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## 6. The 1920s: Tradition and Change

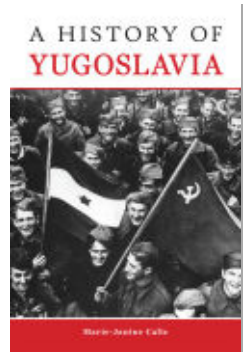
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## 6. The 1920s: Tradition and Change

“Extremes and contrasts are the most striking feature of Belgrade,” reported the journalist Lena Jovičić in the mid-1920s to her English readers. “You see opposing forces everywhere: in the streets, in the houses, in the lives of the people even. Side by side with the peasant in homespun clothes and sandaled feet walk smartly dressed people of the wealthier classes. The creaking ox-cart has the right of way alongside the luxurious limousine car. . . . Thus East meets West in a curious jumble, and in view of such extremes and contrasts you cannot but feel that there is a gap somewhere. The connecting link between the one and the other is missing, and so you constantly find that you suddenly drop into the gap.”<sup>1</sup> No better description could be given of the contradictions found in the first decade after the war between tradition and change, backwardness and progress. While the larger cities were enjoying the amenities of the “golden twenties” and getting caught up the faster pace, transborder interconnections, and new mass culture of the times, large segments of the rural population continued to plod along in long-established ways and oppressive poverty. Although the “Janus-faced nature of modernity” manifested itself in all European societies, in the first Yugoslavia the two sides contrasted particularly sharply.

### *The Inflation Economy and the Postwar Economic Boom*

Between the years 1912 and 1918, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia had found themselves, for all practical purposes, permanently at war. About one million people had been killed in the Yugoslav lands during the First World War, a fourth of whom died in Serbia and Montenegro. Serbia lost more than 16 percent of its prewar population. In addition, hundreds of thousands were uprooted, crippled, or orphaned. The occupiers had plundered raw materials and livestock and destroyed infrastructure, factories, and mines. Once peace

had been achieved, the Yugoslav government demanded a stately sum of seven billion gold francs as reparations for the destruction done, the production and tax revenue lost, and for debt redemption—a sum that equaled about half of the total value of the Serbian economy before 1914.<sup>2</sup>

Like other European countries, the Yugoslav economy profited from the inflation economy that began in 1920. At first, things began to improve. As the country started to rebuild, demand and prices, as well as the public debt, increased. The reaction of the government was to print more and more money. By the end of 1923, the circulation of bank notes was eight times higher than it had been on the day of the currency reform in 1920. Monetary depreciation encouraged investment in tangibles and thus helped to spur investment. Thirty-one percent of all the factories that would be built in the interwar period and 40 percent of all the jobs that would be created appeared between 1918 and 1923.<sup>3</sup> However, this short boom went bust with the stabilization of the currency in 1925.

Soon afterward, the first signs of crisis in the agrarian sector became evident. Far more capacity had been created by the inflation economy than could be supported over the long run by the market economy in light of weak purchasing power. The economic upswing had only shortly camouflaged the more deep-seated problems of the agrarian society, and hopes for lasting recuperation faded fast.

Thus the premise to modernize society and to catch up to Western Europe soon ran up against its inherent economic limitations. Due to growing financial shortages, the young Yugoslav state was not able to master the curse of backwardness in a foreseeable future. Economic stagnation and the first signs of the major worldwide agrarian crisis considerably narrowed its policy options in the areas of taxation, investment, and development. Therefore, in addition to doubts about the political legitimacy of the new state came the fear that possibly it would not be in a position to fulfill the promises of progress and welfare it had made. This was one reason why visible cracks in the fragile political consensus began to show.

### *Population, Family, and Gender Relations*

Few European countries entered the new era under such unfavorable conditions as Yugoslavia did. The First World War had taken a toll on the population of about 1.9 million through death, fewer births, and migration—a severe setback for family, society, and the economy.<sup>4</sup> However, the size of the population began to increase greatly starting in 1918, so that it had reached 15.6 million by the end of the 1930s from originally 12 million. In 1931, the birthrate in Yugoslavia was 34.6 babies per 1,000 inhabitants, whereas in Italy this figure only reached 25.8 and in Germany only 16.8 per 1,000 inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> In the

patriarchal agrarian society, not only were children regarded as valuable labor, they also meant great personal fortune. This attitude did not change until the old social order broke down. Where the extended families fell apart, more people remained single, birth control was used, and there were more abortions.

The trends toward social change that had been evident in the nineteenth century now continued and accelerated. The extended family started to disappear at a more rapid pace, and the types of family began to diversify greatly. There were villages in which the traditional *zadruga* and its strict regime of social relations remained primarily intact, and others in which the households split apart, and finally places where core families dominated. Households with sixty to eighty members coexisted with smaller ones of four to six members.<sup>6</sup> The expansion of the monetary and market economy, the shortage of land, and also new attitudes and values undermined the subsistence-oriented economy by which peasant families survived. As the *zadruga* disappeared throughout Yugoslavia, so too did the paramount authority of the father and the traditional solidarity with the group. New social relations geared toward economic benefit and individualist values prevailed. Generational and gender conflicts within families became quite common. Yet a number of extended families continued to exist even after the Second World War.

