Chapter 2
In Contradiction to Sociopolitical Norms, 1956–1960

Luburić’s defection completed what West German officials called the “tragi-comedy” of the Croatian separatist movement in the emigration. Pavelić’s HDS, Jelić’s HNO, and Luburić’s Otpor all ostensibly shared a common aim. But by the mid-1950s, the separatists had shifted their focus away from fighting the hated socialist Yugoslav state to a basic—and ruinous—internal power struggle. An analysis of the Croatian émigré political press by West German authorities—to provide one illustration—determined that a full three-fifths of all articles published during this period focused on “conflicts with opposing [émigré] groups or the polemic with the Serbs” rather than on the politics of independence. Of the remaining two-fifths, half dealt with issues related to life in Croatia and half with world events. But even these were written “by one side or the other as a way to underline the argument for their partisan political interests.”

The language used in this fratricidal conflict revealed the depth of the animosity among rival factions. As one of Luburić’s supporters avowed at the height of the general’s conflict with Pavelić: “Were we to return to the Homeland, we would set up two concentration camps: one for the traitors in the Homeland and one for the traitors in the emigration. Into the latter, should it prove necessary, we would stick Pavelić.” More concretely, members of one faction often physically harassed and intimidated supporters of rival groups if they failed to fall in line with one or the other organization. The situation so degenerated that competing groups even drew up liquidation lists for members of rival émigré organizations. One such list made by Pavelić’s supporters had Luburić as its first name—a striking and telling development considering the two men’s shared history.

Unsurprisingly, such verbal and physical confrontation only led to a downward spiral of antagonism among competing groups within the emigration, leading to ever deeper schisms. Still more important, the zealous and
even extremist posturing belied a fundamental truth about émigré Croatian separatism: the narcissism of minor intergroup differences had rendered the entire movement impotent. As the previously cited West German report from 1956 observed:

The long list of sensations in the Croatian emigration . . . gives the impression that the whole of the community is engaged in a kind of theatrical farce, in which the individual “character actors” are at loggerheads over the grace of the director, the fees, and the acclamation of the audience. What presents itself here is a tragicomedy, which unveils the shaky foundations upon which the “Independent State of Croatia” of 1941–1945 was built while at the same time—taking into account the other disputes among the various groups—reinforcing doubts that the Croatian emigration as a whole might be able to make a positive contribution to the “liberation” of Croatia and the construction of an independent Croatian state. ⁹

The struggle for an independent Croatian state, as émigré leaders were fond of proclaiming, was one without compromise. But in applying this conviction as much to petty and personal rivalries as to the struggle against actual enemies of Croatian liberation, separatist campaigners undercut their own efforts. The deep cleavages and political infighting that came to define émigré separatism in the 1950s stripped the movement of its impetus toward action. First and foremost, this meant that political violence, once a mainstay of émigré Croatian separatism, ceased to be part of the functional political repertoire of radicals. Émigré political leaders remained as fervent as ever in their books, treatises, op-ed pieces, and letters in support of the Croatian cause, including in their continued call to arms against the hated Yugoslav state and its “Serbo-communist” masters. But direct action such as that taken by the prewar incarnation of the Ustaše—that is, terrorism—was effectively abandoned as a form of political engagement.

**Pavelić’s Last Stand**

Exacerbating the prevailing disharmony and derision among radical émigrés was Ante Pavelić’s desire to reassert himself as the unchallenged leader of the separatist movement. Pavelić, after all, was still—and in his imagination would always be—the poglavnik, and to whatever degree he may have contributed to the overall devitalization of Croatian separatism in the postwar period, in his mind nothing could change the reality of his singular place in history, not only of radical Croatian nationalism but indeed of the Croatian nation as a whole. Even Pavelić’s staunchest critics among his fellow separatists
conceded that the former poglavnik should be praised for having achieved something that no other Croatian political leader had since the year 1102—namely, national independence. Conscious of this legacy, in the mid-1950s Pavelić returned to the basics of the prewar Ustaša movement in an effort to recover the support he had lost to Jelić and Luburić.

Pavelić understood that any enduring appeal he possessed depended first and foremost on his role as founder of the Independent State of Croatia. Rather than viewing the NDH as a dark stain on Croatia’s past from which they needed to distance themselves, radical nationalists saw it as confirmation that Croatian independence was a “historical truth” that gave legitimacy to their continued struggle. As Pavelić’s Australian rival Srečko Rover wrote in an open letter cum treatise on the prospects for socialist Yugoslavia’s survival in 1955: “Nothing is more unfortunate for a nation than unreal politics based on mere imagination, and no one is guiltier of bringing downfall on their own people than are the ones who base their national fight on chimeras, and who do not and could not see real facts.” The mere existence of the wartime Independent State of Croatia meant that national liberation inarguably belonged to the politics of the possible, on the grounds that any nation that had once had a state of its own could have one again. Whatever one thought about Pavelić, he had made Croatian statehood a reality—this provided, of course, that one ignored the fact that the NDH’s establishment was possible only as a result of the Nazi invasion and subsequent defeat of royalist Yugoslavia, as most radical émigrés did. Thus, for émigré separatists the pursuit of separatist politics intrinsically belonged to the realm of the attainable and not to some indefensible pipe dream.

In both his rhetoric and—perhaps more importantly—his organizational skills, Pavelić mobilized this legacy to help stem the tide of defections to his rivals. In 1956, Pavelić fundamentally restructured both his own post-Ustaša separatist party and the larger global network that linked the organizations that remained loyal to him. He did so—as described by contemporaneous Australian authorities—in an effort to “[re-]activate his political efforts and to give them a broad base.” Pavelić began his organizational restructuring by abandoning the Croatian State-Forming Party that he had founded in 1951. Originally, Pavelić had hoped that the HDS might bestow a modicum of respectability on the postwar remnants of the Ustaše. He quickly discovered, however, that this strategy suffered from a double failing. On the one hand, the depravity of the NDH regime ensured that anything that Pavelić touched would be both politically and morally contaminated. Even if the Western Powers preferred former fascists to communists, Pavelić was too intimately connected to Hitler, Mussolini, and the fascist war against the Allies to ever be trumpeted as a figure for democratic national self-determination. On the
other hand, Pavelić’s attempts to gain credibility undermined his radical credentials among many of his longtime supporters. Many combatants envisioned a struggle for Croatian independence that rejected compromise, a principle that many felt Pavelić and the Croatian State-Forming Party had abandoned. Essentially, in wanting to be accepted by the West—which was never going to happen—Pavelić alienated his own supports, leaving him isolated.

