

**THE AGRARIAN REFORM OF 1919 IN YUGOSLAVIA:
ORIGINS AND REACTIONS**

by

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PREFACE

During the preparation of this thesis I had difficulty in obtaining necessary material, especially primary sources. Since some of the primary sources, predominantly material in archives, were not available in this country, I had to depend largely on secondary source material.

The borrowed Turkish and Latin terms in the Serbo-Croatian language were written in English transliteration. The exceptions are the terms pecaiba and pecalbari which are written in Serbo-Croatian form. The geographic and personal names are written in their original form which correspond to the Library of Congress system of transliteration.

I would like to express my gratitude for their advice, suggestions and criticism to Professor Michael B. Petrovich and Professor Milos Velimirovic, University of Wisconsin, Miss Ruzica Popovitch and Mr. Paul L. Horecky, Library of Congress, Mr. Robert Gakovich, Memorial Library of the University of Wisconsin, and last but not least to my friend Mr. Lazar Brkich, graduate student at the University of Wisconsin.

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INTRODUCTION

The Yugoslav lands were under various foreign domination for a long period of time. The northwestern parts were mainly under Austrian domination, and after 1867 under the domination of Austro-Hungary. Through Austro-Hungary, especially Austria, the northwestern provinces came into contact with the developed western European states which influenced the economic, cultural, and political life of these provinces. The exception was Bosna and Hercegovina in which that influence was almost unnoticed. The reason for this exception was the Turkish domination in those provinces which was changed by the Austro-Hungarian domination after the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Bosna and Hercegovina became a component part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after its annexation by Austro-Hungary in 1908. The southeastern parts of Yugoslavia were under Turkish domination and were as backward as Turkey in many ways.

Before the First World War Serbia and Montenegro were the only independent states in the Yugoslav territory. Serbia liberated herself in the first half of the nineteenth century but she was, like Montenegro, not officially

recognized independent until the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

During the First World War well known politicians from all Yugoslav lands worked actively on the unification of the Yugoslav people. The result of their work was a proclamation in Belgrade on December 1, 1918 announcing the creation of a joint state under the name of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (hereafter referred to the Kingdom of S C S) with the Serbian dynasty Karadjordjević at its head. This name was used officially until 1929, when it was changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The first king of the new state was Petar I, who could not rule because of sickness and old age. Instead of Petar I the state was ruled by his younger son Aleksandar I, who was the regent until his father's death in 1921. After Petar I's death he became the king of the Kingdom of S C S, and after 1929 the king of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He was assassinated in Marseille in 1934.

The Kingdom of S C S was predominantly an agrarian state with about seventy-six per cent of the population engaged in agriculture. Before the beginning of the agrarian reform in 1919 there were three main forms of landholding relationships: small holding relations, semi-feudal relations, and large holding relations. Small holding occurred mainly in the territory of Serbia which she had before the Balkan Wars of 1912/13. The various

kinds of semi-feudal relations existed in the part of Serbia which she obtained after the Balkan Wars (Macedonia and the district of Kosovo-Metchija), Montenegro, Bosna and Hercegovina, and Dalmatia. Large holding occurred in Slovenija, Croatia, Slavonija, and Vojvodina.

Land tenure problems were only partially solved in Serbia. She had the first agrarian reform after the Second Serbian Uprising of 1830. The peasants became the free owners of the land which they tilled. Indemnities to the former landowners (spahis) were taken into account in calculating the amount of tribute Serbia was required to pay Turkey. After the Congress of Berlin of 1878 Serbia obtained some new areas to the south, which were not affected by the agrarian reform of 1830. With respect to the landholding relations in these areas a special law was promulgated on February 3, 1880. According to this law the peasants became the owners of the land which they were tilling, but they had an obligation to pay indemnities to the former landowners. By now the Serbian state was exhausted by war (the wars against the Turks from 1876 to 1878) and did not have resources to take over the repayment for the peasant lands. Since the peasants were not able to repay the debts for their lands and the former landowners did not have resources on which to live, the Serbian state had to pay off

the former landowners. She did so in 1882. After 1882 the peasants had an obligation to repay their debts to the state in annual payments. A term of fifteen to twenty-five years was allowed the peasants for repayment of the entire debt. Although Serbia had the two reforms of 1830 and 1880, the agrarian question was not completely solved. When the Kingdom of S C S was created, landless peasants comprised some twenty per cent of the population. Moreover, Serbia was the only province in the Kingdom of S C S which was not affected by the agrarian reform of 1919.

The internal life of the Kingdom of S C S began under very unfavorable conditions. Its territories had very different historical backgrounds and were on different levels of economic, political, judicial, social, and cultural development. In addition, the state, especially Serbia, was desolated and lost a great proportion of her population. Many important and acute problems waited to be solved. Among them was the agrarian question which was considered one of the most important and the most acute.

CHAPTER I

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND POLITICAL ISSUES

The centuries long separation and domination by several foreign powers were the main reasons for tremendous agrarian differences in the provinces which entered into the Kingdom of S C S at the end of the First World War. These differences were so large that some provinces lagged behind others for full historical epochs. For instance, while in the Northern parts the capitalistic approach to the tilling of land was already in existence, in the Southern provinces there were still some remnants of a type of a feudal system called timar-spahi.¹ The best way in which one can see what the situation really was in the villages of certain provinces, where the agrarian reform was to be conducted, can be seen through an examination of the fundamental problems which were facing them.

¹ The timar-spahi system was in effect all over Turkish Empire. It was based on the timar and on the ziamet (land estates) which the sultan had given to the spahis (feudal lords) for their deeds in wars and in service of the state. The spahis had the right to collect a part of the income from these estates and they had the obligation to go to war at a sultan's proclamation. The real ownership of such estates given to the feudal lords remained in the hand of the sultan himself.

Social and Economic Conditions

Among the most backward provinces of the Kingdom of S C S were the present day Macedonia and the district of Kosovo-Metohija, which had been liberated from the Turkish domination during the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. After that they became an integral part of the Kingdom of Serbia and their names have been changed. For Macedonia the term used was Southern Serbia, and for the district of Kosovo-Metohija the term used was Old Serbia. In the desire to strengthen the Serbian population in those areas and to develop these areas economically, the Serbian government issued a decree on February 20, 1914, by which a certain order concerning the colonization of these districts was to be introduced. However, the Serbian plans were interrupted by World War I and the planned reform was postponed until the end of that war. During that time the same agrarian relationships which had been introduced and practiced by the Turks for several centuries were maintained in these districts and provinces.

In Macedonia and Kosovo-Metohija districts as far as the land tenant relationships were concerned there was a widespread system called chiflik, which originated in the second half of the seventeenth century. The land owners were called chiflik-sahibis (aga-s), and the land tillers were known as the chifchi-s. Before the First World War there were two main types of renters or tenants who worked

on the land possessions called chiflik. First, the chifchi-s, who made an agreement with the land owners for a longer period of time. They were obligated to give annually to the land owners, between one-third and up to one-half of all the income, and they also had the duty to do various kinds of work and labor. Occasionally they possessed their own houses, cattle, tools, and small areas of the land, but most frequently all of this had been secured to the tenant by the land owner: Second, regular renters or, as they were called, ćesimlije, who paid a rent which was fixed. The payment was in agricultural products or in cash, most frequently one part of the rent was paid in cash and the other in agricultural products. Besides that, the chifliks were tilled and cultivated on the part of individual agricultural workers who usually made a contract with the land owners for a year. For their work they were paid in cash or in agricultural products and often received as a benefit small areas of land from which all income belonged exclusively to them.²

² Tomasevich, Jozo. Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia (Stanford, California, 1955), p.122; Vukićević, Janko. "Poljoprivreda", Spomenica dvadesetpetogodišnjice oslobođenja Južne Srbije, 1912-1937 (Skopje, 1937), pp.523-531.

The relationships between the renters and the land owners changed frequently because there was no law which would regulate them. They were usually regulated on the basis of a contract of the two interested parties. In many instances these contracts were losing their value because the renters fell into debt by borrowing from their land owners. In such cases they were not allowed to leave the areas where they lived until they were able to repay their debts. Since the majority of the chifchi-s was not usually able to repay these debts, in practice they remained permanently tied to the land that belonged to their creditors. One can justifiably say that the chifchi-s in Macedonia and in the district of Kesove-Metchija were renters only in name while in reality they were semi-serfs. One should mention that the possessions of the chifchi-s were not divided and inheritable but in their totality belonged to the families of the serfs. The idea behind this was to prevent the parceling into small parcels of these land possessions and in connection with that the running away from the land and the proletarianization of the peasants.

The chifliks were relatively small in size and they belonged in their majority to the Moslem city population which practiced commerce in the first place. From a total of 6,937 land parcels, some 6,326 were smaller in size than

100 hectares (hectare is 2.47 acres).³ Only exceptionally did some of these possessions represent really large holdings and they usually were possessed by Germans.

The income from the chiflik was quite low because of the primitive manner of land tilling and the lack of interest of the chifchi-s to increase productivity. Neither were the land owners interested in investing large sums to help the development of agriculture on their lands because these lands were not the main source of their own income. The main source of their income was commerce and it was in commerce that they invested the larger part of their belongings or their capital. Because of the lack of tools, lack of cattle and lack of interest on the part of the peasants in the tilling of the land, and because of the emigration of a large number of Moslems (about 200,000) to Turkey and into Bulgaria after the Balkan Wars,⁴ in Macedonia and in the district of Kosovo-Metchija after the First World War some 59.6% of the total surface of the land remained uncultivated.⁵

³ Ristic, Stefan. "Rezultati agrarne reforme u Jugoslaviji", Ekonomsko-financijski život, No. 85 (Beograd, 1938), quoted in Eris, Milivoje. Agrarna reforma u Jugoslaviji, 1918-1941 (Sarajevo, 1958), p.108.

⁴ Tomasevich, op.cit., p.155.

⁵ Kostic, Mirko. "Agrarna reforma", Naredna enciklopedija srpsko-hrvatsko-slovenska, Vol.1 (Zagreb, 1925), p.25.

In addition to the chifchi agrarian relationship in Macedonia and in the district of Kosovo-Metohija there were also free peasants. They lived in the mountainous districts and their possessions were rather small in size, and the land itself was of rather poor quality. It is interesting to mention that in these mountainous areas of these districts there were certain groups of people who had maintained a semi-nomadic manner of life.

Because of the lack of land which could be cultivated in many areas of these provinces some peasants were forced to emigrate temporarily. Such temporary emigrations were known under the name of pečalba and the peasant immigrants were known as pečalbari. The pečalba was especially widespread in Macedonia and the pečalbari were most frequently the free peasants from the mountainous regions. The peasants who lived on chiflika seldom went to pečalba because, as it has already been stated, they were tied by their debts to the land on which they lived and which they tilled. The pečalbari most frequently went to gain some income in the neighboring states, and when they could not find jobs there they would go across the ocean, most frequently to the U.S.A.⁶

⁶ Tomasevich, op.cit., p.123.

After the Balkan Wars there were, in the provinces of Montenegro and in Bosna and Hercegovina, certain similarities to the situation in Macedonia and in the district of Kosovo-Metchija, as far as agrarian ownership is concerned.

Montenegro was for quite a long period under Turkish domination. In spite of that, mostly thanks to the configuration of the land, the Turks never succeeded in imposing their domination over the whole of Montenegro. The timar-spahi feudal system, which had been introduced throughout the empire, was nearly unknown in Montenegro. Montenegro was recognized officially as an independent state at the Berlin Congress of 1878. On that occasion Montenegro obtained some lands from Turkey in which the agrarian system of the shifahi was in existence. This system was shortly thereafter abolished in these areas and the land owners received some payment. After that Montenegro was mainly a land of small owners.

This situation in the agrarian land ownership relations lasted until the Balkan Wars. After these wars Montenegro received a part of what was to be Macedonia, and the district of Kosovo-Metchija, with a surface of some 6,000 square kilometers and with approximately 130,000 inhabitants.⁷ The agrarian land ownerships on

⁷ Montenegrin Bulletin, No.1 (Geneva, December 1917), p.8, quoted in Tomasevich, op.cit., p.127.

the new territories were the same as in Macedonia and in the district of Kosovo-Metohija, that is mainly the chiflik system.

In Bosna and Hercegovina there were at the same time, side by side, the feudal relationships as well as capitalistic relationships which only made worse the already difficult social and economic conditions in the villages of Bosna and Hercegovina. From the end of the fifteenth century until the Berlin Congress of 1878, Bosna and Hercegovina were under Turkish domination. After that they entered into the Austro-Hungarian Empire where they were to be until the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy at the end of 1918.

At the time when these territories became part of Austro-Hungary capitalism began to penetrate into Bosna and Hercegovina. New roads, railroad lines, and factories were being built, and there was increased exploitation of mines, a new and more modern administration, and so on. The penetration of capitalism usually leads to the introduction of new processes in the villages, processes which change its structure. However this did not happen in the villages of Bosna and Hercegovina, because the Austro-Hungarian state was not interested in the increase of production in the villages and did not wish to begin solving

the complicated agrarian relationships. For their solution great sums of money were needed, and besides the state did not wish to come in conflict with the owners of land in whom it had found some support for the maintenance of its domination. The peasant of Bosna and Hercegovina either remained a serf with all feudal burdens, or he was a free peasant without enough land. The burdens of the capitalist system were expressed in the rapid increase in taxation while the burdens of the feudal system were not resolved.

