

Sylwester Fertacz

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ESTABLISHMENT
AND ACTIVITY OF THE AMERICAN SLAV CONGRESS
DURING WORLD WAR II

In the face of the threat of Italian and German fascism at the end of the 1930s and at the beginning of the 1940s, representatives of various social and political groups of Slav states as well as individual politicians and the military began to proclaim ideas, apparently long dead and buried, of Slav cooperation and solidarity. As was often the case in the past, the Slav idea was revived in different conceptions of a federation of entire Slavdom or its part (in Poland this was the ideology of General Lucjan Żeligowski, the Polish Slav Unity Movement, the Confederation of the Nation and the West Slav Union) as well as in a more or less mass-scale movement of solidarity with nations whose state and national existence was endangered (the protection of Lusatian Serbs, the Czechoslovak Republic, Poland and Yugoslavia). Once again, programmes and postulates of creating some sort of a union of Slav nations had no chance of winning wider acceptance among the ruling and opinion-creating circles since the majority of the projects remained utopian, referred to emotions and did not take into consideration the actual political conditions and the complexity of the Slav world. On the other hand, the Slav idea was implemented, above all, in solidarity campaigns, in cooperation for the realization of concrete goals connected with the retention or the regaining of sovereignty and freedom by particular Slav nations, in undertakings conducted in order to establish mutual contacts, and in the cooperation of social, professional and political groups upon the basis of definite ideologies (such as agrarianism, Catholicism etc).

Many phenomena and processes which occurred in Slav countries were reflected in the life and works of various circles of Slav emigrés. A phenomenon natural not only at a time specially difficult for certain Slav nations was the political, material and spiritual support provided by emigrés for their countrymen. In this respect, the situation during the second world war was identical although the creation of an all-Slav organization upon the foundation of a conception of Slav mutuality was, if not totally new, then envisaged on an unprecedented scale. Its intention was to increase the

effectiveness of political and material support for people engaged in a struggle for the freedom of Slav countries. One such Pan-Slav organization which came into being and was active during the war among Slav communities in different countries (e.g. the All-Slav Committee in Great Britain, the Australian Slavs' Congress, the Slav Committee in Argentina, the Slav Committee of the Middle East, the Slav Union in Uruguay and others) was the American Slav Congress. It remained the most significant venture among similar Slav organizations, both from the point of view of the size of the Slav community in the United States, and its considerable effectiveness.

Heretofore literature on the history of Slav emigration in the United States (including Polish Americans) and the history of the idea of cooperation and Slavic unity lacks separate studies that would characterize the work performed by the Congress, although many publications mention this theme more or less extensively¹. Without claiming to explain all the problems connected with the course of this organization, we would like to present certain basic issues dealing with its establishment and the trends of its activity, as well as to express our attitude towards very diverse and frequently contradictory estimates concerning its work.

The beginnings of an organized solidarity and cooperation movement involving the Slav community in the United States date back to the end of the 1930s — a period of growing German threats and demands towards the Czechoslovak Republic. During a world youth conference in defence of peace, held in the summer of 1938 in America, representatives of Czechoslovakia proposed an extensive social movement in support of state endangered by fascist Germany. The outcome of this initiative was a conference organized in Pittsburgh by Czech, Slovak and Carpatho-Ukrainian insurance organizations on 7 June 1938. It was followed by a number of meetings, already attended by representatives of Croats, Serbs, Slovenes and Poles, which led to the so-called Tri-State Congress of members of various Slavic organizations (Pittsburgh, 3 December 1938). At this conference, 367 delegates, representing 213 Czech, Slovak, Carpatho-Ukrainian, Yugoslav, Russian, Ukrainian and Polish organizations from three states — Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia — passed resolutions protesting against the decisions of the Munich conference, appealed to the progressive interna-

