

Serbian Bourgeois Elite and the Yugoslavia (1918-1941)

Abstract: The essay is about political views, economic programs, democratic potentials, social and national ideas which occupied Serbian bourgeois elite in the years between 1918 and 1941. In the political life of the state, Serbian elite, although divided and alienated, were dominant. However, they did not show the ability to find political solutions, which could alleviate national and social tensions, understand differences, view the needs of the society, influence of fast modernization and formulating the strategy of development.

The formation of modern political programs, economic expansion, parliamentary democracy, and social and national ideas (in large part using the example of developed European countries) all found their firm basis in the Kingdom of Serbia at the beginning of the 20th century. However, Serbia had already had, up until then, distinct individuals within the bourgeois elite, whose ideal for modernizing society was found in the contemporary currents within the history of Europe. That foundation, created in the 19th century, offered a good basis (primarily by education "on the side") for the awakening of modern creativity in all domains of Serbian society. The revolution of 1903 and the ascension of the Karadžević dynasty to the throne only signified an important shift and accelerated the emergence of creativity within the bourgeois elite at the beginning of the 20th century. Serbia on its own also made an effort to move in step with Europe by opening a modern university in 1905, along with the already established Serbian Royal Academy. Representatives of the bourgeois elite in Serbia, then in the prime of their creative strength, were the fulcrum of political centers of power in deciding the policies of internal politics (in the spirit of democratic ideas) as well as economic policy ("The Balkans for the Peoples of the Balkans" and freedom from economic dependence on the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy). They did so with the clear orientation of seeking the firmest possible support from the powers of the Entente. Nevertheless, in the center of attention were two components which defined the bourgeois elite: a) modern organization and arming of the military, which has already at that time had excellent representatives in the military elite and b) maintaining national policies which would lead to the unification of all of the Serbs, keeping in mind that two-thirds of the Serbian people lived

outside of the borders of the Kingdom of Serbia. In these processes of the modernization of society, various tendencies were observed; not only having to do with the interests of the state as a whole, but tendencies that also urged artistically creative competition as well. (Istorija srpskog naroda, 1983:VI-1, VI-2; Janković, 1973)

Competent statesmen were at the head of the political centers of power, most important of which was Nikola Pašić, who knew how to manipulate the various other centers of power (conspirators, the King, military, government, and political parties each with their own programs). In bringing together ideas and practice, the Serbian bourgeois elite demonstrated historical maturity for fulfilling the strategic plans of the state. With this in mind, the greatest victory of these policies is considered to be forcing the international community to understand that the people of the Balkans should be allowed to – within the limits of principles legitimate at that time – create their own path towards development. In so doing, this would allow them to acquire the envious position of a third actor in international relations and in the constellation of international powers amongst which decisions about this extremely important strategic location in Europe are made. In this context, the Serbian government aided in the cultural and educational societies of Serbs outside of Serbia, through the efforts of the representatives of the bourgeois elite, most importantly scientists and intellectuals. This aid directed – especially in Croatia – the policies of “harmony and unity”, which led to the creation of the outline of the Yugoslav idea and movement. The political center of power carried this out carefully and gradually, without provoking upheaval within the country or within enclaves where Serbian people lived. As far as it was possible, tensions with Montenegro were alleviated. The idea of “harmony and unity” entered into the Muslim population. Through the work of the Croat-Serbian Coalition, a certain, influential portion of the Croatian political, intellectual, and especially cultural elite joined the cause. Individual representatives of the Slovenian intellectuals were drawn to Serbia (The Ribnikar Brothers, Dr. Niko Zupanič etc.) as well as Croatian artists (Ivan Meštrović). In this way, especially through the media and various cultural societies, the consciousness of the need for the creation of a single strong Slavic state in Southeastern Europe was spread. A Slavic state that would represent a society in which – based on the same ethnic origins – the interests of all “South Slavic tribes” could be served, including the Bulgarians. This was in accordance with the general historical development of the Serbian state, as well as in the interests of the Entente powers considering that the Central powers’ policies were directed towards penetrating the East.

This generation of Serbian bourgeois elite prepared and, in many ways, brought into being a path for an elementary European understanding of the societal needs of the population as well as the development of state institutions, especially constitutionality, rule of law, and parliamentary democracy. Many newly-founded magazines and the free press wrote about attempts that the state change itself in order to bring

itself into line with contemporary world models. The expansion of educational institutions led to the advancement of the citizens of this new county in its desire to hasten cultural and political emancipation. In this way, the elite executed the first radical modernization of society, with the particular aspirations of abandoning the old patriarchal and oriental practices, building up cities and their infrastructures, creating railways and modern lines of communication, expanding electrification, introducing more modern and European fashions, and supporting the latest trends in the arts (“Lada”, “The Yugoslav Fine Arts Exhibition”, etc), theater, film, and music. (Janković, 1973; Stanković, 1984; Stanković, 1985; Istorija srpskog naroda, 1983: VI-1, VI-20)

However, that which was most important for the societal development of the population was that the Serbian peasantry, which made up 80% of society, transformed from a *subject of the regime* into an *active political citizen* gradually from the end of the 19th century. Most of the credit for this goes to the circles of the National Radical Party. That party, together with the bourgeois elite from other parties, had the greatest contribution towards the creation of a thin, but extremely influential layer of society, “devoted to the homeland, and her goals” – especially representatives from the scientific, intellectual and military elite.

