

Croatia and the Military Frontier

By PAVLOS GIANNELIA

IN the Spring of 1941, when the Germans invaded and conquered the state of Yugoslavia, a new "puppet" kingdom was formed out of one of the territories of that country—Croatia. It will be interesting to see, as time goes on, whether the new kingdom will fall completely under the domination of the New Order, or whether some of the ancient Croatian customs will be revived.

One of the old customs of Croatia was a policy which ruled a large portion of that land until 1881—"the Military Frontier" (*Militärgränze*), which has an interesting history as well as many curious aspects of interest to Georgeists.

The custom can be traced to as far back as the twelfth century, when peasant archers were entrusted with the task of defending the borders of Croatia at the valleys of the Drave and Mur against invaders. The archer (*sagittarius*) was given a lot of land (*huba*) at the border in exchange for his military services. (In a similar manner the *akrites* (border folk) protected the borders of the Byzantine Empire, having been settled there by the Emperors Romanos and Basil as peasant soldiers.)

A second Croatian border was fixed in 1463 (ten years after the fall of Constantinople) by King Matthias Corvinus, who settled in the Lika and Corbava (near Fiume) 20,000 liberated Christian prisoners, granting them exemption from taxes and religious liberty in exchange for the obligation to defend the borders.

The true birthday of the historic Military Frontier was on the first of January, 1527, when the Croats offered their crown to the Austrian Archduke, King of Hungary and Bohemia and brother of Charles V. At first helped by the Holy See, the German Empire and the Styrian Parliament, and afterwards alone, Austria organized the Military Frontier in Croatia from Fiume to the Danube, and along this river to Bucovina, bordering the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. Religious liberty was granted to the Frontier settlers, the majority of them being Greek Orthodox refugees; and the tax exemption was largely compensated by the blood tribute to their military service.

Worth mentioning is the decision of Emperor Charles VI, in 1717, "not to tax the property of the Frontier men, nor to transfer them into the class of peasantry." He also opposed increasing the land tax in the Lika and Corbava, territories which were called *desertum primum* and *desertum secundum*, before the settlers "had transformed by their indefatigable labor this desert into a cultivated land."

The basis of the Frontier laws, it is seen, is the combination of military service with landed property. The most perfect of

these laws—that of 1807—provides as follows: "All the possessions of the Frontier are real feudal farm houses, to which the tenant is entitled to unlimited use, the supreme property rights of the Emperor being respected and all obligations fulfilled. The feudal farm houses are not only landed possessions granted by the sovereign, but are provided with perpetual and inalienable right of use."

Every able-bodied tenant was compelled to perform military service for life. Thus, it is no wonder that in the Frontier one out of every four men was a soldier, while in other parts of the Empire only every thirtieth man performed military service. The Frontier men were excellent soldiers about whom Napoleon said, "It is not enough to shoot a Frontier soldier; he must be pushed, to make him fall." In the last years before the first World War, one-third of the Austrian officers came from Frontier families. It is also interesting to note that General Kvaternik, who this year proclaimed the "independence" of Croatia, is a *Gränzer*.

Another important characteristic of the Frontier laws was the family community system. While the soldier was granted land tenure, this tenure was exercised by the household—*zadruga*—composed of a whole family as a unit under the command of a patriarch, or house-father. This command was of a military nature, and was supplemented by the quasi-military command of the house-mother over the other wives in the family. The law of 1737 stated: "Every family forms a community with common property and stands under the superintendence of an elected patriarch. Every family must supply to the army at least one able man." There were special rules for the changing of patriarchs, etc.

Landed property in the Frontier was divided into "basic" land (*Stammgut*) and "emergency" land (*Uiberland*). A minimum size was stipulated for the "basic" land, and it required the authorization of the Emperor to change hands. As for the "emergency" land, the consent of the entire family, including women, was needed before it could be sold or mortgaged. This tradition lingers on in present-day Serbia.

Land remaining idle for two consecutive years was given by the parish to needy Frontier men, or used as common pasture land. The woodlands bordering the Frontier were also recognized as common property from which the settler was privileged to take wood for building and fire. Thus, common property in land was recognized in several ways—the household had common property in its land, the parish in idle land and pastures, the Frontier in the woodlands, the Styrian Parliament in the ores, and the Emperor in the land and waterfalls. In contrast to this treatment of land, movable

wealth was the unlimited private property of every Frontier family.

