

Between Freedom and Constraint:
Republicanism and the Left in Hungary and Yugoslavia,
1918–1948

By
Cody James Inglis

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Supervisor: Professor Balázs Trencsényi

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation interprets the emergence, articulation, and eventual subsumption of republican political thought on the Left in Hungary and Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1948. It first examines the “crystallization” of this ideational formation during the First World War, when ideas of general human emancipation were linked to visions of radical state democratization and macro-regional federation on the Left. By the end of the 1910s, leftist republican intellectuals in both the Hungarian and South Slavic linguistic contexts answered the intertwined questions of state form and nation with the idea of a democratic federal republic which rejected a capitalist economic framework in favor of socialist, syndicalist, or solidarist ideas of economic organization and production.

In the wake of the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire, Hungary was declared a People’s Republic (*népköztársaság*), then transforming into a Republic of Councils (*tanácsköztársaság*). At first, the new Hungarian republican state was led by a heterogenous cohort of the republican Left—civic radicals, social democrats, national independentists, urban liberals, and feminists. Yet, after pressure from the Entente to withdraw further from the country’s historic borders, the central state apparatus was taken over by a coalition of left-wing social democrats and communists in mid-March 1919. A combination of violent excesses, internal policy missteps, and a deeply hostile international situation ultimately paved the way for a right-wing counterrevolution, a White Terror, and the “restoration” of the Hungarian kingdom in 1920. By contrast, the rapid union of South Slav territories with Serbia in late 1918 cut off the path to federal republican statehood for Yugoslavia early on, a fact set in stone with the passage of the monarchist and centralist Vidovdan Constitution in June 1921. Within this period too, small, ephemeral states in local contexts cropped up, many of which claimed the republican label. Aside from the interesting discursive use of the concept ‘republic’, these microstates did not exist long enough to exercise any lasting alternative to nation-statehood.

In both the Hungarian and South Slavic contexts, republican political thought survived, though now—or perhaps once again—as a sharply oppositional language of politics, emphasizing democratization and popular sovereignty, federalism and self-determination in settings which evermore lurched toward oligarchy, authoritarianism, and centralism. During this period of consolidation, so called, republican political thought in Hungary and Yugoslavia found limited expression in official political fora. Instead, republican political ideas circulated in the metapolitical sphere of culture.

The retreat to culture in the 1920s and ‘30s was a key metapolitical act. Both contexts witnessed the republican Left cultivate its own political temporality, one that linked the construction of a progressive past with the critique of a stagnant present, ending in the theoretical expression of emancipation in a radically democratic future. Yet through this intellectual process, a fundamental conceptual shift occurred: the concept ‘republic’ was increasingly replaced by that of ‘democracy’ in leftist republican political language. From the mid-1930s, however, the republican Left in the Hungarian and Yugoslav contexts increasingly returned to public political life, often under the banner of antifascist popular fronts. In contrast to the French and Spanish cases, these popular fronts rather took the form of decentralized but vibrant “periodical communities” of antifascist and antiauthoritarian intellectuals. These efforts only barely survived the increasingly authoritarian turns in both countries, swept up from 1941 in the Nazi German drive to continental domination through war and genocide.

Despite the particularities across contexts, republicanism in both cases advanced common ideas: freedom as individual and collective autonomy, emancipation from domination, full democratic control over the state and economy, as well as the cultivation of a culture of active civic participation to resist arbitrary rule, that is, a full conception of self-determination. These key themes allowed republican political thought to serve as a bridge during the period of passive and active resistance to fascism in both countries, thus facilitating antifascist alliances

between communists and conservatives, liberals and socialists, and civic radicals and peasantists alike. In Hungary, the endurance of a semi-open public sphere until March 1944 permitted the partial circulation of a surprising plurality of leftist republican ideas. In Yugoslavia, the partisan movement rapidly subsumed republican ideas within the communist *parole*, but this did not mean its exhaustion. Although Hungary and Yugoslavia diverged in their exits from the war, republics were proclaimed in the winter of 1945–46. Postwar Hungary experienced a brief democratic “interlude” through 1948, while in Yugoslavia the process of postwar Stalinization alternatively co-opted and marginalized leftist republican currents. This did not mean the complete disappearance of leftist republican thought, however. As the conclusion makes clear, there were surprising continuities through the rest of the twentieth century.

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ON NAMES, LANGUAGE, AND transliteration

In this dissertation, the labels “Hungary” (*Magyarország*) and “Yugoslavia” (*Jugoslavija*) are used as shorthand for the plethora of official names these two countries had between 1918 and 1948. While recognizing complexity in place names as well, I still opt to use the most common name in English rather than providing a list of the main national-linguistic equivalents separated by forward slashes. So, rather than Beograd/Belgrad/Fehérvár, I use *Belgrade*; for Budapest/Budimpešta, *Budapest*; for Ljubljana/Laibach, *Ljubljana*; for Novi Sad/Újvidék/Neusatz, *Novi Sad*; for Wien/Beč/Bécs/Dunaj, *Vienna*; and for Zagreb/Zágráb/Agram, *Zagreb*.

On the question of language, I likewise use shorthand for the sake of readability. The term ‘Serbo-Croatian’ is merely used as a label to describe the pluricentric common South Slavic language predominantly spoken on the territory of today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia.¹ Sometimes, this language is simply termed (emically) ‘*naški*’, that is, “ours” or “our language,” while in some international contexts the term Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian (BCMS) is used.

I have opted to keep the titles and individual quoted words of Serbo-Croatian sources written in Cyrillic in the original script within the body text and in citations. This is done to preserve source authenticity. I translate directly to English rather than transliterate the title or phrase into a Latin script. In other instances, and often relating to shared organizational names, I simply make use of the equivalence between Ljudevit Gaj’s Latin alphabet and Vuk Karadžić’s Cyrillic alphabet; in particular, I use ‘Đ, đ’ for ‘Ђ, ђ’ rather than ‘Dj, dj’.

¹ See also the principles of the Declaration on the Common Language: “Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku” (Declaration on the Common Language), March 2017, accessible at <https://jezicinacionalizmi.com/deklaracija/>, last accessed August 25, 2025; for more, Snježana Kordić, *Jezik i nacionalizam* (Language and Nationalism) (Zagreb: Durieux, 2010).

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a history of republican political thought as it was articulated on the Left in Hungary and Yugoslavia. It traces the development of this language of politics as well as its “grammar,” moving temporally from 1918 to 1948, between postimperial transition and postwar reconstruction in East Central Europe. The text shows how this particularly leftist and modern(ist) variation of republican political thought came into being, how its articulation shifted and changed, and, at least on the surface, how it disappeared. Through this period, republican political thought on the Left in Hungary and Yugoslavia was defined in large part by its concern for radical democracy, substantive autonomy or federation, liberal socialism, and a conception of self-determination which foregrounded the political community rather than merely the cultural community.

Barring the short “republican moment” in Hungary from November 1918 to August 1919, both contexts under consideration were monarchies throughout the interwar period. The interwar structure of monarchism was not an entirely new invention, but rather an inheritance of the monarchic political cultures of prewar Austria-Hungary and, in the case of Yugoslavia, of Serbia too. In both contexts, the monarchic political cultures fell deeper into right-wing authoritarian modes under the influence of increasingly aggressive corporatist and fascist politics elsewhere in Europe. The Second World War brought a host of radical changes. In April 1941, the political structures of the Yugoslav monarchy were either destroyed, retreated underground, or were evacuated abroad. Hungary remained nominally a monarchy during all of the Second World War, with even the quisling regimes installed in March and October 1944 preserving the regalia and symbolism of the royal state. However, shortly after the end of hostilities, in late 1945 and early 1946, respectively, Yugoslavia and Hungary were declared republics by these countries’ postwar constituent assemblies.

In these shifting contexts, republican political thought was articulated primarily as a sharp expression of opposition before 1945, a negative critique of the very foundations and character of the post-imperial Hungarian and Yugoslav successor states. Throughout this period, republican political thought on the Left offered a compelling alternative vision of the political community, of the polity itself, and so of an alternative political temporality. The attempt to enact that interwar republican vision around 1945 was a story of tragedy and farce, but also of hope. In Yugoslavia, the postwar retributions and the aggressive marginalization of leftist republican voices seemed to have quickly closed off the path toward the realization of the interwar goals. Yet in the aftermath of the 1948 Cominform Crisis (the Tito–Stalin Split), the liberalization of the country showed that leftist republican ideas had rather been sublimated than erased. In Hungary, the pluralist experiment from 1944/45 to 1948/49 demonstrated just how widely leftist republican ideas circulated, impacting nearly every political and civic debate in the country before the consolidation of state power in the hands of local communist forces. The narrative closes with this point of divergence between the two cases: the opening of the Yugoslav state-society complex in 1948 and the Stalinist closure of the Hungarian in the same year.

I compare these two cases in order to capitalize on the fact that, as an oppositional position, the republican political thought expressed on the Hungarian and South Slavic Lefts in the first half of the twentieth century had clearly defined discursive boundaries, core concepts, and political stakes. This was quite different from the republican ideas expressed in other post-Habsburg successor states. Although they were likewise partial inheritors of Habsburg political culture, interwar Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, for example, were all declared republics in late 1918. In those cases, republican political thought was expressed as a rather amorphous discourse of state legitimization rather than as a concentrated political language of opposition. While republican political thought did have its own particular character and expression in these

post-Habsburg republics, its relative ubiquity within these systems meant that variations could be found at nearly every point along the political spectrum.

Certainly, key changes occurred in republican thought in Poland after Piłsudski's coup d'état in 1926, in Austria after the establishment of the *Ständesstaat* in 1934, and in what remained of Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement in 1938. However, the historiographic assessments of the contours and meanings of republican political thought in those contexts would be quite different than the conclusions made in the study at hand. In any case, this does not diminish the importance of scholarly work on the epistemic formation and transformation of republican political thought in these cases. Yet I still argue that a comparison between the variations of republican political thought expressed by the Left(s) in the Hungarian and South Slavic linguistic contexts is fundamental in determining the shape, scope, and structure of republican political thought generally in East Central Europe. Starting from this point of view and looking outward, the constitutive elements of leftist republican thought in Hungary and Yugoslavia may then be held up against the Austrian, Czechoslovak, and Polish cases as a sort of corrective lens, sharpening what may have been distorted and revealing what may have been obscured. Romania also shared many of the authoritarian elements of interwar monarchic political culture that marked the Hungarian and Yugoslav cases. A key question remains about the extent to which republican political thought was expressed as a constitutive language of politics for the progressive liberal, civic radical, or social democratic and communist groups in the country—but to dig deeper would stretch my linguistic abilities beyond their limits.¹

In the broader framing of this project, I aim to address some historiographic links between Habsburg Studies and the intellectual history of East Central Europe. From the 1990s onward, these fields have enjoyed a rich, symbiotic relationship, definitively altering our view

¹ On the case of Dumitru Drăghicescu, a Romanian intellectual comparable in his thought to Oszkár Jászi and Dragoljub Jovanović, see Victor Rizescu, *Development, Left and Right: Ideological Entanglements of Reformist Projects in Pre-communist Romania* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2018), 19–31, 55–87.

of nationhood in the region and offering newer means to break out of the scholarly essentialization of national conflict and mutual ethnic exclusion as constitutive features of East Central Europe's regional history. In particular, newer comparative, transnational, and entangled intellectual histories of East Central Europe have brought to light the richness and variety of political, economic, and cultural thought in the region.² To both Habsburg Studies and these contemporary trends in the intellectual history of East Central Europe, this dissertation offers a means to rethink the intellectual construction of nationhood and statehood in civic and political rather than strictly linguistic or cultural terms. The long shadow of multi-ethnic political community construction is one of the core elements of republican thought as explored in this dissertation. Yet this conception was not rooted in a laudatory nostalgia for the Habsburg past. For the leftist republicans in the post-Habsburg period, the character of political modernity was defined in large part by the region's democratic deficiency owing to the long-lasting structures of estate-based political representation, feudalism under different guises, the seemingly static and conservative character of society under the monarchic spell, as well as the persistence of the empire's authoritarian political cultures well into the twentieth century.

A related and pernicious research problem is in the varied European topography of political modernity itself. During the long nineteenth century and into the short twentieth, the basic concepts and categories used to assess and interpret culture and politics were not always congruent when moving across various linguistic contexts, though this did not mean a complete mutual exclusion in understanding.³ Still, we must keep in mind that basic socio-political

² See, e.g., Balázs Trencsényi et al., *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016–2018); and Włodzimierz Borodziej, Ferenc Laczó, Joachim von Puttkamer, ed., *The Routledge History Handbook of Central and Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 3, *Intellectual Horizons* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); and for a brief overview of recent literature, Matej Ivančík, "Rethinking Intellectual History in East-Central Europe: Capitalizing on Eclecticism (An Introduction)," *Forum Historiae* 17, no. 2 (2023): 1–9.

³ One text which tries valiantly to overcome this is Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); and more recently Balázs Trencsényi, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics in the Interwar Period and Beyond: A Transnational History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025).

concepts—‘liberty’ or ‘state’ or ‘revolution’—do not have inherently universal meanings or identical points of reference. The fact of these differences in political vocabulary should tell us that there are certain features of political modernity which were and continue to be quite different within the distinct symbolic geography of East Central Europe.⁴ But once compared with other contexts, these differences lose their supposed incommensurability and become, on the one hand, a matter of translation, and on the other a widening of the hermeneutic circle. The problem, then, is to find which means best allow the scholar to traverse consequential differences in political *thought* without homogenizing their character or reducing their meaning to mere mimicry.

This brings us to one of the main historiographic problems of this dissertation: To what extent was the mode of republican political thought explored here a particularly East Central European expression? Conversely, to what extent was republican thought here an inheritor of a shared European heritage in its modern form?⁵ These questions rather guide the interpretive apparatus of the text, operating as it were in the background. Answers to these general questions are given as part and parcel of the narratives and arguments in the text. More immediate questions and unresolved tensions are given greater space in the research chapters.

In what immediately follows, I provide a short conceptual history of the key concept ‘republic’ in Hungarian (*köztársaság*) as well as in Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian (*republika*). That discussion offers a brief view of these concepts’ semantic layers to 1848, when the crystallization of these terms’ meanings as the opposite of monarchy in turn helped to structure the ideational formation of republican thought on the Left in the Hungarian and

⁴ For more on the problem of European symbolic geographies, see the contributions in Diana Mishkova and Balázs Trencsényi, *European Regions and Boundaries: A Conceptual History* (New York–Oxford: Berghahn, 2017); and on (East) Central Europe in particular: Maciej Janowski, Constantin Iordachi, and Balázs Trencsényi, “Why Bother about Historical Regions? Debates over Central Europe in Hungary, Poland and Romania,” *East Central Europe* 35, no. 1–2 (2005): 5–58; as well as Maciej Janowski, “Pitfalls and Opportunities. The Concept of East-Central Europe as a Tool of Historical Analysis,” *European Review of History* 6, no. 1 (1999): 91–100; and Robin Okey, “Central Europe/Eastern Europe: Behind the Definitions,” *Past and Present*, no. 137 (1992): 102–33.

⁵ Here I reference Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, ed., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

South Slavic linguistic contexts. Their early modern semantic layers, which pointed toward positive conceptions of the political community's autonomy, as the self-government or self-determination of the political community itself, likewise persisted well into the twentieth century and beyond. A newer meaning had to do with political temporality: 'republic' in these contexts connoted a future-oriented program rather than a defense of existent structures. The consequence of this investigation, I argue, points to the limits of universalizing models of normative interpretation and the necessary incorporation of historicization as a basic and necessary tool to understand the local contextual sensitivity of these concepts, their related semantic fields or conceptual clusters, and the political languages with which they interact and of which they are constitutive elements.

'Köztársaság' and 'Republika': *A Brief Multilingual Conceptual History*

Alongside 'freedom' and 'independence', at the conceptual core of modern republican political thought stands the concept 'republic'.⁶ Like all socio-political concepts, it has its own history. From this historicity, it follows generally that the denotations, connotations, and even basic lexical features of socio-political concepts are subject to regular change—as is their use in speech or texts. Yet there is no universal scheme for the temporality of these changes. The persistence of old meanings, the appearance of new ones, and the overall pace of change in usage are fundamentally contextual questions. Reinhart Koselleck memorably diagnosed a period of fundamental conceptual change in the German linguistic area. Perhaps now infamously, this *Sattelzeit* ("period of transition") stretched "between about 1750 and 1850,"

⁶ Here, I follow Michael Freeden, who defines ideologies as "ideational formations consisting of political concepts." I would consider the same to be true of political languages, though they are often not as formally structured as ideologies. See Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), particularly 47–95.

one outcome of which was the emergence of new, ‘ideologized’ valences of socio-political concepts.⁷ Though this was a contextually and temporally restricted effort: the German linguistic area Koselleck and company investigated largely excluded what came to be the Austrian Empire after 1804, that is, the hereditary Habsburg lands which lay beyond the German states after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire.⁸ Still, the general theoretical features of conceptual change derived from Koselleck’s individual investigations and the imposing collective work behind the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* have offered much to be adapted elsewhere.⁹ One key feature is the partial displacement, or rather “subduction,” of the early modern meanings of key socio-political concepts by what became their modern meanings.

In the French case the general chronology of fundamental conceptual change was slightly antedated by comparison: 1680–1820 for the French vs. 1750–1850 for the German.¹⁰ But the catalyzing influences were effectively the same: “Enlightenment and revolution,” which

⁷ Reinhart Koselleck and Christoph Dipper, “Begriffsgeschichte, Sozialgeschichte, begriffene Geschichte. Reinhart Koselleck im Gespräch mit Christoph Dipper,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 51, no. 2 (1998): 195. On the *Sattelzeit*’s various metaphorical registers, see Chris Lorenz, “Probing the limits of a metaphor: On the stratigraphic model in history and geology,” in *Historical Understanding: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Zoltán Boldizsár Simon and Lars Deile (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 203–15; but also, more critically, Bodo Mrozek, “Die sogenannte Sattelzeit: Reinhart Kosellecks Geschichts-Metapher im Erfahrungsraum des Krieges” (The So-Called *Sattelzeit*: Reinhart Koselleck’s Metaphor of History within the Space of Experience of the War), *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 75, no. 2 (2023): 133–53.

⁸ It should be noted that key theoretical elements underpinning the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* were rooted in the (far-right) critique of liberal institutional normativity and terminological anachronism put forward by Otto Brunner—a co-editor of the project—in his *Land und Herrschaft* (Baden bei Wien: Rohrer, 1939). See James Van Horn Melton, “From Folk History to Structural History: Otto Brunner (1898–1982) and the Radical-Conservative Roots of German Social History,” in *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and James Van Horn Melton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press–Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 1994), 263–92; Gadi Algazi, “Otto Brunner – ‘Konkrete Ordnung’ und Sprache der Zeit,” in *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft: 1918–1945*, ed. Peter Schöttler (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), 166–203; and Peter N. Miller, “Nazis and Neo-Stoics: Otto Brunner and Gerhard Oestreich before and after the Second World War,” *Past & Present* 176 (2002): 144–86.

⁹ Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Reinhart Koselleck *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), a translation of Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979); Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972–1997).

¹⁰ Reichardt described this as a position between social history and the traditional history of concepts. Rolf Reichardt, “Einleitung,” in *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680–1820*, ed. Rolf Reichardt and Eberhard Schmitt, vol. 1–2 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1985), 39–148. Comparatively, Raymond Williams observed roughly the same for Britain; see his entry on ‘Culture’ in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 87–93.

permanently altered the historical political semantics in France.¹¹ What of East Central Europe? Was it merely a repository for imported intellectual goods? Certainly not, for new research on the Enlightenment has produced a differentiated model of transfer, debate, and conceptual change, offering visions of pluricentric or parallel Enlightenments.¹² The effect was that what we may term retrospectively ‘political modernity’ arose in East Central Europe relatively soon after Western Europe. The key difference was, on the one hand, the mediating factor of imperial structures (Habsburg, Romanov, Ottoman), but also—on the other—the role of the public sphere in translating, coining, and proliferating new vocabularies of politics. Yes these lexica of socio-political concepts did not always match the Western origins, being contextualized in a region whose constitutive feature was the various political discontinuities of regimes and social structures. In tracing back these semantic ‘localizations’ of political vocabulary, it becomes very difficult to say that the vocabulary of political modernity arose in East Central Europe simply as a poorer copy from the West. Here, one term was taken from German, another from Turkish, a third from Russian, and another from local linguistic conceptualizations of a specific local problem.¹³ Political modernity arose here too in a much more rhizomatic way, even having global dimensions.¹⁴

¹¹ Reichardt, “Einleitung,” in *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe*, vol. 1–2, 69–70.

¹² See, e.g., Franz Fillafer’s argument in favor of the pluralization of ‘the’ Enlightenment based on the Habsburg context: Franz Leander Fillafer, *Aufklärung habsburgisch: Staatsbildung, Wissenskultur und Geschichtspolitik in Zentraleuropa 1750–1850* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020). A classic treatment of the problem vis-à-vis East Central Europe from twenty years ago: Teodora Shek Brnardnić, “Intellectual Movements and Geopolitical Regionalization: The Case of the East European Enlightenment,” *East Central Europe* 32, no. 1–2 (2005): 147–77; and Robin Okey, “A Comment on Teodora Shek Brnardnić’s Article,” *East Central Europe* 32, no. 1–2 (2005): 179–90. See also Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) for one earlier attempt, as well as the important contribution by Franco Venturi, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

¹³ See László Kontler, “The Enlightenment in Central Europe?” in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Texts and Commentaries*, vol. 1, *Late Enlightenment – Emergence of the Modern ‘National Idea’*, ed. Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 33–44; and Paschalis M. Kitromilides, “The Enlightenment in Southeast Europe,” in *ibid.*, 45–53.

¹⁴ Sebastian Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique,” *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): 999–1027.

One way to approach the emergence of political modernity in the region, then, is to return to conceptual history.¹⁵ Concepts are articulated through certain political languages (or discourses, as one prefers), and as such are bound up with the problem of historical semantics. They are also always embedded in a particular material and social context, which likewise alters both the lexical meaning but also the range of interpretive possibilities. Particularly within East Central Europe, the question of translation becomes extremely relevant.¹⁶ The region's rich linguistic heterogeneity at times posed something of an obstacle to communication between neighboring and interspersed linguistic groups. Latin was a common go-between, though largely displaced in most places by the end of the eighteenth century. Latin survived even later in Hungary, at the very least in an official state capacity until 1844.¹⁷ Among some Slavophone populations in East Central Europe, particularly on the Balkan peninsula, Church Slavonic likewise remained an important conduit of knowledge transmission among Orthodox intelligentsia.¹⁸ In the Serbian linguistic context in particular, which spanned the Habsburg imperial boundary, Church Slavonic and Slaveno-Serbian (*slavenosrpski*) were slowly displaced by the standardization of the Serbian vernacular in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ In these contexts too, Latin also functioned as a channel toward "Catholic" (Western

¹⁵ As sketched theoretically in Balázs Trencsényi, "Conceptual History and Political Languages: On the Central-European Adaptation of the Contextualist-Conceptualist Methodologies of Intellectual History," in *Prague Perspectives*, vol. 1, *The History of East Central Europe and Russia: On the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Death of Jan Slavík*, ed. Petr Roubal and Václav Veber (Prague: The National Library of the Czech Republic, Slavonic Library, 2004), 142–63.

¹⁶ László Kontler, "Translation and Comparison, Translation as Comparison: Aspects of Reception in the History of Ideas," *East Central Europe* 36 (2009): 171–99; also, László Kontler, *Translations, Histories, Enlightenment: William Robertson in Germany, 1760–1795* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Gábor Almási and Lav Šubarić, eds., *Latin at the Crossroads of Identity: The Evolution of Linguistic Nationalism in the Kingdom of Hungary* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); one will also notice the prevalence of Latin texts in the source bases of the contributions in Balázs Trencsényi and Márton Zászkaliczky, eds., *Whose Love of Which Country? Composite States, National Histories and Patriotic Discourses in Early Modern East Central Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

¹⁸ Nenad Ristović, "Acculturation versus Assimilation: the Role of the Orthodox Church in the Organization of Western Modern-Age Classical Education among the Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy," in *Encounters in Europe's Southeast: The Habsburg Empire and the Orthodox World in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, eds. Harald Heppner and Eva Posch (Bochum: Dieter Winkler, 2012), 191–205.

¹⁹ On the transition, see Pavle Ilić, *Преглед историје српског језика* (An Overview of the History of the Serbian Language), ed. Aleksandar Mladenović (Sremski Karlovci–Novi Sad: Zoran Stojanović, 1998), 129–58. For the period of sustained vernacular reform, see Ilić, "Доба победе народног језика (1804–1878)" (The Period of the Victory of the Vernacular (1804–1878)), in *Преглед историје српске језика*, 159–255.

European) cultural life.²⁰ Within the Habsburg Empire, German remained the *lingua franca* throughout the modern period.

To that end, we can expect that a conceptual history of the term ‘republic’ in the three key linguistic contexts under consideration—Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian, and Slovenian—would look slightly different than, say, the English, French, or German cases. Or can we? Contemporary dictionary definitions of ‘republic’ rather seem to mirror colloquial but evidently quite contemporary, static, homogeneous, and partially depoliticized understandings of the term irrespective of language. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘republic’ as “a state in which power rests with the people or their representatives; specifically, a state without a monarchy.”²¹ It is, in other words, a state drawn up from the well of popular rather than royal sovereignty. The ninth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* seems to confirm this sense too. ‘*République*’ is defined as a “political organization in which the exercise of sovereignty belongs to representatives vested with non-hereditary executive power.”²² Definitions of ‘*Republik*’ in German range from “a form of state in which the government is elected by the people”²³ to “a form of state in which rulers are elected for a specific period of time by the people or by the representatives of the people.”²⁴

For the Hungarian linguistic context, a few modern definitions give us a similar sense of ‘*köztársaság*’ (republic). From 2007: “That form of state in which the head of state as well

²⁰ See Nenad Ristović, “Latin and Vernacular Relations in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The Serbian Case,” in *Latin at the Crossroads of Identity*, ed. Almási and Šubarić, 256–77.

²¹ “republic,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, June 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6722394228>, last accessed August 25, 2025. But it is also a state defined negatively, as one without a ‘monarchy’. The *OED* defines this latter term as “rule by a single sovereign,” often but not exclusively of the hereditary kind. See “monarchy (*n.*),” *Oxford English Dictionary*, June 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3404807962>, last accessed August 25, 2025.

²² “république,” *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 9th ed., <https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9R1979>, last accessed Aug. 25, 2025.

²³ “Republik,” *Wörterbuch der deutschen Gegenwartssprache*, vol. 4, *M–Schinken* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974), reproduced in *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Republik>, last accessed August 25, 2025; though it should be pointed out that this was the second definition given. Having been produced in the GDR, the first definition has more local color: “a state in which the entire people, under the leadership of the working class, exercises power in alliance with all laborers.”

²⁴ “Republik,” from *Duden Online*, <https://www.duden.de/node/121121/revision/1275206>, last accessed August 25, 2025.

as the highest units of state power are elected for a limited time.”²⁵ An entry from 1972, published in revised version in 2003, adds that ‘*köztársaság*’ can also refer to “a country with such a form of state,” e.g., the Republic of Poland.²⁶ One definition from the early 1960s formulates it slightly differently, stating that a ‘republic’ is “that form of state in which the population elects person(s) or members of institution(s) to supreme [state] power for a limited time; *re(s)publika*.”²⁷ This last equivalence made between ‘*köztársaság*’ and ‘*re(s)publika*’ provides an interesting lexical link with the South Slavic context, which more readily took the Latin *res publica* as its own. There, ‘*republika*’ is defined in quite the same way as in Hungarian, English, French, and German. In Slovenian, ‘*republika*’ is that “form of state in which the president, as head of state, is elected for a limited time; a state with that form; an equal, relatively independent state-unit in the frame of a federally arranged state, [or] a territory belonging to this unit.”²⁸ In contemporary Serbo-Croatian, we find that ‘*republika*’ is “a political system in which the first person is not a monarch, but rather a president (or prime minister or similar); a state which has that kind of system; a political system in which power is held by elected representatives of the citizens.”²⁹ A definition from 1973 likewise states that ‘*republika*’ is “a state or state unit (independent, or in the frame of a federal state) in which power is not transferred hereditarily and not bounded by a ruling family or dynasty’s exclusive right to decide.”³⁰

²⁵ “*köztársaság*,” *Értelmező szótár*, ed. Vilma Eöry (Budapest: TINTA, 2007), 930.

²⁶ “*köztársaság*,” *Magyar értelmező kéziszótár*, 2nd ed., ed. Ferenc Pustai (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2003 [1972]), 767.

²⁷ “*köztársaság*,” *A magyar nyelv értelmező szótára*, vol. 4, *Ki–Mi*, eds. Géza Bárczi and László Országh (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1961), 473.

²⁸ “*republika*,” in *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika*, 2nd ed. (Ljubljana: Inštitut za slovenski jezik Frana Ramovša ZRC SAZU, 2014), <https://fran.si/133/sskj2-slovar-slovenskega-knjiznega-jezika-2/4526679/republika>, last accessed August 25, 2025.

²⁹ “*republika*,” in Vladimir Anić, *Veliki rječnik hrvatskoga jezika*, ed. Ljiljana Jojić (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2003), 1331.

³⁰ “*рeпyблика*,” in *Речник српскохрватскогa књижевногa језика*, vol. 5, *II–C*, ed. Mihailo Stevanović (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1973), 514.

In sum, these contemporary European understandings of the concept ‘republic’ place that form of state as a container for electoral processes which delegate the exercise of popular sovereignty from the citizens to their representatives in legislative bodies, and sometimes to the executive too. We might even say that ‘republic’ is the form and ‘democracy’ is the content. But such an idea rather puts the cart before the horse. In fact, in the period around the French Revolution and its reverberations in East Central Europe, the concept ‘republic’ did not always refer to the form of state at all. Both Robespierre and Thomas Paine could express this idea around 1791: ‘republic’ was a political concept, but did not designate a particular form of state.³¹ It rather described what Paine called “the *business* of government,” which is to say, ensuring the common good.³² This meaning was rooted rather in the Latin term ‘*res publica*’ (literally ‘thing in common’), here in Paine’s sense pointing toward the “common affairs” of the body of citizens.³³ In some ways, that fuzzier sense of the term was carried well into twentieth-century East Central Europe, as shown in this dissertation. It also linked up with three key terms which appear over and over again: ‘autonomy’, ‘self-determination’, and ‘democracy’. These were not particularly modern inventions of meaning, however, but rather echoes of much earlier senses of the term ‘republic’.

In both the Hungarian and South Slavic linguistic contexts, the concept ‘republic’ came to describe a particular form of state counterpoised to ‘monarchy’ by the beginning of the nineteenth century.³⁴ This betrayed a new ‘ideologization’ of the term, to borrow a very

³¹ Maximilien Robespierre, Speech of September 3, 1791, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 7, ed. Marc Bouloiseau, Georges Lefebvre, and Albert Soboul (Paris, 1950), 552, as cited in Wolfgang Mager, “Republik,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 5, 596n297; and Thomas Paine, “Rights of Man, Part II (1792),” in *Political Writings*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 177–78.

³² Paine, “Rights of Man, Part II (1792),” in *Political Writings*, 177.

³³ See, e.g., “*res publica, rei publicae, f.*,” in *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, fasc. V., *Libero–Pactum*, ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 1635.

³⁴ Loránd Benkő et al., “köztársaság,” *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*, vol. 2, *H–Ó* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1970), 639; Marko Snoj, “republika -e ž,” *Slovenski etimološki slovar*, 3rd ed. (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2015), 617; Petar Skok, “republika, f.,” *Etimološki rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, vol. 3, *poni–Ž* (Zagreb: JAZU, 1988), 130; cf. Mager, “Republik,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 5, 589–618.

Koselleckian phrase.³⁵ In the early modern period, the Hungarian term ‘*köztársaság*’ had pointed rather toward notions of community,³⁶ sociability,³⁷ or rather to describe the status of free cities as independent.³⁸ It did not describe a form of state in particular. In Serbo-Croatian, the idea of a ‘*republika*’ as denoting a free city was particularly prevalent in usage which referred to Ragusa (Dubrovnik) or Venice.³⁹ But this usage could also refer retrospectively to the small cluster of self-administered villages around Omiš on the coast between Split and Dubrovnik, elsewhere called the “Republic of Poljica.” Poljica had its own self-governing statutes originating in the fifteenth century and were kept alive in local practice until the Napoleonic conquests of Dalmatia.⁴⁰ Yet it was not the concept ‘*republika*’ which was used locally in Omiš. An alternative was used as an emic description by the residents, namely the word ‘*posebina*’⁴¹ or ‘*posoba*’.⁴² As noted in the third, posthumous edition of Vuk Karadžić’s *Serbian Dictionary* (1898), ‘*posebina*’ was translatable as both ‘*Gemeinstaat*’ (a state-in-common) and ‘*republica*’ (sic).⁴³ Karadžić also noted that the term appeared only in Dalmatia. Notably, in the dictionary of Serbo-Croatian compiled by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences in Zagreb, the entry for ‘*posoba*’ from 1931 admitted that the word’s “meaning is obscure” and had been used differently across the six examples compiled by the editors.⁴⁴ Nine decades

³⁵ Reinhart Koselleck, “Einleitung,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 1, xiii–xxvii.

³⁶ “*communitas – közönséges társaság*,” *Calepinus latin–magyar szótára 1585-ből*, ed. János Melich (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1912), 51.

³⁷ Albert Szenczi Molnár, “*sociálitas – köz-társaság*,” *Dictionarium Latinoungaricum* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990), f. 579. This is a facsimile of the 1604 original printed in Nuremberg by Elias Hutter.

³⁸ Szenczi Molnár, “*respublica – szabadváros, község*,” *Dictionarium Latinoungaricum*, f. 538.

³⁹ Hanibal Lucić, “Anibal Lucij hvaranin u pohvalu grada Dubrovnika,” (Hanibal Lucić of Hvar Hails the City of Dubrovnik), in *Stari pisci hrvatski*, vol. 6 (Zagreb: JAZU, 1861), 261–65. For more on Lucić, see Ivan Lupić, “Italian Poetry in Early Modern Dalmatia: The Strange Case of Hanibal Lucić (1485–1553),” *Colloquia Maruliana* 27 (2018): 5–41.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., the text of the statute and an introduction by Vatroslav Jagić in *Monumenta historico-juridica Slavorum meridionalium*, vol. 4, ed. Franjo Rački, Vatroslav Jagić, and Ivan Črnčić (Zagreb: JAZU, 1890), ix–xl and 25–141.

⁴¹ Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, “*посебина, f.*,” *Српски рјечник* (Serbian Dictionary), 3rd ed., ed. Ljubomir Stojanović and Petar Pera Đorđević (Belgrade: Štamparija Kraljevine Srbije, 1898), 565.

⁴² Đuro Grubor, “Значење ријечи пособа, f.” (The Meaning of the Word ‘*posoba*’), *Јужнословенски филолог* 12 (1933): 187–98.

⁴³ Karadžić, “*посебина*,” 565.

⁴⁴ Tomislav Maretić, ed., “*posoba, f.*,” *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, vol. 11, *Posmrtnik–perikladanje* (Zagreb: JAZU, 1935), 2; cf. Tomislav Maretić, ed., “*posebina, f.*,” *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, vol. 10, *Pladna–posmrtnica* (Zagreb: JAZU, 1931), 900.

earlier, Karadžić had apparently collected the word during his travels to Dalmatia, visiting Omiš and the Poljica region in 1847.⁴⁵ The example given in the third edition of his *Serbian Dictionary*—partially re-compiled from his notes and from posthumous additions by Ljubomir Stojanović and Petar Pera Đorđević—speaks to a sort of regional memory: “*Dok su Poljica bila posebina*,” translatable as both “When Poljica was a republic....” or “When Poljica was independent....”⁴⁶ The Croatian philologist Đuro Grubor later confirmed this usage some four decades later, already in interwar Yugoslavia, showing that the term was particular to early modern Dalmatian literature, also appearing in various copies of the statue of Poljica, where ‘*posoba*’ and ‘*posebina*’ were used to refer alternatively to ‘independence’ (*samostalnost*), ‘republic’ (*republika*), ‘village organization’ (*seoska organizacija*), or even ‘property’ (*svojstvo*) in a public sense.⁴⁷ For Grubor, the root of the concept was the abstract noun ‘*posebnost*’, meaning on the one hand the condition of ‘specificity’ but also distinctness, separation, or—politically—autonomy from other structures of power and rule. By 1847, when Karadžić likely collected the word, it was precisely the condition of autonomy that equated ‘*posebina*’ with ‘*republika*’.

Elsewhere in the South Slavic linguistic area, the term ‘republic’ was ‘imported’ from Latin directly or adopted indirectly through French or German.⁴⁸ As demonstrated in the Serbian context, a series of alternative spellings were used from the middle of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth, with the term ultimately being fixed as ‘*republika*’ starting around 1791, and so eventually overtaking usage of the older Latinate form ‘*respublika*’

⁴⁵ See, e.g., mention of Karadžić’s trip to the Poljica microregion in a letter from August 1847: *Букова прениска*, vol. 3 (Belgrade: Štamparija Kraljevine Srbije, 1909), 303 and 305.

⁴⁶ Karadžić, “посебина,” 565.

⁴⁷ Grubor, “Значење.”

⁴⁸ Vladimir Anić, “republika ž,” *Veliki rječnik hrvatskoga jezika*, ed. Ljiljana Jojić (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2003), 1331; “република,” in *Речник српскохрватског књижевног језика*, vol. 5, II–C (Novi Sad: Matica srpska–Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1967), 514; Skok, “republika,” 130; Snoj, “republika,” 617.

or, rendered in *slavenosrpski* orthography: ‘*ресь публика*’.⁴⁹ This latter choice to translate (or simply transliterate) the Latin term ‘*res publica*’ was made by Hristofor Žefarović in 1741, in his translation of Pavao (Paulo) Ritter Vitezović’s *Stemmatography*, published in Vienna in 1701.⁵⁰ In the original, Vitezović described Dubrovnik (Ragusa) in the following terms: “The river [which flows through Ragusa] is a symbol of the preservation of its own affluence, justice, and rights; though its course is winding, it never strays from the proper channel. That one and only republic (*respublica*) on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, after Venice, has remained self-governing (*sui juris permansit*); and by the monthly election of a new prince [*Principis*, that is, rector—CJI], it strives to preserve its institutions intact.”⁵¹ Vitezović links the concept ‘*respublica*’, now rendered as a single, compound word, to ‘self-government’, alternatively also ‘independence’ or ‘autonomy’. In Žefarović’s translation into Slaveno-Serbian, the term ‘*respublica*’ is preserved, simply transliterated as ‘*ресь публика*’ (‘*res publica*’), an orthographic return to the earlier Latin form now in Cyrillic costume.⁵² What Vitezović had pointed out explicitly, even if in laudatory language, Žefarović now took as self-evident, namely that the quality of independence or autonomy was a necessary condition for the existence of a *res publica*. This idea is evident in Žefarović’s translation of the phrase ‘*sui juris permansit*’ as ‘*свое постољанство имать*’, literally ‘to have/preserve its own existence’.⁵³ From this small choice to make implicit what had been explicit, by the middle of the eighteenth century an educated Slavophone from the Balkan peninsula could construe independence, autonomy, or self-government as natural characteristics of the *res publica*.

⁴⁹ For example, as shown in Velimir Mihajlović, *Грађа за речник страних речи у предвуковском периоду* (Materials for a Dictionary of Foreign Words in the Pre-Vuk [Karadžić] Period), vol. 2, *M–III* (Novi Sad: Institut za lingvistiku, 1974), 549–550.

⁵⁰ Pavao Ritter Vitezović, *Stemmatographia, sive armorum Illyricourm delineatio, descriptio et restitutio* (Stemmatography, or the Sketch, Description, and Restitution of Illyrian Coats of Arms) (Vienna, 1701); Hristofor Žefarović, *Стематографија или Изображеније оружиј илирических* (Stemmatography, or: the Illustration of Illyrian Arms) (Vienna, 1741).

⁵¹ Vitezović, *Stemmatographia*, 71.

⁵² Žefarović, *Стематографија*, 48a, that is, the verso of page 48.

⁵³ Žefarović, *Стематографија*, 48a.

Even with changes to the meaning of the term alongside the spelling, now pointing more clearly to a particular form of statehood, the meaning of ‘republic’ in these contexts retained the early modern semantic layer of independence or autonomy. This had profound consequences, particularly in the continental wake of the French Revolution, when the concept ‘republic’ increasingly became a *Kampfbegriff* used to denote the opposite of monarchy.⁵⁴ The term ‘republic’ began to be taken up through the nineteenth century, if haltingly, to describe forms of self-government which went beyond the patrician Ragusan and Venetian models. Particularly around 1848, plebian, popular forms of self-government started to become tied to republican imaginaries. One may see this, for example, on the pages of Ljudevit Gaj’s Zagreb periodical *Danica* in 1848 and ‘49, where images of Dubrovnik as an “Illyrian Republic” called back to the republican periods in both Rome as well as in Novogorod.⁵⁵ Elsewhere on the journal’s pages, within Gaj’s editorial article on the necessity of a free press for a healthy public sphere (*javnost*), we read: “... outside of the republic, it becomes impossible for the people (*narod*) to remain free.”⁵⁶ In this vision, the concept ‘republic’ could now encompass a much wider political community and no longer denoted a narrow vision of patrician self-government or the preservation of the liberties (privileges) of a ruling estate.

The Hungarian case looks quite similar. As stated earlier, there was no single definition for ‘*köztársaság*’ (republic) during the early modern period, with the term variously meaning sociability, community, or even referring to the independent status of free cities. In that way, the term had a wide range of meanings, but also politically began to overlap with the idea of the independence or autonomy of a polity against imperial domination. By the middle of the

⁵⁴ This coheres with the observations of Wolfgang Mager for the German linguistic area, logged in his entry for “Republik” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 5, 549–651. On the *Vormärz* and in 1848, see *ibid.*, 607–39.

⁵⁵ Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin, “Novogorod ruska republika” (Novogorod, a Russian Republic), *Danica ilirska* 15, no. 13 (February 24, 1849): 58–60; Ivan Müller, “Dubrovnik, ilirska republika” (Dubrovnik, an Illyrian Republic), *Danica ilirska* 15, no. 15 (March 10, 1849): 74–78; and Antun Sorgo, “Dubrovnik, ilirska republika” (Dubrovnik, an Illyrian Republic), *Danica ilirska* 15, no. 16 (March 17, 1849): 83–87. Karamzin’s text was translated from Russian, Müller’s from German, and Sorgo’s from French by Orsat Počić/Medo Pucić.

⁵⁶ [Ljudevit Gaj,] “Javnost” (The Public Sphere), *Danica horvatska, slavonska i dalmatinska* 14, no. 49 (April 2, 1848): 198.

eighteenth century, the term still mainly referred to the community of citizens or simply individuals in society. It did not denote the state (yet), although the notion of a ‘köz-társaság’ (literally ‘society-in-common’) was still rhetorically opposed to arbitrary rule or domination.⁵⁷ ‘Republic’ only slowly began to refer to a particular form of state—that is, an independent polity constructed out of the community of free citizens—at the end of the eighteenth century. Transitionally, we may point to the 1790 Hungarian translation of Frederick II of Prussia’s *Essay on the Forms of Government and the Duties of Sovereigns* (1777) undertaken by court counsellor and writer József Benedek Kondé (1760–1831).⁵⁸ As part of the text’s discussion of the origin of sovereignty, Kondé translated the key phrase “*Ce magistrat étoit le premier serviteur de l’État*” as “*Ez a’ Fölsőség első szolgája volt a’ köz-társaságnak,*” that is: “This magistrate [to whom the citizenry originally delegated power to preserve the law] was the first servant of the state.” Here, Kondé set *l’État* (the state) and *köz-társaság* as conceptual equivalents.⁵⁹ It was now not a question of sociability, but rather of the state as such, though not yet a question of a particular *form* of state.

In the same period, the concept ‘köztársaság’ could still refer to that quality of independence enjoyed by the Republics of Venice and Dubrovnik, even in Hungarian eyes,⁶⁰

⁵⁷ ELTE Nyelvtudományi Kutatóközpont, *A magyar nyelv nagyszótára* archivális cédulagyűjteménye—hereafter simply NSz—‘köztársaság’, f. 3 (1759). The slip points to a poem written by János Radvánszky (1739–1815) in 1759, reprinted in 1904: Gyula Baros, “Radványi verseskönyvek. (Hatodik és befejező közlemény),” *Irodalomtörténeti közlemények* 14, no. 4 (1904): 479–449, here 482, particularly stanza 28: “Így elhatalmazott erőszak, hatalom, / Ilyen vezéreknél nem lehet oltalom, / Ez köz-társaságba keserves ártalom, / S ilyek alatt élet siralmas unalom.” Perhaps translatable as: “Like this, there can be no protection / From the vested violence and power of such leaders, / Upon this *common community*, grievous harm, / For life under these conditions is lamentable boredom.” Emphasis mine. Special thanks to Veronika Lipp, Nóra Ittész, and their colleagues for making the archival slip collection for *A magyar nyelv nagyszótára* available to me.

⁵⁸ NSz, ‘köztársaság’, f. 8 (1790); Frederick II, *Az országlások nemeiről és az országlóknak kötelességeikről* (On the Forms of Government and the Duties of Sovereigns), trans. József Benedek Kondé (Pest: Patzko Nyomda, 1790).

⁵⁹ Frederick II, *Az országlások nemeiről*, 6. Cf. Frederick II, “*Essai sur les formes de gouvernement, & sur les devoirs des souverains*,” in *Ouvres posthumes*, vol. 6 (Berlin: Voss u. Decker, 1788), 60; and the modern English translation: Frederick II, “*Essay on the Forms of Government and the Duties of Sovereigns*” *Frederick the Great’s Philosophical Writings*, ed. Avi Lifschitz and trans. Angela Scholar (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 195–208.