On the other hand, nationalism was on the rise, springing up from the difficult situation of Serbs outside of Serbia. At this time, the nationalist-romanticist stereotypes were born (especially towards the Turks, Albanians, “Swabians”, Hungarians, etc.). However, these stereotypes, for the most part, were not able to control modern political doctrine, their long-term program designs, or the centers of power.

The landscape towards the Morava-Vardar valley to the south (to Salonika), to the north (Vojvodina) and the west (mainly towards Bosnia and Hercegovina), was extended to the west to the farther most boundaries of the Serbian population and the “South Slavic tribes”. Until the First World War, the Yugoslav movement was not organized and the Yugoslav idea seized only the single finest layer of the societal structure. However, under the slogan of “harmony and unity” of peoples and places, the idea relentlessly spread throughout the cultural and educational societies. The allies – due to the principle of legitimacy that ruled Europe – were still reserved about the idea. For enemy countries and imperialistically minded neighboring monarchies (Austro-Hungarian, and Turkish), the idea provoked the creation of an offensive anti-Serbian, and anti-Yugoslavian propaganda campaign aimed at their South Slavic subjects. Serbia was, in Europe, generally perceived more and more as a small Balkan country, still having an oriental spirit. However, through its feeble, but productive bourgeois elite, it strove to root itself into the course of European history. (Ekmečić, 1989, Stanković, 1984)

An immeasurable national-propaganda impression was made upon the South Slavic peoples by adroitly “executed national propaganda”, as well as official diplo-

macy, freedom from economic dependence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and victories in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). These factors also led to gaining even greater respect among their allies and to the completion of the Central Power's war plans. All of the Serbian bourgeois elite were aware of this. The members of the elite were dedicated, with all of the power at their disposal, to be not only "moral allies" of the Entente powers, but allies who would firmly and unshakably stand behind them in the First World War. This inclination was even actively accepted within the circles of Serbian Socialists. Due to this, Serbia was able – with the unified support of its bourgeois elite, especially from the ranks of its scientists – to plan and establish its war goal at the beginning of the conflict. That war goal was met by the allies with skepticism. However, the persistence with which Serbia sacrificed itself, not only on the field of battle, but in the united propaganda of its bourgeois elite as well, contributed to the disappearance of this skepticism amongst the allies. Thus the allies supported the creation of the Yugoslav state as a war goal of the Serbian state, allowing for a certain nuances in its realization. The Yugoslav Committee, formed in mid-1915 with major financial support from the Serbian government, contributed to this fact, together with The Montenegrin Committee for National Unification which was formed in the beginning of 1917. With the help of representatives of the Serbian bourgeois elite from Serbia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, Slavonia, and Vojvodina, Serbian war goals gained even greater importance in the process of internationalization and changing the attitudes of the great powers. These representatives were either members of these committees, or had worked devotedly on promoting the Yugoslav cause in allied and neutral countries as individuals or as members of special missions of the Serbian government. Skepticism as to the war goals of Serbia was to a great extent caused by secret diplomacy, which was actually causing harm to the creation of the Yugoslav state. Serbia, even though an unshakeable moral ally of the Entente, was not informed nor consulted about the political territorial compensation and the signing of secret treaties (1915 with Italy and 1916 with Romania). There was especially strong and nearly unyielding pressure on Serbia in the negotiations about Bulgaria in the summer of 1915. All of these treaties and secret negotiations were directly harmful to the resolution of the entire Serbian or Yugoslavian question. The most prominent representatives of the Serbian bourgeois elite and Serbian diplomats were only partially aware that negotiations were taking place. With their influence on the representatives of the elites and the diplomats of the allied great powers, they persisted in maintaining the integrity of their war goals. All of these actions were coordinated by the President of the Serbian Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nikola Pašić, whose personal position was greatly strengthened during the war. In addition, all of this was taking place during a merciless war, when from areas where Serbs were settled, thousands of members of the bourgeois elite – from ordinary clergy and teachers to doctors from the most elite European universities –

were interned in concentration camps in Hungary, Austria, Croatia, and Bosnia and Hercegovina. A lesser number was also able to emigrate from the Austro-Hungarian Empire or to withdraw with the Serbian Government through Albania. These groups were able to actively participate in the promotion of their war goals in almost every allied and neutral country. An important portion gave their lives at the front.

The Yugoslav state was created in 1918 with a real consensus of the interests within the bourgeois elites of the majority of the Yugoslav peoples. First among these elites was the real dominance of the military-political center power of Serbia and its allies. In these circles during the war, with the full support of the intellectual, and especially the scientific elite, official declarations about the Yugoslav state as a war goal of Serbia were created (Niš Declaration 1914, Corfu Declaration 1917, Geneva Declaration 1918). These declarations also became the origins of constitutional law in the process of creating the Yugoslav state. (Istorija srpskog naroda; Ekmečić, 1989; Mitrović, 1984; Trgovčević, 1986; Stanković, 1984, Stanković 1985)