¹ See i.a. Miloš Gosiorovský, *Češi a Slováci. Historie vzájemných vztahů, ve 20. století*, Praha 1979, pp. 139–144; Josef Kolečka, *Slavyanskiye programmy i ideya slavyanskoy solidarnosti v XIX i XX vekakh*, Praha 1964, pp. 177–179; Tadeusz Paleczny, *Ewolucja ideologii i przemiany tożsamości narodowej Polonii w Stanach Zjednoczonych w latach 1870–1970 (The Evolution of the Ideology and Transformations of the National Identity of the Polonia in the United States during the 1870–1970 Period)*, Warszawa–Kraków 1989, pp. 200–201; Charles Sadler, "Pro-Soviet Polish-Americans". *Oskar Lange and Russia's Friends in the Polonia, 1941–1945*, "The Polish Review" (New York), vol. 22, 1977, no 4, pp. 26–27.

tional community to counteract Nazi expansion in Europe and proposed to create an anti-fascist Slav organization that would include all states². It also chose a permanent Congress Committee which was to prepare an all-Slav congress and which was headed by John D. Butkovich, president of the Croatian Fraternal Union from Pittsburgh, the largest Croatian organization of its sort in the United States. Before the Committee was able to embark upon its activity, the Czechoslovak state collapsed and soon war broke out in Europe.

All the circumstances and consequences of the fall of Czechoslovakia and the defeat of Poland and, later, Yugoslavia, meant that the old antagonisms which also left their imprint on Slav emigration, were now accompanied by new ones — conflicts between Czechs and Slovaks, caused by their different attitudes towards the Slovak Republic, divergencies within the entire Czechoslovak community which were the result of contrary appraisals of the pro-independence campaign initiated by Edvard Beneš and differences among Slav emigrés produced by their stand towards the Soviet Union and their estimation of the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact and its aftermath. The above mentioned differences and the non-participation of the United States in the European conflict made it impossible to create a national Slav organization in the 1939–1941 period. Nonetheless, it must be stressed that within the framework of government plans of a Polish–Czechoslovak confederation there appeared Polish–Czechoslovak organizations (later including Yugoslavs) such as the Slav federation in Detroit and a Polish–Czechoslovak association in Chicago. Cultural events whose purpose was the inauguration of closer mutual ties were attended by representatives of all Slav groups who also cooperated in combatting the German “fifth column” in the United States, organized support for the anti-fascist policy of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and provided relief for refugees from Slav countries (e.g. at the beginning of 1941 the Polish National Council in New York shared part of the clothing sent to Polish refugees in Europe with Czech and Lithuanian refugees)³.

The outbreak of the Soviet–German war once again reactivated many Slav organizations and, above all, those forces, particularly among the Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Russians and Yugoslavs, who perceived the involvement of the Soviet Union in the war as a chance for speedier defeat of Germany and the emancipation of their native countries. These hopes

² Paper by G. Pirinsky, given on 25 September 1984 at the Fourth American Slav Congress in Chicago, Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records, further as: AAN), Slav Committee in Poland (further as: KSwP), vol. 72, no p.; Minutes of the Tri-State Slav Congress held on Saturday, December 3, 1938 in Hotel Fort Pitt, Pittsburgh, pp. 2–48. Here from: M. Gosiorovský, op. cit., p. 137. For the text of the declaration of the Tri-State Congress see also: “The Slavic American” (New York), vol. I, Fall 1947, no 1, p. 10.

³ “Dziennik Polski” (London), no 185: 14 February 1941; no 226: 4 April 1941; no 238: 21 April 1941; no 266: 23 May 1941; no 267: 24 May 1941; no 416: 15 November 1941.

grew when in July 1941 treaties and agreements were signed with the Soviet Union by the governments of Great Britain, Poland and Czechoslovakia. The most active adherents of Pan-Slav cooperation and unity on American soil included representatives of the already mentioned Croatian Fraternal Union, the Macedonian-American People's League from Detroit, the central Slovenian organization — the Slovenian-American National Council from Chicago — and the 3,000-strong American-Ukrainian League which was controlled by communists. They were later joined by representatives of the United Committee of Russian War Relief which was founded in the winter of 1941. Preparations for an all-Slav organization in the United States also attracted members of the Slav sections in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the United States and in the International Workers Order — the I.W.O. — partially under communist control.

Representatives of the above Slav organizations gathered in Pittsburgh on 10 August 1941 and, referring to the Tri-State Congress they once again proposed to unite the Slav community in the United States and its struggle against fascism, and to increase the effectiveness of help for their native countries. A National Arrangements Committee, headed by J.D. Butkovich, was chosen to make preparations for the future Slav convention⁴.

