understand that Linz and Upper Austria can easily be governed from Vienna on the same principles. But we are too far off. In this Empire there is a complete difference between the North and this little province which has not even a geographical connexion with this state--climate, people, needs, etc. (Deputy Dr. Bartoli: 'Away from Vienna, then?') I shall not draw that conclusion.

502. Cf. Southampton and Portsmouth.

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(Page 412) . . . I do not say 'Away from Vienna,' but I am of opinion that the organization and plan of work in this state are wrong, and that their centre must be not in Vienna but in Dalmatia itself. I do not ask that the State should give us money and that we Dalmatians should manage it as we please. No, gentlemen, unfortunately we are not ripe for that. Let Dalmatia still be administered by men from Vienna. Give us one of your best, a capable, modern, energetic man, and he need not be a Dalmatian, we shall not mind if he is a German Austrian. Give us what the great Napoleon gave us, a Dandolo, who in five years did more for the country than Austria in 105 years. I repeat. . . . without regard for nationality: that is a matter of indifference. . . . In our towns during the Middle

Ages, the head of the town might never be a native, but always had to be a stranger. Gentlemen, the Government which seeks to further the interests of the State, should take an example from the English. England does not send to its important colonies its most incapable men, does not ask whether the man belongs to an old aristocratic family. . . . Have you an Austrian Cecil Rhodes, a Cromer, a Curzon? If you have, or even men of lesser calibre, then send them to Dalmatia. But give the man to whom you entrust the fate of the province and the task of its regeneration, also the power to effect something: do not make him a mere marionette of the central authorities, who has not even 4 [pounds] at his disposal if a village is burnt down. I am not speaking against Vienna. But do you know, gentlemen, the methods of procedure in Vienna? In 1835 a small road was planned from Almissa eastwards, and after sixty-five years this road was at last built. If one wants to build a church or a harbour in some tiny village, it takes twenty, thirty, forty years, till the plans come back from Vienna, and one is at last free to build. . . . I repeat, the only way to help Dalmatia, is to give a wider sphere of action to the Statthalter--call him Governor or what you will--and to surround him with practical men who know the life of the people. Let the Central Government appoint half these men, and the Diet the other half. Some of them need not be natives; we shall be glad if you send us some of your capable men. . . . It is not a matter of federalism, but of a healthy decentralization, which not only Dalmatia but I believe all the Crown lands want. . . . Just make the experiment with us, and if it succeeds, all the others will be grateful. If you do not care to learn from the English, let us look into the past . . . give us Proconsuls, propraetors, like those of the ancient Romans, men with initiative who were petty rulers. To-day no one can be jealous of the ancient Romans.

It is absolutely necessary to fulfil what has been promised, to give out of State money the sums for Dalmatia's barest needs. It may be objected that it might help itself, that something could be done with provincial funds. Gentlemen, we are not able for this. Give

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us land, schools, means of communication, bring us out of the Middle Ages, and then we shall do the rest. It is the State's duty to do this much. To-day--I am ashamed to admit it, but it is the sad truth--Dalmatia has become a land of beggars, through no fault of its own. For centuries it has been systematically plundered and ruined, both by Turks and Venetians, merely to prevent the Turks from reaching the Adriatic coast, which would have been equivalent to the conquest of Italy and other countries too. In our coast towns the Venetian Republic allowed no industry, lest it should compete with Venice; our Hinterland was turned to a desert, lest the Turks should settle there. Our national nobility . . . was rooted out by foreign governments. But the country was not always in so lamentable a condition. I need only remind you of the greatness of Roman Illyria when Salona was one of the greatest industrial towns of the Roman Empire, when the country was intersected by trade roads, when Illyria was a centre of culture for the whole Balkan Peninsula. I need only remind you of the little republic of Ragusa, and of the fact that this country, to-day poor and abandoned, gave to the Roman Empire its wisest organizer, the Emperor Diocletian, to the Church its greatest father, St. Jerome, to the Southern Slav

literature its first poet, Gunduhc, to Italian literature the best master of the language, Tomaseo. . . . Our past, our contributions to general culture, are the titles on the basis of which we demand of a Kulturstaat, that it should do its duty towards us. We ask it too, because Austrian Governments have dealt us the last blow. Our fields have decayed in recent years, our cattle industry has gone back compared to the French period, public health is far worse than then. Our little towns, which had no industry but at least a lively trade with Bosnia and Herzegovina, are to-day ruined, because these countries are only connected by railway with distant Hungary, and thus the main arteries of our towns are severed. Remember too the wine duty on the commercial treaty with Italy, by which we were sacrificed to the interests of the other Crown lands and lost millions.

What we ask of the state to-day, is not alms, not a present, but compensation for the damage which this state has done us. Above all, we demand the necessary railway connexion: without which we cannot live or develop economically. They say, Hungary does not allow that. But if Austria only chooses, she has means to compel Hungary to agree to Dalmatia's railway connexion. Hungary is surrounded by Austria, has no other way to West and North Europe; and there lies Austria's strength and Hungary's weakness, which we can use for our purposes, which are not provincial, but state aims. But we see that the state has not the serious will to help us in this way. Formerly our good people thought the Magyars were responsible for everything; the poor Austrian Government would build the railways, but Hungary will not allow it. To-day

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no one is so naive as to believe that. For we see that Austria can carry through more difficult and important things when she chooses, even against the will of an overwhelming majority in the Magyar Parliament. If that is not done in Dalmatia's favour, we must draw the logical conclusion, that there is no serious intention, but merely sweet words and fine promises.