⁶⁰ NSz, ‘köztársaság’, f. 12 (1791), i.e., Joakim Alajos Szekér, *Magyarok’ eredete a régi és mostani magyaroknak nevezetesebb tselekedeteivel együtt* (The Origins of the Magyars, with the Most Notable Deeds of Ancient and Current Magyars), vol. 1 (Pozsony–Komárom, 1791), 215; and NSz, f. 13 (1791), i.e., *ibid.*, vol. 2, 46.

or of the theoretical independence and indivisibility of the Hungarian state itself, at least according to the “Doctrine of the Holy Crown.”⁶¹ Translation provides us with a good window into shifting usage: the philosopher and Calvinist priest Sámuel Csernátoni translated Karl Friedrich Flögel’s *History of Human Mentalities* into Hungarian in 1795, preserving Flögel’s earlier opposition between republics and monarchies, thus providing a relatively early example in Hungarian usage of setting the two state forms into opposition with one another.⁶² Among a more self-consciously revolutionary milieu in Hungary, namely the conspiratorial group around Ignác Martinovics—the so-called Hungarian Jacobins—the concept ‘*köztársaság*’ was self-consciously opposed to ‘*királyság*’ (kingdom). Though here it was not an object of historical reflection, but rather a future-oriented outcome to be achieved through the liquidation of the Habsburgs and the Hungarian aristocracy.⁶³ The core group was caught and executed in the same period as the arrest and execution of the revolutionary republicans in Vienna.⁶⁴ The affiliated members of the conspiracy in Hungary, like Gergely Berzeviczy, retreated into scholarship and cultural life.⁶⁵ This marked a key discontinuity: the future-oriented usage of the concept ‘*köztársaság*’ as a political project would only reappear in earnest in 1848.

In the meantime, older meanings persisted. During an 1834 debate on the dissolution of serfdom, the young Ferenc Deák made a rhetorical gesture in favor of emancipation by stating

⁶¹ NSz, ‘*köztársaság*’, f. 16 (1792), i.e., Sámuel Decsy, *A magyar szent koronának és az ahhoz tartozó tárgyaknak története* (The History of the Hungarian Holy Crown and its Objects) (Vienna: Ignaz Alberti, 1792), 2. For the Doctrine of the Holy Crown—the *Szent Korona-tan*—and its persistence, see László Péter, “The Holy Crown of Hungary, Visible and Invisible,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 81, no. 3 (2003): 421–510.

⁶² NSz, ‘*köztársaság*’, f. 21 (1795), i.e., Karl Friedrich Flögel, *Az emberi értelemnek természeti története*, trans. Sámuel Csernátoni (Kolozsvár: Református Kollégium, 1795), 258–59; in the original: Karl Friedrich Flögel, *Geschichte des menschlichen Verstandes*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt–Leipzig, 1778), 134–35.

⁶³ See, e.g., “Gotthardi Ferenc jelentése Pergen gr. rendőrmíniszterhez” (Franz Gotthardi’s Report to Count Pergen), document 74a in *A magyar jakobinusok iratai*, vol. 1, ed. Kálmán Benda (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1957), 879; for more, George Barany, “Hoping against Hope: The Enlightened Age in Hungary,” *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 2 (1971): 319–57, particularly 327–32.

⁶⁴ Ernst Wangermann, *From Joseph II to the Jacobin Trials: Government Policy and Public Opinion in the Habsburg Dominions in the Period of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); Alfred Körner, *Die Wiener Jakobiner* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1972); Helmut Reinalter, *Aufgeklärter Absolutismus und Revolution. Zur Geschichte des Jakobinertums und der frühdemokratischen Bestrebungen in der Habsburgermonarchie* (Vienna–Cologne–Graz: Böhlau, 1980).

⁶⁵ Éva H. Balázs, *Berzeviczy Gergely, a reformpolitikus* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967), though for a full biography after 1795, see Jenő Gaal, *Berzeviczy Gergely élete és művei* (Budapest: Politzer, 1902).

that “general happiness” (*közboldogság*) was the “main goal of the *köztársaság*”—yet here he meant ‘society’, not ‘republic’.⁶⁶ The concept still accumulated increasingly radical semantic content among the Left during the later years of Hungary’s Reform Era (*reformkor*, 1825–1848) which came to the surface during the Revolutions of 1848. The radical democrats around the paper *Márczius Tizenötödike* (March Fifteenth, named after the day of the outbreak of the revolution in Pest)—among others, Pál Vasvári and János Horárik, as well as Sándor Petőfi—insisted that “Hungary, as a republic (*köztársaság*), would be in the avant-garde of the large republican (*republicanus*) family.”⁶⁷ It was likewise a repository of international fraternity among nations, particularly in the Danubian basin: “The sacred love of republican (*republicanus*) measures will be a natural bond between us and our brothers, the Croats, Slavonians, Transylvanians, and Dalmatians, and all of Europe will rush to recognize and protect the development of a nation that is distinct from the Slavic race, which will be the most powerful barrier against the barbarians of the East,” meaning the Russians.⁶⁸

What is striking in this brief passage is the usage of both ‘*köztársaság*’ as an abstract noun and the Latinate ‘*republicanus*’ as a sort of ideologized adjective. This latter usage was already apparent in István Széchenyi’s *World* from 1831: “the ignorance of the people (*nép*) and the incompetence of the country’s representatives” would ultimately be to blame for even the “most republican of principalities” (*a legrepublicanusb* [sic] *fejedelem*) turning toward arbitrary rule.⁶⁹ Thus the fundamental ideologization of the term ‘republic’ (‘*köztársaság*’, ‘*republika*’) leading into and during 1848 cannot be overlooked. While the concept had future-oriented horizons among the emerging political Left, it still retained a key aspect of its previous layers of meaning, namely that of independence, self-administration or self-governance, but

⁶⁶ NSz, ‘*köztársaság*’, f. 46 (1834/1882), i.e., Ferenc Deák, “A jobbágyok örökváltásáról” (On the Compensated Emancipation of the Serfs), *Deák Ferencz beszédei* (The Speeches of Ferenc Deák), vol. 1, ed. Manó Kónyi (Budapest: Franklin, 1882), 103.

⁶⁷ *Márczius Tizenötödike* 1, no. 33 (April 22, 1848): 132.

⁶⁸ *Márczius Tizenötödike* 1, no. 33 (April 22, 1848): 132.

⁶⁹ NSz, ‘*republikánus*’, f. 1 (1831), i.e., István Széchenyi, *Világ* (World) (Pest: Landerer, 1831), 111.

even—hazarding a slight anachronism—self-determination. For the radical democrat Mihály Táncsics, the establishment of a republic in Hungary could only obtain as a function of Hungary’s independence, meaning the dissolution of the Pragmatic Sanction.⁷⁰ The establishment of a republic in Hungary would be the natural outcome of a process of collective struggle which Táncsics dramatized in his post-revolutionary dialogue “The Royalist and the Republican,”⁷¹ but also assessed in more reflective theoretical terms in his “Who Are the Red Republicans and What Do They Want?”⁷² It was at this moment, in the early 1850s, in the opening phases of the “neo-absolutism” which reigned in the Habsburg Empire, that the consolidated conceptual apparatus around ‘republic’ was definitively secured for the Left. It would now mean more than the improvement of the common good within imperial or monarchic structures. ‘Republic’, for the Left, meant a full scheme of social transformation which harkened back to the early modern meanings of ‘independence’, ‘autonomy’, and even ‘community’. It was the modernization of the ‘free city’ into the ‘free state’ as the future-oriented outcome of progressive struggle, whether revolutionary or evolutionary.

Approaching the Sources

Where do we go from here? The core of the source base for this dissertation consists of the bread-and-butter of intellectual history: books, essays, correspondence, personal diaries, and notes. Some were published previously; other sources are only accessible in archives. They are

⁷⁰ Mihály Táncsics, “Respublika” (The Republic), *Munkások Újsága* 2, no. 5 (Oct. 13, 1848): 21–22.

⁷¹ Mihály Táncsics, “Királyista és republikánus” (The Royalist and the Republican), in *Táncsics Mihály művei* (The Works of Mihály Táncsics), vol. 10 (Budapest, 1885), 1–112. The text was written in hiding in December 1851.

⁷² Mihály Táncsics, “Mik a vörös republikánusok és mit akarnak?” (Who Are the Red Republicans and What Do They Want?), in *Táncsics Mihály művei*, vol. 9 (Budapest, 1885), 1–72, in the second section of the book. The text was composed in 1852 and then again in 1856. Interestingly, the text was republished in 1978 in Magvető’s “Gyorsuló idő” (Accelerating Time) series of short social-scientific booklets: Mihály Táncsics, *Mik a vörös republikánusok és mit akarnak?*, ed. Szilveszter Ördögh (Budapest: Magvető, 1978).

used ‘traditionally’, so to speak: to reveal what they thought about when they thought politically, to reconstruct the debates and controversies in which they participated, and to understand, as far as possible, their intentions when they wrote down their thoughts.

The study is also a comparative study, which is perhaps more usual in political, economic, or social history than intellectual history. By comparing the features and changes in a particular line of political thinking, I aim to capture something larger. Here I focus on republican political thought, which is my own analytic or heuristic category, but also a category or (self-)descriptor used by the subjects of this study. In Belgrade, for example, the intellectuals around the former Independent Radicals reconstituted themselves as the Democratic (later Yugoslav) Republican Party in early 1920. In Zagreb in the same period, Stjepan Radić’s Croatian People’s Peasant Party was renamed the Croatian Republican Peasant Party, a label which stuck until 1925. Likewise, first in Celje and then in Ljubljana, two successive republican parties were formed, one by the writer Anton Novačan in 1922, then one—a successor to the latter after its dissolution in 1923—by the group of left-wing autonomists around the civic radicals Albin Prepeluh and Dragotin Lončar in 1924. Among the Hungarians, the republican label was shakier, for in the aftermath of the collapse of the Hungarian People’s Republic and then the Republic of Councils in 1919, the counterrevolutionary White Terror and the early formation of the Horthy regime largely wiped the label off the face of the public sphere. Only in exile did the term crop up, but only fleetingly.

In any case, the ideas among these formations were relatively similar, which initially caught my attention and pushed me to make more out of the ‘republican’ label than the subjects of this study did themselves. They all advocated in some measure for a more radical democratization of the political, social, and economic spheres than liberal democracy could offer in its institutional, parliamentary form inherited from the late nineteenth century. They argued for the idea that a superordinate political (civic) community rather ought to be the bearer

of sovereignty beyond individual cultural (ethnic) communities. There was also an element of their thought which was committed to the autonomy and self-determination of that political community through federation with neighboring political communities, securing the fate of many in common. Because of these self-descriptions and the elective affinities between their lines of thought, I use the term ‘republican’ to describe the subjects of this study, and ‘republican thought’, ‘republican language’, or ‘republican political thought’ to refer specifically to that line of thinking and argument. This ought not replace relevant labels which distinguish superordinate ideological commitments: social democratic, civic radical, liberal, agrarian, communist, Christian socialist, etc. For I also make use of these established labels. At the core of this dissertation, however, I focus in on a distinct political *discourse* or *language* rather than a singular, relatively exclusive *ideology*.

How do I go about this? In my interpretation throughout the text, I rely on a combined contextualist-conceptualist approach without reifying the specificity of East Central Europe and its constituent contexts. The ‘contextualist’ element is derived from the Cambridge School, so-called. There was never any “joint manifesto of a Cambridge School,” even if the methodological interests of J. G. A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner, and John Dunn increasingly overlapped during their various periods of time spent at Cambridge.⁷³ Certainly, the work and personalities of Herbert Butterfield and Peter Laslett were unmistakable common influences.⁷⁴ Whereas Butterfield stressed an anti-teleological reading of the past, Laslett insisted on reconstructing a political text’s meaning through its publishing history as well as the intentions of the author in responding to a particular debate. This latter emphasis would have a large influence on the work of Pocock, Skinner, and Dunn particularly during the 1960s, in which

⁷³ Synne Myrebøe, “The Cambridge School and All That: An Antipodean Writes, November 2015,” in *History of European Ideas* 51, no. 7 (2025): 1694–1705, here 1695.

⁷⁴ The classic touchstone texts are Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1931); Peter Laslett, “Introduction,” in Robert Filmer, *Patriarchia and Other Political Works*, ed. Peter Laslett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1949), 1–48; and Peter Laslett, “Introduction,” in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 3–154.

decade they came to express many of their first and lasting methodological contributions to the historical study of political thought. Pocock would, in retrospect, term this the “Cambridge method,” but was not particularly keen to call it a “school,” which was rather an outside imposition.⁷⁵

Of the core group of practitioners, Pocock was first to describe in some detail his methodological outlook, published in 1962 a “The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry.”⁷⁶ There, Pocock argued—in light of his first book, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*⁷⁷—that to study politics historically was, in part, to study the linguistic expression of politics, and at that to study the constraints, conventions, and paradigms imposed by a particular context on political ideas. A series of further articles by Quentin Skinner and John Dunn, rejoined by Pocock, further clarified these ideas which then set the basic methodological setup of the contextualist approach by 1969.⁷⁸ Uncovering authorial intention, immediate contexts of production, and core political debates and controversies for a given text became the key factors in determining what an author was doing when they wrote (or spoke) politically. But context was not enough to explain everything, for as Skinner famously distinguished in relation to political texts, the meaning of an utterance and the illocutionary

⁷⁵ See J. G. A. Pocock, “Preface,” in *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), vii–viii; the term “Cambridge School” was first used by Caroline Robbins in her review of Pocock’s *Politics, Language and Time* in the *American Historical Review* 78, no. 1 (1973): 66. Cf. Samuel James, “J. G. A. Pocock and the idea of the ‘Cambridge School’ in the history of political thought,” *History of European Ideas* 45, no. 1 (2019): 83–98; and Pocock’s response in *History of European Ideas* 45, no. 1 (2019): 99–103.

⁷⁶ J. G. A. Pocock, “The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry,” in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Second Series, ed. Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 183–202; republished in Pocock, *Political Thought and History*, 3–19.

⁷⁷ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957).

⁷⁸ Quentin Skinner, “The Limits of Historical Explanations,” *Philosophy* 41, no. 157 (1966): 199–215; John Dunn, “The Identity of the History of Ideas,” *Philosophy* 43, no. 164 (1968): 85–104; J. G. A. Pocock, “Time, Institutions and Action: An Essay on Tradition and Their Understanding,” in *Politics and Experience: Essays Presented to Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Preston King and B. C. Parekh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 209–38, republished in *Political Thought and History*, 187–216; and Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53.

force of an utterance were two different things.⁷⁹ These could not merely be determined by the social context, for the meaning and illocutionary force of an utterance escaped the immediate context of production and became something embedded in a larger semantic structure that was, by virtue of our being able to read the same text, transhistorical. Likewise, by recognizing this fact, the historian also allowed that the author of a political text may to innovate beyond the determining constraints of a context or they may abandon certain expected forms of argumentation. Conversely, too, this also meant that any retrospective projection of present meaning onto the meaning of a historical text was necessarily an anachronism, and prolepsis arose in the arguments of those historians who argued that a certain author “anticipated” a line of thought or argument only to be established beyond the immediate temporal horizons of a particular text. One had to treat a text in its own time and place, within its own constraints, and within its own language to recover its meaning.

In parallel to the contextualist frame, there was the institutionalization of *Begriffsgeschichte* (the history of concepts) during the 1950s and 1960s in West Germany. Here, however, I draw on methodological precepts at the core of one form of the history of concepts, namely that which originated in “philosophical lexicography.”⁸⁰ In this sense, *Begriffsgeschichte* had been merely an auxiliary to philosophy, as exemplified by the many editions of Rudolf Eisler’s *Dictionary of Philosophical Concepts*.⁸¹ The fourth edition of the *Dictionary*, published posthumously in 1927, provoked sustained criticism from the philosopher Erich Rothacker the same year, in the context of the deepening controversies around the theoretical bases of *Geistesgeschichte* in the Weimar Republic.⁸² At that moment,

⁷⁹ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 45–48; here Skinner relied in particular on J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁸⁰ Helmut G. Meier, “Begriffsgeschichte” (The History of Concepts), Article 2, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 1, A–C, ed. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1971), 791–800, here 791.

⁸¹ Rudolf Eisler, *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe* (Dictionary of Philosophical Concepts) (Berlin: Mittler & Sohn, 1899), republished in new, expanded editions in 1906, 1910, and posthumously in 1927.

⁸² Erich Rothacker, “Hilfsmittel des philosophischen Studiums” (An Aid for Philosophical Study), *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 5 (1927): 766–91.

Rothacker rejected Eisler's hollow conception of *Begriffsgeschichte* as merely a sequential cataloging of quotations around certain terms which arose merely because of their supposed importance within philosophy. Rothacker insisted by contrast that such a lexicographic-philosophical undertaking demanded a more refined historical consciousness to track the very history of philosophy itself, meaning that one had to incorporate the results of historical studies, theology, literature, art, and poetry beyond philosophy narrowly understood.⁸³ A similar undertaking, we may note, appeared a decade later, in drastically changed circumstances by the *Konservative Revolutionär* Otto Brunner in his *Land and Lordship*.⁸⁴ Rothacker too succumbed to corporatist, fascist, and racist temptations in the same period, turning in 1928 away from the national liberal Volkspartei toward the National Socialists, participating actively in the scientific life of the Third Reich from 1933 until the moment of its collapse.⁸⁵ Both attempts to study constitutional history and the history of philosophy, respectively, on their own conceptual terms belied a rejection of normative liberal conceptual vocabulary applied to the past, relishing in the 1930s and '40s a return to a pre-modern vocabulary of politics and philosophy. After 1945, both were marginalized from scientific life for a few years and only after a certain amount of "rehabilitation" were the two reintegrated into the research apparatus of the Federal Republic.

By 1955, Rothacker had founded the *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* and aimed, as Helmut Meier summarized, to focus on "the matter of the concepts themselves, treated from the perspective of their historical contexts of influence and thus removed from any view that is

⁸³ Meier, "Begriffsgeschichte," 795–96.

⁸⁴ Otto Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft: Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Südostdeutschlands im Mittelalter* (Baden bei Wien: R. M. Rohrer, 1939). See James Van Horn Melton, "From Folk History to Structural History: Otto Brunner (1898–1982) and the Radical-Conservative Roots of German Social History," in *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and James Van Horn Melton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press–Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 1994), 263–92; Gadi Algazi, "Otto Brunner – 'Konkrete Ordnung' und Sprache der Zeit," in *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft: 1918–1945*, ed. Peter Schöttler (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), 166–203; and Peter N. Miller, "Nazis and Neo-Stoics: Otto Brunner and Gerhard Oestreich before and after the Second World War," *Past & Present* 176 (2002): 144–86.

⁸⁵ Ralph Stöwer, *Erich Rothacker: Sein Leben und seine Wissenschaft vom Menschen* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2012), 77–81, 113–115.

merely based on a standpoint.”⁸⁶ It was within Rothacker’s *Archiv* that two key historical-conceptual projects were announced in 1967: the *Lexicon of the Socio-Political Concepts of Modernity*, what became the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, edited by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, and the *Historical Dictionary of Philosophy*, conceived in large part by Joachim Ritter.⁸⁷ Both attempted, in a way, to pick up where Rothacker had left off in the 1920s, before his turn toward the National Socialists. Yet it was also an attempt to respond to and in a way further the earlier program of Brunner, now stripped of its *völkisch* perspective, as well as that of the political-theoretical work of Carl Schmitt, himself an implicated Nazi. Thus we may feel that through the younger Koselleck certain parts of the project remained under the spell of a postwar conservative skepticism toward “the pathogenesis of modern society.”⁸⁸

Koselleck’s project in particular—for he was the main theorist of the project—was to investigate the relationship between language, social reality, the conceptualization of social reality within language, and historical change in these conceptions over time. The history of these socio-political concepts, then, became the history of how concepts both “registered and effected the transition to the modern world.”⁸⁹ Under the larger headings of ‘democratization’, ‘temporalization’, ‘ideologization’, and ‘politicization’, Koselleck and company attempted to

⁸⁶ Meier, “Begriffsgeschichte,” 796–97.

⁸⁷ Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 169. See Reinhart Koselleck, “Richtlinien für das Lexikon politisch-sozialer Begriffe der Neuzeit” (Guidelines for a Lexicon of the Socio-Political Concepts of Modernity), *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 11 (1967): 81–97; and Joachim Ritter, “Leitgedanken und Grundsätze eines Historischen Wörterbuch der Philosophie” (Guiding Reflections and Principles for a Historical Dictionary of Philosophy), *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 11 (1967): 75–80.

⁸⁸ Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988); a translation of Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise: Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (Freiburg–Munich: Karl Alber, 1959), Koselleck’s doctoral dissertation submitted in 1953. Koselleck symbolically “volunteered” for service in the Wehrmacht when he was nineteen, but was ultimately drafted in May 1941. Olsen, *History in the Plural*, 12. He rarely spoke about his reasons for doing so, or his relation to National Socialism as a youth, but became deeply skeptical after 1945 of what he called the “utopian surplus” of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes. See Reinhart Koselleck, “Ich war weder Opfer noch befreit. Der Historiker Reinhart Koselleck über die Erinnerung an den Krieg, sein Ende und seine Toten,” *Berliner Zeitung* 7, no. 5 (May 7, 2005), quoted in Olsen, *History in the Plural*, 14.

⁸⁹ Olsen, *History in the Plural*, 171.

trace just how the convergence of language and society fundamentally changed during the transition to modernity, the so-called *Sattelzeit* between 1750 and 1850, described earlier. This meant that the entries in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* were structured temporally around this point of transition to modernity, and thematically according to the wider proliferation of uses of concepts among an ever-broader public sphere, the emergence of future-oriented expectations related to social and political change, the abstraction of concepts and their use by interest groups, and the mobilization of concepts as lines of demarcation in mass-political conflicts.

In a way, there is some theoretical resemblance between the contextualist and conceptualist programs. On the one hand, both attempted to relegate pre-modern meanings and uses of language to a differentiated realm which we, as historians, must reconstruct carefully so as not to assume that the modern and pre-modern meanings were identical. On the other hand, both assumed that linguistic frames both reflected and effected something about social reality itself, that through language one may be able to perceive a more fundamental structure or context which limited or constrained the use of language. Yet the contextualists (Pocock, Skinner, Dunn, and company) derived their methodological program from investigations that largely concerned the period before the various European Enlightenments, concerned more with the problems of civic humanism in the Renaissance or the religious wars of the seventeenth century, not to mention the English Civil War itself. For the conceptualists around Koselleck, however, modernity became “an almost obsessive concern,” to quote Melvin Richter.⁹⁰

Richter himself was the leading proponent, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, of an integration of the contextualist and conceptualist methods. One barrier, Richter argued, was the continued “polemical history” written by Germans and Anglo-Americans of each other against

⁹⁰ Melvin Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 125.

each other from the 1920s onward.⁹¹ Another was the supposed idealism of the German venture in the eyes of Anglo-American analytical philosophers. Yet this too was simply a propagated stereotype, Richter argued, for “intellectual life in the Federal Republic has changed to much since 1945 that older images almost entirely misrepresent the actual situation,” namely that the younger generation of *Begriffshistoriker* like Koselleck had rejected the neo-idealist presumptions of interwar historicist thought and linked the study of the history of concepts concretely to the history of social structures and their changes over time.⁹² For Richter, then, the purchase of linking the history of socio-political concepts with the history of social and political thought was precisely the gained theoretical value of being “in a better position to perceive blind spots and distortions in our own and others’ political and social thought, or to identify alternatives to what now appear as self-evident formulations of it.”⁹³ While some of these issues were addressed directly by the contextualists, in a way they lacked a theory of concepts which, like Koselleck, could distinguish between the appearance of a word and the invocation of a complex concept with various, ambiguous, and contested lexical valences. Thus, to put it in an alternative formulation, the contextualists lacked the base while the conceptualists lacked the superstructure.

An attempt at rapprochement was made by Richter and Hartmut Lehmann at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, in 1992, on the occasion of the completion of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. There, they invited Pocock and Koselleck to participate in a methodological dialogue about the contextualist and conceptualist projects, with additional interventions made by James Van Horn Melton, Donald R. Kelley, Gabriel Motzkin, and Richter himself. The proceedings were published in 1996, the year after Richter’s *The History*

⁹¹ Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts*, 144.

⁹² Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts*, 144–46.

⁹³ Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts*, 159.

of *Political and Social Concepts*.⁹⁴ Pocock's intervention responded to a set of questions raised by Richter regarding the differences between the history of concepts and the history of political thought ("discourses, languages, ideologies, or whatever you prefer to call them"), the assertion by Quentin Skinner that it is impossible to write a history of concepts, and Koselleck's theory of the *Sattelzeit*.⁹⁵ Using the mental image of a textile mill, Pocock suggested that "the part of the horizontal threads is taken by the synchronically existing languages or discourses, and that of the vertical threads by the history of individual concepts."⁹⁶ This may be arranged in different patterns, marking out intersections between different concepts and languages; yet, Pocock noted, there was no reason to think that a lexicon of concepts "however comprehensive and exhaustive, can add up to ... such a system or an organism or to anything having a history as complex as that of a language."⁹⁷ Thus, for Pocock, concepts could be reduced out of language, identified, catalogued, etc., but could not be rearranged to an aggregate equating a language of politics. The fact of the language itself, as a relatively complex but integral whole, meant that it was inherently more than the sum of its parts. Likewise, the theory of modernity upon which such histories were based did not obtain in Britain as it did in Germany, owing at least to the fact that the fragmentation of feudal estates and orders in Central Europe did not resemble the British case, where the *ancien régime* was "unified by a powerful, if unstable, central sovereignty."⁹⁸ Pocock thus maintained his skepticism, suggesting that in fact each method was "historically, culturally, and nationally specific," that they could not be "homogenized," only "confronted, compared, and combined" in non-integral ways.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter, eds., *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 1996).

⁹⁵ J. G. A. Pocock, "Concepts and Discourses: A Difference in Culture? Comment on a Paper by Melvin Richter," in *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts*, 47.

⁹⁶ Pocock, "Concepts and Discourses," 49–50.

⁹⁷ Pocock, "Concepts and Discourses," 51.

⁹⁸ Pocock, "Concepts and Discourses," 57–58.

⁹⁹ Pocock, "Concepts and Discourses," 58.

Koselleck's response was more cordial. He accepted the criticism levelled against *Begriffsgeschichte* by Quentin Skinner, and by extension by Pocock, that every speech act is unique and unrepeatable because of the contingency of context and authorial intent.¹⁰⁰ In fact, Koselleck mentioned, he had argued the same around the same time, albeit in German.¹⁰¹ They agreed on the singular inimitability of utterances, but it was precisely in their uniqueness that past uses then had to be picked up and reused time and again by later authors in new ways, a condition of necessity. *Begriffsgeschichte*, then, was a history not of static, ahistorical concepts, but a history of how conceptual usages were "maintained, altered, or transformed."¹⁰² In this way, basic concepts became the "pivots around which all arguments turn," and so political languages or political discourses require basic concepts while the study of basic concepts requires knowledge of those same discursive contexts.¹⁰³ Still, it was not that such changes occurred in a vacuum. Precisely on this point the *Sattelzeit* thesis entered for Koselleck, for it provided a means by which one could evaluate or interpret conceptual change in structural terms, in relation to a broad change in the social context, namely the transition to modern society. Importantly, however, Koselleck maintained that the *Sattelzeit* was not a new German *Sonderweg* claim, but rather a heuristic device which in fact allowed for a broader range of comparisons to take place beyond the German case. "Similar developments occurred in our neighboring language communities," he argued, "although the eras in which they took place

¹⁰⁰ Reinhart Koselleck, "A Response to Comments on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*," in *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts*, 62; cf. Pocock, "Concepts and Discourses," 55, and 55n2: Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 349–58; and Quentin Skinner, "The State," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 90–131.

¹⁰¹ Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichtliche Probleme der Verfassungsgeschichtsschreibung" (Some Conceptual-Historical Problems in Writing Constitutional History), *Der Staat. Zeitschrift für Staatslehre, Öffentliches Recht und Verfassungsgeschichte*, Beiheft 6, "Gegenstand und Begriffe der Verfassungsgeschichtsschreibung" (1983): 7–21, 22–46.

¹⁰² Koselleck, "A Response," 62–63.

¹⁰³ Koselleck, "A Response," 65.

may have differed and analogous developments may have extended over periods of different duration.”¹⁰⁴

So far, I have used terminology like ‘contextualist’ and ‘conceptualist’ to describe these twin positions. The choice is not accidental, for this is the terminology originally used by Balázs Trencsényi in his study of the application of these intellectual-historical methodologies to the study of political thought in East Central Europe. The *Urtext* was a conference paper published in 2002,¹⁰⁵ translated into English in 2004,¹⁰⁶ and republished in Hungarian in 2007 with some alterations along the way.¹⁰⁷ In “Conceptual History and Political Languages,” Trencsényi had argued that, owing to the cultural embeddedness of the contextualist and conceptualist methods, their adaptation in East Central Europe required The core problem, as Trencsényi initially framed it, lay in the asymmetric nature of cultural transmission: whereas the Cambridge historians could trace the internal development of English political languages from Tudor humanism through the Civil War to the Glorious Revolution, and German conceptual historians could follow the accumulation of meanings within a continuous linguistic tradition across the dividing line of modernity, the intellectual history of East Central Europe presents a landscape marked rather by asymmetric cultural transmissions and discontinuous intellectual cultures, all set within a context of simultaneously present “multiple modernities” which stretched across

¹⁰⁴ Koselleck, “A Response,” 69.

¹⁰⁵ Balázs Trencsényi, “Kulcsszavak és politikai nyelvek: gondolatok a kontextualista-konceptualista eszmetörténeti módszertan kelet-közép-európai adaptációjáról” (Keywords and Political Languages: Thoughts on the East Central European Adaptation of the Contextualist-Conceptualist Method in Intellectual History), in *A történész szerszámosládája. A jelenkori történeti gondolkodás néhány aspektusa* (The Historian’s Toolbox: Some Aspects of Contemporary Historical Thought), ed. András Szekeres (Budapest: L’Harmattan–Atelier, 2002), 117–58. The usage of the term *kulcsszavak* in the title and text is tied in part to the historical-philosophical program of György Márkus: see György Bence, “Márkus és a kulcsszavak” (Márkus and Keywords), *Lehetséges-e egyáltalán? Márkus Györgynek – tanítványai* (Is It Even Possible at All? To György Márkus, from His Students) (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1993), 81–98.

¹⁰⁶ Balázs Trencsényi, “Conceptual History and Political Languages: On the Central-European Adaptation of the Contextualist-Conceptualist Methodologies of Intellectual History,” in *Prague Perspectives (I): The History of East Central Europe and Russia*, ed. Petr Roubal and Václav Veber (Prague: The National Library of the Czech Republic, Slavonic Library, 2004), 142–63.

¹⁰⁷ Balázs Trencsényi, “Eszmetörténeti program és módszertani adaptáció” (Intellectual-Historical Program and Methodological Adaptation), in *A politika nyelvei. Eszmetörténeti tanulmányok* (The Languages of Politics: Studies in Intellectual History) (Budapest: Argumentum–Bibó István Szellemi Műhely, 2007), 13–58.

the European continent.¹⁰⁸ This meant that the semantic structures of modern collective identity construction and their concomitant political languages were formed in a situation where “different layers of modernity, with their reflective and normative elements incorporated with an ‘abbreviated’ time-frame, are often coexisting and/or clashing with each other.”¹⁰⁹ Likewise, these semantic structures were not self-contained, but were filtered through what Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček called “the familiar though external” Western semantic frameworks.¹¹⁰ To that end, political modernity in the region appeared precisely in the moment when meta-political discourses of modernity were imported, translated, adapted, and re-expressed: “modernity itself is a ‘political language’” in East Central Europe, Trencsényi argued.¹¹¹

This insight—that modernity functions as a meta-political discourse subject to local adaptation rather than organic local development—became foundational for the application of the contextualist and conceptualist paradigms to East Central European intellectual cultures. In the introduction to the first volume of *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe* (2006), co-edited with Michal Kopeček, the methodological framework was elaborated through the practical challenge of creating a regional “identity reader.” In doing so, and in studying the constructions of collective identity in the region, the editors and contributors to the broader project concluded that only methodological eclecticism could provide them with the tools needed to interpret these texts sensitively, on their own terms. Their approach concentrated on “*diachronic* conceptual transformation,” but also “*synchronic* divergences in a given tradition, due to the incompatibility of the different discursive modes related to different genre-practices.”¹¹² This meant, in practical terms, that to approach a canon of (collective)

¹⁰⁸ Trencsényi, “Conceptual History and Political Languages,” 156–57.

¹⁰⁹ Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček, “Inter-texts of Identity,” in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Texts and Commentaries*, vol. 1, *Late Enlightenment – Emergence of the Modern ‘National Idea’*, ed. Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček (Budaapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 6.

¹¹⁰ Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček, “Inter-texts of Identity,” 6.

¹¹¹ Trencsényi, “Conceptual History and Political Languages,” 158.

¹¹² Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček, “Inter-texts of Identity,” 8.

identity-building texts meant to compare both within a tradition, across multiple parallel traditions, and also to have what we might call a processual view, a wider vision of the changes, contestations, disappearances, and continuities of a given genre, tradition, or mode of political thought.

Yet understanding these texts could not proceed either from “an ideal-typical ‘Western perspective’” nor from each (national, regional) culture’s “institutionalized self-image”—both were oversimplifications.¹¹³ Instead, they proposed an “inter-textual reading” of the intellectual cultures of East Central Europe, one that did not seek “to construct [the socio-cultural context] as a reality that exists beyond interpretation or outside the text.”¹¹⁴ This positioned the project against what Trencsényi and Kopeček termed the “Platonic image” which separated the so-called Occident (“the transcendent world of the Real”) from the so-called Orient (“the ‘Remainder of Europe’”) and rather insisted that the intellectual constitution of East Central Europe could only be understood in terms of “proliferating chains” rather than “two-layered hierarchies and mirror-worlds.”¹¹⁵

Trencsényi’s Hungarian monograph *The Spirit of the People* (2011) and its English adaptation *The Politics of “National Character”* (2012) applied this framework to the comparative study of national characterology debates. Looking at Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria during the interwar period, Trencsényi explored the ways in which the intellectual cultures of East Central Europe were constituted precisely by “a trans-regional cultural transmission,” meaning that one could not only look at the Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian contexts as neighbors within a region, but also as constitutive contextual entities within broader flows of ideas.¹¹⁶ Local adaptation of a European “ideational package” showed the immense

¹¹³ Trencsényi and Kopeček, “Inter-texts of Identity,” 15 and 20.

¹¹⁴ Trencsényi and Kopeček, “Inter-texts of Identity,” 10.

¹¹⁵ Trencsényi and Kopeček, “Inter-texts of Identity,” 17.

¹¹⁶ Balázs Trencsényi, *The Politics of “National Character”: A Study in Interwar East European Thought* (London: Routledge, 2012), 3; cf. Trencsényi *A nép lelke: Nemzetkarakterológiai viták Kelet-Európában* (The Soul of the

importance of cross-cultural patterns and that the failures of intellectual transmission between generations and subcultures within a single “national” canon were more accentuated than nationalism could ever acknowledge.¹¹⁷ Thus a much more comprehensive interpretive frame appears which can be applied to the assessment of single national cases, a set of them in comparison and entanglement, or, even, at the regional level itself.

The most ambitious move in this direction came with the first volume of *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe* (2016), which Trencsényi co-authored with Maciej Janowski, Mónika Baár, Maria Falina, and Michal Kopeček. Here the authors developed what they termed a “methodological syncretism” drawing on contextualist approaches, conceptual history, and the study of cultural transfers and *histoire croisée*.¹¹⁸ The main question circulated about the extent and ways in which the intellectual and political cultures of East Central Europe negotiated modernity, meaning precisely how local actors adapted imported political vocabularies through complex processes of translation, hybridization, and creative reinterpretation.¹¹⁹ Likewise, the authors introduced a conception of the “different rhythms” and “different temporalities” in ideological reception, necessitating a perspective of entangledness between the local, the regional, and the continental.¹²⁰

Although the authors of *A History of Modern Political Thought* had argued plainly that their effort was “regional but not regionalist,” Trencsényi wrote some five years later argued rather for a “soft regionalist narrative.”¹²¹ Under this heading, essentialist definitions of East Central Europe or the search for “original characteristics” were rejected, yet the continued

People: National-Characterological Debates in Eastern Europe) (Budapest: Argumentum–Bibó István Szellemi Műhely, 2011), 11–12.

¹¹⁷ Trencsényi, *A nép lelke*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Balázs Trencsényi et al., *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, vol. 1, *Negotiating Modernity in the “Long Nineteenth Century”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6–8.

¹¹⁹ Trencsényi et al., *History of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1, 4–5.

¹²⁰ Trencsényi et al., *History of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1, 4.

¹²¹ Balázs Trencsényi, “Thinking Dangerously: Political Thought in Twentieth-Century East Central Europe,” in *The Routledge History Handbook of Central and Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 3, *Intellectual Horizons*, ed. Włodzimierz Borodziej, Ferenc Laczó, and Joachim von Puttkamer (London: Routledge, 2021), 70.

search for that combination of “local” factors that marked the region in particular. One of these, importantly, was the “permanent crisis of identity” which became a defining condition of intellectuals in East Central Europe, subject as they were to regular clashes of historical layers and the contestations between authoritarian (even totalitarian) regimes.

Most recently, in *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics* (2025), Trencsényi took up the topic and concept ‘crisis’ directly, featuring as it had across his works over the previous two decades, tracing its adventures across Europe. Here Trencsényi is perhaps at his most theoretical. The introduction proposes the concept of a “second *Sattelzeit*” for Europe as a whole, roughly between 1890 and 1945, characterized by new ways in which concepts undermined the linear modernist narrative inherited from the late nineteenth century and generated cyclical, anti-historicist, and other “anti-modernist” visions of history. This “second *Sattelzeit*” exhibited several key features: atemporalization; serialization; hierarchization; biologization; and sacralization.¹²² Here, *Begriffsgeschichte* is combined once more with the contextualist analysis of political languages, taking into account the transnational, transregional, and transdisciplinary interplay of political discourses Trencsényi and his interlocutors had developed since the early 2000s. The project of the intellectual history/histories of East Central Europe was now explicitly positioned as an experiment in “de-provincializing” European intellectual history as a whole, putting into dialogue thinkers from divergent contexts and asking readers to think through the history of European political thought from quite different starting points.¹²³

The general framework that emerges insists on the apparently arbitrary nature of canon-building, on the centrality of cross-cultural intellectual contexts in the formation of political modernity in East Central Europe, on the key mediating nature of continental flows of ideas

¹²² Balázs Trencsényi, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics in the Interwar Period and Beyond: A Transnational History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025), 9.

¹²³ Trencsényi, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics*, 6–7.

and their local translation, interpretation, and application, as well as the important factor of the clash of historical layers and the alternative temporalities of political modernity generated by these clashes. Likewise, there remains a consistent commitment to comparative and cross-cultural (entangled) analysis that avoids at all costs the homogenization of local specificities and the avoidance of their treatment as national essences.

The present study draws heavily on this methodological framework. In the text, one will find that what constitutes republican political thought as articulated on the Left was in constant interaction with continental and international flows of republican, democratic, and socialist ideas. As this republican language crystallized on the Left in the period under consideration, the ‘local’ adaptation of republican ideas went hand-in-hand with their articulation to address the self-conceptualized problem of historical domination in its various forms. The struggle for a republican state was therefore a struggle for the autonomy and the self-determination of the political community and the individual, for human emancipation through active participation in the political community, and so the ability to secure the political community into the future through radical democracy in both politics and in the economy.

Chapter Overview

Finally, to round out this introduction, I would like to give a very brief overview of the content and arguments in each chapter in order to guide the reader through the narrative with relative ease.

Chapter One, “The Germination of Leftist Republican Thought,” argues that from the late nineteenth century onward an increasingly coherent language of politics emerged in the Habsburg Empire which we can rightfully call leftist republicanism. This form of republicanism concerned itself above all with national cultural autonomy and self-government,

decentralization and federalism, the escape from domination whether in politics, society, or economy, and the preservation of freedom and independence not only of the individual but of the political community as a collective. Leftist republicanism was largely tied to reformist socialist and civic radical political imaginaries, both streams engaging critically with questions of decentralized statehood, national-cultural autonomy, and the problems of inert agrarian economic structures. In their view, different forms of post-capitalist economic organization ought to be implemented in order to achieve these noble ideas. The chapter traces these ideas across urban centers—Budapest, Chicago, Ljubljana, and Stockholm—showing how they congealed during the crisis years of the First World War. By its end, it becomes clear that while both the Hungarian and South Slavic republican Lefts shared common principles, their visions of postimperial statehood diverged sharply: a United States of Danubia preserving the Habsburg framework for the Hungarians versus a federated Balkan republic requiring its destruction for the South Slavs.

Chapter Two, “The Republican Left in Postimperial Transition,” shows how these arguments developed amid the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the divergent post-imperial transitions of Hungary and Yugoslavia. At the core of leftist republican thought in both contexts was a common notion of radical democratization, a democratized post-capitalist economic framework, and common arguments for national self-determination within federal or decentralized schemes of state organization. Yet comparison reveals that leftist republicans in the Hungarian and South Slavic contexts diverged fundamentally on the future of the post-Habsburg space. The chapter examines the ideational development of leftist republicanism in Hungary during the country’s “republican moment” during the Aster Revolution, the People’s Republic, and the Republic of Councils. The chapter then traces the republican Left’s uncertain struggle for a republic in Yugoslavia, united by a commitment to a republican state form yet divided on questions of centralism, federalism, and the national question. It concludes by

examining the marginalization of the republican Left as the political temporality of the “republican moment” closed in Hungary: the erosion of the public sphere during the Hungarian Republic of Councils and the brutal counterrevolutionary persecution that followed.

Chapter Three, “The Retreat to Culture,” follows the republican Left’s turn to metapolitical activity between 1921 and 1935. Now, the republican Left turned toward culture as the field to develop and propagate their political thought. This took place primarily in three areas of reflection: historical studies and memoir literature, reflections on the boundaries and meaning of the political community, and the sharpened debates over democracy which resulted in the 1930s. The chapter demonstrates that this retreat still aimed at collective human flourishing through mental cultivation. Through historical studies and memoir literature, the republican Left clarified the political community’s progressive collective history; through reflection on the political community, they addressed the unresolved national, women’s, and social questions; through their debates over democracy, they developed future-oriented understandings of radical democracy, solidarity, and human autonomy. During this period, a key conceptual shift occurred: the concept ‘republic’ was increasingly replaced by ‘democracy’ at the heart of leftist republican political language, returning in large part to the early modern conceptual layers associated with ‘republic’—namely autonomy, independence, and self-government.

Chapter Four, “The Return to Politics,” examines how the republican Left was brought back into active political life from the mid-1930s through 1948. It first follows the outlines of their thought as it changed amid the seeming victory of international fascism, tracing attempts at popular front formation in both Yugoslavia and Hungary through the network of antifascist “periodical communities.” The chapter then examines the wildly divergent wartime experiences—broad active resistance movements in Yugoslavia from 1941 versus the illusion of peace in Hungary until 1944—showing that despite these differences, the theoretical

consistency of leftist republican thought was maintained around radical democratization and collective self-determination. Finally, the chapter traces the development of debates over democracy in both countries from autumn 1944 through postwar reconstruction. While Hungary experienced a pluralist “interlude” through 1948 and Yugoslavia underwent rapid Stalinization, the conclusion makes clear that leftist republican thought did not entirely disappear. We may think briefly on Hungary’s 1956 Revolution and subsequent liberalization as well as Yugoslavia’s post-1948 democratic socialist trajectory.

CHAPTER 1. THE GERMINATION OF LEFTIST REPUBLICAN THOUGHT¹

This chapter argues that from the late nineteenth century onward an increasingly coherent language of leftist republicanism emerged in the Habsburg Empire, concerned above all with national cultural autonomy, decentralization and federalism, the escape from domination in politics, society, and the economy, and the preservation of the freedom and independence of both the individual and the political community. Leftist republicanism was largely tied to the reformist socialist and civic radical political imaginaries. Socialists engaged critically with Kautskyan social democracy, while civic radicals drew on a range of inspirations from the Masarykian “realist” tradition to French radicalism to local social-scientific traditions, as in the Hungarian case. In both streams, a critical dialogue focused on decentralized statehood, national-cultural autonomy, and the problems of inert agrarian economic structures that set the East Central European context onto a different pathway out of capitalism and semi-feudalism. The chapter traces these ideas across a set of urban contexts in the Hungarian and South Slavic linguistic spheres, leaning more heavily on the Slovenian case for the South Slavic side, where socialists and civic radicals were most active in mediating the language of leftist republicanism. By its end, the divergent visions of postimperial republican statehood between the Hungarian and South Slavic contexts become clear: a federalized Danubian republic crafted out of Austria-Hungary on one side, a federated Balkan republic necessitating the dissolution of Austria-Hungary on the other.

¹ Parts of this text were used in edited form for my chapter “Socialism and Decentralization: The Marxist Ambiguity toward Federalism in the Late Habsburg Empire, 1899–1914,” in *From Empire to Federation in Eurasia: Ideas and Practices of Diversity Management*, ed. Ivan Sablin and Egas Bender de Moniz Bandeira (London: Routledge, 2026), 39–62.