Initially, this all-Slav meeting was to be held on 23–24 November 1941, but it soon became apparent that it would not take place either in November or in the foreseeable future. In the first place, the largest Polish and Czechoslovak organizations in the United States whose members totalled more than half of the whole Slav emigration in the country, refused to take part⁵. The main reason which inclined the most numerous Polish organizations, headed by the Polish American Council, to boycott the Slav congress was fear of a new form of the rebirth of Russian Pan-Slavism, and a conviction that one should not return to "... theories which divided societies into races" as well as an unwillingness to take part in any sort of undertakings "inspired by Soviet Russia" at a time when the Soviet government revealed an unrelenting attitude towards the eastern frontiers of Poland⁶.

⁴ *Gosudarstvenniy Arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsyi* (up to 1992: *Tsentralniy gosudarstveniy arkhiv Oktyabr'skoy revolyutsyi, vysshykh organov gosudarstvenoy vlasti i organov gosudarstvennogo upravleniya SSSR*) v Moskve (further as: GARF), Sovinformbiuro — 8581/1–77, p. 88; cf. M. Gosiorovský, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁵ According to data provided by a population survey conducted in 1940 in the United States, the number of people who in childhood spoke a Slav language totalled 4,421,520. They included 2,416,320 Poles (of whom 993,479 were born in Poland, and 442,551 had Polish citizenship), 585,080 Russians, 520,440 Czechs, 484,360 Slovaks, 178,640 Slovenes, 115,440 Croats, 83,600 Ukrainians and 37,640 Serbs), Thomas Capek, *Slavs in the United States Census 1850–1940. With Special References to Czechoslovaks*, Chicago 1943, p. 12; "Dziennik Polski" (London), no 453: 31 December 1941.

⁶ According to: GARF, 8581/1–77, pp. 81–82; 85–86; cf. Ch. Sadler, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

It seems worthwhile to mention that in August 1941 the so-called Pan-Slav convention in Moscow was followed by the founding of a Pan-Slav Committee and that one of the basic goals of the latter was cooperation and contact with Slav organizations, press and activists in various countries. Hence the intensified "penetration" of emigré milieus in the United States by Soviet diplomats, TASS correspondents and others already in the second half of 1941, although attempts at establishing direct contact with Slav organizations made by the Pan-Slav Committee in Moscow did not take place until the second half of 1947⁷. The above mentioned facts as well as the active involvement of many communists in preparations for the Slav congress could have awakened the fears of the Polish community as regards the trend of the work and the ideological image of the planned all-Slav organization in the United States.

In the autumn of 1941 the Czechoslovak National Council of America, which incorporated the Czech National Union, the Czech Catholic Union and the Slovak National Society, and which was founded in April 1939 in Chicago, declared that both it and all associated organizations would not attend the coming congress for political reasons. They proclaimed that they had not been invited to take part in preparing the programme of the congress, and that they felt that it was expected that they would accept its ready-made version. In addition, the Council warned that individual members who do not enjoy the support of the Czechoslovak organizations should not be treated as true representatives. Loyalty towards America and democracy, the Council proclaimed, constituted a sufficient goal⁸. It seems that in this case, the Czechs and Slovaks played for time, and, above all, waited for their own government, the government of the United States and the Poles to take a stand as regards the planned Slav convention. When in March 1942 these matters were finally settled, the Czechoslovak National Council and affiliated organizations decided to elect their delegates.

Before this happened, the talks held by J. Butkovich and the leaders of Polish and Czech organizations in Chicago failed.

In November 1941 the new situation compelled the Agreements Committee to make a final decision about holding a Slav congress in April 1942. A conference which took place in Detroit on 7 December 1941, the day of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, altered and expanded the membership of the Agreements Committee up to 16 persons in order to make the

⁷ For more extensive information on this organization see: Sylwester Fertacz, *Komitet Wszechstowiański w Moskwie 1941–1947 (The Pan-Slav Committee in Moscow 1941–1947)*, Katowice 1991.

⁸ GARF, 8581/1–77, p. 83.