They say: 'After all, we need Hungary.' But we Dalmatians ask the state, 'Does Austria not need Dalmatia, or the ten million Serbo-Croats?' I think this state needs Dalmatia, that without a province whose coast is 500 kilometres long and dominates the Adriatic with its hundred harbours, it cannot maintain its present position. Without Dalmatia, we say, you have no sea and no sailors; for of the Austrian sailors, but for the Croats of Istria and Croatia, two-thirds are Dalmatians, who serve two years longer than other men, and even in future will have to serve longer than the others, because in Austria there are not many such smart recruits. If then thousands of our young people must serve two years extra, in order to defend the coast and this state's highest interests, it is only just that the state should give something as compensation. . . .

Gentlemen, it is not enough to be able to exercise material brutal force over a country. A state must endeavour to win over all peoples and provinces in its territory; is it possible then, that the Dalmatian population should be grateful and devoted to this Government, and even (I say it quite openly) to this state, when we are left 100 years in this sad

condition? There is no Irredentism in Dalmatia, neither on Serbo-Croat nor on Italian side, and this last you will surely believe from me as a Slav. But it is not the Servian nor the Italian Governments which work against the interests of this state but . . . the Austrian Government, which by neglecting the country directly produces discontent against it. Our peasants emigrate to America, to Australia, to New Zealand, to Canada, and some return, after seeing in the great world how one lives in modern states. It is these people who create, and inevitably create, a permanent discontent with present conditions. What can be the feelings of these thousands who, in order not to starve, have had to leave homes and families, and seek their living abroad. . . .

This discontent cannot be cured by 'Flogging Patents,'(503) nor by review articles,(504) least of all by High Treason trials (applause), but the state must at last do its duty in matters of culture and in its own interests remove discontent. Millions will now be expended on Dreadnoughts, but it might perhaps be better for the defence of the state to expend these millions, I will not say on Dalmatia,

(503) A phrase invented to describe the Imperial Patent which inaugurated the absolutist Bach regime (1850-1859).

(504) Probably a reference to the Oesterreichische Rundschau's fierce attacks upon Dalmatia.

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but on the future sailors of these Dreadnoughts. It is certainly more useful to the state, to satisfy the country and to give it means of existence, than, as still happens, to disburse money from various secret sources for military spies, who watch for years for the alleged smuggle of weapons from Italy, merely to elicit the fact that no weapons are imported, but that there is a lively export trade in human flesh, Dalmatia's sole article of export to-day. . . . Dalmatia is getting depopulated. Quite close to its chief town Spalato lies the island of Brazza, Austria's largest island. On it the fields are already lying fallow, a large section of the population is already missing. . . . In the interests of the state it is regrettable that this population, so smart, so honest, so hard-working and saving, cannot live at home, but has to emigrate and help other states, as, for instance, in the case of Punta Arena, the southernmost town in the world, where the inhabitants of Brazza form a relative majority of the population and are the smartest workmen, as has been repeatedly admitted by the Chilian Government. It is a pity that the state does nothing to check this misery. We cannot be satisfied at the state regulating two or three torrents a year, if hundreds of other torrents do a hundred times greater damage. . . . One cannot wait one or two centuries until the 300 or 400 villages which have no schools get one new school a year. . . . We hear recently of sympathy felt in various quarters for Dalmatia. We are thankful for the sympathy extended to us by Government organs and by members of this House; but we cannot live on sympathy alone. Besides, these are dangerous sympathies. Dalmatia is regarded as something exotic, it is only regarded from the standpoint of archaeology and tourist traffic. We have no wish to play the part of an archaeological cemetery or an "Indian reservation" with the authentic Dalmatian Red Indians in their gay

costume. No, gentlemen, we want to be able to live and work, to earn our living honestly by agriculture, trade and industry and thus serve the interests of the state as a whole. The necessary conditions are there; for if the torrents are regulated and the swamps drained, we could not only have enough corn and bread for our own use, but could even export it. We have a splendid situation on the sea, with so many hundred harbours, only five or six hours by steamer from Italy; a rich Hinterland--Bosnia, Herzegovina, Servia; admirable trade conditions; the biggest and strongest water power in Europe, so that industry might be promoted as nowhere else. Just consider all these branches of economic life, the rich supplies of minerals, the sea with its fisheries, and you might say, that could be the richest land in Europe. And this might be attained at a relatively small expense, by investments which would bear a hundredfold to the state. Gentlemen, in fulfilment of my duty, I have endeavoured to show the Government the means of helping Dalmatia. Not only capital and investments are needed, but also organization and a

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sensible plan . . . not made in Vienna, but transplanted to the country itself. And so long as the Government and every future Government fails to fulfil this duty towards my native country, I shall vote against the Budget proposals . . . just as I shall gladly acknowledge the Government, if it helps us with deeds, instead of words and promises. . . . In my opinion we (Dalmatian deputies) shall best serve our country, if we follow the lines I have indicated, with all possible energy and without regard to the Government or any one at all. I believe that we shall thus also best serve the national cause of the Serbo-Croats, to whom Dalmatia belongs as one of their noblest provinces, and who, will certainly be stronger if Dalmatia is freed from its present wretched conditions." (Loud applause.)

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