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PUPIN IN SERBIAN-AMERICAN LIFE BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR*

1.

On March 13, 1935, my father, Boro Petrovich, then a Serbian Orthodox priest in my native city of Cleveland, Ohio, received a telegram from Bishop Mardary informing him that Professor Pupin had died and that his funeral would take place on that Friday at 10 a.m. in the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.¹ Unable to attend for lack of funds in that year of the Great Depression, my father decided to hold a memorial service for the great Serbian-American scientist in his own church, St. Sava's, on the following Sunday. I was a boy of twelve at the time. I remember clearly standing next to my father at that service, at a special altar in the middle of the church. As an altar boy it was my task to hold the censer. The solemn service had no sooner begun when a parishioner wandered into the church and asked, rather loudly, for whom the memorial service was being held. Someone whispered, "For Pupin." At this the parishioner let out a terrible Serbian oath, for all to hear, and left. Despite this blasphemy, the service continued.

It was years before I understood how such a thing could have happened. Even as a child I knew that Michael Pupin and Nikola Tesla were the two greatest Serbian-Americans. Pupin was not only a world-renowned inventor and esteemed professor of Physics at Columbia University but also a Serbian patriot who had given of his

*An abridged version of this study was published, in Serbo-Croatian, in *Život i delo Mihajla Idvorskog Pupina* (Novi Sad, Yugoslavia: Pokrajinska Konferencija Socijalističkog Saveza Radnog Naroda Vojvodine, Jugoslovenski Odbor za Obeležavanje 125. Godišnjice Rodjenja M.I. Pupina, 1985), pp. 291–294. This volume on the life and works of Pupin contains many valuable studies, by Yugoslav and American scholars. The papers were presented at a symposium held in Novi Sad on October 4–7, 1979. Though all the studies are printed in Serbo-Croatian, brief English summaries are provided on pp. 599–637.

own wealth to support Serbian institutions and individuals in America. And yet he was not only the most honored Serb in America, along with Tesla, but, unlike Tesla, at one time also the most hated by some of his own people. Today when Serbian-Americans all revere Pupin's memory, this seems incredible. To understand the reasons why Serbian-Americans both admired and hated Pupin, one must know the circumstances of his involvement in Serbian-American life, especially before the First World War.

2.

Pupin did not enter Serbian public life in America until 1907, some thirty-three years after he first arrived in the United States and when he was already fifty years old. During his first three decades in the United States, judging by his famous autobiography *From Immigrant to Inventor*, Pupin had very little contact with Serbs in America. Indeed, he wrote there that he was in the New World three years before he heard his native tongue, and that was only after a chance meeting in New York's Bowery with a Slovene who had once been a peddler in Pupin's native province, the Banat.² While Pupin's autobiography is filled with references to his Serbian origin, his love for his Serbian heritage, and his yearning to hear his native tongue, it makes no mention of any contact with Serbs in America, as if there were no Serbs in New York City.

Actually there were not many in 1874 when Pupin arrived; they did not begin to come in any great number until after 1890, practically all from Austria-Hungary and Montenegro. However, Serbs began to come to New York City even before Pupin landed there. Some of these early Serbian immigrants are known by name. As early as 1838 the *Serbskij Narodnij List* of Budapest published a note by an anonymous Serb identified only as Gav(rilo Ć. . . Ć. written in New York City on February 24 of that year, in which the writer reported that he had met a Gašpar Matković of Rijeka and a Jovan Vučetić there.³ The New York City Directory of 1869, for example, contains names such as Jęfta Popovits (Popović) and John Merkwitsch (Jovan Mirković), both furriers, and a Charles Petrowitsch (Petrović), who sold beer.⁴ It is also known that a Kosta Lazarević lived in New York City in 1870.⁵ When Father Nicholas L. Bjerring, a former Roman Catholic priest who had converted to Orthodoxy, opened a "Greek-Russian Church" on 2nd Avenue in New York City in late 1870,

Serbs were reportedly among his church's best supporters.⁶ The first Serbian organization in New York City was founded in 1896, a mutual aid society called the *Društvo Sjedinjenih Srba u Americi* (Society of United Serbs in America).⁷

Thus had Pupin wished to be in the company of fellow-Serbs in New York City, he could have found them. Rather, all indications suggest that during his formative years and at the height of his activities as an inventor and professor, Pupin had little time and, perhaps, even little desire to get involved with Serbs. Like so many other European immigrants who made good and became famous in American society, Pupin became consciously Americanized. Indeed, his Americanization may be regarded as a major theme of his autobiography, which is an important reason why *From Immigrant to Inventor* became such popular reading, particularly in American schools. Not only Pupin's position in the world of American education and industry but his place in American society, facilitated by his marriage to an American, Sarah Katherine Jackson, the sister of his classmate and future colleague Professor A.V. Williams Jackson, all contributed to Pupin's transformation from a Serbian immigrant to an American in every sense of the word.

What, then, accounts for Pupin's involvement in Serbian affairs in America? The year 1896 may have been the first turning point, for it was then that Pupin's wife died of pneumonia, while caring him for the same disease. Her death left a great gap in his life. Moreover, in his later years, Pupin withdrew increasingly from his scientific research and began to devote himself to public affairs.⁸ To what extent he may have become acquainted with Serbian Americans by the early years of the twentieth century is not known. There is no public record of him in Serbian American life before 1907. He was probably motivated by a combination of an aging man's nostalgia, a widower's need to fill his life, a yearning to turn to something different after a lifetime of hard work as a researcher and teacher, a desire to help others with his considerable fortune, gained from his patents, and a Serbian patriotism revived by the international events of the day.

The earliest mention we can find of Pupin in the Serbian immigrant press was an appeal of May 3, 1907, printed in the May 16 issue of the *Amerikanski Srbobran* (literally American Defender of the Serbs), asking contributions for the newly founded Slavonic Im-

migrant Society. Pupin was listed as president. The two dozen other members of the Society's board included not only Serbs but New Yorkers of various Slavic nationalities. The aim of the Society was to assist Slavic immigrants upon their arrival in New York, just as similar societies aided German, Irish, Scandinavian, Jewish, and other immigrants.⁹ The Slavonic Immigrant Society maintained a representative and two assistants on Ellis Island and an office and hostel in the city itself.¹⁰ Himself once an immigrant who had come, as stated in the first sentence of his autobiography, as a mere boy with only five cents in his pocket, Pupin was, thirty-three years later, in a position to lend his illustrious name and financial support to help a new generation of Slavic immigrants.

