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## AN AMERICAN VIEW OF CONDITIONS IN MONTENEGRO 1918—1919

During a recent search in the Hoover Institution's Archives, the author came upon papers bequeathed to the Archives by Major Charles Wellington Furlong (1874—1967),<sup>1</sup> who served during the First World War on the General Staff of the United States Army, and at the end of the War was a member of the American Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. For a time Furlong was President Wilson's Special Military Aide, and a military observer and intelligence officer in Dalmatia and Montenegro. As a member of the American Military Mission, Furlong was on a special assignment in Montenegro to investigate and report on conditions in that country since the end of the War. He remained in Montenegro from February 6 to March 2, 1919.

The United States was the first of the Allied governments to dispatch a mission to Montenegro. That mission was made up of Major Furlong and two military members of the American Embassy Staff in Rome, one of them Captain James Bruce, and the other a second lieutenant. The mission arrived in Montenegro by way of Kotor. Although an able intelligence officer, a university graduate, author, and later university professor, Major Furlong had limited knowledge of recent Montenegrin history and politics, and he did not fully understand some of what he saw and heard in Montenegro. The authorities in Montenegro, and rightly so, accused him of spending far more time with persons who opposed the union of Montenegro and Serbia than with those who favored it. There is no question but that Furlong was partial to King Nikola and his government. After he left Montenegro, Furlong continued to support the cause

<sup>1</sup> Furlong Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, California. (Hereafter Furlong Papers.)

of the King, and the thankful Monarch and his government expressed their gratitude by decorating him. Foreign Minister J. S. Plamenac bestowed the order of third class (commander) of Prince Danilo I on Furlong for special services which he rendered to the people of Montenegro. That same year, on April 24, the Montenegrin Consul General I. Ramadanović in Rome conferred upon Major Furlong a silver medal for bravery in the War of 1914—1919 in the name of King Nikola.

Yet, despite Furlong's one-sided view of the Montenegrin political scene, his reports on conditions in Montenegro contain many interesting details and insights. The Furlong papers include a lengthy Dossier, several reports on general conditions in Montenegro, a few letters written by others, Furlong's book manuscript, portions of which deal with Montenegro, and a number of photographs of Montenegrin political activists from both sides of the political spectrum, including insurgents, Serbian and Montenegrin military personnel, and political prisoners.

The most important document among the Furlong papers is his final report, or Dossier, as he calls it. On March 11, 1919, after his tour of duty in Montenegro, Furlong prepared »A Preliminary Report« in the office of the Military Attaché in Rome, and subsequently, the fuller »A Dossier on the Political Situation in Montenegro«.<sup>2</sup> The Dossier consists of 74 legal-size typewritten pages. Furlong traveled through much of Montenegro and the northern parts of Albania. He interviewed such individuals and groups as Andrija Radović, Colonel Simović, Marko Vukotić, Marko Jokanović, Miško Nikolić, the Montenegrin refugees at Rome, San Giovanni di Medua (General Andrija Rajčević, Božo Petrović [King Nikola's cousin]), and Nikšić insurgents (Radojica Nikčević). Appended to Furlong's Dossier are brief statements on the problem of health and medicine in Montenegro, the controversy concerning the alleged »betrayal« by King Nikola, the election of the deputies to the Grand National Assembly (*Skupština*) and the Assembly's deliberations and decisions.

Furlong requested that his Dossier, sent initially to General Churchill in Paris, be forwarded to President Wilson. He urged that it be submitted to the Peace Conference for »immediate action« if justice was to be done to »a small nation«. The Montenegrin question was so important, he wrote, that it was »worthy of being brought to the attention of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, for such action as they may deem proper in presenting it to the Peace Conference«. Lest the peacemakers underestimate the capacity of the Montenegrins to govern themselves, he warned that the Montenegrins were people with »a high grade of intelligence, love of liberty and a keen sense of political situations«. He was sure that

<sup>2</sup> A Dossier on the Political Situation in Montenegro, pp. 2—3, Furlong Papers. Box 10.