The new era offered both sexes more freedom, but also greater insecurity. Women were not on an equal footing with men either in the work world or before the law. They were not allowed to vote, for example, or become a judge. Common law, church law, and civil law withheld from women full contractual capability and subjected them to the authority of their fathers, spouses, brothers, or sons. Even as late as 1931, every second woman was illiterate.<sup>7</sup> A concept of the “new woman” similar to those found in industrial countries had not yet found acceptance overall. Only in the bigger cities like Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade did the image of the “modern girl” spread. The features of their emancipation and physical attractiveness—cosmetics, cigarettes, and fashion—came from the world of consumerism that was now popularized through advertising and film.

Therefore, the traditional role model did begin to change even outside the big cities. In the South Slavic countries as elsewhere in worn-torn societies, women had taken over important functions at home, on the farm, and in the urban working world, through which they enhanced their social status. In the urban environment, they retained their positions after the war, attended schools and universities, and fought for more political rights. With women making up 20 percent of the faculties, the academic milieu became a biotope for equality in gender relations and for a more liberal sexual morality, so much so that the use of the term “student marriage” gained currency.<sup>8</sup> The emancipatory impetus manifested itself in external appearances: hairstyles, hemlines,

and marriages were becoming shorter, scoffed the comedian Branislav Nušić in jest.<sup>9</sup> In the rural areas, however, the patriarchal order remained intact for a while. The war's impact on demographics meant a shortage of marriageable men. In turn, this negatively affected the market value of young girls, who realized it was now imperative to have a dowry if they wanted to marry.

In no other aspect of life were the regional differences so great as in the relationship between men and women. In the villages of Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia, it was commonplace to treat women roughly and to humiliate them publicly. Such attitudes on female subordination to male authority and aggression were even reflected in commonplace expressions, such as that a man should “beat a woman and a horse every three days.”<sup>10</sup> In places where the patriarchal authority was crumbling, females immediately gained greater respect. There were areas in Yugoslavia where women lived in near enslavement and other areas where women, even though very poor, were shown respect and affectionate appreciation by men, as was the tradition in these communities. In certain regions, economic considerations stipulated exclusively who one would marry, while in others, such as among Bosnian Muslims, romantic and soulful love (*sevdah*) also counted in picking a partner. In many places, including villages, people even entered into “trial marriages.”<sup>11</sup>

Muslim men rarely had two or more wives, but the gender issue posed fundamental religious problems for the Islamic faithful. The writings of Bosnian scholar Dževad-beg Sulejmanpašić on the liberation of Muslim women prompted angry protest by traditionalists in 1918, and the publication was publicly burned in Sarajevo. At the end of the decade, modernizers founded the society “Reform” in order to work for the abolishment of the veil and the fez, which they saw as stigmatizing symbols of backwardness, while others revered them as an unchallengeable hallmark of their identity. In September 1928, a congress of Muslim intellectuals came up with a Solomonic solution: instead of insisting on banning the veil, people should press for school education for girls. It should be left to every woman to decide whether she wished to wear a veil or not. In Turkey, both the veil and the fez had been banned since 1922.<sup>12</sup>

Both in the cities and the villages, the decline of the traditional family structure meant greater sexual freedom for those married and single, for women and men. Even divorce occurred more frequently and was now a topic in the press and publications. However, the new liberality was tolerated to different degrees across the country since, as the Croatian social anthropologist Vera Stein Ehrlich noted, “in one area a glance under the veil of a woman might prove so fateful that . . . [it could cause] a blood feud between tribes, while in another even the birth of an illegitimate child would be followed only by cynical remarks of . . . a chorus of malicious village voices.”<sup>13</sup>

*Housing, Nutrition, and Health in Rural Areas*

Even though living circumstances differed from region to region, between the city and the countryside, and even among the various ethnic and religious milieus, one overarching fact was true everywhere: the great majority of the population spent their lives scraping by in indescribable poverty and under the most ghastly hygienic conditions. The situation was the worst in the so-called passive regions, meaning the poor and backward areas of Lika and Dalmatia, Herzegovina, western Bosnia, eastern and southern Serbia, and Montenegro. The crop harvests were so meager here that people starved in the winter of even the good years. No thought could be given to investing in agriculture or improving one's house or farm in light of people's precarious income situation.

One of the most severe problems in the Karst regions was a shortage of water. People often traveled for hours just to fill a canister at the next available well. The consequences of the water shortage were untenable hygienic conditions: "Washing clothes or scrubbing floors is of course quite out of the question. People stay dirty and houses unscrubbed as long as there is no water. Dirt breeds sickness. But what can be done? There is no water."<sup>14</sup>

There were practically no baths to be found in villages and only rarely in the smaller cities.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the water shortage, a government inquiry discovered a widespread ignorance among the populace concerning "the most elementary premises of hygiene." The situation was the worst in the south, where the "cleanliness of one's body and clothing . . . is not given any thought." In fact, "there are women who last bathed just before their wedding." Therefore it should come as no surprise that there were many workers in the urban factory setting who also "are not at all familiar with cleanliness, washing themselves, sleeping in a bed, changing clothes regularly, who would rather lie on the floor or outside than in decent apartments."<sup>16</sup>

Because they suffered from such oppressive poverty, the first area where peasants saved was their own nourishment. Their produce was sold at the market as much as possible in order to have money at least for taxes and the purchase of petroleum and salt. Corn porridge and bread were the mainstays of many peasants' diets. "We are never full, we are always hungry," said 40-year-old Mujo from the Central Bosnian region of Bugojno to an ethnologist, who noted: "Nobody in the village is older than forty or fifty. Many people die in the spring when food is scarcest. The last time a physician visited them was 23 years ago. The people cure themselves with various herbs and incantations. Many women die in childbirth, which takes place without any help whatsoever, often in the stable."<sup>17</sup>