By 1908 and 1909 Pupin became involved in two strictly Serbian organizations in America.

The first, the *Srpski Narodni Centralni Odbor* (Serbian National Central Committee), was founded in New York City by Serbian Americans in response to the annexation of Bosnia and Hercegovina by Austria-Hungary in October 1908. Patriotic Serbs bitterly opposed this annexation since they wished these Ottoman provinces to become a part of the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro. During the Annexation Crisis of 1908 it seemed as if Serbia and Montenegro might fight for their claim. In anticipation of war, Serbian Americans throughout the United States decided to show their support by sending money to the Red Cross in both Belgrade and Cetinje. Pupin was also swept up by this upsurge of Serbian patriotism. He became president of the Serbian National Central Committee. Its secretary was Dr. Paul R. Radosavljevich.¹¹ He would later be mentioned just after Pupin and Tesla in any list of illustrious Serbian Americans. Radosavljevich had just received his doctorate, in Education, at New York University, and was a beginning assistant professor in the School of Education there at the time.¹² Having just arrived from Mostar, Hercegovina, where he served briefly as a teacher during the Annexation and where he had temporarily left his wife and American-born son, Radosavljevich contributed to the Serbian cause by publishing an article, in the *Chicago Evening Post*, as an eyewitness.¹³ Pupin contributed money and his reputation.¹⁴ In mid-July 1909 he wrote an appeal addressed to "Brother Serbs throughout America" in which he described the work of the Serbian National Central Committee.¹⁵ Once the Annexation Crisis died down and Serbia and

Montenegro were forced to accept Austria-Hungary's action, the Committee was dissolved. However, the experience convinced Pupin that a serious weakness of Serbian life in the United States was the lack of a united organization. Not only were Serbian Americans scattered from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but they were divided into many small and often rival societies.¹⁶

At the time, most Serbian Americans generally belonged to two prevalent types of institutions, if they belonged to any. One was the Serbian Orthodox Church with its ever growing number of parishes, from the coal mines and steel mills of Pennsylvania to the gold mines of California. The second form of organization was the mutual aid society. In fact, these societies preceded the Church as Serbian immigrant workers sought the protection of insurance for themselves, in case of accidents, and for their families in case of their death. Such protection was all the more necessary in view of the danger to which these heavy laborers were constantly exposed. Eventually local mutual aid societies banded together into federations. It seemed to Pupin, and to other farseeing Serbian Americans, that by uniting into one large organization, these societies and federations would find greater strength and offer their members even more security and benefits.

What Pupin, in his inexperience with Serbian American public life, did not count on was the degree to which various Serbian American leaders derived their personal positions of power and prestige from the existence of these various organizations.

It must be remembered that many Serbian Americans before the First World War were illiterate or barely literate peasants who had come to an alien industrial America to make money quickly as laborers and to go back home with their savings. If so many never returned home, it was because their savings never equalled their expectations, because they became accustomed to life in the cities and towns of America, because their children were born and being educated in the Land of Opportunity, and because even those who might have returned were prevented by the Annexation Crisis of 1908-1909, the two Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, and the World War of 1914-1918.

In this society of largely uneducated and poor workers there emerged a thin stratum of immigrants who rose above these workers either through education or wealth. It cannot be said that most of the ed-

ucated were very educated, or that most of the wealthy were very wealthy. Their accomplishments must be measured by the modest standards of Serbian American society as a whole. The educated often had no more than a high school, trade school, or seminary education in the Old Country. The most vocal part of this Serbian intelligentsia in America before the First World War consisted in the beginning of a mere handful of Orthodox priests and journalists. On the other hand, an increasing number of energetic and able young immigrant workers found various ways of escaping the bonds of wage labor by becoming small businessmen --- grocers, liquor dealers, restaurateurs, dairymen, insurance salesmen, jewelers, tailors, barbers, and the like. Among the most prosperous and influential were the travel agents and the saloonkeepers. It was this rising class of enterprising small merchants that produced a whole group of ambitious leaders in Serbian American life.

The Serbian American population of the United States developed a subculture of its own. By language, religion, and customs these immigrants were socially and culturally aliens, even when they became American citizens. They generally loved America, admired its freedoms, and were grateful for the opportunities of a better life which it offered. Indeed, they were even willing to die for America as soldiers in the First World War. But they did not really feel themselves to be an integral part of American society, and sometimes anti-immigrant American prejudice did not allow them to be. Accordingly they established a life of their own within America, in their own ethnic communities (or "colonies," as many Serbian Americans still call them). These communities, however separated they were geographically, were bound by several overlapping networks of organizations, principally the Serbian Orthodox Church and fraternal organizations. Eventually there emerged a polity of sorts which in some ways faintly resembled the life of Serbs in Austria-Hungary, from which most Serbian immigrants to the United States originally came, including Pupin himself. As in Austria-Hungary, the Serbs of America developed their own institutions, enjoyed a measure of cultural autonomy, and developed an increasingly stratified society. Only the Serbian American counterpart of this model was, to be sure, in every way a smaller and paler reflection.

The religious arm of this Serbian American polity, the Serbian Orthodox Church, still consisted before the First World War of an

unorganized scattering of a few parishes under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, and a few itinerant priests without parishes and, sometimes, without valid credentials. There was no Serbian Orthodox Diocese of America until after the First World War.

The secular arm of this Serbian American polity was made up of the mutual aid societies and fraternal federations. These provided the chief arena for Serbian American ethnic politics, not only before the First World War but for some years later. It was in federation politics, from the local lodge to the national organization of each federation, that a whole generation of young Serbian immigrant leaders found an outlet for their personal ambitions and quest for influence and status. During working hours most of them were but a modest, hardworking part of American society, men of no particular distinction in the larger American scene. However, away from their work, among their fellow-Serbs, these men became figures of importance and their lives acquired a special meaning.