The Act of Unification, December 1, 1918 was an expression of the political will and interests of the internal factors of unification, with the supportive attitude of the victorious allied countries. On the whole, this declaration described the form of the state as that stated by the bourgeois elite of the victorious Serbia. At that time, this coincided with the interests of the centers of power and the desires and interests of the bourgeois elites of the other constituent peoples – the Slovenes and the Croats. The very top of the Serbian bourgeois elite gave their most significant contribution at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919 – 1920, where their exceptional abilities produced great achievements in the process of international recognition and the creation of the Yugoslav state. Often they came mercilessly face to face with great and often unscrupulous allies, with issues mainly concerning ethnic principles. In the period of the provisional situation (1918-1921), during the turbulent times of “revolutionary anarchy”, social unrest, and revisionism in some of the neighboring states, a constitutional order was sought which would guarantee a strong centralized state, able to ensure its stability as a whole. For the first time, the Serbian bourgeois elite were divided. The two essential factions were for either centralization or decentralization, unitarianism or a compromise on national unitarianism. A small portion of the Serbian bourgeois elite supported a republic or federalist form of state, while others joined a new political movement in which the Yugoslav option dominated. This movement had prominent internationalist communist origins. It must not be forgotten the Serbian bourgeois elite from Serbia was joined by the bourgeois elites of the Serbian peoples from other areas of Yugoslavia. They brought with them their own historical uniqueness and new expectations into the once unified positions of the Serbian elite.

The large portion of the Serbian bourgeois elite, which essentially created the new state, created the outline and won the fight for a Yugoslav state in which the Serbian population and their elites would have political hegemony. In so doing, they were aware of the economic and financial power of the Slovenes and the Croats. (Petranović, 1988; Petranović, 1993; Stanković, 1985)

Under the influence of Regent Alexander and Nikola Pašić, the Serbian elite accepted the new principle in national politics – the principle of national reconciliation – from the beginning of the new state's existence. The Austro-Hungarian army, in which there were regiments of Slavic peoples (Croats, Czechs, Serbs, and Bosnian Muslims), committed great crimes against civilians and cultural institutions in Mačva, beginning in the second half of 1914. These crimes continued unabated until the end of the war, intruding on the international rights of Serbia ensured under the Hague Convention. During the occupation of Serbia (1916-1918) 260,000 civilians were taken to concentration camps. In Braunau, there was even a camp created for children in which there were some 5,000 boys younger than 15 years of age. The mortality rate in these camps was exceptionally high due to the strenuous physical activity, unhygienic conditions, and poor nutrition. The Yugoslav delegation to the Peace Conference in Paris was the first to propose, in 1919, the establishment of an international tribunal for war crimes. The High Council accepted this proposal; however, just prior to the signing of the peace accord with Germany, France stated its opposition, wishing to retain for itself the right to penalize the "German aggressors" on its own. The proposal as outlined foresaw the creation of a permanent international tribunal, which would consist of three representatives of the major powers and two representatives from smaller states. The Yugoslav delegation and its legal experts adopted the attitude that the proposal apply only to the collective guilt of the Bulgarian people and Kaiser Ferdinand, as well as to the other members of the Hapsburg dynasty! Because of this, not a single legal proceeding was started against the new citizens of Yugoslavia who had been members of enemy formations that had committed crimes. The Serbian bourgeois elite gradually suppressed these genocidal war events from their collective consciousnesses, hoping that they will be forgotten in time. However, this was not the case. The crimes were of such a scale and of such a broad scope that they remained in the memory of the people. (Stanković, 1985)

The definition of the role of the military elite within the political system was very important for the Yugoslav state. After the breach of the front at Salonika and the liberation of Serbia, as well as after the entry of former Austro-Hungarian lands into the Yugoslav state, the Serbian forces were welcomed as liberators. Although small in number (145,000), they were able to secure not only the ethnic frontiers, but also the strategic and natural borders of the new state as well. A small portion was even able to assist in the stamping out of social unrest, revolutionary anarchy, and the disarmament of the members of the "Green Cadre" (deserters from the Austro-Hun-

garian Army). By 1920, the Serbian Army had been demobilized from its war footing, and the new mobilization and formation of the Yugoslavian Army was complete. Up until the Second World War, the army consisted of around 150,000 professional soldiers and officers, of which were 3,500 active Serbian officers, 2,590 Austro-Hungarian, and 500 Montenegrin. The army was distributed over the internationally recognized territory of Yugoslavia, and divided into 4 armies with 16 infantry and 2 cavalry divisions. Their arms were acquired through the previous wars, and had become obsolete, but remained in service. The military elite changed its national structure through the education and advancement of a large number of Croatian and Slovenian officers. Although on the whole, the officer corps was left in a weak state, educationally speaking, after the natural attrition of the Serbian officers, and with their retirements in large numbers in 1929 under pressure from King Alexander. Taking into consideration the poverty of the country and its financial capabilities, the navy developed slowly, and modern war fighting equipment (aircraft, tanks, communications equipment) was obtained only on the eve of the Second World War. The military press and publications emphasized the Serbian war tradition in the first plan; and from foreign sources, they used the French military doctrine, in contrast to the German, American, and Italian doctrines. Prior to the war, a modern defensive war plan was also conceived, and training of the reserve forces was strengthened. All of this was not sufficiently homogeneously carried out, especially in the ethnically heterogeneous private's ranks, and among a greater portion of the officer's corps. This did not help Yugoslavia resist aggression (from the Axis forces) for more than 10 days in 1941. (Bjelajac, 1988; Bjelajac, 1994, Petranović, 1988; Hoptner, 1971)