Preindustrial customs and traditions also hurt the general health of the population. Long periods of fasting of up to 194 days in a year alternated with phases of extreme overindulgence: "At the time when they are working the

fields . . . the peasants are the worst fed, eating usually bread or corn porridge with garlic, peppers, and vinegar. . . . In the winter months . . . [however] an alarmingly and unbelievably large amount is eaten. Nearly every dish is made with meat.”<sup>18</sup> Once again the health experts complained about the prevailing ignorance: “Our peasant women . . . cannot cook . . . and often have no knowledge about the most elementary rules of hygiene. Valuable parts of foodstuffs are wasted due to their ignorance.”<sup>19</sup>

Poverty, ignorance, and superstition were detrimental to the health of the general population. The mortality rate of mothers and infants was high; tuberculosis and alcoholism were widespread. Peasants distrusted doctors in order “not to agitate the illness.” They preferred to have a priest come by and quietly say a prayer, or, if that didn’t help, then to call the *hodža*—the Islamic instructor—or some herbwoman.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, living conditions gradually improved. In the poorer regions it was common that humans and livestock shared a single room. Only the wealthy built modern houses with floors and windows. More modern and more hygienic types of construction spread slowly. Stoves and beds began to furnish dwellings, but still conditions remained poor. In Croatia, three-fourths of the peasants in the 1930s still did not have their own bed, not even those better off. Instead, they slept on straw mats, sacks, or benches or on the bare floor. Everyone slept in the same room: men and women, old and young, married couples and singles. “Why have the peasants no beds of their own? . . . People have learned to live without beds; or, to be more exact, they have not yet learned to sleep in beds.”<sup>21</sup>

The low standard of living could not be attributed exclusively to poverty and ignorance. Often prosperous peasants did not live any better than their penniless neighbors. If someone had worked abroad, then “as soon as they return, local tradition overwhelms them so thoroughly that they are most reluctant to introduce any change for the better, even in small things, however intelligent they may be.”<sup>22</sup>

### *The Vicious Cycle of Poverty*

Throughout the country, the market economy was expanding and thereby further spreading the new social and income structures. Property collectively owned by the villages was divided up. Starting in 1925, the prices for agricultural produce fell as a consequence of a worldwide crisis in overproduction. Many families found themselves deep in debt and were forced to give up their property and work as wage laborers.<sup>23</sup>

Peasant families everywhere were caught in a vicious cycle of poverty because the increase in productivity did not keep in step with the demographic development. While the size of the population rose by 25 percent in the years

between 1920 and 1935, the amount of arable land increased by only 19 percent during the same period. About 250 acres had to yield enough to feed 52 people in Germany, 48 in France, 30 in England, and 114 in Yugoslavia. Measured against its productive farmland, the density of the country's agrarian population was the highest in all of Europe.<sup>24</sup> In the early 1930s, yields and labor productivity were 31 percent and 57 percent, respectively, below the European average.<sup>25</sup> The gap between population growth and economic growth continued to be wide.

These factors intensified a problem that was referred to at the time as "overpopulation" and today is described by social science with the more neutral label of "underemployment." In 1931, about 34 percent of Yugoslavia's peasants owned less than five acres of land, another 34 percent owned five to twelve acres, 29 percent worked mid-size farms of up to fifty acres, and only a small minority of 3 percent had more than fifty acres.<sup>26</sup> Compared with the European average of per capita production, over 61 percent of Yugoslavia's agrarian population could not cover their daily expenses by working in agriculture. Apart from the size of the farms, what they lacked was knowledge, technology, and attitudes necessary to be able to use manpower efficiently.<sup>27</sup> The agrarian reform announced by the king on 6 January 1919 produced little relief. It dismantled the large estates, compensated the owners, and abolished all peasant dependencies on their former landlords. The reform was meant to satisfy certain national interests in addition to social ones. In Vojvodina, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, South Slavic peasants and war veterans profited the most from the reform. Tens of thousands moved to the newly acquired lands as colonists. More than five million acres were awarded to a total of nearly half a million families.<sup>28</sup> In the postrevolutionary mood after the First World War, agrarian reform was politically unavoidable but economically not very successful. It strengthened the structure of small farm ownership and did little overall to increase agricultural productivity. In Kosovo and Macedonia, many colonists soon fled in fear of the recurring violent attacks by local rebels.<sup>29</sup>

Underemployment was evident in various ways. Since there was simply not enough to do on the many small farms that existed, people worked little and slowly, despite severe poverty. Researchers studying village life in the 1930s discovered a glaring lack of useful work indoors and outdoors, so that "among peasants, most of the year passes in idleness or with unproductive activities 'just to be doing something.'" <sup>30</sup> In one household of four adults located in the Serb community of Rakovica, they noted the following: "There were hardly any work days, 44.5 of 200, that is, a fifth. If we assume that household work and community work and trade also represent useful work, then it follows that, in 200 days, our household head only worked 75.7 [days] or a third of this time."<sup>31</sup> And this was certainly not the worst case.