Committee more representative, and to attract wavering Polish organizations; if this were to fail to produce the desired effects it was planned to replace representatives of Polish and Czech insurance organizations with trade union delegates. The new head of the Agreements Committee was now Leo Krzycki, the best-known trade union leader of Polish descent in the United States and president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (part of the Congress of Industrial Organizations — C.I.O.)⁹. It also became possible to convince other members of Polish organizations to attend the Congress i.a. Blair Gunther, a representative of the largest Polish organization — the Polish National Union — who became vice-president of the Agreements Committee, and subsequently a member, although not for long, of the American Slav Congress authorities. Preparations for the congress also involved Stanley Novak, a trade unionist and Senator from Michigan who said at one of the sessions of the Agreements Committee that if Polish organizations refuse to take part their decision will denote that Poles in general will not attend the congress. An analysis of the membership of trade union organizations, he went on to say, shows that, for example, 70 per cent of the unions are made up of Poles. The place of the representatives of insurance organizations can be, therefore, taken by the trade unionists¹⁰.

In order to win the acceptance of the United States authorities, L. Krzycki requested Sidney Hillman, an influential trade union leader, to intervene. As a result, on 13 January 1942 Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, made a statement in which he expressed the whole-hearted support of the government for the very idea of holding a congress. "The full support of our war efforts of American citizens of Slavic descent who are such a large factor in our production programmes in heavy industry (it was estimated that workers of Slav descent provided about 50 per cent of the war production in the United States — S.F.) is particularly important". The speaker added that all efforts should be directed towards the reduction of all racial differences to a minimum and towards emphasis on national unity. This is why if the goal and programme of the planned congress would be directed towards stimulating the consolidation of American unity, and its attention — concentrated chiefly on that issue and not on controversial problems concerning the future of Eastern Europe, the conference would contribute to further effective work¹¹.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 83–84. On Leo Krzycki (1881–1966) see: *Polski Słownik Biograficzny (Polish Biographical Dictionary)*, vol. XV, pp. 550–551; Tabitha Petran, Leo Krzycki, "The Slavic American", vol. I, Fall 1947, no 1, p. 18–19, 63–65; Bolesław Gebert, *Z Tykocina za Ocean (From Tykocin across the Ocean)*, Warszawa 1982, pp. 70–72.

¹⁰ GARF, 8581/1–77, pp. 86–87.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 88–89.

The First American Slav Congress took place in Detroit on 25–26 April 1942; it was attended by 2,323 delegates (with only 148 Poles), representing 1.5 mill. Slavs, members of self-help, professional, cultural, religious, sport etc. organizations. Guests of the Congress included representatives of federal, state and municipal authorities, dignitaries of the Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, union leaders, industrialists and artists. Greetings to the delegates were sent i.a. by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The programme formulated by the Congress decided to assist speediest possible victory i.a. by increasing production, supporting sales of war bonds, actively promoting government efforts to secure permanent peace, the security of the United States and post-war industrial growth which would offer employment to all persons seeking work, and by supporting European countries in their struggle for freedom. The Congress declared that American Slavs would foster understanding and friendship between Slav countries and the United States, demand the punishment of all those guilty of war crimes, consolidate understanding and cooperation between Slavs living in America so that they could create a uniform and constructive force, and overcome all religious and racial conflicts in order to assure the growth of democracy in the United States¹²

These tasks were to be realized by conferences, conventions, meetings, lectures and demonstrations dealing with current tasks and problems, systematically organized by the Executive Committee of the A.S.C. This campaign was to involve the publication of brochures, bulletins and other types of literature devoted to the problems of the American Slav community, the organization of concerts and cultural events intended for all national groups, war relief for Slav countries, the purchase of war bonds, blood donorship, the prevention of strikes in war industry, the solution of various everyday difficulties and an active participation in American political life.

The Congress addressed a manifesto to Slavic Americans and Slavs in Europe, and passed resolutions pertaining to the acceleration of the “second front” in Europe, to the necessity of overcoming defeatism and the German “fifth column”, as well as cooperation with war relief organizations in Russia, Great Britain, Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Greece and China. The resolutions also concerned civil defence, the increase of industrial production, and celebrations of the “Slav day”, annually held in July¹³. Both the contents of the manifestos and the resolutions, and the very course

¹² More extensively about the Congress: G. Pirinsky, *Slavic Americans in the Fight for Victory and Peace*, New York 1946, pp. 6–12; Stjepan Lojen, *Uspomene jednog iseljenika*, Zagreb 1963, pp. 214–218.

