

Yugoslavia

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Introduction

Yugoslavia was formed as parliamentary constitutional monarchy in 1918. It was established through the merger between the provisional state of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs previously existing within the Austro-Hungarian empire, on the one hand, and the Kingdom of Serbia, on the other (Prpa, 2018). Even though the country's official name in the period from 1918 to 1929 was the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the name Yugoslavia was already used widely, meaning 'the country of south Slavs'. Thus, we also label it simply as Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia is categorized as democracy starting in 1921 when the constitution was adopted (Boix, Miller and Rosato, 2013). Its democratic period ends with the imposition of dictatorship by the king in 1929 (Gligorijević, 1979)

Until the enactment of the 1921 constitution, authority was shared between the king and the 'Provisional National Assembly,' established through a government decree (Popović, 2008: p. 87). The government determined the structure of this parliament and the number of members of parliament. These solutions were justified by extraordinary circumstances, i.e., the war just ended and someone had to make those decisions. Serbian political parties had a more influential role in the Provisional National Assembly and this role was accepted by other political/ethnic actors until the enactment of a new constitution, due to the fact that Serbian parties had more experience in parliamentary affairs from the pre-WWI time. The parliament's structure was derived from local pre-existing assemblies within the provinces and states in which they operated prior to Yugoslavia's formation (Gligorijević, 1979).

Constitutional assembly first session took place on December 12, 1920. This assembly operated until July 2, 1921 when it turned into legislative national assembly or parliament (Popović, 2008: p. 93). The main dividing line was unitary vs federalist organization of the state, dividing mainly the two largest ethnic groups, Serbs and Croats. The most important moment during the lifetime of constitutional assembly was the adoption of Vidovdan Constitution on June 28, 1921 which caused many divisions that would define the political landscape for years to come. The main dividing line was unitary vs federalist organization of the state, dividing mainly the two largest ethnic groups, Serbs and Croats.

The opponents of the unitary state saw the constitution as a tool for parts of Serbian political elite who wanted to create a centralized system that would be dominated from Belgrade (Gligorijević, 1979; Prpa, 2018).

Elections

Up until the imposition of personal dictatorship by king Aleksandar Karadjordjevic in 1929, parliamentary elections took place 4 times: 1920, 1923, 1925 and 1927. The 1920 elections were constitutional assembly elections. No parliamentary assembly managed to reach the entire mandate (4 years) due to inter-ethnic conflict, fragile party system and interference of the monarch in the parliamentary life.

Citizens wanting to run for office were required to have the right to vote, be literate, a minimum age of 25, and a residence on the Kingdom's territory for at least 10 years (Balkovec, 2016). The voting process involved a secret ballot, with voters placing rubber balls into boxes corresponding to the list or candidate they supported. Throughout the democratic era of the country, a proportional system with multiple districts was consistently employed (Gligorijević, 1979). However, changes in individual laws gradually distorted the proportional nature of the electoral system (Balkovec, 2016). The procedure for determining the number of seats per political party involved establishing the ratio between the number of inhabitants and one mandate. Subsequently, authorities calculated the number of mandates in each district. For instance, during the Constituent Assembly elections, the initial ratio was one mandate per 30,000 inhabitants, with additional mandates allocated for every 17,000 inhabitants.

Since the amendment of the law in 1922, the ratio became one mandate per 40,000 inhabitants, with an additional mandate for every 25,000 inhabitants. The population figures were based on the 1910 census, later updated to the 1921 census. In the elections following 1920, the system of quotients was also introduced, i.e., the electoral threshold, which was not equal for all, because in smaller constituencies the percentage needed for threshold was higher than in larger constituencies. The difference is that in 1920 the

quotient served only as aid for the division of seats, but did not mean the threshold for entering parliament. Since 1922, the electoral quotient actually meant threshold. That quotient somewhat distorted the proportional system, but did not really introduced the majority system. However, proportional system was also affected by constituencies of unequal size. The percentage of votes a party needed to win at least one seat was higher smaller constituencies than in large constituencies. For the division of mandates among parties, D'Hondt system was used (Balkovec, 2016).