The national component played a fateful role in the division of the Serbian bourgeois elite throughout the entire Yugoslav state. Gathered mainly around the National Radical Party and its leader, Nikola Pašić, the crowned father of Yugoslavia, the Serbian elites wanted the program to be adopted in the first place by the "entire Serbian population". This program was the basis of the first parliamentary elections. The Serbian elites did not wish for the name of Serbia, as victor, removed from the name of the country ("Yugoslavia is an unnatural name", "It smells of Austrian-ism", "watered down Yugoslavia" etc.). However, a large portion of the Serbian bourgeois elite had immediately accepted the name of *Yugoslavia*, which was promoted by the Yugoslavian Democratic Party, based on the support by Regent Aleksandar. For the Farm Labor and Republican Parties, who also contained a certain number of representatives of the Serbian bourgeois elite, that issue was not important to a certain degree. From this, we are able to determine that with the creation of Yugoslavia, as well as the national politics within the country, the Serbian bourgeois elite did not accomplish the integration of the Serbian nation. On the contrary, they left this open to various influences, with extreme political programs, as well as a tense battle over the division of political power within the country. As it was, the

problem of the development of society was pushed into the background into secondary priorities. (Stanković, 1992: 116-140)

In the new country, the Serbian bourgeois elite encountered insurmountable difficulties, specifically in the area of the creation of a modern society, due to the extreme economic, cultural, and educational inequalities between the different regions and nations of Yugoslavia. Slovenia, Croatia, and Vojvodina, in the northern part of the country, as far as industry, infrastructure, culture, and literacy rates were concerned, were far ahead of the level of development in the southern half of the new country. The same was true in the area of agriculture, which was of particular importance due to the agrarian character of the country. Industrial development in the north was four times greater than in the south, transportation five times more dense and modern, and literacy rates were unbelievable disparate – 90% illiteracy in Kosovo and 84% in Macedonia compared to 9% in Slovenia. 40% of private financial capital was concentrated in Zagreb. In addition, the legal apparatus was more educated and capable in the north, as well as the technical and high schools. The state was not able to unify cultural and educational politics at all until 1934; nearly 90% of the funds set aside for the Ministry of Education were expended on the salaries of administrative and teaching personnel, leaving 10% for the repair and construction of schools. (Dimić, I, 1996:80-168)

Since the unification, the country generously aided the established and creative authors and artists, enhanced publishing and increased the numbers of periodicals and newspapers. Contrary to the orientation of the majority of authors and artists, very few of these publications were supportive of the Yugoslav idea. As far as the political and national passions were raised within the country, the cultural elite disintegrated into its component layers. The universal values of the cultural creativity were being abandoned, and alignment on the basis of the national identity increased. Many of the renowned artists entered government services, especially into the diplomatic corps. The top of the cultural creativity inertly migrated from the cities to small towns, while their contribution to the cultural renaissance of the villages was insignificant. European standards were achieved occasionally by a small number of periodicals, especially in the fields of law and social sciences, literature, philology and ethnology, and to a lesser extent, in finance and economics, and also by daily newspapers, or an occasional play. In the decade preceding the war, balkanological and historical periodicals can also be considered to be a part of this group. (Dimić, III, 263-325)

In these domains of society, the Serbian bourgeois elite, that were in two strongest political parties, had differing programs. The Radicals allowed societal development to follow the course of liberal capitalism, while the Democrats sought the strengthening of the intervention of the state. The representatives from the Democrats and the Radicals were only on rare occasions able to successfully carry out their own

programs – the Democrats having the support of the important representatives of the economic elite, and the Radicals having the support of the financial elite. In this way, Yugoslav society further maintained its agrarian character. The population in the south, due to the small size of land holdings (67% of holdings were of 5 hectares or less), were eating bread, corn bread, beans, and dairy products, and only rarely meat. In the north, however, nutrition, public health, and the standard of living were more diverse and richer. (Đurović, 1986)

The phenomenon of government, especially when it brought monetary power as well, was exceptionally expressed in the Kingdom of Serbia, and the battle among parties and campaign propaganda was intensified to the outmost limits of political culture. This was noticed not only by the contemporary members of individual Serbian bourgeois elites, but by official diplomatic representatives as well. This phenomenon of the battle for government and the dispersal of governance on the basis the national and Yugoslav options was very clearly transmitted into the circles of the Serbian bourgeois elite. The government, which was almost completely made up from the ranks of the Serbian political elite, was fragile, due to the fact that not a single political party had a majority in the parliament. As this was the case, the political life of the Kingdom was marked by the appearance of coalitions, often very loose associations and controlled by the Court. Among other political phenomenon that the Serbian bourgeois elite brought to the new country was achieving a political goal “at any cost”, which, along with other methods, brought the implication of buying votes, as well as covering up corruption in the governmental apparatus. (Petranović, 1988)

The Vidovdan Constitution (1921), adopted exactly along these lines, became a source of new, or the extension of old political crises. This time, these were transferred onto the national plans and the clustering of political parties around the national programs, which were weakening the interests of the country as a whole. The idea of state intervention into economics, culture, education, with the goal of creating firmer internal cohesion existed within a few individual intellects in the areas of politics and science where the Serbian bourgeois elite was concerned. Even the military elite distanced itself. Even King Aleksandar I gradually infringed upon and destabilized the democratic parliamentary organization of the state. The centers of political power were too concerned about external dangers to the new state, enough to say that they were fascinated by the topic. In so being, so far as the Serbian bourgeois elite were concerned, they took no steps to put productive programs which would create integration within the state into practice. Frequent changes in governments, frequent parliamentary elections, and numerous ministries which were constantly changing served to create confusion in the carrying out of state duties, which were also poorly understood.