1.1. *Federalism, Democratization, and National Self-Determination: Etbin Kristan and the Seed of Leftist Republicanism*

Etbin Kristan departed Trieste for New York City on July 28, 1914.² The previous evening, he held a farewell dinner at the Workers' Lodge (*Delavski dom*) in Trieste with the local political committee of the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party (*Jugoslovenska socialnodemokratska stranka*, JSDS). It would have been a striking event. Kristan co-founded the JSDS in 1896,³ had been the party's leading theorist on the national question (at times adopting the pen name 'Theoreticus'), and had co-edited the party's various press organs for nearly twenty years. For those socialists gathered at the farewell dinner, it felt like a betrayal. Ivan Regent, just twenty years old at the time, recalled decades later that "for me and the other comrades, it was a painful thought that Kristan would leave the Party at this terribly difficult moment. The whirlwind of war was at our doorstep, our leader left the Party in the lurch, went to America, and hardly made a statement throughout the war."⁴ Kristan departed on what turned out to be the final ocean liner to sail directly between Trieste and New York.⁵ Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia before the ship had left the Adriatic.⁶

² The date is given by Ivan Regent, "Kratki spomini na Etbina Kristana (IV.)" (Short Reflections on Etbin Kristan, Part 4), *Primorski dnevnik* 21, no. 286 (December 2, 1965): 3. Majda Kodrič gives the same date in her "Etbin Kristan in socialistično gibanje jugoslovanskih izseljencev v ZDA v letih 1914–1920" (Etbin Kristan and the Socialist Movement of Yugoslav Immigrants in the USA, 1914–1920), *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 23, no. 1–2 (1983): 64. Sections of this contextualization of Kristan are drawn from Cody James Inglis, "Etbin Kristan: Un-American Socialism," in *Political Transformations in the Interwar Period: The Case of Slovenian Political Thought from Yugoslav and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Isidora Grubački and Marko Zajc (Ljubljana: Institute of Contemporary History, 2026), 171–86.

³ On the creation of the party, see Dušan Kermavner, *Začetki slovenske socialne demokracije v desetletju 1884–1894* (The Beginnings of Slovenian Social Democracy in the Decade 1884–1894) (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1963).

⁴ Regent, "Kratki spomini (IV.)," 3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Announced widely in the Austro-Hungarian and international press the following day, e.g.: "Austria Formally Declares War on Servia," *The New York Times* 63, no. 20,640 (July 29, 1914): 1; "Vojska je napovedana!" (The Army is Mobilized!), *Slovenski narod* 67, no. 173 (July 29, 1918): 1–2; "Das Kriegsmanifest des Kaisers" (The Emperor's Declaration of War), *Neue Freie Presse*, no. 17933 (July 29, 1914): 1, etc.

As the July Crisis of 1914 had dragged on, the prospect of war became clear to many educated socialists like Kristan.⁷ Without a doubt, the situation in East Central Europe hastened his decision to leave for the United States. However, Kristan seems to have already made up his mind earlier in 1914, before Sarajevo, owing to an earlier experience in the States in early autumn 1912. The Yugoslav Socialist Federation (*Jugoslovanska socialistična zveza*, JSZ) in Chicago had invited Kristan to give a lecture tour across the United States to South Slavic immigrants. After he arrived, Kristan was taken on a barn-storming tour of the Midwest, attracting new members to the JSZ and collecting \$2000 in donations.⁸ The popular rise of Eugene Debs and the Socialist Party of America (SP) provided a helpful background context.

Initially, the JSZ was formed in July 1910 through a merger of Croatian socialists around the newspaper *Radnička straža* (The Labor Guard), three small Serbian socialist organizations, and the Slovenian Socialist Federation (*Slovenska socialistična zveza*), the latter founded in 1903.⁹ In January 1911, the JSZ became an official foreign-language branch of the SP.¹⁰ Yet for all of the hope that such an affiliation would bring in greater visibility and relevance, the merger proved largely extractive: the SP concerned itself primarily with taking membership fees from the South Slavic socialists while at the same time barring them and all other foreign-language section members from voting on resolutions at SP congresses.¹¹ Unable

⁷ See, e.g., Georges Haupt, "The ISB in July 1914," chapter 9 in *Socialism and the Great War: The Collapse of the Second International* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 183–94.

⁸ Joseph Stipanovich, "'In Unity is Strength': Immigrant Workers and Immigrant Intellectuals in Progressive America: A History of the South Slav Social Democratic Movement, 1900–1918," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1978, 16–17; Ivan Molek, *Slovene Immigrant History, 1900–1950: Autobiographical Sketches*, trans. and ed. Mary Molek (Dover, DE: n.p., 1979), 178–80.

⁹ On the pre-history of the JSZ, see Ivan Čizmić, *Jugoslavenski iseljenički pokret u SAD i stvaranje jugoslavenske države 1918* (The Yugoslav Émigré Movement in the USA and the Creation of the Yugoslav State in 1918) (Zagreb: Institut za hrvatsku povijest, 1974), 23–25; Stipanovich, "'In Unity is Strength'," 2–12 and 138–68; Ivan Čizmić, "Yugoslav Immigrants in the U.S. Labor Movement, 1880–1920," in *American Labor and Immigration History, 1877–1920s: Recent European Research*, ed. Dirk Hoerder (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 177–90; Matjaž Klemenčič, "American Slovenes and the Leftist Movements in the United States in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 15, no. 3 (1996): 22–42;

¹⁰ On the process, see Stipanovich, "'In Unity is Strength,'" 1–14; on the Croatian, Slovenian, and Serbian immigrant socialists in this period, see the articles in *Migracijske teme* 4, no. 1–2, special issue "Immigrants in the Labour Movement of the Countries of Immigration, 1880–1941" (1988).

¹¹ On this, see Stipanovich, "'In Unity is Strength,'" 138–53. The same nativist attitude is reproduced even in contemporary historiography on the party. Jack Ross's *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History*

to participate actively in the SP, the leading members of the JSZ began to turn toward the politicization of South Slavic immigrant workers on their own terms.

Kristan's 1912 tour coincided with the development of this parallel organizational network. During Kristan's trip, he attended the Fifth Congress of the Slovenian National Benefit Society (*Slovenska narodna podporna jednota*, SNPJ) in Milwaukee, where he met Ivan Molek, who had led the adoption of a socialist platform for the SNPJ.¹² He also reestablished contact with Jože Zavertnik, a comrade who had participated in the founding of the JSDS in 1896 and emigrated to the US in 1903. These personal connections allowed Kristan to return and integrate easily in summer 1914.

Kristan had returned to Austria-Hungary in November 1912, but became much less active within the party thereafter.¹³ He soon gave up his position in the JSDS Executive Committee. By the end of February 1914, his role as editor of the JSDS organ *Zarja* (Dawn) had been taken over by union organizer Ivan Tokan.¹⁴ Kristan's participation in the party had diminished to such an extent that he didn't even participate in the JSDS's Ninth Party Congress in late June 1914.¹⁵ This complete retreat from the Slovenian social democratic movement in Austria-Hungary contrasted greatly with the activity and energy he demonstrated before 1912 and then from autumn 1914 onward, following his return to the United States.

Likely sometime in the first or second week of August 1914, Kristan made his way to Chicago after landing in New York City. By the beginning of September, he was given the editorship of the JSZ's organ, *Proletarec*. Kristan became the managing editor and editor-in-

(Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books of the University of Nebraska Press, 2015), is—despite its subtitle—a rather incomplete history: the foreign-language sections are treated only in passing. Some text is spent on the large and influential Finnish membership, but nowhere are the South Slavic groups mentioned.

¹² Molek, *Slovene Immigrant History*, 177–79.

¹³ Kodrič, "Ethin Kristan in socialistično gibanje," 64.

¹⁴ Kristan's final issue as editor-in-chief was *Zarja* 4, no. 813 (February 21, 1914). Ivan Tokan began his work with *Zarja* 4, no. 814 (February 25, 1914).

¹⁵ See "Deveti strankin zbor" (Ninth Party Congress), *Zarja* 4, no. 850 (July 1, 1914): 1–2; coverage continued in the following issue, no. 851 (July 4, 1914): 1–2. By coincidence, on the first day of the JSDS Congress, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, were assassinated by Gavrilo Princip in Sarajevo.

chief of the paper—which provided him with a regular income—as well as the author of many front-page editorials and a regular participant in the JSZ Executive Committee’s monthly meetings *ex officio*.¹⁶ With his reputation as a writer and socialist theorist already cemented by the turn of the twentieth century, Kristan obtained a position of intellectual influence within the JSZ and the wider South Slavic immigrant population in the Midwest.

Kristan’s influence had a direct impact on the JSZ’s position toward the war. While the SP line remained staunchly anti-war,¹⁷ socialist anti-war appeals chafed against a distinct rise in nationalist sentiments among the South Slavic immigrants, who saw the war against Austria-Hungary as one of national liberation.¹⁸ The Yugoslav Committee (*Jugoslavenski odbor*), founded in London shortly after the outbreak of the war, quickly began to make links with the South Slavic immigrant population in the United States, sending the Croatian lawyer Franko Potočnjak at the end of January 1915 to rally support behind the postwar creation of a unified South Slavic state.¹⁹ Potočnjak published a call for a South Slavic national congress to meet in Chicago on March 10, 1915.²⁰ In the leadup, a group of Slovenian immigrants created the nationalist Slovenian League (*Slovenska liga*) in Cleveland, Ohio, with connections to Catholic clerical politics.²¹ To the JSZ, the whole affair smacked of the chauvinism and clerical politics which the JSZ and the socialist Slovenian labor movement had fought in Austria-Hungary in the decades previous.

¹⁶ Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota (hereafter IHRC), Fond 1149 Yugoslav Socialist Federation Records (hereafter IHRC 1149), Folder 1: Executive Committee, Minutes, 1910–1915, Session of the JSZ Executive, September 5, 1914, p. 138. Kristan is mentioned here for the first time, representing the editorial board of *Proletarec*.

¹⁷ Ross, *The Socialist Party of America*, 146–215; Molek, *Slovene Immigrant History*, 191–93.

¹⁸ Čizmić, *Jugoslavenski iseljenički pokret*, 37–45.

¹⁹ Milada Paulová, *Jugoslavenski odbor: povijest jugoslavenske emigracije za svjetskog rata od 1914.–1918*. (The Yugoslav Committee: A History of the Yugoslav Emigration during the World War, 1914–1918) (Zagreb: Prosvjetna nakladna zadruka, 1925), 66–72; Čizmić, *Jugoslavenski iseljenički pokret*, 47–71.

²⁰ Paulová, *Jugoslavenski odbor*, 69; Čizmić, *Jugoslavenski iseljenički pokret*, 51–52.

²¹ “Poziv zavednim Slovencem za Slovensko ligo” (Call to Conscious Slovenes for the Slovenian League), *Clevelandska Amerika* 8, no. 15 (February 19, 1915): 1; “Narodno zborovanje” (National Congress), *Clevelandska Amerika* 8, no. 16 (February 23, 1915): 1. See also Čizmić, *Jugoslavenski iseljenički pokret*, 51–55.

Kristan and the JSZ reacted quickly to Potočnjak's call and the formation of the Slovenian League.²² "The proponents—here individual persons, some kind of association—describe the task of the League as 'the liberation of the Slovenian nation,' 'national autonomy,' 'unification with the Croats,' and so on, all without clear definitions or precise concepts," Kristan wrote.²³ The JSZ Executive Committee argued that fundraising for the League and Yugoslav Committee was an undue burden on the impoverished working class. Instead, they wrote, "the Yugoslav Socialist Federation, which stands strictly on the platform of the International, that is, consistently on the platform of the freedom, independence, and equality of each nation ... rejects all games with the fate of the [Slovenian] nation, and vigorously protests against all attempts to exploit the nation for unknown purposes, in which it is clear that only money is being demanded from the working people again."²⁴ The JSZ declared that it would not participate in the Chicago congress.

Furthermore, Kristan claimed, Potočnjak himself had falsely suggested that the war in Europe had become one between *germanstvo* and *slovanstvo*, an ethnic war between Germanic peoples and Slavs. This was patently false; the wider war, Kristan insisted, was rather one of imperialist antagonism. There was no reason to subject oneself to the "imperialism" or "tyranny" of the Romanov Empire merely for the sake of some Slavic camaraderie. A solution to the social question was instead needed. Kristan identified this solution in socialism, the system which would truly provide "freedom from tyranny." Resolving the national question by itself, Kristan argued, was only a partial solution. It was the social question "which encompasses the real causes of oppression and exploitation." Still, national unification, particularly the "democratic unification" of the Yugoslavs, would remove one large "obstacle

²² JSZ Executive Committee, "Izjava" (Declaration), *Proletarec* 10, no. 389 (February 23, 1915): 1; "Svoboda od tiranstva" (Freedom from Tyranny), *Proletarec* 10, no. 389 (February 23, 1915): 1.

²³ JSZ Executive Committee, "Izjava," *Proletarec* 10, no. 389 (February 23, 1915): 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

to international social progress” and help to realize a key goal: the “Yugoslav republic.”²⁵ The seed of leftist republicanism had been planted.

As Dušan Kermavner put it some decades later, these early debates allowed the JSZ and Kristan to clarify their “internationalist and anti-war position, opposition to tsarism, republicanism in relation to the political and socialism in relation to the social order of the state in which Slovenes would achieve national freedom.”²⁶ The idea of a democratic, socialist Yugoslav republic came to be a common position shared by other groups of South Slavic socialists in the US—and, by 1917, in Europe—as the war went on.²⁷ For example, Frano Supilo’s break with Trumbić and the Yugoslav Committee in 1916 only empowered the socialists in their republican visions for a postwar state. Although Supilo was no socialist, his disagreement with the Yugoslav Committee hinged precisely on his rejection of unification on an Italian model, where the Kingdom of Serbia would act as a Balkan Piedmont and extend its monarchic form to the other South Slavs. Supilo’s idealistic anti-monarchic liberalism contrasted with Trumbić’s pragmatism, where national independence had to be won at any price.²⁸ Support for the republican position found fertile intellectual ground among the South Slavic socialists in the JSZ, who programmatically set out a similar position and maintained it throughout the war.

They soon had a rather visible opportunity. On December 6, 1915, Representative Meyer London of the Socialist Party introduced a Joint Resolution in the US House of Representatives (H. J. Res. 38, 1915), “calling upon the President to convene a congress of neutral nations.”²⁹ London personally sent a letter through SP channels to Frank Petrič, secretary of the JSZ Executive Committee, “urging the Yugoslav Socialist Federation to

²⁵ “Svoboda od tiranstva” (Freedom from Tyranny), *Proletarec* 10, no. 389 (February 23, 1915): 1.

²⁶ Dušan Kermavner, “O protivojnom stališču slovenskih socialistov v ZDA leta 1915” (On the Anti-War Position of Slovenian Socialists in the USA in 1915), *Naši razgledi* 16, no. 15 (August 12, 1967): 408.

²⁷ Čizmić, *Jugoslavenski iseljenički pokret*, 76.

²⁸ Paulová, *Jugoslavenski odbor*, 195–214; Stipanović, “‘In Unity is Strength’,” 21–22.

²⁹ 64 Cong. Rec. H32 (December 6, 1915); Čizmić, *Jugoslavenski iseljenički pokret*, 77–78.

cooperate with the Committee on Foreign Affairs” while it held hearings on London’s resolution.³⁰ The JSZ Executive Committee convened an extraordinary session on February 19, 1916: Etbin Kristan was tasked with preparing a memorandum to be submitted to the House Committee; Karel Pergler, a representative of the Bohemian Socialist Federation, was delegated to represent the JSZ at the hearings alongside the Czechs.³¹ The memorandum which Kristan drafted was accepted and sent along with Petrič’s signature. The Slovenian-language original was quickly published in *Proletarec*.³²

The English-language copy was received by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs during its hearings on February 24 and 25, 1916, and published subsequently in the printed proceedings.³³ Kristan’s text argued that the war in Europe would, at some point, envelop the United States as well, owing to “all kinds of entanglements” stemming from the country’s trade and relations with European nations.³⁴ An unfair peace imposed from the victors’ position of strength would only generate a new war, “if conditions in [the] New Europe do not rest upon just fundamentals.”³⁵ The JSZ argued that Rep. London’s resolution had to be supported in order to create a just peace, which meant particularly that “occupied territories be evacuated” and that “liberty be given to oppressed nations.”³⁶ Kristan argued that this would be a moment of historical liberation, proceeding then to outline the history of the South Slavs’s domination by foreign, imperialist powers, namely Ottoman and Habsburg. Imperialist expansion in Central and Southeastern Europe had led to an artificial separation of the South Slavs’ ethnographic

³⁰ IHRC 1149, Folder 2: Yugoslav Socialist Federation, Executive Committee, Minutes, 1915–1920, Minutes of the Extraordinary Session of the JSZ Executive, February 19, 1916, f. 2.

³¹ IHRC 1149, Folder 2: Yugoslav Socialist Federation, Executive Committee, Minutes, 1915–1920, Minutes of the Extraordinary Session of the JSZ Executive, February 19, 1916, f. 2.

³² JSZ Executive Committee [Etbin Kristan], “Jugoslovanska Socialistična Zveza ameriškemu kongresu o položaju Jugoslovanov v Evropi” (JSZ to the US Congress on the Position of Yugoslavs in Europe), *Proletarec* 11, no. 441 (February 22, 1916): 5–6.

³³ Meyer London et al., *Congress of Neutral Nations: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Sixty-Fourth Congress, First Session, on H. J. Res. 38* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916), 70–75.

³⁴ London et al., *Congress of Neutral Nations*, 70.

³⁵ London et al., *Congress of Neutral Nations*, 70.

³⁶ London et al., *Congress of Neutral Nations*, 70.

unity. The resulting condition of small, bifurcated nationhood—which, Kristan insisted, even “blocked the way of progress of the universal evolution of all mankind”³⁷—could only be solved through national unification within an independent, sovereign state. His formulation is worth quoting at length:

For practical reasons, as well as for ideal economic, and political, culturic, and social reasons, and because of natural egotism, meaning the power of will for existence, and because of desire to become efficient coworkers for uplifting the culture of mankind in general, the south Slavs are looking toward their unity. The best form of this unity would be a democratic south Slavic Republic in which all races of the Slavonic south, heretofore separated, could have the autonomy, and in which they could freely endeavor to achieve even more close associations. In view of the principles so many times solemnly expressed by our cothinkers of Balkan, we can say that the second goal of this republic would be its combining with the rest of the Balkan nations, including self-governing Macedonia, into a democratic federation in the greater republic. Still further, this federation should become a member of the united states of Europe.³⁸

Kristan set out a vision of what ought to be called cascading republican sovereignty. His formula offered not only a solution to local national questions but also to questions of international and inter-state relations. (Tellingly, Kristan did not mention the social question in this text addressed to the US Congress.) The theoretical foundations supporting this formula, however, had been developed in the decades previous, through Kristan’s theorizations on the national question. These ideas, then, ought to be taken not as a single point of genealogical origin, but rather a key expression of the rhizomatic proliferation of republican ideas on the Left.

The idea of a democratized, federal state with non-territorial national cultural autonomies was introduced by Kristan on behalf of the JSDS already at the 1899 Brno Congress of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Austria. The congress itself had been convened to

³⁷ London et al., *Congress of Neutral Nations*, 71.

³⁸ London et al., *Congress of Neutral Nations*, 74–75. I have reproduced the English original here without edits.

pass a *Gesamtpartei* resolution on the national question.³⁹ While Kristan's proposal was not accepted, the general formulation of the final national program retained important compromises between the Austrian and South Slavic positions. Importantly for our investigation, some basic principles from the 1899 Brno discussions were retained in the 1916 JSZ memorandum: the national question, intertwined so closely with the social question in Austria-Hungary, could only be resolved through the distribution of "equal rights," the joining of nations into a "democratic union," the implementation of "national self-government," and the destruction of "every form of bureaucratic centralism of the State as well as the feudal privileges of the Provinces."⁴⁰ Austria, according to both the 1899 Brno program and the 1916 JSZ memorandum, "must be changed into a democratic Federal State."⁴¹

While the "first goal" of the 1916 program would have been the establishment of a democratic Yugoslav republic with strong internal autonomies for each constitutive nation, Kristan likewise saw this program extending down the Balkan peninsula as the second. The notion of a federal Balkan republic in socialist political thought had its own intellectual history.⁴² Kristan himself had played a key role in its theorization. Following Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in October 1908, ideas of Balkan unity gained new life and urgency. Karl Kautsky, at the pinnacle of his influence, implored socialists in the

³⁹ For the minutes of the Brno Congress, see *Verhandlungen des Gesamtparteitages der Sozialdemokratie in Oesterreich* (Proceedings of the All-Party Meeting of Social Democracy in Austria) (Vienna: Ignaz Brand, 1899). Kristan's proposal on the national question and Austria-Hungary's restructuring can be found in the *Verhandlungen*, xv. The full debate, including the original proposal of the *Gesamtexecutive* of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria, can be found in the *Verhandlungen*, 74–94.

⁴⁰ London et al., *Congress of Neutral Nations*, 73.

⁴¹ London et al., *Congress of Neutral Nations*, 73.

⁴² On socialist ideas of Balkan federalism, see Andreja Živković and Dragan Plavšić, ed., *The Balkan Socialist Tradition and the Balkan Federation, 1871–1915* (London: Porcupine Press, 2003); Leften Stavros Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation: A History of the Movement toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1964); James Robertson, "Imagining the Balkans, Space of Revolution, 1870–1914," chapter 1 in "Balkan Worlds: Community, Space and Revolutionary Internationalism on the Yugoslav Literary Left, 1870–1938" (Doctoral Dissertation, New York City, New York, New York University, 2014), 1–36; and Stefan Gužvica, "Sickle without a Hammer: Revolution and Nation-Building in the Balkans, 1900s–1930s" (Doctoral Dissertation, Regensburg, Germany, University of Regensburg, 2022), 247–396.

Balkans in December 1908 to coordinate and lay the groundwork for “all the nations of the Balkan peninsula to be united in a federal republic.”⁴³

Using the example of the Bulgarian nation, Kautsky claimed that socialists ought to work to disentangle the national and dynastic principles. The process of modern national unification in Europe had been conducted on behalf of monarchic dynasties and expansionist imperialism, functioning among the Bulgarians just as it had for the Italians or Germans. Macedonia, Kautsky argued, was a case in point: competition among the Ottoman, Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian monarchies over Macedonia could result in the incorporation of *their* nation through territorial state expansion, but would in turn separate other nations in Macedonia from their co-nationals in surrounding states. Armed conflict would certainly ensue. The only way to keep the historical integrity of Macedonia intact—with its mixed Bulgarian, Greek, Turkish, and Serbian populations—was through a federal Balkan republic which could overlay such diversity in unified structures.⁴⁴ Kautsky suggested that democratic revolution and supra-national unification would be the only means by which socialism could eventually come about. Not only would this eliminate the external economic and geopolitical dependencies of small states, but it would likewise eliminate the class and estate stratification and so internal social domination exacerbated by both capitalism and the dynastic principle.

⁴³ Karl Kautsky, “Die nationalen Aufgaben der Sozialisten unter den Balkanslawen” (The National Tasks of Socialists among the Balkan Slavs), *Der Kampf* 2, no. 3 (December 1908): 106; Karl Kautsky, “The National Tasks of Socialists among the Balkan Slavs,” in *The Balkan Socialist Tradition*, 159. The text was written as the preface to the Bulgarian-language edition of Kautsky’s “Republik und Sozialdemokratie in Frankreich” (The Republic and Social Democracy in France), *Die Neue Zeit* 23, nos. 1/9–15 (1904–5), published as К. Кауцки, *Републиката във Франция и социалдемократията* (The Republic in France and Social Democracy) (Sofia: Партиятната социалистическа книжарница, 1909), i–xii.

⁴⁴ Notably, nowhere was there mention of a separate Macedonian nation. On the “Macedonian Question” and the Balkan Left, see Alexis Heraclides, *The Macedonian Question and the Macedonians: A History* (London: Routledge, 2020); Tchavdar Marinov, “We, the Macedonians: The Paths of Macedonian Supranationalism, 1878–1912,” in *We, the People: The Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Diana Mishkova (Budapest: CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY Press, 2009), 107–38; and Andrew Rossos, “Macedonianism and Macedonian Nationalism on the Left,” in *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, ed. Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995), 219–54.

A republican polity which underwent thorough democratization was the only way to ensure that socialism would be realized in the historical development of any given political community. This was the theoretical fundament standing at the base of Kautsky's argument, drawn first and foremost from the historical example of the French Revolution, filtered through Engels's and Marx's republicanism as well.⁴⁵ A case in point is Engels's critique of the 1891 Erfurt Program, which Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein had written. There, Engels asserted directly that "our [the German Social Democratic] Party and the working class can only come to power within the form of a democratic republic."⁴⁶ Such a form of state, Engels argued, was "the specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as well as how the Great French Revolution had succeeded."⁴⁷ Engels qualified that a 'unitary' republic could also be a federal one in the American sense—though not a *confederal* one in the Swiss sense—meaning "full self-administration in each province, district, and municipality via clerks (*Beamte*) elected through universal suffrage."⁴⁸ Kautsky had, by 1908, assimilated the view that the creation of a *republican* polity was a necessary condition for the establishment of socialism, and proposed the *federalization* of a Balkan republic as a means to overcome the condition of small state- and nationhood.

"Therefore," Kautsky wrote, "the national idea need not be an obstacle to the unification of the Balkan peoples in a federal state. It may in fact draw fresh strength from such a state." He continued: "It is not the nationalist idea that stands in the way of bringing together the Balkans peoples into one state, but *dynastic* interests. These peoples can unite as equals in a *democratic* manner."⁴⁹ Equal, democratic, *republican* unification of the Balkan peoples into a

⁴⁵ On the republican tradition within Marxism, see Bruno Leipold, *Citizen Marx: Republicanism and the Formation of Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024).

⁴⁶ Friedrich Engels, "Zur Kritik des sozialdemokratischen Programmentwurfs 1891" (Critique of the Erfurt Program), in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, vol. I/32, *Werke—Artikel—Entwürfe. März 1891 bis August 1895*, ed. Peer Kösling (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010) 49–50.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁹ Kautsky, "The National Tasks of Socialists," in *The Balkan Socialist Tradition*, 160–61; cf. Kautsky, "Die nationalen Aufgaben der Sozialisten," 107–108.

single federal state was not a vision of loose association of independent nation-states, but rather a democratized multinational state. This, in Kautsky's view, was the necessary basis from which the establishment of socialism could proceed. The terms of debate on the republican content of socialist ideas of Balkan federalism were, by and large, framed by the reception, interaction, adaptation of and debate with Kautsky's broader democratic republicanism.⁵⁰

Some months after Kautsky's article, Kristan urged the JSDS Executive Committee in Ljubljana to begin planning a congress of social democratic forces to respond to the annexation and to discuss "the national and cultural questions of the South Slavs."⁵¹ Social democrats from Bosnia and Herzegovina had likewise approached the JSDS Executive Committee "to establish a common direction for the clarification of questions which have become or will become real in the aftermath of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina."⁵² The result was the Yugoslav Social Democratic Conference, held in Ljubljana on November 21–22, 1909.⁵³ Delegates from the Austro-German, Bohemian, Croatian, and Serbian social democratic formations arrived in Ljubljana and, after some deliberation, passed what came to be known as the Tivoli Resolution.

The document argued that the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina proved that "Austria-Hungary as a great power has attempted a vigorous thrust in the imperialist direction." This, in the view of the social democrats, formed a "new capitalist exploitation" which would subject the South Slavs within the monarchy to "proletarianization and impoverishment" based on the existent system of "centralist absolutism" and "feudal agrarianism."⁵⁴ In response, the social democrats insisted that the socialist parties in Austria-Hungary had to organize and

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Ben Lewis, "Karl Kautsky's Democratic Republicanism," in *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, ed. and trans. Ben Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1–40; Michael J. Thompson, "Karl Kautsky and the Theory of Socialist Republicanism," in *The German Revolution and Political Theory*, ed. Gaard Kets and James Muldoon (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 159–81.

⁵¹ "Jugoslovanska konferenca," *Rdeči prapor* 12, no. 22 (March 17, 1909): 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Originally planned for Easter weekend (April 11–12) 1909, but was postponed because the Hungarian Social Democratic Party would hold their party conference for the same weekend. See *Rdeči prapor* 12, no. 27 (April 3, 1909): 3.

⁵⁴ "Jugoslovanska socialno-demokratska konferenca," *Rdeči prapor* 12, no. 128 (November 25, 1909): 1.

coordinate their efforts to upend “absolutism and feudal dualism” through the struggle for “national democracy” as well as “a new political idea of national autonomy.”⁵⁵ By this, they meant the federal restructuring of Austria-Hungary so that “within a single economic space, each nation, irrespective of historical borders, would be guaranteed unity, independence, and self-government in all national and cultural matters.”⁵⁶ This was a restatement of Kristan’s idea of a non-territorial “federalism of nations,” a position he had maintained since the turn of the twentieth century.⁵⁷ It also resonated strongly with Engels’ and Kautsky’s ideas of a single, unified state with strong concentric autonomies from the municipality through the province to the center, an idea registered in agrarian form by the JSDS’s young theorist Albin Prepeluh already in 1903.⁵⁸

The key provisions of the 1909 Tivoli Resolution included “the complete national unification of all Yugoslavs, irrespective of differences in name, religion, script, dialect, or language”; to that end, “a common national-autonomous cultural life as a free unit in a fully democratic confederation of nations.” This pointed toward a broader “complete democratization of all national, state, and political institutions,” as well as the introduction of universal, equal, and secret suffrage in all diets and legislative bodies in Austria-Hungary, including newly annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵⁹ The South Slavs were no longer to be conceived of as separate nations, but rather as Yugoslavs artificially separated by the contingent tragedies of historical dismemberments.⁶⁰ The next practical step would be a concerted effort

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See note 44. See also Etbin Kristan, “Nationalismus und Sozialismus in Oesterreich” (Nationalism and Socialism in Austria), *Akademie: Orgán socialistické mládeže—Organ der socialistischen Jugend* 2, no. 11 (1898): 485–91; idem., “Národnostní otázka v jižním Rakousku” (The National Question in Southern Austria), *Akademie: Revue socialistická—Sozialistische Revue* 4, no. 3 (1900): 88–94; idem., *Narodno vprašanje in Slovenci* (The National Question and the Slovenes) (Ljubljana: Delavska tiskovna družba, 1908).

⁵⁸ Abditus [Albin Prepeluh], *Občina in socializem: Kaj zahtevamo od občine* (The Municipality and Socialism: What We Demand from the Municipality) (Ljubljana: Naši zapiski, 1903).

⁵⁹ “Jugoslovanska socialno-demokratska konferenca,” *Rdeči prapor* 12, no. 128 (November 25, 1909): 1.

⁶⁰ Cf. Božidar Jezernik, *Yugoslavia without Yugoslavs: The History of a National Idea* (New York–Oxford: Berghahn, 2023).

“to reach an agreement on a common national language and orthography as the first prerequisite for a complete unified national life of the Yugoslavs.”⁶¹ The text itself was a collaborative effort among South Slavic social democrats across the Cisleithanian–Transleithanian divide, primarily authored by Etbin Kristan along with Juraj Demetrović and Vitomir Korać from the Social Democratic Party of Croatia-Slavonia in Zagreb.⁶² The idea for future Yugoslav political unity centered on a socialist version of integral Yugoslavism combined with the Austro-Marxist insistence on the full democratization and federalization of Austria-Hungary—though, in Kristan’s formulation, federalization would be composed of relations between nations rather than between territories.

Three months later, the JSDS delegated another key social democratic intellectual from the Slovenian context, Henrik Tuma, to an equally important social democratic conference in Belgrade, the Balkan Socialist Conference (January 7–9, 1910), which gathered social democratic groups from Southeastern Europe on a regional level, crossing imperial and nation-state boundaries.⁶³ The conference resolution bears similarity to both Kautsky’s article from December 1908 and the 1909 Tivoli Resolution. The focus shifted from Kautsky’s stress on the dynastic principle as a constraint against Balkan unity and rather pointed toward a broader European system of imperialism, as Andreja Živković has pointed out.⁶⁴ Yet the shift was not so drastic, nor were the views sharply opposed. Kautsky did discuss the fact that imperialism was intertwined with the dynastic principle; the Resolution of the First Balkan Social Democratic Conference likewise recognized that “the capitalist bourgeoisie, with the help of

⁶¹ “Jugoslovanska socialno-demokratska konferenca,” *Rdeči prapor* 12, no. 128 (November 25, 1909): 1.

⁶² Franc Rozman, “Tri pisma o Tivolski konferenciji leta 1909” (Three Letters about the Tivoli Conference of 1909), *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 13, no. 1–2 (1973): 239–43. Kristan sent an outline of the resolution to Viktor Adler ahead of time, in a letter dated November 16, 1909.

⁶³ See, e.g., *Rdeči prapor* 13, no. 4 (January 11, 1910)–no. 8 (January 20, 1910) for coverage; see Živković and Plavšić, ed., *The Balkan Socialist Tradition*, 151–98, for the relevant article from Kautsky, cited above, texts from Dimitrije Tucović, Christian Rakovsky, and Dimitur Blagoev on the conference, as well as the conference resolution.

⁶⁴ Andreja Živković, introduction to chapter 6, “The Balkan Federation and Balkan Social Democracy,” in *The Balkan Socialist Tradition*, 152.

monarchism, under the existing economic, political, and national conditions in south-eastern Europe, creates new national antagonisms that prevent the resolution of the Balkan Question by way of the unification of the peoples.”⁶⁵ It was a shift in emphasis rather than a shift in the type of analysis.

The main point was coherent across the line of thinking among social democrats in East Central Europe from the late nineteenth century onward: the struggle was for “full democratic self-government by the people and to national independence,” which ultimately ought to result in the peoples of the Balkans “combining their economic forces into one whole, abolishing artificially drawn borders, and enabling them to live together in full reciprocity and in united defense against common danger.”⁶⁶ As Kautsky had stated, one of the key consequences of the French Revolution was the ability of revolutionaries to unite the political community in common defense against external and internal enemies. The same lesson had to be applied to the Balkan Question as well as the national question in the continental empires of Europe.

It should now be clear that Kristan’s authorship of the 1916 JSZ memorandum, presented to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, was not simply an immediate reaction to the wartime situation in Europe, or a quick appeal to the American model of federal republicanism. Rather, it was informed by nearly two decades of theorization on the national and state questions in Austria-Hungary and the Balkans. At times, this proceeded with Kristan’s active theorization; in other moments, separate theoretical developments were disclosed through personal and party connections. The creation of a federal Yugoslav republic meant the full integration of the South Slavs into a political and cultural Yugoslav nation, which would constitute the political community of the republic. By extending this upward to a federal republic of Balkan peoples, Kristan extended the theoretical interventions of the post-annexation social democratic responses put forward in the 1909 Tivoli Resolution and the 1910

⁶⁵ “Resolution of the First Balkan Social Democratic Conference,” in *The Balkan Socialist Tradition*, 165.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 165–66.

Resolution of the First Balkan Social Democratic Conference. Full democratization and national unification could only come about through the process of establishing an independent, federated Balkan republic. The escape from capitalist exploitation and the continental—even global—system of imperialism could only occur in democratized, republican units with clearly defined political communities that unified cultural nations. Finally, Kristan’s vision of a United States of Europe, the final goal of the 1916 JSZ memorandum, would be comprised of these federal republics, both national and regional. This scheme of cascading or concentric republican sovereignty moved from self-administering municipalities with elected officials outward across provinces, federations, and macro-regions, upward to the continental level.

The formula of full or complete democratization, federalism, the creation of a unified political community, and the (macro-)regional horizons of a post-capitalist economic form would constitute the basis of republican thought on the Left in East Central Europe throughout the twentieth century. Kristan’s texts taken together are a representation of this stream of political thought. Further elements, like the boundaries of inclusion in the political community, or the relationship between the political community’s culture and its history, will be further developed out of this basis, as the following three chapters of this dissertation will demonstrate. This ideational structure largely held true in both the Hungarian and South Slavic linguistic spaces, where this type of republicanism stood in complete opposition to the authoritarian, right-wing, and monarchist ruling regimes that constituted in Hungary and Yugoslavia in the wake of the First World War.

1.2. *The Crisis of 1917: Budapest, Stockholm, Ljubljana*

The immanent fact of a ‘republican moment’ in East Central Europe would have been difficult to discern from the inside out. Yet, in retrospect and in a regional and transnational comparison, this moment came into being first as a purely intellectual or ideational phenomenon.

On October 21, 1916, Cisleithanian Minister President Count Karl von Stürgkh was assassinated by the Austro-German social democrat Friedrich Adler. Stürgkh had “adjourned” the Cisleithanian *Reichsrat* on March 16, 1914, opening the door to rule by fiat even before the July Crisis and the outbreak of war.⁶⁷ Adler’s assassination was a radical act of protest against the absolutism which had obtained in Cisleithania in the intervening two years.⁶⁸ Stürgkh’s successors tried haphazardly to liberalize the system of war absolutism in reaction, a process given further momentum after the death of Franz Joseph and the succession of Karl to the throne in November 1916. In more ways than one, it was the beginning of the end.

During late summer and early autumn 1916, the Central Powers “had reached their limits” in conducting the war and the various occupation regimes from the Balkans to the Low Countries.⁶⁹ This crisis of military operations and logistics likewise led “to politics being reformulated and restructured” in quite radical and unexpected ways on the home front.⁷⁰ For the Hungarian Left in particular, this was confirmation enough that the Habsburg imperial framework seemed to be a house built on sand. The wartime sense of domestic crisis in Cisleithania had been induced by the suspension of civilian government since the beginning of

⁶⁷ Albeit inadvertently. See point III in the minutes of the meeting of the Ministerial Council, July 23, 1914, in *Die Protokolle des cisleithanischen Ministerrates 1867–1918*, vol. 8, *Erster Weltkrieg*, Part 1, 23. Juli 1914–22. November 1916, ed. Wladimir Fischer-Nebmaier (Vienna: Verlag der ÖAW, 2023), 5; in *ibid.*, 5n10, the editors state that: “The *Reichsrat* was adjourned by Stürgkh on March 16, 1914. See *MR* (Ministerratsprotokoll) from March 16, 1914, point I. [Yet to be published.—CJI] On the pre-history, see Rumpler, *Parlament und Regierung*, 885–892,” meaning: Helmut Rumpler, “Parlament und Regierung Cisleithaniens 1867 bis 1914” (*Parliament and Government in Cisleithania, 1867–1918*) in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 7, *Verfassung und Parlamentarismus*, Part 1, *Verfassungsrecht, Verfassungswirklichkeit, zentrale Repräsentativkörperschaften*, ed. Helmut Rumpler and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Verlag der ÖAW, 2000), 885–92.

⁶⁸ Charles A. Gulick, *Austria: From Habsburg to Hitler*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), 38.

⁶⁹ On Austria-Hungary’s military campaigns at the end of 1916 and beginning of 1917 as well as the Austro-Hungarian–German–American diplomatic situation, see Manfred Rauchensteiner, *The First World War and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1914–1918*, trans. Alex J. Kay and Anna Güttel-Bellert (Vienna–Cologne–Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 667–89.

⁷⁰ Rauchensteiner, *The First World War*, 590.

the war.⁷¹ As the war dragged on, that feeling of internal crisis was amplified by food shortages and aggressive censorship. In Hungary and Croatia-Slavonia, however, civilian government had remained partially intact. The public sphere was comparatively more open, though censorship certainly still occurred and harsh repressions were not unknown to perceived enemies or supposed foreign agents. By no means could we frame the prewar and wartime Tisza regime as anything but authoritarian, and the semblance of a liberalized public sphere in Hungary and Croatia-Slavonia was rather a downstream consequence of Tisza's reactionary intransigence against Viennese centralization. As 1916 turned into 1917 and the crisis deepened, these authoritarian tendencies in Hungary only hardened.

With the February Revolution in Russia and the entry of the United States into the war in spring 1917, Austria-Hungary entered an even deeper domestic and international crisis. These circumstances forced open “the horizons of political imagination,” to echo Balázs Trencsényi and his co-authors.⁷² As they wrote, “in many cases the prospect of independence for the nations included in the imperial framework of belligerent powers became a realistic agenda only from 1917 onwards. Prior to that, the advocates of national independence were outnumbered by those who hoped for some sort of decentralizing reform of the existing multinational polities.”⁷³ Emboldened by these crisis developments, intellectuals of all stripes began to call more aggressively for reform, restructuring, or even the dissolution of the empire. The beginning of the republican moment in East Central Europe coincided with this deep crisis of the state-society complex and the quick renewal of oppositional intellectual life. In the intervening period between spring 1917 and autumn 1918, the advent of leftist republicanism was articulated through a dense series of pamphlets, manifestos, memoranda, articles, speeches,

⁷¹ See, e.g., John Deak and Jonathan E. Gumz, “How to Break a State: The Habsburg Monarchy's Internal War, 1914–1918,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2017): 1105–136.

⁷² Balázs Trencsényi et al., *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, vol. 2, *Negotiating Modernity in the “Short Twentieth Century” and Beyond*, Part 1, 1918–1968 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5.

⁷³ Trencsényi et al., *A History of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2/1, 5.

and declarations. The consolidation of a modern republican Left began precisely during this wider “declaration movement,” to take a term from Slovenian historiography and extend it outward.⁷⁴

The language of leftist republicanism took its cues ‘from below’ as much as from the higher realm of theory. On May 1, 1917, International Labor Day was celebrated once again after two years being banned in Cisleithania. Sporadic strikes began in armaments works and railway workshops; among the crowds in Prague, one heard shouts for Masaryk, still in exile; a series of strikes led to the formation of a workers’ council in Prague under Social Democratic leadership.⁷⁵ In Budapest, where May Day had been celebrated during the war years, there was an even larger, near-complete general strike. Thousands took part in mass political meetings. The following day, factory workers went on strike for an hour to demand universal suffrage for men and women, expanded welfare and labor protections, Prime Minister István Tisza’s dismissal, and peace without annexations.⁷⁶ The momentum toward democratization seemed to be growing into a mass movement.

The following week, formal negotiations began among the civic radical, social democratic, Christian socialist, and liberal democratic forces in Hungary to create a “Suffrage Bloc” (*Választójogi Blokk*). Although only officially created on June 6,⁷⁷ the groups around Mihály Károlyi and his left-wing split from the ‘48-er Independence Party (*Függetlenségi és*

⁷⁴ See, e.g., as in Lojze Ude, “Deklaracijsko gibanje pri Slovencih” (The Declaration Movement among the Slovenes), *Zgodovinski časopis* 24, no. 3–4 (1970): 191–207; Janko Pleterški, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo: Politika na domačih tleh med vojno 1914–1918* (The First Decision of Slovenes for Yugoslavia: Domestic Politics during the War, 1914–1918) (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1971); more recently, Walter Lukan, “Habsburška monarhija in Slovenci v prvi svetovni vojni” (The Habsburg Monarchy and the Slovenes in the First World War), *Zgodovinski časopis* 62, no. 1–2 (2008): 91–149; and Vlasta Stavbar, *Majniška deklaracija in deklaracijsko gibanje: Slovenska politika v habsburški monarhiji, od volilne reforme do nove države (1906–1918)* (The May Declaration and the Declaration Movement: Slovenian Politics in the Habsburg Monarchy from the Electoral Reform to the New State (1906–1918) (Maribor: Založba Pivec, 2017).

⁷⁵ Leo Valiani, *The End of Austria-Hungary* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 181.

⁷⁶ Valiani, *The End of Austria-Hungary*, 189; see reports in *Népszava* 45, no. 114 (May 3, 1917).

⁷⁷ “Harc a választójogért” (The Fight for Suffrage), *Világ* 8, no. 144 (June 7, 1917): 11. The report was last-minute news tucked away at the back of the paper. The next day, it was the front-page headline: “A választójog ünnepe” (Suffrage’s Holiday), *Világ* 8, no. 145 (June 8, 1917): 1–2. See also Péter Hanák and Ferenc Mucsi, ed., *Magyarország története*, vol. 7/2, 1890–1918, 2nd ed. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983), 1160–65.

48-as (Károlyi) Párt), the Social Democratic Party (*Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt*, MSZDP), Vilmos Vázsonyi's Civic Democratic Party (*Polgári Demokrata Párt*, PDP), Oszkár Jászi's Civic Radical Party (*Polgári Radikális Párt*, PRP), and the left wing of the Christian Socialist Party, personified by Sándor Giesswein, had begun to discuss with intensity the question of suffrage's expansion to women.⁷⁸ Their demands for a settlement to the war without reparations or annexations, the democratization of international relations, and universal, equal, and secret suffrage gained traction on the popular resentment expressed toward the conservative, aristocratic elite. The Suffrage Bloc's program also linked with Hungarian left-wing intellectuals' long-standing quest to liquidate the "entire edifice of Hungarian neo-corporatism," as Andrew C. Janos put it.⁷⁹

On April 28, a few days before the massive May Day protests, the pressure for suffrage reform in Hungary had already reached King (Emperor) Karl. In turn, he requested that Tisza

⁷⁸ There were numerous articles in *Világ*, *Népszava*, and *Magyarország*—to name the three main left-wing, oppositional daily papers—from the end of April to the beginning of June 1917. At least once per week there was discussion about creating a *választójogi blok(k)* among the left-wing parties in Hungary. See, e.g., Oszkár Jászi, "Az öt gróf parlamentje" (The Five Counts' Parliament), *Világ* 8, no. 106 (April 22, 1917): 1–2; "A király levele Tiszához" (The King's Letter to Tisza), *Világ* 8, no. 112 (April 29, 1917): 5–7; "A demokrácia karikatúrája" (Democracy's Charicature), *Népszava* 45, no. 112 (April 29, 1917): 2; "A politikai helyzet" (The Political Situation), *Magyarország* 24, no. 114 (May 3, 1917): 3–4; "A demokratikus erők tömörülése" (The Gathering of Democratic Forces), *Világ* 8, no. 121 (May 11, 1917): 7; "A választójogi blok" (The Suffrage Bloc), *Népszava* 45, no. 121 (May 11, 1917): 1–2; Márton Lovász, "Választójog és béke" (Suffrage and Peace), *Magyarország* 24, no. 135 (May 27, 1917): 1–2, etc., etc.