28 November 1920

In the 1920 elections, 22 political organizations participated, but the voter turnout was relatively low at 65% (Gligorijević, 1979). It was considered low because given the ubiquitous presence of politics in everyday life in the middle of the establishment of the new state. At that time, the Law on Citizenship had not yet been enacted (Balkovec, 2016) so citizenship was determined based on the election law. It encompassed individuals who were citizens of the Kingdom of Serbia and Montenegro before December 1, 1918, those with citizenship in Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia, or residency in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Refugees from the Russian Empire were also granted the right to vote. Furthermore, although national minorities were allowed to join political parties, they were not granted the right to vote for Members of Parliament. Following World War I, women gained political recognition, but the right to vote remained denied. The political discourse was sharply divided regarding women's suffrage. Opposing parties contended that politically inexperienced women might be susceptible to influence by revolutionary factions, citing the significant representation of women among the Bolsheviks as the primary argument (Balkovec, 2016: p. 201).

Despite conditions favoring Serb parties (Balkovec, 2016; Banac, 2019), the 1920 elections yielded unexpected results. Whereas turnout was low among the majority population, the minorities with the right to vote turn out in large numbers. This prevented Serb parties from securing the anticipated majority in parliament, leaving them with only a relative majority. This posed a significant problem due to a prior agreement among polit-

ical actors stipulating that the constitution should be adopted by a two-thirds majority (Popović, 2008: p. 93). Fearing a loss of political control, Serb parties took a unanimous position and co-opted smaller minority parties. This move solidified majority control over political decision-making, leading to the adoption of a controversial constitution and the establishment of a highly centralized state. In response, the Croatian Peasant Party and several additional parties boycotted the parliamentary session during the constitution's enactment. The strongest political forces after these elections were the Democratic Party with 19.9%, the Radical Party with 17.7%, Croatian Peasant Party with 14.3% and the Communist Party 12.4%.

18 March 1923

The 1923 elections were the first in four cycles to witness widespread electoral intimidation by the ethnic majority party in areas where they counted on votes (Gligorijević, 1979: p. 129). This included the use of state resources to reward potential voters and intimidate political opponents. These practices, however, had the unintended effect of homogenizing the Croat minority: turnout increased sharply compared to 1920, and the minority ethnic party emerged victorious in all Croatian strongholds like no other party in any other region of Yugoslavia did. Almost all Croats now rallied under their ethnic party.

The top three top getters from the 1920 elections were also top vote getters now, although with different balance of power. the Radical Party 25.8%, Croatian Peasant Party 21.8% and Democratic Party 18.4%.

8 February 1925

Ahead of the 1925 election, the majority ethnic party — Radical Party — ran its campaign with the narrative that the country was being threatened by the Croat political leadership tied to the communist international (Dragnich, 1983; Matković, 1998). The Croatian Peasant Party was banned from campaigning, and the party's leader was arrested on dubious charges (Gligorijević, 1979: p. 181). However, the party was still not prohibited from participating in the elections. Those in power believed that the restrictions would

make electoral chances of the Croatian minority negligible (Matković, 1998: p. 116). However, Croatian voters further homogenized, turned out to vote, and the party retained its status as a unique representative of Croatian interests. The party finished second on the national level and its absolute vote share further increased compared to previous elections. The Radical and Democratic secured the first and third, capturing 35.2% and 12% respectively.

11 September 1927

The Serbian majority agreed to concessions after 1925 and invited the minority ethnic party to join the government in order to ease social tensions. This was the first government participation of the Croatian minority. However, it was too little and too late for tensions to ease. Frustrated by their party's entry into the majority-dominated government, the Croatian population began withholding political support from their ethnic party, despite the party maintaining a very critical stance toward the unitary organization of the state. Anyhow, this coalition was short lived. In response to irregularities during the 1927 campaign and the party's inability to prevent them, it withdrew from the government coalition in February of that year and returned to the opposition.

The very 1927 elections were quiet. The prevailing sentiment among the Croat population was that little could be done to change their political status (Gligorijević, 1979). However, tensions between the government, dominated by the Serbian majority ethnic party, and the largest ethnic minority, escalated in parliament to the extent that it became difficult to legislate (Grgić, 2020). Instances of offenses and open threats became very common (Dragnich, 1983). The culmination of these tensions occurred in June 1928 when a majority ethnic party MP, Punisa Racic, shot dead the leader of the minority ethnic party and two other MPs of the same party. In response, the Croat ethnic party withdrew from parliament, refusing to participate in parliamentary affairs until a new constitution was adopted (Dragnich, 1983). Consequently, the government officially resigned on July 4, 1928. Capitalizing on the weakened state of political parties and parliamentary democracy, the king seized the opportunity to introduce a personal dictatorship in

January 1929, outlawing political parties and suspending the constitution.