The unresolved agrarian problems conditioned the more strained relationships between the serfs and land owners and led to peasant uprisings, and an extensive emigration of peasant-serfs into Serbia, Montenegro and so on.⁸ Such a situation had forced Austro-Hungary to find some manner of accommodation between the two opposing classes by a partial solution of the agrarian relationships. The first step in that direction was to call an agrarian conference in Sarajevo in December 1879. This conference was called by the central government, and some state employees participated in it while the feudal lords and the peasants were not represented. It is characteristic

⁸ Kapidžić, Hamdija. Bosna i Hercegovina u vrijeme Austro-Ugarske vladavine (Sarajevo, 1968).

that the attitudes at this conference were divided. The majority of the working members at this conference was for a compulsory solution of the agrarian problem, because they viewed the agrarian relationships in Bosna and Hercegovina as being of a purely feudal character and a matter of public legal concern, and they believed that the state has an obligation to impose a solution in such circumstances. A minority at that same conference favored a contractual manner of solving the agrarian relation, assuming that the agrarian question in Bosna and Hercegovina was a private matter and for its solution they should engage both interested parties, the land owners and peasantry.⁹ Another important conference dealing with agrarian reform was held in Vienna in 1880. This conference was made up entirely by the representatives of administration, and in its decisions was supposed to help the government take an attitude towards these agrarian relationships. The work of this conference, however, did not bring any significant results. It was decided to continue with the assembling of data about the character of the agrarian relationships and to take some preliminary steps

⁹ Kapidžić, ed. Agrarni odnosi u Bosni i Hercegovini (1878-1918), Vol. I (Sarajevo, 1969), p. 6.

toward their solution.¹⁰ These preparations were continued and lasted until the downfall of Austro-Hungary. During that time there were agrarian land ownership relations which had been inherited from the period of Turkish domination. Moreover, the Turkish agrarian laws were still in force though they had been promulgated in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Bosna and Hercegovina became a part of a joint Yugoslav state still possessing a semi-feudal system formulated in the chiflik and Dey's Estate (begluk) relationships. The process of the growth of chiflik in Bosna and Hercegovina was completed during the first half of the nineteenth century. Here the main power of the chiflik system was the indigenous spahi who made or transformed their land into chiflik and later settled on this land mostly an orthodox population primarily from Montenegro.

The chifliks of Bosna and Hercegovina may be divided into three basic types. One type was that which was cultivated by the owner, that is, chiflik-sahibi (aga), alone or with the help of rented workers. The second type were the chifliks cultivated by peasant-serfs with the obligation of giving half of the income from the land to the aga.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.6.

In such instances, besides renting or giving under rent the land itself, the aga gave also the oxen, house and farm buildings. The third type were chifliks where the land and buildings belonged to the agas and the tools for work and the oxen belonged to the peasants. In such a type the serf gave or had an obligation to give one-third or one-fourth of his income, which depended on the quality of the land.¹¹ Besides these there were other types of chifliks, where the relationships between land owners and peasant-serfs were regulated in similar ways.

The difference between the chiflik system in Bosna and Hercegovina on the one hand and the chifliks relationship in Macedonia, in the district of Kosovo-Metchija, and in Montenegro on the other hand, was that the peasant-serfs in Bosna and Hercegovina enjoyed a certain amount of independence which had been guaranteed to them by some Turkish agrarian laws promulgated in the 1850's. It is true that these laws were not always respected but they did exist and were on the books and the peasant-serfs had the right to quote them in many court trials when facing their owners or masters and they did make use of them.¹² Where chifchi

¹¹ Sućeska, Avdo. "O nastanku čiflika u našim zemljama", Godišnjak Društva istoričara Bosne i Hercegovine, Year XVI (Sarajevo, 1965), pp.37-57.

¹² Tomasevich, op.cit., pp.91-112.

ownerships were burdened as it were with some rights of the serfs, the bey's estates (begluks) were fully owned by the beys (begs) and they might either till it alone or rent it under various conditions. The owners tilled those lands in many ways: 1) with their own work power or that of their servants; 2) by hiring the manpower; 3) by work of families who lived on these lands; 4) by renting the land temporarily and requesting a compulsory part of the harvest, either a half, third, or quarter, annually, and 5) renting the land in a system known as kesim that is, with the obligation of giving a fixed amount of the products annually regardless of the total amount of income. The relationships on the settled bey's estates were similar to the chiflik system. The main difference was that the tiller had no tenure nor the right of inheritance of the land.¹³

The Moslem religious organizations also possessed large amounts of land which were known as "vakf". They were usually gifts of the Turkish feudal lords for religious and humanitarian purposes. The agrarian relationships on such lands were similar to the chiflik system.

¹³ Begović, Mehmed. "Veliki posjedi (šitlući)", Enciklopedija Jugoslavije, Vol. 1 (Zagreb, 1955), p.409.

Throughout the period of the Austro-Hungarian domination the technical level of the agricultural products remained almost unchanged, leading to a decline of productivity. In addition certain parts of the land were purposely left fallow.¹⁴ According to one of the statistics from 1921, in Bosna and Hercegovina every year about 13.29% of the total arable land was left fallow.¹⁵ This consequence of an old standing tradition diminished annually the already limited arable surfaces in Bosna and Hercegovina.

The hunger for earth or the need for additional land increased with the population growth. From 1895 to 1910 there was an increase of 329,952 persons, that is, from 1,568,092 to 1,898,044 or 21.04%.¹⁶ At the same time as the need for additional land grew, the land government of Bosna and Hercegovina began an action to settle peasants from foreign countries, seeing in this move a possibility for an increase in agrarian production. In order to attract the peasants from the neighboring lands the

¹⁴ Certain determined amounts of surface of the arable land were left each year to rest (fallow). For that year those surfaces of land were plowed and fertilized but they seeded only during the next year.

¹⁵ B.Sedmak, "Privredne prilike u Bosni i Hercegovini", Pregled, No.185 (Sarajevo, 1939), p.238, quoted in Hrelja, Kemal. Industrija Bosne i Hercegovine do kraja prvog svjetskog rata (Beograd, 1961), p.7.

¹⁶ Masleša, Veselin. Mlada Bosna (Sarajevo, 1964), p.52.

government gave certain help to the settlers and freed them from taxes for a few years. The largest number of families which moved into Bosna and Hercegovina came from the most passive districts of the Austrian Southern Tirol. Among them there were also Poles, Hungarians, Germans, and so on. Usually they settled in the northwestern part of Bosna where they established their villages and foreign colonies.¹⁷ It turned out however that these immigrants worked rather poorly. Neither did they care enough to prepare the materials for house building so that the provincial government of Bosna and Hercegovina had to hire workers who prepared the lumber for these colonists. In trying to find out the reasons for this passivity of the colonists the provincial government discovered that many of these colonists were not pauperized peasants but mostly hired helpers and people without work. Since they did not have anything to lose some of them viewed this colonization as an entertaining travel at state expense and counted on a return should their undertaking fall short of their expectations.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hauptman, Ferdo. "Reguliranje zemljišnog posjeda u Bosni i Hercegovini i počeci naseljavanja stranih seljaka u doba austrougarske vladavine", Godišnjak Društva istoričara Bosne i Hercegovine, Year XVI (Sarajevo, 1965), pp.151-171.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.168.

Many such families left Bosna after a few years and those that remained have not contributed to the increase of agricultural production.

After agriculture, the most significant trade or profession in Bosna and Hercegovina was the raising of cattle. The availability of pastures and forests as well as the circumstance that a serf did not have to pay taxes for cattle helped to develop cattle raising. During the period of Turkish domination in the middle of the Nineteenth century, with barely over one million inhabitants, Bosna and Hercegovina were among the richest lands in Europe by the number of cattle per capita of population.¹⁹ During the Austro-Hungarian domination the number of head of cattle diminished greatly. There were several reasons for such a state of affairs. The first was the conversion of pastures into tilled land. For instance, only between 1895 to 1905 some 61,000 hectares were converted from pastures to tillable arable land.²⁰ Another reason was a penetration of a cash economy into the village. The peasant was forced to sell cattle in order to pay taxes

¹⁹ Hrelja, op.cit., p.7.

²⁰ Masleša, op.cit., pp.52-53.

and buy his needs in the city. He sold the cattle most frequently because that was his exclusive property with which he could freely dispose. Two additional reasons may be mentioned that led to the decrease of the number of cattle. These were the droughts and years of diminished productivity on the one hand and the growth of an industry of exploitation of forests which reduced the availability of some pastureland in forests. The decrease of the number of cattle influenced negatively that already low standard of living of the Bosna and Hercegovina peasantry. The village population was the one to suffer mostly, especially in its diet, since milk was its main staple.

During the period of Austro-Hungarian domination in Bosna and Hercegovina the serfs had made good use of a Turkish law of 1876 which permitted the serfs to free themselves of the servile relationships by paying a certain fixed amount to their masters. In spite of the fact that a large number of serfs was able to buy their freedom, Bosna and Hercegovina became a part of Yugoslavia still having some 100,000 families or about 52% of all peasant families which had either fully servile or partly servile status.²¹

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Šarac, Nedim. "Socijaldemokratska stranka Bosne i Hercegovine i agrarno pitanje", Godišnjak Društva istoričara Bosne i Hercegovine, Year XI, 1960 (Sarajevo, 1961), pp.58-62.

After the revolutions of 1848 the feudal relationships were abolished in all the provinces comprising the Austrian empire except for Dalmatia. There the family feudal system remained in power, a system characterized in the colonnate relationships. The colonnate system originated from the time of the Roman Empire and was widespread in manifold forms almost in all lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. It was a system similar to the feudal system. The essential difference was that the colonnate was a private legal institution. In addition the colonnate could be cancelled and its duration and size could vary, whereas in the serfdom a serf could not cancel and had to stay in that status. The duration of the colonnate could vary and it depended on the district where the land was and the manner in which the land had been cultivated. Where cereals were being cultivated, the colonnate system could last from one to four years, and where the peasant (that is, the colonus) had to clear the land and in the clearance raise an olive grove or a vineyard and so on, the colonnate relationship lasted as long as that particular culture brought fruit. This could last from twenty to fifty years and therefore the colonnate lands were hereditary. The obligations and rights of the tenants of the land were not only tied to him but they were transferred to all his legal inheritors and to the type of house

cooperative to which he belonged. The owner of the land could not change a colonus until the kind of trees or vineyard ceased to bring fruit.²²

The possessions of the Colonate system were most frequently rather small in size and sometimes their owners were just as poor as were their tenants. In the southern part of Dalmatia there were quite a few larger colonate possessions and they were usually owned by the Italian citizens. According to the census of 1910 in southern Dalmatia some 60% of the village population were colonuses. In central and northern Dalmatia this percentage was much smaller and varied between 6 and 9%.²³

The peasant colonus tried to buy out gradually the land to own it, the same land which they tilled. Because of a scarcity of public financial institutions they were forced to borrow money from wealthier townsmen and village masters who owned larger properties. In this way the peasants became the prey of high interest rates and were caught in the net of commercial and usury-type capital. Such relationships led to their political dependence and

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Franges, Otto. "Kolonat", Narodna enciklopedija srpsko-hrvatsko-slovenačka, Vol.2 (Zagreb, 1925), pp.377-378.

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Mathl, Josef. Die agrarreform in Jugoslavien (Berlin, 1927), p.22, quoted in Stojsavljević, Bogdan. Seljaštvo Jugoslavije, 1918-1941 (Zagreb, 1952), p.18.

in the struggles against the feudal system the peasants were helping the town population and at the same time became its economical and political prey in the form of a voting machine.²⁴

In Dalmatia, under the slogan of defense of large possessions and against proliferation of smaller ones, what happened was that a dying semi-feudal institution, which could not change or help develop the agriculture and in this way could not lead to the betterment of the situation of the peasantry was being defended. The peasant could at best become a hired hand who worked with the obligation of giving half of the harvest to the owner but in such a situation his social position would not change essentially. That is why the Dalmatian peasant saw in a free ownership, however small, the basis for a better existence in the future. Because of the unsettled agrarian ownership relationships, the low yield of the land, and the limited amount of arable land in Dalmatia, a large number of people started emigrating. Most frequently they would move away to Germany, the U.S.A., and Australia. Only in the period from 1881 to 1910 some 21.88% of the total

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Petrović, Rade. "Socijalno-ekonomske prilike u Dalmaciji u XIX stoljeću", Godišnjak Društva istoričara Bosne i Hercegovine, Year XVI (Sarajevo, 1965), pp.78-85.

population of Dalmatia had emigrated.²⁵

In the northern parts of the new state in Slovenija, Croatia, Slavonija and Vojvodina, differed considerably from the other provinces of the Yugoslav state. In these provinces the feudal system was abolished in 1848 when capitalism started making great strides. The capitalistic way of production penetrated even into the villages so that before the First World War it was already used and applied in many larger estates. As far as agrarian land ownership is concerned there were mostly large estates, most frequently owned by either the Roman Catholic or Serbian Orthodox Church or by foreign citizens. The foreigners possessed the largest estates. According to the data of Otto Frangeš, of some 369 large estate owners before the First World War, 310 were foreigners. Of these 142 were Austrian citizens, 126 Hungarians, 10 Italians, 8 Czechoslovakians, 4 Roumanian, 3 German and 17 owners who were citizens of other lands.²⁶

The large estates were less to be found in Slovenija than in Croatia and Vojvodina. Even so only in Kranjska

²⁵ Jovanović, Dragoljub. Agrarna politika (Beograd, 1930), p.265.