⁷⁹ Andrew C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary, 1825–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 184. See the entire chapter "The Revolution of the Left (1906–1919)," in *ibid.*, 149–200, for a helpful overview of the social composition and intellectual disposition of the Hungarian urban Left at the turn of the twentieth century. Otherwise, see Márta Tömör, *Új vizeken járok: A Galilei kör története* (On Uncharted Waters: A History of the Galileo Circle) (Budapest: Gondolat, 1960); Tibor Süle, *Sozialdemokratie in Ungarn: zur Rolle der Intelligenz in der Arbeiterbewegung 1899–1910* (Social Democracy in Hungary: On the Role of the Intelligentsia in the Labor Movement, 1899–1910) (Köln–Graz: Böhlau, 1967); Richard Edwin Allen, "Oscar Jászi and Radicalism in Hungary, 1900–1919" (Doctoral Dissertation, New York, Columbia University, 1972); Zoltán Horváth, *A magyar századforduló. A második reformnemzedék története (1896–1914)* (The Hungarian *Fin-de-Siècle*: The History of the Second Reform Generation, 1896–1914) (Budapest: Gondolat, 1974); György Litván, "Magyar gondolat – szabad gondolat": *Nacionalizmus és progresszió a század eleji Magyarországon* (Hungarian Thought – Free Thought: Nationalism and Progress in *Fin-de-Siècle* Hungary) (Budapest: Magvető, 1978); János Hauszmann, *Bürgerlicher Radikalismus und demokratisches Denken im Ungarn des 20. Jahrhunderts: der Jászi-Kreis um „Huszadik Század” (1900–1949)* (Bourgeois Radicalism and Democratic Thought in Hungary during the Twentieth Century: The Jászi Circle and *Huszadik Század*, 1900–1949) (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988); Attila Pók, *A magyarországi radikális demokrata ideológia kialakulása* (The Formation of Radical Democratic Ideology in Hungary) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990); György Litván, *A Twentieth-Century Prophet: Oscar Jászi, 1875–1957* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006); and Péter Csunderlik, *Radikálisok, szabadgondolkodók, ateisták: A Galilei Kör története (1908–1919)* (Radicals, Freethinkers, Atheists: The History of the Galileo Circle, 1908–1919) (Budapest: Napvilág, 2017).

provide proposals for “an extension of the right to vote, which corresponds to the fateful times in which we live and to the sacrifices made by the people.”⁸⁰ The Budapest-based Feminists’ Association (*Feministák Egyesülete*, FE) welcomed the king’s declaration. On the pages of their journal, *A Nő* (The Woman), the FE insisted that “*the nation (nemzet)* does not only mean men, *the people (nép)* is not the same as the smaller half of society. Out of the Royal Declaration, we read the promise of universal, equal, and secret suffrage for men and women.”⁸¹ The Christian socialist Sándor Giesswein likewise argued that “the reconciliation of Europe and the whole cultured world can only be hoped for if women gain political rights in all civilized countries.”⁸² Democratization for the republican Left in Hungary demanded the active participation of women, and so the expansion of the boundaries of the political community. Yet, inevitably, there was conservative backlash. Tisza stubbornly refused the entire scheme. On May 21, Karl asked Tisza to resign; the official reason was his failure to reform the electoral law. Instead of pacifying social tensions, Tisza had preferred to maintain the ossified form of Hungary’s feudal, estate-based, oligarchic political system, accelerating the disintegration of the very Hungary he had tried to save.

The young Móric Esterházy was given Hungary’s premiership soon afterward, and put forward a government program which explicitly included the expansion of suffrage to women.⁸³ For Esterházy, reform of the electoral law had become “the government’s very reason for existence.”⁸⁴ The following day, Mihály Károlyi greeted “that government which had been

⁸⁰ “Ő császári és apostoli királyi Felsége a következő legfelső kéziratot méltóztatott legkegyelmesebben kibocsátani” (His Imperial and Apostolic Royal Highness Has Deigned to Issue Most Graciously the Following Supreme Manuscript), *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 99 (April 29, 1917): 1; in German, see “Allerhöchstes Handschriften an den Ministerpräsidenten Grafen Tisza” (Supreme Manuscript to Prime Minister Count Tisza), *Wiener Zeitung*, no. 98 (April 29, 1917): 9. See also “A király levele Tiszához” (The King’s Letter to Tisza), *Világ* 8, no. 112 (April 29, 1917): 5–7; “A demokrácia karikaturája” (Democracy’s Caricature), *Népszava* 45, no. 112 (April 29, 1917): 2.

⁸¹ “Szólt a király...” (The King Has Spoken...), *A Nő: Feminista folyóirat* 4, no. 5 (May 10, 1917): 1. The short response text was likely written either by Rózsika Schwimmer or Vilma Glücklich.

⁸² Sándor Giesswein, “Miért kívánatos különösen most a nők politikai joga?” (Why Are Women’s Political Rights Desirable, Especially Now?), *A Nő: Feminista folyóirat* 4, no. 5 (May 10, 1917): 2.

⁸³ Session 726, June 21, 1917, in *Az 1910–1915. évi Országgyűlés Képviselőházának naplója*, vol. 36 (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1917), 8. Hereafter, *Képviselőház naplója*.

⁸⁴ Session 726, June 21, 1917, in *Képviselőház naplója*, vol. 36 (1917), 13.

formed under the sign of democratism,” stating that it was his group’s “moral duty” to support the new government “if it really implements or wants to implement the program it presented here.”⁸⁵ Two individuals within the Suffrage Bloc, Tivadar Batthyány and Vilmos Vázsonyi, now sat in Esterházy’s cabinet. It seemed that partial democratization could proceed.

Around the moment of Tisza’s resignation, a delegation of the Hungarian Social Democrats made their way to Stockholm to participate in efforts toward democratization and peace at the international level. Starting in April 1917, the Bureau of the Socialist International, under the leadership of Camille Huysmans, relocated to Stockholm on neutral Swedish territory. By early May, after meetings between Dutch and Swedish social democrats, Huysmans announced that an international socialist peace conference would be organized; the Dutch-Scandinavian Committee began holding consultations.⁸⁶ Between May 1917 and January 1918, the Committee received delegations from an extraordinary roster of socialist parties from across Europe and beyond—however no *formal* conference was ever held, as American, French, Italian, and British representatives were barred from attending by their national governments.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the consultations pushed many socialist groups to prepare declarations clarifying their positions toward the possible post-war world. On May 19, the Bosnian social democrats, led by Franjo Markić and Dušan Glumac, presented their memorandum. They demanded peace without annexations or reparations, the “self-determination of the people,” and an independent South Slav state—though autonomy within

⁸⁵ Session 727, June 22, 1917, in *Képviselőház naplója*, vol. 36 (1917), 30. The Social Democrats and Civic Radicals, for example, were not represented in the Hungarian parliament, owing to the strict limits on political representation maintained by the Tisza regime and its predecessors.

⁸⁶ On the conference, see Hildamarie Meynell, “The Stockholm Conference of 1917,” *International Review of Social History* 5, no. 1 (1960): 1–25, and *ibid.*, no. 2 (1960): 202–25; “Presskommuniké zur Sitzung der holländischen und schwedischen ISB-Delegationen,” May 3, 1917, Document P/06c in “The 1917 Stockholm Peace Conference,” ed. Martin Grass, Social History Portal online archive, International Association of Labour History Institutions (IALHI) <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111539>; and “Erste Sitzung des Holländisch-skandinavischen Komitees,” May 10, 1917, Document P/07 in *ibid.*, <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111540>.

⁸⁷ Comité organisateur de la Conférence socialiste internationale de Stockholm, *Stockholm* (Stockholm: Tidens Förlag, 1918), xxii–xxiii. Hereafter, *Stockholm*.

Austria-Hungary would also be acceptable if independence proved impossible. They demanded a federation of states in Europe, but as a “minimal goal” could accept a federal Balkan republic.⁸⁸

The following week, on May 25–26, the Austro-German delegation arrived, comprised of the party’s ‘right wing’: Victor Adler, Wilhelm Ellenbogen, Karl Seitz, Anton Hueber, Karl Renner, and Ludo Hartmann. Their approach did not differ much from the 1899 Brno Program: Austria-Hungary would remain intact as a democratized federation of territorialized nations with cultural autonomies.⁸⁹ The Hungarian delegation—Zsigmond Kunfi, Ernő Garami, Jakab Weltner, Manó Buchinger, Dezső Bokányi, and trade unionist Samu Jászai—met with the Committee on May 29 and 30.⁹⁰ Their memorandum, largely written by Kunfi and Garami, agreed in principle with the Bosnian memorandum, echoing calls for peace without annexation or reparations, the renewed independence of Serbia, and a solution to the Macedonian Question through a Balkan federation. The concept ‘republic’ was missing from the Hungarian memoranda, likely because Minister of Foreign Affairs Ottokar Czernin had approved their passports under the condition that they represent Austria-Hungary’s official foreign policy line.⁹¹

⁸⁸ “Sitzung des Holländisch-skandinavischen Komitees mit der Delegation aus Bosnien-Herzegowina,” May 19, 1917, Document P/16 in “The 1917 Stockholm Peace Conference,” ed. Martin Grass, <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111556>; see also *Stockholm*, 188–90.

⁸⁹ “Sitzung des Holländisch-skandinavischen Komitees mit der Delegation aus Österreich,” May 25, 1917, Document P/21 in “The 1917 Stockholm Peace Conference,” ed. Martin Grass, <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111565>; “Pressekommuniqué zu den Sitzungen mit der österreichischen Delegation am 25.-26. Mai 1917,” May 29, 1917, Document P/22a in “The 1917 Stockholm Peace Conference,” ed. Martin Grass, <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111567>; *Stockholm*, 124–27.

⁹⁰ See “Sitzung des Holländisch-skandinavischen Komitees mit der Delegation aus Ungarn,” May 29 and 30, 1917, Documents no. P/24 and P/25, in “The 1917 Stockholm Peace Conference,” ed. Martin Grass, <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111569> and <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111570>, along with the press release from the next day: “Pressekommuniqué zu den Sitzungen mit der ungarischen Delegation am 29.-30. Mai 1917,” May 31, 1917, in “The 1917 Stockholm Peace Conference,” ed. Martin Grass, <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111571>.

⁹¹ Jakab Weltner, “*Milliók egy miatt*”: emlékek (“Millions Because of One”: Memoirs) (Budapest: self-published, 1927), 283.

In this way too, the Hungarian delegation echoed ideas in the Austro-German declaration. They insisted on the “territorial integrity” of Hungary and did not “believe in the establishment of states underpinned by the national principle.”⁹² They continued:

Regarding the freedom of the seas, the Hungarian delegation finds it necessary to insist once more on the point that the separation of Croatia from the Hungarian state would result in cutting Hungary off from its only access to the sea; for that reason, once more, the delegation protests energetically against the aspirations of the South Slavs and their desire to hinder or render impossible the economic development of Hungary.⁹³

The Hungarian social democrats’ insistence on territorial integrity chafed against the core demand of the Bosnians for an independent, democratized South Slav state. The section of the Balkans to be federalized was located further south according to the Hungarians’ symbolic geography—somewhere beyond Bosnia, beyond the imperial borders. Both the Austro-German and Hungarian social democrats preferred a democratized, federal Austria-Hungary to its dissolution into smaller national units. The level of reception of this memorandum in Hungary is unclear, however; the Hungarian censorship regime prohibited the publication of Kunfi’s original memorandum. An incomplete, altered version appeared in *Népszava* and the civic radical *Világ*.⁹⁴

Simultaneously, on the final day of the Hungarian delegation’s meetings—May 30—the *Reichsrat* in Vienna resumed its work, nearly three years after it had been “adjourned.”⁹⁵ The reopening was part of a push by Emperor Karl and the Ministerial Council to reinstate

⁹² *Stockholm*, 191.

⁹³ *Stockholm*, 194.

⁹⁴ “Stockholm,” *Népszava* 45, no. 138 (June 1, 1917), 3–5; “A stockholmi konferencia sikerei” (The Successes of the Stockholm Conference), *Világ* 8, no. 139 (June 1, 1917): 3–4; Imre Déri, “Az osztrákok békefeltételei” (The Austrians’ Peace Terms), *Világ* 8, no. 139 (June 1, 1917): 5. Imre Déri (1889–1959), *Világ*’s foreign correspondent, reported directly from Stockholm.

⁹⁵ For more, see Helmut Rumpler, “Parlament und Regierung Cisleithaniens 1867 bis 1914,” in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 7, *Verfassung und Parlamentarismus*, Teilband 1, *Verfassungsrecht, Verfassungswirklichkeit, zentrale Repräsentativkörperschaften*, ed. Helmut Rumpler and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Verlag der ÖAW, 2000), 885–92.

constitutional life and civilian government in Cisleithania; in Transleithania, however, some level of constitutional life had continued, even under strict supervision and control by the illiberal, authoritarian Tisza regime.⁹⁶ On the first day of the reconvened *Abgeordnetenhaus*, a series of declarations were made by various parliamentary clubs representing the non-German nationalities, among these the Yugoslav Club, led by Anton Korošec of the Slovenian People's Party (*Slovenska ljudska stranka*, SLS). As their declaration read:

The deputies united in the Yugoslav Club declare that, on the basis of national principle and historical Croatian state right, they demand the unification of all the territories of the monarchy inhabited by Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs into an independent state body—free from any nationally foreign rule and built on a democratic basis—under the scepter of the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty, and that they are in favor of the realization of this demand of their unified nation with all their might.⁹⁷

Korošec's idea stood somewhere between the Bosnian, Austro-German, and Hungarian social democratic memoranda put forward at the Stockholm consultations. Although Korošec was no socialist or republican—and hardly a democrat—he saw that a federalized Austria-Hungary was a necessary step on the way to implement some form of national sovereignty among the South Slavs.⁹⁸ The SLS subsequently seized the initiative, transforming the spirit of the May Declaration into a wave of popular political mobilization among Slovenian-speakers. Tens of

⁹⁶ Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 392–93 and 419–24.

⁹⁷ *Stenographische Protokoll über die Sitzungen des Hauses der Abgeordneten des österreichischen Reichsrates im Jahre 1917. XXII. Session*, vol. 1, 1. (Eröffnungs-) bis 21. Sitzung (Vienna: k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1917), 34. For a Serbo-Croatian translation, see “Deklaracija Jugoslovanskog kluba” (Declaration of the Yugoslav Club), in *Jugoslovenski federalizam: Ideje i stvarnost* (Yugoslav Federalism: Ideas and Reality), vol. 1, 1914–1943, eds. Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević (Beograd: Prosveta, 1987), 35.

⁹⁸ On these federal ideas, see Leo Valiani, *The End of Austria-Hungary* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 182–83; Jana Osterkamp, “Krisenjahre. Aporien des territorialen Föderalismus und das neue Modell des Personenverbands (1907–1918)” (Years of Crisis. The Aporia of Territorial Federalism and the New Model of the Personal Union), chapter 9 in *Vielfalt ordnen: das föderale Europa der Habsburgermonarchie (Vormärz bis 1918)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 343–86; cf. Jana Osterkamp, “Ein Reich ohne Eigenschaften? Das Erbe föderaler Ideen in den ‘Nachfolgestaaten’ der Habsburgermonarchie” (An Empire without Qualities? The Inheritance of Federal Ideas in the ‘Successor States’ of the Habsburg Monarchy), in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 12, *Bewältigte Vergangenheit? Die nationale und internationale Historiographie zum Untergang der Habsburgermonarchie als ideelle Grundlage für die Neuordnung Europas*, ed. Helmut Rumppler and Ulrike Harmat (Vienna: Verlag der ÖAW, 2018), 431–57.

thousands participated in the “declaration movement” in 1917 and 1918, collecting signatures in favor of Korošec’s text. The idea of South Slavic national unity (*narodno jedinstvo*), of Yugoslavism, now became tied to a vast popular movement among the Slovenes. As Dušan Kermavner expressed, democratization and federalization now became slogans and aims from broad swaths of the population itself.⁹⁹

In the midst of the “declaration movement,” the Slovenian social democrats gathered in Ljubljana for their party conference on June 17. The delegates re-established a party organ, *Naprej* (Forward), for the first time since *Zarja* had been banned at the outbreak of the war. (The JSDS’s trade union paper *Delavec* [The Worker] had been allowed to continue publishing.) The paper was now under the editorship of the feminist and pedagogue Alojzija Štebi, affiliated at that moment with the Masarykians and the informal “Socialist Youth” group within the JSDS, including Albin Prepeluh, Dragotin Lončar, and Fran Erjavec.¹⁰⁰ The conference likewise elected delegates to be sent to Stockholm and, inevitably, drafted a conference resolution.¹⁰¹

The resolution argued that the absolutism of the Stürgkh regime still existed, “only represented by other individuals.” In such a state of arbitrary social domination within the state, there could be no realization of the “democratic principle” even with the reinstatement of the *Reichsrat* in Vienna. To that end, the JSDS committed itself to struggle for “the democratization of daily life, the introduction of universal and equal suffrage for all public positions, as well as

⁹⁹ See, e.g., Dušan Kermavner, “O radikalizaciji in demokratizaciji slovenske meščanske politike v letu 1917” (On the Radicalization and Democratization of Slovenian Bourgeois Politics in 1917), in *Ivan Cankar in slovenska politika 1918* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1968), 7–24.

¹⁰⁰ For more on the Socialist Youth, see Jasna Fischer, “Idejni razvoj Albina Prepeluha v letih 1899–1918” (Albin Prepeluh’s Ideational Development, 1899–1918), Undergraduate Thesis, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, 1968, 38–50; Vlado Strugar, *Jugoslavenske socijaldemokratske stranke 1914–1918* (South Slavic Social Democratic Parties in 1914–1918) (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska Akademija Znanosti i Umjetnosti, 1963), 265–70; Dušan Kermavner, “Razhajanje ‘mladih’ socialistov s socialno demokracijo poleti-jeseni 1917” (The Split between the ‘Young’ Socialists and Social Democracy in Summer–Autumn 1917), in *Ivan Cankar in slovenska politika*, 29–82; and Franc Rozman, “Socialistična omladina” (The Socialist Youth), in *Enciklopedija Slovenije*, vol. 12, *Slovenska n–Sz* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1998), 102–103.

¹⁰¹ “Konferenca socialne demokratične stranke v Ljubljani” (Conference of the [Yugoslav] Social Democratic Party in Ljubljana), *Delavec* 4, no. 25 (June 23, 1917): 2.

to extend to women the right to vote and to stand as candidates.”¹⁰² Finally, they demanded that “bureaucratism” be replaced by “self-administration of the people” (*samouprava ljudstva*). “The only basis of freedom in a state is a free municipality,” they argued: “Municipalities should unite into self-administered districts, and these into self-administered national formations, which should manage their cultural and economic affairs through their own judiciary and political administration—all united into a federal state.”¹⁰³ It was ambiguous whether this “federal state” would be a federalized Austria-Hungary or a federal Balkan republic, but the openness was certainly tactical. The Slovenes were now caught directly between the Austro-Hungarian and Yugoslav state ideas—with Italian expansionism slowly creeping toward the threshold. The seeds of the idea of a federalized, democratized republic covering the Danubian basin sprouted in quite different places. Let us return to Etbin Kristan and the Yugoslav Socialist Federation in Chicago.

Following the SP’s ‘emergency conference’ in April 1917, held in response to the US’s entry into the war, the SP’s pacifist stance was secured through a majority resolution. By spring 1917, the JSZ was split between two factions: one pacifist around the Serbo-Croatian-language paper *Radnička straža*, and one ‘liberationist’ around *Proletarec* with Kristan at its head, arguing that America’s entry had put the question of armed national liberation from Habsburg domination on the table. The two factions split; JSZ Club #1 halted its participation in the SP and became an independent organization. They had the funding and structures to operate outside the SP and now experienced financial relief without the party’s mandatory extraction of fees.¹⁰⁴

Soon, the Slovenian socialists in Chicago drafted their own declaration: the “Chicago Declaration” (*Chicaška izjava*). Written in part in response to America’s entry into the war, the

¹⁰² “Konferenca socialne demokratične stranke v Ljubljani” (Conference of the [Yugoslav] Social Democratic Party in Ljubljana), *Delavec* 4, no. 25 (June 23, 1917): 1.

¹⁰³ “Konferenca socialne demokratične stranke v Ljubljani” (Conference of the [Yugoslav] Social Democratic Party in Ljubljana), *Delavec* 4, no. 25 (June 23, 1917): 1.

¹⁰⁴ See Klemenčič, “American Slovenes,” 27.

February Revolution, and the resumption of civilian government in Cisleithania—not to mention Korošec’s “May Declaration”—the Chicago Declaration was co-authored by fourteen Slovene socialists, including Kristan, Molek, and Zavertnik, and published on July 10, 1917, in *Proletarec*.¹⁰⁵

The text opened with appeals to the democratic character of the Russian people and the February Revolution, as well as reference to Woodrow Wilson’s note to the new Russian government from May 22, 1917.¹⁰⁶ Wilson’s note hinged on the distinction between democratic peoples and authoritarian governments. The authors of the Declaration argued that, based on these ideals, it was their responsibility to take up this Wilsonian idea—the “right of autonomous decision-making”—for the Slovenes and the Yugoslavs as a whole.¹⁰⁷ They located the Slovenes in ethnic and geographic terms: “The Slovene nation, living in Carniola, the Adriatic Littoral, Lower Styria, and Carinthia, with smaller fragments in Hungary and around Venice, is an ethnological part of the Yugoslavs, which also includes Croats, Serbs, and Bulgarians.”¹⁰⁸ Any future “successful solution” to the Slovene national question would also have to solve the “Yugoslav question” through unification into a single polity. However, the authors were skeptical of quick centralization; any future state would have to leave “autonomy to each part in all matters that are not by their nature common to all.”¹⁰⁹ It was out of this recognition of anthropological unity but historical distinction that Kristan and his co-authors argued for a

¹⁰⁵ “Slovincem v Ameriki” (To the Slovenes in America), *Proletarec* 12, no. 513 (July 10, 1917): 3; Republished in an accessible format as “»Chicaška« izjava,” (The ‘Chicago’ Declaration), document no. 93 in *Programi slovenskih političnih strank, organizacij in društev v letih 1890–1918: Pregled k slovenski politični zgodovini* (The Programs of Slovenian Political Parties, Organizations, and Associations, 1890–1918: An Overview of Slovenian Political History), ed. Jurij Perovšek (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2016), electronic publication, <https://www.sistory.si/cdn/publikacije/30001-31000/30658/doc093.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. For the note, see “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Russia (Francis),” document no. 97 in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 1, 1917, Supplement 2, *The World War*, ed. Joseph V. Fuller (Washington: Department of State–United States Government Printing Office, 1932), 71–73; and U.S. Congress. Senate. *Address by the President of the United States*, 65th Cong., 1st sess., 1917, S. Doc. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Larry Wolff, “‘This War of Emancipation’: The Wilsonian Deliverance of the Habsburg Peoples,” chap. 2 in *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 56–114; “Slovincem v Ameriki” (To the Slovenes in America), *Proletarec* 12, no. 513 (July 10, 1917): 3.

¹⁰⁸ “Slovincem v Ameriki” (To the Slovenes in America), *Proletarec* 12, no. 513 (July 10, 1917): 3.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

“federal Yugoslav republic”—a common, self-governing, democratic state with internal cultural autonomies and administrative decentralization.

The Chicago Declaration laid out its guiding principles for the future Yugoslav republic’s public life:

Universal, equal, secret, and proportional suffrage regardless of gender (*brez ozira na spol*) for all political and administrative posts; popular referenda and initiatives; the responsibility of all public officials; the public execution of foreign policy; full equality of all citizens; complete freedom of speech and press; complete freedom of education and conscience; neutrality of all authorities in class struggles.¹¹⁰

These Slovene socialist émigrés went beyond liberal democracy in its normative understanding on the cusp of the 1920s: administrative posts would be elected; legislation would be carried out by popular referenda; all public officials would be subject to imperative mandates; foreign policy would be the domain of the people themselves; and the state would act as an impartial arbiter while class struggle proceeded in the economic sphere. Kristan and the JSZ argued that a radically democratized, federal Yugoslav republic was the only state form for the Yugoslavs. Austria-Hungary would have to cease to exist.

The same month, the exiled Serbian government and the Yugoslav Committee met on Corfu and agreed to the Corfu Declaration, explicitly aiming to unify South Slavs with the kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro. The declaration stated that the future state would be a constitutional monarchy headed by the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty.¹¹¹ The ‘modernity’ and ‘democratic’ character of such a monarchist arrangement was precisely the point put into question by the Slovenian republican socialists in Chicago. In mid-August, the Chicago Declaration was approved as the program of the newly founded Slovenian Republican Alliance (*Slovensko republičansko združenje*, SRZ), led by Kristan. The SRZ declared it would “work

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “Krfška deklaracija” (Corfu Declaration), in *Jugoslovenski federalizam*, vol. 1, 37.

for the creation of a Yugoslav Federal Republic,” including Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and Bulgarians.¹¹² “If we want to have a Yugoslav federation,” Kristan stated at the opening congress, “then it is necessary to unify all who are of Yugoslav origin. Without the Bulgarians, the Yugoslav Question cannot be solved definitively.”¹¹³ Kristan noted that “the very way in which revolutionary Russia overcomes the current crises guarantees to us that it will overcome all difficulties and become the strongest democracy in the world. The Russian revolution is healthy, and such a revolution is capable of transforming the whole world.”¹¹⁴ Subsequently, a slim volume appeared critiquing the Corfu Declaration.¹¹⁵ The monarchic principle was completely unacceptable to the Slovenian republicans; it did not hew with the spirit of the times. The selection of the Karađorđevićs as heads of state would mean domination by the Serbian military and loyalist bourgeoisie in affairs which ought to have been commonly and democratically ‘Yugoslav’. To that end, the SRZ’s republican stance could respond equally well to any monarchist initiative, whether on the side of the Habsburgs or Karađorđevićs.

Back across the Atlantic, through late summer and autumn 1917, final consultations were being made in Stockholm. Delegates from the Social Democratic Party of Croatia-Slavonia and from the Serbian Social Democratic Party arrived on August 28 and October 15, respectively.¹¹⁶ The lawyer Mijo Radošević represented the Croatian delegation, joined by Franjo Markić from the Bosnian delegation. Their joint memorandum again argued for a

¹¹² “Slovensko republičansko združenje” (The Slovenian Republican Alliance), *Proletarec* 12, no. 518 (August 14, 1917): 3. A further report on the conference was published in the following number of *Proletarec*, no. 519 (August 21, 1917).

¹¹³ “Slovensko republičansko združenje” (The Slovenian Republican Alliance), *Proletarec* 12, no. 518 (August 14, 1917): 3.

¹¹⁴ “Slovensko republičansko združenje” (The Slovenian Republican Alliance), *Proletarec* 12, no. 518 (August 14, 1917): 3.

¹¹⁵ Etbin Kristan et al., *Krfska deklaracija in demokracija* (The Corfu Declaration and Democracy) (Chicago: Slovensko republičansko združenje, 1917).

¹¹⁶ “Sitzung des Holländisch-skandinavischen Komitees mit der Delegation aus Kroatien,” August 28, 1917, in “The 1917 Stockholm Peace Conference,” ed. Martin Grass, <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111653>; “Sitzung des Holländisch-skandinavisch-russischen Komitees mit der Delegation der Serbischen sozialdemokratischen Partei,” October 15, 1917, in “The 1917 Stockholm Peace Conference,” ed. Martin Grass, <https://socialhistoryportal.org/stockholm1917/documents/111667>.

federalized union of Balkan republics. After surveying the historical causes for the dismemberment of a once-unified Yugoslav nation, the resolution insisted that the future Yugoslav polity had to be part of a fully democratized international system: transparent diplomacy; “democratic control” of foreign policy; disarmament; freedom of the seas; compulsory international arbitration; internationalization of “global transport routes”; freedom of trade; global economic planning; “general democratization”; and women’s political emancipation.¹¹⁷ This went hand-in-hand with the Russian declaration insisting on peace without reparations, annexations, and the “right of nations to freely determine their affairs.”¹¹⁸ The Bosnian and Croatian social democrats insisted on an independent Yugoslav state which would likewise be part of a “republican confederation of all other Balkan states.”¹¹⁹

The Serbian delegation, made up of Dušan Popović and Triša Kaclerović, in principle agreed with the other South Slavic memoranda. Their view stressed that reparations ought to be paid by the “great powers” for Serbia’s reconstruction, and that Serbia and Montenegro ought to be unified with access to the Aegean through Thessaloniki.¹²⁰ Yet they did not demand continued Serbian domination over Macedonia, but rather—in line with the other delegations—the creation of a “federal Balkan republic” wherein Macedonia would have well-defined territorial and cultural autonomies.¹²¹ The idea of a federal Balkan republic went beyond ‘wide’ or ‘narrow’ Yugoslavism and now included Greek, Albanian, Turkish, and other populations on the Balkan peninsula.

¹¹⁷ *Stockholm*, 185.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* The original declarations, as well as further theses, are reprinted in *Всероссийское совещание Советов рабочих и солдатских депутатов. Стенографический отчет* (The All-Russian Conference of the Councils of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies: Stenographic Notes), ed. Mihail N. Pokrovskij and Jakov A. Jakovlev (Moscow–Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdaltel’stvo, 1927), 291–312.

¹¹⁹ *Stockholm*, 185. An English-language version of the memorandum was published as Mijo Radošević and Franjo Markić, *Memorandum Addressed by the Yugoslav Socialists to the International Socialist Peace Conference in Stockholm* (London: Yugoslav Workmen’s Association, 1917 [1918?]). It was printed earliest in October or November 1917, though perhaps already in 1918. By this moment, Radošević was in emigration in Petrograd, where he finished the preface to the English edition in October 1917. See, in the memorandum cited here, p. 1–2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 219–21.

The missing link was the Slovenian delegation from the JSDS. Although the party conference had chosen Henrik Tuma, Anton Kristan, and Josip Kopač to present the party's memorandum,¹²² the three delegates never made it to Stockholm. They had agreed only to participate if Entente social democratic parties would attend. At the August 29–30 consultative meeting in Vienna,¹²³ it became clear that French, British, American, and Italian representatives would not appear. The text of the JSDS memorandum, authored by Henrik Tuma,¹²⁴ was never submitted—and never published in full until 2011.¹²⁵ To prepare the manuscript, Tuma conducted intensive research on “the national, political, economic, and social conditions of all those parts of European countries that were disputed between warring countries” alongside the historian Ivan Prijatelj, at that moment working at the *Kriegsarchiv* and *Hofbibliothek* in Vienna.¹²⁶ Tuma's interpretive principles rested upon the 1909 Tivoli Resolution: all Yugoslavs ought to live “a common national-autonomous cultural life as a free unit in a fully democratic confederation of nations.”¹²⁷ The seventy-five-page document was completed on July 1, 1917.¹²⁸ Apparently it was read informally by Karl Renner, as well as in JSDS party circles.¹²⁹

¹²² “Konferenca socialne demokratične stranke v Ljubljani” (Conference of the [Yugoslav] Social Democratic Party in Ljubljana), *Delavec* 4, no. 25 (June 23, 1917): 2.

¹²³ “Beratung über Stockholm” (Consultation on the Stockholm Conference), *Arbeiter-Zeitung* 29, no. 241 (September 2, 1917): 1.

¹²⁴ Alojzija Štebi to Albin Prepeluh, August 28, 1917, letter no. 139, in *Viri* 4, “Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha – Abditusa” (The Correspondence of Albin Prepeluh – Abditus), ed. Franc Rozman (Ljubljana, 1991): 63; Henrik Tuma, “Stockholmska spomenica,” *Socialist* 3, no. 28 (June 26, 1925)–no. 54 (December 31, 1925); D[ušan]. K[ermavner]., “Urednikove dopolnitve” (Editorial Additions), in Henrik Tuma, *Iz mojega življenja* (From My Life), ed. Dušan Kermavner (Ljubljana: Naša založba, 1937), 445–66.

¹²⁵ Branko Marušič and Franc Rozman, ed., *Stockholmska spomenica Henrika Tume* (Henrik Tuma's Stockholm Memorandum) (Ljubljana: Zgodovinski inštitut Milka Kosa ZRC SAZU, 2011). The original typescript, in German and Slovenian versions, was kept in Tuma's personal papers, now kept at the Nova Gorica branch of the Scientific Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

¹²⁶ Tuma, *Iz mojega življenja*, 360. Tuma must have worked tirelessly in Vienna; he was elected to the JSDS's delegation to Stockholm on June 15, 1917; less than a month later, on July 1, he completed the manuscript.

¹²⁷ “Jugoslovanska socialno-demokratična konferenca” (Yugoslav Social Democratic Conference), *Rdeči prapor* 12, no. 128 (November 25, 1909): 1.

¹²⁸ Marušič and Rozman, ed., *Stockholmska spomenica*, 71; Franc Rozman, “Mirovna konferenca v Stockholmu (1917),” in *Stockholmska spomenica*, ed. Marušič and Rozman, 8; cf. “Beratung über Stockholm” (Consultation on the Stockholm Conference), *Arbeiter-Zeitung* 29, no. 241 (September 2, 1917): 1.

¹²⁹ Hernik Tuma to Albin Prepeluh, September 17, 1934, in Henrik Tuma, *Pisma: osebnosti in dogodki (1893–1935)* (Letters: Personalities and Events, 1893–1935), ed. Branko Marušič (Ljubljana: Zgodovinski inštitut Milka Kosa ZRC SAZU, 1994), 357. Originally published in *Sodobnost* 2 (1934): 416–18; Marušič, “Kako je nastajala Stockholmska spomenica dr. Henrika Tume” (How Dr. Henrik Tuma's Stockholm Memorandum Was Created), in *Stockholmska spomenica*, ed. Marušič and Rozman, 20.

Tuma's text begins with an unconditional echo of the resolution passed by the Russian Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates: "Peace without annexations or reparations; the self-determination of the people."¹³⁰ Yet, Tuma argued, self-determination could only exist in any country after the conquest of state power by the international working class. He distinguished "class-based nation-states" (*razredne narodne države*) like Britain and Germany, where the only struggle was class struggle, from "multinational states" (*narodnostne države*) like Austria-Hungary and Russia, where class struggles were twisted through simultaneous national struggles. There was likewise a two-tiered system of nationhood: "Poles, Czechs, and Croats are nations, Rusyns, Slovaks, and Slovenes are only nationalities."¹³¹ Such were the hierarchical politics of nationality in the Habsburg Empire.

Tuma proposed the creation of an "Adriatic–Danubian–Balkan State," a completely democratized federal construction built out of Austria-Hungary. The implication was that the dynastic, imperial, and capitalist principles undergirding the state would have to be abolished:

The salvation of Austria-Hungary will be that it ceases to be a state based on bourgeois rule and violence and becomes a multinational Adriatic–Danubian–Balkan State. This will also be the salvation of Germany: it is to be driven back to its natural boundaries, with an independent Poland on the path to the Northeast, as with the Adriatic–Danubian–Balkan State toward the East. The building and reconstruction of the Adriatic–Danubian–Balkan State cannot be carried out by its own will, however. Austria is weakened by Germany on the one side and by Hungary on the other, and so can neither rebuild its own ruined areas, nor can it relieve Germany of its national debt of 11 billion [*Mark*], nor stand on its own feet in industry and trade. Only with the cooperation of England, France, and America will it be possible to build a strong Adriatic–Danubian–Balkan State, and only with their help will lasting peace and the peaceful coexistence of the democratic state formations of Central Europe be possible.¹³²

¹³⁰ Since Tuma's text was prepared in both German and Slovenian, I cite both here and below: Henrik Tuma, "Erklärung der Delegation der Südslavischen Sozialdemokratischen Partei in den Vorverhandlungen zu dem Friedenskongresse in Stockholm" (Memorandum of the Delegation of the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party for the Preparations of the Peace Congress in Stockholm), in *Stockholmska spomenica*, ed. Marušič and Rozman, 31; Tuma, "Izjava delegacije Jugoslovanska socijaldemokratske stranke za razpravo na mirovnem kongresu v Stockholmu" (Memorandum of the Delegation of the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party for the Preparations of the Peace Congress in Stockholm), in *ibid.*, 75.

¹³¹ Tuma, "Erklärung," 32–33; Tuma, "Izjava," 76.

¹³² Tuma, "Erklärung," 44–45; Tuma, "Izjava," 87.

Tuma continued, surveying particular problems related to Italy, the German and Hungarian populations, and the Balkan peninsula. His conclusion was the same: peace would only be possible in a large, federated state with strong autonomies. This meant a concentric system of administrative autonomies: one ought to “erect free, independent economic and administrative municipalities (selfgovernment [sic]).”¹³³ These would be joined through horizontal relations to create larger districts, also democratized, and only then would relations be created toward a central state.¹³⁴ Such a system would guarantee “the self-determination of the people.”

Tuma’s conclusion reveals the particularly republican commitment of his socialist vision. The creation of horizontal and localized political relations would engender necessary participation in public life through “selfgovernment” [sic] at local and regional levels. The “bourgeois” (*Bürger, meščan*) would become a full “citizen” (*Staatsbürger, državlján*) by expanding duties and obligations alongside rights—at the expense of estate- or class-based privileges. The worker would gain self-consciousness to become a full citizen too, expanding rights to match existent economic duties. With a fully formed and active citizenry, there would be no need for a standing army. Tuma explicitly endorsed the older republican idea of a local defensive militia comprised of citizens rather than a professional standing army. On nationalism, Tuma insisted: “Bourgeois nationalism means the strengthening and isolation of a single national culture, overgrowing and displacing smaller nationalities; social-democratic nationalism means the free development of every cultural community regardless of numbers and at the same time the natural fusion and crossbreeding of cultures as the true basis of higher culture.”¹³⁵ This broad conception of positive freedom and of cultural and political non-domination hewed with Tuma’s views on the necessity of socialism. His vision of a republican

¹³³ Tuma, “Erklärung,” 70; Tuma, “Izjava,” 111. Tuma used the English term ‘self-government’ in a few places to give further texture to the concepts.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Tuma, “Erklärung,” 71; Tuma, “Izjava,” 112.

citizenry, with concentric autonomies and self-government in every sphere, implied that he would have endorsed self-government in the firm and factory too.

Further to the southeast, in Zagreb, another group articulated a vision of a democratized, federal polity, though one which took agrarianism rather than socialism as its ideational guide: the peasantists in the Croatian People's Peasant Party (*Hrvatska pučka seljačka stranka*, HPSS) and their leader, Stjepan Radić. Throughout the war, Radić maintained that the Habsburg state ought to be reformed along federal lines, breaking up the 1867 Settlement and the Hungarian–Croatian *Nagodba* of 1868.¹³⁶ His views on federalization and democratization were not dissimilar to those of the social democrats, even if tinged with the greener hue of agrarianism. Radić remained skeptical of Marxist visions of socialism, with their focus on the urban industrial proletariat, insisting instead that agrarianism would be the most democratic system for the common Habsburg state, reflecting the overwhelmingly agrarian structure of the economy.¹³⁷

Radić's intellectual formation was shaped by his time studying in Prague, where he was part of the circle of South Slavic students around Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk at the turn of the twentieth century—a milieu that also influenced figures like the Slovenian Socialist Youth.¹³⁸ Like several Serbian republicans—whom we shall introduce in the next chapter—Radić also had formative educational experiences in Paris, which reinforced his democratic and federalist inclinations.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Mark Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, the Croat Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization, 1904–1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 121; see also Bogdan Krizman, “Stjepan Radić i Hrvatska pučka seljačka stranka u prvom svjetskom ratu” (Stjepan Radić and the Croatian People's Peasant Party during the First World War), *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 2, no. 2 (1970): 99–166.

¹³⁷ Session 89, June 24, 1915, in *Stenografički zapisnici i prilozi Sabora kraljevine Hrvatske, Slavonije i Dalmacije* (Stenographic Notes and Appendices of the Sabor of the Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia), 1913–1918, vol. 3, *1915 i 1916* (Zagreb: Kraljevska zemaljska tisarna, 1917), 88–96.

¹³⁸ For some intellectual output of this period, see Štěpán Radić, *Slovanská politika v Habsburské monarchii* (Slavic Politics in the Habsburg Monarchy) (Prague, 1902); in Croatian, Stjepan Radić, *Slavenska politika u Habsburškoj monarhiji* (Zagreb, 1906).

¹³⁹ On the “formative years” in Zagreb, Paris, and Prague, see Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 27–61.

Radić welcomed the February Revolution and saw in it a vision of democratization that would overflow into Austria-Hungary.¹⁴⁰ But he had a particular spin: the principle of national unity or oneness (*narodno jedinstvo*) was only a means to an end—the unification of the Croatian nation. Radić accepted the continued existence of Austria-Hungary, but only if all Croatian lands would be joined together in federal union with Austria. This went against the territorial integralism of the Hungarian social democrats and contested the push for integral Yugoslav independence harbored by many South Slavic social democrats and some liberal Yugoslavists like Svetozar Pribićević.¹⁴¹ It certainly excluded the ‘Piedmontist’ vision of Pašić and the Serbian government-in-exile endorsed in the Corfu Declaration.

During the August 4, 1917, session of the *Sabor* in Zagreb, Radić distilled this vision of a democratized, federalized Austria-Hungary with reorganized internal relations favoring Croatian unification.¹⁴² This was similar to Frano Supilo’s skepticism toward incorporating South Slavs into the Kingdom of Serbia. The threat of a Serbian national dynasty extending domination over the Croats pushed Radić into opposition toward the many “declarations” floating around.¹⁴³ It would only be in 1918, as Mark Biondich and Bogdan Krizman have traced, that Radić would shift toward advocacy of full Croatian independence, under the spell of his contacts with Czech émigrés in Western Europe and the United States as well as the joint “Epiphany Declaration” of January 1918 which called for the complete national independence of a Czechoslovak state.¹⁴⁴

Up until autumn 1917, then, two visions of future political arrangements were developed by the Hungarian and South Slavic republican Lefts. The Hungarian republican Left,

¹⁴⁰ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 123.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 124–26. On Pribićević and the Croat-Serb Coalition, see Nicholas J. Miller, *Between Nation and State: Serbian Politics in Croatia Before the First World War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010). Pribićević had also been part of the South Slavic student circles in Prague.

¹⁴² Session 177, August 4, 1917, in *Stenografički zapisnici Sabora*, 1913–1918, vol. 5, 1917, 450–78. The text was also published as an off-print with the title *Mir, pravica i sloboda* (Peace, Rights, and Freedom) (Zagreb: Radićeva Slavenska knjižara, 1917).

¹⁴³ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 130–31.

¹⁴⁴ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 131–48; Krizman, “Stjepan Radić i Hrvatska pučka seljačka stranka,” 144–65.

and to a certain extent Radić and the Croatian peasantists, insisted on various forms of radical democratization and federalization within the framework of the state's territorial integrity. The visions on the South Slavic republican Left excluding Radić were more contested. The Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian social democrats all argued for the creation of a separate South Slavic state—but some saw this within a federal Balkan republic; others still somewhere between, unclear whether Austria-Hungary's territory in Central Europe could also be folded in, as in Tuma's idea of an Adriatic–Danubian–Balkan State. Etbin Kristan and the JSZ in Chicago, unrestrained by domestic censorship within the Empire and not reliant on party-institutional structures in Austria-Hungary, argued explicitly for an independent, federal Yugoslav republic and the destruction of Austria-Hungary.

By autumn 1917, the radical shift in Russian affairs with the Bolshevik revolution pushed the republican Left to clarify its strictly political positions. But future-oriented visions of statehood had been largely consolidated beforehand. The pressure for radical democratization gained further traction. There remained considerable contestation over whether Austria-Hungary would survive in democratized, federalized form, or succumb to the pressures of national liberation now gaining the upper hand in moral and intellectual terms.

1.3. *Crystallization: Late 1917–1918*

“Bolshevik agitation has gained a majority among the proletarian masses; the working masses have risen to power in Petrograd with a new revolution,” the front page of Budapest's *Népszava* announced on November 9, 1917.¹⁴⁵ Their program consisted of three main points: the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat; immediate peace negotiations; and the

¹⁴⁵ “Új orosz forradalom” (A New Russian Revolution), *Népszava* 45, no. 276 (November 9, 1917): 1.

socialization of the factories and land.¹⁴⁶ “What is now happening in Russia is nothing else but the 1871 Paris Commune in gigantic proportions,” the editorial continued.¹⁴⁷ Yet the Commune had fallen precisely because it was unable to secure the support of the rural countryside. Would the Russian Bolsheviks succeed where the French communards had not? The question wound up as a hanging, open-ended remark—the last eighteen lines of the text were removed by the Hungarian censors.

Still, the ideas of the October Revolution circulated and inspired. Some weeks later, on November 25, a massive demonstration of workers in Budapest occurred. Nominally, they were protesting for “peace, freedom, and humane living conditions” on the Hungarian home front, but in reality the demonstration wound up being a show of support for the Bolshevik revolution.¹⁴⁸ Starting at 7 o’clock in the morning, masses of workers poured out from the tenement houses on the industrial outskirts of Pest and headed toward Oktogon in the center, joined by more demonstrators as they marched. “Long live world peace! Down with the war! Long live the Russian revolution,” they chanted: “We demand peace! Let the war end! Rights and bread! Enough of the slavery!”¹⁴⁹ The crowd—some one-hundred thousand people—funneled up toward the City Park (*Városliget*), where masses packed themselves into the Hall of Industry (*Iparcsarnok*). Dezső Bokányi, one of the MSZDP delegates to Stockholm, took the floor. Toward the middle of his speech, Bokányi diagnosed the future: “I don’t know what the revolution will produce: whether it will be a socialist republic, a bourgeois republic, or a socialist-bourgeois republic of a mixed form. But it’s certain that never again will Russian tsarism return!”¹⁵⁰ Nor ought it return, as he remarked later, “in Hungarian form.” The promise of the republican dimension of the revolution was its promise for a future which had overturned

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “A munkások napja” (The Workers’ Day), *Népszava* 45, no. 291 (November 27, 1917): 1.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

all forms of domination, secured full independence for the political community, and guaranteed a peace without annexations or reparations. The resolution of the extraordinary MSZDP party meeting held the same day demanded an immediate peace with the Russians and the other belligerent powers, the resolution of food supply problems through the socialization of the latifundia, the revocation of censorship, and restoration of fundamental political rights. More concretely, the MSZDP insisted that the draft law on suffrage include provisions for universal, equal, secret, and direct suffrage.¹⁵¹

In the months leading to the mass demonstration, the political situation in Hungary had shifted. Esterházy's government had fallen toward the end of August 1917 and was followed by that of Sándor Wekerle. There had been no progress in reforming the electoral law under Esterházy. By the end of the year, Vilmos Vázsonyi, who continued in the new Wekerle government as Minister for Suffrage Reform, finally submitted a draft suffrage law.¹⁵² In the meantime, Mihály Károlyi, representing the Suffrage Bloc in parliament, continued to insist that either a fully reformed electoral law be passed or new elections be called.¹⁵³ By the measure of Zoltán Zigány, a progressive pedagogue close to the civic radicals, Vázsonyi's draft was "a sincere and honest compromise between radical democracy and well-intentioned conservatism."¹⁵⁴ Zigány observed that if Vázsonyi's draft law was accepted as submitted, the electorate in 1918 would increase to 3,855,033 voters, an increase of 260% compared to 1910. The electorate would include roughly 21% of the adult population, certainly still a minority, but up from barely 6% according to the electoral law in force.¹⁵⁵ The electorate would be predominantly male, with limitations based on age, education, literacy, and taxation. Women's suffrage was now included, but with strict provisions that raised the threshold much higher than

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 1 and 4; see the following issues of *Népszava* (nos. 292–294) for the debates during the party meeting.