Approximately two-thirds of the agrarian population depended on supplementary income from nonagricultural employment. By this time, there were actually more opportunities to earn money or wages. One could haul the (usually quite modest) surpluses with a donkey to the market or get hired as a side hand. "They will often travel a hundred kilometers or more . . . from Travnik to Jajce, from Bugojno to Split. . . . A peasant will go dozens of kilometers to sell the small quantity of maize or wool which his horse can carry."<sup>32</sup> Others walked for hours to earn a humiliatingly small but absolutely necessary extra income by working in a mine or factory.

Since an ever-growing number of peasant households supplemented their income with work away from their farm, a new type of dual agrarian-industrial family economy evolved and with it a new social class: the worker peasant. In 1931, more than 90 percent of the agrarian population owned land, which is why few of them were willing to give up agriculture altogether, even though they earned extra income in industry and mining.<sup>33</sup> The Yugoslav Social Ministry reported "that in Yugoslavia there is a constant stream of laborers coming and going from agriculture to industry and vice versa. What has developed from this is a new class of workers—we call them industrialized peasants—who are regularly employed in industry without having broken their ties to agriculture."<sup>34</sup> In 1929, more than half of the industrial workforce belonged to this agrarian-industrial hybrid.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the entire interwar period, the industrial labor force remained deeply rooted in agriculture. Even in the 1950s few were in a position to say whether they identified themselves socially as peasants or as workers.<sup>36</sup>

Many people attempted to flee poverty by emigrating, especially the younger and better trained from the western parts of the country. Between 1921 and 1939, approximately 200,000 men and women headed abroad.<sup>37</sup> However, emigration became increasingly difficult in the mid-1920s because the classic destinations, including the United States, issued rigid immigration quotas to protect their own labor market. For this reason, about 90,000 migrants headed instead to continental Europe. At the same time, more and more countries sent foreign workers home again because of the economic crisis. Therefore, emigration brought little noticeable relief to the job market.

### *Industrialization and Social Change*

Although the speed increased with which industrialization took place during the 1920s, Yugoslavia did not yet fully develop the typical characteristics of a modern society: the accelerated growth of the secondary and tertiary sectors, the dissemination of urban ways of life, and the self-propelling dynamics of science and technology. Even in 1931, only 11 percent of the population was employed in industry or artisan trades while 76 percent continued to live off

agriculture. From the days of the inflation economy until the year 1938, about 145,000 industrial jobs were created—far too few to absorb the swelling army of jobseekers. Not until 1948 did Yugoslavia reach the point at which the size of the agrarian population began to shrink in absolute terms, something that had occurred in England already in 1820, in Germany in 1850, and in Italy in 1920.<sup>38</sup> There are a number of primarily structural reasons why industrialization did not advance faster than it did. Yugoslavia possessed rich deposits of coal and iron ore; significant reserves in copper, gold, silver, lead, and zinc; as well as chrome, manganese, and bauxite. However, it lacked the prerequisites to mine, transport, and further process these. For one thing, there was not enough electrical power. In 1934, the average energy consumption in Belgrade was 90 kilowatts per hour (kwh) per person, while in Budapest the figure was 253 kwh and in Paris 367 kwh. The country had to export its raw materials for further processing, then turn around and reimport the resulting intermediate goods of iron and steel at high cost. Machines, tools, and technical plants were also imported at great expense to foreign currency reserves. Often buyers would purchase used or outdated equipment because it was cheaper. Yet such outdated technology, combined with a shortage of skilled labor, a lack of credit, a high tax burden, and inefficient management contributed to the fact that Yugoslavia produced fewer and inferior goods at a greater expense than in western and central European countries.

Since Yugoslav goods were not competitive abroad, they had to be consumed at home. But demand in domestic markets was weak. For many peasants, industrial goods were simply unaffordable. Because the prices for agricultural products had been dropping since 1925 at a much faster rate than those for industrial products, the purchasing power of farmers shrank continually. So it proved illusionary to think of backwardness as a privilege, namely that developing countries could “spur” industrialism and accelerated growth by importing advanced scientific and industrial techniques.<sup>39</sup>

Despite it all, industry did begin to grow. Between 1919 and 1938, a total of 2,193 factories were built. The majority were erected in the first five years after unification: in Slovenia 47 percent, in Croatia and Slavonia 37 percent, in Serbia 24 percent, and in Macedonia and Kosovo 14 percent. These statistics also offer evidence of the disparity in regional development.<sup>40</sup> The textile and food industries developed the best; they required little investment and needed low labor skills. At no point in the entire interwar period did Yugoslavia experience an industrial takeoff and structural change in industrial production from consumer to production goods.

What exactly was a factory? The commerce law of 1931 considered an industrial plant to be “any workshop or plant in which more than fifteen workers are employed, if motor power is used, or twenty-five workers, if no motor

power is used,” which is why large artisan shops were included in the statistics.<sup>41</sup> Many industrial businesses were actually primitive workshops operating on little capital and with few machines. The majority of these were built “out of poor materials and do not conform to the most basic requirements of statics, hygiene, and fire protection,” complained the Ministry for Building. Others grew out of agriculture: “Very often the more prosperous peasants will erect a building or use one of their farm buildings, begin production with several workers who break hemp with wooden tools. Then they purchase an old locomotive and a breaker, employ an ever-larger number of workers, and so emerges a factory step by step. Then comes machine after machine, the steam-driven apparatus is replaced with a motorized machine, an ever-greater part of the work becomes mechanized . . . and suddenly the industrial plant exists.”<sup>42</sup>

Outside industry, new opportunities for wage employment were opening up, such as in agriculture and forestry, publishing, crafts, and household service. In 1938, there were about 730,000 wage laborers, of whom only 240,000 were employed in industry and 54,000 in mining.<sup>43</sup> Until the end of the 1930s, this extreme heterogeneous Yugoslav workforce had not yet merged into a somewhat uniform proletarian class characterized by roughly similar interests, ways of life, customs, and values. A working class comparable to the industrialized West with its own organizations, forms of protest, and culture was just beginning to evolve.