To replace the HDS, Pavelić established the Croatian Liberation Movement (HOP; Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret) on June 8, 1956. Much like Jelić’s HNO, the HOP was conceived not as a party unto itself but as a broad “national front” organization that would integrate the efforts of any and all groups seeking Croatian liberation anywhere in the world. As elucidated in its constitution, the HOP was “a universally Croatian, non-party, and democratic movement . . . [with] its aim being to provide the framework within which to concentrate, coordinate, and reinforce the activities of the adherents of, [inter alia], the Croatian Ustaša Movement, . . . as well as of all the patriots grouped in associations and organizations under a variety of names in a variety of foreign countries, and pursuing the same goal of liberation.” Pavelić gave the HOP the appearance of striving to be a relatively loose confederation of like-minded groups that shared a common aim but wished to maintain their own organizational structures. While he sought to cloak the organization with a democratic structure and mission, in reality the HOP was effectively a vehicle for the poglavnik to reconsolidate his position as leader of radical separatist politics.

Central to this rebranding of the HDS was Pavelić’s conscious aim to imbue the new organization with the legacy of the interwar Ustaše. He did so most obviously by invoking the name itself in the HOP’s constitution. Among all the émigré separatist groups operating in the world, the HOP alone would be the direct successor to the original Ustaše, and thus the only one capable of once again achieving Croatian independence. Less obviously—but possibly more shrewdly—Pavelić sought in particular to channel the spirit of the prewar Ustaše by characterizing the HOP as a movement as opposed to a party. For Pavelić, it was important that the HOP have the appearance—at least in the eyes of his followers—of being a true social and political phenomenon, not simply a legal institution. In naming his organization the Croatian Liberation Movement, he hoped to imbue the HOP with a revolutionary character that would have been muted had it been called a “party” or “organization,” regardless of its actual nature. Such a rhetorical strategy, of course, was not new to Pavelić. In 1933, notably, he had rechristened the “Ustaša–Croatian Revolutionary Organization” (Ustaša–Hrvatska revolucionarna organizacija) to “Ustaša–Croatian Revolutionary Movement” (Ustaša–Hrvatski revolucionarni pokret).
More pragmatically, Pavalić gave the HOP a structure that would bring as many of his former followers back into his camp as possible. Five regional Central Committees—South America, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe—were given the mandate to organize, administer, and supervise all local and national separatist groups. Essentially, the HOP would serve as an umbrella organization that was open to any group involved in the struggle for Croatian independence. The only proviso, of course, was that “the group has not offended and is not acting against the Croatian Liberation Movement.”

Nominally, the Central Committees were to be agents of cooperation that operated above and outside party politics. Local branches of the HOP in places such as West Germany and Australia, for instance, formally shared equal status with what might be dozens of ostensibly equal independent affiliates of these Central Committees. In practice, however, leading members of local HOPs controlled not only the executive boards of their own organizations but also those of regional Central Committees. In the end, the Central Committees effectively became little more than subsidiaries of local HOPs, which, in turn, remained steadfastly loyal to the poglavnik.

The most important regional committee was the Central Committee of Croatian Associations in Europe (SOHDE; Središnji odbor hrvatskih družtava Evrope), which comprised delegates from fifty-four separate organizations from across the continent. Together with the HOP in West Germany, SOHDE included groups as diverse as the United Croats of West Germany (UHNj; Ujedinjeni Hrvati Njemačke), a group of hardline radicals founded in 1950, and the Croatian Worker’s Union for Germany (HRS; Hrvatski radnički savez za Njemačku), a union of miners that had ties to the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB; Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund). SOHDE also comprised a restructured HOS that replaced the one eviscerated by the loss of three of its four senior commanders following Luburić’s split with Pavalić and served as the military wing of the HOP. The similarly diverse Central Committee of Croatian Associations in Australia (SOHDA; Središnji odbor hrvatskih družtava Australije) encompassed twenty-five different organizations. In all, each of the five regional Central Committees gave greater cohesion to the political, organizational, and even military resources available to Pavalić, who was able both to stem the growing tide of dissidence against him and reactivate his remaining supporters.

The changes made by Pavalić largely enabled him to reverse many of the setbacks he suffered during the first half of the 1950s. The HOP’s organizational structure acknowledged, accommodated, and indeed exploited the disunity within the émigré separatist movement. This allowed him to create a network of followers that enjoyed greater breadth than either Jelić or Luburić could manage. By the end of the decade, the HOP became the
most prominent organization among radical nationalists within the Croatian diaspora, reclaiming the title from the HNO and Otpor. As one assessment of the HOP by West German Authorities in July 1959 affirmed: “After a severe crisis, which this group underwent in the postwar period, . . . [the HOP] has recently succeeded in gaining new impetus and momentum. Today, it is undoubtedly the strongest, most active, and best organized political group in the Croatian emigration.” Pavić’s position as leader of the radical émigré separatist movement remained far from uncontested, but through the HOP the poglavnik ensured at the very least that his own personal vision for a postwar Ustaša movement lived on.