Basically, the common aim of the mutual aid societies was a good and necessary one, to provide certain minimal forms of insurance protection at low prices and in a social context that provided the insured member with the fellowship of members of his own ethnic group. Beyond this the mutual aid societies also promoted Serbian culture and patriotism. Serbian immigrants gained a measure of distinction by becoming elected to the boards of local lodges. As lodges formed federations, some of the more ambitious and politically adept immigrants, especially from among the few intellectuals and merchants, gained places of authority, prestige, and accessibility to a supply of money which they could use for public, and sometimes even private, purposes. Certain leaders (the common Serbian American word for them, borrowed from the English, was *lideri*) attracted personal followings, and there was lively competition and strife among contending factions, accompanied by intrigues of all kinds. Though all of this was on a small scale and for small stakes by comparison with the world of American politics or even Serbian politics in Austria-Hungary or little Montenegro, the passions were just as great and the contests were just as exciting for the participants. How one chose sides in these struggle among contending federations depended on many things -- family ties, Old Country provincial loyalties, geographical location in America, and many other

circumstances. The game of open politics and secret intrigues that marked this aspect of Serbian American life was often tough and rough, and the means used to achieve one's ends were not always fair, and sometimes foul.

It was into such an arena that Michael Idvorsky Pupin descended from his Olympian heights as a renowned inventor, professor of Columbia University, and distinguished American public figure, so that he could take part in the life of his Serbian people in the United States. Whatever rewards this activity brought him, it also gave him much grief.

3.

Pupin's aim was simple, logical, and benevolent — the unification of all Serbian American fraternal mutual aid societies into one large federation. What made many Serbian Americans agree with him was an incident that occurred in 1907 — a major embezzlement of funds in the Serbian Orthodox Federation *Srbobran* in Pittsburgh by an influential Serbian travel agent in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, who had packed the Federation's board with his own cronies.¹⁷ When the scandal broke out, in 1908, Pavle Hadži-Pavlović, a rarely educated Serbian immigrant trained in Berlin in finance and with banking experience, was persuaded to take over as treasurer of the Federation *Srbobran* in its crisis.¹⁸ He was in close contact with a Serbian physician in Pittsburgh, Dr. Svetozar Grgin, who was Pupin's nephew. The two of them decided that the situation was so bad that only a man of Pupin's stature could effect a basic change, and so they persuaded Pupin to get involved.¹⁹

Apparently many Serbian Americans agreed with them. In July 1909 Pupin addressed an invitation from his home in Norfolk, Connecticut, to all Serbian Americans, calling them to a "Pan-Serbian Assembly" to be held in Cleveland on September 14 of that year. This date was chosen to coincide with the regular convention of the largest Serbian federation of mutual aid societies at the time, *Srbobran*. Another large federation, the Chicago-based First Serbian Fraternal Benevolent Society, agreed to send four plenipotentiary representatives to effect a merger, and now Pupin invited others to join as well.²⁰

It seems hardly likely that a simple invitation from Pupin would have sufficed to bring about such a merger had there not already

been considerable sentiment in favor of the idea. However, there is no doubt that Pupin provided a crucial element in the process, namely, the authority of a respected figure who was above the rather unfraternal feuds of these fraternal federations. As the largest Serbian American newspaper, the *Amerikanski Srbobran*, reported at the time, only a neutral man of great reputation such as Professor Pupin was able to bring about the merger.²¹

The Pan-Serbian Assembly of 1909 in Cleveland, which was attended by 106 delegates from all parts of the United States, created a single organization called the Federation of United Serbs Concord. Its Serbian name, *Savez Sjedinjenih Srba Sloga*, was particularly apt since its initials coincided with what were believed to be the initials on the medieval Serbian Empire's coat-of-arms, which a later popular Serbian mythology turned into a slogan: *samo sloga Srbina spasava* ("only concord saves the Serb"). The new organization merged three Serbian American fraternal federations: the Serbian Orthodox Federation *Srbobran* (*Srpski Pravoslavni Savez Srbobran*), with around 7500 members; the First Serbian Fraternal Benevolent Society (*Prvi Srpski Bratski Dobrotvorni Savez*), with around 3000 members; and the First Montenegrin Federation (*Prvi Crnogorski Savez*), with around 1500 members, making for a total of some 16,000 members.²²

Pupin was not only hailed by the Pan-Serbian Assembly as the creator of the new concord among Serbian Americans, but he was elected president of the new organization.²³ Pupin took his election seriously, as something far more substantial than an honorary position. This can be seen from his insistence that he would accept only if the headquarters of the new federation were established in New York City. This was supposedly a personal concession to him, since he taught there. Actually Pupin probably also hoped that the new federation could thus start with a clean slate, away from the previous centers of the chief federations, Pittsburgh and Chicago. Pupin understood quite well how much the previous federations had suffered from two evils in particular: factionalism and poor (and sometimes dishonest) management. He hoped to overcome both faults by locating the new Federation *Sloga* in New York City, under his benevolent direct supervision and the regulations of the State of New York. Pupin wished to give the new federation a sound financial base by adopting actuarial tables and investing the federation's

funds in United States Government bonds.²⁴ Pupin's chances of achieving reforms were heightened by the inclusion of several officers on the new board who were very close to him, notably Pavle Hadži-Pavlović and Boža Ranković, who held the important posts of secretary and treasurer respectively. Another potential source of Pupin's strength was the newspaper *Amerikanski Srbobran*, which was supposed to be transferred from Pittsburgh to New York City along with its printing press.

The unity achieved at Cleveland did not last long. Not even with Pupin's reputation behind it could the merger withstand the pressure of old local rivalries and personal ambitions among the leaders. No sooner did the delegates return from Cleveland when a revolt took place in Pittsburgh. The Serbs in that area had worked hard to build their own federation, *Srbobran*, only to see it now "taken away" from their midst to distant New York.