¹³ For texts of declarations see i.a. St. Lojen, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–60; “Slaviane” (Moscow) 1942, no 1, pp. 55–58.

of the Congress, remained concurrent with the suggestions of the United States authorities, and, for all practical purposes, dealt exclusively with American issues.

In accordance with decisions made at the First Congress, the chief Slav organization in the United States was now the American Slav Congress whose members were not individual persons but Slav committees and societies. The main body of the A.S.C. was the National Committee, composed of a president and eleven (later, twelve) nationality vice-presidents who represented all Slav national communities and comprised a Board of Directions. Members of the National Committee were elected amongst representatives of various nationalities proportionally to the sizes of the national organizations which formed the Congress (the First Congress chose 60 members of the Committee, and in 1945 their number rose to 125). The entire National Committee, lead by the head of the Board of Directors, was to convene twice a year. The current work of the A.S.C. was to be directed by an Executive Committee, made up of a president, vice-president, secretaries and treasurer. The first president of the Executive Committee and the National Committee was Leo Krzycki. The vice-president of the Executive Committee was a Czech, Professor Jaroslav Zmrhal, accompanied by a Pole, Blair Gunther (vice-president of the Board of Directors) a Slovak, Stephen Zeman jr (secretary) and a Croat, Vinko Vuk (treasurer). Already during the war, the composition of the Executive and the number of the members of the National Committee were expanded; the new vice-presidents of the Executive included the well-known Croatian musician Zlatko Balokovich and a Czech, Harry Payer. The function of the Executive secretary was entrusted to a Macedonian from Bulgaria — George Pirinsky, and the post of the financial secretary — to a Slovak, Steve Krall. The new treasurer who replaced V. Vuk was Martin Krasich, and then Anton Derkos¹⁴. Such an Executive worked until the final dissolution of the A.S.C.

The first plenary session of the National Committee took place in Pittsburgh on 10 April 1942, and discussed current work connected with the implementation of the decisions of the Congress to offer all-sided support for the war effort of the United States and its allies. It also resolved that the organizational foundation of the A.S.C. will consist of state, regional and municipal Slav committees and associations, composed of representatives of Slav organizations — members of the A.S.C. — and financed by volun-

¹⁴ For a complete composition of the A.S.C. authorities during the war see: *Działalność Kongresu Słowiańskiego w USA. Biuletyn, referaty, rezolucje 1946–1953 (The Activity of the Slav Congress in the United States. Bulletin, Papers, Resolutions 1946–1953)*, AAN, KSwP, vol. 72, no p.: GARF, 8581/1–77, pp. 92–93; Mary Pirinsky, *Slav Peoples Now: Never Again!*, New York 1945, pp. 29–30.

tary donations. The heretofore campaign of relief for countries battling fascism was approved, and a special commission, headed by Stanley Novak, for combatting the “fifth column” in the United States was established; the Committee also defined the programme of the so-called Slav day or week, to be celebrated in 1942 in all the largest Slav concentrations¹⁵.

State and regional congresses and committees were formed rather soon after the Congress (in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maryland, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, West Virginia, Washington, California and Oregon); in the second half of 1942 they conducted a campaign of selling war bonds and winning blood donors, organized a collection of donations for war victims in Europe, and worked, i.a. by means of holding numerous festivals and concerts, on closing the gap between particular Slav groups as well as acquainting American society with Slav culture¹⁶.

We lack sufficient space for characterizing the extremely varied wartime activity which the Congress and its branches pursued with great vitality. It seems worthwhile to mention that one of the main trends of this work was a campaign conducted in 1942–1943 in favour of a “second front” in Europe. Furthermore, “Slav days” or “weeks” were held (in 1942 in 68 towns) as a demonstration of Slav unity and an occasion for bringing American society closer to the culture and customs of the Slavs. Financial aid was collected for Slav countries. A diversified propaganda campaign supported President Roosevelt’s policy of strengthening the anti-fascist coalition and the anti-fascist unity of the American people. Symptoms of racial and national discrimination and intolerance were opposed. In 1944 the A.S.C. involved itself in the presidential campaign of Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose re-election was to guarantee further Allied cooperation and to secure permanent peace in the future.