»with some unselfish and just paternal assistance on the part of the Allies, a satisfactory solution of the Montenegrin problem could be effected«. The Major expressed a strong wish that, in accordance with President Wilson's Fourteen Points, the Peace Conference would render »a just and prompt solution of the Montenegrin situation«.

While much of what Furlong heard and observed about the Whites (*bjelaši*) and the Greens (*zelenashi*) in Montenegro was not new, he reminded his readers that neither of these two groups was homogeneous in a political sense. There were in their ranks individuals who were intransigent in the stand they had taken, as well as individuals who were moderates and compromisers. Thus, for example, Furlong divided the Whites into the numerically larger extremists and the numerically smaller moderates. He identified among the moderates such men as Mihajlo Jovanović, Gavriilo Cerović, and Aleksandar Martinović. The moderates opposed the imprisonment of the leaders of the Green Party and favored a republican in place of a monarchical government for Yugoslavia. Yet, in the opinion of Furlong, they were realistic enough to realize that the time for a republican government was not opportune, and would not be for some four or five years.<sup>3</sup>

According to Furlong's findings the Whites represented those who »at present govern Montenegro« and who have »practically« proclaimed as their political program the annexation of Montenegro to Serbia, abolition of the sovereignty of the Montenegrin State, and union with other South Slav peoples into a common state. They were led by Andrija Radović, and opposed to King Nikola and his government. As for the Greens, Furlong reported that they demanded the restoration of Montenegro in the manner of Serbia and Belgium, and the same rights as those accorded to Serbia. They insisted that questions concerning the future of Montenegro be solved on the basis of »self-determination«. The Greens, he said, objected to the manner in which the elections to the Grand National Assembly were held and were bitter over the harsh treatment to which their followers were subjected. They attributed all of Montenegro's difficulties to »the invasion by the Serbian armies«, asked for tangible assistance in finding »a definite and just solution« to the Montenegrin political problem, and insisted that only a temporary occupation by an Inter-Allied police force (American, British and French), or by a police force of any of these powers (preferably in the order in which they are listed here), could bring peace to Montenegro and make it possible for its people to decide their destiny by fair elections. The Greens complained that Serbia was »aided and abetted« by France, and that Italy had incited trouble in Montenegro because its objectives were to prevent the formation of a Yugoslav state, to convert Montenegro into a buffer state against Yugoslavia and to

<sup>3</sup> A Dossier on the Political Situation in Montenegro, p. 2.

preserve its economic influence in Montenegro. According to Furlong, both Greens and Whites opposed Italian interference in the internal affairs of Montenegro. Both of them, he wrote, placed their trust in America and honored President Wilson's Fourteen Points.

Furlong believed that most members of the »Green Party«, led by Jovan Plamenac (located in Paris) and Božo Petrović (imprisoned at Podgorica), favored a Yugoslav state in which Montenegro would be an autonomous unit. What the Greens wanted was Montenegro's direct entry into a Yugoslav state and not through the prior merger into Serbia. They sought to preserve their country's sovereign rights and wished to be accorded full equality with Serbia. Among the Greens, Furlong said, there were both supporters of King Nikola and the Petrović dynasty, as well as those who wanted Montenegro proclaimed a republic at an appropriate time. There were some, to be sure, who wanted an immediate referendum on a republic, favoring an immediate establishment of a republic »if a legal vote could be taken«.

Furlong goes on to say that some Greens favored retaining Nikola as King of Montenegro, while others wanted to keep him the monarch only until »a republic was gradually and normally formed«. Despite whatever differences may have existed among the leaders of the Greens, Furlong found that all of them agreed that the sovereign rights of the Montenegrin people were represented through the King until otherwise determined by the will of the people; and, that the intrigues of Serbia and the leaders of the White Party did not permit the Montenegrins to express their will freely in the November 1918 election.<sup>4</sup>