What further aggravated the situation, *Srbobran*'s leaders and most members were immigrants from Lika and other South Slavic provinces of Austria-Hungary and were largely of peasant origin. Pupin himself was from Austria-Hungary, but his two chief advisers were from Serbia. Moreover, they were intellectuals. Neither category was in good repute among the Serbs of America. There were very few immigrants from the Kingdom of Serbia, largely because the peasants there lived better than most Serbian peasants in Austria-Hungary or the Kingdom of Montenegro. Of those few who came from Serbia, some were quick-witted ne'er-do-wells who had a reputation for shady dealings among Serbian immigrants, and so their unsavory reputation tainted all *Srbijanci* ("Serbians" as distinct from "Serbs" as a general ethnic term) in the eyes of many Serbian Americans. As for intellectuals, they were all traditionally suspect among persons of peasant stock as reputedly men who wished to make money off others without working — to "get bread without a hoe," as the common Serbian peasant expression put it. With all these attitudes to play upon, the local leaders in and around Pittsburgh and their confederates were able to engineer a revolt. Their chief weapon was the newspaper *Amerikanski Srbobran*, whose printing press was still in their hands.

Just a few days after the Cleveland convention, news reached New York City that the Pittsburgh rebels had typeset an issue of the newspaper in which the merger was repudiated and which called on all

members of the Federation Srbobran to disregard the Federation Sloga in New York City. Boža Ranković informed Pupin of this development by telephone. Pupin's reaction and what subsequently happened is best told, even in translation, in Ranković's own words:

He was silent for a few seconds and then said to me: If the newspaper is published in Pittsburgh and is circulated, then everything is lost. That means that all the work in Cleveland was just a circus. I did not go there just to entertain people. I will call you back in ten minutes. When he called me again, he said that Hadži-Pavlović and Nikola Jelić should be at the Pennsylvania Railroad Station at 12:30, from where the three of them would set out for Pittsburgh. I was to remain in the office by the telephone and to inform Dr. Grgin and the priest Aleksa Savić of their arrival.

They arrived in South Side (Pittsburgh) that evening, where they were met by Dr. Grgin, Father Savić, and two other friends, and all five immediately went to the Federation printing shop. There was a thick darkness, and the door of the shop was locked.

The Columbia University professor, scientist with a worldwide reputation, took a gun out of his pocket and was about to smash the lock with a bullet. That a gunshot would wake up the neighborhood, that the police would come running, and that they would spend the rest of that murky night in jail — all this could not keep our professor from destroying the set-up newspaper and thus save the Federation and all that was accomplished in Cleveland. Luckily it occurred to one of the young men who had come with Savić that he could squeeze through the transom over the door and open it from the inside. In those days the newspaper was printed with hand-set type, and in a few minutes the venomous public declaration of the reckless evil-doers lay scattered over the floor of the press.

The next day Pupin and his two fellow-travellers returned to New York. I completed all arrangements for

the Federation newspaper in New York, which was printed two days later and distributed to all the Serbian colonies.²⁵

Despite Pupin's energetic measures, the Cleveland merger was rent by a schism which became formal in 1910. The Federation Sloga, based in New York City and led by Pupin, was larger and financially better off than the Federation Srbobran. However, both were strong enough to wage war against one another. They were finally to reunite in 1921, but not without passing through turbulent times in which each federation underwent another split within itself.²⁶

During those dozen years and more of feuding, Pupin was subjected to incredible verbal abuse and worse by his opponents. In the years 1910-1911 hardly an issue of the *Amerikanski Srbobran* in Pittsburgh appeared without a personal attack on Pupin. Everything possible was written to damage his reputation. He was branded a liar.²⁷ A lodge in Kansas City, Kansas, even brought Old Country politics into the fray by formally accusing Pupin, in a unanimous resolution, of seeking to destroy the Federation Srbobran "on orders from Budapest and Zagreb."²⁸ The journalist M. Jevtić accused Pupin of using the money of poor immigrant Serbs to bribe his followers and to pay for his spies, called him a "moral cripple" (*moralni bogalj*), and railed against him. "You have sullied the honorable position of a professor of Columbia University."²⁹ Especially effective were the *Amerikanski Srbobran*'s frequent references to the fact that Pupin had spent several decades of his life in America without seeking any contact with his fellow-Serbs. One article charged him with "sleeping in luxury for thirty years without wishing to hear of Serbs" and with having declared that the Orthodox religion "poisoned Slavic blood."³⁰ Another article claimed that Pupin had never entered a Serbian church in thirty years.³¹ The title of an article against the Federation Sloga and its president, Pupin, cited the Serbian proverb: "A fish stinks from its head."³²

Copies of the *Amerikanski Srbobran* are not extant for the years 1913 through 1917. However, practically every issue in 1918 contained some attack on Pupin. If anything, the tone of the attacks had become even more strident and bitter. Apparently, one writer noted sardonically, we did not know we were Serbs until Pupin came along to tell us so, and he didn't until 1909.³³ "Where is the money

of the poor, Mr. Michael I. Pupin?" another article demanded to know. "What have you done with the money gained from the callouses of the workers and which was meant for the hungry poor?"³⁴ There was a constant attempt to belittle Pupin. The *Amerikanski Srbobran's* editor at the time, Budimir Grahovac, contemptuously referred to Pupin as "Uncle Misha."³⁵ He assured his readers that Pupin could not at all have ranked with Edison or Tesla as an inventor.³⁶ Various writers impugned Pupin's Serbian patriotism during the First World War by calling him an Austrian agent.³⁷ "I personally believe," wrote B.R. Savić of Pittsburgh in mid-1918, "that Michael I. Pupin is an Austrian agent. I have good reason to believe this, and I fear no court. . . . Let Pupin sue me. . . ." ³⁸ Pupin was forced to do just that. He filed suit in a Pittsburgh court against Savić, Grahovac, and the officers of the Federation *Srbobran*.³⁹ Pupin's enemies even spread the rumor that he was not Serbian at all but a Hungarian or a Romanian.