These questions were discussed on 23–24 September 1944 by the Second American Slav Congress, which convened in Pittsburgh and was attended by 2,414 delegates and 500 guests. The delegates accepted the heretofore forms of the work performed by the A.S.C. and unanimously ascertained that the most constructive way to accelerate victory would be to retain national unity, and support the candidature of Franklin D. Roosevelt for President, an opinion which was expressed in a letter addressed to him¹⁷. Undoubtedly, on 7 November 1944 the votes of the Slav electorate were decisive for Roosevelt’s victory in such states as Pennsylvania, Michigan and Illinois where citizens of Slav descent constituted a significant percentage of the population.

¹⁵ GARF, 8581/1–77, p. 96.

¹⁶ For more information see: G. Pirinsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–14.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 21–23; “The Slavic American”, vol. I, Fall 1947, no 1, p. 15.

With time, the participation of Poles in the work conducted by the A.S.C. began to grow. This holds true both for their presence in events organized by the Congress (in 1942 Poles in Chicago formed the majority of the 35,000 demonstrators who celebrated "Slav Day" and the 532 anniversary of the battle of Grunwald), as well as in local committees where workers were soon accompanied by an increasing number of new and better educated representatives of Polish Americans. The recognition which the Congress won among federal authorities and even among many of its heretofore adversaries meant that numerous group of Polish emigrés began to become aware of the abnormal situation in which the highest authorities of the Polish community found themselves and of their *sui generis* isolation in contrast to other Slav groups in the United States. For example, following the "Slav day" celebrations in June 1942, the periodical "Dziennik Chicagowski", up to then an opponent of Pan-Slav cooperation, informed with a certain note of bitterness that due to their supposed "lordly tradition and spiritual laziness (the Poles) were, as usual, too late to attend the Congress". On the other hand, the Boston-based "Kurier Codzienny" declared that the Poles were becoming "... defectors in the eyes of the other Slav groups. Why? Are we afraid of communism? Or perhaps we regard ourselves better than others?"¹⁸.

In a search for the real causes of the negative or reluctant attitude towards the A.S.C. on the part of the leaders of the Polish American Congress or the two largest groups among the Polish community — the National Polish Union and the Polish Roman-Catholic Union — one should take into consideration at least three, mutually connected, issues.

First, the attitude of the Polish community was influenced by the consequences of the events of 17 September 1939 and the growing complications and tension in Polish-Soviet relations in the years 1941-1943. What was at stake were by no means suspicions, which we shall discuss later, that the Congress authorities represented the interests of Bolsheviks and the Soviet Union. Advocating the inviolability of the borders of the Second Republic and its territorial integrity, Polish organizations "observed the work of the Congress from afar" in the belief that it would be difficult to cooperate with "other Slav groups, not always amicable towards the Polish issue" (predominantly the Russians, the Ukrainians and, partially, the Czechs)¹⁹.

Secondly, the above question was connected with the refusal of the A.S.C. authorities to condemn Soviet aggression against Poland in September 1939 and the subsequent stand of the Soviet Union towards Polish frontiers. Already prior to the Detroit Congress L. Krzycki refused to

¹⁸ Quoted according: B. Gebert, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁹ "Dziennik Polski" (London), no 665: 9 September 1942.

approve suggestions expressed in the telegrams of some the ministers of the Polish government-in-exile (especially Jan Stańczyk) and Ambassador Ciechanowski who proposed that the Congress should not support the Soviet Union “unconditionally and without reservations”, or that it should protest against the “annexation of foreign territory not only by fascist enemies”²⁰. L. Krzycki was indubitably correct in replying that the delegates themselves would decide about the character of the Congress whose only goal, in accordance with the suggestions of the American authorities not to involve American society in European matters, was to unite the effort of the Slav community in the United States for the sake of a quicker victory over fascism.

