

## THE SECOND GENERATION OF SLOVENE AMERICANS AND THE YOUTH MAGAZINE *MLADINSKI LIST* – JUVENILE

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From the start the Slovene benefit societies in the United States had a dual purpose: to provide their members with sickness and death benefits and to unite the immigrants by promoting cultural activities. With the growth of the second generation the Slovene benefit societies were faced with a new challenge: how to preserve their role not only as insurance companies, but also as cultural centers. New ways of involving the immigrants' daughters and sons – the second generation of Slovene-Americans – became a central issue for the future existence of these societies.

*Slovenska narodna podporna jednota - the Slovene National Benefit Society (S.N.P.J.)* was founded in Chicago in 1904. At the Society's first convention a centralized structure of the organization was accepted, namely, that sick benefits like all the other types of benefits would be paid by the Society's central committee directly instead of by each local lodge separately, as was the case with many other societies. The Society at first admitted only men into its ranks but by 1909 women were allowed to become members with equal rights, although at first they were regarded suspiciously:

It was not long after the S.N.P.J. became nationally recognized as a progressive fraternal benefit society that the women began to get curious and ask questions about it. Especially this was true of the wives of those who attended lodge meetings. It was not uncommon for a meeting to last six, eight or even twelve hours in those days. In some few cases, we are told that the doors were locked and no one was allowed to leave until the president adjourned the meeting. It's no wonder that our women-folks began to take an interest in the affairs of the lodge and the Society. They wanted to know what was done about at the meeting about this or that question they heard about. Finally a few became so bold to join the Society.<sup>1</sup>

In 1913 the *S.N.P.J.* officially started admitting juvenile members - thus the *S.N.P.J.* embraced the entire family under its protection. The immigrants' children

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Vrhovnik, "In Honor of the *S.N.P.J.* Juvenile Thirtieth Anniversary", *Mladinski list - Juvenile*, XXII (1943): 3.

were enrolled by their parents when they were born. In 1913 the juvenile members numbered 1,407 and their membership steadily increased until the peak year 1928 when there were 19,331 juvenile members. When a member reached the age of sixteen he or she automatically became an adult member. The *S.N.P.J.* was soon aware that this passive membership was not enough. These children needed to be involved in the society activities otherwise they might be attracted by the better offers of other benefit societies which were not so ethnically orientated. To prevent this in 1922 after the Third Regular Convention of the *S.N.P.J.* a magazine the *Mladinski list-Juvenile* was founded. In 1925 the first English-speaking Lodge was organized in Chicago (No. 559 Pioneers). A year later the English section of *Prosveta*, the *S.N.P.J.* newspaper, started to be published.

The *Mladinski list-Juvenile* was published with the subtitle: "mesečnik za slovensko mladino" - *Monthly Magazine for Young Slovenes in America*. The first six issues were composed of sixteen pages equally divided between Slovene and English contributors, with the Slovene half given preferential space in the front half of the magazine. The cover and inner pages were alike as to color and quality, black print on ordinary newspaper. The pages were numbered consecutively, starting with the first issue of the year and ending with the final page of the last. The magazine like all the other *S.N.P.J.* publications had strong socialist orientation from the start.

The popularity of the *Mladinski list* spread quickly among both the juvenile and adult members of the *S.N.P.J.*. In fact, some time after it appeared, suggestions were received that it should be published twice a month instead of once. Rather than follow this suggestion, the number of pages was increased from sixteen to thirty-two, still half Slovene and half English beginning with the first issue of 1923. The 1925 issues incorporated a Slovene corner for practical grammar exercises. In 1927 a table of contents for the whole year started to be published with the December issue in order to facilitate the binding of the issues in a book.

On the one hand the content of the *Mladinski list-Juvenile* was rather didactic - it included informative articles about Slovenia and its traditions, with historical and scientific contributions. There were numerous articles speaking about the American Slovenes, the activities of the *S.N.P.J.* and articles on occasion of various *S.N.P.J.* anniversaries. On the other hand the core of the magazine was the original literary contributions written in either Slovene or English. Some of the poems, short stories and dramatic texts are outstanding in terms of form and subject matter, so they can be considered as being addressed to an adult public as well.

The first editor of *Mladinski list-Juvenile* was Jakob Zupancic. His wife Katka came to the United States in 1924 and soon started to write for the Slovene sections of the paper. At the start, the Slovene contributors outnumbered those of the English section. There were contributors from the homeland such as Tone Seliškar and Mile Klopčič. Louis Adamic started to write for the paper in February 1926. He freely translated into English some of the short stories by Ivan Cankar, the greatest Slovene writer. Other regular contributors such as Ivan Jontez and Anna Praček Krasna, who started writing for the paper in 1929, wrote for both the English and Slovene parts.