Not even Pupin's private life and family were spared. The *Amerikanski Srbobran* took obvious delight in reporting, in mid-1911, on the basis of articles in the *New York Herald* of June 17, 1911, and the *Pittsburgh Post* of June 19, 1911, that Pupin's daughter had run away with her riding master.⁴⁰ Particularly inasmuch as Pupin was a widower, frequent allusions were made to his love life. A lead editorial in the April 6, 1911, issue of the *Amerikanski Srbobran* made a reference to "Pupin's Guard" as men "he has embraced and kissed and presented to his mistresses."⁴¹ Pupin's friendship with a wealthy widow, Mrs. Helen Hartley Jenkins, gave rise to all kinds of malicious rumors. Mrs. Jenkins' generous gifts to various Serbian causes earned her the gratitude of many Serbs. Yet at the 1913 convention of the Federation *Sloga* in Denver, where Pupin, as presiding officer, was forced to leave the convention hall in disgust as the result of charges involving the source of his income, there were open allusions to Mrs. Jenkins as "some American woman with money," and in the corridors of the convention there was a whispering campaign about how Pupin "made money in bed." Only after obtaining a written apology from the convention did Pupin agree to return to the hall, and when he did, he received a standing ovation.⁴² As for his financial dealings with Mrs. Jenkins, when both she and the buyer of her half-interest in the Remington arms industry in Massachusetts insisted on giving Pupin \$160,000 as a customary com-

mission for his having facilitated the transaction, he refused to accept the money for himself but instead used it to establish a special fund to aid the Serbian Orthodox Church in America.⁴³ This did not prevent Pupin's enemies later for suggesting that he had misappropriated this money.⁴⁴

Evidently many Serbian Americans, being simple people divorced from American society at large, could not really understand Pupin's eminence or the source of his wealth as an inventor. For many of them he was simply a teacher in some school or other in New York. His opponents constantly cast doubts on his accomplishments as a scientist and inventor. The editor of the *Amerikanski Srbobran* in 1981, Budimir Grahovac, called him a "clever plagiarist."⁴⁵ A man who should have known better, Pupin's own colleague at New York University, Professor Paul Radosavljevich, then his opposite number in the war of Serbian fraternal federations as the president of the Federation *Srbobran*, wrote that Pupin was a "pseudo-scientist, a plagiarist of inventions, and (he added for good measure) a wrecker of marriages."⁴⁶

In 1911 Pupin was named Honorary Consul General of the Kingdom of Serbia in the United States and Canada.⁴⁷ He was the first official representative of Serbia in the United States.⁴⁸ His opponents were outraged that the man whose reputation they were trying to blacken had been given such an honor. The president of Federation *Srbobran*, Rade Musulin, and his board responded by calling for a mass meeting in Pittsburgh on May 29, 1911, in Musulin's own hall on Carson Street.⁴⁹ The hall was packed that Sunday evening with Serbs from the whole Pittsburgh area. Speech after speech denounced Pupin as a renegade. Manula even declared that if Pupin ever came to Pittsburgh again, there were seven warrants -- a good epic number -- for his arrest.⁵⁰ The resolution which that protest meeting sent to Belgrade characterized Pupin as "an Austrian and Hungarian official."⁵¹ Belgrade knew better and paid no attention to the protest.

It must be said that both the Serbian government and Serbian Americans benefitted greatly from Pupin's appointment. Instead of regarding his post as purely honorary, he opened an office and, as he was given no salary or expense budget, he paid for the office and his staff out of his own pocket.⁵² During the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 he invited all citizens of the newly liberated regions of Serbia

who were residing in America to register at the Consulate and to obtain Serbian passports.⁵³ During the First World War Pupin's Consulate in New York City was an important center of activity, both for Serbian missions to the United States and for Serbian American volunteers going to the Serbian front.

Pupin's opponents not only attacked Pupin personally, but they did not spare those around him. Pupin's nephew, Dr. Svetozar Grgin, was castigated by *Amerikanski Srbobran* as a do-nothing who was content to live off his uncle's money instead of going to wartorn Serbia where physicians were needed.⁵⁴ Pupin's adviser and protege Boža Ranković was accused of having fled to America after stealing money from the National Bank of Serbia.⁵⁵ Glišo Rapačić of Gary, Indiana, a Serbian immigrant from Lika who served as president of Federation Sloga's convention in 1916 in New York, was almost stripped of his American citizenship on a technicality after Pupin's opponents charged him with having falsely obtained his citizenship.⁵⁶ Actually all that happened was that one of Rapačić's witnesses, who later turned against him for political reasons, had sworn incorrectly that he had known Rapačić for the required five years, and when Rapačić offered to produce many other witnesses who had known him for that long, the judge dismissed the case.⁵⁷

It would be possible to continue at even greater length in documenting the campaign of many years against Pupin. The crudeness and violence of these assaults went far beyond honest criticism. How did Pupin take these attacks? Surprisingly well. Another man, especially one in his position — an acclaimed scientist, inventor, and educator with money and high standing in American society at large — could easily have turned his back on Serbian American squabbles and withdraw. Why didn't he? It is rarely, if ever, easy to gauge men's motives and to distinguish between good reasons and real reasons. Yet many things seem fairly clear.

For one thing, Pupin had strong-minded advisers, men like Boža Ranković and Pavle Hadži-Pavlović, who encouraged him to persevere. Moreover, it was obvious that many, probably most, Serbian Americans admired and respected Pupin. Just as he was villified in the pages of Pittsburgh's *Amerikanski Srbobran*, so he was glorified in the pages of Ranković's newspaper *Srpski Dnevnik* (Serbian Daily) in New York and in other Serbian American periodicals. Pupin did not lack for supporters. A certain Proka Stojanov, for example, was

led by Old Country provincial loyalty to reply to a Serbian priest from the province of Lika, "Why do you bray so? Don't you know that there are Vojvodina Serbs who would lay down their lives for Pupin?"⁵⁸ However, it was not this kind of braggadocio that sustained Pupin; on the contrary, he was saddened by it, for Serbian unity was his ideal.

An idealistic explanation for Pupin's perseverance is that he was led by a sense of duty and love for his people. This is not wrong, but it would not be the whole answer. We suspect that there was something else in Pupin's character to explain his endurance. Unlike Nikola Tesla, who was a recluse to the point of eccentricity, Pupin was a very gregarious person who not only enjoyed society but liked to be the center of attention, apparently whether friendly or hostile. Moreover, he was stubborn and never liked to give up, perhaps the mark of every successful inventor. In fact, he seemed to relish a good fight for what he believed in, though he did not look for a fight. When he was asked how he could endure all those attacks against him, he boasted that he had a broad back.⁵⁹ Pupin once laughingly told a supporter in Gary that his opponents were mere straws over which he trod.⁶⁰ True, even he had his crises when close associates had to hearten him. Yet on the few occasions when he walked out on a convention or threatened to resign, his opponents never took such threats seriously because they came to know his tenacity. They accused him on such occasions of indulging in tactics and stratagems. It might be more accurate to say that the professor was giving object lessons.