Joseph II, beloved son of Maria Theresa and ruler of the Military Frontier, was inspired by the French economists in his search for a just tax. In 1783 he wrote the following: "The land, given by nature for the sustenance of man, is the source from which all comes and to which all returns, whose existence is eternal. From this follows the undeniable truism that only the land can sustain the necessities of the State. It must then be concluded that every one must be taxed only in proportion to the *extent*, the *fertility* and the *site* of his land."

While this was a splendid utterance, the application was far from realizing the ideal. Joseph introduced a tax of eight per cent. on the *gross* yield of land in the Confines, and did not relieve the trade restrictions. The elder Mirabeau, a Physiocratic leader, saw the error in this; he remarked: "It is said that the Emperor has realized the Physiocratic system. *Mon Dieu!* What sort of Physiocracy is that? Imposing custom duties on imports and exports, and hampering trade. The Emperor merely introduced a land tax. *Voilà tout!* It is the greatest nonsense to believe that he realized the Physiocratic ideal. Where indirect taxes remain and are increased, where trade is handicapped, a land tax is heavy and insupportable."

Fortunately, Joseph's brother, Leopold II, revised the tax on the gross yield of land. From 1792 the land tax in the Frontier was calculated according to the land's *quality* and *fertility* (*Güte und Ertragsfähigkeit*). Although this reform was far from the ideal of basing taxation on the *value* of land, it was a first step in the right direction. In 1810, 95 per cent. of the tax revenue was derived from Physiocratic taxes, and only five per cent. from all other sources. In 1860, the Physiocratic taxes still comprised over half the revenue.

The Frontier men were quite jealous of their status, and resisted the many changes that political leaders of those days sought. They were proud of their direct dependence upon the Emperor, and, in their own words, they "feared more the intervention of the Germans than the sword of the Turks." They guarded well their common property in the woodlands, but in 1867, when the Frontier passed to the Hungarian monarchy, this common property was violated by the new rulers, and appropriated by the State. The protests of the inhabitants were ignored, and despite the many propositions to preserve the common lands in a modernized form, the dissolution of the Frontier was undertaken.

On October 15, 1881, a penstroke from Francis Joseph abolished the Military Frontier. But the Frontier men didn't accept this without resistance, and, as a contemporary slogan went, "the soldiers of *Emperor* Francis Joseph fought against the soldiers of *King* Francis Joseph." Finally, armed resistance in the Frontier was broken by the Hungarian troops in a battle at Lika.

Thus ended the Military Frontier—a custom which had proven its worth over and over again during the many difficult periods in the history of the Balkans—an institution admired and emulated by such great statesmen as Prince Eugene of Savoy, Charles VI, Catherine and Peter of Russia, and Napoleon.

Today the territory which formerly comprised the Military Frontier—a territory which for centuries formed the dividing line between Eastern and Western civilization—forms the backbone of the newly created Kingdom of Croatia. The Kingdom is now ruled by a Savoyan prince, symbolizing Western culture, and a Greek princess, personifying the influence of Byzantium.

What will be adopted of the salutary features of the Military Frontier in the new Croatia?

Our Australian Letter

From A. G. HUIE

WHEN he was leader of the Opposition in New South Wales, Mr. W. J. McKell promised that if he was returned to power at the then forthcoming General Elections, he would abolish the Wages Tax. As reported in my letter in your July-August number, he was successful and assumed office. The Wages Tax was introduced over ten years ago. At first it was three pence on the pound over a moderate minimum. The Lang Labor Government increased it to a shilling. After its defeat the rate was reduced. It has always been regarded as a particularly obnoxious tax.

Latterly its title was changed to "unemployment relief and social service" tax. As this tax in the past year produced nearly nine million pounds and the State could not afford to lose that revenue, Mr. McKell was set a difficult problem. The Henry George League of N. S. W. arranged a deputation to the Government. It was received by the Hon. C. C. Lazarini, M.L.A., Honorary Minister, on behalf of the Premier. The speakers commended the Government for its determination to abolish the Wages Tax. It suggested taxation of land values to at least make good a substantial portion of the revenue needed. Consideration of our suggestions was promised.

There was no evidence of it when Mr. McKell made his budget speech. It appears that a readjustment of the income tax, with a higher minimum is to be adopted. Details are not yet available, although expected shortly. The plea of the Labor Party is to make the higher incomes pay more, to tax dividends and companies. Of course all business concerns will have their production costs increased and so the workers will have to pay higher prices.

The Henry George League had arranged another deputation, about three weeks earlier, to the Minister for Local