¹⁵² Session 762, December 21, 1917, in *Képviselőház naplója*, vol. 38 (Budapest, 1917), 109–10.

¹⁵³ Session 741, September 12, 1917, in *Képviselőház naplója*, vol. 37 (Budapest, 1917), 21–22.

¹⁵⁴ Zoltán Zigány, "A választójogi törvényjavaslat" (The Suffrage Draft Law), *Huszedik Század*, no. 37 (January–June 1918): 23.

¹⁵⁵ Zigány, "A választójogi törvényjavaslat," 26.

for men: women had to complete four years of intermediary education *after* elementary school, which applied to only 160,000 women, plus an estimated 100,000 literate war widows—together making up only 6.7% of the electorate.¹⁵⁶ Men would outnumber women in the electorate by more than two-to-one. Among the national groups, 61.7% of the male electorate would be Magyar and 38.3% non-Magyar; among women, the imbalance was wider: 75.5% to 24.5%.¹⁵⁷ The compromise draft law ensured continued gender-, class-, and nation-based domination. There was certainly no republican impulse within the legislation, only a pithy wavering between gentry and bourgeois liberalisms.¹⁵⁸

Vázsonyi had ultimately compromised on the Suffrage Bloc's principles. Now, in December 1917, the draft law was submitted for further revisions in a parliament where Tisza's National Party of Work (*Nemzeti Munkapárt*) still held a majority even without their leader as prime minister. These developments coincided with (or rather caused) a right-wing turn in the Wekerle government. Nationalist demands, like an independent standing Hungarian army, were placed at the center of the government's program at the expense of suffrage. Vázsonyi suggested on the pages of the urban daily *Az Est* (The Evening) that it was in the interest of suffrage reform to accept the deal, placing the army issue at the top of the government's list of priorities: "The right to vote will not be abandoned, but the issue of the Hungarian army cannot be removed from the agenda until it becomes a reality."¹⁵⁹ The national ought to take

¹⁵⁶ See Judit Acsády, "The Debate on Parliamentary Reforms in Women's Suffrage in Hungary, 1908–1918," in *Suffrage, Gender, and Citizenship: International Perspectives on Parliamentary Reforms*, eds. Irma Sulkunen, Seija-Leena Nevala-Nurmi, and Pirjo Markkola (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 242–58; and Susan Zimmerman, "Frauenbewegungen und Frauenbestrebungen im Königreich Ungarn," in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 8, *Politische Öffentlichkeit und Zivilgesellschaft*, 1359–491.

¹⁵⁷ Zigány, "A választójogi törvényjavaslat," 27.

¹⁵⁸ On the distinction in the Hungarian context, see Miklós Szabó, "Nemesi és polgári liberalizmus" (Gentry and Bourgeois Liberalism), in *Filozófia és kultúra: írások a modern magyar művelődéstörténet köréből* (Philosophy and Culture: Writings from the Field of Modern Hungarian Intellectual History), ed. Miklós Lackó (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 2001), 113–64.

¹⁵⁹ *Az Est* 9, no. 9 (January 10, 1918): 3.

precedence over the democratic, Vázsonyi argued.¹⁶⁰ This was taken by the Károlyists, civic radicals, and social democrats to mean that suffrage was being indefinitely delayed.

Károlyi responded directly to Vázsonyi, insisting that suffrage reform still ought to have primacy, even on national grounds: “Why do we want democratic suffrage? Because the Magyar people ought to be their own rulers.” The only way to achieve the dream of an independent standing army was “through the path of suffrage.” In plain terms, “the national trend and the path of democracy do not intersect.” Károlyi tucked in an alternative vision, deeply republican in its formulation: the goal ought not be a standing army anyway, but rather a civic militia, “which is my ideal ... and which cannot be anything else than Magyar, national, and democratic.”¹⁶¹ The social democrats echoed the same sentiment, insisting that “the most ardent supporters of a Hungarian national army are forced to see that without a democratic parliament they cannot come any closer to their goal.”¹⁶² Jászi, Szende, and the civic radicals likewise argued for a militia, calling it the “logical corollary to nations’ right to self-determination (*nemzetek önrendelkezési joga*).” The army issue was a red herring; they still aimed to “ensure the priority of suffrage over all other issues.”¹⁶³

The same day that these statements were released, the clubhouse of the Galileo Circle, a leftist student club connected to the civic radical and social democratic milieus, was raided and sealed off by the police.¹⁶⁴ Young radicals around Ilona Duczyńska and her partner, Tivadar Sugár, had circulated an anti-militarist leaflet among soldiers in Budapest: “Brother Soldiers! ... The Russian soldiers have already realized that the land they must conquer is in their own

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶¹ “Gróf Károlyi Mihály válasza Vázsonyinak” (Count Mihály Károlyi’s Reply to Vázsonyi), *Az Est* 9, no. 11 (January 12, 1918): 3.

¹⁶² “A magyar hadsereg” (The Hungarian Army), *Népszava* 46, no. 11 (January 12, 1918): 4.

¹⁶³ “Az Országos Radikális Párt és a katonai követelések” (The Radical Party and Military Demands), *Világ* 9, no. 11 (January 12, 1918): 2.

¹⁶⁴ Péter Csunderlik, “‘Beszéljünk mi is oroszul, cselekedjünk mi is oroszul!’ Az 1917-es oroszországi forradalmak hatása a Galilei Körre” (‘We Ought to Speak Russian, We Ought to Behave Like Russians Too!’ The Impact of the Russian Revolutions on the Galileo Circle), *Történelmi Szemle* 60, no. 3 (2018): 437.

country.”¹⁶⁵ The suggestion was that Hungarian soldiers ought to do the same. This led to the closure of the clubhouse and the arrest of nearly thirty members on orders of the Wekerle government.¹⁶⁶ Beginning with Tisza and hardening under Wekerle, an increase in repression went hand in hand with the military crises of the imperialist Habsburg state, even in nominally civilian Hungary.

Following the closure of the Galileo Circle’s clubhouse, the right-wing turn of the Wekerle government became a fixed condition. A wave of strikes took place in Hungary and Austria starting in January 1918,¹⁶⁷ directed against the harsh dictates of the Germans against the Bolsheviks at Brest-Litovsk. At the beginning of February, the Radical Party’s executive, led by Jászi and Pál Szende, announced that it would leave the Suffrage Bloc, addressing their open letter to Károlyi. The causes lay with the Wekerle government’s rightward lurch and the watering down of Vázsonyi’s draft. Nevertheless, Jászi and Szende wrote, “it is unnecessary to elaborate before you [Mihály Károlyi] and progressive public opinion in this country that we remain ready for all struggles and sacrifices to achieve universal, equal, and secret suffrage.”¹⁶⁸ The following day, Károlyi declared that the Bloc itself would be dissolved.¹⁶⁹ Not only had Vázsonyi failed to include provisions for universal suffrage in his draft law, but he had continued into Wekerle’s new right-wing government without informing the Bloc. “I know that the problem of suffrage is not tied to any party or person,” Károlyi wrote in the civic radical *Világ*: “If it breaks, if it tears, there will still be suffrage because the wheel of time cannot be stopped.”¹⁷⁰ The historical *necessity* of universal suffrage meant that neither Vázsonyi nor Tisza nor Wekerle could stand in the way of progress. Károlyi declared that he and his allies would

¹⁶⁵ Csunderlik, *Radikálisok, szabadgondolkodók, ateisták*, 321.

¹⁶⁶ On the events and context, see *ibid.*, 320–26.

¹⁶⁷ See *Magyarország története*, vol. 7/2, 1182–84.

¹⁶⁸ “A radikális párt kilépése a Választójogi Blokkból” (The Radical Party’s Exit from the Suffrage Bloc), *Világ* 9, no. 33 (February 8, 1918): 1.

¹⁶⁹ “Feloszlott a választójogi blokk” (The Suffrage Bloc Has Fallen Apart), *Pesti Napló* 69, no. 35 (February 10, 1918): 2.

¹⁷⁰ “A választójogi blokk megszűnt” (The Suffrage Bloc Has Dissolved), *Világ* 9, no. 35 (February 10, 1918): 3–4.

still fight for the Suffrage Bloc's three key points: universal suffrage, an immediate and fair peace, and the democratization of foreign and military affairs.¹⁷¹ With the Suffrage Bloc dissolved, the Hungarian Left was again completely excluded from government.

Vázsonyi's draft law still had to make it through the relevant parliamentary committee before a vote on the House floor. Only a few members of the Left even made it on to the special committee to discuss and revise the draft law; in any case, the results were the same even if Károlyi and János Hock, the charismatic Catholic priest within the *Károlyi-párt*, would not have been included in the committee's work.¹⁷² The suffrage committee stated in its concluding memorandum that "even in the democratic progress inherent in the expansion of the right to vote, our national interests must be protected and the guiding and leading role of moral, educated, and cultured forces must be ensured."¹⁷³ There would be no universal, secret, or equal suffrage; the democratic was subjected to the national.

The week before the revised draft law was put before parliament, members of the Feminists' Association, the National Association of Women Officials (*Nőtisztviselők Országos Szövetsége*), and supporters of women's suffrage had met outside of the parliament building to hand out fliers. "Kindly give women the right to vote," the suffragettes called out.¹⁷⁴ It did not matter; the committee voted down women's suffrage. Vilma Glücklich, head of the Feminists' Association, regrouped and continued the protest in front of parliament, demanding that Wekerle bring the matter back to the committee, "otherwise there will be trouble."¹⁷⁵ The majority opinion of the suffrage committee stated that "the movement for women's suffrage in

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷² See Session 764, January 17, 1918, in *Képviselőház naplója*, vol. 38 (Budapest, 1918), 153–54.

¹⁷³ "A választójogi külön bizottság jelentése 'az országgyűlési képviselők választásáról' szóló törvényjavaslat tárgyában" (The Report of the Special Committee on Suffrage on the Matter of the Draft Law on the Election of Parliamentary Representatives), Document no. 1450, in *Az 1910. évi június hó 21-ére hirdetett Országgyűlés Képviselőházának irományai* (Documents of the Parliamentary House of Representatives), vol. 62 (Budapest, 1918), 224.

¹⁷⁴ "Élénkség a politikában: A mai szavazás következményei" (Liveliness in Politics: The Results of Today's Vote), *Világ* 9, no. 129 (June 1, 1918): 3.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

our country is only limited to a small part of female society itself,” and that extending the right to vote would only accelerate that trend pushing women to seek work and become active in public life—a trend regarded with contempt by the conservative parliamentarians.¹⁷⁶ The edited draft law, providing limited expansion of suffrage for men only, was passed by the House of Representatives (July 24) and then the House of Lords (July 31). This, ten years after universal male suffrage had been introduced in the Austrian half of the Empire, was still not enough.¹⁷⁷ As Birgitta Bader-Zaar observed, “the war was in general perceived as a chance to gain citizen rights by those hitherto excluded from them and as an opportunity to prove affiliation to the nation in the sense of the republican concept of citizenship.”¹⁷⁸ But the problem remained unresolved in the Hungarian context until after the Second World War. The limited electoral reform undertaken in 1917 and 1918 in Hungary did not matter; it would never come into effect.

In Ljubljana, the resonance of the women’s question also took on class and national dimensions alongside the particular political problem of the lack of women’s suffrage. Alojzija Štebi addressed this question in the first issue of the new review of the Socialist Youth, *Demokracija*.¹⁷⁹ While calls for a unified women’s movement had been made in the years leading into the war, Štebi argued, there were still no attempts to unify a women’s movement along a broad cross-section of social strata among the South Slavs. This had to do with the uncritical transplant of “slogans of the women’s movement from abroad on our soil,” which could not “account for the practical demands of our nation.”¹⁸⁰ While concepts like ‘equality of rights’ or ‘political freedom’ were noble, they “found no suitable recipients” among the

¹⁷⁶ “A választójogi külön bizottság jelentése” (The Report of the Special Committee on Suffrage), document no. 1450, in *Képviselőház irományai*, vol. 62, 228.

¹⁷⁷ William Jenks, *The Austrian Electoral Reform of 1907* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974); Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 288–92; also Birgitta Bader-Zaar, “Women’s Suffrage and War: World War I and Political Reform in a Comparative Perspective,” in *Suffrage, Gender and Citizenship*, 193–218.

¹⁷⁸ Birgitta Bader-Zaar, “Women’s Citizenship and the First World War: General Remarks and a Case Study of Women’s Enfranchisement in Austria and Germany,” *Women’s History Review* 25, no. 2 (2015): 277.

¹⁷⁹ Alojzija Štebi, “O ženskem gibanju na Slovenskem” (On the Women’s Movement in the Slovenian Lands), *Demokracija* 1, no. 1–2 (1918): 12–13.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

majority of Slovenian women.¹⁸¹ Štebi found this not to be the deficiency of individual women, but part of the broader social question. The social question among a “small nation” was conditioned by economic underdevelopment actively but incompletely transitioning toward an “industrial capitalist way of life.”

The crux between problem and solution lay in the realm of education. Štebi set forth a program of improved women’s education in the countryside; in urban centers, these efforts ought to be tied to the social-political struggle, where “the community of women (*ženstvo*) can become the avant-garde” for the realization of the demands against social, economic, and political oppression.¹⁸² The emphasis on education hewed with a republican concern for the molding of enlightened citizens, able and willing to participate in public life. The passive liberal model of citizenship shifted in Štebi’s conception toward a republican model of active engagement and duty toward the political community. Individuals were not atomized, but part of a larger social whole, part of the political community itself.

The seemingly “nationalist” inflection of Štebi’s view of the socialist women’s movement did not emerge from revanchism, but from a position informed by the previous decades of debate within the JSDS over the national question. While the 1909 Tivoli Resolution had asserted the Yugoslavist position, problems over national-cultural autonomy and statehood persisted, accelerated by the war. A key point of debate took place in late summer and autumn 1917, when the JSDS underwent an internal split between its ‘heterodox’ and ‘orthodox’ wings.

These were relative labels within the party, but with some mapping on the German ‘model party’ and the Kautskian mainstream of the Second International.¹⁸³ The ‘heterodox’ wing was centered around the “Socialist Youth,” whose members included Alojzija Štebi, Albin Prepeluh, Dragotin Lončar, Štebi’s brother Anton, as well as the modernist writer Ivan Cankar,

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid., 13.

¹⁸³ Georges Haupt, “Model Party: The Role and Influence of German Social Democracy in South-East Europe,” in *Aspects of International Socialism, 1871–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 48–80.

Milan Lemež, Fran Erjavec, Josip Ferfolja, and Rudolf Golouh.¹⁸⁴ This group came from diverse backgrounds—some grew up on the multinational Austrian Littoral, others in Carniola and Lower Styria. Lončar, Lemež, and Golouh had studied in Prague and came under the intellectual influence of Masaryk, Beneš, and the Czech Realists.¹⁸⁵ Others, like Cankar, were raised in Carniola but soon departed for *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, exposed to every modernist cultural stream. Prepeluh and Štebi had grown up, been educated, and began careers in Ljubljana and its surroundings, establishing wide networks of contacts even from what, at the time, was a provincial setting. This group's common captivation with socialism was tied to the turn-of-the-century feeling of youthful displacement—a sense that a dead-end in politics had been reached locally under the alternating leadership of the conservative Catholic SLS and the urban liberal National Progressive Party (*Narodno napredna stranka*). Neither had anything to offer in terms of radical democratization; they were both parties of the late imperial status quo. To the heterodox socialist youth, both were two faces of the same Janus head of social domination: conservative and clerical or liberal and capitalist. Joining the JSDS was a form of self-liberation through mass politics.¹⁸⁶

That the heterodox socialist youth was in a dissenting position vis-à-vis the JSDS leadership was already clear at the turn of the twentieth century. Dragotin Lončar and Anton Dermota largely wrote the programmatic text of the youth, delivered as a speech in the *Narodni dom* in Ljubljana in September 1900. Entitled *Kaj hočemo* (What We Demand), the small pamphlet set out a rejection of liberalism, clericalism, and orthodox social democracy.¹⁸⁷ What Lončar argued for was largely in line with Masaryk's rejection of historical materialism and the

¹⁸⁴ Jasna Fischer, "Idejni razvoj Albina Prepeluha," 39; Strugar, *Jugoslavenske socijaldemokratske stranke*, 266.

¹⁸⁵ See Irena Gantar Godina, *T. G. Masaryk in masarykovstvo na Slovenskem (1895–1914)* (Masaryk and the Masarykians in the Slovenian Lands) (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1987). A shorter version was also published in English: Irena Gantar Godina, "The Influence of T. G. Masaryk on the Slovenes up to 1914," in *T. G. Masaryk (1850–1937)*, vol. 1, *Thinker and Politician*, ed. Stanley B. Winters (London: UCL SSEES, 1990), 114–29.

¹⁸⁶ That is, politics in a new key, here in a Slovenian variation. See Carl E. Schorske, "Politics in a New Key: An Austrian Trio," in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 116–80.

¹⁸⁷ Dragotin Lončar and Anton Dermota, *Kaj hočemo: poslanica slovenski mladini* (What We Demand: The Program of the Slovenian Youth) (Ljubljana: L. Schwentner, 1901).

acknowledgment that orthodox interpretations of Marxism often left open the potential for revolutionary violence. Rather, Lončar argued, the moral goals of socialism needed to be preserved: all forms of domination needed to be dissolved through both quotidian and structural social reforms. Lončar argued for a “revolution in our minds and hearts” rather than an armed struggle.¹⁸⁸ It was a refusal of liberal-conservative parliamentarianism as well as the idea that only the proletariat had the historically necessary role to guide the path of human progress.

Albin Prepeluh, in the same period, had rejected the JSDS’s focus on the industrial proletariat as its sole base, arguing instead that a more reflective approach was needed in a context where the vast majority of the population worked in the agrarian sector.¹⁸⁹ The smallholding peasantry, in spite of their seeming backwardness and reactionary political ideas, needed to be brought over to the side of socialism through a common acknowledgment of the destructive effects of capitalism in both town *and* country. This combined with Prepeluh’s complex ideas of concentric political, economic, and cultural autonomies which he believed ought to be built from the village and town outward, from the bottom up.¹⁹⁰ Prepeluh’s socialist vision encompassed a society much wider than the industrial proletariat—which comprised only 4% of the population of Carniola in 1910¹⁹¹—and marked a fuller theorization of his long-standing urge to find a “Slovenian” form of socialism and democracy.

Finding much in common on these points, Lončar and Prepeluh, with the help of Karel Linhart, launched the first properly theoretical journal associated with the Slovenian socialist movement, *Naši zapiski* (Our Notes), in July 1902. It ran until 1914, when it halted publication

¹⁸⁸ Lončar, “Naše filozofično stališče nasproti liberalizmu, klerikalizmu in socialni demokraciji” (Our Philosophical Position toward Liberalism, Clericalism, and Social Democracy), in *Kaj hočemo*, 31.

¹⁸⁹ Abditus [Albin Prepeluh], “Kautsky o agrarnem vprašanju pri nas” (Kautsky on Our Agrarian Question), *Naši zapiski* 1, no. 2 (August 1902): 17–20; see also Prepeluh to Kautsky, March 14, 1902, letter no. 86 in *Karl Kautsky und die Sozialdemokratie Südosteuropas: Korrespondenz 1883–1938*, eds. Georges Haupt, János Jemnitz, and Leo van Rossum (Frankfurt–New York: Campus, 1986), 222, and Kautsky to Prepeluh, April 9, 1902, letter no. 87 in *ibid.*, 223. See also Cody James Inglis, “Albin Prepeluh: Why Are We Republicans?” in *Political Transformations in the Interwar Period*, ed. Grubački and Zajc.

¹⁹⁰ Abditus [Prepeluh], *Občina in socializem*, 52–55.

¹⁹¹ *Österreichische Statistik*, Neue Folge 3, “Berufsstatistik,” Heft 5, “Kärnten und Krain” (1915): 67.

due to wartime censorship. Over that decade, *Naši zapiski* had become the primary outlet for the heterodox youth opposition within the JSDS. The debates and theorizations in that journal were the intellectual roots of the intra-party polemics in autumn 1917 which sharply pitted the orthodox (‘old’) and heterodox (‘young’) wings of the party against each other.

Those debates were initiated by Milan Lemež, writing under the pen name M. Rule, on August 12, 1917, through the party organ *Naprej*, under the editorship of Štebi. Entitled “National and International Thought,” Lemež argued that the World War demonstrated clearly that “the working class is not homeless,” but rather

that they are just as deeply rooted in the nation and its mental life as anyone else; that—for the worker—nationality is not a phantom, but a solid fact that lies buried in the depths of the soul. On the contrary, it turned out that the [Second] International was a house of cards, because its essence was nationless in theory, but in practice it rather recognized only the ruling nations.¹⁹²

Such an idea was in diametric opposition to the traditional internationalist position of a section within the JSDS leadership. Yet the 1909 Tivoli Resolution had insisted that “within a single economic space, each nation, irrespective of historical borders, would be guaranteed unity, independence, and self-government in all national and cultural matters.”¹⁹³ Lemež in fact was attempting to follow from Etbin Kristan’s theorizations on non-territorial autonomy closely, indirectly citing from the JSDS “founding father” against the older leadership.

For the Socialist Youth, the war had altered the trajectory of socialist internationalism. Internationalism appeared to be a cover for Greater German hegemony, economic expansion, and explicit domination. (The specter haunting East Central Europe from 1915 to 1917 onward was not communism but Friedrich Naumann’s *Mitteleuropa*.) Lemež insisted that the only

¹⁹² M. Rule [Milan Lemež], “Narodna in mednarodna misel” (National and International Thought), *Naprej* 1, no. 25 (August 12, 1917): 1–2.

¹⁹³ “Jugoslovanska socialno-demokratska konferenca” (The Yugoslav Social Democratic Conference), *Rdeči prapor* 12, no. 128 (November 25, 1909): 1.

resolution to the Yugoslav Question was through national liberation from “German–Hungarian state ideas”—meaning liberation from the Habsburg Empire—and the establishment of a unified Yugoslav national state.¹⁹⁴ The escape from domination had to happen on two fronts: national-cultural and economic. “It is not the capitalist as such who sucks their [the worker’s] blood, drop by drop ... [but] this capitalist is at the same time a foreigner who seeks to enslave our man (*naš človek*) not only economically, but also mentally, who seeks to assimilate, to breed him, if not with the beautiful then with the ugly.”¹⁹⁵ The social question and the national question were intertwined inseparably in the Slovenian context.

The reaction from the JSDS Executive Committee came from Melhijor Čobal, one of the party’s co-founders with Etbin Kristan in 1896. He appealed to his own experience: “If I recall the years 1888, 1889, and then 1890, 1895, etc.—when I began to work toward socialism in various large industrial towns around the Slovenian Lands (*po Slovenskem*)—there was no national consciousness among the workers.”¹⁹⁶ The tactic was to first make workers aware of their “material destitution,” and only after could they “win him [the worker] over to the Slovenian national idea.”¹⁹⁷ Capitalism was an international system and could only be overthrown through internationalist action. The national question was a second-order problem according to the orthodox Čobal.

Incidentally, some days after Čobal’s article, Albin Prepeluh’s mother died, on August 21. The letters of condolence which reached him reveal much about intellectual life in this moment. Dragotin Lončar, for example, wrote to invite Prepeluh to join him on summer vacation in Kandija, near Novo mesto:

We’ve been down here since July 17. Come and visit! [Anton] Kristan told me that you were planning to come. I read your articles with interest; tell me more about the

¹⁹⁴ Lemež, “Narodna in mednarodna misel,” 1.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Melhijor Čobal, “Narodna in mednarodna misel,” *Naprej* 1, no. 29 (August 18, 1917): 1.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Declaration. I intend to write something about it for *Hrvatska njiva*. We need to get out of our passivity. I approve of M. Rule's article (or is it possible that Abditus is behind that name?). Well, M. Č. is an old man who cannot grasp that this is a more correct understanding and pursuit of internationalism. One cannot completely exclude international relations; that is impossible.

How is it going with your Machiavelli? Perhaps something can happen with the Tiskarna zadruga, which publishes *Ljubljanski zvon*?¹⁹⁸

Here, Lončar references Prepeluh's two ongoing projects: an article series in *Naprej* entitled "On Our National Problems" (*O naših narodnih problemih*), addressing the position of the Slovenian nation before and during the war; and his translation of Machiavelli's *Il principe*, begun in 1916 and published only in 1920.¹⁹⁹

The following week, Štebi wrote to Prepeluh. "Your announcement that Dr. Lončar agrees with Rule's article made me so happy that I laughed out loud," she wrote, continuing:

'Anti-Rule' was in the editorial office on Sunday, wearing a sour face, as if he had been soaked in the strongest vinegar for a year's time. He had come to talk to Rule, but, unluckily for him, that very evening Rule travelled to Dolenjska, where he still is. I was sorry that they did not run into each other. That would have been a pleasure!²⁰⁰

Here, 'Anti-Rule' is Anton Kristan—no relation to Etbin—at that moment leader of the JSDS and the towering figure of the Slovenian cooperative movement. Štebi concluded that they needed to meet to discuss their new publishing venture, which she believed would help guide their heterodox intellectual stream. "Rule [Lemež] has spoken to some young people, and they are enthusiastic about the cause. So, there would be enough enthusiasm for the moment. Now

¹⁹⁸ Dragotin Lončar to Albin Prepeluh, August 22, 1917, letter no. 109 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 49. *Hrvatska njiva* (Croatian Field) was a cultural and political journal edited by the Croatian social democrat Juraj Demetrović, married at that time to the Slovenian feminist writer Zofka Kveder. *Ljubljanski zvon* (The Bell of Ljubljana) was the premier cultural and political journal in Ljubljana, edited at that moment by the modernist poet Oton Župančič, and which broadly represented the cultural tastes of urban liberals, progressives, and some socialists.

¹⁹⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Vladar* (The Prince), trans. Albin Prepeluh (Ljubljana: J. Blasnik, 1920).

²⁰⁰ Alojzija Štebi to Albin Prepeluh, August 28, 1917, letter no. 139 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 63.

we have to roll up our sleeves and get to work.”²⁰¹ This publishing project would become the Slovenian Social *Matica* (*Slovenska socijalna matica*).

Štebi argued that Europe’s *Zeitgeist* had changed fundamentally: the old internationalist ideas of Austrian social democracy were no longer valid. “Now, when new ideas are being ignited in the face of the world conflagration, it is necessary to be clear-eyed about where that development is going. ... Socialism remains our liberation from all bondage—but should we stand idly by while the struggle is on to lead the Yugoslav nation out of foreign domination and into independence?”²⁰² Ivan Regent tried to negotiate between the sides: “national thought is now revolutionary, now the struggle for the oppressed against the oppressors, and now the struggle for freedom, for democracy.” Nevertheless, he hedged, “socialism is international, or it simply isn’t socialism.”²⁰³

Prepeluh’s intervention came on September 22, 1917, in his text “Idea or Dogma?” (*Ideja ali dogma?*). Using the example of the Bolsheviks, Prepeluh argued that socialism, as a “science” rather than “a political or party slogan,” needed to be adapted to local conditions.²⁰⁴ There were British, French, and German types—and so the Slovenes likewise ought to have their own type. “The Slovenian worker, small peasant, lower clerk are, by their social essence and their national psyche, democratic elements. The English worker knows only the social struggle; the German and Italian know the social and political struggle; the Czech and Slovenian workers know the social, national, cultural, and linguistic struggle.”²⁰⁵ Slovenian socialists had to struggle with their co-nationals first, establishing “full national territorial autonomy in a united Yugoslavia.”²⁰⁶ Through subsequent struggle for democracy and socialism, links toward

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² X. Y. [Alojzija Štebi], “Narodna in mednarodna misel” (National and International Thought), *Naprej* 1, no. 36 (August 26, 1917): 1.

²⁰³ i. r. [Ivan Regent], “Narodna in mednarodna misel” (National and International Thought), *Naprej* 1, no. 46 (September 7, 1917): 1; and in *Naprej* 1, no. 47 (September 8, 1917): 1.

²⁰⁴ Abditus [Albin Prepeluh], “Ideja ali dogma?” (Idea or Dogma?), *Naprej* 1, no. 59 (September 22, 1917): 2.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

other nations would organically develop, creating true internationalism. As Dušan Kermavner argued, “Prepeluh, until the war, saw the national question as a question of the democratization and federalization of Austria, yet now it became a question of revolution.”²⁰⁷

The JSDS Executive Committee responded through a four-part article authored by Anton Kristan.²⁰⁸ Kristan insisted on keeping to the 1909 Tivoli Resolution, the 1899 Brno Nationalities Program, and the traditional principles: class struggle, full democratization, and proletarian internationalism.²⁰⁹ Then, already at the end of September, the party executive sat down with Štebi to insist that *Naprej* not be an outlet for polemics, but an organ for workers’ enlightenment—requiring a united front. The JSDS Executive Committee appointed “a censorship section which had to work to keep the paper from going astray.”²¹⁰ Štebi handed in her resignation, insisting that no one outside the editorial board ought to review articles.²¹¹ Štebi’s final day as editor-in-chief was November 5; Josip Petejan from the trade unions then took over.²¹²

In private correspondence, Štebi revealed the pressure. On October 13, she wrote to Prepeluh: “I’m lonely as usual and am freezing up in the editorial office, it is terrible.”²¹³ Two days later: “a hundred plans are running through my head, but I can’t come to a decision. ... no one is allowed to think differently than the respected gentleman Verus [Anton Kristan]. It seems

²⁰⁷ Dušan Kermavner, “Albin Prepeluh – Abditus: Njegov idejni razvoj in delo” (Prepeluh’s Intellectual Development and Work), in Albin Prepeluh, *Primpombe k naši prevratni dobi* (Remarks on Our Revolutionary Era), ed. Dušan Kermavner (Ljubljana: J. Blasnik, 1938), 439; cf. Strugar, *Jugoslavenske socijaldemokratske stranke*, 267.

²⁰⁸ Verus [Anton Kristan], “Da se razumemo! Malo odgovora” (So That We Understand Each Other! A Small Reply), *Naprej* 1, no. 62 (September 26, 1917): 1–2; *Naprej* 1, no. 65 (September 29, 1917): 1–2; *Naprej* 1, no. 67 (October 2, 1917): 1; and *Naprej* 1, no. 68 (October 3, 1917): 1–2.

²⁰⁹ Kermavner, “Albin Prepeluh,” 443.

²¹⁰ Dušan Kermavner et al., ed., *Zgodovinski arhiv Komunistične partije Jugoslavije*, vol. 5, *Socialistično gibanje v Sloveniji 1869–1920* (Belgrade: Zgodovinski oddelek CK KPJ, 1951), 305. Hereafter *Zgodovinski arhiv KPJ*, vol. 5.

²¹¹ *Zgodovinski arhiv KPJ*, vol. 5, 304.

²¹² See *Naprej* 1, no. 95 (November 5, 1917) and *Naprej* 1, no. 96 (November 6, 1917); for further details on the debate (and the subsequent party congress), see Strugar, *Jugoslavenske socijaldemokratske stranke*, 267–75; and Kermavner, “Albin Prepeluh,” 452–57; and Fischer, “Idejni razvoj Albina Prepeluha,” 40–43.

²¹³ Štebi to Prepeluh, October 13, 1917, letter no. 140 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 64. Sadly, as mentioned in a note above, Prepeluh’s responses were not preserved. They do not seem to be in the remnants of Štebi’s personal papers, held in the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia, Fond 1510.

to me that it will be impossible to get along with these people.”²¹⁴ On the 25th: “I simply resigned because I couldn’t stand this unclear situation any longer.”²¹⁵

Prepeluh had written to Henrik Tuma on October 23: “The editorship of *Naprej* [Štebi] has informed me that the Executive Committee has forbidden any further publication of our polemical articles. ... I demand on behalf of the ‘youth’ [the Socialist Youth—CJI] that a session of the broader Executive Committee be convened, to which we, the intellectual workers (*duševni delavci*) of the party ought to be invited as well. ... If the channel is not opened for us, we will appeal directly to the organizations.”²¹⁶ Tuma replied that he in principle agreed, and that the Executive Committee had always acted against his desire to put the JSDS on “a stable, independent, and radical path.”²¹⁷

Meanwhile, Štebi began organizing an alternative outlet.²¹⁸ In a letter from November 22, Lončar wrote to Prepeluh: “[W]e need a printing cooperative which should publish a weekly ... without content from daily politics, but rather journalistic-scientific, theoretical, so that we can prepare the ground to spread interest in and understanding of contemporary issues.”²¹⁹ The weekly, Lončar noted, should be modeled after Juraj Demetrović’s *Hrvatska njiva* in Zagreb. “The editorship should be Štebi’s, as well as yours, if you’d like.” It ought not be the base of a separate party, but rather “a stream, a direction, which should critically, theoretically shake up the thinking and action of the party.” The slogan: “national autonomy in an international union.”²²⁰

Lončar then turned to his current project, tentatively entitled *History and Politics* (*Zgodovina in politika*), a collection of “studies of the Slovenian past and present.” He joked

²¹⁴ Štebi to Prepeluh, October 15, 1917, letter no. 141 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 64–65.

²¹⁵ Štebi to Prepeluh, October 25, 1917, letter no. 142 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 65.

²¹⁶ Prepeluh to Henrik Tuma, October 23, 1917, letter no. 169 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 77.

²¹⁷ Tuma to Prepeluh, October 27, 1917, letter no. 168 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 76–77.

²¹⁸ Štebi to Prepeluh, November 16, 1917, letter no. 143 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 65.

²¹⁹ Lončar to Prepeluh, November 22, 1917, letter no. 110 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 49.

²²⁰ Ibid.

that Prepeluh had already taken the better title: *Problems of a Small Nation* (*Problemi malega naroda*), prepared as the book form of his article series.²²¹ Lončar's scholarly work was progressing slowly: fuel shortages, school duties, and "the nervous mood" meant "that one cannot work in peace—the consequences of the war."²²²

The Slovenian Social *Matica* (*Slovenska socijalna matica*) was founded in December 1917 as a result, and the title of the new journal was decided upon: *Demokracija*—the keyword of their new "direction and purpose," as Prepeluh noted to Lončar.²²³ Within the JSDS, power was reconsolidated under Kristan and company, with the only dissenting voice at the Tenth Party Congress being Rudolf Golouh, who was close to Štebi, Lončar, and Prepeluh.²²⁴ The Socialist Youth's attention now turned fully toward the Slovenian Social *Matica*, writing for *Demokracija*, and only as a consequence maintaining an alternative stream within the party.

In this context, Prepeluh published a text to commemorate the late Janez Evangelist Krek, leader of the Christian socialist left wing of the SLS who had died in mid-October 1917, in the December issue of *Ljubljanski zvon*, entitled "Democracy as an Idea" (*Demokracija kot ideja*). Prepeluh expressed his wartime views in condensed form. The World War had created a new world, and democracy was striding forth as the defining idea of the era. Democracy, he wrote, is

the popular feeling that we are equals, that every individual has the right to assert themselves, that they have the right and will to develop mentally. Therefore, democracy, processed mentally and implemented consistently, erupts in the self-determination of the people as an ethnic and cultural group of individuals, above all when they are mentally united. Democracy is therefore a cultural essence, not just a form—it is more a sense than a science.²²⁵

²²¹ Which would be published the following year as the first number of the Slovenian Social *Matica*'s book series: see Abditus [Albin Prepeluh], *Problemi malega naroda* (The Problems of a Small Nation) (Ljubljana: Slovenska socijalna matica, 1918).

²²² Lončar to Prepeluh, November 22, 1917, letter no. 110 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 49–50.

²²³ Prepeluh to Lončar, December 15, 1917, letter no. 116 in *Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha*, 52.

²²⁴ See *Zgodovinski arhiv KPJ*, vol. 5, 299–324.

²²⁵ Abditus [Albin Prepeluh], "Demokracija kot ideja" (Democracy as an Idea), *Ljubljanski zvon* 37, no. 12 (December 1917): 671.

The political ideas Prepeluh drew out described a form of state altogether different from the old regimes. While the “old” European continental imperial formations had been structured as dynastic, hereditary monarchies, the new world required “new” political forms—ones that were inherently democratic. Democracy in its true and robust form is anti-monarchic, anti-imperial, and—to a certain extent—national. Prepeluh employed the concept of “the people” (*ljudstvo*) rather than “the nation” (*narod* or *nacija*), but his specification of common ethnic ties, shared cultural traits, and mental unity as conditions for successful self-determination tied *ljudstvo* to a wider process of conceptual shifts in the (former) Habsburg Empire. The definition of the political community was still caught between broad and narrow conceptualizations.

A text which rounded off these debates and marked a new phase was Lončar’s article published in the first issue of *Demokracija*, entitled “The Slovenian Proletariat and the South Slav Question.”²²⁶ Lončar, a trained historian and pedagogue, insisted that the Slovenian nation had its “individuality and distinct cultural, economic, and political life,” meaning that socialism had to take on national dimensions in order to become a “social movement of the broadest popular strata.”

Lončar agreed with Kautsky, particularly his critique of Naumann’s *Mitteleuropa* concept.²²⁷ The proletariat had to fight for political freedom, for democracy, “for autonomy and independence from all foreign domination” and not simply for socialism in isolation. Democracy and the idea of the nation-state coincided, or “where that isn’t possible,” then complete “national autonomy in a multinational state.” The ideas of 1848, of national unification—which had resonance among Slovenian intellectuals—pointed toward the union of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs into a common political community. “The Slovenian proletariat

²²⁶ Dragotin Lončar, “Slovenski proletariat in južnoslovansko vprašanje” (The Slovenian Proletariat and the South Slav Question), *Demokracija* 1, no. 1–2 (1918): 14–16.

²²⁷ As in Karl Kautsky, *Die Vereinigten Staaten Mitteleuropas* (Stuttgart, 1916).

has a duty to take the front line in the struggle for the realization of national freedom,” he wrote. Political democracy was the “categorical imperative of culture, which can only develop naturally and fully on the basis of a free nationality, and culture is an essential condition for social freedom.” Lončar’s short text set out in a nutshell the program of the republican Left for the rest of the interwar period. The goal was to escape from all forms of domination and set the boundaries of freedom and autonomy for the political community. As a result, the social, national, and state questions were all wrapped up in the minds of the republican Left. There was hardly a simple solution. Nevertheless, the continued theorization developed the language of leftist republicanism in the following years and decades, carried along by the theorists surveyed here.

1.4. *Conclusion*

The intellectual roots of leftist republicanism stretched back into the nineteenth century, even as the political language began to germinate anew during the final crisis of the World War. Social democrats, civic radicals, and peasantists across the Hungarian and South Slavic contexts all positioned themselves as representatives of broad democratization, self-determination, popular sovereignty, decentralization and federalization, and cultural autonomy. The discourse around democratization took on many forms in this early phase: it pointed toward the political and economic spheres, with consequences for cultural and social relations within the political community. In Hungary, this took the form of agitation for the ideals of the twin Russian revolutions and for women’s suffrage within a broader universal, equal, secret, and direct scheme of voting rights, clarifying the working relationship between Jászi’s Civic Radicals, Károlyi’s left-wing nationalists, the feminists, and the Social Democrats. Among the South Slavic social democrats, democratization pointed toward a combined political, national, and

economic transformation, while within the Slovenian party the theorizations of the Socialist Youth around Štebi, Prepeluh, and Lončar showed another path, where the national question was more pronounced and a heterodox socialist view of the political community had begun to cause frictions already in the early 1900s.

Self-determination, federalism, and cultural autonomy were taken up by each of these actors in different measure, and with quite different consequences for the integrity of the Habsburg state. The Hungarians insisted on the unity of the historical state while offering radical visions of national self-determination within that structure; the South Slavic republican Left insisted that an independent republican Yugoslav federation would be the only acceptable solution. Popular sovereignty functioned as the linking element between these discourses. By imagining the political community as a space of duties, obligations, rights, and decision-making through debate between enlightened citizens, the republican Left produced a working idea that democratization, decentralization, and the institutionalization of radical forms of popular sovereignty would be the only guarantee against the forms of domination which had obtained in Austria-Hungary. Monarchy, capitalism, and imperialism were the antithesis of these ideas, and each would have to go.

By summer and early autumn 1918, these were the key foundational ideas of leftist republican thought and the points of intellectual agreement which generated a loose group we can term the republican Left. Through the regional process of revolution, counterrevolution, and post-imperial transition, as the next chapter demonstrates, these ideas underwent considerable debate and revision. This occurred under two general headings: domestic opposition and foreign exile, both indicating dynamic processes rather than static conditions. Some who chose exile from Hungary after August 1919 could return later in the 1920s or 1930s; by contrast, emigration was hardly a widespread choice in the Yugoslav context, barring the numerous communists who fled abroad. In most instances, there was a retreat from the public

political sphere into the attempt to cultivate a cultural counter-hegemony out of the leftist republican language that had crystallized at the end of the World War. The following chapter retraces this short-lived ascent to power in Hungary and the republican Left's contestation in Yugoslavia, resulting in the forced retreat into culture and the beginnings of an oppositional position carved out through the 1920s and 1930s.

CHAPTER 2. THE REPUBLICAN LEFT IN POSTIMPERIAL TRANSITION

The preceding chapter traced the dispersed germination of republican ideas on the Left across a set of urban centers in the Hungarian and South Slavic linguistic contexts. This chapter follows those ideas into the process of post-imperial transition and successor state consolidation after autumn 1918. At the core of leftist republican thought among Hungarians and South Slavs stood a common commitment to radical democratization beyond the narrow representative frame of liberalism as conceived in the late nineteenth century, toward a democratized post-capitalist economic order, and the institutionalization of national self-determination within federal or decentralized schemes of state organization. Through comparison, however, it becomes clear that leftist republicans in the two contexts diverged on the future of the multinational imperial framework: Hungarian republicans sought to preserve the historical state through federalization, while South Slavic republicans envisioned independence and a broader Balkan federal republic. The transition itself was mediated by council systems that assumed local and regional power as October rolled into November 1918, and the very choice of the term ‘republic’ spoke to the conviction that democracy had to break out of its stunted bourgeois liberal form and move toward a truer institutionalization of popular sovereignty. The chapter proceeds in three sections, treating the Hungarian “republican moment,” the Yugoslav struggle for a republic, and the closure of the public sphere after 1919 in turn.

2.1. *The Faces of Octobris in Hungary*

In Budapest, the establishment of a national council on October 24 came late compared with the rest of East Central Europe. Subsequent events made up for lost time: within a week, a social revolution had broken out, quickly reverberating around the country. The vanguard of the revolution—that is, the Aster Revolution (*őszirózsás forradalom*), named for the white chrysanthemum flowers tucked in the revolutionary soldiers' caps—was comprised of intellectuals previously united within the Suffrage Bloc, reinforced by a revolutionary mass openly demanding independence and a republic. This mass included not only workers organized in workers' councils and soldiers in soldiers' councils, but also the progressive bourgeoisie: journalists, lawyers, university students, and even some members of the lower nobility.¹

The moment of the revolutionary outbreak can be traced back to the bullets fired by the royal gendarmes on October 28. That day, a crowd had gathered in Pest at the Chain Bridge to cross the Danube to Buda Castle and demand that Archduke Joseph install Mihály Károlyi as prime minister. Gendarmes stopped the crowd and scuffles broke out, ending only when police fired into the crowd, killing three and wounding dozens.² To quell the ensuing unrest, Wekerle resigned in the days following; János Hadik lasted less than twenty-four hours as his replacement.³ Only then did Archduke Joseph appoint Mihály Károlyi on October 31. With this, the republican Left came to power in what remained of royal Hungary.⁴ In parallel, local

¹ Hajdu, *Az 1918-as forradalom*, 31–65; *Magyarország története*, vol. 8, 39–75.

² Ibid.

³ Károlyi recalled that Hadik was “clad in pyjamas and slippers” when they met to negotiate his resignation and Károlyi’s appointment with the Archduke: “his huge frame seemed to have wilted” under the stress of the revolutionary events. Károlyi, *Faith without Illusion*, 118.

⁴ MNL OL K 27, Minutes of the Ministerial Council (Károlyi Government), Session 37, October 31, 1918, p. 1. Károlyi, alongside his role as prime minister, was responsible for finances. Tivadar Batthyány was appointed Minister of the Interior; Ernő Garami, Minister of Commerce; Barna Buza (appropriately), Minister of Agriculture; Márton Lovászy, Minister of Religious and Educational Affairs; Béla Linder, Minister of Military Affairs. Ferenc Nagy, Oszkár Jászi, and Zsigmond Kunfi were named ministers without portfolio, but who were responsible, respectively, for food supply, nationalities’ affairs, and labor affairs and welfare.

councils cropped up across the countryside, swearing oaths to the new government.⁵ With pressure for a republic from both the crowd and the intellectual vanguard, Károlyi asked that he and his government be released from their royal oaths. Both King Karl and Archduke Joseph agreed.