Constitutionality was not consistently applied; the administrative structures of the provinces remained until 1925, even though the Directive for the Administrative

Division of the State was handed down in 1922. A movement for the revision of the constitution appeared. Within the context of this movement, the Serbian bourgeois elite joined with the initiative of the Democratic Party, which maintained that through a movement of “public workers” (Congresses in Sarajevo and Zagreb 1922) it would be possible to mitigate the effects of centralism, and the political terror which had been gaining strength. After the failure of the talks between the Radical Party with the Federalist Block, 1923, a constitutional crisis began which lasted until 1925.

In this situation, the Serbian bourgeois elite, which maintained political hegemony within the country, did not demonstrate the ability to devise the types of integrative programs which would have lessened not only national tensions, but all social divisions within the society, the growth of regional differences, and the appearance of radical class-conscious and separatist organizations. Up until the Second World War, the Kingdom, nevertheless, demonstrated economic vitality and advancement, as well as progress in culture and education. However, these changes were not significant enough to satisfy the population, individual nations, and the provinces. The victory of fascism in Italy in 1922 and Nazism in Germany in 1933, countries which immediately surrounded Yugoslavia, did not receive an adequate response from the Serbian bourgeois elite. From the ridicule of centralism and the compromise of national unitarianism, King Aleksandar took the initiative in 1929 for the protection of the unity of the country through even stronger centralization (dictatorship) and integral Yugoslav-ism. The results of these policies, inspired by a portion of the ranks from the Serbian bourgeois elite, were stronger national separatism and class-conscious radicalism. Yugoslavia’s enemy neighbors found this to be fertile ground for the destabilization of the state and society. Internally, already in 1921, various military organizations appeared – some of these were paramilitary, while others were terrorist in character. Among the first of these fall the Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (ORJUNA), the Serbian Nationalist Youth (SRNAO), Četnik organizations in which the Serbian bourgeois elite took a visible role, and with them the Croatian Nationalist Youth (HANA O). In the terrorist groups were the Macedonian Committee and the Albanian Renegades. In the period until the final consolidation of the country and its borders (1925) the Yugoslavian Gendarmerie and Army had over 1000 fatal casualties (among them, a general), as well as numerous civilian casualties. After being forbidden to exist in 1921, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the third most powerful party in the country at that time, transformed into a small, but radical party of professional revolutionaries faithful to the Comintern in Moscow. (Petranović, 1988; Gligorijević, 1970; Krizman, 1975)

As much as the old Serbian war allies were passive observers to the creation of the Yugoslav state under the Vidovdan Constitution, in equal amounts they began to secretly and openly interfere during the introduction of the dictatorship as well as the realignment of the states prior to the Second World War. The Serbian political elite

were apathetic to this interference (as well as bribable, when taking into consideration the significant presence of foreign capital), finding solutions in extreme measures – from parliamentary democracy to dictatorship, from party compromise through coalitions to a single party system, from national unitarism through compromise (“a state of a nation with three tribes”) to integrated Yugoslav-ism and the beginning of federalism with the creation of the Croatian Banovina in 1939. The Serbian bourgeois elite did not have adequate answers to the questions of national homogenization in Slovenia and Croatia. This homogenization was concurrent with Slovene and Croatian political policies and their accelerated economic and cultural development. The Serbian national corpus within the state remained demobilized, and their peripheral ranks were even left behind and forgotten by Belgrade. In this complex situation, the prominent national, religious, and political leaders’ animosities intensified, as well as their unexpectedly unreliable political behaviors. First, we must point out that Nikola Pašić and Stjepan Radić, undeniably, the two most important representatives of the most populous peoples of the state – the Serbs and the Croats – met for the first times in their lives only in 1925 in Geneva. That same year, Stjepan Radić changed from a republican and confederalist into a Monarchist and moderate centralist. We also must point out that Svetozar Prbićević, a representative of the Serbs in Croatia, who brought the “three crowns” to King Aleksandar, ended up as the King’s most bitter opponent, and before his death, close to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The only consistent political policies, with national and political points of view, came from the Slovenian leader Dr. Anton Korošec and leader of the Bosnian Muslims, Dr. Mehmed Spaho. The intervention of the King into politics, the influence of his court, and the brutal assassination of a Croatian Representative in the National Parliament in 1928 all served to cause unquantifiable damage to the Serbian bourgeois elite. All of these events, together with the assassination of the King in 1934 by the Croatian Ustaša and the Macedonian VMRO led to a deepening of the crisis and hastened the destruction of the foundation of the newly created state. The involvement of Italy and Germany in this assassination in Marseille, as well as the involvement of the far right wing of the ranks of the Serbian bourgeois elite in the assassination of the Croatian Representative in the National Parliament in Belgrade was unquestionably equal to the level of Croatian intolerance towards the “Salonikifying of the victors” and Serbian political hegemony. The fact that Slovenia and Croatia were economically and fiscally more developed and had more advanced infrastructures was suppressed by political passion and intolerance. In order to hide this fact all the more, an offensive political propaganda campaign was started claiming their exploitation by the Serbs. The Serbian bourgeois elite could not come up with an adequate response to these issues. On the basis of society – degrees of economic development, financial power and modern infrastructure – the Serbian bourgeois elite did not know how to include into its priorities the modernization and advancement of society in

