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Back to Uncertainty
The Return of Yugoslav Emigrants to Yugoslavia 1945–1951

Summary

Although the end of World War II did not mean the end of the emigration of the Yugoslav population to the West, significant movements in the opposite direction were observed in the first few years following the war. More than 16,000 Yugoslav emigrants returned to socialist Yugoslavia from the end of World War II until 1951. Most immigrants returned between 1947 and 1948. The return of large numbers of Yugoslav emigrants coincided with the state-sponsored campaign aimed at the managed repatriation of emigrants. Emigrants from all parts of the world including Canada, United States, South America, Australia and New Zealand returned to Yugoslavia, as well as those living in Western Europe.

The Yugoslav public was being bombarded with information regarding the return of the emigrants. The reporting by the leading Yugoslav daily “Borba” (The Struggle) reflected the world view constructed by the Yugoslav propaganda machine in the early post-war years. The authors of such reports strove to reinforce the view of the inherent inhumanity of capitalist societies in which the workers’ standard of living was extremely low. At the same time, “Borba’s” reports stressed that the returning emigrants were coming to a “land reborn”. In the contrast with the countries from which the emigrants were returning, Yugoslavia was being presented as a land of prosperity and security. The amplification of these two stereotypes fitted in well with the simplistic view of Yugoslavia and the World, which characterized the reporting of the Yugoslav media at that time.

Reports on the return of emigrants quoted some of them in order to demonstrate the willingness of the returnees to contribute to the regeneration and redevelopment of the country following World War II. However, having faced a variety of economic problems, many returnees decided to leave Yugoslavia again.