²⁶ Frangeš, La réforme agrarie (Rome, 1934), p.140, quoted in Mirković, Mijo. Ekonomska historija Jugoslavije (Zagreb, 1958), p.223.

which is the largest province in Slovenija, according to statistics of 1902 there were 306 estates larger than 100 hectares of land.²⁷ Half of all the large estates in Slovenija were forest ownerships. All private large estates were in the hands of German nobility.²⁸ Because of the population growth, of the undeveloped industry and the impossibility of existence by agrarian work only, a large number of Slovenian peasantry emigrated into lands across the oceans. According to an estimate in the period between 1910 to 1918 about 80,000 emigrated from Slovenija.²⁹

The large estates were much more frequently found in Croatia and Slavonija. According to a census of 1895 estates larger than 600 hectares of land covered the tremendous surface of 607,995 hectares, at the same time small estates smaller than 0.6 hectares totalled only 13,137 hectares or half of 1% of the total surface.³⁰

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was

27 Eric, op.cit., p.23.

28 Janković, Dragoslav. "Društveni i politički odnosi u Kraljevstvu Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca uoči stvaranja Socijalističke radničke partije Jugoslavije (komunista)", Istorija XX veka, Vol.1 (Beograd, 1959), p.47.

29 Kuhar, Alojzije. "Naše iseljensko vprašanje", Spomenik Slovenije (Ljubljana, 1939), p.525, quoted in Eric, op.cit., p.27.

30 Ristić, Borba za zemlju i naša agrarna reforma (Beograd, 1939), p.42; Kostić, op.cit., p.24.

a substantial economical progress in Croatia and Slavonija. Yet it did not touch the small peasant estates which could not begin to be cultivated in that more rational and profitable way. A large number of the peasantry which could not subsist in an agricultural economy tried to find employment in the cities. However, the slow industrial development would not make it possible to provide jobs for many of these. That is why a mass emigration began, mostly into the United States of America. According to official statistics, during the first decade of the twentieth century more than 150,000 people emigrated.³¹ In connection with this statistic one should stress that the actual number was much larger because a large number of peasants emigrated illegally. If one were to take into account that the total population of Croatia and Slavenija, according to a census of 1910, was 2.6 million persons, this means that in the first decade of the twentieth century that province lost some 6% of its population due to emigration.³² Since the emigrants were mostly grown-up males the loss for the economic and social situation, for the development of the land, was very great.

³¹ Jaroslav Šidak, Mirjana Gross, Igor Karaman i Dragovan Šepić. Povijest hrvatskog naroda g.1860-1914 (Zagreb, 1968), p.227.

³² Ibid., p.227.

As in Croatia and Slavonija, Vojvodina also had large estates. According to the census of 1918 estates larger than 100 cadastarl yokes (cadastral yoke is slightly over 1.3 acres) covered 19.92% of the total surface of the arable land.³³ These estates were most frequently owned by foreign citizens who rented these to richer peasants who in turn had them cultivated by the manpower of poor peasants and landless peasants. Then for instance, only in Bačka (a district in the province of Vojvodina) at the beginning of 1919 there were 365 estates larger than 200 cadastarl yokes of land of which 59.45% were rented while at the very same time the number of landless peasants was 57,631. One should also cite that in the same province of Bačka, 50.09% of landless peasants did not own a house, and 79.38% did not possess any cattle.³⁴ A separate problem in the province of Vojvodina were agricultural workers the number of whom, after the war and not counting the district of Srem, was about 300,000.³⁵

The cited examples demonstrate clearly that the

³³ Mathl, op.cit., p.28, quoted in Stojsavljević, op.cit., p.13.

³⁴ Šecero, Slavko. "Socijalno-agrarne odnosi u Bačkoj pred izvedjenje agrarne reforme", Spmenik, No.69 (Beograd, 1929), pp.145-146.

³⁵ Marković, Svetozar. Problemi poljoprivrednog radništva u Vojvodini (Beograd, 1939), p.45, quoted in Janković, op.cit., p.44

social and economical conditions were very poor and that something had to be done to relieve the situation. Since the largest problem was in an outlived, outmoded semi-feudal relationship dealing with land ownership one had to start by a very radical agrarian reform. The same opinion was advocated by the creators of the Kingdom of S C S, who even at their Corfu Conference of 1917, unanimously declared that in the joint state agrarian reform must be conducted immediately after the liberation.

Political Issues

The national and religious questions were very closely linked to the agrarian question in all provinces of the Kingdom of S C S which were to be affected by the agrarian reform. These links were especially strong in Bosna and Hercegovina, Vojvodina and the district of Kosovo-Metohija. In each of these provinces the ties of the national and religious problems with the agrarian problem have had their own specific peculiarities.

According to the statistical data from 1910, or some 88% of 1,898,044 inhabitants in Bosna and Hercegovina, 1,668,587 were living off of agriculture.³⁶

³⁶ Rezultati popisa žiteljstva u Bosni i Hercegovini of October 10, 1910 (Sarajevo, 1912), pp.58-60, quoted in Purivatra, Atif. "Političke partije prema agrarnoj reformi u Bosni i Hercegovini neposredno poslije 1918. godine", Prilozi, No.3 (Sarajevo, 1967), p.89.

The ratio of land owners and serfs as to their religious allegiance was the following: of the owners of large chifchi and bey's estates, 9,537 or 91.15% were Moslems, 633 or 6.05% were Orthodox and 267 or 2.55% were Roman Catholics, and the remaining 26 or 0.25% of different religions. As for the serfs, Moslems numbered 3,653 or 4.58%, the Orthodox numbered 58,895 or 73.92%, Roman Catholics numbered 17,116 or 21.49%, and others 13 or 0.01%.³⁷ In order to evaluate the situation of the Moslem population in comparison with the Christian population (that is, versus the Serbs who are Orthodox and Croats who are Roman Catholics), it should be mentioned that according to the very same census 612,090 Moslems or 32.25% of the total population lived in Bosna and Hercegovina at that time. Of these 76.93% lived in villages and 23.07% were living in towns.³⁸

These statistics show that the land owners were mainly Moslems and that the serfs were mainly the Christian population. These huge differences in the agrarian land-owner relationship manifested themselves through a religious antagonism of the serfs toward the feudal lords and thus were expressed in hatred of Christians against the Moslems. Very often the agrarian question was identified with the religious and the religious question with the agrarian.

37 Ibid., p. 89.

38 Ibid., p. 99.

The religious and class antagonism in the villages of Bosna and Hercegovina expressed itself mainly or came to surface mainly between the Orthodox and Moslems. The hatred of serfs against the Moslems had its roots in the famous battle of Kosovo in 1389, when the Serbs were defeated by the Turks and lost their independent state. This hatred was transmitted from one generation to another to reach its culminating point at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the national consciousness was being awakened. At the beginning of the twentieth century the national consciousness of the orthodox peasant in Bosna and Hercegovina was also already developed. This was mainly a result of propaganda activities from Serbia, and the very existence of Serbia as an independent state without feudal lords, and without serfs, owning free land, was enough to influence the development of the national consciousness among the Serbs in Bosna and Hercegovina. They were great followers of the idea of unification with Serbia because with such an establishment they expected that the semi-feudal relations would be abolished and obtain full religious liberty and these were the greatest problems which confronted the orthodox peasants in Bosna and Hercegovina.

Oddly enough there was no antagonism between the Moslems and the peasants of Roman Catholic religion in Bosna and Hercegovina. The main reasons for this state of

affairs were the insufficiently developed national consciousness and the pacificatory attitude of the Roman Catholic clergy which took upon itself the role of leaders among the peasants. For instance, if one were to have asked a Serbian Orthodox peasant as to what he was, he would have answered that he was a Serb, and when a similar question was asked of a Croatian Roman Catholic peasant he would have replied he was a Roman Catholic.³⁹ The politics of the Roman Catholic clergy towards the Moslems can best be seen in the principles of the draft for the rules and regulations of the Croatian Roman Catholic Association of 1909. In the second paragraph of that draft the Croatian Catholic Association stressed "a particular inclination towards Moslems with whom the Catholic Croats are tied by a common national existence, tradition, and a national principle."⁴⁰ The Catholic clergy took this kind of attitude toward the Moslems because they expected from them support in the nationalistic struggles against the Serbs in Bosna and Hercegovina.

³⁹ Kapiđić, Memorandum A. Seka, "Bosna i Hercegovina i ustavne uređbe", Glasnik arhiva i Društva arhivista Bosne i Hercegovine, Vol.2 (Sarajevo, 1962), pp.318-321, quoted in Djaković, Luka. "Formiranje Hrvatske katoličke udruge", Godišnjak Društva istoričara Bosne i Hercegovine, Year XV (Sarajevo, 1966), p.135.

⁴⁰ Djaković, op.cit., p.151.

The antagonism between the Serbs and Croats in Bosna and Hercegovina was not as great as was the antagonism between the Moslems and Serbs, and it had an essentially religious and nationalistic character. The Serbian peasantry, as already stated, saw the only salvation in the unification with Serbia, and the Croatian peasantry led by the clergy was much more oriented towards Croatia, in which the majority of the population was Roman Catholic. The politics of the Bosnian and Hercegovinian Roman Catholics can best be illustrated by the example of the archbishop of Sarajevo named Josip Stadler. After Austro-Hungary annexed Bosna and Hercegovina in 1908, he led a delegation of Roman Catholics from Bosna and Hercegovina to Vienna to express gratitude to the Emperor Francis Joseph and to the Archduke Francis Ferdinand for this annexation. In his speech addressing Archduke Ferdinand, Stadler stressed "the warm prayer of Croats of Bosna and Hercegovina, that Bosna and Hercegovina may be united with its kingdom of Croatia, as soon as possible, considering it as its own mother, as it were, and that the mother and daughter may embrace and under the wing of the Monarchy of Austro-Hungary."⁴¹

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Vrhbosna, No.23 (Sarajevo, 1908), quoted in Djaković, op.cit., p.141.

We have stressed in some detail these relationships between the Serbs and Croats because at times they were the reasons for peasant uprisings and dissatisfaction towards the end of 1918. The newspaper Narodno jedinstvo, official paper of the People's Council for Bosna and Hercegovina, wrote about one such trouble:

"It happened these days that there were some places in which the Croatian flag was torn or taken down... During the street demonstration, there were shouts against the Croats, against Croatia and against Yugoslavia and only for an excluded Serbia."⁴²

The conditions in Vojvodina were completely different as far as agrarian and national relationships were concerned. In this province there were many foreigners, especially Hungarians and Germans who were settled in large masses here after the Austro-Hungarian Agreement of 1867. Especially growing was the number of Hungarians. For instance between 1890 and 1910 in Banat (a district of Vojvodina) the number of Hungarians increased by 66%.⁴³ Many Hungarians and Germans were owners of the large estates. In the district of Bačka alone among all owners of large estates over 100 cadastral yokes, the Hungarians

⁴² Narodno jedinstvo of November 5, 1918 (Sarajevo), quoted in Purivatra, op.cit., p.94.

⁴³ Tomasevich, op.cit., p.156.

numbered 35.26% and the Germans 21.81%, and of the owners of estates over 200 cadastarl yokes, 29.59% were Hungarian and 11.23% were the Germans.⁴⁴ These foreign owners of large estates had a great influence on the political life in the land, often helped by the church hierarchy and by some distinguished intellectuals.

The government of the new state was facing a similar problem in the district of Kosovo-Metohija. The difference was that in this district the majority of the population was Albanians (Šiptars),⁴⁵ who did not own large estates. The government wanted to colonize that province with the aim of strengthening the Serbian national element among the Albanians.

The great difference in the agrarian land ownership relations, the large taxes on peasantry and the low living standard were the main reasons for frequent disturbances in Yugoslavian lands towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. During the First World War the dissatisfaction of the peasantry grew rapidly so that by the end of the war it assumed even the form of peasant revolutions.

⁴⁴ Šećerov, op.cit., p.146.

⁴⁵ At the end of the seventeenth century a large proportion of the Serbian population, retreating from the Turks, departed from the district of Kosovo-Metohija. They settled mostly in the northeastern parts of the present day Yugoslavia while the district of Kosovo-Metohija was gradually settled by the Albanians.

The peasants usually expressed their dissatisfaction by killing the owner of large estates, burning their houses and farm buildings, annexing the land on which they lived and worked and refusing to fulfill the obligation toward their masters, and so on. It also happened that some of these attacks, which were usually devoid of any social and political characteristics, mainly revealed a tendency towards delinquency on the part of the participants.⁴⁶

Peasant uprisings were quite serious in Croatia, Slavonija, Vojvodina and in Bosna and Hercegovina. Many documents testify to their seriousness from that period. During the month of November 1918 alone the Department for National Defense of the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in Zagreb,⁴⁷ received hundreds of telegrams and telephone reports about uprisings and the critical situation in the villages of these parts of Yugoslavia which previously belonged to the Hapsburg monarchy. For instance

⁴⁶ Culinović, Ferdo. Odjeci Oktobra u jugoslavenskim krajevima (Zagreb, 1957), p.91.

⁴⁷ The National Council of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was founded in Zagreb on October 6, 1919 as a political representative body of all Southern Slavs in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. When the Croatian Diet on October 29, 1918 broke off all ties with Austro-Hungary, the National Council proclaimed an independent state under the name the State of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs which existed until the proclamation of the Kingdom of S C S on December 1, 1918.

in the telegrams from Pregrad of November 4, 1918 it was reported:

"The peasants mutinied. Started plundering. There are several dead. The peasants declare that they can now do anything that they want because it is freedom. Military help urgently requested."⁴⁸

Other telegrams and other documents dealing with unrest in Croatia and Slavonija had a similar content. On the basis of these documents one can conclude that the largest number of uprisings took place during the first fifteen days of November and that after that their numbers diminished rapidly as a result of certain actions undertaken by the National Council.