the country as a whole. Prince Pavle, Regent of Yugoslavia, proved himself to be incapable of being of modern statesman by 1941. These times demanded the adoption of modern and liberal social and national programs to serve as shock absorbers for these rising tensions which were obviously destabilizing the state and ridiculed the social structure. What was left of the representatives of the Serbian bourgeois elite, partially those gathered around the Serbian Cultural Club, did not demonstrate forcefulness in the world of the centers of power, in so far that it desired in the least bit the saving of the Serbian national corpus, and with it, Yugoslavia as a state. (Hoptner, 1971, Stojadinović, 1970, Petranović, 1988, Dimić, I, 1996)

To this day, the question still remains: How did the Serbian bourgeois elite, so unified in the creation of the modern Serbian state and society at the beginning of the 20th century, and also showing the same unification in creating a single great Slavic state in Southeastern Europe in 1918, end up to be so politically unprepared, so disoriented, and so poorly understood that large area, having been almost completely pulled into the politics and nationalistic manipulations, without a modern understanding of the needs of the development of society?

We can be sure in one of the historically accepted understandings of this phenomenon, if not the main cause – their inexorable biological attrition. We will list only those from the top of the pyramid of the Serbian bourgeois elite. In 1914, Jovan Skerlić died, the “apostle of Yugoslav-ism”, literary critic and historian by training, politically aligned with the left wing of the independent radicals, and close to the socialists. That same year, the Slovenes Vladislav and Darko Ribnikar were killed on the field of battle as high ranking officers of the Serbian Army. Vladislav was the founder of *Politika*, the oldest publication in the Balkans, and Darko was the editor. Their newspaper contributed immeasurably to the propagation of the Yugoslavian idea, democratic institutions, and political freedom. The following year, the old conservative Dr. Stojan Novaković passed away. Dr. Novaković was the president of the Serbian Royal Academy, a university professor and historian, and one of the creators of the Serbian war goals. That same year, 1915, Nadežda Petrović and Dr. Lazar Paču died. Ms. Petrović was a well known Serbian and then Yugoslav artist, and Dr. Paču was, next to Nikola Pašić, the most important figure in the National Radical Party. He was a physician from Vojvodina, a genius Minister of Finance in most all of Pašić’s governments, and was the first to state the Yugoslav program in the Party Club, which was unanimously adopted. In Belgrade, 1916, Petar Kočić died. Kočić was the most important Serbian author from Bosnia, a tireless rebel and national soldier, and a Representative in the Bosnian Sabor as well. In Nice, 1917, Duke Radomir Putnik died. Duke Putnik was the head of the Serbian High Command. In Salonika the same year, Dragutin “Apis” Dimitrijević, the well known head of the Intelligence Bureau of the SVK, was shot. The next year, 1918, Andra Nikolić, president of the National Parliament, and Ljubomir Kovačević died. Kovačević was

the creator of Serbian critical historiography, university professor, Minister of Education and state advisor during the wars from 1912 – 1918. In 1920, Dragoljub Pavlović and Kosta Milićević passed away. Pavlović was an historian, university professor, and academic, a democrat and a great supporter of Yugoslavia, and the first president of the provisional national representative government. Milićević was the founder of Serbian and Yugoslav modernism in fine arts, and a participant in all Yugoslav exhibitions from 1904 to 1924. A year later, in 1921, the following people left the historical and political stage: Petar Karađorđević I (“The Liberator”) – one of the most responsible for the rebirth of Serbia from 1903, Đorđe Stanojević – a student in Berlin, Paris and Cambridge, professor of physics, president of Belgrade University, and pioneer of the electrification of Serbia, Milan Savčić – director of the publication “*Epoha*”, president of the Society of Serbian Journalists and National Representative, General Branko Jovanović – Minister for Military Affairs, Milenko Vesnić – long-time emissary in Paris, and president of the government, Dr. Kosta Stojanović – a renowned economist in European circles, Duke Živojin Mišić – head of the General Headquarters of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the most talented of military commanders, and Milorad Drašković – democrat, tireless fighter for the modernization of Serbia, the unification of Yugoslavia and political freedom, and also author of the Niš Declaration of 1914. He was killed by members of the radical wing of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The following year, by royal order, Duke Stepa Stepanović and Petar Bojović were forced into retirement. That year, 1922, Jaša Tomić died. He was a student in Prague and Vienna, a Vojvodinian, Serbian, and Yugoslavian patriot, and was responsible for the unification of Vojvodina with Serbia November 26, 1918. In 1923, Stojan Protić passed away. He was the third most powerful member of the Radical Party, Minister, president of the first Yugoslavian government, and persistent fighter for a settlement with the Croats through a revision of the constitution. The great Serbian poet and patriot from Bosnia, Aleksa Šantić, died in 1924. Nikola Pašić, the most powerful and most significant personality in Serbia and Yugoslavia, died in 1926. Dr. Jovan Cvijić and Janko Vukotić both passed away in 1927. Cvijić was a world renowned ethnologist and Yugoslav, while Vukotić was a Montenegrin divisional commander and general in the Yugoslav Army. The next year, 1928, Ljubomir Jovanović and Stepa Stepanović died. Jovanović was a historian by profession, and a long time Minister and president of the National Parliament.