Unfortunately—from Pavić’s perspective—the poglavnik himself could enjoy only briefly the benefits of his structural reorganization. Late in the evening of April 10, 1957—on the sixteenth anniversary of the establishment of the NDH—Pavić was shot as he left a bus in the Buenos Aires suburb of Lomas del Palomar. The gunman fired five times, striking the poglavnik twice, once near the spine and once in the clavicle. The assailant was most likely Blagoje Jovović, a Montenegrin émigré to Argentina who, during World War II, had fought first with the Partisans and then the Četniks. By Jovović’s own account—which he first made public in 1999—the would-be assassin acted independently of the Yugoslav or any other security services. Instead, Jovović shot Pavić because—as he later claimed to have said at the time of the shooting—“I want to kill the greatest butcher of Serbs, I want to avenge Serbian victims, and I’m going to do it because I’m a Serb; I do it for the nation [narod].”

Pavić’s wounds were not life-threatening. But they were serious enough to require hospitalization. Consequently, both the poglavnik’s identity and whereabouts—which had been something of an open but nevertheless still guarded secret—came to the attention of first local, then national, and ultimately international media. They also came to the attention of the government in Belgrade. Within a week of the assassination attempt, Yugoslavia renewed its request for Pavić’s extradition with the government in Buenos Aires, to which the government in Buenos Aires relented on April 28, 1957. To Belgrade’s dismay, however, three days previously the still recovering Pavić had clandestinely fled Argentina to neighboring Chile. For a third time in his life, Pavić was forced into exile.

While the assassination attempt on Pavić was unsuccessful, it did effectively bring to an end the Poglavnik’s public political career. Following his flight from Argentina, Pavić was rumored to have taken up the position of head of secret police under Paraguay’s dictator Alfredo Stroessner. In truth, Pavić’s movements after April 1957 were somewhat less dramatic. After a short sojourn in Chile, Pavić opted to return to Europe, at least in part to
reduce the distance between himself and his main rivals in the émigré separatist movement. Unfortunately for Pavelić, as both a former Nazi quisling and a wanted war criminal his options were limited; post–World War II Europe, simply, was not South America. In the end, Pavelić had little choice but to seek patronage from one of the few ideological allies remaining on the continent. Francisco Franco agreed to provide the poglavnik sanctuary in Spain, but only under certain provisions. As with Mussolini in the period following the 1934 assassination of King Aleksandar, the Spanish leader demanded as a condition of refuge that the poglavnik withdraw from both political and public life. With few alternatives, Pavelić accepted Franco’s offer and entered into what some would have considered a long-overdue retirement. Occasionally, Pavelić issued communiqués to the émigré community calling for a unified front against continued “Serbo-communist” hegemony over Croatia. But any pretense that Pavelić remained the functional leader of the separatist movement all but disappeared. On December 28, 1959, two years after arriving in Spain and more than two and a half years after being shot, Pavelić died in a German hospital in Madrid, having receded into relative obscurity.

That Pavelić, before being shot, was able to maneuver the HOP to the forefront of Croatian émigré separatism during the second half of the 1950s said less about the strengths of his organization than the weaknesses of not just the poglavnik’s rivals but indeed of the separatist movement as a whole. The HOP owed its initial successes as much to the failure of either Jelić or Luburić to build on the promising inroads they had made against Pavelić earlier in the decade as it did to the poglavnik’s own maneuverings. The previously cited West German assessment of the HOP’s ascendance missed this important detail, thus overestimating the organization’s strength. It also explains why Pavelić’s death was less of a blow to radical separatism than it might have been under different circumstances. There was no question as to Pavelić’s historical and symbolic importance for most—if not all—separatist nationalists through to the end of the 1950s. But Pavelić had by the time of his death ceased to be a unifying political force for the Croatian cause. Although Pavelić enjoyed a bona fide political revival during the second half of the 1950s, his own inefficacy, as well as that of the broader movement in the immediate postwar years, mitigated the significance of his death for those seeking the destruction of socialist Yugoslavia and the establishment of an independent Croatian state.

Disarray, Disfunction, and Deception
The inability of either Jelić or Luburić to expand on their initial gains within the political diaspora spoke to the extreme dysfunction within the radical separatist movement. Of the two pretenders to the throne, the case of Luburić is simpler but also somehow less explicable. Ultimately, internal strife presented less of
a problem than did simple organizational inertia. Luburić functioned well as a firebrand and zealot but less so as a calculating political agent. In the first five or so years of its existence, Otpor did little to galvanize its initial supporters. Luburić’s detractors employed the hackneyed but nevertheless effective ploy of emasculating Luburić, blaming Otpor’s relative ineffectiveness on Luburić’s inability to be master of his own home. As recounted in one West German report, Luburić’s enemies declared that his failure to build his base was due to the fact that “he had difficulties with his wife, who demanded that he give up politics.” In truth, the issue was Luburić’s political inexperience and failure to develop a clear program for Otpor. Organizing, motivating, and leading a diverse and dispersed political organization, Luburić discovered, was not the same as leading fanatical militants into battle, as he had done during World War II. Nevertheless, Luburić made no efforts to coordinate his efforts with others such as Jelić to build a collective alternative to Pavelić and the HOP. In time, Luburić would acquire the political acumen to fulfill to some degree the revolutionary promises made at the time of his split with the poglavnik in the mid-1950s. But in the period leading up to Pavelić’s death, Luburić remained passive, after he had stormed onto the scene with such force.

The decline of Jelić’s HNO, in comparison, was both more public and more dramatic. During the first half of the 1950s, Jelić had built support for the HNO in part by playing off the organizational infighting within Pavelić’s HDS that had initially soured so many to the poglavnik. By the end of the decade, however, the HNO succumbed to the same kind of internal strife. The downward spiral began in September 1958, when the HNO executive committee moved to suspend one of the organization’s most prominent members, Miroslav Varoš. In addition to being a member of the executive committee, Varoš was second treasurer of the HNO, vice director of the section for propaganda and information, and chair of the central committee of the HNO’s Italian branch. Ostensibly, Varoš was suspended from the HNO for misappropriating funds in his role as second treasurer. The alleged infraction involved the rather paltry sum of 19,429 Italian lira, at the time worth about 130 DM or US$31. In reality—as was all too typical within the émigré separatist movement at the time—the censure of Varoš was the result of a power conflict between the two leading personalities within the HNO.