There are many documents concerning the wide spread of peasant movements in Vojvodina on the basis of which one can accept the thesis that the dissolution of Austro-Hungary was followed by some sort of peasant revolution. For instance, in the vicinity of the town of Sombor at the end of 1918, there was such a strong movement of poor peasants and landless peasants that there were some 5,000 rich peasants ready to enter into the army in order to

⁴⁸ Krizman, Bogdan. "Gradja o nemirima u Hrvatskoj na kraju g. 1918", Historijski zbornik, Nos.1-4 (Zagreb, 1957), p.120.

secure their estates from the movement of the poor ones.⁴⁹ The movements of poor peasant masses were in their essence revolutionary because the peasants desired to execute a radical change in the landowning relations. However, many contemporaries, particularly from the townspeople, viewed these moves as plundering and even felonious.⁵⁰

In Bosna and Hercegovina the situation was so much more complex because the question of serfs came, during the unrest, to be identified with the national and religious questions. For the post war conditions in Bosna and Hercegovina a characteristic example is to be found in the report of December 25, 1918 of a district office of the town of Bosanska Dubica to the provincial office in Banja Luka, in which among other things it is stated:

"During the plundering in Knežice and in Sreplije not only of the private but also land owned objects there was a large participation by the members of the 'National Guard'. A very important point now is the agrarian question. One can sense that the disposition of serfs towards the spahis is unfavorable. The serfs and workers give vent to their displeasure by burning buildings and taking away the wheat and other property. The third (of what is due) is

49 Istorijski arhiv FK SKS za Vojvodinu, arh. No. 20400
 quoted in Gaćeša, Nikola. Agrarna reforma i koloniza-
cija u Bačkoj, 1918-1941 (Novi Sad, 1968), p. 37.

50 Gaćeša, op.cit., p. 35

seldom given; in places, not at all. The forests owned by the bey's are being plundered without any regard, so that from any point of view the spahis are being damaged. In short, the relationship between the spahis and the serfs is very tense and requires a quick solution.⁵¹

In other provinces of the former Austro-Hungarian state the peasant unrest did not assume larger dimensions for various reasons. In Slovenija one of the main reasons was that the majority of the large estates was essentially land covered by forests rather than the arable land for which the peasants strived most. Dalmatia was occupied by the Italian army and the movement there had an essentially nationalistic character. Whereas the unrest in Macedonia and in the district of Kosovo-Metchija were in their very beginning suppressed by the Serbian army. The Russian Revolution of 1917 did influence the spirit of the peasant unrests. The propagators of ideas of that revolution were the soldiers from the East (Russian) Front and participants in that revolution and in a smaller number of members of a social democratic party. The number of soldiers who returned from the eastern front who were active participants

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The Archives of Bosna and Hercegovina, funds: Zemaljska vlada za B i H, prezidijal No.29/1919, quoted in Purivatra, op.cit., p.91.

in the revolution was in the vicinity of 40,000.⁵²

The influence of the October Revolution was felt most strongly in Vojvodina where there was a large number of agricultural workers. For instance, in the village of Moravica in the northern part of Bačka the agricultural workers at the end of 1918 took power into their hands and organized a peoples council in which there were eight agricultural workers, two intellectuals (teachers) and two townsmen.⁵³ In some places some soviet councils were proclaimed.⁵⁴ Such manifestations however, were rare and the Serbian army did not have any difficulty in stopping their work and reestablishing the status quo. It would be a mistake to think that peasants under the influence of the October Revolution had some plan for a radical change in the social and economic relationships. One of the slogans of the October Revolution, "the land belongs to who is cultivating it," increased the revolutionary disposition of poor peasant masses and it is in that, that the influence of that revolution mainly consisted.

52 Kecić, Danilo. "Buržoazija prema boljševičkom pokretu u Vojvodini u prvoj polovini 1919. i generalni štrajk socijalističke solidarnosti", Zbornik za društvene nauke, No.48 (Novi Sad, 1967), p.6. For further information about the influence of the October Revolution see: Čulinović, op.cit., and S. Belić-Franić, "Oktobarska revolucija i njen odjek u drugim zemljama", Iz istorije Jugoslavije, 1918-1945 (Beograd, 1958), pp.50-74.

53 (Contd on next page)

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Groups of army deserters known under the name of "Green Cadre" also had a great role in the peasant movements.⁵⁵ According to some sources it has been estimated that in the Yugoslav lands formerly belonging to the Hapsburg monarchy at the end of the First World War, there were about 200,000 such "green cadre soldiers".⁵⁶ Until the fall of 1917 this was a spontaneous and disorganized movement, but after that it assumed a much more expressive political character as soon as soviet propaganda came about the October Revolution and about the need to end the First World War.⁵⁷ The "Green Cadre" never developed into a uniform and unified organization. It was simply a disorganized and spontaneous movement of masses without a unifying and elaborate program of action. Its members had in front of their eyes mainly the success of the October Revolution and they tried to emulate it.

As the peasants' movements in the Yugoslav territory of the former Austro-Hungary assumed a more and more

53 Lebl, Arpad. Sindikalna borba agrarnog proletarijata (Beograd, 1954), quoted in Gačević, op.cit., p.37.

54 Kecić, op.cit., p.6.

55 "Green Cadre" consisted of groups of deserters from the Austro-Hungarian Army. This dissent occurred during the First World War in the territory of Yugoslavia which at that time was a part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

56 Čulinović, op.cit., p.97.

57 Ibid., p.247.

revolutionary form, the National Council of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs undertook almost all possible measures to stop their spread. The leader of the Croatian Peasant party, Stjepan Radić, proposed an amnesty for all former members of the "Green Cadre." He also brought drafts for the text of such an amnesty move on October 28, 1918. The National Council did not promulgate a formal text of amnesty but with its declaration to soldiers dated October 29, 1918, it made known that the deserters would not be prosecuted. In that declaration, among other things, it was stated:

"Soldiers! The government of the National Council understands the reason of all that bitterness which can be seen around the land; therefore the government of the National Council calls on you to anticipate with confidence the new works. We are now guaranteeing you that the so-called deserters will not be persecuted nor called to account for their deeds. Let's stop destruction, fire, killing, because it is your own goods that are being destroyed and burned."⁵⁸

Some days later on November 2, 1918 the same council issued a call for mobilization in order to assemble the disintegrated army which consisted mainly of peasants.

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Šišić, Ferdo. Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine SHS, 1914-1918, (Zagreb, 1920), p.211.

However neither the declaration nor the call for mobilization had almost any kind of effect on the soldiers. In some parts of the country the council established by the National Local Council undertook some sharper measures against the rebels by introducing martial law and military tribunals but these measures did not achieve the desired effect. Aware of the dangers which such moves could cause, the members of the National Council in Zagreb at the meeting November 4, 1918 brought the decision to ask Serbia for help, addressing themselves also to the powers of the Entente. Special embassies were sent to Serbia to get in touch with the Serbian government and a telegram was sent to the powers of the Entente. The help that was desired arrived fast and the spread of the peasant movements was stopped. Although these movements had rather large dimensions there was a small number of casualties. This can mostly be ascribed to the fact that the agas and beys ran into the cities and the larger estate owners even ran abroad expecting to follow the development of events. Although the growth of this movement was stopped, it was not fully destroyed. It still simmered in the population and almost any moment there was danger that it would inflame itself again and receive a much better organized shape. In order that such a thing would not happen the members of

the National Council began to fulfill some of the fundamental peasant requests. The first step in that direction was a manifesto of the members of the National Council addressed to the peasants and dated November 14, 1918.

The second point of that manifesto stated:

"In this state of ours, of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs every family will be able today and for a long time to come, to receive enough of that arable fruitful land for every work, and no one will be unjustly damaged. This will take place according to the law, because if it were not according to law there would be a general butchering and those who are the most aggressive would grab everything while the most honest ones, the most peaceful ones, the most assiduous ones, would remain without anything."⁵⁹

Ten days later on November 26, 1918, the National Council issued a proclamation to the peasantry about the intended agrarian reform. The basic principles of that reform were: abolishing of all feudal relationships in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs with the just paying of damages to the owners of the land; the division of large estates into smaller parcels, again with damages; and the appropriation by the state of all those large land

holdings regardless of their size which were acquired during the war.⁶⁰

This proclamation did not have a large significance because it was not on its pages that the intended agrarian reform was to take effect. By the creation of the Kingdom of S C S the National Council in Zagreb ceased to exist and with this development all of its decisions and proclamations lost any value.

It should be mentioned that the government of the new state did have certain obligations towards the army volunteers. Namely, the government of the Kingdom of Serbia in exile on the Island of Corfu, in order to attract Yugoslav soldiers from the territory of Austro-Hungary, issued a special proclamation on February 20, 1917. In that proclamation it promised lands to all those volunteers who would come to their Serbian side, to be given after the liberation. It was envisaged to give all soldiers, five hectares of land, and three hectares to those in non-fighting capacity. This promise had to be fulfilled as soon as possible because the volunteers were mainly peasants who kept the arms which

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The acts of 1918, the State Archives of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, quoted in Čulinović, Dokumenti o Jugoslaviji (Zagreb, 1968), p.125.

they had during the war. Furthermore their number was 39,526 and they represented a potential danger for the new state because there was the possibility that they would express solidarity with other peasants and start participating in their numerous uprisings.⁶¹

On the basis of all things stated one can see that the agrarian problem in Yugoslav lands was a complex and serious one. The only solution was to put agrarian reform into effect immediately because there was no time for preliminary work. Since peasant unrest did not cease even after the proclamation of the Kingdom of S C S on December 1, 1918, the government of the new state immediately started executing agrarian reform in order to reconstitute order in the country. The first step in that direction was a proclamation by the Regent Aleksandar of January 6, 1919. This proclamation was supposed to pacify the peasantry until the promulgation of the first laws for the execution of the agrarian reform. In that part of the proclamation addressed to the peasants he stated:

⁶¹ Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine Kraljevine SHS,
Vol.2, No.51 (Beograd, 1924), p.131.

"I wish that a just solution of the agrarian question be immediately undertaken and that all serfdom be immediately abolished as well as the large land estates. In both cases the land will be divided among the poor peasants with a just payment of damages to the former owners of the land. Let every Serb, Croat and Slovene be the master of his own land. In our free state there can be, and will be, only free land owners. That is why I have instructed my government to immediately establish a committee which will prepare a solution of the agrarian question, and I am calling upon the peasants and serfs to have confidence in my word of honor as a king, and to peacefully wait until our state in a lawful manner gives them the land which will henceforth be only of God and theirs, as it has been for a long time in Serbia."⁶²

Next month, on February 25, 1919, the Council of Ministers brought a temporary law about the execution of the agrarian reform. It was published in the official newspaper Službene novine of February 27th of the same year, entitled "Preliminary decrees for the preparation of the agrarian reform." (hereafter referred to Preliminary decrees) By these decrees were abolished the serf relationships (chiflik) and similar ones by dividing the land among the peasants and paying just indemnities to the former owners. In the indemnities one had to add

⁶² Šišić, op.cit., p.299.

all the peasant's debts (hak)⁶³ for the year 1918. Also there were to be expropriated the large estates in the northern part of the country with indemnities to the owner (large estates were declared to be at least 100 to 500 cadastral yokes of arable land, depending on the patterns of the estates and the economic conditions of the district). The estates of the Hapsburg dynasty and of the members of the Hapsburg Imperial Family were to be expropriated without indemnities. This also applied to all estates belonging to the dynasties of the enemy countries which were given as gifts, as favors done to the Hapsburg dynasty, and which had not yet passed into a different hand. All large forest estates became the property of the state and the peasants were given the right of free pasture in these lands as well as the use

⁶³ Hak was a part of the crop which was paid to the owner of the land in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It could be from one-fifth to one-half of the crop, but was usually one-third. Large hak such as a half were given only in those instances where the owner gave the serf seeds, tools for cultivation, cattle, and so on. Only in rare occasions the hak was determined in advance regardless of the annual harvest. The hak was to be given only from the main crop.

of wood for fuel and lumber.⁶⁴

These decrees had to prepare the actual execution of the agrarian reform until the promulgation of a fundamental law for its execution. However they did become the basic law and it is on these that the agrarian reform was based. Only some new decrees, orders, and laws which qualified some of the articles were to be issued later.

⁶⁴ Ministarstvo za agrarnu reformu Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca. Agrarna reforma; uredbe, naredbe i raspisi (Zagreb, 1920), pp.12-17.

CHAPTER II

THE ATTITUDES AND THE FIRST REACTIONS OF THE
POLITICAL PARTIES AND SOCIAL GROUPS

The internal life of the Kingdom of S C S started in very unfavorable circumstances because of the unsettled political as well as economic conditions. Various political parties and groups tried to make use of such circumstances. The pre-war political parties changed their programs, adapting themselves to the new conditions, and numerous new parties created their programs tightly linked with the pressing problems of the state. Immediately after the unification of the state, many political parties were created. It is interesting to observe that until the elections for the Constitutional Assembly of November 28, 1920 in the Kingdom of S C S, which at that time had about twelve million inhabitants, there were over forty different political parties and groupings with the most diversified programs and aims.¹ Many of these were almost without any political significance and existed for a very short period,

¹ Čulinović, Ferdo. Jugoslavija između dva rata, Vol.1 (Zagreb, 1961), p.258.

as for instance the Party of the War Invalids, the Party of the Accordant Croats, the Party of the Coachmen (kiridžijska), and so on.

The majority of the political parties was founded on or depended on a region and had a regional character because they represented the interests of a definite group of people from that territory. Such parties were the Yugoslav Moslem Organization, the National Republican Peasant Party, the Peasant Party of Bosna, the Slovenian People's Party, and so on. A smaller number of these parties had or tried to have a more general Yugoslav character as for instance the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the Agricultural Party, the National Radical Party, the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party, and so on.