“The revolution became the revolution of the republic,” the young Erich Friedrich (Frigyes) Podach wrote, setting the foundations of “the new Hungary.”⁶ Speaking to the National Council, Kunfi announced that “on the basis of the republican atmosphere expressed in the broadest sections of the popular masses,” the question of state form needed to be decided by a constituent assembly elected through universal, secret, and equal suffrage, explicitly including women.⁷ Two weeks later, on November 16, 1918, the Hungarian National Council—“out of the will of the people”—declared the Hungarian People’s Republic (*Magyar Népköztársaság*).⁸ Both chambers of the old parliament were dissolved to cheers of “Long live the republic!”⁹ The philosopher György Lukács, writing in *Világ*, insisted on the republic’s symbolic importance, representing “land reform and tax reform, new social policies and new schools, in a word ... Hungary’s internal economic and social rebirth.”¹⁰ Soon after, a radically reformed suffrage law including women was passed,¹¹ along with new laws on press freedom and trial by jury.¹² The success of the Aster Revolution marked the beginning of Hungary’s republican moment. From January 1919, Károlyi was elected the republic’s interim president,

⁵ On the events outside of Budapest see, e.g., Ignác Romsics, *A Duna–Tisza köze hatalmi viszonyai 1918–19-ben* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982).

⁶ Erich Frigyes Podach, “Az októberi forradalom” (The October Revolution), *Huszadik Század* 19, no. 38 (July–December 1918) 325. Podach (1894–1967) would go on to become a prominent Nietzsche scholar in Switzerland and Germany before the Second World War, turning to ethnology and anthropology after the war.

⁷ MNL OL K 27, Minutes of the Ministerial Council (Károlyi Government), Session 38, November 1, 1918, p. 5.

⁸ *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 269 (Nov. 23, 1918): 1.

⁹ Session 829, November 16, 1918, in *Képviselőház naplója*, vol. 41 (1918), 451.

¹⁰ György Lukács, “A köztársasági propaganda” (Republican Propaganda), *Világ* 9, no. 264 (Nov. 10, 1918): 17.

¹¹ *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 269 (Nov. 23, 1918): 1.

¹² Respectively, Laws II (On Freedom of the Press) and III (On the People’s Trial by Jury) of 1918: *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 282 (Dec. 8, 1918): 1.

with Dénes Berinkey—Minister of Justice, civic radical, and a founder of *Huszádik Század*—named prime minister.¹³

The republican moment was further radicalized in March 1919 when Károlyi and Berinkey resigned over the so-called Vix Note, a diplomatic ultimatum requiring Hungarian forces to withdraw from even more territory than agreed to during the Armistice of Belgrade the previous November.¹⁴ On March 21, the Berinkey government transferred power to Hungarian communists and left-wing social democrats who declared Hungary a Republic of Councils (*Tanácsköztársaság*).¹⁵ Between March and August 1919, the Republic of Councils attempted wide-ranging reforms aimed at democratizing the social sphere. Aside from limited successes, most of the reforms were either ill-conceived, unrealized, or simply rolled back following the counterrevolution from August 1919 onward. In a way, the Republic of Council's fate was foreclosed early on. With the excesses of the Red Terror between March and June 1919, large swaths of society had turned against the revolutionary state. Poor material conditions continued to worsen, exacerbated by forced agricultural collectivization and the Entente blockade of the country. The military situation, particularly against Romanian troops in the east, became insurmountable by the summer. The curtain was drawn on Hungary's republican moment at the Tisza River in late July when Romanian troops routed the remnants of the Red Army.¹⁶ The Aster Revolution and the Hungarian People's Republic had lasted 144 days; the Republic of Councils, just eleven days fewer.

The collapse of each republic provoked waves of emigration. Leftist republicans skeptical of local bolshevization, like Oszkár Jászi, left soon after the declaration of the Republic of Councils in March. Others, like Mihály Károlyi, retreated from the public sphere

¹³ *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 10, Special Issue (Jan. 13, 1919): 1; *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 17 (Jan. 21, 1919): 1–2. See *Magyarország története*, vol. 8, 77–177, for the context.

¹⁴ *Magyarország története*, vol. 8, 177–90.

¹⁵ “Mindenkihez!” (To All!), *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 69, special number (Mar. 24, 1919): 1–2.

¹⁶ *Magyarország története*, vol. 8, 327–46.

before departing in summer 1919. Yet others, like Zsigmond Kunfi and Vilmos Böhm, stayed on and bridged the personnel between the two republics, departing only in early August when the collapse was already underway and the right-wing counterrevolution was first cresting.

The counterrevolution itself did not appear out of thin air in August. Far-right militias led by the reactionary Hungarian gentry, an alternative government in French-occupied Szeged, an Anti-Bolshevik Committee in Vienna, and the Hungarian National Defense Organization (MOVE) all formed during the “republican moment” and coalesced against the revolutionary states. These forces embarked on a retaliatory White Terror already in 1919 in the vacuums of state power in the countryside and lasted into 1921, ultimately taking thousands of lives.¹⁷ On February 28, 1920, the counterrevolutionary National Assembly reestablished the Kingdom of Hungary, explicitly calling it a “restoration” (*helyreállítás*) and nullifying the republican proclamation from the previous November, in fact invalidating all legislation put forward between October 31, 1918, and August 1, 1919.¹⁸ The day after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Hungary, Admiral Miklós Horthy was elected Regent with expansive executive powers and adorned with symbolic regalia identical to that of a king in all but name.¹⁹ That summer, the Treaty of Trianon was signed by Horthy’s representatives, drastically reducing Hungary’s boundaries.²⁰

¹⁷ Béla Bodó, *The White Terror: Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921* (London: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁸ Law I of 1920 in *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 49 (Feb. 29, 1920): 1–2.

¹⁹ Session 9 of March 1, 1920, *Nemzetgyűlés naplója*, vol. 1 (1920), 105–106. The election was enshrined in Law II of 1920, published in *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 55 (Mar. 7, 1920): 1.

²⁰ The historiography on the Treaty of Trianon is massive, though most of it is written from an over-inflated sense of national self-pity or chauvinism. Attempts at a more even-handed appraisal have been published more recently. I recommend Balázs Ablonczy, *Ismeretlen Trianon. Az összeomlás és a békeszerződés története 1918–1921* (Unknown Trianon: The Histories of the Collapse and the Peace Treaty, 1918–1921) (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2020); Gergely Romsics, *Összeomlás és útkeresés, 1917–1920: A magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás útjai* (Collapse and Path-Finding, 1917–1920: The Intellectual Paths of Hungarian Foreign Policy) (Budapest: HUN-REN BTK TTI, 2023); and Ignác Romsics, *A trianoni békeszerződés* (The Peace Treaty of Trianon) (Budapest: Osiris, 2007). See also Ignác Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary: The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920*, trans. Mario D. Fenyő (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 2002) in English.

From summer 1920, a reactionary, Christian nationalist, and vehemently irredentist Hungary consolidated under Horthy.²¹ Many leftist republican intellectuals remained in exile; those who stayed in the country faced formal and informal persecution—investigations, trials, imprisonment, censorship, blacklisting, and murder. Most who remained went into internal exile even still, retreating into cultural and scientific work, the fields of which became a bastion for re-politicization over the following decades. While the Hungarian republican Left did not undergo fundamental transformation in this period, several developments occurred.

The question of state form became pressing alongside the national and social questions; these three became increasingly inseparable. The retreat to culture allowed reflection on the cultural dimension of the political community, though this could turn toward broader civic commitments or narrower ethno-national conceptions. This introspection led many to reconsider the temporality and fragility of freedoms, making rights and liberties something worthy of defense.

Exiles made stronger attempts at international connections: Jászi with Beneš and Masaryk's circle, then American progressive circles after 1925; Kunfi, Rónai, and Böhm with the Austro-Marxists and the Labor and Socialist International; Károlyi with the international

²¹ The literature on the Horthy period is likewise massive. For the intellectual and political character of the era, see, in English, Paul Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890–1944* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 77–136; Thomas Lorman, *Counter-Revolutionary Hungary, 1920–1925: István Bethlen and the Politics of Consolidation* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2006); Miklós Zeidler, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920–1945* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2007); and, more recently, Balázs Ablonczy, *Go East! A History of Hungarian Turanism*, trans. Sean Lambert (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022). On the roots, see especially Miklós Szabó, *Az újkonzervativizmus és a jobboldali radikalizmus története (1867–1918)* (The History of Neo-Conservatism and Right-Wing Radicalism in Hungary, 1867–1918) (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 2003) and Ignác Romsics, ed., *A magyar jobboldali hagyomány, 1900–1948* (The Hungarian Right-Wing Tradition, 1900–1948) (Budapest: Osiris, 2009). Further literature includes Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness*, 201–237; and Ignác Romsics, *A Horthy-korszak: válogatott tanulmányok* (The Horthy Era: Collected Studies) (Budapest: Helikon, 2017). The most up-to-date biography of Bethlen and portrait of his tenure as prime minister is Ignác Romsics, *Bethlen István: politikai életrajz* (Budapest: Helikon, 2019). An earlier edition was translated into English as Ignác Romsics, *István Bethlen: A Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary, 1874–1946* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1995). For Teleki, see Balázs Ablonczy, *Teleki Pál* (Budapest: Osiris, 2005), which was likewise translated into English as Balázs Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki (1874–1941): The Life of a Controversial Hungarian Politician*, trans. Thomas J. and Helen D. DeKornfeld (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 2006). A shortened and updated version was published as Balázs Ablonczy, *A miniszterelnök élete és halála: Teleki Pál, 1879–1941* (The Life and Death of a Prime Minister: Pál Teleki, 1879–1941) (Budapest: Jaffa, 2018).

Left from Moscow to Paris to New York; the Polányi brothers and Károly Mannheim in Austrian, German, British, and American academic circles. Lukács pursued political activity abroad, mainly in Vienna and Berlin until 1933, in dialogue with the early Comintern, though he too retreated into culture following harsh factional struggles within the Hungarian communist camp at the end of the 1920s. Those who remained in Budapest were not simply resigned to marginalization. Many, like Róbert Braun, Ruzsem Vámbéry, or Imre Csécsy, maintained their radical intellectual engagements. When a new generation of writers appeared in the late 1920s, new possibilities also opened. The ‘older’ generation returned to active political writing alongside cultural patronage—hence Vámbéry co-edited *Századunk* (Our Century), the successor to *Huszadik Század* from 1926, with Csécsy joining the board from the mid-1930s.

For the rest of this section, let us return to the intellectual themes central to leftist republican thought: radical democracy and popular sovereignty, decentralization and cultural autonomies, and advocacy for a non-capitalist economic framework. Socialism was a common label, but individuals imagined quite different details, with Marxism only one option among many. There was likewise a common belief in the temporalization of human progress, to be achieved through political struggle or historical inevitability. A key moment in the clarification of ideas was the rich debate initiated by Oszkár Jászi on the pages of *Világ* and *Huszadik Század* beginning in September 1918 and lasting until January 1919. This debate condensed and clarified the republican Left’s views on the national, state, and social questions, while setting groundwork for further ideational development. In this context, the republican Left had turned from the Naumannian conception of *Mitteleuropa* toward Wilson’s Fourteen Points and a revival of the Kossuthian idea of a Danubian Confederation.²² These conceptions, however,

²² See Holger Fischer, *Oszkár Jászi und Mihály Károlyi: Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenpolitik der bürgerlich-demokratischen Opposition in Ungarn von 1900 bis 1918 und Ihre Verwirklichung in der bürgerlich-demokratischen Regierung von 1918 bis 1919* (Munich: Trofenik, 1978), 66–81.

insisted on the territorial integrity of the multinational empire, though now in a democratized, republican form.

In two September 1918 editorials for the civic radical paper *Világ*, Jászi weighed the consequences of applying these ideas. Wilson's ideas meant "inevitable" total democratization, expressing "the moral convictions and political will of the vast majority of educated humanity."²³ Yet democratization did not necessarily mean state fragmentation. Against small nation-states, Jászi argued in favor of preserving "the ancient historical, geographic, and economic unity of Hungary," ensuring full democratization and cultural autonomies for constitutive nations within a common state.²⁴ Small states with minorities, by contrast, "would always create new irridentists," yet:

What is truly important and essential is not the mechanical implementation of the nationality principle, but the establishment of viable states where the natural prerequisites for them exist (Poland, Bohemia, a South Slav State, Ukraine) and ensuring the undisturbed cultural development of national minorities wherever their organization into separate statehood is not possible.²⁵

Jászi insisted on unifying "liberated" Central European states into an economic and political union. Such a union would preserve the unity of historical lands accumulated under the Habsburgs while allowing for full democratization—dissolving nationally oppressive structures within the Empire.

Jászi further clarified his position through a debate in *Huszadik Század* with the right-wing nationalist Mihály Réz, a professor at the Franz Joseph University in Cluj. Réz began with an intervention on the "nationalities question" from the perspective of "political science," though what he presented was social Darwinist Magyar nationalism with a thin glaze of social-

²³ Oszkár Jászi, "Becsületes választójog nélkül nincs világbéke" (No World Peace without Honest Suffrage), *Világ* 9, no. 210 (September 8, 1918): 2.

²⁴ Oszkár Jászi, "Az osztrák alkotmányreform" (The Constitutional Reform in Austria), *Világ* 9, no. 216 (September 15, 1918): 5.

²⁵ Ibid.

scientific terminology. True to his colors, Réz rejected liberalism and Marxism as “anachronistic” and foreign in East Central Europe. The national question could only be understood through biological race (*faj*) and so through relations of supremacy and subjugation. “What appears to be the ultimate goal at each stage of racial strivings (*faji törekvések*),” Réz wrote, “is only the attainment of the nearest stage. For the nationalities, national existence; for the nation, national unity; for the unified nation, independence; for the independent state, influence over other states”—which is to say, imperialism.²⁶ Each social group lived under “the law of life,” he argued, striving “not only for freedom, but also for the assertion of power—and the assertion of the power of the strong: domination.”²⁷ Réz’s conception seemed to justify the World War itself as an incarnation of the inevitable and natural struggle toward empire.

Jászi’s reply was stark contrast.²⁸ Dismissing “political science’s” obsession with race—“with its mystically unavoidable determinism”²⁹—Jászi conceived the national question in terms of subordination to “the requirements of common sense, democracy, and humanism.”³⁰ Réz’s thought was cloaked in false biologisms; even Ludwig Gumplowicz knew that the category ‘race’ was historically constructed rather than biologically natural, Jászi argued.³¹ Réz’s position represented a chauvinist form of “state idealism” (*állami idealizmus*), where humanity’s development was meant to end in nation-states within an anarchic international system—a teleological (theological) view, not historical or sociological.

By contrast, Jászi conceived history as “a grand assimilatory, levelling, and democratizing process, the meaning of which is the creation of ever-wider civilizational and

²⁶ Mihály Réz, “A nemzetiségi kérdés a politikai tudomány szempontjából” (The Nationalities Question from the Perspective of Political Science), *Huszadik Század* 19, no. 38 (July–December 1918): 17.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Oszkár Jászi, “A nemzetiségi kérdés a társadalmi és az egyéni fejlődés szempontjából” (The Nationalities Question from the Perspective of Social and Individual Development), *Huszadik Század* 19, no. 38 (July–December 1918): 97–111.

²⁹ Ibid., 98.

³⁰ Ibid., 99.

³¹ Ibid., 103.

cooperative unities.”³² Against “state idealism,” Jászi asserted “ethical idealism,” whose end was not racial struggle and homogeneous nation-states, but “individual self-determination” through cooperation and negotiation—ultimately pointing toward a “structured world state” (*szervezett világállam*) guaranteeing both individual equality and collective cultural autonomies.³³ Taking the United States and Switzerland as models, Jászi showed that such cooperative unities already existed. The national question could only be resolved through broadening “social and state circles” via reorganization and democratization of existing state-society complexes.³⁴ Here emerged a conception of concentric or cascading republican sovereignty, where the federal principle appeared telescopic, integrating spatial scales beyond the nation-state.

Jászi likewise addressed the South Slavs’ drive for unification and independence, declaring it as legitimate as the German, Italian, and Hungarian drives for national unification.³⁵ The South Slavs’ unificatory efforts were part of “developmental logic of world history”—irrespective of “Hungarian and German chauvinist politicians” like Réz.³⁶ The main obstacle to national unification was “foreign capitalist interests” and narrow nationalism of local governments alike.³⁷ “There is no other serious and definitive solution to the South Slavic Question than one that ensures the South Slavic cultural community an adequate state existence and national self-determination within its natural geographic and historical boundaries,” Jászi argued.³⁸ This could only be realized through a “democratic federation of free nations”—

³² Ibid., 99.

³³ Ibid., 100.

³⁴ Ibid., 110–11.

³⁵ Oszkár Jászi, “A délszláv krízis” (The South Slav Crisis), *Huszadik Század* 19, no. 38 (July–December 1918): 48–49.

³⁶ Ibid., 49.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 50.

pointing explicitly to Kossuth—and “the most fatal cause of European anarchy would be relieved by the undisturbed cooperation of the Danubian peoples.”³⁹

These ideas were developed in Jászi’s *The Future of the Monarchy*, written in spring 1918 but published only in October, owing to “the unripeness of the situation.”⁴⁰ Events outstripped the title; after the Hungarian National Council’s founding, the book was reprinted in a second edition as *The Future of Hungary*.⁴¹ Though the monarchy had fallen, Jászi’s argument had not. Pointing to Switzerland particularly, he argued that a future Danubian United States ought to take on structures of radical democratization, non-domination, and cross-national cooperation, conceiving the state as “supra-national” (*nemzetfölötti*) in character.⁴² The pressing issue was avoiding new war; Jászi put all hope on emerging states joining common structures of political democratization and economic integration linked to strict cultural autonomies.

Zsigmond Kunfi had likewise written on the national question and economy for *Szocializmus*, the social democrats’ theoretical journal, but the censorship office did not allow a single line to be printed.⁴³ We can approach Kunfi’s ideas obliquely through his editorial note on the Austrian social democratic Left’s program published in the same journal. The Austrian social democratic Left, Kunfi argued, “emphasizes internationalism more strongly, does not insist on the historically established state framework, and rather wants to restructure it on the

³⁹ Ibid., 52; cf. Jászi’s related debate with Julius Bunzel on Central Europe, dualism, and the national question: Julius Bunzel, *Ungarn und wir* (Graz: Leuschner und Lubensky, 1918); Oszkár Jászi, “A németek és mi” (We and the Germans), *Világ* 9, no. 136 (June 9, 1918): 1–3; Julius Bunzel and Oszkár Jászi, “Dualizmus vagy demokratikus népszövetség” (Dualism or a Democratic Alliance of Peoples), *Huszadik Század* 19, no. 38 (July–December 1918): 53–57; see also the critical comment on the book by Friedrich Wanderer in *Der Kampf* 11, no. 8 (August 1918): 597–98.

⁴⁰ Oszkár Jászi, *A Monarchia jövője: a dualizmus bukása és a Dunai Egyesült Államok* (The Future of the Monarchy: the Collapse of Dualism and the Danubian United States) (Budapest: Új Magyarország, 1918), 5.

⁴¹ Oszkár Jászi, *Magyarország jövője és a Dunai Egyesült Államok* (The Future of Hungary and the Danubian United States) (Budapest: Új Magyarország, 1918).

⁴² Ibid., 98.

⁴³ Zsigmond Kunfi, “Német világpolitika és magyar feudalizmus” (German Geopolitics and Hungarian Feudalism), *Szocializmus* 11, no. 10 (October 1918): 449–54. The article is mentioned in the table of contents at the back of the journal issue. The phrase “*A cenzura törölte*” (Removed by the Censors) is printed on the corresponding pages instead of Kunfi’s text.

basis of people's self-determination through the political victory of the proletariat.”⁴⁴ Such a sharp contrast between party wings did not exist in Hungary, Kunfi argued, because this leftist position was the mainstream position among Hungarian social democrats.⁴⁵

The leftist republican vision warranted wider distribution. Outlets like *Világ*, *Huszadik Század*, *Népszava*, and *Szocializmus* provided large platforms, but the attempt was to go beyond typical audiences. The civic radicals and social democrats had established a joint publishing house, Új Magyarország Rt. (New Hungary Ltd.), the previous year.⁴⁶ Jászi and Ervin Szabó were founding shareholders alongside figures close to both parties.⁴⁷ Out of this, a popularizing book series “Nature and Society” (*Természet és társadalom*) was established, ranging from Mihály Babits's translation of Kant's *Perpetual Peace*⁴⁸ to Franz Oppenheimer's *The Social Question*⁴⁹ to Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*.⁵⁰ Új Magyarország likewise published Jászi's *The Future of Hungary*, offering a cornucopia of leftist republican thought to a wider public.

With this venture underway, Jászi and *Huszadik Század* gathered responses for a discussion on the national question and the future of Central Europe through a questionnaire reflecting on these debates, with responses sent during and after the Aster Revolution. The

⁴⁴ “Az osztrák szociáldemokrata párt balszárnyának nemzetiségi programja” (The Nationalities Program of the Left Wing of the Austrian Social Democratic Party), *Szocializmus* 11, no. 10 (October 1918): 489.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 490. The national program of the Austrian social democratic Left, led by Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler, was published in *Der Kampf* 11, no. 4 (April 1918): 269–74. The original program of the Left was given by Gabriele Prost of the women's section at the SDAPÖ Parteitag in October 1917. See *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Deutschen Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei in Österreich, abgehalten in Wien vom 19. bis 24. Oktober 1917* (Vienna: Wiener Volksbuchhandlung Ignaz Brand, 1918), 113–17, immediate reactions in *ibid.*, 118–19, and a fuller debate in *ibid.*, 139–66. The debate continued in various articles in *Der Kampf* for all of 1918.

⁴⁶ See data in Ernő Margitay, “Új Magyarország Részvénytársaság” (New Hungary Ltd.), *Élet* 10, no. 35 (September 1, 1918): 811–12.

⁴⁷ See *Központi Értesítő* 43/1, no. 50 (June 23, 1918): 1307, for more of the company's basic data. Their offices were located in the Anker-köz in downtown Pest, on today's Deák Ferenc tér, where the Galileo Circle's meeting hall was also housed.

⁴⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Az örök béke* (Perpetual Peace), trans. Mihály Babits (Budapest: Új Magyarország, 1918).

⁴⁹ Franz Oppenheimer, *A szociális kérdés* (The Social Question), trans. Gábor Kovács (Budapest: Új Magyarország, 1918).

⁵⁰ Bertrand Russell, *A filozófia alapproblémái* (The Foundational Problems of Philosophy), trans. Béla Fogarasi (Budapest: Új Magyarország, 1919).

responses were published in booklet form in January 1919.⁵¹ Among the contributors, two stand out: Péter Ágoston and György Lukács.⁵²

Ágoston, writing from a radical democratic perspective close to both Jászi and Kunfi, stood by earlier views published in 1916.⁵³ His conception of the national question and its solution started with “common existence, cooperation, commerce, and state order.”⁵⁴ This scheme folded with a broad conception of state-based nationhood that ultimately pointed toward a “European State of United Nations.” This idea explicitly contrasted with a “United States of Europe” in Jászian terms, which Ágoston perceived as a federation of existing states rather than a restructuring of the European state order. In other words, the former notion signaled that nations rather than states were to be federalized on equal bases. (Interestingly, Ágoston’s idea resonated with Etbin Kristan’s conception of a federalism of nations previously outlined, though without an apparent line of contact.)

Ágoston reached back to the Réz–Jászi debate, disagreeing with Réz’s insistence on each nation’s natural quest for domination, instead insisting on the equal rights of nations to cultural autonomy. Yet he also critiqued Jászi’s formulation: a territorialized solution would maintain state boundaries within which national minorities would still require complicated systems of autonomy to be administered. Ágoston emphasized that “the entire nation exercises state sovereignty as one,” meaning that the envisioned European State of United Nations would have to be “decidedly international,” like Switzerland. That model was most appealing, for its

⁵¹ Oszkár Jászi, ed., *A nemzetiségi kérdés a társadalmi és az egyéni fejlődés szempontjából: a Huszadik Század kérdérendje* (The Nationalities Question from the Perspective of Social and Individual Development: The *Huszadik Század* Questionnaire) (Budapest: Új Magyarország, 1919). The contributors were Péter Ágoston, Győző Concha, Géza Czirbusz, Béla Felszeghy, Sándor Giesswein, János György, Oszkár Jászi, Aurél Lázár, György Lukács, János Lupas, Jenő Rákosi, Mihály Réz, Lajos Steier, and Sámuel Zach.

⁵² For biographies of both, see the Biographical Notes in the Appendix. For a detailed biography of Ágoston, see Mária Ormos, *A katedrától a halálsorig. Ágoston Péter, 1874–1925* (From the Faculty to Death Row: Péter Ágoston, 1874–1925) (Budapest: Napvilág, 2011).

⁵³ Péter Ágoston, *A mi útjaink: Magyarország jövője* (Our Paths: The Future of Hungary) (Oradea: A Nagyvárad-i Társadalomtudományi Társaság kiadása, 1916).

⁵⁴ Ágoston in Jászi, ed., *A nemzetiségi kérdés*, 40; Ágoston, *A mi útjaink*, 43, 51ff. See also Béla Vas’s review of Ágoston’s *A mi útjaink*—written under the spell of the *Középeurópa* debate—in *Huszadik Század* 18, no. 35 (January–July 1917): 94–96.

constitutional order “bears the character of no nation,” in Ágoston’s words, and the country’s internal organization adhered to historical and geographic criteria rather than ethnic boundaries. The Swiss case was likewise favorable for its republican form. Monarchy, Ágoston argued, was a nationalizing force that generated loyal national aristocracies, but did not respect the rights of the lower classes or national minorities. “In a word, monarchy does not conform to such a development”—the progressive internationalization he had outlined.⁵⁵ Only a republic could.

Lukács’s intervention may be one of his only texts on the national question, and to date has not been included in collections of his writings. The text was prepared precisely in the period between “Bolshevism as a Moral Problem” and “Tactics and Ethics,” which is to say Lukács’s wavering moment between romantic anti-capitalism and Bolshevism.⁵⁶ In the text, Lukács also rejected Réz’s use of ‘race’, though only outside of a strict biological definition—it ought to be reserved for the animal kingdom, not humanity—offering a contrast to Jászi’s critical acceptance of its applicability as a historical-sociological category. Only a Hegelian understanding of “absolute spirit” and its concretization in particular historical moments could grasp the national question, interpreted through modern sociological methods, implicitly Marxism. Racial arguments, to Lukács, were “always naturalism and as such necessarily dogmatic metaphysics.”⁵⁷ For example: any attempt to explain Roman law’s specificity with reference to Roman “racial character” reduced the complex history of Roman law’s development in the Roman republic to a list of what Roman citizens were like. Racial arguments were merely irrational explanations based on ahistorical and unverifiable “character.”⁵⁸ ‘Nation’ for Lukács could only be understood as one among historically concrete categories of absolute spirit alongside ‘state’ and ‘class’.

⁵⁵ Ágoston in Jászi, ed., *A nemzetiségi kérdés*, 44.

⁵⁶ Trencsényi et al., *A History of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2/1, 106–108; see also Michael Löwy, *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism* (London: NLB, 1979) for a complete study, a new edition of which was published by Verso in 2017.

⁵⁷ Lukács in Jászi, ed., *A nemzetiségi kérdés*, 63.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Common language and custom were key elements of nationhood, and developmentally it was fundamental to have a *Charaktergemeinschaft* built from a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*—here Lukács referenced Otto Bauer’s “excellent” *The National Question and Social Democracy* in support.⁵⁹ Yet this was not enough. Here ‘state’ and ‘class’ reemerged: every fully-fledged nation had a class structure and some relation to statehood, referencing the Marxian and Engelsian dual conception of ‘historical’ and ‘non-historical’ nations.⁶⁰ Only large communities with identifiable “ruling classes (nobility, intelligentsia, etc.)” could count as nations. Having a ruling class meant that antagonism between nations also occurred beyond intra-national class struggle. One could feel Lukács’s stronger pull toward Marxism: national and class antagonism were the constitutive elements of modern (but not pre-modern!) states, developing from continual outward economic and political expansion—capitalism and imperialism—resulting in structured competition between states over finite and identifiable resources. “The nation, as a social-psychological and as an ideological formation, thus means the sense of solidarity which belonging to a polity creates in those who are subordinated to it under state law,” Lukács wrote, meaning the capitalist state.⁶¹ The national question could only be resolved by ending the capitalist structure in other words. In a classless society, there can be no nations in their modern form.

The intertwined national, state, and social questions were pressing matters for many. Kunfi articulated one vision in a front-page article for *Népszava* on October 8.⁶² The historian Tibor Hajdu suggested that the text “contained not the slogans of socialist revolution, but rather

⁵⁹ Ibid., 65; Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung Ignaz Brand, 1907); a modern English translation was published as Otto Bauer, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*, trans. Joseph O’Donnell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)

⁶⁰ Lukács in Jászi, ed., *A nemzetiségi kérdés*, 65–69.

⁶¹ Ibid., 81.

⁶² Zsigmond Kunfi, “Magyarország népéhez!” (To the People of Hungary!), *Népszava* 46, no. 235 (October 8, 1918): 1–2; Mihály Károlyi, in his memoirs, attests to Kunfi’s authorship of the text, recalling that “Kunfi’s brilliant style was recognizable and it thus became evident that the left wing of the [Social Democratic] party was now taking the upper hand.” See Károlyi, *Faith without Illusion*, 97.

bourgeois democracy (*polgári demokrácia*),” yet closer examination suggests it went well beyond 1918 liberal bourgeois democracy.⁶³ In “To the People of Hungary!” (*Magyarország népéhez!*), Kunfi insisted on an independent Hungary and a new constitution. The ruling classes’ constitution (of 1867) was based not merely on splitting sovereignty into a dualist model but on “the oppression of nationalities and the [preservation of] political and social class rule inseparable from it.” A new constitution would do away with these privileges and the system of dual exploitation. An entirely new Hungary could be created, based on “the right of nations living in the country to self-determination, the right of the working class to a humane livelihood, and organized in the spirit of democracy and social justice.”⁶⁴ This meant creating a government “which includes delegates from all democratic classes of the country, and all nations living in the country,” dissolving Parliament, and electing a new constituent assembly through “universal, equal, secret suffrage, extended to women as well.” The government would then contract peace “on the basis of the Russian proletarian revolution and Wilson’s principles,” without annexations or reparations, and enter into a “society of nations” based on “disarmament, arbitration, free trade, and peaceful cooperation.”⁶⁵ Kunfi’s program stood for a much more radical conception of the link between political and economic democratization and national autonomy than late-nineteenth-century liberal democracy could allow. He insisted on preserving the Hungarian state’s unity yet did not insist it was exclusively Hungarian (that is, *magyar*).

This content reflected what would begin to be termed Octobrisism—synonymous with leftist republican thought in the context of the Aster Revolution and its aftermath. It meant a commitment to radical democratization in political, economic, and social spheres; the institutionalization of strict national cultural autonomies; and the creation of a liberated, supra-

⁶³ Hajdu, *Az 1918-as forradalom*, 29.

⁶⁴ Kunfi, “Magyarország népéhez,” 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

national political community guiding its own progress with intellectual and moral forces. Concretely these streams came together when Kunfi's text was combined with the Radical and Károlyist programs to draft the Hungarian National Council's program on October 24, 1918.⁶⁶ The National Council blamed "absolutism, class rule, and the oppression of the nationalities" for Hungary's crisis and demanded national self-determination for all "non-Hungarian-speaking peoples." It insisted upon general amnesty, absolute press freedom, radical land reform, and an economic and political union between "independent and democratic Hungary" and the newly emerging "Ukrainian, Polish, Czech, South Slav, and German-Austrian national states."⁶⁷ This vision guided the Károlyi government in negotiating the Armistice of Belgrade (November 13), albeit unsuccessfully, for the armistice turned out to be merely an ultimatum given by French General Franchet d'Espèrey. From that moment, Hungary had been practically truncated already.⁶⁸

Military forces on the territory made negotiations with non-Hungarian-speaking groups trickier for Jászi as minister responsible for national self-determination in Károlyi's cabinet. In mid-November, Jászi still tried, travelling to Arad with Imre Csécsy, now his personal secretary, to meet representatives of the Hungarian National Council in Transylvania and the Central Romanian National Council.⁶⁹ The Romanian side insisted on state sovereignty according to the national principle, meaning unification with the Old Kingdom. Jászi did not

⁶⁶ For the Radicals' programs, see Gyula Mérei, ed., *A magyar polgári pártok programjai (1867–1914)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971), 311–19 (1914) and 319–21 (1918); for the Károlyists' programs, see Mérei, *ibid.*, 307–11 (1916) and the newer version read out by János Hock in Session 823, October 16, 1918, in *Képviselőház naplója*, vol. 41, 281–84.

⁶⁷ "Magyarország népéhez! A Nemzeti Tanács kiáltványa" (To the People of Hungary! The Declaration of the National Council), *Világ* 9, no. 251 (October 26, 1918): 1. Reprinted in Litván and Varga, eds., *Jászi publicisztikája*, 281–85. The declaration was signed by the *Károlyi-párt*, the Social Democratic Party, and the Radical Party; as György Litván and F. János Varga noted in *Jászi publicisztikája*, 285, the proclamation was written by Jászi with Kunfi's additions and corrections. This is attested in Hajdu, *Az 1918-as forradalom*, 39, and Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 122, as well.

⁶⁸ Fischer, *Oszkár Jászi und Mihály Károlyi*, 92–95; Litván, *A Twentieth-Century Prophet*, 149–54.

⁶⁹ On the negotiations, see Fischer, *Oszkár Jászi und Mihály Károlyi*, 99–103; Litván, *A Twentieth-Century Prophet*, 154–60; and Peter Haslinger, *Arad, November 1918: Oszkár Jászi und die Rumänen in Ungarn, 1900 bis 1918* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1993); as well as Jászi's memoir of the meeting, *Visszaemlékezés a Román Nemzeti Komitéval folytatott aradi tárgyalásaimra* (Recollections of My Negotiations with the Romanian National Committee in Arad) (Cluj: Lapkiadó Rt., 1921).

accept the tie between national self-determination and nation-state independence, rather insisting on split government and administration based on Wilsonian principles and the Nationalities Law of 1868. Jászi envisioned an Eastern Switzerland; the Romanian delegates demanded territorial unification with Romania. Events outstripped theory. Romanian troops' presence in Transylvania and the announcement of the region's unification with the Old Kingdom at Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918, led to the end of negotiations. Jászi offered his resignation in a letter to Károlyi a little over a week later.⁷⁰ In that letter, Jászi argued that the only way to avoid "anarchy" and "counterrevolution" was to "go beyond complete political democracy," breaking up latifundia through radical land reform, socializing the means of production, and investing confiscated capital into a deepened welfare system.⁷¹ The point was not to stand by territorial integrity but to stand by the ideas of October.

Csécsy argued for precisely the same position in *Szabadgondolat* (Free Thought)—the re-founded organ of the Galileo Circle, of which he had been a member—in January 1919.⁷² The slogan of territorial integrity had been a root cause of the World War, Csécsy observed. Hungary's logic for entering the war had been to preserve its boundaries, defending them "from Ypres to Thessaloniki, from Warsaw to the Piave, from the middle of the Atlantic to the Dardanelles." Yet "the entire psychological and technical edifice of the war, launched under the false slogan 'defending our borders', collapsed in a single blow."⁷³ The only reason there wasn't an even more terrible apocalypse was the Aster Revolution itself—"a purely anti-militarist revolution"—and defending its principles counted more than defending historical borders:

⁷⁰ For Jászi's resignation letter, see *Károlyi levelezése*, vol. 1, 320–21. Jászi's first resignation letter from November 25, Litván notes, has not been found.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁷² Imre Csécsy, "Területi integritás" (Territorial Integrity), *Szabadgondolat* 9, no. 1 (Jan. 1919): 13–14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13.

Hungarian progress has a duty to itself and to the nationalities to defeat the ‘territorial integrity’ of the counterrevolution once and for all, for if we do not have the strength to do so, we must also renounce the centrifugal impulse of economic and moral justice to ever again weld the Bihar lords’ disintegrated empire into an Eastern Switzerland.⁷⁴

Csécsy further reflected on the revolution’s crisis in an unpublished typescript entitled “Radicalism, Socialism, and Progress,” likely written in early 1919 and preserved in his bequest at the Széchényi National Library in Budapest.⁷⁵ He identified two sources of intractable crisis: the Károlyist Right, led by Tivadar Batthyány; and the communist Left, led by Béla Kun. While the Right rejected Jászi’s radicalism and whose obstructionism had begun to open the path to the counterrevolution, the Left insisted on syndicalist tactics and the dictatorship of the proletariat, cancelling out the moral and intellectual autonomy of the individual at the core of the leftist republican idea. The Entente was also to blame. Their arrogance, fast-and-loose negotiations, continued blockade, and secret treaties had only exacerbated the crisis.

With the reactionary Right, there was no hope of coalition. With the communist Left, it was a dogmatic, vulgar understanding of historical materialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat that appeared as the obstacle to a common front. Csécsy defended “the supremacy of intellectual and moral forces” to guide history rather than single class rule, for only through democratic consultation, decision-making, and trial and error could human progress be realized.⁷⁶ There was no inevitability to history, only progress guided by humanity’s concrete intellectual and moral efforts. Ultimately, he concluded, so much more could and should have been done to defend the Aster Revolution. Not only should the communist Left have renounced

⁷⁴ Ibid., 14. Here, “Bihar lords” (*bihari urak*) refers to Kálmán and István Tisza—whose estates were in Bihar County (with today’s Oradea as its capital)—both of whom played an outsized role in Hungarian political life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The term was likewise used as a symbolic gesture by Endre Ady—a native of neighboring Szatmár County who had worked in Oradea from 1899—to refer to entrenched, conservative, aristocratic power in the country: see, e.g., Endre Ady, “Bihar és Sáros,” *Népszava* 40, no. 221 (Sept. 18, 1912): 9, and “Fehér Dezső jubileuma,” *Nyugat* 7, no. 5 (Mar. 1, 1914): 351, both republished in *Ady Endre összes prózai művei*, vols. 10 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973) and 11 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), respectively.

⁷⁵ OSZK K 163, File no. 2438, Imre Csécsy, “Radikalizmus, szocializmus, progressio [sic]” (Radicalism, Socialism, and Progress). Undated, likely early 1919.

⁷⁶ OSZK K 163, File no. 2438, Imre Csécsy, “Radikalizmus, szocializmus, progressio [sic],” f. 4–5.

its voluntarism, but the conservatives supporting Károlyi were just as much to blame for failing to snuff out the counterrevolution in their own ranks. The rise in communist support now threatened to subordinate the long-term preservation of the radical democratic order to short-term collectivization. Csécsy could already perceive the backlash toward such quick, drastic transformation in a society barely out of war.

Csécsy's text can be read as linking two debates that would continue for decades: the debate on Octobrisms' true ideas, particularly energetic in exile circles, and the debate over the boundaries between republican and communist Lefts—between Octobrisms and Bolshevism. The contrast with the reactionary Right was clear enough. But the line between Octobrisms and Bolshevism was blurry. Károly Polányi used the December 1918 issue of *Szabadgondolat* to explore those boundaries. Jászi, Lukács, and the Marxist economist Jenő Varga were all invited to reflect on the problem of socialism and its implementation. The main idea in Jászi's intervention, "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat," was quite clear: "As a matter of principle," he wrote, "I am against every dictatorship, because every dictatorship means the denial of moral autonomy just as it does the true democratic spirit."⁷⁷ Taking Russia as example, dictatorship had not dissolved class rule but only "inverted" it. Dictatorship could never be merely "transitory"—Jászi had argued this fifteen years earlier in his *Historical Materialism's Theory of State*.⁷⁸ Instead, "reason and the expansion of moral consciousness" were more productive tools for socialism than class struggle. His civic radicalism—understood as an inheritance from the French revolutionary *citoyen* rather than the bourgeois—refused continued gentry and bourgeois class rule but likewise refused rule by any single class. Jászi's desire was "to build up a new society ... with the organs of intellectual and moral forces, with the development of

⁷⁷ Oszkár Jászi, "Proletárdiktatúra" (The Dictatorship of the Proletariat), in *A szociológia első magyar műhelye*, vol. 2, eds. György Litván and László Szűcs (Budapest: Gondolat, 1973), 493–94, here 493. The special issue of *Szabadgondolat*—vol. 8, no. 10 (Dec. 1918)—likewise included a key text by Polányi himself, entitled "A szocializmus próbája" (The Attempt at Socialism).

⁷⁸ Jászi, "Proletárdiktatúra," in *A szociológia első magyar műhelye*, vol. 2, 493; Oszkár Jászi, *A történelmi materializmus állambölcselete* (Historical Materialism's Theory of State) (Budapest: Politzer, 1903).

general cultural ideals, and on the foundation of the understanding, just cooperation of any and all social groups.”⁷⁹ The only alternative would be domestic counterrevolution and imperial domination abroad. Sections in Csécsy’s “Radicalism, Socialism, and Progress” matched Jászi’s intervention almost word-for-word—evidence of ideational consolidation and shared phraseology within this network.

Jenő Varga’s opinion was optimistic but narrowly economic, befitting his confident Marxist orientation. Bolshevik rule was “neither an unrealizable utopia, nor a fantasy,” simply a new mode of governance replacing coercive, class-based labor discipline with voluntary production.⁸⁰ Yet economic production in Bolshevik Russia had dropped below wartime levels. Varga blamed insufficiently socialist-educated intellectuals and technocrats. Seeing world revolution’s inevitability, such a system could emerge in more economically advanced states like Hungary or England. Varga, then, stuck to the orthodox Marxist skepticism toward socialism in predominantly agrarian economies.

Lukács focused on the ethical dimension of Bolshevism.⁸¹ In this text—widely taken as his inflection point toward communism⁸²—Lukács did not yet accept that the proletariat itself was the actualized subject of the Hegelian “absolute spirit.” Instead, “for the era of true freedom, which knows neither oppressor nor oppressed, the victory of the proletariat is an indispensable precondition—for then the last oppressed class will be liberated—but only a

⁷⁹ Jászi, “Proletárdiktatúra,” in *A szociológia első magyar műhelye*, vol. 2, 494.

⁸⁰ Jenő Varga, “A bolsevik uralom jövő kilátásai” (The Future Horizons of Bolshevik Rule), in *A szociológia első magyar műhelye*, vol. 2, 496–98, here 496–97.

⁸¹ György Lukács, “A bolsevizmus mint erkölcsi probléma” (Bolshevism as a Moral Problem), in *A szociológia első magyar műhelye*, vol. 2, 499–505; translated into English as Georg Lukács, “Bolshevism as a Moral Problem,” trans. Judith Marcus Tar, *Social Research* 44, no. 3 (1977): 416–24. See also Isaac Nakhimovsky, “Georg Lukács and Revolutionary *Realpolitik*, 1918–19: An Essay on Ethical Action, Historical Judgment, and the History of Political Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 83, no. 1 (2022): 63–85.

⁸² Cf., e.g., Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 1979); Michael Löwy, *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism* (London: New Left Books, 1979); Lee Congdon, *The Young Lukács* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Ferenc L. Lendvai, *A fiatal Lukács: útja Marxhoz, 1902–1918* (The Young Lukács: His Path to Marx, 1902–1918) (Budapest: Argumentum–Lukács Archívum, 2008); Konstantinos Kavoulakos, *Georg Lukács’s Philosophy of Praxis: From Neo-Kantianism to Marxism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); or Éva Fekete, *Lukács György: Késleltetett életrajz* (A Delayed Biography) (Budapest: Kalligram–Lukács Archívum Nemzetközi Alapítvány, 2021).

precondition, only a *negatívum*.”⁸³ The dictatorship of the proletariat was hardly revolution’s goal, for “the class struggle of the proletariat, which is destined to bring about this new world order, qua class struggle, does not yet contain this world order itself.”⁸⁴ That order would be created from a new revolutionary situation. This meant, as Michael Löwy noted, going “beyond the limits of the proletariat’s class struggle for its concrete material interests” to create a new democratic world.⁸⁵ This was the moral problem of Bolshevism: the “faith” (*hit*) or belief that one’s actions would create a new world. Yet this was hardly an endorsement of the voluntarist’s “sudden, heroic act.” Rather, Lukács endorsed “a slow, unblinking, unheroic, but deeply responsible, soul-preserving, long and instructive struggle of democratic commitment.”⁸⁶ Lukács’s initial skepticism toward Bolshevism depended on rejecting the heroism of violent direct action.

In the meantime, Lukács met Béla Kun, now returned from Moscow, and was convinced to join the Party of Communists in Hungary (*Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja*, KMP). “His conversion took place in the interval between two Sundays: from Saul became Paul,” as Anna Lesznai famously described.⁸⁷ While rapid and surprising, the shift may be perceived as the last push in Lukács’s organic intellectual development toward revolutionary Marxism, mediated through interactions with Budapest’s civic radical and socialist milieux. Lukács did not reject Bolshevism or the dictatorship of the proletariat; he had rejected using violence and voluntarist terror to establish it. Now Lukács opened the door to violence as means whereby the “transcendent ultimate objective”—socialism—would be realized.⁸⁸ In “Tactics and Ethics,”

⁸³ Lukács, “A bolsevizmus mint erkölcsi probléma,” in *A szociológia első magyar műhelye*, vol. 2, 501.

⁸⁴ Lukács, “A bolsevizmus mint erkölcsi probléma,” in *A szociológia első magyar műhelye*, vol. 2, 501.

⁸⁵ Löwy, *Georg Lukács*, 131.

⁸⁶ Lukács, “A bolsevizmus mint erkölcsi probléma,” in *A szociológia első magyar műhelye*, vol. 2, 505.

⁸⁷ David Kettler, “Culture and Revolution: Lukács in the Hungarian Revolutions of 1918/19,” *Telos*, no. 10 (1971): 69.