During these 15 portentous years of Serbian and Yugoslavian history (1914–1929), the Serbian bourgeois elite was decapitated by the departure of their most intelligent and most capable members. In the political, national and the collective psychological realms, the Serbian people were left in the hands of weak and incompetent representatives, and being as such, prone to subjugation by international factors. The tragedy of those who were left, according to one of the contemporary mem-

bers, was also reflected in the fact that everyone left was already along in their years and had lost their creativity and enthusiasm. (Stanojević, 1929; Enciklopedija Jugoslavije, 1955)

With the introduction of the dictatorship in 1929, not only was the constitution suspended, but organizations based on Yugoslav or national foundations were forbidden. These included political parties, and paramilitary and militant organizations. A rigid political ideology of integrated Yugoslav-ism was established within organizations that supported such ideas, such as the Yugoslavian Falcon, the Adriatic Guard, and the Četnik association "For King and Homeland". These organizations were inspired by and based upon the support of the large number of members of the Serbian bourgeois elite who had actively participated in the creation of the regime and the ideology of the dictatorship. However, in the same year of 1929, the Croatian fascist and separatist Ustaša movement was founded (in Hungary, Italy, and in parts of Germany). On the same basis, the politics of the Macedonian separatists were radicalized – the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO). Within the legal framework in Croatia and Slovenia, a number of paramilitary organizations were formed: the Croatian Peasant Defense, the Croatian Civil Defense, and the Slovene Fantj. The Serbian bourgeois elite in Croatia and Bosnia responded with a massive increase in membership in the Četnik association "For King and Homeland", especially in the small villages. However in 1936 the Minister for Internal Affairs, Slovenian Anton Korošec, with the permission from the president of the government, Milana Stojadinović, and with the knowledge of Prince-Regent Pavle, outlawed these organizations and seized their assets and gave them to the Sava and Vrbas Banovinas (Croatian and Bosnian). He also forbade the publication of their periodical, the "Yugoslavian Guard". With these actions, over 2 million Serbs were left without physical protection and the authority of the government and the Serbian bourgeois elite were both severely weakened in these areas. According to the latest research, the legal apparatus in these parts of the country lost authority under the influence of legal Croatian and Slovenian organizations, which had not been outlawed, and the state began its decline towards disintegration. In addition, the Clero-fascist policies of the Catholic Church, headed by Cardinal Alojzija Stepinac, contributed specifically to this decline. (B. Petranović, 1988; Hoptner, 1971; Stojadinović, 1970; Dimić, II, 1996)

Integrated Yugoslav-ism and the imposition of the military-monarchical dictatorship January 6, 1929 had its own base of support within a large portion of the Serbian bourgeois elite. However, the same was true for the weakening of the dictatorship with the adoption of the Oktroisan Constitution in 1931. However, in the decade preceding the Second World War, the biological attrition of the most important members of the Serbian bourgeois elite continued. In 1930, Ljubomir Stojanović and Ilija Stanojević ("Uncle Ilija") passed away. Ljubomir Stojanović was a histori-

an and philologist, university professor, secretary of the Serbian Royal Academy, and a zealous worker for the Yugoslav cause. Ilija Stanojević was one of the greatest Serbian and Yugoslavian actors. In 1934, King Aleksandar I was removed from the thrown by assassination. He was a controversial character, but an indisputably good diplomat, and a leader who was dedicated to the protection of Yugoslavia until the end. However, this same leader demonstrated – together with the Serbian bourgeois elite – the extreme incapability of resolving the main internal societal and especially national problems. From the beginning, he narrowed the effectiveness of the government and the parliament as well as narrowing their spheres of activities. Considering this was a society without a long democratic tradition, this led to unforeseeable consequences. A significant portion of the most prominent members of the Serbian bourgeois elite supported him in these measures, with the mentality of loyal subjects fought for government, sinecure, and social status (diplomacy, military, and the legal apparatus). Following his death, in the years preceding the Second World War, a few more representatives of the intellectual and political Serbian elite also died. In 1935, Sima Lozanić passed away. Lozanić was a chemist, university professor, university president, president of the Serbian Royal Academy and an expert at the Peace Conference in Paris. Two years later, in 1937 the following people died: Milan Srškić – representative of the Bosnian Serbs, Svetozar Pribičević – representative of the Serbs in Croatian and Slavonia, Stanoje Stanojević – historian, fighter for the Yugoslav idea, founder of the Yugoslav Historical Society, creator of the first Yugoslavian encyclopedia, and founder of the Yugoslav Historical Magazine, Đorđe Vajfert – long time governor of the National Bank of Yugoslavia, and one of Yugoslavia's greatest industrialists, and Patriarch Varnava – head of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In 1938, those who died included Milan Rakić, renowned poet and diplomat, and Branislav Nušić, the greatest Yugoslav comedian. 1939 saw the passing of Pavle Popović and Jovan M. Jovanović. Popović was a renowned historian of Serbo-Croatian literature, a member of the Yugoslav Council, and a university professor. Jovanović was an emissary in Vienna and London, a great diplomat, Yugoslav, writer of historical-diplomatic works and head of the Council of Farm Laborers. In the end, in 1940, Ljubomir Davidović passed away. Davidović was the head of the Democratic Party and considered by many of his contemporaries to be the most respected politician in the Kingdom, and the “Marshal of Democracy”.