Finally, the leaders of the Polish emigration were dissatisfied with the presence and excessive activity of communists in the Congress. Many were distant from the anti-communist phobias of, for example, the National Committee of Americans of Polish Descent, but they feared that the pro-Soviet stand of the communists would hamper the defence of the political rights of Poland in the Congress. These anxieties resulted from a misunderstanding of the nature of the A.S.C., an organization which was established to deal with domestic American problems. It seems worthwhile to mention at this stage that the leaders of the National Committee of Americans of Polish Descent i.a. Ignacy Matuszewski and Maksymilian Węgrzynek, as well as their New York-based periodical “Nowy Świat” expressed an extremely negative opinion about the Congress. They were also vehemently critical of the policy pursued by the government of General Władysław Sikorski, the General himself and the policy of the United States government, forcing the Department of State to register I. Matuszewski as “an agent of a foreign power”. In a petition addressed to the Department of State, M. Węgrzynek appealed to the American authorities to cease supporting the Detroit Congress which, in the eyes of the leaders of the National Committee of Americans of Polish Descent was “clearly inspired by communists desiring to gain influence over American Slavs”. Also Elbridge Durbrow, an expert on Poland in the Department of State observed that the A.S.C. generally followed “the Moscow line” in favour of a revival of the Pan-Slav movement²¹.

It must be said without delving into the undoubtedly pro-Soviet stand and activity of the communists in A.S.C. that the above cited appraisals of the work performed by the Congress as a whole and by Krzycki personally had little in common with reality, at least as regards the period up to 1944. The A.S.C. was unwilling to be suspected of succumbing to outside pressure, and especially of realizing the directives of Moscow; up to the middle of

²⁰ GARF, 8581/1-77, p. 87; B. Gebert, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

²¹ Quoted according to: Ch. Sadler, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

1943, when it sent wishes of fruitful debates to the delegates of the Third Pan-Slav Convention in Moscow (9 May 1943), it did not maintain any contacts with the Pan-Slav Committee in the Soviet Union and did not even reply to its New Year greetings. This stand produced a decidedly inimical attitude of the Moscow Committee towards the “reactionary leadership of the Congress”, “the American bourgeoisie and bankers who wish to win the trust of the Slav” and “who do not want to make contact with us” (the Moscow Committee — S. F.)²². The reasons for this state of things were perceived in Moscow in the large number of Poles and, generally speaking, of the “liberal bourgeoisie” among the leaders of the A.S.C. The same reasons were also supposed to have been decisive for the fact that on April 1942 the Slav Congress in Detroit was conducted in a spirit of “American patriotism” and “the elimination of political issues from its debates”, a decision which served as an accusation and which was supposed to have had a negative impact on the relations of the Congress towards the Soviet Union and the Red Army. These negative features were purportedly expressed by the resolutions of the Congress and the statements of the speakers which “usually do not mention the Soviet government and the Red Army”; they were also seen in the fact that in his speech L. Krzycki (an opponent of the left wing who only “pretended to be friendly to the Soviet Union”, as he was described in Moscow) “mentioned the Soviet Union as the last” on a list of countries fighting against Germany. Furthermore, delegates of the Congress were not presented with a motion proposed by the Carpatho-Ukrainians who wanted a special resolution to express their gratitude to the Soviet authorities for their accomplishments in the unification of Slavdom. Further charges mentioned that the list of organizers of the Congress did not include a single Russian and that a collection of donations for the Red Army was not held during the debates²³.

The above accusations which, at times, sound rather absurd and which were certainly the product of the great power megalomania so characteristic for Soviet officials of the Stalinist period, do not require any commentary. One must say, however, that in 1943, due to the changing international situation, the polarization of forces within particular nations, political groups and ruling circles, as well as a discernible increase of sympathy towards the Soviet Union following the Stalingrad breakthrough, contact had been established between the Pan-Slav Committee in Moscow and the A.S.C. together with associated organizations, although at this stage it only took on

²² GARF, 8581/1-77, pp. 6-7, 20, 65, 94; 6646 (*Slavyansky Komitet SSSR*) (1-4, p. 39; 6646/1-73, p. 2.

²³ *Ibidem*, 8581/1-77, pp. 90-91.

the form of an exchange of occasional greetings and wishes. This fact in itself, of course, could not discredit the Congress, its leaders and L. Krzycki as supposed executors of directives issued by Moscow.