Whatever may have been his real motives, Pupin did feel the need to complain publicly at times. As he wrote in an open letter to the members of the Federation Sloga on January 29, 1914. "Up to this day I have drunk many a cup of gall in my federation work. Certain Serbian immigrants who have no notion of decency have taken advantage of the laws concerning a free press by going so far in their abuse and slander that a man's blood must freeze in his veins on paging through those newspapers which seethe with invective, libel, and the most vulgar epithets against my person."⁶¹

Pupin refused to surrender even after he was ousted as president of the Federation Sloga in 1920. He headed his own federation, again with the four S's in the name — *Srpski Savez Svesna Srbadija* (literally "Serbian Federation Aware Serbdom"), with about 3500 mem-

bers. In 1928 this federation joined the Federation Sloboda (Liberty) in Pittsburgh, and they all merged with Srbobran-Sloga on September 21, 1929, thus forming the present Serb National Federation with its headquarters in Pittsburgh.⁶² This federation, which finally brought together both his friends and foes, was the realization of Pupin's original goal of unity, which had been but briefly achieved and then abandoned in 1909. It was fitting that Pupin should have been elected Honorary President of the Serb National Federation.⁶³ That federation's 13th Quadrennial Convention, held on August 20-23, 1979, was officially dedicated to "Mihailo Pupin, great Serbian patriot" on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of his birth.⁶⁴ The newspaper of that federation, the same *Amerikanski Srbobran* that had once attacked Pupin so viciously, had nothing but praise for Pupin ever since the merger. Indeed, few Serbian Americans today know or could easily imagine how maligned Pupin was in the decade before the First World War and in the years just after the war. Today Pupin is remembered, along with Tesla (who had very little to do with Serbian life in America), as the greatest Serbs that ever immigrated to the United States.

4.

Pupin's activities among Serbian Americans before the First World War involved more than fraternal mutual aid organizations. Pupin was a generous philanthropist and supporter of Serbian cultural institutions.

He established and contributed to a Serbian Cultural and Beneficial Fund (*Srpski Kulturni i Dobrotvorni Fond*) which was used to promote educational and cultural work among Serbian Americans. The largest single donor to the Fund was the Federation Sloga, under Pupin's presidency.⁶⁵

Eager to raise the level of the Serbian immigrant press, Pupin loaned Boža Ranković \$10,000 for a printing press to enable him to found a newspaper, the *Srpski Dnevnik* (Serbian Daily). The quality of this newspaper was far above most Serbian newspapers in America at the time which devoted themselves largely to polemics, weddings, baptisms, and obituaries, or served the special interests of travel agents. Ranković made every effort to publish a real newspaper filled with news of domestic American and international events, especially news from the various Serbian lands, as well as educa-

tional articles. The first issue of the *Srpski Dnevnik* appeared on October 10, 1912. Pupin himself financed the first forty-five issues, until the newspaper was able to support itself.⁶⁶ Later, this newspaper, too, was to succumb to the temptation of waging polemics, with Pupin's opponents, to such a degree that it provoked the founding of a rival, in 1916, the *Dnevni Glasnik* (Daily Herald). It is interesting to note that Nikola Tesla lent his name to this venture.⁶⁷

Pupin was also a supporter of the Sokols, a Slavic patriotic gymnastic organization with national ethnic branches --- Serbian, Croatian, Czech, Slovak, etc. While he was president of Sloga, that federation contributed substantially to the Serbian branch in America.⁶⁸

It may be true that Pupin was not religious in the traditional Orthodox sense. In 1946, in refusing the proposal of Bishop Nicholas (Nikolaj Velimirović) that Pupin's remains be buried in the St. Sava Monastery in Libertyville, Illinois, Pupin's daughter, Varvara Pupin Smith, wrote, "Papa's religion was that of the natural philosopher rather than that of the orthodox church."⁶⁹ Yet Pupin cared deeply about the Serbian Orthodox Church, both by virtue of his upbringing and because he recognized the significance of the Church's traditional national and cultural role in Serbian life. Accordingly he founded the Serbian Church Fund (*Srpski Crkveni Fond*), which he based on the \$160,000 he refused to take as a commission on a business deal for Mrs. Jenkins.

Among that Fund's disbursements in the pre-World War I period were \$6000 each to the Serbian churches in McKeesport and Wilmerding, Pennsylvania, and monthly support to Serbian schools and libraries in Cleveland and Cincinnati, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Gary and Indianapolis, Indiana; New York City; and Chicago, Illinois. The Fund was also used to support Serbian students in America as well as Serbian artists, including the painter D. Ružić and the operatic singer O. Djurin. Moreover, this Fund financed the missionary activities of Father Danilo Bukorović, who helped organize Serbian parishes in the United States.⁷⁰

In 1912 Pupin sent a letter to the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Austria-Hungary, Patriarch Lucian (Lukijan Bogdanović), in Sremski Karlovci, in which he expressed concern over the lack of churches and priests in Serbian American communities.⁷¹ Pupin became personally involved in the whole tangled question of how

the Serbian Orthodox Church in America would be organized, whether it would continue to be under the jurisdiction of the Russian Church in America or whether it would live a life of its own under some Serbian Orthodox jurisdiction. As an example of Pupin's involvement we can point to a conference of Serbian Orthodox priests held on July 16, 1914, in Pupin's own home in Norfolk, Connecticut.⁷² After the First World War, and to the very time of his death, Pupin assiduously supported Bishop Mardary (Mardarije Uskoković) and his project of building the St. Sava Monastery as the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church in America. Bishop Nicholas (Nikolaj Velimirović) wrote to Pupin's daughter in 1946, "Professor Pupin saved St. Sava's Monastery at Libertyville (Illinois) by paying its debts in a sum of about 23,000 dollars. Without that our monastery should have been closed and gone."⁷³

Pupin was always proud of having come to the United States as a boy with only five cents in his pocket. This memory also made him more aware of the plight of the East European immigrant. We have already observed that Pupin really first entered Serbian American public life, in 1907, through his interest in the Slavonic Immigrant Society, an organization which he helped to found in order to assist newly arrived Slavic immigrants. The society, over which Pupin presided, maintained a hostel, the Slavonic Immigrant Home, next to the Serbian Home (*Srpski Dom*) which was a gift from Mrs. Jenkins. Here Serbs as well as other Slavs could find clean rooms, Slavic food, fellowship, comfort, and guidance.⁷⁴ Another such organization which Pupin supported before the First World War was the New York Polyclinic Hospital and its special Slavic section, which gave medical treatment to Slavic immigrants free of charge or for very little money. This was a great boon to Serbian and other Slavic immigrants who were either too poor to pay for doctors or else were being sent by unscrupulous Serbian, Croatian or other travel agents to quack doctors from whom these agents received commissions. Pupin was made a member of the board of directors of this hospital.⁷⁵

Pupin also made personal gifts and loans to various Serbian Americans who were in need or who required capital to establish themselves in some business. He did this on such a scale that his opponents jealously complained that he was thus bribing men to be his supporters.