With most everyone that Furlong spoke among the Montenegrins and Serbians he found strong opposition to sending Italian troops into Montenegro. The Italians, apparently, would not allow the Montenegrins to use the Virpazar-Antivari railroad, and both Montenegrins and Serbians resented the presence of the Italian sentry patrol. Otherwise, the Greens had succeeded to convince Furlong that Montenegro was occupied by the force of Serbian arms, assisted by the White Party, and aided by France, and that the leaders of the Green Party were sent to the prisons in Podgorica and Nikšić or driven to the mountains or *abroad*, and that »many« of their homes were »probably pillaged«. For all these reasons, Furlong suggested that the Peace Conference might consider »the advisability of Serbian control« over Montenegro.<sup>5</sup>

According to the first question concerning Montenegro to be settled was »the legality of the November elections«. Yet, he was convinced *a priori* that the elections of November 1918 were »illegal«, because the Serbian troops »undoubtedly had a coercive effort on the Montenegrin people«. Furlong contended that the 1918 electi-

<sup>4</sup> A Dossier on the Political Situation in Montenegro, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> A Dossier on the Political Situation in Montenegro, p. 3.

ons were steered by a group of men who, with the help of Serbia, were able to gain political control of the country. The November elections, according to Furlong, were the cause of the Montenegrin »Revolution on January 6—10, 1919, at Cetinje and Nikšić. The violence occurred during the Serbian Christmas, and hence it is called the Christmas Uprising. The situation, Furlong writes, was »successfully« handled by »the action of American troops« (but he does not explain how) and by French General Venel, who failed to carry out the promise of protection to all who gave up their arms.

In his report, Furlong notes that after the Christmas Uprising the organization of the insurgents was shattered, but that the insurgents were not subdued. As the drive against the insurgents mounted, he says, more people, including former military, police and administrative personnel, were forced to withdraw into the hills. The result was that the fighting between the police and armed bands expanded, and some major battles were fought. Furlong writes that although weaker than their adversary, the insurgents were most active, he said, in the areas of Nikšić, Cetinje, Rovci and along the Albanian border.

Furlong described the Serbian administration of Montenegro, the deployment and supplying of Serbian troops, Serbian efforts to organize a Montenegrin force, and an attempt to send about 850 Montenegrin troops to Belgrade in exchange for a battalion of Serbian troops. Furlong reasoned that by controlling the food supplies, the Serbians had perhaps the most effective weapon toward achieving domination over Montenegro. For this reason, he proposed that food supplies be distributed under the supervision of either the American or Allied Commission.<sup>6</sup>

In regard to King Nikola, Furlong shared the complaints of the Greens that the Serbians and the Whites, were seeking to discredit him and his government. They were accusing the King of having sold out to Austria by a deal personally arranged by Prince Peter of Montenegro, a charge vigorously denied by the Prince, who offered to testify before the Peace Commission.<sup>7</sup>

To resolve the Montenegrin question Furlong urged the American Commission to Negotiate Peace to request the Peace Conference in Paris to consider the immediate withdrawal of Serbian troops from Montenegro and their concurrent replacement either by American and/or British troops (to function as Military Police), under an American or British commanding officer, with headquarters in Cetinje. He felt it highly advisable not to include French or Italian troops because of their countries' Balkan interests and the antipathies of the Montenegrins toward them »in the present circumstances«. Furlong appealed for the »good care« of political prisoners in Montenegro, asked that a full list of their names be forwarded to

<sup>6</sup> A Dossier on the Political Situation in Montenegro, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> A Dossier on the Political Situation in Montenegro, pp. 4—5.

the Peace Conference, that all Montenegrins abroad be allowed to return home without harm to their person and property, and that political prisoners be tried by an Allied tribunal (not to include Serbian judges) chosen by the Peace Conference. He also recommended that some imprisoned leaders of the Green Party (such as the elder Petrović) and insurgents near Nikšić and at San Giovanni di Medua, be called to testify before the Peace Conference, and that the officers who fought in the battle of Lovćen, including Prince Peter of Montenegro, Serbian Colonel Petar Pešić, Major Joko Martinović, Major Niko Jovičević, and officers of the French Artillery at Lovćen, also be invited to testify. Furlong hoped that the collection of such evidence would enable the Peace Conference to make a decision on Montenegro.