None of the political parties remained indifferent towards the agrarian question in view of the structure of the population (75.9% of the total population were peasants) and the question was very much in everybody's mind. Because of that the agrarian reform was used in various political combinations and activities of political parties as a common tool. The representatives in the parliament by names of Velja Vukičević and Nastas Petrović, at the very beginning of the execution of agrarian reform, immediately called attention to the fact that there was a danger in using the

agrarian reform itself for political aims. These two representatives in one of their objectives of July 8, 1919 sent to Franjo Poljak, the minister for agrarian reform, wrote that the agrarian question must be solved in a healthy and just manner before "it becomes an object of party competition and party auctioneering."²

However, little attention was paid this and similar warnings and the social question became a means or a tool in the struggle for primacy among the leading political parties. For instance the unsolved agrarian question was used at the time of the voting for the constitution of the Kingdom of S C S, a constitution which had to make lawful the centralistic organization of the state and give great powers to the ruler. Since the coalition government of Nikola Pašić feared that they would not have a sufficient number of votes to pass the constitution, that government decided to make deals with certain parties in order to guarantee the necessary majority. An agreement was made with the agricultural group from Slovenija under the leadership of Bogumil Vošnjak, with the Moslem party from Macedonia and the Kosovo-Metchija district known under the

² Stenografske beleške Privremenog narodnog predstavništva,
Vol. 3, No. 9 (Beograd, 1920), p. 203.

name of Džemijat, and with the Yugoslav Moslem Organization. The agricultural group from Slovenija received a permit for export of cattle to Austria, and Vošnjak received a promise for a position as an ambassador abroad. To the party Džemijat and to the Yugoslav Moslem Organization were promised certain concessions as far as the execution of the agrarian reform was concerned in those areas which these two groups represented and in return these groups promised to vote for the constitution.³

All political parties and groupings were aware of the seriousness of the unsolved agrarian problem and were in favor of passing an agrarian reform. The debatable question was how to start executing it, whether to pay indemnities to the former landowners or not, and if so what should be the maximum and minimum sizes of land possessions. These were the two basic questions which separated political parties one from another in connection with the execution of the agrarian reform. One should stress that the first question, the question of indemnities, was much more important and often the political prestige of leading political parties depended on their attitude towards that question. We are

³ Horvat, Josip. Politička povijest Hrvatske, 1918-1929 (Zagreb, 1938), pp. 254-260.

stressing the leading ones because the situation of the smaller regional parties in the political life of the country did not improve regardless of their attitudes towards the agrarian question. Insofar as the first reactions in connection with the execution of agrarian reform is concerned, we can divide the political parties into three basic groups, the Middle Class Parties, Agricultural Parties, and Socialistic Parties.

Middle Class Parties

To see if the attitudes of the middle class parties were similar concerning the execution of the agrarian reform, we shall examine the attitudes of the National Radical Party, of the Yugoslav Democratic Party, and of the Yugoslav Moslem Organization. These parties had not only a leading role in the State or in certain districts and parts of the State, as was the case of the Yugoslav Moslem Organization, but also at the same time represented specific attitudes of all the middle class parties and differed in their attitudes only insofar as the solution of the relationships between the former landowners and their serfs or peasants were concerned.

The National Radical Party (N R P) was the oldest political party in the Kingdom of S C S. Its beginnings can be traced in the seventies of the nineteenth century

in Serbia. In the beginning of its existence it was a progressive party which assembled the peasantry and the small middle class groupings. In the course of time it started changing so that after the foundation of the Kingdom of S C S it became an exclusively middle class party, but it did not break its links with the Serbian peasantry towards which it came always "demagogic with various political slogans, particularly relating to the national question."⁴ After the unification, the Radical Party of Serbia was joined by several groups and parties from those areas which entered into the new state (Vojvodina, Bosna-Hercegovina). With these additions this party lost the characteristic of an exclusively Serbian party and to a certain extent it became a Yugoslav party. It was the largest party and played one of the most important roles in the political life of the Kingdom of S C S.

Immediately after the unification some members of the N R P championed the radical agrarian reform with a just indemnity to the former owners. Their declarations were always in accord with the proclamation of the Regent Aleksandar of January 6, 1919. As an example we may cite

⁴ Čulinović, op.cit., p.282.

a part of the speech by Stojan Protic, the first prime minister of the Kingdom of S C S, and one of the leaders of the Radical Party, which he delivered at a meeting of the delegates of the Radical Party in Sarajevo on November 8, 1919. In that speech he touched upon the agrarian reform and among other things stated:

Therefore those who till the soil should own that soil. This is our desire and our program and our firm commitment that that is how it should be, and to those who owned the land until now, to them, brothers, one should give a just and honest indemnity. There are people among you who call themselves people's people, democrats, who tell you that this should not happen and to these (landowners) one should not pay anything. I owe it to you, brothers, in my own name as well as in the name of my comrades, in the interest of the whole country as well as in the interest of all of you, to tell you that such teaching is bad and dangerous. Everyone who owned the land until now, whatever his name may have been, ought to be assured that the Radical Party will honestly and justly pay for that which is being taken away from them. That which will be given will not be paid by the peasant to whom we are giving the land but it will be paid by the state.⁵

Until September 1920 the N R P had not taken a uniform attitude in relation to the agrarian question and the execution of the agrarian reform. The main reason for this was to be found in the differences of attitudes of individual

⁵ Protic, Stojan. Naša spoljna i unutrašnja situacija (Beograd, 1920), pp.52-53.

radical groups. For instance, the radicals from Bosna championed the abolition of serfdom and they were little interested in the solution of the big land ownership question in the province of Vojvodina, and the radicals from Vojvodina were not unified among themselves. One group was in favor of the maintenance of the capitalist big land ownership whereas another group was in favor of preservation of large church-owned estates.⁶ Because of that, when deciding upon its uniform and unified attitude, the Radical Party had to take into account all these points of view in order to prevent a breach in the party and also not to lose the large masses of voters, who were favoring the execution of that reform.

The N R P formulated its own unified attitude towards the agrarian reform at the time of a conference held in Belgrade between September 25 and 28, 1920. In that program a repetition or a restatement of attitude was made, of attitudes which before then some of its distinguished members had already expressed in public. The party came out against serfdom and similar relationships, and for repayment of indemnities to former landowners, payment which the state

⁶ Eric, Milivoje. Agrarna reforma u Jugoslaviji, 1918-1941 (Sarajevo, 1958), p.192.

had to guarantee, and also for distribution of the land to poor peasants and landless peasants. In the process of dividing the land, the first land to be given was the State-owned land, and if there was not enough State-owned land one could start distributing private lands if they were to be requisitioned in the process of the agrarian reform.

Besides that the Radical Party took the position that there ought to be a planned colonization on land and that in the process of this colonization one had to take into account so-called "higher interests," particularly national ones, and also a legal limitation of the maximal size of an agricultural estate. It is interesting to mention that at the same conference the Radical Party took the position that there must be an exclusively legal base for the execution of the agrarian reform and that this reform should as soon as possible be taken out from political authorities and their organs if they were not already placed under the control of the courts.⁷

The positions of the N R P were quite elastic so that some of the points could be interpreted either by temporary wishes or by political needs. For instance, the N R P took the attitude that there ought to be a legal limitation as

⁷ Marković, Lazar. "Ekonomski i finansijski program Narodne Radikalne stranke," Finansijski problemi Kraljevine SHS (Beograd, n.d.), quoted in Erić, op.cit., pp.193-194.

far as a maximal size of an agricultural estate is concerned but it did not spell out how large such maximal size ought to be. Such a position left the N R P free to change its attitudes in relation to this delicate question. Also it never spelled out in detail what its attitude towards the big land estates and church-owned estates was, allowing itself to accommodate its attitudes with regard to these questions according to the current political situation.

The Yugoslav Democratic Party (Y D P) was founded in May, 1919 by the fusion of several political groups. From the very beginning it was in favor of the solution of the agrarian question and its members often stressed that in its essence this was a peasant party. In its program, besides the solution of the agrarian question, the Y D P was in favor of a guaranteed minimal estate for everyone who wished to cultivate the soil, it came out in favor of a guaranteed voice of the villages in all public and state enterprises and business, of a faster development of villages in the cultural, economical and political respect, and of the introduction of pensions for workers, and so on.⁸

⁸ Prodanović, Jasa. "Demokratska stranka," Narodna enciklopedija srpske-hrvatske-slovenačka, Vol. I (Zagreb, 1925), pp. 492-493.

Within the Y D P the greatest champion of the agrarian reform was "Prečanska grupa,"⁹ led by Slavko Šećerov, and in various ways this group was against the immunity of private ownership and in favor of the betterment of the position of peasants.

"Shall we abandon the welfare of hundreds of thousands of our peasant (wrote Šećerov) only to allow that a few hundred degenerated big land owners would benefit."¹⁰

Under the influence of the "Prečanska grupa" the Democratic Party as a whole took quite a radical attitude towards the agrarian reform. The attitudes of this party were first formulated in a plan for a program published in 1920. This party viewed the execution of the agrarian relationships as one of the most important parts of the program of liberation during the First World War. The Party stated that it favored the full abolition of feudal relationships and that for this abolished feudal right no one deserved any kind of indemnities. But within the same program the Party took the position that the state should take care of

⁹ "Prečanska grupa" was an unofficial name for the members of the Yugoslav Democratic Party from Vojvodina. The nucleus of this group consisted of members of the former Croatic-Serbian Coalition, a union of Croatian and Serbian middle class parties in Croatia, founded in 1905.

¹⁰ Šećerov, Slavko. Iz naše agrarne politike, 1919-1929 (Beograd, 1930), p.8.

those former owners of the feudal right who would by the loss of this right be unable to maintain themselves.¹¹

The attitude of the Democratic Party with relation to agrarian reform was more radical than the attitude of the Radical Party because the Democratic Party stated that it was for the abolition of feudal relationships without indemnities to former rich landowners. Similarly to the position of the Radical Party, the Democratic Party did not bring into the open its attitudes towards the church-owned big estates and estates of large landowners in the northern part of the country.

The agrarian reform had affected the feudal owners in Bosna and Hercegovina very strongly and in a certain way they were the ideological founders of the political organizing process of the Moslems in Bosna and Hercegovina, and their influence at a meeting of the Moslem delegates from many parts of Bosna and Hercegovina was strong. This meeting was held in Sarajevo from February 14-17, 1919, and there was founded a united or unified political party named the Yugoslav Moslem Organization (Y M O). Although these feudal lords from Bosna and Hercegovina initiated the idea

¹¹ Brpski glas, No.16 (Velika Kikinda, 1920), quoted in Eric, op.cit., pp.197-198.

to organize such a political party, these same feudal lords were not largely represented either in the management of the Y M O or among the representatives who went to the parliament. For instance, in the first Central board of the Y M O of thirty-two members, only seven were landowners.¹² Yet in spite of this they succeeded in imposing on the Y M O their own agrarian politics which during the first few years of its existence, dominated the Y M O's political activities. The Y M O devoted considerable attention to the agrarian question in its own program. It stressed that every peasant, everyone who tills the soil, ought to get enough land for his own subsistence, and in order that the liberated peasant lands would be maintained the Y M O requested a legal definition of the minimal land ownership which could not be sold or burdened by debts. In addition the Y M O was in favor of the maintenance of larger free estates (begluk) and in favor of assigning more land to those begs who did not have enough of it and wished to cultivate it. This Party in its own program stressed separately the point that it would devote especial attention

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Pravda, No.1 (Sarajevo, February 22, 1919), quoted in Purivatra, Atif. "Političke partije prema agrarnoj reformi u Bosni i Hercegovini neposredno poslije 1918. godine," Prilozi, No.3 (Sarajevo, 1967), p.101.

to the improvement of the economical position of the Moslem population in villages and in cities by the founding of agricultural and craftsman organizations.¹³ The parliamentary representatives of the Y M O frequently appeared in public, in the Temporary Parliament and in the Constitutional Assembly, not only to defend the interests of former agas and begs but also against the unequal or inegalitarian position of the Moslem population in general.

"Neither the life nor the possession nor the personal liberty or freedom, not even the religious holy icons of the Moslems, were not, nor are they now, protected in such a way as it should be in a state based on law. These were the main reasons for the beginnings of our organization in the year 1919 (wrote Mehmed Spaho, the president of this party).¹⁴

A similar point of view was stressed in the Constitutional Assembly by one of the landowning representatives of the Y M O, Seid Alibeg Filipović, when he said the Moslems assembled in Y M O were there because after the First World War there was such a situation in Bosna and Hercegovina that "Moslems had no rights whatsoever. They were being killed, they were being plundered, their lands were being burned, and all of that only to Moslems."¹⁵

¹³ Statut i program JMO (Sarajevo, 1919), pp.5-7, quoted in Purivatra, op.cit., p.102.

¹⁴ Spaho, Mehmed. "Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija," Nova Evropa, No.17 (Zagreb, 1923), p.505.

¹⁵ Stenografske beleške Ustavotvorne skupštine, Vol.2, No.35 (Beograd, 1921), p.38.