In 1929 Ivan Molek assumed the duties of chief editor of all the publications of the *S.N.P.J.* and this included *Mladinski list-Juvenile* too. In his editorial debut he presented the aims of the new editorial staff. They would strive to obtain more correspondents in both languages and to secure a greater number of subscribers. He particularly stressed the compelling need to find some local English-speaking writers. In fact, in the first years of the *Mladinski list-Juvenile* the English section contained little original material consisting mainly of reprints of English and American writers and poets. Other aims were to inform their readers of news regarding the homeland of their parents, to encourage their appreciation of their parents' native language and enhance their pride in their Slovene background. Since the readers were sons and daughters of Slovene workers, the paper had primarily to acquaint them with progressive cultural education. The reading matter of the magazine would concentrate on an educational and entertaining format.

In his editorial Ivan Molek stressed the role that parents needed to play to get their children interested in the *Mladinski list-Juvenile*. The new editor particularly stressed the role of this magazine within the family. He saw it as a tool for building mutual understanding, as a bridge between the two generations. He seemed to have been sensitive to the needs of children from working class families, where both parents worked and were out of home for twelve or more hours a day. These young people were left to themselves and thus subjected to the preponderant American influences. In August and September 1929 he wrote two articles for the parents. Interestingly, because both articles were addressed to the first generation immigrants, they were both written in Slovene. There he underlined the parents' responsibility towards their children, since they were their first educators in socialist and other important issues. Matters concerning the birth of children, death and other taboo questions had to be answered carefully, casting away all superstitions with the aid of science and scientific explanations. He stressed the importance of a sexual education. Only in this way would it be possible to ensure a stable mutual understanding between parents and children. He viewed education in quite a new, modern way, especially when one considers the enormous hold that Catholic morals had on the Slovene people. He attempted to show how many values changed in the New World and how the parents had to adapt to these changes:

The children are no longer obliged to their parents as in the Old Country. They will start to feel bound to them only when they take hold of permanent values, which convince them that they are morally obliged to respect and help their parents.<sup>2</sup>

These children were Americans by education and in thinking and they had only second-hand information about their parents' homeland. The Slovene they knew was the dialect they learnt from their parents. Their conception of the Slovene heritage was fragmentary – they remembered only some scraps of it: some words, some recipes, a song or two.

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<sup>2</sup> "Otrok ni dolžan staršem (stara domneva), otroci se bodo čutili dolžne napram staršem šele takrat, ko bodo prijeli od njih trajne vrednote, ki jih bodo uverile, da so moralno obvezani vračati spoštovanje in ponos," *Mladinski list – Juvenile*, IX (1929): 258. (The English text is my translation).

From the very beginning both English and Slovene readers of the *Mladinski list-Juvenile* had their own "Chatter Corner". Each was preceded by the editor's note – each in their respective languages, the former in English, the latter in Slovene. The Corner's contributors were children from seven to sixteen years. The editor usually encouraged the readers to be original, not to copy and to take the opportunity to write to improve their Slovene. He was committed to correcting the inevitable mistakes. Nevertheless, the majority of the contributions submitted were in English. In 1935 the English "Chatter Corner" was almost twice the size of the Slovene. For instance, in February 1932 on page 59 a contributor said that she particularly enjoyed reading English letters since she could not read Slovene. A lot of them would say that their parents had helped them. Some sent Slovene songs they had learned from their parents, especially their mothers and many appealed to the editor to correct their Slovene orthography. The editor continuously encouraged the contributions by announcing competitions among the English and Slovene corners and between boys and girls. Socialist ideas were continuously fostered. Readers were encouraged to write their own opinions on contemporary events and to report the social injustices they witnessed in their settlements and neighborhoods. The socialist attacks on the capitalist system were bitter especially during the years of the Depression.