Leo Krzycki was described by the Department of State as “a Socialist, as a typical nineteenth-century trade-union leader who represented a fissure in the Polish-American community between the Church and materialistic Socialism”²⁴. He was undoubtedly an adherent of permanent and friendly relations between the United States and Poland and, on the other hand, a supporter of good-neighbourly relations between democratic Poland and Russia. He also fully advocated the policy of the government of General Sikorski, a feeling which he expressed i.a. during a visit paid by the General in the United States in December 1942²⁵. Concern for the unity of the Allies, full support for the political undertakings of the United States government on the international arena and an unwillingness to express his opinions as regards issues which lay beyond his competence — all these features were typical for L. Krzycki and the A.S.C. Leadership also during the open Polish-Soviet conflict of 1943. Apart from the sometimes outright aggressive statements made by many representatives of the Slav community, including some members of the Congress (i.a. G. Pirinsky), and addressed to the Polish government-in-exile, the official announcements of the A.S.C. from the period of the intensification of the Polish-Soviet conflict, and, above all, the declarations of Krzycki himself lack any critical remarks towards the Polish officials and their policy. In this case, the A.S.C. represented sensible and cautious stand²⁶.

At the turn of 1944, the Congress revealed a certain polarization of opinions. Putting it simply, one could say that the growing significance of the Soviet Union on the international scene at the end of the war meant that an increasingly key role was played among the leaders of the Congress by people such as G. Pirinsky, secretary of the Executive Committee and a fervent supporter of social transformations in Slav countries, patterned after the Soviet model. Of course, the majority of the Yugoslav, Czechoslovak or Bulgarian emigrants had no reason for concealing their support for the Yalta resolutions or for refusing to accept the postwar changes which took place in their native countries from 1944 to 1945. The same could be said about the Poles in the Congress leadership. There would be nothing strange in their approach, considering that it was the result of support for the foreign policy

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 858.

²⁵ “Dziennik Polski” (London), no 755: 23 December 1942; no 765: 24 December 1942.

²⁶ Cf. statements by L. Krzycki in “Slaviane” (Moscow), 1943, no 8, pp. 41–42; 1944, no 2, pp. 45–46.

of the United States; on the other hand, it reflected the polarization of stands which was taking place in many of the political groups in Slav countries, including Poland, especially among the peasant parties and the socialists. What was at stake was not the growing interest of the Congress in the situation in native countries or the fact that it strove towards closer contacts with local social organizations. The crux of the matter was that from 1945 the official declarations of the Congress and the statements made by some of its members included an increasingly uncritical acceptance of the domestic and foreign policy of the Soviet Union, and that the argumentation and reasoning of the Congress became more and more concurrent with Soviet propaganda. Furthermore, the A.S.C. abandoned the good tradition of dealing with issues within its competences, and to a growing extent began involving itself in "great international politics". This trend was initiated by the Congress delegation to the San Francisco Conference (April–June 1945) where the United States delegates were presented with a petition signed by 300 representatives of American Slavs who expressed the hope that the United States policy would retain the current launched by President Roosevelt, and that it would respect the resolutions of all conferences on international security held by the Big Three. In a period of rising divergencies within the former anti-fascist coalition and an apparent division of the world into two opposite blocs, the A.S.C. authorities blamed the emergent state of things on the United States government, and sharply criticized the policy pursued by President Harry Truman. Consequently, the Senate Commission led by Joseph R. McCarthy duly recognized the A.S.C. as an organization which expressed the interests of a foreign power, and issued a ban on its further activity. Several leaders of the Congress (i.a. G. Pirinsky and Tom Babin) were deported from the United States²⁷.

This last post-war stage in the work of the Congress as well as the absence in the A.S.C. of official representatives of the largest Polish organizations inclined many publicists to claim that the Congress was a pro-Soviet and pro-communist organization. Such views remain unjustified as regards the activity of the American Slav Congress at least up to 1944 and the political opinions of many of its leaders.

(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska)

²⁷ *Działalność Kongresu Słowiańskiego w USA. Biuletyn, referaty, rezolucje 1946–1953*, AAN, KSwP, vol. 72, no p.; *Report on the American Slav Congress and Associated Organizations*, Washington 1949.