The Greens had hoped through Furlong and the Peace Conference to precipitate Allied intervention on behalf of Montenegro. On February 20, 1919, Furlong sent a message to the American Military Attaché in Paris, General Churchill, suggesting that the Peace Conference consider »requesting the immediate release of all Montenegrin political prisoners on condition that they sign an agreement to refrain from aiding or abetting any revolt until after the decision of the Peace Conference«. In his message, Furlong stressed the need for »prompt action« before these men were tried and sentenced »by the tribunal«. He further advised that while the Peace Conference has the question of Montenegro »under consideration«, American or British troops should »occupy Montenegro«.<sup>8</sup>

On February 25 in a telegram to General Churchill, Furlong pressed for an immediate Allied decision on Montenegro. He proposed that an envoy be sent to Montenegro to confer with both Whites and Greens and to promise them that their case would be heard and justice rendered by the Peace Conference. Furlong repeatedly counseled that Montenegro be given independence, that the nationality of its people be recognized, that Montenegro be awarded a representation at the Peace Conference, and that the fate of Montenegro be determined by free and secret election.<sup>9</sup>

On March 4, Furlong reported that the French General Venel did not keep his promise to protect the Montenegrin insurgents who surrendered and reported that the conditions under which the members of the opposition to the new Montenegrin regime lived were deplorable, describing the cells in which they were placed and their daily rations.<sup>10</sup> On March 6, 1919, Furlong sent a message from Rome to General Churchill pleading for fair trials for the Montenegrin prisoners and asked that they be released on the promise to refrain

<sup>8</sup> Furlong Report, February 20, 1919, Box 3, Hoover Institution Archives. 6317—18. 08.

<sup>9</sup> Furlong Dossier, pp. 5—6.

<sup>10</sup> Furlong Papers, Box 3.

from disorderly activity. Again he proposed that American and British troops be sent to Montenegro for policing purposes, and that the Serbians and Italians not be included in any international police force.<sup>11</sup>

### *Furlong Interviews the Komiti Who Appeal to Wilson*

On February 21, 1918, Major Furlong interviewed the insurgents (»revolutionists«), the so-called »komiti«, located in the mountains south of Nikšić. The interview occurred by happenstance when the Major and his escort were stopped on the road to Nikšić. One of the leaders of the *komiti*, Radojica Nikčević, invited the Major to a nearby house and proceeded to explain his group's attitude to »the present government« in Montenegro. Nikčević complained against the Serbian army in the Nikšić area, and the manner in which the November elections were held, expressing his group's readiness to accept the results of honest elections. They resented the order to replace King Nikola's insignia from their caps with that of King Peter and complained that their homes had been plundered and families abused. The insurgents told Furlong that if Yugoslavia must be a monarchy, they would prefer King Nikola over King Peter as their monarch, but given a choice, they would prefer a republic. They also expressed preference for »a big Montenegro« over »a big Serbia«. If Montenegro became a part of Yugoslavia, the insurgents wanted King Nikola to remain as their King. What they firmly insisted on was for Montenegro to join Yugoslavia as an independent state.

The leader of the Nikšić insurgents, Radojica Nikčević, said that insurgency in Montenegro would end if the political prisoners were released, the refugees permitted to return home, and if the Serbian troops in Montenegro were replaced by English and American troops. Nikčević objected to the fact that the troops raised in Montenegro must swear allegiance to King Peter and that those who fail to respond to military call were subject to reprisals. He counted on the American Mission in Montenegro »to settle everything peacefully«. Furlong and his followers vented the same opinions and grievances that the American Major had previously heard and reported on.

On behalf of the representatives of eight insurgent clans from the Nikšić region, Nikčević entrusted Furlong, on February 23, 1919, with a letter to President Wilson. Furlong forwarded the letter to General Churchill, on March 11, 1919,<sup>12</sup> after he had it translated from Serbian into English. The eight clans, committed to the cause of the Greens, repeated their complaints against the Serbians (listing specific charges against them) and once again stated their de-

<sup>11</sup> Furlong Papers, Churchill, General M., Box 1.