Importantly, Varoš himself was not one of these two men. Rather, the conflict was between Jelić and Krunoslav Draganović, the leading figure of the Italian wing of the HNO. Draganović is probably most widely remembered for his role in the infamous ratlines that facilitated the escape of thousands of Ustaše—along with other Nazis and Nazi collaborators—to South America following World War II. Despite the overall success of these escape routes, Draganović and Pavelić had—almost predictably—an intractable falling out
soon after the end of the war. The cause of this estrangement between the two prominent Ustaša figures remains clouded in conjecture. The most prominent rumor within the diaspora at the time suggested that Draganović had arrogated part of the Ustaša gold entrusted to him for safekeeping, which understandably angered Pavelić. Whatever the actual cause, the schism between Draganović and Pavelić was all too real, leading the former to ally himself with Jelić from the earliest days of the HNO. Although Draganović never held a prominent position within Jelić’s organization, he supported the efforts of Jelić and the HNO through, in his own words, “charitable and social activity.” Nevertheless, as reported by West German authorities, “this naturally did not prevent him from becoming behind the scenes the most active personality within the Croatian National Committee as well as its ‘Grey Eminence.”

For much of the 1950s, Draganović remained faithful to the HNO’s party line as set out by Jelić. A series of personal setbacks, however, convinced Draganović of the need to broaden his influence within the émigré community, including among those outside the HNO. In early 1958, Draganović had been passed over for the position of rector of the San Girolamo degli Illirici seminary in Rome, a post he long had coveted. To make matters worse, Draganović lost out to a candidate—Giorgio Kokša—favored by the regime in Belgrade. Adding insult to injury, Draganović was then forced to vacate completely his rooms at the seminary where he had resided since 1943 ahead of a visit to the Vatican by the archbishop of the Catholic Church in Belgrade, Josip Antun Ujčić. In what can only be considered a related development, just months after his eviction from San Girolamo, Draganović began working as an informant for United States Army Intelligence against socialist Yugoslavia.

The leadership of the HNO—Jelić in particular—was, of course, displeased by Draganović’s actions. Exacerbating tensions between Draganović and Jelić were persistent rumors that thousands of deutsche marks raised in social programs run by the former in the name of the HNO ended up in his own personal bank account and not that of the organization. A further complication was that, as a priest, Draganović was in many ways beyond reproach, creating a problem for Jelić. Beyond the reverence in which many Croats held the Catholic Church, since its founding the HNO relied more than any other émigré group on clerical elements for support, making any public reprimand of Draganović difficult. Instead, Jelić sought to undermine the priest by weakening and marginalizing the entire Italian wing of the HNO, which meant first and foremost removing Draganović’s closest collaborator and ally in Italy, Varoš.

This gambit, however, failed when Draganović—whether acting out of necessity or opportunity—found in the HNO Executive Committee’s censure of Varoš an occasion to further elevate his position within the émigré
community. Instead of capitulating to Jelić, Draganović and Varoš went on the offensive by detaching the Italian faction of the HNO from the German one. In May 1960, Draganović and Varoš formed yet another new émigré separatist political organization, the Croatian Democratic Committee (HDO; Hrvatski demokratski odbor), headquartered—like Jelić’s organization—in Munich but comprised almost wholly of members of the HNO’s Italian wing. To be sure, there was real intellectual dissension prior to 1959 between the Draganović/Varoš and Jelić cliques, primarily regarding the potential governmental structure of any eventual independent Croatian state. However, as was often the case in rifts within the radical émigré community, personal rather than political disputes were central to Draganović and Varoš’s defections from the HNO.

The impact of this split within the HNO’s leadership precipitated a crisis in the organization. As one Australian report asserted: “During the period 1953–7 it can be reasonably said that the [Croatian] National Committee was pre-eminent in Croatian activities in West Germany” and elsewhere. The same, however, could not be said of the HNO’s standing by the end of the decade. Both the influence and importance of the organization abated significantly during the closing years of the 1950s, in large measure due to a failure of the HNO to contend with the successes of Pavelić’s HOP. If Jelić harbored any plans to reverse this trend once Pavelić was out of the picture, those plans were effectively dashed by the rupture in the HNO brought on by Draganović and Varoš. At precisely the moment when Jelić should have been focusing his energies on expanding the HNO’s base—meaning, the period following Pavelić’s death—he was forced instead to work full time consolidating his position within the organization he himself had founded.

Unfortunately for Jelić, even this proved too much for the one-time hope of the émigré separatist movement. Just two years after Draganović and Varoš officially broke from the HNO to form the HDO, Jelić faced further revolt within the ranks of his organization. In the early 1960s, a number of prominent members of the Croatian diaspora endeavored to establish an all-encompassing international assembly of political parties, organizations, companies, and individuals dedicated to the cause of Croatian independence called the Croatian National Council (HNV; Hrvatsko narodno vijeće). Simply put, the HNV was ill-fated from the start, as arguably the three most high-profile, which is not to say most important, relevant, or influential, groups in the Croatian diaspora—namely, the HOP, HSS, and HNO—all refused to collaborate on the project. Those who did participate, meanwhile, proved prone to the same kinds of personal and political disputes and conflicts that had plagued the émigré separatist movement since the earliest postwar years. The first meeting of the HNV, held in New York City in August 1962, proved to be the last, at least of the council’s first iteration.
Although the HNO executive committee did not endorse the HNV, Jelić attended the meeting in New York anyway, claiming to represent all European-based Croats. Upon his return to Europe, he was confronted by two of his closest confidants and allies, Mate Frković, who had been the last NDH minister of the interior, and Stjepan Buć, a cofounder of the HNO and former head of the Croatian National Socialist Party (HNSS; Hrvatska nacionalsocialistička stranka). The clash between Jelić and the Frković/Buć clique led to a very public series of recriminations and accusations that ranged, once again, from the political to the personal. This included an article by Frković that echoed the rhetoric of emasculation earlier levied against Luburić, in which he wrote that “the great man and great Croatian politician” Jelić was merely a “completely ordinary plaything in the hands of his wife.” In any case, the conflict resulted in yet a further split in the HNO, with Jelić relocating one faction of the organization to West Berlin and Frković and Buć taking over the remnants of the HNO in Munich.