The generations that followed onto the political scene only served to deepen the differences within the nations and among society. This fact was adroitly exploited by the re-formed Communist Party of Yugoslavia, with new leadership and a new program (National Front, protection of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito).

Already at this point, the Serbian bourgeois elite were strongly divided and faced opposition from within. Groups consisted of those from the Serbian Cultural Club, which wanted to “mark the boundaries of Serbian lands” within Yugoslavia, to

those who were of pro-western orientation, with democratic visions and programs, and were determined anti-fascists. Amongst them were the highest members of the intellectual, scientific, and political elite. Another, smaller portion, accepted, both secretly and openly, the pro-Nazi politics of the “new European order”. The division of class layers continued before the war with the acceleration of the political maneuvers of the National Front (led by the Communists). A small, but prominent portion from all levels of the Serbian elite participated. The most characteristic example was at Belgrade University. Among the professors, a national Serbian and pro-Western option was most prominent. However, among the 11,000 students, the greatest proportion was with the communists. In this radical division of society, the Army elite were even involved, however without any significant influence from the Communists. The largest portion of the intellectual elite were more disorientated and passive, rather than actively involved. A portion of the prominent economic elite shared their own fate, in that an influential group openly turned to “the prosperity and profitability of Nazi Germany”. The financial centers of power were not able to resist this, since they were more connected with the capital of Western Europe. (B. Petranović, 1993; Stojadinović, 1970; đurović, 1986; Krizman, 1975)

We cannot neglect the fact that the new generation of Serbian bourgeois elite found themselves facing the entirely new challenges of the new international power order and internal crises. The only one to behave in a politically mature manner was Dr. Milan Stojadinović, exhausting his strength making up for the weaknesses of the “English man”, Prince-Regent Pavle, among other things. Even considering the economic recovery, Serbian society was on a quickly declining path., and the Serbian national corpus was in shambles even more that it was in 1918. On the other had, national and religious leaders of the other nations, without having scruples when it came to grabbing for power, were not interested in the interests of the country as a whole, but were neither for the increased national and social tensions. We still have not found an answer to the question – Why, during this period of crisis in the state and in society, did the Serbian bourgeois elite appear to be so incapable, without a modern vision for their own future and the future of Yugoslavia? In the first place, we are referring to the political and military elite, as well as the unproductive and passive intellectual and scientific elite. Are the answers to these questions to be sought in the application of force by the international factors in resolving of the internal problems (fall of the government of the dr. Milan Stojadinović and the creation of the Croatian Banovina in 1939) as well as in the crucial decisions concerning foreign policy (Yugoslavia’s joining the Pact March 25 and the determining effects on the carrying out of the military coup March 27, 1941).

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Резиме

Ђорђе Станковић

Српске грађанске елите и Југославија (1918-1941)

Историографски есеј говори о политичким погледима, економским програмима, демократском потенцијалу, социјалним и националним идејама које су заокупљале српске грађанске елите у годинама 1918-1941. Посебно је скренута пажња на компоненте које су у првим годинама XX века пресудно утицале на обликовање грађанских елита: формирање интелигенције на страним универзитетима; модерно устројство државе и наоружање војске; национална политика која је коначно решење нашла у уједињењу свих Срба, претварање сељака (80% становништва) од поданика државе у активног политичког субјекта. У годинама Првог светског рата на стварању заједничке државе југословенских народа посебан допринос дале су српске војне, политичке и научне елите. Прводецембарски акт уједињења 1918, којим је на крају Првог светског рата настала југословенска држава, био је израз политичке воље и интереса унутрашњих чинилаца уједињења и благонаклоног става савезничких победничких држава. Свој допринос уједињењу сам врх српских грађанских елита дао је и на Мировној конференцији у Паризу 1919-1920, на којој је својим дипломатским умећем остварио максимална достигнућа у процесу међународног признања и територијалног облика југословенске државе. Питања унутрашњег уређења земље поделиле су српске грађанске елите у више непомирљивих табора преваходно сучељених око питања централзма или децентрализације, унитаризма или националног компромиса. У националној политици српске елите су прихватиле принци националног помирења. Српски генералитет доминирао је у војној елити југословенске државе, а у годинама диктатуре (1929-1934) био основа монархове власти. Екстремна економска, културна и просветна неуједначеност простора који се 1918. нашао у границама заједничке државе чинила је српским елитама непремостиву тешкоћу. У политичком животу државе српске елите, иако подељене и посвађане, биле су доминантне. Ипак, мора се рећи, да оне нису исказивале способност изналажења политичких решења која би умањила националне тензије и социјална незадовољства, разумела разноликости простора, сагледала потребе друштва, утицала на убрзану модернизацију и формулисање стратегије развоја.

* Овај чланак је објављен у *East European Studies* (Seul), vol. 12 (2), 2003, 235-261.