Parties

Radical Party (NRS)

The Radical Party was also known as the People's Radical Party (Narodna Radikalna Stranka) or Serbian Radical Party (SRS), as (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: p. 1041) labels it. In Serbian Sources it appears simply as the Radical Party. It was the dominant party in the period after WWI (Popović, 2008).

McHale writes that "ideologically, it was influenced by the mid-19 century Russian brand of socialism, with primary emphasis on political liberties and peasant welfare. It's major support 1919-1926 came from the Serbian middle class, particularly from the Belgrade business and commercial strata, the wealthier peasants and from some Serbs in formerly Austrian-controlled lands in the north; the support from the peasants was still large. To a large extent, the party's wide appeal stemmed from its nationalist, Greater Serbian orientation" (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: pp. 1041-1042). Nikola Pasic, as the party leader and widely respected politician among the Serbian public, was a strong supporter of a centralist state controlled from Belgrade. The party had a violent wing that clashed with Croatian nationalist and with the Organization of Yugoslav nationalists (Orjuna) (Newman, 2015).

Democratic Party (DS)

Also called the Yugoslav Democratic Party or Jugoslovenska Demokratska Stranka (JDS) in Serbo-Croatian. Organized by a Serb from Croatia Avetozar Pribicevic, it existed and competed also in the former Austro-Hungarian lands. The party advocated constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democratic system and a unitary Yugoslav state (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: p. 1047) Its major support came from central Serbia, but the party managed to get at least some support from every state province. Aside from the Pasic's Radical Party, it was the strongest Serbian in Yugoslavia (Popović, 2008).

There were two factions in the Democratic Party, one lead by Pribicevic and the other by Ljubomir Davidovic which they mainly clashed over the issue of Croatian autonomy (Gligorijević, 1979). In 1924, the party split and the Pribicevic-led faction created Independent Democratic Party/Samostalna Demokratska Stranka. During the time of Pribicevic' chairmanship of the Democratic party, the paramilitary/violent wing called Organization of Yugoslav nationalists (Orjuna) was tied to it (Korenic, 2019; Newman, 2015).

Croatian Peasant Party (HSS)

The party can also be found under the names Croatian People's Peasant Party (HPSS) and Croatian Republican Peasant Party (HRSS) in the literature. In Serbo-Croatian: Hrvatska seljačka stranka The party was initially established by brothers Radic (Anton and Stjepan) in 1904 as the Croatian People's Peasant Party. After WWI it developed into the strongest party of Croatia. Its support base is overwhelmingly peasants, even though it was gradually changing into the middle-class party (McHale and Skowronski, 1983). In the first years Yugoslavia, HSS strongly opposed the monarchy and advocated the republican institutional arrangement (Gligorijević, 1979; Prpa, 2018).

The party strongly opposed the 1921 constitution. The party harshly criticized the policies of the ethnic party-dominated governments. After unsuccessful attempt to participate in the government coalition following the 1925 elections, the party joined the anti-government anti-unitary Independent Democratic Party-led coalition (Popović, 2008). The rising tensions with the Serbian nationalists resulted in assassination of Stjepan Radic in the parliament in Belgrade on June 20, 1928. Since then (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: pp. 1023-1049).

Communist Party of Yugoslavia

To be differentiated from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia that emerges in the 70s. They have exactly the same name.

So Komunistička partija Jugoslavije (in Serbo-Croatian) emerged in 1919. It was

very pro-decentralization, McHale says that the party advocated a 'dismembered' Yugoslavia (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: p. 1030). The term means an extremely fragmented/decentralized state. In principle, the party stood for autonomy for all ethnic group in the Yugoslav state (Gligorijević, 1979). It was a third strongest force after elections for constitutional assembly. Along with the Democratic Party, it was the only party to gain seats in every province of the country, so its support was fairly spread out (Gligorijević, 1979)

Just as the Croatian Peasant Party, it strongly opposed the 1921 Vidovdan constitution. It even walked out of the parliament during its adoption, as a sign of protest, and opposed the centralized Serbian monarchy (Popović, 2008). Its program was considered too radical and, as such, it took the party to unconventional participation in politics. It was banned after the 1920 elections and basically went underground (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: p.1030). Internal struggles between factions (which reflected the struggles within the Soviet Union leadership), infiltration by police informers and frequent leadership changes were the factors that contributed to dissolution of the party and its decreasing role in Yugoslav politics. Even through its proxies, it essentially ceased being a relevant actor in party politics after the 1920 elections (Prpa, 2018).

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