It is not within the scope of this study to describe Pupin's efforts on behalf of the Serbian cause during the First World War. Let us simply recall that the outbreak of the First World War found Pupin actively engaged in several ventures that involved many Serbian Americans. In 1914 he became president of the newly formed *Narodna Odbrana* (National Defense) in America, which soon had 83 local chapters plus the support of around 180 other Serbian American societies and groups, and which sent packages and volunteers to embattled Serbia.⁷⁶ In 1917, when the United States entered the war, Pupin directed a proclamation to all Serbian Americans asking them to contribute to the American Liberty Loan.⁷⁷ While this may have cut into their contributions to Serbia, as some opponents complained, nevertheless Serbian Americans were thus able to express their support of their new homeland as well as Serbia's ally.

Since this study began with my father, let it end with him: Boro Petrovich, a Serb from Austria-Hungary, was among the many Serbian immigrants who left the United States early in the war to fight for Serbia. He served as an ambulance driver in a Red Cross unit organized by Michael Pupin and, as such, took part in the ill-fated retreat of the Serbian Army across Albania. He was one of the few to survive. Pupin did all he could to aid all these demobilized volunteers who wished to return to America after the war by organizing a special relief fund for them in 1919.⁷⁸ My father was among those who returned. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, three years later. I offer these personal details merely to emphasize that, whether they realize it or not, many Serbian Americans have had their lives touched in some way by Pupin's activities among them as a philanthropist and Serbian patriot, just as the lives of all mankind have been enriched by his inventions as a scientist — particularly in long distance telephone and telegraph communications and X-rays.

University of Wisconsin-Madison

⁷⁶Telegram of March 13, 1935, sent from Evanston, Illinois, by Bishop Mardary (Mardarije Uskoković) to the Reverend Boro Petrovich in Cleveland, Ohio: archives of the St. Sava Monastery in Libertyville, Illinois. (The items in these archives do not

presently have catalogue numbers assigned to them.)

¹²Michael Pupin. *From Immigrant to Inventor* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), pp. 95–98.

¹³"Pismo jednog Serbljina iz Severne Amerike." *Serbskij Narodnij List za godinu 1838* (Budapest), Teodor Pavlović, ed., pp. 141–142.

¹⁴Trow's *New York City Directory*, compiled by H. Wilson. Vol. LXXXII. for the year ending May 1, 1869, pp. 87, 745, and 858 respectively.

¹⁵"Srpski dopisi," *The Slavonian* (San Francisco), I. No. 3, June 20, 1870, p. 3.

¹⁶Constance J. Tarasar, ed., *Orthodox America 1794–1976: Development of the Orthodox Church in America* (Syosset, New York: The Orthodox Church in America, Department of History and Archives, 1975), p. 39.

¹⁷Pero Slepčević, *Srbi u Americi: beleške o njihovoj stanju, radu i nacionalnoj vrednosti* (Geneva, Switzerland: Štamparija "Ujedinjenja," 1917), p. 45.

¹⁸Bergen Davis, "Michael Idvorsky Pupin, 1858–1935." *Biographical Memoirs (National Academy of Sciences of the United States)*, XIX, No. 10 (1938), pp. 310–311 and 313.

¹⁹"Veliko slovensko emigrantsko društvo." *Amerikanski Srbobran* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), May 16, 1907, pp. 2–3. This newspaper changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar some time between 1912 and 1918, we cannot say for certain when because those issues are not extant. In the 20th century the Julian calendar was thirteen days behind the Gregorian. The footnotes will give the dates as they appear on the newspaper itself.

²⁰*Ibid.*, July 5, 1907, p. 2.

²¹"Srpski Narodni Centralni Odbor," *ibid.*, January 22, 1909, p. 8.

²²Jovan Iskruljev, *Dr. Paja Radosavljević: život i rad* (Belgrade: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika Socijalističke republike Srbije, 1971), p. 79.

²³"The Servians and Austria. Effect of Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina." *Chicago Evening Post*, December 4, 1908, pp. 6–7; see Iskruljev, *op. cit.*, pp. 79, 85, 289, and 324. Iskruljev says nothing about Radosavljević's involvement in the Serbian Central Committee.

²⁴"Sjednica Centralnog odbora." *Amerikanski Srbobran*, January 8, 1909, p. 2. The article notes that, as of that date, Pupin donated \$520, more than any other donor.

²⁵Mihailo I. Pupin, "Braći Srbima širom Amerike," *ibid.*, July 30, 1909, p. 1.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Slepčević, *op. cit.* p. 47; M. Jevtić, *Mala Srbija: Srpsko useljenstvo u Americi* (New York, 1916), p. 24.

²⁸Božidar Purić, *Biografija Bože Rankovića: Doprinos istoriji srpskog iseljenštva u Severnoj Americi* (Munich: Iskra, 1963), pp. 23 and 36.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁰Pupin, "Braći Srbima širom Amerike." *Amerikanski Srbobran*, July 30, 1909, p. 1.

³¹"Kako je postao S.S.S.S.," *ibid.*, September 13, 1909, p. 1.

³²"Srpski potporni savezi." *Spomenica pedesetogodišnjice od osnivanja prvog srpskog saveza Srpskog Pravoslavnog Saveza "Srbobrana" 1901–1951*. Nikola J. Vurdelja and Sava N. Vujinović, editors (Pittsburgh, 1951), pp. 42–43.