In the Temporary Parliament and in the Constitutional Assembly the representatives of the Y M O, besides pointing out the unequal position of Moslems, requested an equal treatment of all provinces of the Kingdom of S C S as far as a solution of the agrarian question was concerned. During the discussions about the agrarian reform they championed as large as possible indemnities to former landowners as well as the payment of what was due to them in 1918. Thus, for instance, at the 42nd regular meeting of the Constitutional Assembly on May 30, 1921, a representative of the Y M O, Šemsudin Sarajlić, came out in favor of the repayments to former landowners with these words:

"Keep in mind, gentlemen, that our families which were touched by this agrarian question have been selling from their homes, one could say even their last possessions, only to be able to survive...If you keep in mind that they have been selling things and that they have nothing on which to live, and if they have any right to those things that they have inherited from their forefathers, can one take it upon his own soul to say that one does not have to give them any payment? We shall not perhaps adopt a reverse system as there was a law in China according to which for the thefts committed by sons, the fathers were punished, and so establish here that for a heritage from their fathers, the sons are being punished."¹⁶

16 Ibid., p. 20.

Besides these public statements of the representatives of Y M O, the regional organizations of the same party came out with statements of its own, too. The activity of these regional organizations was largest immediately after the promulgation of the first laws for the execution of the agrarian reform. These organizations sent protesting letters to the Temporary Parliament requesting that the estates of the smaller landowners be exempt, as well as requesting payment of the hak to the agas and beys for 1918.¹⁷

Of all middle class parties, the Y M O advocated most intensely interests of landowners and small middle class elements of Bosnia and Hercegovina. This task was not easy because the agrarian question in these areas, as already mentioned in the first chapter, was very closely tied to the religious and national questions. In spite of these difficulties the Y M O achieved a great deal for those whose interests it defended, largely by reason of the development of the political maneuvering.

There was not a single middle class party which would have been an enemy of agrarian reform. The attitudes of

¹⁷ Stenografske beleške Privremenog narodnog predstavnistva, Vol.1 (Zagreb, 1919), pp.167-168.

the middle class parties were quite similar. However, they did differ, mainly with respect to the indemnities to the former landowners and on the manner of execution of the reform. All of these parties stressed in the first place that the peasants should receive as much land as they needed for their own existence. In their programs these parties tried as much as possible to protect the interests of the former landowners, claiming a just indemnity or some sort of social help for the poor ones. The programs of the middle class parties were quite elastic and could be changed to a certain extent when the political situation required.

Agricultural Parties

At the time of the founding of the kingdom of S C S the only true peasant party in the country was the Croatian People's Peasant Party (C P P P). It was founded by the brothers Antun and Stjepan Radić in 1903. In its first phase from the founding until 1918 this party advocated mostly the social and economical interests of the Croatian small peasantry. Toward the end of the First World War it stressed more and more the national and political aspects in its activities. This party stressed that the Croatian peasantry was a carrier of a state idea and that in Croatia it should play a primary role in political life. The leaders of that

party, the brothers Radić, saw the solution of the vital problems of the peasantry in the creation of a Croatian peasant state.

In the second phase of the history of that party, which begins after the creation of the Kingdom of S C S, the national and political aspects kept pushing into the background the social aspects of its activities, and the party started making a link with the middle class elements in the cities as well as the richer peasantry in villages. With its politics, the C P P P, from 1920 known as Croatian Republican Peasant Party, started losing the characteristics of a purely peasant party and became more and more a middle class party with a peasant name. As far as the agrarian question is concerned the Croatian Peasant Party took the position which it spelled out already in 1905 in its programs. In it this party came out in favor of the distribution of the estates owned by feudal lords to the peasants with just indemnities to the former owners.¹⁸ In occasional publication the Party kept warning the peasants not to grab the big land estates by force but to wait until the Croatian Peasant Party came to power and, after a republic had been

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Hrvatska pučka seljačka stranka (Zagreb, 1905), quoted in Čulinović, Dokumenti o Jugoslaviji (Zagreb, 1968), p.180.

proclaimed, then this party would distribute the land.¹⁹ Such warnings created confusion among peasants and did not quiet down their revolutionary mood. The C P P P was far from taking the role of a leading political party in the country and the desire for the founding of a Croatian peasant republic was only a dream because the centralized power in the new state grew from day to day.

In its activities, the C P P P devoted itself mainly to the national and political questions and showed little interest in a rapid and radical solution of the agrarian question. Because of that it is not exaggerated to say that in the first few years of the execution of the agrarian reform the Croatian Peasant Party was more or less a passive onlooker during the solution of this complex and difficult problem in a young state.

Another, more important, peasant party in the Kingdom of S C S was the Union of Peasantry or Agricultural Party which was founded in Belgrade at the end of 1920. It came into existence by the fusion of three parties: The Group led by Mihailo Avramović from Serbia, the Union of Laborers from Bosna, and the Laborers Union from Dalmatia. Composed of three peasant parties from different parts of the

¹⁹ Hribar, Alfons. Agrarna reforma (Zagreb, 1924), p.72.

country it was the only peasant party in the Kingdom of S C S which to a certain extent had a Yugoslav character, but it never became a true Yugoslav Peasant Party because it succeeded in assembling mainly only the Serbs.²⁰ The chairman of the Central board of the Party was a rich peasant, but that was only a formality because Party matters were decided and the Party was ruled by the politicians and diplomats such as Jovan Jovanović-Pižon and Milan Gavrilović.

The Agricultural Party came forward with a rather large program. It stressed that the land belongs to the one who cultivates it and lives on it permanently. The Party was for a total abolition of all serfdom relationships, colonnate relationships, and any other semi-subservient relationship. This Party came out in favor of the maintenance of some large estates in the interest of productivity, but only after the peasants who did not have any land or did not have enough of it received their share first.²¹ Furthermore, this Party was in favor of colonization with a communal base, the improvement of agriculture by the improvement of the national health, and the

²⁰ Purivatra, op.cit., p.112.

²¹ Jovanović, Jovan. "O Savezu zemljoradnika," Nova Evropa, No.10 (Zagreb, April, 1923), p.293.

education of the peasants. It also favored a communal (zadruga) spirit among the peasants, and the introduction of special credits for agriculturists on the largest possible base with the help of the State, and so on.²² As far as the execution of the agrarian reform was concerned, the Agricultural Party requested that this reform be applied also on the territory of Serbia, and that in Serbia be taken away all the land that belonged to those in cities, specifically merchants and lawyers, and so on, which they did not cultivate. As for the methods for the execution of the reform, this party took the position that the division of the land should be made through village councils, consisting of the peasants themselves.²³ Its basic position was against the indemnities to former owners of the land but it did take the position that the poor former feudal lords were entitled to some kind of social help.²⁴

The third important Agricultural Party was created in Slovenija at the beginning of June 1919. That was the Independent Peasant Party which in its attitudes did not differ much from the already mentioned Peasant Parties.

²² Predanović, Jaša. "Savez zemljoradnika," Narodna enciklopedija srpske-hrvatske-slovenačka, Vol. 4 (Zagreb, 1929), p. 47.

²³ Selo, No. 36 (Beograd, 1920), quoted in Ericić, op cit., p. 204.

²⁴ Stenografske beleške Ustavotvorne skupštine, Vol. 1, No. 7 and Vol. 2, No. 35 (Beograd, 1921), pp. 1, 8-9.

If one compares the first reactions of the agricultural parties with the first reactions of the middle class parties one sees that they were quite similar to one another and on certain questions, identical. It is an interesting fact that the middle class parties were much more interested in the execution of the agrarian reform than the peasant parties which by the nature of things should have been concerned with the village peasants and the prosperity of the agricultural production.

Socialistic Parties

Because of the former division of the various provinces and the small number of the working class, there was not a single workers party in the Yugoslav lands before the unification. There were only regional social democratic parties founded toward the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. These were under the influence of foreign social democratic parties and showed little interest in the peasant masses. During the First World War their work nearly stopped. After the war the social democratic parties started their activities again and this time, because of the immediate impact of the agrarian question, showed a little bit more interest in peasants and in the unsolved agrarian question. For instance, the Social Democratic Party of Bosna and Hercegovina (S D P B & H)

criticized the manifesto of Regent Aleksandar and the Preliminary decrees. It was against any indemnities to the Bosna and Hercegovina feudal lords, which Aleksandar had promised and the Preliminary decrees confirmed. Immediately after the January declaration of Regent Aleksandar the newspaper Glas slobode, an official organ of S D P B & H wrote:

"According to such a program especially in a revolutionary epoch the attitudes of a revolutionary party is already clearly formulated in advance for a party such as the social democratic one: the strongest opposition."²⁵

The same newspaper defined the Preliminary decrees as "Compromise with the feudal lords."²⁶

Besides the writings in the press and the meetings with peasants, the social democratic parties of the Kingdom of S C S devoted a considerable amount of space to the agrarian question in the resolutions which were formulated at the party conferences. We can give some examples.

The Social Democratic Party of Croatia and Slavonija passed this resolution at the Conference held in Zagreb on January 26-27, 1919:

²⁵ Glas slobode, No. 6 (Sarajevo, 1919), quoted in Šarac, Nedim. "Socijaldemokratska stranka Bosne i Hercegovine i agrarno pitanje", Godišnjak Društva istoričara Bosne i Hercegovine, Year XI, 1960 (Sarajevo, 1961), p.82.

²⁶ Glas slobode, No.53 (Sarajevo, 1919), quoted in Šarac, op.cit., p.82.

"This Conference requests that the land be declared state or national property and that all those members of the Yugoslav people whose profession it is to cultivate the earth, that all of them be given as much land as they are able alone or in union with the members of their family to cultivate, and that of that moment when they cease to be agriculturists that land be taken away and given to others who would cultivate it. This Conference requests that these big land estates on which there is an exemplary economic organization that such estates be transformed into agricultural communes. The State must with all its might support the founding of peasant communist unions which would have as their aim the exchange of agricultural products with the products of industry."²⁷

The resolution of the Social Democratic Party of Dalmatia passed at the Regional Conference in Split on March 25, 1919 was much sharper and more specific. In that resolution came to the fore the process against the government-sponsored agrarian reform, the main tendency of which was to strengthen the desire for ownership among the peasants and thus continue maintaining a capitalist order in which the peasant masses were being exploited in the same way as the workers were exploited in factories. The participants at that conference were against the division of the land and creation of a great number of small estates as well as against indemnities. They requested that all big

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Isterijski arhiv KPJ, Vol.4 (Beograd, 1950), p.164.

land estates, those owned by the churches as well as the Moslem estates, be confiscated, and that on such lands agricultural communes be founded.²⁸

As one can see from the cited resolutions, the social democratic parties were not looking with favor at the division of the land estates to the peasants but were in favor of the creation of agricultural communes. This fact alone was sufficient to create suspicion and loss of confidence of the numerous poor peasantry and landless peasants who had been fighting for a little bit of land which they could call their own. One should mention that within this party there were groups which were known under the name of "Rightists" which were against such an agrarian policy. These Rightists were in favor of the distribution of land to peasants with indemnities to former owners.²⁹

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was founded at a Congress of Unification held in Belgrade from April 20-23, 1919 when several social democratic parties fused together. The first title of this joint party was the Socialistic Workers Party of Yugoslavia (Communists), a title retained until the month of June, 1920, when a congress was held in

²⁸ Ibid., p.196.

²⁹ Korac, Vitemir. Povijest radničkog pokreta u Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji, Vol.1 (Zagreb, 1929), pp.261-262.

Vukovar. At that congress the process of unification of the Party was completed and its official title became the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (C P Y). At the Congress in Belgrade, it came to some disagreement with regard to the agrarian reform between the less extreme group, led by Dragiša Lapčević and Živko Topalović, and the extreme group, led by Pavle Pavlović. Lapčević was in favor of the distribution of big estates to peasants while the pro-bolshevik Pavlović was in favor of the creation of agricultural communes on large estates.³⁰ This proposal of Pavlović was rejected as utopian by Topalović and finally was withdrawn.³¹

The Congress in Belgrade passed a separate resolution dealing with the agrarian question. In that resolution the Party requested: a radical abolition of all still existing feudal remnants without any indemnities, then that all peasants receive freely at their disposal the tools and inventory for building of houses and farm buildings, that there be a distribution of large estates without any indemnities, and that the whole business of distribution and organization of work on large estates be entrusted to peasant councils

³⁰ Radničke novine (May 2, 1919), quoted in Avakumovic, Ivan. History of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (The Aberdeen University Press, 1964), p.29.

³¹ Radničke novine (May 5, 1919), quoted in Avakumovic, op.cit., p.29.

which should be constituted of those who had been working on such estates.³²

At the Congress in Vukovar from June 20-25, 1920, there was very little debate about the agrarian question. There was even no separate resolution dealing with it but only Clause 14 of the general resolution dealt with it by stating:

The CPY will undertake the most energetic action to uncover all those lies and crimes of the bourgeoisie in the "solution" of the agrarian question. The Party will unmask these lies and cheatings to the masses and with its full energy work toward the fullest solution of the agrarian question, to be achieved by the expropriation of all large estates and leaving them, without any indemnities and including all inventory, to the peasant councils constituted of those who in fact cultivate soil.³³

Besides the resolutions and frequent public statements, the representatives of the CPY frequently appeared in public with statements for a radical agrarian reform. In the Constitutional Assembly this Party had fifty-nine representatives, and in sheer numbers it was the third largest party in the parliament, immediately after the National Radical Party and the Yugoslav Democratic Party.³⁴

33 Ibid., p.43.

34 Pregled istorije Saveza komunista Jugoslavije (Beograd, 1963), p.67.

The sudden success of Communists scared the government and it passed special laws forbidding the work of the C P Y. First at the end of 1920, it issued "Obznana" (a proclamation in the form of posters), and the government promulgated in the beginning of August 1921 the "Law for the protection of the state" which imposed the strictest penalties for Communist activities including the death penalty. The C P Y was thus forced to operate illegally, so it could not achieve much for a speedy and radical execution of the agrarian reform.