At the start of the 1920s, every fifth person who was covered by national insurance was female. Ten years later it was every fourth. On average, women were younger, less qualified, and especially cheaper, which is why they pushed men out of the job market during periods of economic crisis. The same was true for children and youths, who found low-paid employment in factories, mines, workshops, cottage industries, and transport. In the mid-1920s, every tenth wage earner was under the age of 18. Although they were often officially taken on as apprentices, these minors were actually hired to do backbreaking work. It was common practice to work nights and Sundays and as many as sixteen hours a day.

As everywhere in Europe, the working class evolved out of migration and by acculturation to the new way of life dictated by the factory. Many jobseekers moved to the cities, where entire new neighborhoods sprang up in the 1920s. Between 1918 and 1941, Belgrade itself grew three times over from 110,000 to 350,000 inhabitants. “Overnight they hauled timber beams, pounded them into the ground, built a roof with cheap scrap wood, and covered it with old pieces of hole-punched tin pitchers, porcelain pots, billboards . . . instead of walls, wrapped [the dwelling] temporarily with tent canvases, [and then] carried in some battered oven.”<sup>44</sup> Due to the acute lack of housing everywhere, even these huts were soon hopelessly overcrowded. Despite the crowdedness of the premises, every second worker household rent out places to

sleep to people who could not afford their own bed, often to several at a time. The wretched colonies of huts sprawled rampantly around all larger cities, and every morning a procession would commence from these huts into the city: “Hundreds of newspaper sellers, hawkers, washerwomen . . . leave their filthy and gloomy dwellings while it is still dark. Handymen, workers of all trades, day laborers, and the unskilled, the numerous doormen at law offices. . . . This entire army of workers . . . move daily in an early morning wave in the city.”<sup>45</sup>

Terrible living conditions prevailed in these miserable dwellings, where a mixture of the rural lower class, wandering petty traders, unskilled workers, and beggars were housed. In 1930, 48 percent of the working-class dwellings in Belgrade were damp, 69 percent had no sanitary facilities, and 87 percent were structurally unsafe. People lived with the smell of garbage and open sewers; children played amid trash and primitive outdoor toilets. Poverty and indescribable hygienic conditions greatly concerned city planners, but they lacked the financial means to extend the city’s systems of water pipes, canalization, and street lighting.<sup>46</sup>

For quite a while, the urban newcomers ran their own clubs and societies and cultivated the traditional peasant lifestyle and customs. Only with a heavy heart did they part with these old habits and traditional peasant costumes. Gradually even the most sporadic factory work changed the way they lived and did business. Houses were not the only things to be modernized. Crop cultivation methods were intensified and more and more up-to-date equipment appeared. The hygiene, nourishment, and health of the population began to improve. Punctuality and discipline were accepted as virtues.

### *The Beginnings of the Social Welfare State*

Like everywhere else in Europe, the state felt compelled to eradicate the worst social evils, and these were many. The costs to build drinking-water and sewage pipes, construct housing, and regulate the growth of cities seemed astronomical, not to speak of the pending investment in education, medical care, and social insurance. Against this backdrop, one of the greatest achievements of this new state was the creation of a social welfare state. Prior to the First World War and under pressure from the labor movement, most European countries had already created the basis for insuring against illness, old-age poverty, and injury caused by workplace accidents. However, the South Slavic countries had only developed very rudimentary beginnings of public welfare and labor protection. Now, in this postwar era, the eight-hour day was introduced in Yugoslavia as elsewhere, child labor was forbidden, and a national social security system was developed. Between 1923 and 1939, the number of people covered by the social insurance scheme rose from 439,163 to 728,494 individuals.

The new social system was inadequate in many respects. As in most European countries, the Yugoslav social state limited itself at first to providing

health insurance strictly for industrial workers. The masses of those in need—rural laborers, servants, artisans, and domestic workers—were not covered. However, those who were insured received little more than symbolic medical and financial support. Other branches of social insurance like old-age, invalidity, and pensions for surviving dependents existed only on paper until the end of the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> Despite such limited coverage, public budgets were utterly overwhelmed. As early as the mid-1920s, the insurance providers were already operating in the red, long before the Great Depression caused them nearly to fold completely.

The second pillar of the modern welfare state was legislation on industrial safety. Yugoslavia adopted all of the relevant international conventions. Although the eight-hour workday had been law since 1919, in many regions people worked longer hours in unsuitable buildings and under unacceptable hygienic conditions, meaning no heat, light, fresh air, or sanitary facilities. Workshops operated without any safety precautions, were crammed with machinery, and were thoroughly overcrowded.