³³"Zaključci o sjedinjenju saveza." *ibid.*, September 20, 1909, p. 1.

³⁴Jevtić, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁵Boža Ranković, "Mihailo Pupin kao čovek, povodom stogodišnjice njegovog rođenja." *Sloboda* (Chicago), October 20, 1958, as quoted by Purić, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40.

³⁶Mile S. Djaković, "Četiri kobne godine." *Spomenica...Srpskog Pravoslavnog Saveza "Srbobrana" 1901–1951*, pp. 36–38.

³⁷"Ko izaziva?" *Amerikanski Srbobran*, October 6, 1910, p. 1.

- ²⁹"Izjava SPCO Kansas Siti." *ibid.*, March 2, 1911, p. 1.
- ³⁰M. Jevtić, "Pupinova garda." *ibid.*, April 6, 1911, p. 1, lead editorial.
- ³¹"Novi Brankovići." *ibid.*, January 26, 1911, p. 1.
- ³²"Zlo iza zla." *ibid.*, May 23, 1912, p. 1.
- ³³"S glave riba smrdi." *ibid.*, October 17, 1912, p. 1.
- ³⁴"Pred sud naroda." *ibid.*, February 11, 1918, p. 2.
- ³⁵"Gde su sirotinjske pare, Gospodine Mihailo I. Pupine?" *ibid.*, February 13, 1918, p. 1.
- ³⁶"Gdje smo braćo?" *ibid.*, February 6, 1918, p. 2.
- ³⁷"Pupinove reklame." *ibid.*, February 16, 1918, p. 2.
- ³⁸M.M. Miličević, "M. Pupin Idvorski." *ibid.*, May 28, 1918, p. 2. Addressing himself to Pupin, Miličević wrote that he agreed with M. Dutina and B.R. Savić that "your work till today shows you to be an Austrian agent and nothing else."
- ³⁹B.R. Savić, "Mihailo Pupin i M. Jevtić -- bloferi." *ibid.*, May 18, 1918, p. 2.
- ⁴⁰"Pupin je tužilo." *ibid.*, May 31, 1918, p. 1.
- ⁴¹*ibid.*, June 22, 1911, p. 2.
- ⁴²M. Jevtić, "Pupinova garda." *ibid.*, April 6, 1911, p. 1.
- ⁴³Purić, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
- ⁴⁴*ibid.*, p. 68.
- ⁴⁵"Ima reč M. Pupin." *Amerikanski Srbobran*, March 4, 1918, p. 2.
- ⁴⁶Cited by Purić, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
- ⁴⁷"Pupin počasni konzul." *Amerikanski Srbobran*, May 25, 1911, p. 2.
- ⁴⁸Purić, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
- ⁴⁹Rade Musulin, "Srbobranci!" *Amerikanski Srbobran*, May 25, 1911, p. 1.
- ⁵⁰"Narodna osuda i rezolucija." *ibid.*, June 1, 1911, p. 1.
- ⁵¹*ibid.*
- ⁵²Purić, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
- ⁵³*ibid.*, p. 79.
- ⁵⁴"Skandal u Srpskom Domu u Njujorku." *Amerikanski Srbobran*, May 9, 1918, p. 1.
- ⁵⁵Purić, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
- ⁵⁶*ibid.*
- ⁵⁷Interview with Glišo Rapačić in Gary, Indiana, on September 22, 1979.
- ⁵⁸Purić, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
- ⁵⁹*ibid.*, p. 110.
- ⁶⁰Interview with Glišo Rapačić in Gary, Indiana, September 22, 1979.
- ⁶¹Purić, *op. cit.*, p. 24, citing *Srpski Dnevnik* (New York) of January 29, 1914.
- ⁶²"Srpski potporni savezi." *Spomenica Srpskog Narodnog Saveza 1901–1951*, p. 43.
- ⁶³George Vodick, "Life, Deeds of Pupin among American Serbs." *American Srbobran* (English section of *Amerikanski Srbobran*, Pittsburgh, Pa.), October 31, 1958, p. 4.
- ⁶⁴"XIII SNF Quadrennial Convention." *American Srbobran*, September 13, 1979, p. 1.
- ⁶⁵Jevtić, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- ⁶⁶Purić, *op. cit.*, pp. 68–73 *passim*.
- ⁶⁷Iskruljev, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
- ⁶⁸Jevtić, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- ⁶⁹Letter of June 17, 1946, from Mrs. Louis Graham Smith (Varvara Pupin Smith) in New York City to Bishop Nicholas (Nikolaj Velimirović), in the archives of the St. Sava Monastery, Libertyville, Illinois.
- ⁷⁰Jevtić, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–36.

Minutes of meeting of Serbian priests in the United States with Pupin in Norfolk, Connecticut, on July 16, 1914, attached to a letter of July 24, 1914, from Father Joakim Pavić to Father Aleksije (Savić?), in the archives of the St. Sava Monastery, Libertyville, Illinois.

Copy of letter from M.I. Pupin in New York City in 1912 (month and day not recorded) to Patriarch Lucian (Lukijan Bogdanović) in Sremski Karlovci, Austria-Hungary, in the archives of St. Sava Monastery, Libertyville, Illinois.

Copy of letter of June 4, 1946, from Bishop Nicholas (Nikolaj Velimirović) to Mrs. Elizabeth Graham Smith (Varvara Pupin Smith) in New York City, in the archives of St. Sava Monastery, Libertyville, Illinois.

Težević, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Ibid., pp. 37–38.

Spomenica 40-godišnjice Srpske Narodne Odbrane (Chicago: Izdanje Narodne Odbrane u Americi, 1950), pp. 44–45; also in *Spomenica povodom 20-godišnjice završenog rada Srpske Narodne Odbrane u Americi 1941–1961* (Chicago: Izdanje Srpske Narodne Odbrane, no date (1961?), p. 31. On p. 115 of his previously cited work, *Biografija Bože Rankovića*, Purić gives February 4, 1917, as the founding date of the Narodna Odbrana in America, but this must be a misprint since on the next page the author states that the organization sent 15,000 packages valued at \$30,000 from Salonica (Thessaloniki) in 1916–1917.

Purić, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

Ibid., p. 151.