The attitude of the Socialistic Parties differed very much from the attitudes of the Middle Class and Agricultural Parties because they requested radical changes in the agrarian ownership relationships. In spite of that they did not obtain the confidence of the poor peasantry because these attitudes were frequently undefined and unacceptable for many peasants. The propositions for the founding of agricultural communes were truly utopian because a large part of the state, in its agrarian ownership relationships and in the manner of the cultivation of the soil, was several centuries behind the more progressive states in Europe, and besides political circumstances were not favorable for such a thing to materialize.

Feudal Land Owners³⁵

During the last few months of 1918, a large number of serfs in Bosna and Hercegovina became liberated from feudal relationships by expropriating the estates of beys and agas, as well as by ceasing of payments hak through their former masters. The promised just repayment to the feudal lords as declared by the Regent Aleksandar on January 6, 1919 and by the Preliminary decrees of February 25th of the same year, was being paid in small amounts and irregularly because of budgetary and political difficulties. These happenings were the reasons for a difficult financial situation for the former feudal lord.

They did not become reconciled to the existing situation but began a campaign against the manner of execution of the agrarian reform. The leading role in that campaign was assumed by the Moslem feudal lords, who were most numerous among the feudal lords of Bosna and Hercegovina interpreting the abolition of feudal relationships as an attack on the interest of the Bosna and Hercegovina Moslems as a whole, although among the Moslems only ten percent were feudal lords.³⁶ Already in January a small group

³⁵ The feudal landowners were the owners of the chifchi, bey, and colonus estates.

³⁶ Purivatra, op.cit., p.99.

of Moslem feudal lords formed a political organization (Yugoslav Moslem Democracy). In their program they were for a "solution of the question of serfdom, as justly as possible for both sides."³⁷ This attitude was elaborated somewhat later, requesting that the state pay indemnities in cash for the land now owned by serfs and that the estates of the begluk remain an immune ownership of their legal owners.³⁸ At the meeting of Derventa May 2, 1919, the feudal lords of Bosna and Hercegovina founded an association entitled the "Association of landowners of Bosna and Hercegovina" and in it, besides the Moslems, there were Serbs and Croats. The society had its center in Sarajevo, and in all larger towns and cities of Bosna and Hercegovina there were local councils. The members of this organization held their first joint meeting on February 3, 1919 in Sarajevo from which, with a separate delegation, they sent a resolution to the Prime Minister Stojan Protic. In this resolution they declared that the agrarian question due to its importance, could not be solved in haste in a simple manner without hearings involving those interested in it. Therefore they requested that the solution of this question be postponed

³⁷ Jednakost, No.5 (Sarajevo, 1919), quoted in Šarac, op.cit., p.83.

³⁸ Šarac, op.cit., p.83.

until such time as the people can with its legally elected representatives defend its own just interests.³⁹ There is an interesting memorandum which these landowners sent to Regent Aleksandar on November 24th of the same year. In it, among other things, they stated that the right to indemnities from the legal as well as the moral viewpoint was fully justified and they should not even be discussed. They justified this by stating that the serfdom relationship did not come into existence by the right of the mighty but by contract and natural evolution of that relationship due to the supply and demand of land and of work.⁴⁰

Such a statement of former feudal lords was fully mistaken because the Turkish agrarian law never acknowledged the full right of ownership of the land. According to the Koran the supreme owner of all land is God. Since the sultan as a caliph is a representative of God he was viewed as a supreme owner of the land. Individuals have the right with special decrees to become owners of such land estates, with a house and land around it which did not surpass half a dunum (about 500 square meters).⁴¹ However,

³⁹ Vrijeme, No.9 (Sarajevo, February 4, 1919), quoted in Purivatra, op.cit., p.100.

⁴⁰ Vlajinac, Milan. "Agrarna reforma; pitanje o naknadama," Srpski književni glasnik, No.8 (Beograd, April 16, 1921) p.610.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.610.

these agrarian laws were not respected and the spahis not only kept the timars and ziamets received from the sultan but started rapidly getting richer with the advent of chiflik, especially from the end of the seventeenth and in the course of the eighteenth century.

The landowners also tried to obtain and achieve their interests with the help of the Y M O and by the intervention of the ruling National Radical Party. Since they were not fully satisfied with the actions of Y M O they founded their own political organization in March, 1920, the Moslem National Party, and later on the National Moslem Organization, which had the same character. To express their protests in connection with the agrarian reform, the Bosno-Herzegovinian feudal lords used the press. Most often they published their protests in the newspapers of Y M O, Vrijeme and Pravda. Thus, for instance, Pravda after the passage of the Preliminary decrees for several months published letters of groups and individuals.⁴² The former landowners in Bosna and Herzegovina most often requested in their writings: indemnities for the land given to serfs, the unpaid income for 1918 and 1919, the treatment of bey's estates as free estates, payment of damages incurred in

⁴² Sarac, op.cit., p.83.

late 1918 and early 1919, as well as legal protection.

The reactions of landowners in Macedonia and the district of Kosovo-Metchija were similar to the reactions of the landowners in Bosna and Hercegovina. However, they were not as well organized nor were their protests as frequent. The reason for this should be sought in the emigration of a large number of Moslem landowners immediately after the Balkan Wars and during the First World War. They expressed their protests as well as their own requests for the execution of agrarian reform most often through their own political party Džemijat, of which there has been mention already. Although not as numerous, this group succeeded, with its skillful politics, to obtain certain concessions with regard to the expropriation of estates and to the indemnities to former landowners of Macedonia and in the district of Kosovo-Metchija.

The landowners in Dalmatia did not found separate organizations or parties to protect their own interests. If they sometimes demonstrated they usually did so individually. The main reason for this was that the execution of the agrarian reform had not officially started there until June of 1931 because a large part of it was for several years after the First World War under the domination

of Italy.⁴³

Large Land Owners⁴⁴

Immediately after the promulgation of the Preliminary decrees, the local big landowners and the foreign big landowners who remained in the Kingdom of S C S began a concerted action for the preservation of their estates. In doing this, they used mostly the press, memorandums to the Regent Aleksandar, and the Prime Minister Stojan Protic, with corruption of influential politicians, and use of some agricultural experts and so on. In order to achieve a more efficient action the big landowners of Croatia and Slavonija founded in March of 1919 their association entitled "Union of Masters." Already at the end of March of the same year this union sent a separate delegation to Belgrade, to submit a protesting memo to Stojan Protic and to the Regent Aleksandar. In that memo they stated that when the big land estates were to be expropriated one should not take into account that there were such estates which

⁴³ In 1915 there was an agreement made in London between Italy and the powers of the Entente (The Treaty of London). Italy committed herself to the powers of the Entente and in return was to receive certain districts, among which were a large part of Dalmatia, including some of the islands; Istra and a part of Slovenija. After the end of World War I, Italy occupied some of these Yugoslav provinces on the basis of this agreement.

⁴⁴ Large estate owners in Slovenija, Croatia, Slavonija, and Vojvodina.

were not the remnants of the feudal social structure, but that such were created and were being maintained by highly developed economical culture and rational work. If such large estates did not exist, stressed those who submitted this memo, one should try to create them because they gave the market surplus food for feeding the population in cities and in the passive districts and thus served as a model to the small owner population. Further, they stressed it was not correct that the peasants wished to divide the large estates because of the lack of land, because in the whole country they improved agriculturally and came into a better material situation. They agreed that an agrarian reform was necessary, but that this one should be executed gradually and cover all parts of the country, including Serbia. Those peasants who did not have any land or did not have enough of it, was mentioned further in the memo, should receive a part of the big estates in the eastern parts of Croatia and Slavonija, and all other land must be preserved for a later total colonization. According to the opinion of the Croatian and Slavonian landowners, the parcelling of the large estates which had just begun was economically damaging and unjust from the point of view of

justice and existing legal regulations.⁴⁵ The attitudes as well as the requests of the large estate owners in Slovenija and Vojvodina were nearly identical with those expressed in this memo.

The landowners in Vojvodina were assembled around a society entitled "Njiva" and expressed their progress in pamphlets, press, memos and so on. Joca Lalošević, one of the members of this association, in a memo addressed to the Regent and to the government, requested the cessation of the execution of agrarian reform, claiming that it would lead to a catastrophe in the area of the peasant question.⁴⁶

One segment of the foreign big landowners had left their estates during the First World War or immediately after its end and settled primarily in Hungary and Austria, whose citizens they were. During the first month of the agrarian reform they expressed their dissatisfaction in written protest to the government of the Kingdom of S C S, expecting that the other countries would strengthen their own international position. After they did that these foreign landowners began, with the help of their respective governments, to undertake more serious steps. Thus, for

⁴⁵ Erić, op.cit., pp.184-187.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.190.

instance, the big landowners from Hungary started a court trial submitting a complaint to the international court of justice in Hague against the Kingdom of S C S.⁴⁷

The Peasants

If there was anyone anywhere who should have welcomed the beginning of the execution of the agrarian reform in the Kingdom of S C S, this should have been the poor peasants, the semi-serfs, and the landless peasants because of whom this reform was being created. However, instead of letters of thanks and an expression of satisfaction to the authorities, the numerous peasant masses, the indigenous ones as well as those of foreign origin, began to express their dissatisfaction from the very beginning of this reform.

Already in March, 1919 peasant unrest began again in districts of the Kingdom of S C S in which the agrarian reform was to take place. Having lost patience in awaiting a real execution of the agrarian reform, peasants continued distributing large estates, which they had started doing in large masses at the end of 1918, and which action was stopped by the arrival of the Serbian Army and the Army of

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Gaćeša, Nikola. Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Bačkoj, 1918-1941 (Novi Sad, 1968), p.126.

the Allies from the Entente. Their repeated actions were prevented by interventions of the regular army. Such interventions frequently ended with blood and massacres, most frequently to the detriment of the semi-armed or unarmed peasantry.⁴⁸ For instance on March 9, 1919 in the vicinity of Varaždin there were serious clashes of armed peasants and the army when the peasants attacked a landowner's home. According to the military report, in the village of Maruševac seven peasants were killed and several other unruly peasants were wounded.⁴⁹ The gendarmes were often called upon to put down peasant uprisings. This was the case on a large estate in Dalj near Osijek when the peasants took over the estates and started distributing land, and tools, and inventory. Those in charge of the estates sought urgent help from the military command but could not obtain it immediately. Therefore they turned requesting help from the Ministry of the Interior, Svetozar Pribičević. This minister requested by a telegram from the Ban Mihalević that the gendarmes of the District of Virovitica give armed help to the feudal

⁴⁸ Rojc, Milan. "Prilike u Hrvatskoj," Nova Evropa, Vol.2 (Zagreb, 1921), pp.46-71.

⁴⁹ Radničke novine, No.62 (March 17, 1919), quoted in Stojšavljević, Bogdan. Prodiranje kapitalizma u selo, 1919-1929 (Zagreb, 1965), p.41.

lords of Dalj, and that did happen.⁵⁰

The majority of peasant uprisings was more or less spontaneous and disorganized. However, there were some, though these were not frequent, which were prepared and well planned. For instance, in the village of Ludbreg (Croatia), Stjepan Bojčić, an American Croat and a volunteer during the First World War, called a large meeting on March 3, 1919, to start debating the question of the division of land without indemnities.⁵¹

After the victory of the Socialistic Revolution in Hungary at the end of March, 1919, the peasant uprisings, especially in the northern part of the Kingdom of S C S, which borders on Hungary, were more frequent. As has been stated already, the revolting peasants requested the division of the land or took it themselves into their private property and did not fight at all that this land become an entirely popular national property. These peasant movements could not be characterized as bolshevik. It is true

⁵⁰ The State Archives in Zagreb, U.O.Z.V.6-5, 48-29-1093/1919, quoted in Stojsavljević, op.cit., p.48.

⁵¹ ANRH, Pr. ZV 6-14/1437-1626-1593/1919, quoted in Janković, Dragoslav. "Društveni i politički odnosi u Kraljevstvu Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca uoči stvaranja Socijalističke radničke partije Jugoslavije (komunista)" Istorijski glasnik, Vol.1 (Beograd, 1959), p.41.

that among the rebellious peasants there were individuals who were pro-bolshevik (returnees from Russia and the members of the left wing of the social democratic parties) but they were not able to give to these peasant movements a socialistic orientation. It is of interest to mention that some of these movements, especially in the province of Slavonija, were also anti-semitically disposed.⁵²

The peasant serfs of Bosna and Hercegovina who appropriated the land in the unrest of 1918 frequently expressed their own protests against payment of any kind of damages to the former feudal landowners. Immediately after the passage of the Preliminary decrees they sent protesting letters to the Temporary Parliament. One of the first such letters was sent by the peasant serfs of the area surrounding Sarajevsko Polje. In it they wrote the following:

"The serfs of Sarajevsko Polje have concluded unanimously at their meeting today at Ilidža to request most energetically from the Temporary Parliament, to bring immediately a law dealing with full liberation of all slaves of spahis without any indemnities on their account."⁵³

When in June 17-19, 1919 a big questionnaire was issued in Belgrade dealing with agrarian problems, prepared by the

⁵² Janković, op.cit., p.146.