Why was the welfare state established belatedly in South Slavic countries, and why did it remain so deficient for so long? First, very few large industrial agglomerations existed, let alone a concentration of proletarian masses. So the social problem was not openly perceivable as such. Many people remained farmers and only worked in factories periodically or seasonally. The interests of this heterogeneous and fluctuating class were hard to organize and articulate through trade unions. For state welfare bureaucracies it was just as difficult to collect accurate statistics and to supervise this diffuse social class. Second, the low aggregate income of the population and the barely functioning taxation system limited the financial outlays that the national budget could afford. Third, the indigence existing in a predominantly rural environment was far less visible than in an industrial society. The village community and the extended family still provided for their elderly and sick. Therefore, at the time, proletarian poverty could hardly be distinguished from the needs of others, such as the rural lower classes. Fourth, outside of Slovenia and Croatia, the tradition of church and communal welfare agencies was very weak, leaving little on which the state could have built. Not until the late 1930s when strikes were on the rise did the pressure significantly increase to improve the situation of workers. The statistics for 1937 listed 238 strikes involving 53,000 workers.<sup>48</sup>

#### *International Exchange and the New Mass Culture*

Those to profit from Yugoslavia's entry into the international order after the First World War were educated urban dwellers. Cultural, scientific, and technological exchange rapidly developed and a number of innovations, cultural influences, and fashions swept across the country. Whereas those benefiting

from such transfer had been limited to a small circle of students, scientists, and politicians before the war, now more people were making contacts abroad. Cultural institutions and new networks of charitable, cultural, scientific, and bilateral friendship societies acted as the clearinghouses of exchange. The media—newspapers, radio, and the movies—opened up new worlds to a mass public. Modern role models changed taste preferences, lifestyles, fashions, consumption demand, and values.<sup>49</sup>

The elites had no doubts that Yugoslavia would be a part of European civilization, whereby they did not always look to the West. Intellectuals, scientists, writers, musicians, and other artists located “Europe” anywhere they found interesting trends worth emulating. In addition to Paris, London, Berlin, and St. Petersburg/Leningrad, influences on style also emanated from Prague, Budapest, and Bucharest.<sup>50</sup> This interaction is most obvious in modern urban architecture. Neobaroque, neorenaissance, neoclassical, and art nouveau buildings could be found next to those built in a historicizing Serbian national style, which was inspired by medieval Byzantine style. In the 1930s architecture was further influenced by classic modernism, Bauhaus, and the Garden City movement. For this reason, the Italian writer Alberto Moravia thought of Belgrade after the Second World War as a synthesis of several metropolises.<sup>51</sup>

Urban cultural life was also cosmopolitan with strong inclinations toward France, Great Britain, and Germany—in part the result of changing political alliances in the interwar period. American influences also had an impact. German and Austrian musicians, conductors, and directors often performed on the theater stages of Yugoslavia’s major cities, exhibitions of European art were shown, and foreign literature was translated and published. In turn, Yugoslav orchestras and artists performed abroad. The magazine *Nova Literatura* (New literature) impressively illustrates this multifaceted interconnectedness. Among those on its editorial staff of thirty-five were Albert Einstein, Maxim Gorky, George Grosz, Sergei Eisenstein, Hugo Kersten, and Upton Sinclair.<sup>52</sup>

Czechoslovakia was particularly attractive. The writings of the country’s highly revered founder, Masaryk, had inspired the pioneers and protagonists of Yugoslavia. Not only architects, musicians, and artists viewed the avant-garde in Prague as an important cultural compass, conservative and nationalist-oriented circles also greatly admired the Slavic “brother country.” In bourgeois circles, Russia was no longer looked upon as the center of pan-Slavic solidarity following the Bolshevik revolution. Travelers, students, and teachers now identified with an idealized “Slavic modernity,” in which emotionality and rationality appeared to have organically coalesced.<sup>53</sup>

In particular, the literary and artistic avant-garde understood itself as part of a European and worldwide cultural scene. Preceded by the aesthetics

of impressionism, symbolism, and art nouveau, classic modernism developed new experimental and eccentric styles such as expressionism, cubism, Dadaism, and surrealism.<sup>54</sup> As in other countries, the trauma of the war stimulated provocative art forms, which were offered a forum in magazines like *Mladina* (Youth), *Svetokret* (World-turn), *Plamen* (Flame), *Zenit*, and *Dada Jazz*. Writers developed societal utopias like The New Age (Dimitrije Mitrinović) or cosmopolitanism (Miroslav Krleža).<sup>55</sup>

Intellectuals sought to make an original contribution to European civilization that reflected their own identity, expressed in the form of popular, romantic, socially critical, and realistic literature.<sup>56</sup> However, this contribution was also made in the form of experimental, provocative, subversive, and anarchistic texts, manifestos, collages, and films. For example, the avant-garde Zenitism of Ljubomir Micić propagated the “Balkanization of Europe” in which the direction of the civilizing mission was reversed. Cultural progress was not to spread from West to East, but vice versa, from the Orient to the Occident. His utopian figure “Barbarogenius” embodied the Balkan “anti-Europe,” the opposite of that old and decadent continent that lacked an identity and had blanketed the world with unbounded force.<sup>57</sup>

While avant-garde art remained a noteworthy but elitist phenomenon, the broader public in the cities came into contact with modern Anglo-Saxon mass culture. The proliferation of newspapers and magazines alone from 1,245 to 1,939 contributed greatly to this. Radio was also coming into its own, even though only 4 percent of the population could be reached by radio during this decade. Still, between the years 1929 and 1938, the number of radio receivers rose from 19,270 to 86,060 as more and more people were able to afford one. Television did not exist until after the Second World War.<sup>58</sup>