⁸⁸ György Lukács, “Tactics and Ethics,” in *Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays, 1919–1929*, trans. Michael McColgan and ed. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 3; originally published as the first essay in the short collection *Taktika és etika* (Tactics and Ethics) (Budapest: Közoktatásügyi Népbizottság, 1919). Lukács, from March 21, was the Deputy People’s Commissar for Public Education, working under Zsigmond Kunfi. See *Budapesti Közlöny* 53, no. 69, Special Issue (March 24, 1919): 2.

written before March 1919 but after joining the KMP, proletarian class struggle was “the means whereby humanity liberates itself, a means to the true beginning of human history,” but not the end of historical development.⁸⁹ Lukács’s shift was to insist that “the quest for socially correct ‘values’, socially correct goals” was itself an ethical pursuit, overwriting the means undertaken to achieve the transcendent objective.⁹⁰ Lukács did not deny individual responsibility for murder in revolutionary situations, but insisted the individual was also responsible for “the world’s destiny.” With this ethical imperative, one had to act in accordance with “the correct perception of the given historico-philosophical situation”—“the formation of class consciousness” and “its world-historical mission.”⁹¹ To dismantle the capitalist legal order was to act ethically, even if it meant individual murder, which remained flatly unethical.

Lukács was not arguing for wanton mass murder but making a case for the ethical imperative to dismantle injustice. This demanded going beyond what was merely “legal” or “historical” while maintaining responsibility for one’s actions. In fact, in a revolutionary situation, violence was omnipresent on all sides: “all those who ally themselves to the other side, the defense of capitalism, must bear the same individual responsibility for the destruction entailed in the new imperialist revanchist wars which are surely imminent, and for the future oppression of the nationalities and classes.”⁹² No one could be neutral; even unwillingness to act was a choice laden already with moral consequences.

Lukács’s move was to insist that the dictatorship of the proletariat was transitory but had an inherent world-historical mission of liberating humanity. Jászi, Csécsy, or Kunfi would hardly have disagreed with the mission; there was much debate rather over the means. Escape from domination and the liberation of humanity was—to use Lukács’s words—the transcendent ultimate objective for both republican and communist Lefts. Whether this would be carried out

⁸⁹ Lukács, “Tactics and Ethics,” in *Tactics and Ethics*, 6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 8.

by class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat, or by guiding progress with humanity's intellectual and moral forces, would be the main distinction between the two camps.

By late February 1919, it was clear that attempts at institutionalizing radical democracy within the People's Republic were in crisis. Planned elections for the constituent assembly still hadn't taken place, though scheduled for March or April. Rudolf Tőkés, in his study, argued that the Hungarian People's Republic was in a situation of dual power, not incomparable to Russia; Károlyi and his government nominally controlled central state power, "but it could not implement a single major decision ... without the tacit or expressed consent of the socialists."⁹³ On the streets, in factories, and in the countryside, it was the socialist-dominated workers' and soldiers' councils that ran the show. Independent left-wing socialists, now opposed to the ruling coalition, declared themselves in favor of a communist republic: "our road begins only where the republican, nationalist, and other bourgeois parties—having achieved their goals—call for a halt."⁹⁴ Because of KMP agitation and the general degradation of material conditions, public demonstrations became daily occurrences. *Vörös Újság*, the KMP's organ, called for the proletariat to take up arms: "wherever and however you can, disarm the counterrevolution of the bourgeoisie ... so you may live with the right of revolution, and all enemies of the revolution will be buried or hanged."⁹⁵

This had a strong agitational effect on a population ravaged by war, shortages, disease, death, and a lack of alternatives. By February 20, a mass demonstration for unemployment welfare at the Vigadó Theater in Pest marched to the *Vörös Újság* offices, where Béla Kun addressed them, then continuing to the social democrats' *Népszava* offices. The social democrats called for police protection; a struggle broke out, shots were fired, and five

⁹³ Tőkés, *Béla Kun*, 87.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Tőkés, *Béla Kun*, 90.

⁹⁵ "Szentelt vízzel" (With Holy Water), *Vörös Újság* 1, no. 21 (Feb. 6, 1919): 1; as quoted in Tőkés, *Béla Kun*, 121.

policemen and one civilian were killed.⁹⁶ While Tivadar Batthyány had demanded the communists be arrested in December,⁹⁷ Kunfi insisted in one session of the National Council that more effort ought to be spent “agitating against Bolshevism among the working class with the weapons of intellectual struggle,” echoed then by Jászi who stated “one can only struggle against the Bolsheviks with intellectual weapons, and at the same time rely on a trustworthy national guard (*nemzetőrség*).”⁹⁸ Again, the republican leftist vision of a civic militia drawn from the active citizenry appeared; a true republic ought not have a professional police force, detached from the political community, but rather a bottom-up defense of the republic by its own citizens.

The Berinkey government had no qualms about using the police, however. The Károlyist Vince Nagy, the new Minister of Interior, now put Batthyány’s earlier plan into action, ordering police to ransack the *Vörös Újság* offices and arrest the entire KMP Central Committee.⁹⁹ The day after, *Az Est* reported that Kun had been brutally beaten in his cell by uniformed policemen.¹⁰⁰ This outraged many in both the communist and republican leftist groups. A meeting of older-generation Galileists was held, and they agreed to approach Károlyi and Berinkey. Under the name the Free Association of Old Galileists,¹⁰¹ this “older generation” explicitly condemned the police’s brutality both at the protest and in Kun’s cell. The old

⁹⁶ For the events, see Tökés, *Béla Kun*, 122; Tibor Hajdu, *Az 1918-as forradalom*, 313–16; as well as Tibor Hajdu, “A KMP vezetőinek 1919 február 21-i letartóztatása a minisztertanács előtt,” *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 11, no. 2 (1965): 169–73.

⁹⁷ F. János Varga, “Két dokumentum: A galileisták tiltakozása a kommunista vezetők letartóztatása ellen, 1919. február 26.,” *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai és Történettudományok Osztályának Közleményei* 25, no. 2–3 (1976): 325.

⁹⁸ MNL OL K 27, Minutes of the Ministerial Council, Session no. 66, December 11, 1918, f. 11–12.

⁹⁹ Tökés, *Béla Kun*, 122.

¹⁰⁰ The police did so in front of *Az Est*’s police reporter, Vilmos Tarján, who was even able to capture verbatim dialogue as he witnessed the beatings. See Vilmos Tarján, “Kun Bélát félholtra verték a rendőrök” (The Police Beat Béla Kun Half-Dead), *Az Est* 10, no. 46 (Feb. 22, 1919): 4.

¹⁰¹ Established in early November 1918 by former members of the Galileo Circle “to secure the achievements of the revolution” and to work “to build up the new Hungary.” See the announcement under the advertisement of the Galileo Circle lecture in *Világ* 9, no. 259 (Nov. 5, 1918): 12. It should be pointed out that the modifier “old” only referred to whether one had participated in the Circle before the war. It had nothing to do with age, strictly speaking. In 1919, Imre Csécsy, from the “old,” pre-war group, was only twenty-six years old; Ilona Duczyńska, from the “young,” wartime group, was twenty-two.

imperial spirit in the police hadn't changed, they argued; the Old Galileists could still perceive the reactionary institution which had fired into the crowd at the Chain Bridge.

The Old Galileists demanded the abolition of political persecution; respect for the new rights and liberties of the political community; the dismissal and prosecution of responsible policemen; “the complete eradication of the spirit of public danger prevailing in the police, and the establishment of a genuine people’s police” (*néprendőrség*); the removal of the police captain, Károly Dietz; and the creation of an investigative commission comprised of Old Galileists.¹⁰² Imre Csécsy was delegated to lead the committee and hand the statement to Károlyi and Berinkey.¹⁰³ Csécsy read out a further statement during his audience. The Old Galileists did not comprise a political party, he noted, but were “the living consciousness of the revolutionary youth,” brought together to defend “the achievements of the revolution”—including the people’s republic itself, “which secured the freedoms of assembly, association, thought, print, and speech for all.” Csécsy continued:

We are convinced that these rights and liberties cannot be restricted, cannot be limited even by the Law on the Defense of the People’s Republic,¹⁰⁴ because the laws founding these rights and liberties are neither ad hoc, nor of local character, but the expression of general human ideals, from which all other laws must retreat.¹⁰⁵

The primacy of these rights meant police could not use violence to disperse freely assembled protests. The government needed to respect the republic’s laws first; doing so protected the republic itself. The entire police force needed to be transformed in the spirit of the revolution. Maintaining police in their old imperial spirit would only allow the growth of the

¹⁰² *Károlyi levelezése*, vol. 1, 429. The version compiled by György Litván was an original copy held in Imre Csécsy’s personal bequest at OSZK. An edited version of the memorandum was published in *Világ* 10, no. 46 (Feb. 22, 1919): 5.

¹⁰³ The committee also included Lili Hajdú, György László, and Erich Frigyes Podach. See *Károlyi levelezése*, vol. 1, 429, note to letter no. 410.

¹⁰⁴ Csécsy here refers to Law XI of 1919, “A népköztársasági államforma védelméről” (On the Defense of the People’s Republican State Form), published in *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 35 (Feb. 11, 1919): 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Károlyi levelezése*, vol. 1, 430–32. A summary of the meeting is given in *Világ* 10, no. 50 (Feb. 27, 1919): 4.

counterrevolution, the republic's destruction, and so the endangerment of the political community's freedom and autonomy. A civic militia drawn from citizens themselves was the only fitting defensive force for a genuine republic.

Károlyi "listened to Old Galileists' viewpoint to the end with great interest and visible sympathy."¹⁰⁶ The struggle over the republic's future could not take place with force of arms but through the struggle of ideas, he responded. The only place to decide for or against a "communist republic" was the ballot box. At the following cabinet meeting, Károlyi took some of the demands passed along by Csécsy to heart, insisting certain prisoners be released. Yet no commission was formed, and Kun remained in jail. Conditions for Kun, however, were not terrible by then. He could freely receive visitors and organized a shadow government of communists and left-wing social democrats in his cell. But contingency planning became unnecessary.

On March 19, General Paul-Joseph de Lobit wrote to Károlyi announcing the Entente's new decisions regarding Hungary.¹⁰⁷ The Council of Ten in Paris had accepted a proposal that moved the Hungarian-Romanian demarcation line to the Tisza River, supposedly "with a view to preventing the spreading of Bolshevism."¹⁰⁸ The text of the decision was sent along as a note, handed to Károlyi by Lieutenant Colonel Fernand Vix.¹⁰⁹ Károlyi responded that the decision clearly violated the Armistice of Belgrade. The government would not implement terms that "neither respects the vital interests of the country, but rather stunts the country's development and endangers the peace."¹¹⁰ Instead, the government would resign.

¹⁰⁶ *Világ* 10, no. 50 (Feb. 27, 1919): 4.

¹⁰⁷ *Károlyi levelezése*, vol. 1, 445–48, in French with Hungarian translation.

¹⁰⁸ Minutes from Meeting of February 21, 1919, in *The Paris Peace Conference*, vol. 4, 60; Minutes from Meeting of February 26, 1919, in *The Paris Peace Conference*, vol. 4, 145–47.

¹⁰⁹ In Hungarian historiography, this has been termed the so-called *Vix-jegyzet* (Vix Note), which to this day has borne the name of the messenger rather than the authors.

¹¹⁰ *Károlyi levelezése*, vol. 1, 448–49, in French with Hungarian translation.

The decision was relayed across the press the next day.¹¹¹ The merger of KMP and MSZDP was also announced—creating the Socialist Party of Hungary—as was the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Republic of Councils. Lajos Biró, writing for *Világ*, asked readers to remember the transformation had been achieved without bloodshed.¹¹² It was a peaceful transfer of power. For many on the republican Left, the events simply opened a new chapter in the Aster Revolution. Zsigmond Kunfi and Vilmos Böhm, for example, continued working toward their original goals in new offices. For others, the transition was hardly welcome. Jászi noted that, after waiting fruitlessly for Lukács to bring news about the new regime, he and the artist Anna Lesznai (his wife) made their way home by car and were stopped at gunpoint and searched by proletarian guards. “That trip home had an effect of almost symbolic bleakness on me,” Jászi wrote, remarking the following day that the whole project had become “a dreadful, depressing constellation.”¹¹³ The fragility of the Republic of Councils had been clear to Jászi from the beginning; the burgeoning counterrevolution now stood on the horizon.¹¹⁴ By early May, he was in Vienna.

2.2. *The Struggle for a Republic in Postwar Yugoslavia*

In Yugoslavia, post-imperial transition took a quite different form. At the end of November 1918, nationalist assemblies in Syrmia and Vojvodina, along with the Podgorica Assembly in Montenegro, declared unilateral unification with the Kingdom of Serbia. A week later, on December 1, 1918, the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs—governed by the National Council

¹¹¹ *Világ* 10, no. 69 (Mar. 22, 1919): 2; *Népszava* 47, no. 69 (Mar. 22, 1919): 1–4; *Az Est* 10, no. 69 (Mar. 23, 1919): 1–3; “Mindenkihez!” (To All!), *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 69, special number (Mar. 24, 1919): 1–2.

¹¹² Lajos Biró, “Magyar tanácsköztársaság” (Hungarian Republic of Councils), *Világ* 10, no. 69 (Mar. 22, 1919): 1.

¹¹³ Litván, *A Twentieth Century Prophet*, 181–82.

¹¹⁴ Litván, *A Twentieth Century Prophet*, 185.

in Zagreb—declared its unification with Serbia in Belgrade, creating the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.¹¹⁵ Under the surface of what seemed to have been a swift adjoining of sovereign states was, in reality, a realm of endless friction.

In debates over unification at the National Council in Zagreb, Stjepan Radić had expressed a pronounced agrarian republican view, jettisoning his earlier Austro-Slavist position. On November 24, at the night session before the Council's delegation was to head to Belgrade, Radić insisted that “we, the Croats, want no political entity but a federal republic.”¹¹⁶ This radically upset the transition politics of the Croat-Serb Coalition, led by Svetozar Pribićević, that insisted upon centralist unification. Beyond the technical details, this simply meant the unilateral extension of Serbian administrative and legal structures to formerly Habsburg imperial territories. Radić argued by contrast that ‘democracy’ had become “an empty word” to those desiring such top-down unification. The centralist faction had ignored the popular will, particularly in Croatia-Slavonia, which was overwhelmingly drawn from peasant masses. The peasantry itself had become “decisively and enthusiastically pro-republic” by the war's end.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ For overviews of the process, see, e.g., Ferdo Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata* (Yugoslavia between the Two World Wars), vol. 1 (Zagreb: JAZU, 1961), 5–150; Metod Mikuž, *Oris zgodovine Slovencev v stari Jugoslaviji 1917–1941* (An Outline of the History of the Slovenes in the Old Yugoslavia, 1917–1941) (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1965), 23–83; Bogdan Krizman, *Raspad Austro-Ugarske i stvaranje jugoslavenske države* (The Collapse of Austria-Hungary and the Creation of the Yugoslav State) (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1977), 214–29; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 115–40; Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988* (The History of Yugoslavia, 1918–1988), vol. 1, *Kraljevina Jugoslavija, 1914–1941* (The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1914–1941) (Belgrade: Nolit, 1988), 21–30; Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 12–39; or Marie-Janine Calic, *A History of Yugoslavia*, trans. Dona Geyer (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2019), 61–67.

¹¹⁶ Stjepan Radić, “Govor na noćnoj sjednici Narodnog vijeća dana 24. studenoga 1918” (Speech at the Night Session of the National Council, November 24, 1918), in *Politički spisi: autobiografije, članci, govori, rasprave* (Political Writings: Autobiographies, Articles, Speeches, Interventions), ed. Zvonimir Kulundžić (Zagreb: Znanje, 1971), 323–35; republished in English translation as Stjepan Radić, “Speech at the Night Assembly of the National Council on 24 November 1918,” in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945)*, vol. 3/1, *Modernism – The Creation of Nation-States*, ed. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny, and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest: CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY Press, 2010), 151–60.

¹¹⁷ Radić, “Govor na noćnoj sjednici,” in *Politički spisi*, 324.

Republicanism among the Croatian peasantry was part of a larger popular revolt erupting from the post-imperial transition's opening moments. It represented "freedom, above all liberation from conscription, taxation, usury, requisitioning—everything which the peasant associated with the city," as Mark Biondich wrote.¹¹⁸ The "neutral Croat peasant republic" represented peasant-centered "plebiscitary democracy," meaning more precisely that "the people, that is, the peasantry, would be truly sovereign" vis-à-vis the urban center but also the rural forces of agricultural exploitation.¹¹⁹ Radić's republicanism had its own integrative and protective political temporality: "not only a radical reckoning with the past," Branka Boban noted, "but also the best solution to the problems brought about by this new era, the best means to oppose the ideas and forces which threatened to dissolve the peasant movement."¹²⁰ From a more normative viewpoint, the political scientists Tihomir Cipek and Vladimir Šadek likewise pointed out that Radić's republicanism "does not exclusively mean the form of state and the way to exercise political power founded on popular sovereignty, but also Croatian state independence. ... the idea of the republic is tied to freedom, the rights of humanity and citizenry, as well as ideas of solidarity and social justice. ... The republic is thus founded on the harmony between freedom, democracy, and solidarity."¹²¹

Radić's republicanism was hardly nationally exclusive. He did not deny the ethnographic unity of the South Slavs but insisted this unity obtained within a broader conception of Slavdom. Importantly, 'unity' did not mean the mechanical integration of Croats

¹¹⁸ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 150. The invective '*kaputaš*' (derived from the word '*kaput*' for 'coat', i.e., 'coat-wearer'), a key concept in Radić's and the Croatian peasantists' political language, conveys an image of the urban bourgeois, particularly those middle class officials circulating in high social circles, and representative of the landowners, bank officials, and civil servants whom the peasantry blamed for their poverty and oppression.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. See also Zvonimir Kulundžić, *Stjepan Radić i njegov republikanski ustav* (Stjepan Radić and His Republican Constitution) (Zagreb: Azur, 1991).

¹²⁰ Branka Boban, "O osnovim obilježima »seljačke države« u ideologiji Antuna i Stjepana Radića" (On the Basic Characteristics of the 'Peasant State' in the Ideology of Antun and Stjepan Radić), *Radovi* 13, no. 1 (1980): 51–88, here 55; see also the longer discussion of Radić's ideology in Branka Boban, *Demokratski nacionalizam Stjepana Radića* (The Democratic Nationalism of Stjepan Radić) (Zagreb: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1998).

¹²¹ Tihomir Cipek and Vladimir Šadek, "Teorija republikanizma Stjepana Radića" (Stjepan Radić's Theory of Republicanism), *Historijski zbornik* 62, no. 2 (2009): 411–25, here 418.

with Serbs and Slovenes into a single Yugoslav nation. For Radić, each Slavic nation had developed historically into a nation unto itself, even if linguistic ties were closer between the neighboring Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs than with the Poles and Czechs. *Narodno jedinstvo* (‘national unity’) may have meant spiritual, linguistic, and cultural ties, but these ethnographic facts did not necessitate political unification on centralist terms. Radić by contrast asserted national autonomies based upon his rural vision of peasant democracy, realizable only in a federal republic.

Yet the centralism of the unification process appeared to have cut off any alternative realization—federal, autonomist, republican, socialist, peasantist—of *narodno jedinstvo*. Less than a week after the Kingdom’s creation, on December 5, a demonstration broke out in Zagreb, comprised primarily of soldiers from the former Austro-Hungarian army and Croatian Home Guard, joined by civilians. Nominally against arbitrary unification, the common positive principle of the protest was a mix of popular republicanism and state federalism offered by both Radić’s peasantists and the social democrats. Cheers of “Long live the republic!” and “Down with the king!” rang in Jelačić Square; some demonstrators tried to take red flags from the social democratic organ *Sloboda* (Freedom).¹²² When armed Sokol members and the National Guard attempted to disarm and disperse the protesters, both sides opened fire, leaving at least thirteen killed and seventeen wounded.¹²³

It was, as Biondich noted, “an inauspicious beginning to a seemingly auspicious enterprise.”¹²⁴ Ferdo Čulinović observed that December 5 was “an expression of dissatisfaction with the newly created state of affairs in view of the national and social questions.”¹²⁵ This was

¹²² See Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, 160–69; as well as Zorica Stipetić, *Argumenti za revoluciju – August Cesarec* (Arguments for Revolution: August Cesarec) (Zagreb: Centar društvenih djelatnosti, 1982), 70–71.

¹²³ Josip Horvat stated in 1938 that “a definite number was never established.” See *Politička povijest Hrvatske* (The Political History of Croatia), vol. 2 (Zagreb: August Cesarec, 1990 [1938]), 136. Ferdo Čulinović argued that, “according to the official report,” at least 13 people were killed and 17 wounded. Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, vol. 1, 160.

¹²⁴ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 148.

¹²⁵ Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, vol. 1, 168.

likewise the opinion of the twenty-five-year-old leftist August Cesarec. Two days after the protest, Cesarec took to *Sloboda* with his article “On the Occasion of the Greatest and Saddest Glory.”¹²⁶ In his first published text after the war’s end and unification, Cesarec observed that “we are neither socially liberated nor morally unified,” despite claims to the opposite made by “the opaque, compromised minority” of “the bourgeois class” directing unification from above.¹²⁷ The South Slavs’ unification-in-disunity was determined by a missed historical chance, with the consequence that “the general political development in Europe has surpassed our political development by a full fifty years.”¹²⁸ The missed chance for a national and social revolution came between the Illyrian movement’s height in the 1830s and the rise of “Starčevićism”—exclusivist Croatian ethnic nationalism based in part on Croatia’s corpus of historical state rights during the 1860s.¹²⁹ By contrast, German and Italian national unification had come *before* the 1871 Paris Commune, Cesarec argued, yet Yugoslav unification came *after* the Russian and German social revolutions in 1917 and 1918. The results of a delayed social and national revolution thus had direct influence on Yugoslav unification’s possibilities: “monarchy or republic, centralism or federation.”¹³⁰ Through this historical interpretation, Cesarec wanted to make a larger political point that social liberation was not a bourgeois concession but something to be won through revolution.

For Cesarec it wasn’t obvious, as for Radić, that republicanism and federalism were a natural pair. Instead, it was “neither monarchy nor separatism, but a centralist republic with a

¹²⁶ Stipetić, *Argumenti za revoluciju*, 70. The original text is August Cesarec, “Povodom najveće i najtužnije slave,” *Sloboda* 2, no. 5 (December 7, 1918): 1–3; reprinted in August Cesarec, *Rasprave, članci, polemike: društveni i kulturni problemi Jugoslavije (1918–1925)* (Discussions, Articles, Polemics: The Social and Cultural Problems of Yugoslavia, 1918–1925), vol. 1, ed. Vice Zanimović (Zagreb: Mladost, 1986), 7–11. I quote from this latter edition.

¹²⁷ Cesarec, “Povodom najveće i najtužnije slave,” in *Rasprave, članci, polemike*, vol. 1, 7–8.

¹²⁸ Cesarec, “Povodom najveće i najtužnije slave,” in *Rasprave, članci, polemike*, vol. 1, 9.

¹²⁹ See Mirjana Gross, *Povijest pravaške ideologije* (The History of Pravaška Ideology) (Zagreb: Institut za hrvatsku povijest, 1973) for a detailed study. Here, *pravaška* refers to someone or something related to the *Stranka prava*, the ‘Party of Right’, that is, the Party of Croatian State Right. While the party was on the political Right, the name does not refer to a place on the political spectrum; rather, ‘Right’ in this case refers to the legal corpus of accumulated rights undergirding the idea of Croatia’s state independence.

¹³⁰ Cesarec, “Povodom najveće i najtužnije slave,” in *Rasprave, članci, polemike*, vol. 1, 9.

federal administration” that could act as “the suitable path for social liberation.”¹³¹ A centralist republic was the only means to achieve moral unification and social liberation and prevent further “bloodshed” and “mutual slaughter.”¹³² Cesarec stood firmly in the leftist stream of Croatian social democracy; with Miroslav Krleža, he would play a key intellectual role in what became the Croatian branch of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, though both would retain heterodox views vis-à-vis the party line throughout the interwar period.¹³³

The communist movement in interwar Yugoslavia, while heterogeneous, largely fell outside the republican Left’s horizon. Committed to revolutionary transformation through class struggle and dictatorship of the proletariat rather than democratic reform, the communists pursued different means toward overlapping ends. Yet certain heterodox individuals—like Krleža, Cesarec, and later Edvard Kardelj—maintained dialogue with republican ideas and would act as significant bridges between these currents. Cesarec had attempted to diagnose the political-theoretical consequences of social unrest at the end of 1918 in decidedly republican *and* social revolutionary terms. While social unrest continued for years, particularly in the countryside, quick and brutal suppression of popular dissent snuffed out revolutionary potential similar to what had appeared in Hungary.¹³⁴ Instead, the creation of delegated representative bodies began hemming in which future-oriented political temporalities could obtain among the South Slavs. Slowly, the path toward social revolution was cut off; reformist attempts at constitutionally altering the state form were blocked; finally, the republican Left made a slow retreat to culture from 1921 onward—a more gradual process than in Hungary. But with their

¹³¹ Cesarec, “Povodom najveće i najtužnije slave,” in *Rasprave, članci, polemike*, vol. 1, 11.

¹³² Cesarec, “Povodom najveće i najtužnije slave,” in *Rasprave, članci, polemike*, vol. 1, 11.

¹³³ Zorica Stipetić, “Uloga Augusta Cesarca i Miroslava Krleže u stvaranju Komunističke partije Jugoslavije” (The Roles of August Cesarec and Miroslav Krleža in the Formation of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia), *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 5, no. 3 (1973): 71–97; also, Ivan Očak, *Krleža – Partija: Miroslav Krleža u radničkom i komunističkom pokretu 1917-1941* (Krleža – Party: Miroslav Krleža in the Workers’ and Communist Movement, 1917–1941) (Zagreb: Spektar, 1982).

¹³⁴ On the unrest, see, e.g., Bogumil Hrabak, “Radikalizacija seljaštva u Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji 1919. i 1920. godine” (The Radicalization of the Peasantry in Croatia-Slavonia in 1919 and 1920), *Zbornik Historijskog instituta Slavonije*, no. 10 (1973): 13–81.

participation in representative parliamentary fora, the language and theory of leftist republicanism was perhaps given a firmer basis in the political mentality of interwar Yugoslavia.

Among these new representative institutions aimed at forestalling a revolution, a Temporary National Representation (*Privremeno narodno predstavništvo*, PNP) was delegated by Regent Aleksandar at the end of February 1919 to begin transferring legislative power from the various national councils to a common legislature. It began its work on March 1.¹³⁵ Members included some figures of the South Slavic republican Left, particularly social democrats from Slovenia, Croatia-Slavonia, Serbia, and Vojvodina, who formed their own parliamentary club.¹³⁶ In their inaugural declaration, the social democrats argued for radical suffrage expansion—“universal and equal, direct and secret ... without gender differences”—plus a proportional electoral system for legislative and administrative roles. They asserted clearly that “we demand the republican form for our country, because we see in this state form the most ideal expression of political democracy, which is a prerequisite for the socialist organization of society.”¹³⁷

However, the PNP’s procedure was entirely undemocratic and framed only within a monarchic understanding of the future state.¹³⁸ The first government, led by Stojan Protić, had been appointed by Regent Aleksandar rather than elected either within the PNP or in a general election. This was symptomatic of what Branislav Gligorijević called the “*sui generis*” character of “non-responsible” government and “unparliamentary” legislative life, determined by Serbian crown intervention rather than democratic consensus.¹³⁹ Even the PNP’s

¹³⁵ Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, vol. 1, 203–206.

¹³⁶ See, e.g., their common declaration: Melhijor Čobal et al., “Delavskemu ljustvu v jugoslovanskih pokrajinah!” (To the Working People in the Yugoslav Lands!), *Naprej* 3, no. 57 (March 10, 1919): 1.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ On the character of the PNP, see Branislav Gligorijević, *Parlament i političke stranke u Jugoslaviji (1919–1929)* (Parliament and Political Parts in Yugoslavia, 1919–1929) (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1979), 17–36, particularly 26–34.

¹³⁹ Gligorijević, *Parlament i političke stranke*, 22–23.

appointment criteria was Byzantine. Each delegate had been appointed according to obscure region-specific criteria. Unevenness in representation ensured delegates from the former Kingdom of Serbia were overrepresented, most of whom were committed monarchists and centralists. From the territories administered by the National Council in Zagreb—the former State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs—there was one representative per 100,000 people; from pre-war Serbia, one per 42,000.¹⁴⁰ A minority on the Verification Committee, including Dragotin Lončar,¹⁴¹ initially protested against arbitrary delegation and put forward a separate opinion. Yet they acquiesced, stating that if dissenting views became public, this “could be interpreted by the enemies of our unification as [evidence of] our own impotence.”¹⁴²

Radić’s republican peasantists were more active thundering against top-down unification. At the Peasantry Party’s convention on February 3, 1919, a resolution was passed demanding a “peaceful peasant republic” on the basis of “old Croatian state right and the new right of national self-determination.”¹⁴³ Radić insisted on a constituent assembly for Croatia to determine relations within an envisioned federal republic. Protić’s government was less than tolerant: with Pribičević as Interior Minister, Radić’s party paper *Dom* was banned in

¹⁴⁰ Gligorijević, *Parlament i političke stranke*, 26.

¹⁴¹ Lončar was elected to the Verification Committee of the PNP on March 4, then as one of the secretaries of the PNP on March 13. See “Seja državnega veća” (Session of the State Council), *Naprej* 3, no. 53 (March 5, 1919): 4–5; and “Seje narodnega predstavnštva v Belgradu” (Sessions of the National Representation in Belgrade), *Naprej* 3, no. 61 (March 14, 1919): 3. It must be noted that Lončar’s position was largely ceremonial, and he was part of a small minority of socialist deputies from within the minority of delegates from Slovenia. In fact, Lončar’s position was so marginal that when he read out a report of the Verification Committee in Slovenian translation, Anton Korošec interrupted him and insisted that “the reading in Slovenian be immediately abandoned, because all Slovenians understand Serbo-Croatian.” See “Seja narodnega predstavnštva” (Session of the National Representation), *Naprej* 3, no. 60 (March 13, 1919): 3.

¹⁴² Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, vol. 1, 207.

¹⁴³ Stjepan Radić, *Put k seljačkoj republici* (The Path to a Peasant Republic) (Zagreb: Naklada Radićeve slavonske knjižare, 1923), 12–13; Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 163–64. Biondich cites Rudolf Horvat’s *Hrvatska na mučilištu* (Croatia in the Torture Chamber) (Zagreb, 1942), 83–84, for this information too. Horvat’s account is that of an eyewitness, for in the late 1910s and early 1920s he had been an active leader in the Croatian peasantist movement around Radić. Still, we have to be skeptical of his interpretation: Horvat retreated from public life when Radić brought the Croatian (Republican) Peasant Party into the Krestintern in 1924, and then took a sharp right-wing turn in the meantime, later becoming an active collaborator in the quisling Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna država Hrvatska*, NDH) from spring 1941. Horvat’s cited text was published in 1942, written in retrospect and in the context of his active historical revisionism in the NDH. On Horvat, see Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, “Horvat, Rudolf (2002),” in *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, online edition, Zagreb, Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak/7877>.

February.¹⁴⁴ Radić himself was arrested in March for sending a republican pamphlet to Wilson and Entente leaders in Paris, spending over twenty months in prison between March 1919 and November 1920.¹⁴⁵ The Croatian peasantists had only been delegated two PNP seats, but would eventually win 50 seats in the countrywide Constituent Assembly elections—but with their categorical refusal to recognize the 1918 unification, they abstained from all common legislatures from 1919 to 1924.¹⁴⁶

The PNP's sole purpose was to pass a suffrage bill for the Constituent Assembly elections, to be held November 28, 1920.¹⁴⁷ Yet a key document was also passed to curtail the opposition's political room: the Code of Conduct requiring elected representatives to take an oath to the king *before* debating the constitution. This seemed to curtail the republican Left's ability to advocate openly for a republican state form—theoretically invalidating one's oath and making one ineligible to participate.¹⁴⁸ While never enforced, the condition spoke to the monarchist and centralist ideas reigning over proceedings. Meanwhile, the Yugoslav republican Left underwent broadening and transformation. The Republican Democratic Party (*Republikanska demokratska stranka*, RDS) of Jaša Prodanović and Ljubomir Stojanović was formed in Belgrade in January 1920.¹⁴⁹ The Socialist Workers' Party of Yugoslavia (Communist) (*Socijalistička radnička partija Jugoslavije (komunista)*, SRPJ(k)) was established in April 1919 out of left-wing splits in the various South Slavic social democratic formations, later becoming the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, KPJ) at the Vukovar Congress of June 1920.¹⁵⁰ A month later, the Social

¹⁴⁴ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 164.

¹⁴⁵ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 164–66, 170–71.

¹⁴⁶ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 164.

¹⁴⁷ Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, vol. 1, 216–17.

¹⁴⁸ Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, vol. 1, 218–19.

¹⁴⁹ Aleksandar Lukić, *Југословенска републиканска странка у политичком животу Краљевине Југославије (1920-1941)* (The Yugoslav Republican Party in the Political Life of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1920–1941) (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2020), 125–26.

¹⁵⁰ Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988*, vol. 1, 103–111; also Ivan Avakumović, *History of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia* (Aberdeen: The Aberdeen University Press, 1964), 25–59, in English.

Democratic Party of Yugoslavia (*Socijaldemokratska stranka Jugoslavije*, SDSJ) was established through mergers of social democratic parties from Croatia-Slavonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Vojvodina.¹⁵¹ The Yugoslav Social Democratic Party (JSDS) remained independent in Slovenia. At this moment, Etbin Kristan returned from the United States, rejoined the JSDS, and began agitating for a republican and socialist Yugoslavia on the basis of the Chicago Declaration.¹⁵² Finally, Radić's party officially became the Croatian *Republican* Peasant Party (*Hrvatska republikanska seljačka stranka*, HRSS) in December 1920, though apparently this was only a formal clarification: the leadership insisted "the party was from its very creation republican in spirit."¹⁵³

This concentration of formations with explicitly republican programs fared relatively well in Constituent Assembly elections, together winning 121 of 419 seats (29%), with the KPJ and HRSS alone claiming 58 and 50 seats respectively.¹⁵⁴ Yet Radić's party maintained its abstention, reducing republican Left's seats from 121 to 71 (to about 17% of the total). The HRSS drafted their own constitution outside of the proceedings, declaring their unwavering support for a neutral Croat peasant republic.¹⁵⁵ Holding less than a fifth of seats was insufficient to stave off momentum toward monarchy: the Vidovdan Constitution passed on June 28, 1921, with 223 votes in favor, 35 against, and 158 abstentions.¹⁵⁶ The JSDS, SDSJ, RDS, and most delegates from the Union of Agrarian Workers (*Savez zemljoradnika*, SZ) voted against; the KPJ and HRSS abstained. The monarchist and centralist factions would have carried the

¹⁵¹ Toma Milenković, *Socijalistička partija Jugoslavije (1921–1929)* (The Socialist Party of Yugoslavia, 1921–1929) (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1974), 31–88.

¹⁵² Kodrič, "Etbin Kristan," 87.

¹⁵³ Tomislav Išek, *Djelatnost Hrvatske seljačke stranke u BiH do zavođenja diktature* (The Work of the Croatian Peasant Party in Bosnia and Herzegovina until the Introduction of the Dictatorship) (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1981), 79. Although Išek focuses on HRSS in Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, pages 30–90 feature a good general overview of the HSS from its creation to 1921. Otherwise, Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 173, for the name change but also the opening chapters of the book for a broader overview of the HSS.

¹⁵⁴ "Целокупан преглед у земљи" (Total Overview in the Country), *Статистички преглед избора народних посланика за Уставотворну скупштину* (Statistical Overview of the Elections of People's Representatives to the Constituent Assembly) (Belgrade: Ustavotvorna Skupština, 1921), fold-out table attached to end of the book.

¹⁵⁵ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 175–76.

¹⁵⁶ Gligorijević, *Parlament i političke stranke*, 110.

majority even if KPJ delegates had voted and those from the HRSS participated in the first place. The Vidovdan Constitution enshrined the state's monarchic form, set guardrails against the disruption of traditional social relations, and curtailed parliamentary democracy—and eventually enabled King Aleksandar to enact a royal dictatorship on January 6, 1929, without a coup.¹⁵⁷

Among the South Slavic republican Left, the pressing Adriatic Question became particularly relevant for Slovenians around the JSDS and among the Masarykian civic radicals (Lončar, Prepeluh, Štebi). The Italian occupation of the former Austrian Littoral and Dalmatia, along with conflicts between South Slavic and Austro-German paramilitaries in Styria and Carinthia, shook assumptions that a complete and peaceful unification could take place. This also pushed the Slovenian republican Left to reflect on the social question, national question, and question of state form before the immediate electoral and parliamentary debates leading into Vidovdan 1921.

Anton Kristan, representing the JSDS mainstream, was appointed head of the Commissariat for Social Welfare within the Regional Government for Slovenia on October 31, 1918.¹⁵⁸ On November 18, he appointed two key Socialist Youth intellectuals to his office: Albin Prepeluh as commissar for the war-injured and social welfare, and Milan Lemež for labor law and worker protection.¹⁵⁹ Alojzija Štebi was later named supervisor for youth welfare.¹⁶⁰ By late February 1919, Prepeluh headed the Commissariat for Social Policy while Anton Kristan took that of National Economy.¹⁶¹ Yet by April that year, the JSDS Executive

¹⁵⁷ For the intellectual and legal debates around monarchist thought, see Cody James Inglis, "The Languages of Monarchism in Interwar Yugoslavia, 1918–1941: Variations on a Theme," *History of European Ideas*, pre-print, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2023.2233061>.

¹⁵⁸ "Razglasi Narodne vlade" (Notices of the National Government), *Uradni list* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 4, 1918): 1.

¹⁵⁹ "Naredba poverjenjstva za socialno skrbstvo" (Announcement of the Commissariat for Social Welfare), *Uradni list* 1, no. 9 (Nov. 18, 1918): 17. To note, the page numbering of the *Uradni list* (Official Gazette) is continuous across the issues. Lemež's title was corrected in the following issue: "Popravek" (Correction), *Uradni list* 1, no. 10 (Nov. 20, 1918): 20.

¹⁶⁰ *Uradni list* 1, no. 27 (Dec. 23, 1918): 58.

¹⁶¹ Session 67 of the Regional Government for Slovenia, February 28, 1919, in *Sejni zapisniki Narodne vlade Slovencev, Hrvatov in Srbov v Ljubljani in Deželnih vlad za Slovenijo 1918–1921* (Stenographic Notes of the

Committee requested their resignations—worsening conditions had pushed railway workers toward strike, and majority opinion was that the JSDS should no longer legitimate a governing body unable to enact reforms. Prepeluh doubted whether he remained “a confidant of the party.”¹⁶² Nevertheless, Prepeluh and Kristan stayed through summer, with Kristan departing for the short-lived Davidović government in Belgrade and Prepeluh remaining in the Commissariat for Social Welfare in Ljubljana until November 1919.

This liminal position was awkward. The rise of the revolutionary Left within the JSDS in early 1919 had displaced Prepeluh and Kristan to the party’s relative right wing. Before, late wartime factions had grouped around an internationalist ‘older’ generation and a national-autonomist ‘younger’ group. Now fractures fell upon revolutionary and reformist lines which scrambled the previous factions. The Slovenian republican Left emerging from the JSDS did not always fall cleanly along these lines either. Still, Anton Kristan and Prepeluh worked earnestly to improve workers’ conditions, even as a minority with little room for maneuver. In one of his first actions, Anton Kristan had asked that the National Government repeal the old Austrian law on associations, proposing that “associations ought to be freely established” with meetings held without surveillance or requests for permission.¹⁶³ While this would radically liberalize the public sphere beyond the press, Kristan’s drive was not simply about getting rid of the imperial past wholesale. In early January 1919, he lodged a further interpellation against the vandalism of monuments and the destruction of German-language newspapers in cafés in Ljubljana. “All of this is done under the leadership of people who want to win over a nationally-minded audience by such acts, to show themselves to be radical,” he argued. “But, in reality,

Sessions of the National Government of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs in Ljubljana and the Regional Government for Slovenia, 1918–1921), vol. 2, *od 28. feb. 1919 do 5. nov. 1919*, ed. Peter Ribnikar (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 1999), 5–12.

¹⁶² Session 88 of the Regional Government, April 14, 1919, in *Sejni zapisniki*, vol. 2, 146.

¹⁶³ “134. Gesetz vom 15. November 1867 über das Vereinsrecht,” *Reichsgesetzblatt*, no. 58 (Nov. 24, 1867): 377–84; Session 11 of the National Government in Ljubljana, November 10, 1918, in *Sejni zapisniki*, vol. 1, *od 1. nov. 1918 do 26. feb. 1919*, ed. Peter Ribnikar (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 1998), 94; the Administrative Commission of the National Government was instructed on November 18 to “consider Commissar Kristan’s motion,” in *ibid.*, 118.

such actions would only reintroduce pre-war methods into our public life... our reputation—on the outside, in front of the world—suffers.”¹⁶⁴ Against heightened nationalist tensions, Kristan’s tried to speak to a larger issue about the political community’s boundaries. The nationalist political temporality obtaining in the consolidating state fed on a future vision excluding non-South Slavic minorities from public life. In Anton Kristan’s vision, the German-speaking cultural community in Ljubljana and beyond was still part of the same shared past and so part of the same political community even in a new, nominally South Slavic state.

These attempts at negotiating an alternative republican political temporality were brought into tension with the pressure of Italian incursions into the Littoral and Dalmatia, and boundary disputes with the new German-Austrian Republic in Styria and Carinthia. The National Government sought sympathetic international contacts to relieve the situation. Dragotin Lončar, owing to academic contacts with Masaryk, Beneš, and the Czech Realist circles from his student years, was tapped as the Slovenian envoy to Prague.¹⁶⁵ If Lončar could inveigh against Italy’s advances to Masaryk, perhaps Masaryk would take word to Wilson that the Entente ought to pressure the Italians against expanding in the northern and eastern Adriatic. Lončar was given 1,000 crowns for his trip.¹⁶⁶ Upon his return, he reported that he had ultimately met with the geographer Václav Švambera, his former doctoral supervisor at Charles University, who recommended that “our government ought to request immediately that maps and images (prints) of our territory be handed over” by the *Militärgeographisches Institut* in Vienna—ensuring boundary claims could be backed by visual data during “the liquidation of Austria-Hungary.”¹⁶⁷ It does not seem that Lončar was able to meet with Masaryk or Beneš personally.

¹⁶⁴ Session 41 of the National Government in Ljubljana, January 3, 1919, *Sejni zapisniki*, vol. 1, 238.

¹⁶⁵ Session 20 of the National Government in Ljubljana, November 21, 1918, *Sejni zapisniki*, vol. 1, 123.

¹⁶⁶ Session 26 of the National Government in Ljubljana, November 30, 1918, *Sejni zapisniki*, vol. 1, 150.

¹⁶⁷ Session 42 of the National Government in Ljubljana, January 7, 1919, *Sejni zapisniki*, vol. 1, 242.

Political discourse on the new state's boundaries did have some resonance among the circle of the Slovenian republican Left beyond Lončar's foray in Prague. The March 1919 issue of Alojzija Štebi's *Demokracija* was dedicated to "Our Occupied Territory" (*Naše zasedeno ozemlje*), featuring an editorial from Štebi and contributions from Rudolf Golouh, Fran Erjavec, Prepeluh, and others. Štebi opened by arguing against national, cultural, and social domination—*suženjstvo* ('slavery')—invoking "self-determination, freedom of the people, democracy" against Italian imperialism imposed on South Slavs in the Adriatic.¹⁶⁸ More broadly, Štebi tried to conceptualize the postimperial transition's political temporality: "The end of the war should have meant the powerful rise of the idea of humanity, transforming the actions and inactions of the entire world, for the realization of this idea brings lasting peace, prosperity, and culture."¹⁶⁹ Yet capitalism, imperialism, and militarism had not only birthed the World War but survived it. This took on an immediate local form through the Italian occupations, encouraged as they were by the other Entente powers in Paris. Štebi acknowledged two solutions: "either we become an active agent among the revolutionary European masses—if the rulers do not suppress the uprising with military force before the stormy waves reach us—or we liberate the occupied territory through sensible irredentist work."¹⁷⁰

Golouh, appointed to the Slovenian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference,¹⁷¹ wrote a critical report suggesting the conference's missteps would be "enshrined in the peace treaties" and would have "done more for Bolshevik agitation than all the Russian Bolsheviks from Lenin on down."¹⁷² Golouh insisted lasting peace could only come through cross-national solidarity, "from the people themselves, from nation to nation," and that Slovenes under Italian occupation

¹⁶⁸ Alojzija Štebi, "Uvod" (Introduction), *Demokracija* 2, no. 1–3 (1919): 1.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷¹ For an overview, see Fran Erjavec, *Slovenci na mirovni konferenci l. 1919–1920* (Slovenes at the Peace Conference, 1919–1920) (Ljubljana: Založba Slovenske pravde, 1960); see also Golouh's memoirs, *Pol stoletja spominov* (Half a Century of Memories) (Ljubljana: Inštitut za zgodovino delavskega gibanja, 1966), 160–61; and Prepeluh, *Pripombe k naši prevratni dobi*, 271–72.

¹⁷² Rudolf Golouh, "Pariški kongres in jadransko vprašanje" (The Paris Peace Conference and the Adriatic Question), *Demokracija* 2, no. 1–3 (1919): 6.

could only proceed through “true democracy.”¹⁷³ The decision of monarchy or republic, conversely, was hardly relevant when the overarching system remained capitalism. Yet on the Adriatic Question’s concrete problematic, Golouh suggested creating an “independent Adriatic Republic,” for it was the only solution to each nation’s claims to territory, which inevitably used the very same principles in favor of divergent aims: “logic, justice, modern nationalist ideology, self-determination, etc., etc., etc.”¹⁷⁴ In Golouh’s scheme of an independent Adriatic republic, Trieste and its hinterland would be internationalized: “If we consider that the Adriatic coast is so ethnically mixed that it is impossible to find a clear ethnic line, and that these areas can only survive if they retain their economic importance and the possibility of peaceful economic and cultural development, this middle path [internationalization] should be the only practical way out of the current predicament.”¹⁷⁵ The following texts—by Fran Erjavec, Slavko Fornazarič, and the pseudonymous Vida Primorska—surveyed Slovenian cultural, economic, and political developments in Trieste, Istria, and Gorizia, arguing that integration into a homogenizing Italian state by force would be unjustifiable. Erjavec even claimed “the sea that roars along the coast of Istria must be ours, because our right to all of this is natural, not artificial like that of the Italians.”¹⁷⁶ One struggles to find the line between genuine concern for the political community and the seeds of future revanchism in such statements. In this heated moment, the ethno-nationalist temptation was not foreign to the republican Left.