Back in Italy, the disarray in the HNO might have been a boon to Draganović and Varoš’s newly formed HDO, had it not inherited the dysfunction endemic to its precursor, and indeed the entirety of the separatist movement. Just one year following its establishment, the HDO experienced a debilitating fracture of its own. The schism followed a familiar script. At a meeting of the HDO held in Münster in November 1961, the group’s leading intellectual and one of the more enigmatic figures in the nationalist diaspora, Ante Ciliga, tabled a motion to reorient the group’s approach to advancing the cause of Croatian independence. Rather than continuing as a revolutionary political organization, Ciliga argued, the HDO should adopt a policy of promoting passive resistance to Belgrade in the homeland by helping build from the outside a legal, grassroots parliamentary opposition to the regime within the Socialist Republic of Croatia itself.

During the interwar period, Ciliga had been a prominent figure in the left wing of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ; Komunistička partija Jugoslavije), serving as regional secretary for Croatia and editor of the party’s official organ, Borba. After his expulsion from royalist Yugoslavia in 1926, Ciliga joined the Soviet Communist Party and moved to Moscow. Due to his close personal and ideological relationship with Leon Trotsky, however, Ciliga was arrested and exiled to Siberia four years after his arrival in the USSR. As an Italian citizen by birthplace—Istria, where he was born, came under Italian control after World War I—Ciliga was released in 1935 as part of a larger agreement between Mussolini and Stalin. Eventually, Ciliga settled in Paris, where as an “ultra-leftist,” he issued fervent and embittered denunciations of both Stalinism and Trotskyism. Following the German occupation of the French capital in 1940, he returned to Croatia, only to
be arrested and imprisoned in the Jasenovac concentration camp. Ciliga’s fierce anti-Soviet credentials made him useful to the NDH, however, and in 1943 he was released from Jasenovac and drafted to serve as an intellectual critic of Bolshevism and the USSR for the NDH’s politico-cultural weekly *Spremnost* (Readiness).

After the war, Ciliga ultimately settled in Rome, where he became a leading émigré critic of both communism and fascism as well as a committed supporter of national—and above all Croatian—rights. He was an early supporter of the HNO and for much of the 1950s worked closely with Jelić, most notably through his publication of the HNO’s *Bilten Hrvatskog narodnog odbora u Italiji* (Bulletin of the Croatian National Council in Italy). When Draganović and Voroš split from the HNO, Ciliga sided with his compatriots in Italy. Within two short years, however, Ciliga found himself on the outs with the HDO leadership, which viewed his ideas not just as a threat to the organization but to the very project of nationalist separatism. Shortly after the meeting in Münster, Ciliga and his supporters were expelled from the organization for “actions incompatible not only with the spirit of the organization’s statute, but also with the wishes and actions of Croatians in the homeland and their determination, to the very end, to persevere until victory,” adding yet one more rift to the growing number of cleavages besetting the émigré separatist movement.

Ciliga’s ouster, meanwhile, was little more than a prelude to a more momentous event later in the decade that would impact the HDO—and indeed the entire émigré separatist movement. While on a visit to the border city of Trieste in September 1967, Krunoslav Draganović disappeared without a trace. For two months, the priest’s whereabouts remained a mystery, leading to rampant speculation regarding his fate within the émigré community. Many assumed that Draganović had either been kidnapped by Udba operatives and forcibly repatriated to socialist Yugoslavia or simply had been murdered by agents of the regime. In early November, however, Draganović resurfaced at a press conference organized by the Yugoslav government in Sarajevo. He declared that his return to socialist Yugoslavia had been voluntary. In a letter released by governmental authorities, he also explained that he had come to recognize fundamental changes both within Yugoslavia and in the Holy See’s policies toward the countries of eastern Europe, leading him to return to his homeland.

Within the emigration, of course, there was suspicion that both Draganović’s repatriation and his sudden praise of the regime had been coerced rather than undertaken freely. With time, however, questions among émigré separatists began to circulate that reconsidered the actions of Pavelić’s former right-hand man in the Vatican. After his return to socialist Yugoslavia,
Draganović was allowed to move freely within Bosnia and Croatia, and photographs of his travels appeared often in Yugoslav newspapers. Furthermore, Draganović never appeared before a Yugoslav court, even though the regime had previously declared him a war criminal. These “facts” led many to believe that Draganović had long been an informant for the Yugoslav security services, if not an actual agent provocateur for the Udba.

Such doubts were also fueled by the equally furtive return to socialist Yugoslavia of Draganović’s closest postwar ally, Miroslav Varoš. Under circumstances not unlike those of Draganović four years earlier, Varoš—along with his wife and daughter—disappeared following a family trip to Milan in January 1971. Sometime later, the Varoš family appeared in Zagreb before settling down near the coastal city of Split. Over the years, rivals had repeatedly accused Varoš of being an Udba agent, although—as seen in the previous chapter—leveling such a charge was almost obligatory for any attack on an opponent within the émigré separatist movement. For many, however, Varoš’s return to socialist Yugoslavia confirmed this claim, especially because he, like Draganović, never faced charges of any kind and was able to live freely until his death. Varoš’s voluntary repatriation was also damning for Draganović, as his long-standing relationship with Varoš was cast in a new light. Even more, a long shadow fell over the entire émigré separatist old guard, as once more, the landscape of radical nationalist organizations in the diaspora grew only more convoluted and complex.