<sup>12</sup> Z. Nikčević, Secretary of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.



mands. They were especially bitter against the Montenegrin »traitors«, whom they accused of agitating among the people to betray and »sell-out Montenegro«, and destroy »the authority of our King« and all his principal backers. The letter condemned the Montenegrins who sold out and held them morally and criminally responsible »to the people«. They were critical of the »Montenegrins who had emigrated to Serbia, and the South Slav soldiers, who had been taken prisoner by the Russians and later joined the Serbian army«. The insurgents wanted the traitors punished and the Montenegrin question cleared up by a court composed of »the most conscientious men of the country« and »the representatives of our allies«.

Stung by repeated charges of the King's betrayal of the Serb cause and Montenegro's capitulation to the enemy, the insurgents countered these charges by reminding the Allies of the Montenegrin contribution to the Allied war effort. Among other things, the insurgents claimed to have made possible the successful flight of the Serbian army abroad to resume fighting from foreign soil.<sup>13</sup>

The insurgents described the various election irregularities in November and criticized the deliberations and decisions of the National Assembly, which, they said, were not an expression of »the will of the people«. They insisted that the Resolution, passed by the Podgorica Assembly calling for the deposition of King Nikola and the merger of Montenegro into Serbia under the Karadorđević dynasty, did not reflect the popular choice. The insurgents promised to stop further shedding of blood if the Allies would send troops to Montenegro to re-establish peace and order. They spoke of the strength and dedication of their bands (*komiti*), and expressed confidence that the Serbians and their Montenegrin »collaborators« would not be able to extirpate them. In their letter to President Wilson, the Montenegrin insurgents complained that the Serbian officers had been stripping insignias from the dress of former Montenegrin officers and the communal presidents, and ripping off the monograms of King Nikola from »national caps«. They complained that the Serbian-established government in Montenegro resorted to violent methods, comparable to those of the Spanish Inquisition. They described the miserable social and economic conditions in Montenegro, and the tactics used by the civilian and military authorities to hunt, imprison and destroy the opposition and the insurgents.<sup>14</sup>

In their letter to the President the insurgents appealed to the Entente Powers to send troops to Montenegro as soon as possible to stop »all shedding of fraternal blood, to remove all stumbling blocks from the path of the Montenegrins«, to dissolve the Podgorica Assembly and declare its decisions null and void, and to hold a

<sup>13</sup> Furlong Papers, Letter to President Wilson, Box 10. Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>14</sup> Furlong Papers, Letter to President Wilson, Box 10.

new election for national deputies. They pledged to place themselves at the disposal of the Allies and to guarantee their safety. As for Montenegro's future, they proposed the creation of »a great Yugoslav state«. This, they said, was in line with Montenegrin »traditions« and the Montenegrins owed it as their »sacred duty« to their ancestors, who had »fought and shed [their] blood« for the Yugoslav cause on a number of occasions. But the insurgents made it amply clear that they would enter a Yugoslav state only on condition that their rights were fully recognized, and that the Grand Assembly elect the head of the state.

### *Conclusion*

The Furlong Dossier and reports represent but one view of the United States policy toward Montenegro, at a time when the official policy had not yet crystallized. The United States interests in Montenegro in 1918—1919 stemmed from its duties as an Allied nation, from the reports of civil strife in Montenegro, from the application of the Wilsonian principles (one of which called for the restoration of Montenegro) and from the fact that in a broader context the question of Montenegro had become an aspect of the heated Adriatic question. The United States had no other political objectives than to see that justice was done to Montenegro and its people. Initially, its sympathies lay with King Nikola and his government with which it had exchanged diplomatic representatives. It was against this background that Major Furlong performed his duty in Montenegro. His views reflected a fleeting moment in American relations with Montenegro. But in time the higher Allied interest came to prevail and, like the other Allies, the United States found itself on the side of the unionists and Serbia.