The improvement of the *Mladinski list - Juvenile* was decided at the *S.N.P.J.* Eleventh Regular Convention in Cleveland, May 1937. From 1938 on, there was an improvement in the cover pages, now made of heavier material and colored differently from month to month. A much better quality of paper was being used and the pagination also changed. Every issue was paginated separately. Also the content of the contributions changed. They became lighter, more humorous and gay. There was not only the depiction of harsh social realities, but also children's verses and stories dealing with fantasy worlds started to appear. The general directives of the paper remained socialist, but they were not applied so rigidly anymore. There was no longer the division between the Slovene and English sections, the literary contributions as well as the readers' letters appeared together, whether in Slovene or in English. There was a large and increasing number of drawings and pictures illustrating the stories, articles and poems. There appeared a number of constant columns such as "Slovene Shufflegrams", "Stric Joško pripoveduje", "What's on Your Bookshelf", "Slovenia Cooking Club", "When We Play" and many others. Only in the year 1938 did there appear about twenty-eight constant columns. Among them was the column "Stric Joško pripoveduje" (Uncle Joško's stories). Under the pseudonym of Stric Joško was hidden the editor himself. The rubric is interesting for two main reasons. The most evident is the language. Ivan Molek used the "foni lengvič" (funny language) of the Slovene-Americans. The second aspect is the content. Through vivid dialogues the author in a humoristic way presented life in a Slovene community. It is interesting that he based many of the humorous sketches on his own autobiographical events the same ones that he would later gather in his autobiography.

In many cases he exaggerated the characteristics of this "mixed" language:

Ves žalosten in sor vakam po štritih Stare Avstrije v Čikagi. V Stari Avstriji je bilo takrat lacu salunov. Grem v salun. Še je bilo nekaj nikeljev v paketu.

Bojsi, ki so stali pri bari, so govorili slovensko.

"Ali ste Slovenci, bojsi?" jih vprašam.

"Nak, mi smo Kranjci," je bil odgovor.

Šaks, to je vseeno, jih trajam podučiti.

"Natink dujink! Mi smo Kranjci! Ta salun je kranjski salaun, imamo kranjsko društvo in kranjsko jednoto! Slovenci so oni, ki nič ne delajo – samo lote prodajajo in ki njuspeper printajo. Naš fadr, gospud fajmošter, so Slovenec – mi pa nismo, smo Kranjci. Mi delamo... Kaj si pa ti? Ali nisi Kranjc? Na obrazu se ti pozna, da si kranjski Janez... kja se boš postavljaj!"

Ali niso bili foni, ti naši Slovenci? Nekateri so bili samo Gorenjci ali Dolenjci, drugi so bili Beli Kranjci, vsi ostali pa so jim bili Črni Kranjci; Prekmurci so bili Madžari, Primorci pa Italijani. In Črnim Kranjcem so bili Beli Kranjci – Hrvati. Jako foni so bili ti naši ljudje.

In to ni bil naš edini trubl. Bili smo tudi Avstrijaki, Grajnarji, Bohunki in Hunketi – lacu imen smo imeli. Fajnali nismo sami znali – kaj smo.

Neki naš rojak mi je enkrat rekel: "Mi smo najmanjši pipl na svetu, ali če greš na nord pol, boš tam našel dva Kranjca, ki se bosta tepla... Najmanj nas je, smo pa olover!"...

These columns were received in two different ways. They were very successful among the young readers as their letters testify, but they were criticized by the older generation.<sup>3</sup> In the August 1938 issue an angry reporter attacked the "Stric Joško" series. He considered the column harmful to the younger generation's view of the Slovene language. But the purpose of Stric Joško was rather the opposite. He wanted to make the readers aware of the degradation of the language while at the same time amusing the readers by making fun of immigrants' shortcomings, misadventures and the eternal fights and disagreements between the clerics and the freethinkers.

The column can be regarded as one of the many attempts that were made by the *S.N.P.J.* to attract the young members to their organization. The magazine was continuously trying to combine Slovene and American elements. It was clearly run in an American way. There were frequently contests for the new Society slogan, the best poem or drawing. There were annual campaigns for new members and the

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: *Mladinski list-Juvenile*, III (1938): 22-23; IV (1938): 24; V (1938): 23; IX (1938): 22.

"old" members were directly involved in finding as many new members as possible.

In the year 1938 the independent Juvenile Circles were created. Elected or appointed adult members supervised these Juvenile Circles. The *Mladinski list-Juvenile* soon started to report on the Circles' activities and it became their paper. Moreover, an outline of very practical advice was being published. It aided the establishment of new circles and provided the local leaders with starting ideas for activities.

In 1944 a new name, "that shall have a greater appeal to the average American youth of Slovene or other extraction", was decided by the readers' contest. The new name, *Voice of Youth*, has lasted to the present day, although the magazine is now mainly in English, with occasionally one Slovene page only. The magazine's flexibility and constant ear for the interests of its young readers was probably the key to its survival and success.

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