A New Generation

The state of disarray that characterized émigré separatism so crippled the movement that active political agitation for an independent Croatian state became only a secondary or even tertiary priority for radical organizations within the diaspora. Instead, competition for new recruits became the foremost priority of rival factions by the late 1950s. As one West German report from 1956 stated bluntly: “The struggle among the three main groups [the HOP, HNO, and Otpor] in Europe . . . has become primarily and foremost about mining the newest group of refugees. Pavelić, for example, has assigned his agents in Austria, Italy, and especially the Federal Republic [of Germany] to conscript [these new refugees] as ‘Cadres of the Croatian Liberation Army.’” At the heart of this competition was the employment of ever escalating radical rhetoric, dicta, and doctrines to win new supporters. Such extremism was necessary for groups to both differentiate themselves from one another and for them to establish and prove their nationalistic and revolutionary credentials. While this competition further weakened the movement in many respects, the rivalries that developed ultimately helped stimulate the reradicalization of Croatian émigré separatism.
The target for recruitment among the various factions of postwar emigrants was a new generation of migrants who moved from socialist Yugoslavia to the West in increasing numbers starting in the late 1950s. In contrast to the immediate postwar generation, these new emigrants left socialist Yugoslavia more for economic than political reasons. Between 1952 and 1962, the number of unemployed in Yugoslavia rose by over 500 percent—from 45,000 to 237,000—despite the promise of full employment in socialist ideology. Among the factors behind this problem was the country’s rapid urbanization in the decade following World War II. While urbanization helped fuel the modernization of Yugoslavia’s economy in the 1950s, employment in factories and other urban industries could not match the growing labor pool migrating from the countryside to the cities. At the same time, the sustained expansion of western Europe’s postwar economy—particularly in West Germany with its so-called \textit{Wirtschaftswunder} (economic miracle)—led to an acute labor shortage in the West that increased demand for migrant workers. The lack of work at home and the promise of employment abroad made emigration an attractive option for many young Yugoslavs. In the decade between 1953 and 1963, between a quarter and a half million people migrated from socialist Yugoslavia in search of employment despite emigration from Yugoslavia being illegal from the end of World War II until the early 1960s.

Although the promise of work served as the primary magnet for migration in the 1950s and 1960s, the distinction between “economic” and “political” for this new generation of migrants was intrinsically ambiguous, contingent, and mutable. In part, this was due to the way the state itself dealt with emigration, at least officially, until the 1960s. Economics—and by extension economic migration—was axiomatically politicized in Tito’s Yugoslavia. In the immediate postwar period—as was the case elsewhere in state socialist eastern Europe—Belgrade pursued economic policies that were highly planned and centralized. These included, to quote William Zimmerman, “autarchy, full employment through mass underemployment, political factories, nationalization, and the expropriation of foreign holdings.” Such measures, the state promised, would lead to the end of capitalism’s many afflictions, including unemployment. Crucially, however, socialism’s guarantee of employment did not come without obligations of its own. To work—that is, to be employed—was considered to be a moral responsibility for all members of society. Employment functioned as a kind of social contract between the regime and the populace, upon which not just the economic but political and social order of the state rested.

Consequently, Belgrade considered economic migration to be an inherently political act. To leave the country in search of work, to cite the prominent Yugoslav geographer Ivo Baučić, “was in contradiction to socio-political
It challenged the core ideology of the state, undermining one of the regime’s principal claims to legitimacy. Thus, to seek employment abroad was not simply frowned upon; it was seen as treasonous. As the official economic organ of socialist Yugoslavia *Ekonomska politika* conceded in 1969, economic migration before the change in policy in the early 1960s by definition “meant also political emigration. . . . Going to work in a foreign country was treated as well nigh a betrayal.” Simply, even if an individual’s decision to emigrate from socialist Yugoslavia was made for purely economic reasons, there was no escaping either the political significance or ramifications of the act. This remained true even following the regime’s pragmatic decision, beginning in the late 1950s, to tacitly tolerate some degree of economic migration as a mechanism for relieving pressure on the domestic economic and political situation.

In any case, the impulse to leave Yugoslavia before the early 1960s was rarely wholly economic. As has often been noted, socialist Yugoslavia fared in most respects substantively better than its Soviet-satellite neighbors in the decades after World War II. The enactment of economic policies particular to Yugoslavia’s brand of state socialism—most notably workers’ self-management and an openness to economic assistance from the West—led to a higher standard of living than in the Soviet Bloc. Yugoslavs also enjoyed greater personal liberties—including access to foreign goods and popular culture—than those living to the east of the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, Tito’s Yugoslavia retained many of the undemocratic and repressive qualities familiar to postwar European state socialism. The state’s approach to both nationalistic chauvinisms—to employ the parlance of the state—and organized religion in particular were often heavy-handed and severe. With the country’s experience of brutal ethnic atrocities committed during World War II not yet consigned to history, manifestations of nationalism were simply not tolerated by the regime. While organized religion may have received better treatment in socialist Yugoslavia than within the Soviet Bloc, the environment for believers remained inhospitable and even hostile, in particular for the Catholic Church. Further issues, such as the state’s failed attempts to collectivize the country’s agriculture and the harsh treatment of the regime’s political opponents in the immediate postwar era, contributed to widespread—if still mostly muted—discontent among many within the country. Compared to its eastern neighbors, postwar Yugoslavia may have been a model of progressive and tolerant socialism. But it could not escape many of the authoritarian trappings of one-party rule.