⁵³ Stenografske beleške Privremenog narodnog predstavnictva, Vol.1 (Zagreb, 1919), p.218

Ministry for the Agrarian Reform, among other questions there was the following one for the freed serf's lands, who, in principle, has to pay the damages, serfs or the state? The serfs of Bosna and Hercegovina replied to that question as follows:

"Neither serfs or state. For centuries we paid dearly with blood and sweat for that which had been plundered from us and which we are getting now for our own."⁵⁴

A similar attitude was expressed by the serfs of all religions in Bosna and Hercegovina in a resolution passed at the meeting of the delegates in Sarajevo on August 24-25, 1919 at the discussion of the draft for a law about the fundamental regulation of the agrarian relationships. From that meeting they sent a memo to Regent Aleksandar in which they explained in detail why the former feudal landowners had no right to any damages.⁵⁵

In the first years of the execution of the agrarian reform of the landless peasants in Vojvodina conditions did not improve; in fact, in some instances they became worse. Especially difficult was the position of the Hungarian landless peasants who were treated badly after the creation

⁵⁴ Vlajinac, op.cit., p.609.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.609-610.

of the Kingdom of S C S. Most of them were landless, only in the province of Bačka at the beginning of 1919 the Hungarian landless peasants numbered 23,863 or 41.41% of the total number of landless peasants.⁵⁶ In order to secure the most basic means for their families they secretly rented lands and paid two to three thousand crowns for one cadastarl yoke of land, while at the same time the peasants of Yugoslav national cities paid for one cadastarl yoke of first-rate land only 224 crowns.⁵⁷ Frequently it happened that the Serbs or Croats sold the same land to three different Hungarians, and in such instances these landless peasants lost money as well as the land. Usually they vested their complaints and requests to the representatives of the authorities asking for help and protection. A case in point is the village Lek, in which lived 150 Hungarian families with 750 members of whom only five had a little bit of land. These peasants addressed a letter to the Minister for Agrarian Reform on December 16, 1921 which ended with the following words:

56 Šecerev, "Socijalno-agrarni odnosi u Bačkoj pred izvođenje agrarne reforme," Spomenik, No.69 (Beograd, 1929), p.119.

57 Gaćeša, op.cit., p.98.

Mr. Minister, we are good workers and useful citizens, we pay and carry the load of taxes and public lands equally as our brother Serbs. We do not ask to be given land for free but at an exemplary rent.⁵⁸

As was indicated before, almost all political parties and various social groups came out only against the manner of implementation of reform and not against the reform itself. However, the richer peasants were often opposed to the agrarian reform itself for various reasons. The main reasons were that they were losing large surfaces of big estates which they used to rent and cultivate by using the agricultural workers or poor peasants, and they feared that they would lose a cheap labor force if everyone received the land, and, that they feared that their own estates might come under the agrarian reform because the first definitions did not specify the maximum that one could own.⁵⁹ Such peasants rarely took action to express their dissatisfaction.

The Churches

In the Kingdom of S C S, the churches were big land-owners of the best land surface and this applies to both the

⁵⁸ IA APV, Fond Županijskog agrarnog ureda Novi Sad, fasc. 1921, quoted in Gaćeša, op.cit., p.123.

⁵⁹ Pribičević, Adam. Seljak (Zagreb, 1936), p.202; Hribar, op.cit., p.72.

Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox churches. Thus, for instance, only on the territory of Croatia, Slavonija and Srem the church institutions (chapters, bishoprics, archbishoprics, patriarchates, and so on), Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelistic, owned some 100,697 cadastarl yokes of land, of which 83,550 yokes were arable land and forests, whereas the rest were pastures, orchards and vineyards.⁶⁰

Even before the new joint state of the Yugoslav peoples was created at the time of the widespread peasant unrest towards the end of 1918, the Catholic Church, feeling the peasants would take away that land by force, expressed itself for an agrarian reform which should cover the church-owned property as well. At the Conference held in Zagreb from November 27-29, 1918, the Roman Catholic bishops passed a general resolution in which they devoted the fourth clause to the agrarian question, and in it they stated:

"The Yugoslav Catholic Episcopate realizes that, as is justified, the non-owning part of the peasantry should receive an exemplary possession of land and towards this aim there is a necessity for an agrarian reform of large estates. For its part, the bishopric is ready to intercede with the Holy See and obtain an agreement that, with just

⁶⁰ Vračinac, Julijana. Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca do Vidovdanskog procesa (Beograd, 1956), p.25.

indemnities, part of the church estates with the required land be relinquished.⁶¹

This as far as we know is the first official document in the history of the Roman Catholic Church of the Yugoslav peoples according to which the Catholic Church expresses readiness to relinquish a part of its land to the poor peasants but with just indemnities. When, after the unification of the country, 110,000 cadastar1 yokes of church-owned land came under the attack of agrarian reform, and the danger from the peasant masses was mainly removed, the representatives of the Church started a resolute action to preserve the total immunity of their own possessions.⁶²

The actions by churches had various forms, most often protest letters, complaints and memos addressed to the authorities, and the press itself was utilized in that respect. For instance, the archbishop of Zagreb Ante Bauer requested from the government "An exceptional status for the amiable properties of the Catholic Church on the whole territory of Yugoslavia."⁶³

⁶¹ Šišić, Ferdo. Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine SHS, 1914-1919 (Zagreb, 1920), p. 263.

⁶² Mirković, Mijo. "O dvadesetogodišnjici naše agrarne reforme," Socijalni arhiv, Nos. 3-4 (Beograd, March-April, 1939), p. 70.

⁶³ Vračina, op.cit., p. 31.

The Zagreb chapter went as far as to request that the land already taken away, be returned by being taken away from the peasants to whom it was given. It justified this request by a statement that for the maintenance of the twenty-eight canons of Zagreb and of some cultural institutions there were no other resources except the income of that land.⁶⁴ It is interesting to mention that the Zagreb chapter owned something more than 18,707 cadastarl yokes of land of which for these agrarian distributions was taken only some 4,221 cadastarl yokes.⁶⁵ Among the numerous writings which tried to defend the immunity of the estates of the Catholic Church we shall cite, because of its characteristic attitude, a fragment from a periodical Narodno bogatstvo in Zagreb, which was printed a few years after the beginning of the execution of the agrarian reform. In it, it was stated:

The national motives, from our point of view, were not respected at the execution of the agrarian reform, because if the national motives were to be respected, one could not touch the estates owned by our church, which

⁶⁴ Hribar, op.cit., p.137.

⁶⁵ The State Archives in Zagreb, Agrarna direkcija, godina 1922, f.938, No.501-1000, Agrarni spisi, No.151, quoted in Stojsavljević, op.cit., p.96.

is completely in national hands, nor could one touch the estates of the old Croatian noble families owning large estates.⁶⁶

The representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church were not much behind the representatives of the Catholic Church in their own actions. Thus, for instance, the Great Ruling Council of the Serbian Patriarchate submitted a complaint to the ministers for agrarian reform against a decree of an Agrarian district office in Novi Sad. This complaint tried to protect and preserve a church-owned estate at Sivig (Bačka). In the complaint they cited that those who benefitted from this estate (in the vicinity of 4,684 cadastarl yokes), were some six bishops, and that, in the definition of the maximal landownership, one should take care of each one of them separately. If one were to take this into account, the complaint stressed further, each bishop should receive a maximum 521 cadastarl yoke of arable land, which would amount to 3,126 cadastarl yokes.⁶⁷ In connection with this particular case the radical Krsta Miletić, the Minister of Agrarian Reform, issued a decree

⁶⁶ "Agrarna reforma; osvrt na misljenje profesorskog zbora Gospodarsko-šumarskog fakulteta sveučilišta Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca u Zagrebu," Narodno bogatstvo, No.2 (Zagreb, January 15, 1924), p.32.

⁶⁷ IA APV, Fond Županijskog ureda Novi Sad, fasc.1921, 3027, quoted in Gašević, op.cit., p.103.

according to which the lands owned by this patriarchate was left to its bishops.⁶⁸ Among the reactions of the Serbian Orthodox Church there is an interesting complaint of a church community which stated that such an attack as agrarian reform was, had not been experienced by church communities during either the Turkish nor the Hungarian times.⁶⁹

The reactions of the representatives of the Moslem religious community did not take such dimensions because their interests were being represented by the Y M O, which tried to appear as representative of all Moslems. Also, the representatives of other religious groups did not undertake larger actions. The main reason for this was that they were not as numerous and that their estates were, relatively speaking, smaller, and most frequently were not touched by agrarian reform.

Agricultural Experts

The agricultural experts expressed their own reactions during the first years of the implementation of agrarian

⁶⁸ Gaćeša, op.cit., p.176.

⁶⁹ Brpski glas, No.12 (Velika Kikinda, 1920), quoted in Eric, op.cit., p.176.

reform, most frequently individually, via some economic institution, and via scientific institutions. Thus, already at the meeting of the communal organizations in Belgrade in June, 1919, the Greatian-Slavonian Economical Society, which belonged among the most significant and most influential communal organizations in the Kingdom of S C S, expressed its attitude towards the agrarian reform. In its report it stressed that the agrarian reform must be executed gradually because if the large estates were to be divided immediately then the whole economy would suffer irreparable damages. In addition, the society requested that in the execution of agrarian reform, should be taken into account who would receive how much land, because in their opinion the aim of the agrarian reform should be a charitable action by which the poor would get some more land than they had before, but enough so that they could live decently as human beings.⁷⁰ A similar attitude was taken by the Central Union of Croatian Peasant Communes. At the same meetings, the Union of Serbian Agricultural Communes expressed its position through their representative Mihailo Avramović. He stressed in the first place the guaranteeing of freedom

⁷⁰ Srbanov, Milan. "Nekoliko podataka o provedjenju agrarne reforme u selima Vojvodine, Hrvatske i Slavonije poslije prvog svjetskog rata," Zadružni arhiv, No.7 (Novi Sad, 1959), p.153.

in land holdings, and in the realization of the principle that one who owns the land must cultivate it. He stressed that the members of the family communes do not start from the patriarchal point of view but from a socially objective one, taking into account social needs. According to his words "The family commune members have nothing against large estates but that they cannot be declared to be a social necessity."⁷¹

A detailed analysis of the first years of the execution of agrarian reform was made by the professors of the Economic and Forestry Faculty in Zagreb. They have formulated their views in a pamphlet Agrarian Reform in Croatia, Slavonija and Vojvodina, which was published in Zagreb in 1923. That work did not express only the attitude of the professors of that school but also the attitude of a larger number of the agricultural experts in the country. In the first place, they warned that the existing reform could exercise a negative influence on the economic development of the state. After a detailed analysis, these professors were of the opinion that the agrarian reform could be executed without economical handicaps if the following

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Ibid., p.153.

measures were to be followed: 1) the abolition of all privileges which certain classes of agricultural owners enjoyed; 2) the introduction of a just and progressive tax system; 3) establishment of a bank, giving loans with low interest rates, which could be used by peasants for acquisition of land; and 4) an establishment of a fund for the needs of colonization. Furthermore, they expressed the opinion that the state should, by applying these measures, take upon itself the following: the organization of an agricultural credit for the reclamation of the land, regulation of the peasant heritage law, forcing of the reclamation and commassation of land, maintenance of a just merchant and customs politics, and education for peasants and support on the family communal systems.⁷²

Since the Kingdom of S C S was primarily an agrarian land, the reform had direct or indirect influence on almost all social groups. There were very few who entirely welcomed this huge action on which, in a large measure, depended the survival and prosperity of the young state. Each group viewed agrarian reform only from its own point of view with the aim to protect or to realize its own interests.

⁷² Gospodarsko-šumarski fakultet u Zagrebu. Agrarna reforma u Hrvatskoj, Slavoniji i Vojevodini (Zagreb, 1923), pp. 36-37, quoted in Kriš, op.cit., pp. 226-227.

CONCLUSION

For the resolution of the complex agrarian question in the Kingdom of S C S detailed preparations should have been made. However, it could not be done. The peasant uprisings were widespread and the government of the new state was forced to begin immediately with the solution of this question. Any delay on its part could have jeopardized the continued existence of the new state, because the uprising of the peasant masses began to have more organized form and the influence of the October Revolution was felt.

During numerous uprisings at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919, the peasants solved the agrarian question partially in many instances, simply by appropriating the plots of land which they tilled. Later, during the execution of the agrarian reform, the government legalized what the peasants did by decrees and laws. The first decrees, laws, orders, etc. were incomplete and imprecise, including the Preliminary decrees. Such legislation created confusion and often strained relations between the peasant-serfs and their former masters. The incomplete decrees and laws were promulgated partially because of the political reason that what could be changed corresponded to the

development of political affairs, and partially because of the government unpreparedness for such a difficult task as the execution of the agrarian reform was.

From the very beginning this exclusively socio-economic question became a political one and was most often solved according to the political interests of the parties involved. The middle class and agricultural parties were careful when they were expressing their attitudes regarding the agrarian reform. They tried to satisfy the peasantry and the former landowners, because they needed the support of both groups. The socialistic parties were divided on the question and did not show enough interest toward the peasants and their problems. The attitude of the right wing of these parties was not too much different from the attitudes of the middle class and agricultural parties. Their left wing was a sharp opponent of any kind of indemnities to the former landowners and the proponent of the creation of some kind of peasant commune. With such a policy they were separating themselves from the peasant masses which wanted the plots of land as their full property.

The different groups within the society viewed the resolution of the agrarian question only from their own positions, trying to realize or to protect their interests.

In order to attain their goals and to protect their interests they used all available means. The churches went so far as to require that their estates would not be affected by the agrarian reform and that their lands, which had been allotted to the peasants or appropriated by them, be returned to them. The agrarian experts emphasized too much the economic question, forgetting that the agrarian reform was not only being executed because of socio-economic reasons but also because of national and political reasons which were much more important at the beginning.

During the execution of the agrarian reform many irregularities were done which caused many reactions and created tension in the state for a long time. Yet, it should be pointed out, that only in the first few months of its execution more was done in the resolution of landholding relationships than ever before in the history of the Yugoslav people.

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