

### Charles Jelavich, 1922–2013

One of America's foremost Balkan, Habsburg, and South Slavic specialists, Charles Jelavich, died at Meadowood Health Pavilion, Bloomington, Indiana, on 23 April 2013, aged 90. He was born in Mountain View, California, on 15 November 1922, well before the rise of Silicon Valley, amid the peach groves that were farmed by many Croat settlers. (His parents hailed from the hamlet of Komin, in the delta of the turquoise-colored Neretva.) Jelavich graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1944, where he met his future wife, Barbara Brightfield. They would both receive their PhDs in history from Berkeley—Barbara in 1948 and Charles in 1949—and became lifelong partners, not only in scholarship. Both also taught at Berkeley until their transfer to Indiana University in 1961.

Half a century ago Balkan history was construed as a playing field of the great powers, among which Russia held the leading role. As a student of both Robert J. Kerner, Berkeley's and the West Coast's premier Slavic historian, and George R. Noyes, Berkeley's pioneering Slavist, Charles inherited their fervor for the integrality of the Slavic world and a lively skepticism of German (including Habsburg) influence. This approach, however amended in the first part, was much in evidence in Charles and Barbara Jelavich's *The Habsburg Monarchy* (1959), in which they underscored the absence of any "unifying principle" as the chief reason for the monarchy's demise, adding that a "German victory [in World War I] might have guaranteed its preservation on much the same basis as that on which the Ottoman Empire had existed in the previous centuries." Still, in Charles's first monograph, *Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism: Russian Influence in the Internal Affairs of Bulgaria and Serbia, 1879–1886* (1958), the dominant theme was the failure of Russian imperial ambitions in Bulgaria, and indeed the "failure of the Pan Slav dreams of Slavic unity under Russian guidance," and the achievement of "the remarkable young prince, Alexander of Battenberg" in preventing "Bulgaria from becoming a Russian province." Charles argued that the patient and moderate policies of N. K. Giers, the director of the Asiatic Department in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were more helpful to Russia's cause, certainly in turning Serbia away from Austria-Hungary after the abdication of Milan Obrenović, than the chaotic and bullying approach of Alexander III that proved to be so disastrous in Bulgaria. Giers, effectively Russia's foreign minister from 1878 to his death in 1895, became the Jelavichs' favorite as a "constant advocate of compromise and moderation." In 1962 they edited Giers's incomplete autobiography, *The Education of a Russian Statesman: The Memoirs of Nicholas Karlovich Giers*.

During the 1960s, the Jelavichs contributed greatly to the first collective and organizational initiatives of North American Balkanists. In June 1960 they presided over a conference at Berkeley on "The Transformation of the Balkans since the Ottoman Era," which was attended by practically all the historians in the field. They edited the proceedings of this important gathering and published them three years later as *The Balkans in Transition: Essays on the Development of Balkan Life and Politics since the Eighteenth Century* (1963). In the introduction, though they recognized the diversity of and conflicts in the Balkan condition, they argued that the "Balkan peninsula does represent a unity in its historical, social, economic, political, and cultural development." This lopsided view overstressed the experience of the peninsula's Eastern Orthodox peoples and Russia's role in their liberation but retreated on the issue of modernization, which the Jelavichs saw as attainable only "through the study of Western science and technology." These themes were reiterated in the

longer perspective of the Jelavichs' brief synthesis of Balkan history, *The Balkans* (1965), but also in the research program they favored for their doctoral students at Indiana, in which liberal alternatives to the political course taken in the modern Balkans received exceptional attention. In 1965, at the request of the Subcommittee on East Central and Southeast European Studies (of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council), Charles also edited a guide to east central and southeast European studies, by discipline: *Language and Area Studies: East Central and Southeastern Europe, a Survey* (1969); both Jelavichs wrote a segment on history for this work.

The Jelavichs' last joint effort was the eighth volume in the University of Washington Press's History of East Central Europe series, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804–1920* (1977). In it they outlined a more nuanced history of Balkan state formation, but with a clear emphasis on the diplomatic and territorial restructuring of the peninsula's Orthodox east. On the whole, the Jelavichs were convinced that the "errors and failures in national development" were not the dominant theme of the Balkan *Ottocento*. Rather, the "great accomplishments of the century and the positive gains from national unification should, in the final analysis, take precedence over any reservations and negative judgments." Moreover, they thought that the territorial settlements that were pursued or imposed after 1918 were demonstrably stable. Indeed, the disputes among the Balkan nations after 1945, "in contrast to the nineteenth century . . . have been settled by negotiation and not on the battlefield."

Charles's last major work, *South Slav Nationalisms: Textbook and Yugoslav Union before 1914* (1990), was published at an awkward moment, when Yugoslavia was in an advanced stage of dissolution. Warnings of this process had been available for some time, and these, among other reasons, prompted him to look at what generations of pupils pre-unification knew of their respective (or common) national space and history and to ascertain to what extent this knowledge was at all "Yugoslavist." He concluded that none of the textbooks "even remotely conveyed the type of information and enthusiasm about South Slav unity or Yugoslavism that was being expounded by intellectuals, university students, and a few politicians in the decade before the [First World] war." Worse yet, though Croat and Slovene textbooks were somewhat successful in conveying information about other South Slavic nations, Serb textbooks "offered no information about the other two South Slavic peoples." This study inspired numerous subsequent examinations of textbooks in various Balkan countries and of various periods and political regimes.

Charles was an outstanding teacher, mentor, and colleague. He served the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies as vice president and president, and he was a member of the editorial board of *Slavic Review*. Devoted to the field and his numerous students, whom he adored to excess and who themselves have had a significant impact on academia, the media, and government, Charles was a man of sound and practical judgment. He also had a joyous and droll sense of humor. In one of his numerous letters to me, he wrote, "I was told that when Indiana University received a letter from the Yugoslavs in the late 1950s asking for an exchange of publications they concluded the letter with their [customary] 'Smrt fašizmu, sloboda narodu [Death to fascism, liberty to the people].'" When this was translated for President Wells, he accepted their proposal and ended his letter with "Beat Purdue!" Charlie will be greatly missed.

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