Many of those who did not benefit from the advances made by Yugoslavia’s brand of socialism inexorably linked economic hardship to both real and imagined political inequity, alienation, and subjugation. This was particularly true among those who came of age in the late 1950s and early 1960s. For this
generation—which had been born either after the war or too soon before it to have actively participated—the promises of both the regime and socialist ideology held less authority than for those who had contributed to Yugoslavia’s wartime antifascist struggle. Economic setbacks and governmental trespasses, for instance, faced greater scrutiny and were afforded less patience by this generation than that of their parents. By the early 1960s, this translated into a growing challenge to the state’s legitimacy by the very generation meant to benefit most from socialism’s triumph. As one mid-1960s report prepared by the American embassy in Belgrade on the growing generational crisis in socialist Yugoslavia laid bare: “Discontent among the students and working young people . . . is probably the most explosive nationalist element [in the country]. Croatia and Slovenia have a real generation problem. The young people have become adults since the ‘revolution’ and . . . care little whether their fathers or mothers were or were not partisans. What is important to them is that they have a role in the total life of the country not just one particular sector as most of their parents have, i.e. being producers with a political or social voice.”

That the issue was more pronounced in Croatia and Slovenia had myriad deeply rooted social, political, and economic reasons. Important here is the degree to which a generational shift was taking place in the country, one that concomitantly had implications not only for domestic politics in socialist Yugoslavia but for the development of separatist nationalism outside the country as well.

That Croats—together with Slovenes—were at the center of growing dissatisfaction with the economic and political situation in socialist Yugoslavia was reflected in the disproportionate percentage of people from the Republic of Croatia and predominately Croatian areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina who migrated illegally out of socialist Yugoslavia in the 1950s and early 1960s. In the first four years of the 1960s, for example, Croats from the Republic of Croatia made up on average 53 percent of those leaving the country, although the republic comprised less than 22 percent of Yugoslavia’s total population. Adding in Croats from Herzegovina and other parts of Bosnia, the percentage reached 65 percent. This demography of emigration reflected directly the growing generational crisis in socialist Yugoslavia. In 1959, 75 percent of all emigrants illegally crossing Yugoslavia’s borders to the country’s non-state socialist neighbors—namely, Italy, Austria, and, to a lesser extent, Greece—were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. Similarly, a majority of emigrants—roughly 60 percent—were either unskilled or semiskilled workers. An even higher percentage—around 80 percent—had completed at most an elementary education, with the majority even less.

Taken together, the combination of youth, lack of education, relative impoverishment, and general disaffectedness with socialist Yugoslavia made this new generation of emigrants attractive targets for radical separatist groups in
places like West Germany, Belgium, Sweden, and Australia. Even if, by and large, these new emigrants were not nearly as politically developed or engaged as those émigrés who had left Yugoslav lands in the immediate postwar period, what they lacked in conviction they made up for in the demographic and political characteristics that made them particularly susceptible to recruitment into the ranks of émigré separatism. This danger did not go unrecognized by the regime in Belgrade. In the words of the Central Committee of the Republic of Serbia—as reported by West German authorities—the high number of Croats emigrating out of Yugoslavia in the early 1960s was "not just a socio-economic, but also a political problem." Such was the concern in Belgrade that in 1962 the government adopted a wide-sweeping amnesty law aimed at repatriating upward of 150,000 émigrés living abroad. While the law ostensibly included all those who had left after 1945, the exceptions written into the law meant that generally only the more recent generation of emigrants qualified for the amnesty.

Not unrelated, it was, in fact, the illegal status of most emigrants from the late 1950s and early 1960s that most made this new generation of Croats abroad prone to radical émigré influences. To cross the frontier from Yugoslavia into Austria or Italy made Croatian emigrants illegal twice over, once in the eyes of the country they left and once in the eyes of the country into which they had entered. Instead of being greeted with employment, housing, and entry visas by authorities in Vienna or Rome, for instance, newly arrived emigrants were often consigned to grim refugee camps where they could wait for months, if not years, for the chance to start their new lives, provided, of course, that they were allowed to stay and were not just deported back to Yugoslavia. The situation for Croats who managed to get as far as West Germany—which was the primary destination of choice for the majority of emigrants—was in some ways even worse. In 1957, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) severed diplomatic ties with socialist Yugoslavia in line with the Hallstein Doctrine following the latter's recognition of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). As a result, Belgrade lacked both the standing and resources to pressure Bonn to expedite the processing of Yugoslav nationals in the country, unlike the governments of other countries with large immigrant populations in the FRG, such as Italy, Turkey, or Greece.

Consequently, many new arrivals sought routes to the West outside those provided by official channels. As often as not, these pathways were controlled by radical separatist émigrés. By the end of the 1950s, postwar émigrés had established a sizeable and influential presence in the refugee camps through which most new emigrants had to pass. Usually, this presence had its roots in the time the older émigrés themselves had been interned in the same facilities in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Émigré separatists also established myriad organizations outside the camps that officially were registered with authorities as being "humanitarian" or "cultural" but were, in fact, political
in nature. Additionally, postwar émigrés infiltrated more “reputable” relief organizations—such as Caritas, as discussed in the last chapter—dealing with the well-being of refugees. This was done both to spread their net as widely as possible in targeting possible recruits and to provide, to quote one Australian security service report, “a legitimate reason for taking part in a variety of Croatian activities” of a political nature involving new emigrants.

Through these various personal, occupational, and political connections, postwar émigrés could first target, then recruit, and finally groom potential recruits among newly arriving emigrants. They did so, plainly, by offering services and benefits that other organizations or governmental bodies simply could not. Older émigrés could arrange jobs, shelter, and even papers for fresh arrivals, removing considerable uncertainty and offering significant stability for new emigrants. Equally important, émigré networks provided a familiar social and cultural—and by extension political—environment within which new emigrants could more easily transition into their new lives abroad. Such was the appeal of these networks, in fact, that—as elucidated in one West German report dealing with the problems with and among Croats in the country—the greater majority of new emigrants came to believe that the “guarantees” necessary to secure a successful new beginning in the West could come only from “the older Emigrants” or “those who came before us” rather than through more official channels, such as local aid organizations, trade unions, or even local governments.