Like everywhere else in Europe, cinema established itself as an essential medium of entertainment; here the public watched American, German, and domestic productions. As of 1939, Yugoslavia had imported about 500 American films.<sup>59</sup> Not only were popular adventure, crime, romance, and entertainment movies shown, but also artistic films by Ernst Lubitsch, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, Fritz Lang, Sergei Eisenstein, and Man Ray. Politics also made use of this new medium to disseminate information, election campaign rhetoric, and propaganda.<sup>60</sup>

Photos, posters, and advertisements contributed notably to the change in popular taste and dress. The styles from Vienna and Budapest, so widely worn before the war, now seemed old-fashioned. Smartly dressed women preferred the latest Paris collections, featuring short skirts and high heels, while elegant men wore English-style tweed suits and Anthony Eden hats. Special shops and department stores for ready-made clothing opened for business.<sup>61</sup>

American and British influences on popular mass culture had the most lasting impact. Major sporting events, especially soccer, handball, and boxing, aroused new passions and shaped social identities. Following a visit to Czechoslovakia in the early 1920s, a group of women students introduced the popular handball game *hazena* that they had discovered there. Soon it became the most popular women's sport in the entire country.<sup>62</sup>

Movies, jazz, nightclubs, variety shows, and bars changed the way people spent their leisure time. In addition to the polka and the waltz, people at parties now danced the Charleston, foxtrot, and tango. Comic series and films introduced Yugoslavs to Mickey Mouse, Felix the Cat, and Tim Taylor. Popular comics were adapted culturally to illustrate the life history of famous historical figures, such as Saint Sava or Tomáš Masaryk.<sup>63</sup>

Outside of the cities and larger towns, in which only a fifth of the population then lived, foreign cultural influences were slow to reach people. Few individuals had ever even left their home region, many could not read or write, and unlike in other Western countries, travel was something undertaken only by a very small educated class. At best, men became acquainted with other parts of the country through their military service. Modern mass tourism did not yet exist. Still, the first travel office, Putnik, opened in Belgrade in 1923.

Despite the increasing domestic and transnational contact and communication, the broad masses still considered the Western lifestyle an abstract entity. They remained faithful to their customs and religions, and the symbols, interpretive frames of reference, and values indelibly connected with them. These were the indisputable anchors of daily cultural life. The strength of these ties to community is demonstrated by the fact that in 1918 about 60 percent of all Yugoslavs dressed in their respective traditional costumes, the cult, color, and ornamentation of which indicated their regional origin, marital status, religion, and ethnic group.<sup>64</sup>

### *The Politicization of Religious Milieus*

Throughout the entire interwar period, religious affiliation played a major role in political, cultural, and social life. It constituted the most important milieu of people's lives and was at the same time the most distinctive criteria to demarcate between the various ethnic collectives. According to the 1921 census, 46.67 percent of the Yugoslavs were Orthodox (especially Serbs, Macedonians, and Montenegrins), 39.29 percent were Catholic (Slovenes and Croats), 11.22 percent were Muslim (Bosniaks, Albanians, and Turks), 1.91 percent were Protestant, and 0.54 percent were Jewish.<sup>65</sup> No one religion clearly dominated.



The liberal Vidovdan constitution from 1921 guaranteed the separation between church and state, freedom of conscience, and equality among all recognized religious communities. Inherent to Yugoslavism were religious neutrality and anticlericalism, not only a result of the Enlightenment-inspired ideas from which it had grown but also a result of its progressive focus on the future and its dictate of tolerance as strategic factors to ensure the survival of the multiethnic state.

Despite the formal equality within the Kingdom of SHS, the Catholic and Orthodox churches once again found themselves in different roles. For the Serbian Orthodox Church, the aim of the national and canonical unification of all Serbs into one state had been fulfilled. The patriarchate created in 1920 combined the divergent Orthodox areas of jurisdiction into a single church hierarchy which was de facto subordinate to the state. Yet even though it was no longer the official state church, as it had been before the war, the Orthodox Church was still very closely linked to the monarchy.

Since Orthodox Yugoslavs made up the relative majority in the country, the Catholic Church feared for its position, not without reason. Catholicism was universal, not genuinely Slavic, and was subordinate hierarchically to the Vatican, which had spoken out in favor of an independent Slovenia and Croatia. For this reason, the church was under general suspicion in Serbia. Despite great reservations, the church had decided by and large in 1918 to be loyal to the new Yugoslav course. Unlike Archbishop of Sarajevo Josip Stadler, many did adopt a pro-Yugoslav stance, including the Zagreb archbishop, the Franciscans, and the ranks of political Catholicism.<sup>66</sup>

The secular Kingdom of SHS stipulated by law the legal position and self-administration of the four recognized religious communities of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Islam, and Judaism. It prompted a storm of protest and resistance by church officials when it banned the misuse of clerical authority for political aims, established civil marriage, and assumed supervision of school education. Starting with the state's founding, a creeping politicization and radicalization of the religious communities became visible, which later, in the 1930s, led to a dangerous connection between the clergy and extremely nationalist parties and movements. Ivo Andrić described the precarious multi-religious coexistence of 1920:

Anyone who spends one night in Sarajevo sleepless on his bed, can hear the strange voices of the Sarajevo night. Heavy but steady strikes the clock on the Catholic Cathedral: it is 2 a.m. More than one minute will pass (exactly seventy-five seconds, I counted) and only then will the Serbian Eastern Orthodox Church announce itself. It strikes its 2 a.m. A while after, with hoarse faraway voice the Sahat Tower near Beg's

Mosque declares itself. It strikes eleven times, the eleven ghostly Turkish hours, according to some strange alien part of the world. . . . And thus even during the night, when everybody is asleep, in this counting of the hours in the dead part of the night, the difference which divides these sleeping beings has been emphasized. . . . And this difference, sometimes openly and visibly, sometimes invisibly and basely, approaches hatred, often identifying with it.<sup>67</sup>

For historical reasons, religious community officials saw themselves as the natural, God-given trustees guarding the interests of “their” faithful, which is why it was customary to use churches and mosques for political events.<sup>68</sup> In the minds of the greater part of the population, no distinction was made between nationality and religion: the majority of Serbs were Orthodox, Croats Catholic, and the Bosnian Muslims were just that, Muslims: “Everything that has to do with religion also simultaneously has to do with nationality, and everything national is simultaneously religious,” stated one observer in 1920.<sup>69</sup>

Although premodern attitudes toward church and religion survived in many regions, new links between groups had been evolving since the turn of the century because of increasing social transformation and the development of a broader church infrastructure that included schools, societies, and publications. Religious communities functioned as both social and religious milieus, meaning that they were influenced not only by faith but also by shared socioeconomic interests, ethnic and cultural identities, values and attitudes, and the congruence of ethos and sentiment. It was in this framework that contacts were made and networks created, that guidance was sought and spiritual comfort found. The community thus created a truly tangible alternative to the distant, foreign, and sometimes hostilely viewed state. With the portent of increasing politicization, more and more of the faithful viewed religion as an obvious ethnic attribute with which they could identify and distinguish themselves from others; this also influenced the direction of national politics and, in part, ideological convictions.<sup>70</sup> The religious-social milieus cultivated their own symbols and rituals, holidays and commemorations, semantics and historical images that circumvented those of the state every day. This explains the persistent resistance to the Yugoslav national ideology and the phenomenal success of the ethnic-bloc parties as compared with supranational political movements.

The sociocultural practice of Yugoslavism was polyvalent and could evoke both a Yugoslav identity as well as exclusively national or regional traditions. Historical events, popular culture, and myths could be incorporated into either one of the constructions of identity. For example, the monumental sculpture erected in Split in 1929 of Bishop Gregory of Nin, the work of the

sculptor Meštrović, could have represented national Croat or all-Yugoslav history, depending on the perception of the observer. The churchman, who had defended the Slavic-Glagolitic liturgy in the tenth century against the pressure coming from Catholic Rome, could be commemorated as an early protagonist of Croatian independence as well as a symbol of South Slavic pre-schismatic unity. The depiction, interpretation, and perception of one's own history, even of that of the nation itself, could serve thoroughly different needs.<sup>71</sup>

When all ethnic organizations were banned in 1929, the political confrontations over questions of nationality shifted all the more clearly to the religious communities. Popes and priests were considered to be people of authority in the village community, especially when they could read and write. They were opinion makers for a public that was still greatly influenced by verbal communication and personal relations, even though modern mass media was reaching them. In 1932, the pro-Yugoslav politician Svetozar Pribičević complained: "Since 1918 . . . one has never heard from the mouth of the Patriarch something about questions of faith and church, about the relationship of man to God, about brotherly love, . . . only ever about questions of a national or political nature. . . . He emphasizes the double-headed eagle, the powerful king, the blood spilled on battlefields, the war sacrifices—in a word, everything that serves extreme nationalism."<sup>72</sup> The more the semantics of religion became imbued with political agendas, the more outright became the solidarity between religious leaders and politics.

The question of religion was posed in a somewhat different light for Muslims. Until 1878, the two main pillars of Bosnian identity had been mutually supportive: on the one side was the special administrative position of being an Ottoman province and on the other was the identification with a worldwide, religiously tolerant Islam. In the age of nationalism, however, matters involving territory, religion, and ethnicity became increasingly conflictual in regions inhabited by Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. How should, how could Bosnian Muslim identity be defined? The Bosnian elite remained divided. Some spoke out in favor of "nationalizing" Muslims. If certain old customs were to be abandoned, like the veiling of women and the religious schools, this would help the community embrace "healthy reason and the zeitgeist," as one Bosnian scholar expressed it in a tract on Muslim progress.<sup>73</sup> Others propagated the laicistic, political *bošnjaštvo* (Bosniakhood) as proof of the historical individuality and ethnic identity of their people. Contrary to an older version from the Austro-Hungarian era, this concept was now reserved exclusively for Muslims, who were understood as a tribe of their own. Historical causes were said to be the only reason why this tribe was bestowed with a religious name instead of an ethnic one.

To many others, the next logical step to solving religious-regional conflict over identity then seemed to be a clear conviction to supranational communism, that is, the transference of the trend toward secularization into fundamental atheist attitudes. The only ones to unequivocally presume the existence of a distinct Bosniak national identity were the Marxist intellectuals associated with the Zagreb magazine *Putokaz* (Signpost) in the late 1930s.

Regardless of the direction each proposed reform took, they shared one common feature: all strove to strengthen the ethnic spirit and national character of Slavic Muslims and an appreciation for their homeland.