The issue, of course, was that older émigrés unfailingly asked for certain loyalties and commitments in return for the services and support they provided. As the aforementioned report continued: “Political groups exploited the economic situation . . . by coupling guarantees for [living and work] arrangements with their own goals.” In some cases, in order to benefit from the assistance offered by older émigrés, young, unmarried emigrants—who were the vast majority of new arrivals to the West—had to “voluntarily enlist” in “Croatian Divisions.” Any notion that these divisions were nothing more than social clubs was belied by the ritual oath required of members before they joined. As the pledge of one such division—the Secret Revolutionary Ustaša Formations (TRUP; Tajne revolucionarne ustaške postrojbe)—read:

I (name) swear to the almighty God, my honor, and all that is dear and holy to me, that I enter into the TRUP and HOP. I will hold secret all that which is trusted to me, even from my relatives and loved ones. I enter into TRUP and will fight for the liberation and re-establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. I dedicate myself to this end with my time and ability. I will trust my superiors and will not work without their knowledge and permission. In case I do not obey, I agree to every punishment laid out in the statutes, so help me God!
Furthermore, as part of the “recruitment” process, new draftees were asked about any time spent in the military as well as their highest rank. They were also required to sign a statement declaring themselves ready, should the need arise, “to fight for the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia.”

Once enlisted, recruits were often compelled to attend community “picnics” that in reality were training camps that provided “courses for espionage and terrorist-diversionist activities against the [Socialist Federal Republic] of Yugoslavia (SFRJ).” The headline for an article in a local separatist newspaper about one such gathering on the banks of the Murray River in the Australian city of Wodonga held in January 1963 read: “Today, the Murray: Tomorrow, the Drina,” leaving no doubt as to the intent of such outings.

Young emigrants who balked at the demands of older émigrés, meanwhile, faced the prospect of blackmail, extortion, and even bodily harm. One Australian governmental report, for instance, referenced “information coming to hand from overseas liaison sources to the effect that [radical separatist groups are] prone to use ‘strong-arm’ squads to threaten Croats in an attempt to either conscript them into their organization or to extract financial contributions for their cause.” Similarly, an American report on radical groups in West Germany noted that such groups went “even so far in exerting pressure as to maltreating and beating up these [emigrants] and threatening to report them to the German police as ‘Yugoslav spies’ and even to kill them.” The competition for new members among the various separatist organizations in the West meant that no strategy for bolstering the ranks of one or the other group could be left unexplored, including the victimization of those for whom the movement claimed to be fighting.

One tactic used by older émigrés, for instance, was to threaten those carrying falsified documents such as work permits and driver’s licenses with exposure to the police should the holder of those papers refuse to either join or financially support their organizations. That those perpetrating the blackmail had themselves provided the documents to the newly arrived emigrants was by design. Another ploy involved forcing new arrivals to subscribe to radical separatist newspapers and journals. This was done not only to fill the coffers of radical organizations in the diaspora but also to create a mechanism of coercing individuals into providing both personal and financial support for the separatist cause. Those holding subscriptions to the unvaryingly anticommunist and anti-Yugoslav periodicals faced having their “betrayal” revealed to Yugoslav authorities if they did not comply with the demands of older émigrés. The potential punitive consequences of being blacklisted by the regime in Belgrade for separatist tendencies—including not being able to return home to Yugoslavia or having family members back home persecuted by the state—was often enough to keep the victims of the blackmail in line.
In a similar vein, older émigrés were invested in ensuring that the status of illegal migrants to the West remained unsettled. As explicated in one American report, radical separatist organizations “tried to hinder by all means the émigrés in their desire to settle the question of their status in relation to the SFR of Yugoslavia. For this reason they resorted to individual terror against persons who were beginning to regulate their status or were ready to regulate it in the spirit of the [1962] amnesty.” Legal or economic insecurity, older émigrés understood, were powerful factors in the radicalization process of illegal emigrants. In perpetuating the legal limbo of new arrivals to the West, older émigrés could both maintain the political uncertainty—and by extension, the intrinsic political engagement—of young emigrants vis-à-vis the regime in Belgrade and ensure that the newer emigrants remained susceptible to, if not indeed reliant on, the influence of radical elements in the diaspora.

No less important, postwar émigrés complemented the material pressure they exerted on the younger generation of émigrés with a steady stream of radical propaganda that sought to reframe the ideological thinking of new arrivals, creating a radical discursive milieu that permeated Croatian diaspora political rhetoric throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Even if a new arrival to the West could successfully navigate the web of influence established by radical separatists—which, of course, most could—avoiding the charged discourses of the older émigrés that pervaded the relatively insular world of recent emigrants was considerably more difficult. Older émigrés ensured that radical discourse became part of the fabric of everyday life in the diaspora community, facilitated by the dissemination of extremist pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines whose content infiltrated the political discussions of every refugee camp, worker’s barrack, construction site, factory, restaurant, and bar where emigrants could be found. A young Croat new to the West may not have shared the political or ideological views of radical separatism, but nor could he or she totally evade exposure to the principles advanced by the postwar generation of émigrés.

The problem, of course, is that as much as a new arrival to the West had great difficulty in avoiding the radical politics of many older emigres, so, too, could he or she not avoid the endemic political and personal infighting that characterized the postwar separatist movement. As pervasive as the efforts to recruit new members by the older generation were, they failed to address the one thing that perhaps most hindered the movement for Croatian liberation—namely, the chasms that divided postwar anti-Yugoslav separatism. Consequently, members of the new, “semi-émigré” generation that began to trickle into the West in the 1950s could almost not but regard the “old guard” of former Ustaše more with suspicion and even derision than with reverence or respect. The aims of the older generation may have not just appealed to some
new arrivals in the West; many eagerly embraced them. But this was separate from whether the methods of the older generation held similar attraction. As the “old guard” soon discovered, the answer broadly was that they did not. Quite simply, among those for whom World War II was history and not lived experience, émigrés from the interwar and NDH period were seen simply as incapable of promoting Croatian interests within the “new political realities” of the Cold War. The consequence of this would be nothing less than a fundamental shift in the nature of the anti-Yugoslav separatist movement beginning in the 1960s.¹¹⁰