Albin Prepeluh, by contrast, couched national and class issues together to negotiate a path out of the ethno-nationalist temptation. International socialism and international democracy were the only means to fight imperialism, he claimed. There was no doubt that militarism and territorial conquest were functions of capitalism. Yet Prepeluh also identified

¹⁷³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷⁶ Fran Erjavec, “Naša Istra” (Our Istria), *Demokracija* 2, no. 1–3 (1919): 20; the text was likewise published in pamphlet form: Fran Erjavec, *Naša Istra* (Ljubljana: Zvezna tiskarna, 1919).

national groups in mutually exclusive categories of oppressor (Italians, Germans) and oppressed (Slovenes), caught within the larger struggle for imperialist economic dominance. “[I]n the struggle between the imperialism of the German nation and the democracy of the Yugoslav people, which is an expression of the struggle for our daily bread, our national struggle finds its justification and rationale as a transformed class struggle, as a defensive struggle of the weaker against the violence of the stronger.”¹⁷⁷ Prepeluh saw an alternative political temporality in this struggle—a general human liberation generated from the democratic example set by the Yugoslavs, but only “if we ourselves learn to think and feel democratically.” That meant: “First, democratic sentiment must permeate all of us so that we become permanently aware of our previous immoral servility (*hlapčevstvo*).”¹⁷⁸ In Prepeluh’s reading, the Adriatic Question was not only about territory but about democratization, social and national liberation, and the escape from past domination.

For Etbin Kristan and the Yugoslav Republican Alliance (*Jugoslovansko republičansko združenje*, JRZ) in the United States, the Adriatic Question was likewise key. From October 1917, the JRZ published *The Slovenian Review*, renamed *The Jugo-Slav Review* in early 1919 to reflect state unification and the change in the organization’s name, now including as it did Serbs and Croats in the United States.¹⁷⁹ Jože Zavertnik argued on the *Review*’s pages that “the aims of the Slovenian Republican Alliance ... are the same as those of the Bohemian National Alliance and of the Bohemian revolutionist Prof. Thomas G. Masaryk,” which was to say, the necessity of independent democratic republics for the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav nations.¹⁸⁰ On the Adriatic Question, the JRZ sought “positive assurance of equal rights” between Slovenes

¹⁷⁷ Abditus (Albin Prepeluh), “Mnogoobrazni malik” (The Multifaceted Idol), *Demokracija* 2, no. 1–3 (1919): 30.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁷⁹ Key texts included “A Resolution,” *The Slovenian Review* 2, no. 1 (March 15, 1918): 6–7, which is an English translation of the founding resolution of the Slovenian Republican Alliance; or “The Corfu Declaration and Democracy,” *The Slovenian Review* 2, no. 2 (July 15, 1918): 3–10, which is an English translation of *Krfska deklaracija in demokracija* (Chicago: Slovensko republičansko združenje, 1917).

¹⁸⁰ Jože Zavertnik, “The Slovenes and the War Loans,” *The Slovenian Review* 2, no. 2 (July 15, 1918): 11.

and Italians but insisted that “the Trieste question must not be judged from the national standpoint alone.”¹⁸¹ Because of Trieste’s past as a key Austro-Hungarian port, economic factors still linked it to Central Europe rather than Italy, they argued. The JRZ stood against Italian imperialism and in favor of Slovenian self-determination.¹⁸²

Through summer 1919, the Slovenian republican Left in the US accelerated its agitation against Italian imperialism. The JRZ even petitioned the US Congress, suggesting that “the real value and meaning of [the] principle of self-determination was not carried out, as understood by the people.” They imagined “nationalistic controversies be solved by plebiscite,” which should apply to the “Italo-Yugoslav dispute.”¹⁸³ Any “fulfillment of Italian pretensions” would split the Yugoslav nation and “unavoidably create a Jugo-Slav irredenta.”¹⁸⁴ In a resolution sent variously to US diplomats in Paris, to President Wilson, and to the US Congress, the JRZ insisted that “foreign rule” over the South Slavs would force them “to play the role of Helots and would be considered as an inferior race. Cut off from their race, their native language would cease to serve them as a cultural means.”¹⁸⁵ Such injustice would result in “a world danger” of future war as long as “the worm of injustice may gnaw the hearts of the unjustly punished Jugo-Slavs.”¹⁸⁶ Kristan, in another text, insisted democracy and diplomacy were on different tracks:

During the war, democracy was written upon all banners. Where is the democracy now, when the nations are required to keep silent, when they are not even allowed to know in what manner their fate is sealed and how the bargains are made? ... It was said that no nation should be forced under a rule, which it

¹⁸¹ [Etbin Kristan], “The Trieste and Yugoslav Question,” *The Slovenian Review* 2, no. 2 (July 15, 1918): 16.

¹⁸² For more contemporary historiography on the Trieste Question—which, incidentally enough, seems to agree with the leftist republicans’ insistence already in 1919 that one had to go well beyond the national question to understand the concrete stakes of the problem—see Marco Bresciani, “The Battle for Post-Habsburg Trieste/Trst: State Transition, Social Unrest, and Political Radicalism (1918–23),” *Austrian History Yearbook* 52 (2021): 182–200, and, in a comparative perspective with Danzig, Marco Bresciani and Klaus Richter, “Trieste and Danzig after the Great War: Imperial Collapse, Narratives of Loss, Reconfigured Globalization,” *Journal of Modern History* 95, no. 3 (2023): 557–95.

¹⁸³ [Anton J. Terbovec, Etbin Kristan, et al.], “Addressed to the United States Congress,” *The Jugo-Slav Review* 3, no. 5 (May 19, 1919): 1.

¹⁸⁴ [Anton J. Terbovec, Etbin Kristan, et al.], “Declaration,” *The Jugo-Slav Review* 3, no. 5 (May 19, 1919): 2.

¹⁸⁵ Frank Zaitz, Philip Godina, et al., “To the Peace Conference, President Wilson and [the] Congress of the United States,” *The Jugo-Slav Review* 3, no. 5 (May 19, 1919): 3–4, here 3.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

did not wish. Did any one of the diplomats at Paris convince himself as to whether or not the Germans in Saar Valley care for the French rule, or if it is the wish of the Gorizian Slovenes to be subjugated to the Italian kingdom, or if the Chinese in Kiau Chau [Jiaozhou] care to come under the Mikado's government?¹⁸⁷

In each instance, there was not a question of winners or losers but of whether justice and national self-determination through democratic means had been realized.

Their agitation won quite an audience by September 1919, when Kristan led a JRZ delegation to Washington for the Senate's hearings on the Treaty of Versailles.¹⁸⁸ The hearings became a forum for representatives of national groups affected by the Paris Peace Conference. For the Yugoslav case, only Kristan and the JRZ were called—perhaps because of persistent petitioning.¹⁸⁹ Kristan began by insisting the peace conference “did not place itself on a basis of justice, but often rather listened to arguments which truly democratic elements thought were destroyed in the blast of the world conflagration and their ashes buried forever”—implicitly, capitalism and imperialism.¹⁹⁰ Kristan focused on the continued national domination of Slovenes, formerly by Austro-Germans, now by Italians:

doomed for over a thousand years to a life without any national schools, without their own official institutions and courts—in short, without anything where their language would be acknowledged and officially used. ... And now the Italian aspirations aim to cut off almost one-third of this nation's body and cast it in a situation which would be much more desperate than under the Austrian misrule, where it was at least ethnologically united.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Etbin Kristan, “Peace a Blunder,” *The Jugo-Slav Review* 3, no. 5 (May 19, 1919): 12.

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Treaty of Peace with Germany: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate*, 66th Cong., 1st Session, July 31–September 5, 1919, 1091–1108. The delegation consisted of Etbin Kristan, Frank Kerze, Philip Godina, and A. H. Skubic, all regular members of the JRZ executive bodies, and were joined by the comedian and theater director from Trieste, Rainer F. Hlacha, by Stephen Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich, the author of *The Serbian People: Their Past Glory and their Destiny* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), as well as, apparently, the architect, urban planner, and future mayor of Skopje, Josif Mihailović (Macedonian: Јосиф Михајловиќ).

¹⁸⁹ The other members of the Committee present at the hearing included Frank B. Brandegee (R, CT), Philander C. Knox (R, PA), George H. Moses (R, NH), Claude A. Swanson (D, VA), and Atlee Pomerene (D, OH).

¹⁹⁰ Statement of Mr. Etbin Kristan, of Chicago, Ill., in *Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Sixty-Sixth Congress, First Session, on the Treaty of Peace with Germany* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), 1092. Kristan's statement was likewise published in the final issue of *The Jugo-Slav Review* 3, no. 8 (September 30, 1919), 1–5.

¹⁹¹ *Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 1096.

Justice, freedom, and international cooperation ought to be the goal. At his statement's end, Kristan was engaged by Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge in a series of questions:

The Chairman [Henry Cabot Lodge]. May I ask you a question? I understand your people do not desire to unite with Serbia in the Serbian Monarchy.

Mr. Kristan. Oh, yes; we want unity with Serbia and Montenegro.

The Chairman. You do?

Mr. Kristan. We do.

The Chairman. I wanted to be sure about that.

Mr. Salvatore A. Cotillo.¹⁹² Mr. Chairman, if it will not interfere with the procedure of this committee I should like to ask the speaker what is the population of Fiume?

The Chairman. The Italians will have their hearing to-morrow.

Mr. Cotillo. I wanted to be informed about that.

The Chairman. They will have their hearing to-morrow. Then, I understand, Mr. Kristan, that you are speaking for the so-called Serbian Monarchy?

Mr. Kristan. No; we are representing the Jugo-Slav Republican Alliance, an organization of Jugo-Slavs in the United States.

The Chairman. I understand that, but do they wish to unite with Serbia and Montenegro and have one State, or do they wish an independent republic of their own?

Mr. Kristan. We wish unity with Serbia and Montenegro, only we wish the American form of government applied to our State also.

The Chairman. Instead of a monarchy with Serbia?

Mr. Kristan. Yes.

The Chairman. That is all.¹⁹³

Clearly, the storied chairman was less than adequately informed about the various national and state questions in the New Europe. This must have been clear to Kristan and the JRZ delegation. Some months later, in March 1920, Kristan and a group of South Slavic advocacy organizations in the United States reiterated their position on the Adriatic Question in a separate letter to President Wilson. The South Slavs, particularly the Slovenes in the Littoral, demanded

¹⁹² Salvatore A. Cotillo (1886–1939) was a Democratic Party member of the New York State Assembly, elected from East Harlem, and from 1918 became a delegate of the Committee on Public Information in Italy. In the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing cited here, he was part of the group representing Italian-American interests alongside Fiorello La Guardia, see *ibid.*, 1109–59. In 1924, Cotillo became a justice of the New York Supreme Court. Cotillo was largely sympathetic toward the Italian nationalist cause and advocated in the hearings for Italy's annexation of Fiume, hence his attempt to bait Kristan.

¹⁹³ *Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 1097–98.

unification with Yugoslavia, the text argued, to guarantee that Italy does not “commit the same wrong against Yugoslavia which she so greatly and justly resented when it was committed by Austria against her.”¹⁹⁴ Only “national unity, self-determination, and liberty” could ensure that the friendship between the Italians and South Slavs could be preserved in the face of the Italian state’s aggressive moves in the Adriatic.¹⁹⁵ This also meant continued access to necessary coal and timber resources in the Littoral, as well as the area’s sea ports and hinterland railway infrastructure. This would allow for quick economic reconstruction and continued prosperity, Kristan and company argued. Ultimately, however, reconstruction and reconciliation could only proceed “from a basis of justice, real friendship and mutual trust,” not from mere economic considerations, further noting that “only on such a basis can the glorious ideals be realized for which humanity has bled and died.”¹⁹⁶

Aside from regular agitation in *Proletarec* and the *Jugo-Slav Review*, as well as a 1919 fundraising drive “for a free Yugoslavia,”¹⁹⁷ there had not been many opportunities to sustain links with the leftist republican movement in the new Kingdom. A personal letter from Alojzija Štebi to Kristan, preserved in the *Proletarec* archives, testifies to difficulties faced by the JSDS.¹⁹⁸ Sent August 31, 1919, the letter recounted the events of 1917–18, then turned to ongoing factional struggles: “The idea of communism has always been cultivated in our ranks,” Štebi wrote, “and the party itself is probably predominantly communist.”¹⁹⁹ Clearly delineated wings had emerged around the time of the state’s unification. The right wing controlled the

¹⁹⁴ Etbin Kristan et al., *An Appeal to the President and the People of the United States of America in Behalf of Jugoslav Nation* (Chicago: The Jugoslav Review, 1920), 2.

¹⁹⁵ Kristan et al., *An Appeal to the President and the People of the United States*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ Kristan et al., *An Appeal to the President and the People of the United States*, 6.

¹⁹⁷ See *Spominska knjiga prve serije prostovoljnega narodnega davka slovenskemu republičanskemu združenju za svobodno Jugoslavijo* (Commemorative Book of the First Series of Voluntary National Contributions to the Slovenian Republican Alliance for a Free Yugoslavia) (Chicago: Jugoslovansko republičansko združenje, 1919), published as a special issue of *The Jugo-Slav Review* 3, no. 6 (1919). Altogether, they collected \$57,125.99 in 1919 US dollars (see p. 56), or, estimated in today’s inflation-adjusted dollars, roughly \$1,061,503.26. Calculated through the CPI Inflation Calculator of the Official Data Foundation (Alioth LLC), <https://www.officialdata.org/>.

¹⁹⁸ IHRCA, Yugoslav Socialist Federation, Folder 311, *Proletarec*, Correspondence, 1919, Letter from Alojzija Štebi to Etbin Kristan, August 31, 1919.

¹⁹⁹ IHRCA, Yugoslav Socialist Federation, Folder 311: *Proletarec*, Correspondence, 1919, Letter from Alojzija Štebi to Etbin Kristan, August 31, 1919, f. 4.

organizational infrastructure—“the executive committee, the trade union organizations, the consumer cooperatives, the papers”—while the left wing controlled *Demokracija* and the Slovenian Social *Matica* publishing house. On the Left: Štebi and her brother Anton, Rudolf Golouh, Milan Lemež, and Dragotin Gustinčič. To the right: the “elders” Anton Kristan, Henrik Tuma, and Melhijor Čobal. Štebi revealed that Prepeluh “is among the right-wingers,” suggesting lines from 1917–18 had not fully carried over into new factional struggles between communist-sympathetic Left and communist-skeptical Right.²⁰⁰

From published sources, Prepeluh seems to have held an in-between position—publishing in *Demokracija* and with the Social *Matica*, while participating in the Regional Government at the same time. Government participation alone was hardly a marker of one’s position. In May 1919, Prepeluh appointed Štebi to the High Council on Schools.²⁰¹ Štebi reflected this in her letter to Etbin Kristan: “I am drawn back toward teaching,” much as she had been before the war.²⁰² In a way, sympathy with communism was perfectly coherent with the practical civic work of reforming education. Working toward radical social transformation to preserve and develop the political community was part of both the communist and republican Left’s intellectual repertoire, blurring the lines between the two.

Soon after Štebi’s letter, it seems that Kristan made more concrete efforts to make contact with the JRZ’s allies in the new South Slavic state. In the final *Jugo-Slav Review* issue—at least the final issue preserved—Kristan published the JRZ’s Senate statement followed by a statement from the JSDS Executive Committee in Ljubljana and JSDS representatives in the PNP in Belgrade, altogether Rudolf Golouh, Albin Prepeluh, Dragotin Lončar, Melhijor Čobal,

²⁰⁰ IHRCA, Yugoslav Socialist Federation, Folder 311: *Proletarec*, Correspondence, 1919, Letter from Alojzija Štebi to Etbin Kristan, August 31, 1919, f. 5.

²⁰¹ “Izpremembe pri višjem šolskem svetu” (Appointments to the High Council on Schools), *Uradni list* 1, no. 103 (June 7, 1919): 355.

²⁰² IHRCA, Yugoslav Socialist Federation, Folder 311: *Proletarec*, Correspondence, 1919, Letter from Alojzija Štebi to Etbin Kristan, August 31, 1919, f. 5.

Josip Kopač, Anton Kristan, Josip Petejan, and Milan Korun.²⁰³ “We, Jugo-Slav Socialists feel duty bound to raise our voice, independently of the bourgeoisie [sic] which has the power in its hands, and to protest formally against the unconscious designs of the co-allied imperialism,” they wrote.²⁰⁴ The peace conference had “discarded the idea of Self-Determination of the peoples” and followed the dictates of “Capitalism and Imperialism.” Recalling that “the Jugo-Slav peoples have sacrificed much blood and wealth in fighting for political, economical, cultural and social liberty, ... in order to enter as an element of culture and progress into the ranks of other civilized peoples,” they argued for proletarian unity against the peace conference’s dictates.²⁰⁵ They envisioned a just peace based on popular self-determination and plebiscites to decide boundaries from below:

It is into [the proletariat’s] hands that we commend our fate; it is [from] our brethren of common ideals we demand aid in this hour of common danger. We greet, especially, the Italian and Austro-German Comrades and Brethren with whom we have until now shared our destiny, and with whom we will remain united in the future struggles which will lead us to our happiness and to the prosperity of the whole world.²⁰⁶

The political community was now an international proletarian community, bound against capitalism and imperialism, linking present “common danger” to be overcome through “shared destiny” and “future struggles.” The recognition of the political community’s fragility and necessity of its protection continued as a keystone of republican thought, now cast in proletarian form.

A year later, in mid-August 1920, Etbin Kristan returned to Ljubljana.²⁰⁷ He arrived by ship to Trieste—now Italian-occupied—and immediately took the late train to Ljubljana, where

²⁰³ Ralph [Rudolf] Golouh et al., “The Yugoslav Socialists to the Proletariat of the World,” *The Jugo-Slav Review* 3, no. 8 (Sept. 30, 1919): 5–7.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁰⁷ “Pozdravljen, Etbin Kristan!” (Greetings, Etbin Kristan!), *Naprej* 4, no. 188 (August 18, 1920): 1.

Albin Prepeluh greeted him at the station on behalf of the JSDS.²⁰⁸ Kristan had returned “to work for the liberation of our proletariat,”²⁰⁹ and the immediate task became campaigning for the Constituent Assembly elections. Again, pressing social and national questions were bound up with questions of state form, governance, and constitutional structure. To Kristan and company, it appeared to be an opportunity to enact a democratic, socialist, federal republican state through constituent power.

In the lead-up to elections, republican forces attempted to sharpen their theoretical framing of the day’s pressing issues. Among the Serbian republicans, Ljubomir Stojanović—a former leader of the pre-war Independent Radicals and renowned scholar in Serbian philology²¹⁰—composed a series of texts in 1919. Published as *Republican Views on Some Contemporary Questions* in 1920,²¹¹ these texts underpinned the newly founded Republican Democratic Party’s orientation. But the party was not entirely new, for it was formed out of the left-wing remnants of the Independent Radical Party (the right-wing faction formed the Yugoslav Democratic Party). Within this pre-war Independent Radical milieu, important intellectuals were concentrated: Jaša Prodanović, Ljubomir Davidović, Jovan Skerlić, Milan Grol, and others.²¹² While Skerlić had passed in the meantime, Prodanović and Stojanović, along with the famed geologist Jovan Žujović, had formed the Republican Democratic Party. Davidović and Grol rather joined the new Yugoslav Democratic Party with Svetozar Pribićević. Stojanović was hardly a marginal personality, serving as he did before 1914 as Minister of

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ See Vojislav Veljković, “Љуба Стојановић као јавни радник” (Ljuba Stojanović as a Public Figure), *Српски књижевни гласник* 30, no. 5 (1930): 355–57. The same issue was a sort of memorial issue on the occasion of Stojanović’s death, with contributions by Aleksandar Belić, Ljubomir Davidović, Jaša Prodanović, and Jovan Žujović.

²¹¹ Ljubomir Stojanović, *Републикански погледи на неколико савремених питања* (Republican Views on Some Contemporary Questions) (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1920); on the split, see Lukić, *Југословенска републиканска странка*, 108–25.

²¹² Mira Radojević, “О jugoslovenstvu Samostalnih radikala” (On the Yugoslavism of the Independent Radicals), *Istorija* 20. veka 16, no. 2 (1998): 17–31, here 18; for a wider overview see also Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Научници Србије и стварање Југославије, 1914–1920* (The Scientists of Serbia and the Creation of Yugoslavia, 1914–1920) (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1986).

Education (1903–1904, 1906, 1909) and briefly as Prime Minister in the short-lived Independent Radical coalition government of 1905–1906 and again in 1909.²¹³

In “Some Thoughts on Our New State Form” (September 1919),²¹⁴ Stojanović outlined his vision of a semi-parliamentary, semi-presidential republic accommodating Yugoslav cultural diversity. He bemoaned the undemocratic legislature while welcoming national unification, noting difficulties would inevitably arise from Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes living together for the first time—in fact, the first time all *Serbs* would live together!²¹⁵ A much more democratic process had to take over from the crown’s arbitrary will. Pointing to Switzerland as a model but also Italy, France, and Germany, Stojanović suggested policies for “state unification”: a common army, common foreign policy, common foreign trade policy, common transit infrastructure, and common fiscal and monetary policy.²¹⁶ These institutions were not yet linked; barriers along the patchwork legal and institutional inheritance from the country’s various predecessor states were still strongly felt. Yet Stojanović did not insist on strong top-down centralization but looked toward decentralizing self-administration: “in a centralized state, one city becomes the cultural center, while all others remain *palanke* (peripheries); in a state with self-governing regions, each region becomes a cultural center, so education and culture reaches the people (*narod*) more easily and quickly.”²¹⁷

Stojanović’s decentralization vision was not as strong as Radić’s federal vision of loosely linked national republics; it was closer to Cesarec’s radical socialist vision of a centralist republic with autonomous regional administration. Stojanović, however, further differentiated

²¹³ Branislav Miljković, “Ljubomir Stojanović,” *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, vol. 8, *Srbija–Ž*, ed. Miroslav Krleža et al. (Zagreb: Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod, 1971), 156–57.

²¹⁴ Ljubomir Stojanović, *Неколике мисли о нашем новом државном уређењу* (Some Thoughts on Our New State Form) (Belgrade: Milorad Stefanović, 1919); republished in Stojanović, *Републикански погледи*, 3–28.

²¹⁵ Stojanović, “Неколике мисли о нашем новом државном уређењу,” in *Републикански погледи*, 10.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18. To note, *palanka* originally referred to a wooden encampment to protect travelers from bandits in the Ottoman Empire; more neutrally, in Serbo-Croatian, it has developed to refer to a small rural town in general. But in more negative use, *palanka* can mean ‘backwater’ or be used as a symbol for cultural and economic backwardness. Here, Stojanović contrasts *palanke* in the plural with *centar* in the singular, even suspending ‘*palanke*’ in quotation marks to highlight its rhetorical function.

between presidential and parliamentary forms, warning against purely parliamentary forms, arguing that they could lead to endless party conflicts and the politicization of administrative roles. Ultimately, Stojanović favored a modified parliamentary or semi-presidential form (like that of France)—what he called a “presidential parliamentary republic”—to guarantee “presidential power does not change into dictatorship” and “sovereign power remains permanently in its totality in the hands of the people.”²¹⁸

More radical was Stojanović’s close interlocutor, Jaša Prodanović, who openly linked a republican vision with the desire for fundamental but peaceful social transformation. In a May 1920 lecture in Belgrade, Prodanović argued against common misconceptions about republican ideas. He expressed sympathy with the Bolshevik turn in Russia as “a just and honorable protest against the evil which obtained in Russia.”²¹⁹ Yet he insisted that if republican transformation came in Yugoslavia—a “social-democratic republic”—it would better guarantee realizing communism “along a peaceful path,” what he termed “evolution.”²²⁰ Republican states offered the best chance for peaceful transformation “without blood and disruption,” he argued.²²¹

Likewise, Mihailo Ilić, a Belgrade law professor, addressed the Republican Democratic Party’s program in a series of 1920 articles in the party’s organ *Република* (The Republic) under the column “Ideas and Program.”²²² Under the subtitle “Homeland and Humanity,” Ilić addressed the problem of patriotism and cosmopolitanism—generally rendered in East Central Europe as defending local authenticity against false, imported modernity, or insisting on the

²¹⁸ Ibid., 27–28.

²¹⁹ Jaša Prodanović, “Je li vreme republici?” (Is It Time for a Republic?), *Република* 4, no. 84 (June 9, 1920): 3.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid. From the beginning of 1920, *Република* (The Republic) became the organ of the Republican Democratic Party in Belgrade. Before, it had been the paper of a group of young students and intellectuals in Belgrade propagating republican ideas starting in 1907, and with more activity from 1910 until the outbreak of the Balkan Wars. See Branislav Gligorijević, “Državno i društveno uređenje Jugoslavije u gledištima srpskih republikanaca (1919–1925)” (The Form of State and Society in Yugoslavia in the Perspective of Serbian Republicans, 1919–1925) *Istorija 20. veka* 3, no. 2 (1985): 7–9; for a detailed discussion of the merger of Serbian republican forces, see Lukić, *Југословенска републиканска странка*, 47–125.

²²² Mihailo Ilić, “Идеје и програм: Отаџбина и човечанство” (Ideas and Program: Homeland and Humanity), *Република* 4, no. 108 (July 8, 1920): 1; with a second part in *Република* 4, no. 109 (July 9, 1920): 1.

need to catch up with the supposedly superior Western model. Ilić argued that this was a false dilemma: “patriotism in the proper sense, an enlightened and democratic patriotism,” he wrote, “is the positive feeling and outlook of a specific national group, from the perspective of international society as well.”²²³ Mutual recognition was based on the ‘homeland’ (*отаџбина*), the “natural center” of the political community’s life and activity. Yet this was not a hermetically sealed space. Republican efforts were directed toward the homeland in order that it be “better organized politically and more just socially,” with the result that “such a homeland would not seek to hate the homelands of others, but rather see in them free and equal members of a free humanity.”²²⁴ Patriotism properly understood did not end in inward-looking nationalism but opened the path to political emancipation, social justice, and cooperation.

On political emancipation, Ilić favored a republic but insisted ‘republic’ stood for much more than state form—not an “end” but “a means.”²²⁵ One could claim the same of monarchies; so another defining reason was needed. Ilić found it in popular sovereignty. In monarchies, power is split between monarch and people; republics “express the pure and full rule of the people.”²²⁶ Republics express “general social solidarity,”²²⁷ that is, if the French revolutionary principles of “freedom, equality, and solidarity” (*слобода, једнакост, солидарност*) were realized.²²⁸ On the social question, Ilić drew on French sources—and unsurprisingly so, for Ilić had been socialized in Parisian culture and academia, completing his doctorate in law at the Sorbonne in 1919.²²⁹ Ilić singled out Charles Gide’s program of consumer cooperatives,

²²³ Ilić, “Отаџбина и човечанство,” *Република* 4, no. 108 (July 8, 1920): 1.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Mihailo Ilić, “Је ли република само питање форме?” (Is a Republic Only a Question of Form?), *Република* 4, no. 162 (Sept. 10, 1920) 1.

²²⁶ Ilić, “Је ли република само питање форме?” (Is the Republic Only a Question of Form?), *Република* 4, no. 163 (Sept. 11, 1920): 2.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ilić, “Је ли република само питање форме?” (Is the Republic Only a Question of Form?), *Република* 4, no. 164 (Sept. 12, 1920): 1.

²²⁹ Mihaïlo Ilitch, *Considérations générales sur la Société des nations et son droit* (General Considerations on the League of Nations and its Legal Bases) (Paris: Jouve, 1919); reviewed by Đorđe Tasić in *Архив за правне и друштвене науке*, no. 26 (1924): 149–58 (Ilić specifically on pages 155–58).

democratically managed and operating according to the logic of solidarity.²³⁰ Production was planned, but only insofar as all cooperative members had access to producer lists, were also producers themselves, and ordered and produced what they needed rather than for a profit.²³¹ Within Ilić's envisioned republic, economic democracy went hand-in-hand with political democracy. The Serbian republicans' Constituent Assembly program reflected these ideas: from imperative mandates to generous agricultural credits, from universal suffrage to universal healthcare, from anti-corruption safeguards to radical agrarian reform, all directed toward the "self-administration of the people," which is to say, popular self-determination.²³²

The results of the November 1920 elections, however, dampened these grand designs. With the constitution and so the state's form to be decided by a vague "qualified majority" per the Corfu Declaration,²³³ stakes were particularly high for republican-minded parties. The Yugoslav Republican Party won only three delegates—Jovan Đonović (Montenegro), Krsto Pejović (Montenegro), and Milovan Lazarević (Belgrade)—while the fragmented social democrats won ten seats led by Etbin Kristan.²³⁴ Communists fared best among republican parties (58 seats), with Radić's HRSS fourth (50). Both trailed the Democrats (92) and Radicals (91).²³⁵ This monarchist, centralist bloc had passed ministerial positions back-and-forth since 1918 and now retained dominance in drafting the constitution—further aided by the HRSS's complete abstention protesting the Croatian *Sabor*'s dissolution after December 1, 1918.²³⁶

²³⁰ Mihailo Ilić, "Лиге потрошача" (Consumers' Leagues), *Република* 4, no. 118 (July 15, 1920): 1. Ilić does not cite one of Gide's works in particular, only the thinker by name. It is likely that Ilić had read Gide's *Les sociétés coopératives de consommation* (On Consumer Cooperatives) (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1904).

²³¹ Ibid., 1–2.

²³² "Našem narodu" (To Our People), *Република* 4, no. 209 (Nov. 4, 1920): 1–2.

²³³ For the rules (and debate around the rules) of the election and the outcome, see Gligorijević, *Parlament i političke stranke*, 67–89.

²³⁴ See "Списак изабраних народних посланика" (List of Elected National Delegates), in *Статистички преглед избора народних посланика за Уставотворну скупштину*. The book is, unfortunately, unpaginated.

²³⁵ Banac, *The National Question*, 394–95.

²³⁶ The text of the abstention, addressed to (at that moment still Regent) Aleksandar Karađorđević, was republished in Radić, *Politički spisi*, 346–60.

Instead, Radić and the Croatian peasantists abstained from the proceedings in Belgrade and declared themselves majority representatives of a republican Banate of Croatia, passing their own constitution declaring a Neutral Peasant Republic of Croatia in March 1921.²³⁷ The text acknowledged and thanked the forces that liberated Croats from “the violence of aristocratic-feudal Magyar centralism, [and] the Germano-militarist sovereignty of the Habsburg dynasty”²³⁸—specifically, the American intervention with Wilson, the Russian revolution, British and French democracy, Belgium’s example, Serbia’s “rare heroism and martyrdom,” Croatian resistance, and also the republican idea itself:

Thanks above all to the suddenly and strongly developed sense of human dignity, human rights, and republican freedom that the war awakened and after the war irresistibly developed in the layers of peasants and workers of all the nations in the world; thus this constitution of ours is one of a small, peace-loving peasant nation, formed out of the external and internal factors of our liberation.²³⁹

While imagining Croatia as an independent state, the document acknowledged the necessity of a South Slavic confederation encompassing Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Bulgaria. The notion of “popular self-government” (*narodna samovlada*)—rendered also in English as “selfgovernment”²⁴⁰—recalled Henrik Tuma’s usage from 1917 and resonated with Slovenian autonomist ideas in Prepeluh and Lončar’s work after 1921.

Back in Belgrade, there were attempts to bridge the small republican faction’s heterogeneity. One strategy was attacking the state’s *Obznana* (Decree), published December 29, 1920, which banned Communist Party activities under the pretense that the party’s legal existence was a front for revolutionary violence. Against the proclamation, both the Communist

²³⁷ Stjepan Radić, “Državno uređenje ili ustav Neutralne seljačke republike Hrvatske” (State Form, or: The Constitution of the Neutral Peasant Republic of Croatia), in *Politički spisi*, 366–93.

²³⁸ Radić, “Državno uređenje,” *Politički spisi*, 368.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 383.

Party and the Yugoslav Republican Party held a joint demonstration on January 2, 1921, at the Hotel Slavija on Belgrade's Slavija Square.²⁴¹ Jaša Prodanović gave the leading speech, denouncing the “criminal” government which passed such legislation. Demonstrators chanted “The end is near! Long live the revolution! Down with the monarchy!”—prompting a city official to break up the demonstration with gendarmes. Demonstrators pushed back: “Down with the police! Down with the criminal government!” The city official, with a copy of the *Obznana* in hand, declared the protest over. Demonstrators poured out of the hotel onto Slavija Square. Fights broke out with gendarmes; four demonstrators were beaten badly enough to be hospitalized.²⁴²

The affair was raised in the Constituent Assembly by Republican delegate Jovan Đonović.²⁴³ During questions, Đonović pressed Interior Minister Milorad Drašković, the *Obznana*'s author: even if the *Obznana* was rightfully announced because of an imminent communist danger, the government had still acted without parliamentary consent, making the proclamation illegitimate by basic democratic standards. Passing legislation without parliament's consent was not only “an attack on the freedom of legislation in this House,” Đonović argued, but explicitly curtailed freedoms of assembly and speech. It was tantamount to “forbidding any opinion to be heard even outside of parliament,” meaning that “even the Republican Party has been put outside of the law.”²⁴⁴ The Slavija demonstration protested the *Obznana* and criticized government policies, it was true, but it should have been allowed to proceed precisely because doing so would uphold the basic democratic principles invoked

²⁴¹ “Комунисте и републиканци: Јучерашњи сукоб на Славији” (Communists and Republicans: Yesterday's Scuffle on Slavija), *Политика* 16, no. 4563 (January 3, 1921): 2.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Statement of Jovan Đonović in the Fourth Regular Session of the Constituent Assembly, January 15, 1921, in *Стенографске белешке Уставотворне скупштине Краљевине Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца* (Stenographic Notes of the Constituent Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes), vol. 1, no. 2 (Belgrade: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1921), 12–14. NB: Although bound as a book, pages are sequential only within each published issue number, which covers one or two sessions. Pagination begins anew with the next labelled issue number.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 13.

repeatedly but apparently cynically by the Democrats and Radicals. Nevertheless, the protest was still broken up by force: “[The gendarmes] attacked passers-by, people who came to the market to shop, women, and parliamentarians in a savage, unrestrained way—they attacked in such a way that it gave the impression that they wanted none of the demonstrators to remain physically unpunished.”²⁴⁵ Ultimately, Đonović observed, “the state is more in danger from those who trample on the laws of this country with unchecked directives and orders; from those who created a regime in which national traitors, big businessmen, and corrupt elements have found protection; from those who were given large titles and estates and large medals to adorn their uniforms.”²⁴⁶ While the state had narrated itself as democratic,²⁴⁷ the republican Left argued that actions like these undermined that image in its entirety.

On what right had Drašković proclaimed the *Obznana*? On what basis had police banned the demonstration? On whose order it was broken up? Did “the government intend to continue obstructing public speech and attacking civil liberties during the work of the Constituent Assembly”?²⁴⁸ Before being cut off for time, Đonović concluded: “civil liberties may be suspended only during war and revolution; we are not in the middle of a war now, and the proof that we are not in a revolutionary situation is that you are all here,” motioning to the gathered elected representatives.²⁴⁹ Drašković stuck to the government’s line: the apparently omnipresent communist threat necessitated the proclamation. He suggested communist slogans were being used by the Republican Party, that their gatherings had been infiltrated by communists, and then revealed that police had surveilled the Republican Party from its inception. The government had intimate knowledge of the party’s members and what was said at their gatherings. Milovan Lazarević, the Republican Party’s representatives from Belgrade,

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.

²⁴⁷ Maria Falina, “Narrating democracy in interwar Yugoslavia: From state creation to its collapse,” *Journal of Modern European History* 17, no. 2 (2019): 196–208.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 14.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

interjected: “To think that the law still applies in this country...” The Radical and Democratic majority quickly shouted him down.²⁵⁰

The following six months differed little in tone or productivity. No proposals from the Republicans, Communists, or Social Democrats were accepted or debated in earnest. The Communists, completely marginalized, closed ranks. The Assembly quickly became their soapbox to advocate for a soviet republic and a revolutionary overthrow of the existent system.²⁵¹ Republicans and Social Democrats soon brokered common lists for internal committee elections. In the internal elections to the Assembly’s Constitutional Committee, a common list led by Etbin Kristan united the social democrats with the Republicans, who were then joined by the idiosyncratic Spasoje Piletić.²⁵² Etbin Kristan and Jovan Đonović were the only ones elected from the list.²⁵³

The only tangible result from their time on the committee was a “Separate Opinion” on the draft constitution—and not for lack of trying. Although they had been active participants in the Constitutional Committee, their marginalization by the centralist and monarchist representatives only engendered a feeling of political resentment easily felt in their text: the lack of democracy in parliamentary procedure now mirrored the lack of democracy in the country. By circumventing the rule of law with the *Obznana*, the government had acted with arbitrary power which had not been delegated from the well of popular sovereignty. Instead, the monarchic state was already sliding toward authoritarianism before the constitution had

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 14.

²⁵¹ See, e.g., the speeches of Filip Filipović and Sima Marković at the Fifth Session of the Constitutional Committee, February 8, 1921, in *Стенографске белешке Уставног одбора Уставотворног скупштине Краљевине Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца* (Stenographic Notes of the Constitutional Committee of the Constituent Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) (Belgrade: Narodna samouprava, 1921), 31–44.

²⁵² Ninth Regular Session, January 31, 1921, in *Стенографске белешке*, vol. 1, no. 4, 14. The list, in order, included Etbin Kristan (JSDS), Jovan Đonović (JRS), Nedeljko Divac (Socijaldemokratska partija Jugoslavije, SDPJ), Milan Korun (JSDS), Milan Lazarević (JRS), Rudolf Golouh (JSDS), Krsto Pejović (JRS), Milan Sekulić (SDPJ), Spasoje Piletić (Demokratska stranka, DS), Anton Kristan (JSDS), Vojin Brkić (SDPJ), Josip Kopač (JSDS), Filip Kisovar (JSDS), and Zvonimir Bernot (JSDS).

²⁵³ Ninth Regular Session, January 31, 1921, in *Стенографске белешке*, vol. 1, no. 4, 14.

even been ratified.²⁵⁴ Their pessimistic tone betrayed a sense that the one chance to create a truly democratic republic for the South Slavs had passed. The Vidovdan Constitution was accepted by a majority of the Assembly on June 28, 1921. Kristan retreated from public life, returning to the United States where he worked as a consular official in New York before moving back to the Midwest with his Slovenian-American wife. It would not be until the mid-1930s, with the rise of fascism beyond Italy, that Kristan would enter public life again as a writer and polemicist. For the rest of the Yugoslav republican Left, the struggle for a republic had failed by Vidovdan 1921—not that the direction of unification had not already been foreclosed on December 1, 1918. For the following decades, the Yugoslav republican Left would continue to have to cultivate its political thought in the realm of culture, in a metapolitical key.

2.3. *Modes of Marginalization in Hungary*

In Hungary, the marginalization of the republican Left began and ended with a paper shortage. Already in 1916, the wartime Tisza government recognized that the country had a dearth of newsprint, part of the wider crisis of production and supply in the wartime Habsburg Empire. The government intervened, requiring paper factories to report stocks and set price floors.²⁵⁵ A Newsprint Center (*Újságpapír Központ*) was established, but the situation hadn't improved by the end of 1917. The Wekerle government then created a Paper Committee (*Papír Bizottság*) with extraordinary power to inspect companies' accounting books, invoices, and correspondence.²⁵⁶ This extended to publishing houses, amounting to backdoor surveillance

²⁵⁴ Etbin Kristan and Jovan Đonović, *Одвојена мишљења* (A Separate Opinion) (Belgrade, self-published, 1921).

²⁵⁵ Decree no. 734 of 1916 in *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 50 (March 2, 1916): 7–8.

²⁵⁶ Decree no. 4.980 of 1917 in *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 4 (Jan. 5, 1918): 3.

and potential censorship. Yet even with these invasive measures, there was no improvement, the economic crisis further exacerbated by the continued Entente blockade.

The day before the Hungarian People's Republic was declared, the new Károlyi government intervened as well. All paper stocks were to be inventoried, and non-compliant publishers would not be sold further paper. The regulations remained in place, though the specter of censorship was dispelled after the press freedom law.²⁵⁷ Between autumn 1918 and spring 1919, the crisis of textual reproduction was primarily material rather than political.

Against this background, the social democratic journalist Ferenc Göndör was given a new role. In his memoirs, Göndör recalled being brought to the meeting between left-wing social democrats and imprisoned communists negotiating the formation of a new government.²⁵⁸ "The agreement was made in the prison," Göndör wrote, "the workers' council and then the party leadership met in the evening, the proletarian dictatorship broke out, and together with the communists who had been released from prison already, they [the social democrats] formed the Revolutionary Governing Council (*Forradalmi Kormányzótanács*)."²⁵⁹ Then they all went to Göndör's apartment to celebrate. Late in the night, Béla Kun approached Göndör and told him the Revolutionary Governing Council had agreed to appoint him People's Commissar for Press Affairs.²⁶⁰ Göndör responded that he would accept the portfolio but "under no circumstances" take the title "People's Commissar"—not that he disapproved of the "new system," but rather that he did not want to sacrifice his independence. In the end, he accepted. Göndör later reflected it would allow him to continue the "humanist work" of preserving newspapers and their workers' wellbeing.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Decree no. 5.543 of 1918 in *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 268 (Nov. 22, 1918): 6. Cf. People's Law II of 1918 in *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 282 (Dec. 8, 1918): 1; and the Minister of Commerce's (Ernő Garami) order on the inventory of paper supplies: Decree no. 109.110 of 1918 in *Magyarországi rendeletek tára*, vol. 52 (Budapest: Magyar Belügyminisztérium, 1918), 2657–60.

²⁵⁸ Ferenc Göndör, *Vallomások könyve* (Book of Confessions) (Vienna: self-published, 1922), 62.

²⁵⁹ Göndör, *Vallomások könyve*, 67.

²⁶⁰ Göndör, *Vallomások könyve*, 67.

²⁶¹ Göndör, *Vallomások könyve*, 67–68.

During the Revolutionary Governing Council's first session, Göndör was formally appointed People's Commissar for Press Affairs and given leadership of the Press Directorate (*Sajtódirektorium*). The first task was to solve the material reality of the severe paper shortage.²⁶² The Directorate's initial plan was to roll conservative bourgeois papers—*Alkotmány*, *Budapesti Hírlap*, among others—into either *Vörös Újság* or *Népszava*, combining or reassigning editorial staff and journalists.²⁶³ Importantly, they were to be kept at their desks, neither fired nor retired. Göndör began implementing the dissolution but insisted owners pay everyone three months' salary from the paper's accounts.²⁶⁴ For Kun, however, this was hardly the full dissolution he had envisioned. Kun insisted on appointing a further political commissioner, "someone without ties to the press." Vilmos Böhm suggested only *Pester Lloyd* and "two further bourgeois papers" be kept alongside "party papers" in view of the paper shortage.²⁶⁵ By April 2, Böhm gathered the data: paper stocks would only last another week. He insisted supplies be directed specifically to "propaganda, *Népszava*, and *Vörös Újság*."²⁶⁶

The problem became so critical that Zsigmond Kunfi even suggested reanimating a press censorship body not unlike Hungary's wartime *Hadfelügyeleti Bizottság* implemented by the Tisza regime. Nevertheless he insisted that "it is not enough to put an ironworker at the head of the press; next to energy, expertise is also needed," and while he "desired strong centralization," in certain instances he asked for "individualism for the papers."²⁶⁷ Béla Kun's solution was sharper: "The feudal press needs to be banned," he demanded—"but within the party it is necessary to allow criticism based on principle and theory." On this, György Lukács

²⁶² Session 1 of March 22 in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei, 1919*, ed. Magda Imre and László Szűcs László (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 56.

²⁶³ Minutes of the Press Directorate, Session of March 25, reprinted in "*Mindenki újakra készül...*" *Az 1918/1919-es forradalmak irodalma* ("Everyone's Prepared for the New Situation...." *The Literature of the Revolutions of 1918–19*), vol. 4, *A tanácsköztársaság publicisztikája és irodalmi élete* (The Publishing and Literary Life of the Republic of Councils), ed. Farkas József (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967), 788.

²⁶⁴ Göndör, *Vallomások könyve*, 73–75.

²⁶⁵ Session 5 of March 28 in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei*, 108.

²⁶⁶ Session 7/a of April 2 in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei*, 144.

²⁶⁷ Session 11 of April 8 in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei*, 213.

agreed, as did Gyula Hevesi, though Hevesi noted he only agreed because of the “catastrophic” paper shortage, not necessarily out of the need to close the public sphere. Kun doubled down: “Every privately owned paper, every paper which is not published by the Party or the printing houses of the proletarian state must be banned.”²⁶⁸ The Revolutionary Governing Council accepted this proposition, with the exception that *Az Est* and *Pester Lloyd* would remain “under the supervision” of the Revolutionary Governing Council.²⁶⁹

Göndör opened the subsequent Press Directorate meeting in shock.²⁷⁰ The Directorate had been accused “in private company” of having worked “to take care of journalists—guided by collegiality and solidarity—and so conducted careless financial management.”²⁷¹ Aside from the accusation of fiscal irresponsibility, Göndör wondered whether it hadn’t been the specific task of the Directorate “to take care of the existential affairs of journalists.” Béla Vágó, People’s Commissar for the Interior, disagreed. The Directorate’s job was rather to implement the Revolutionary Governing Council’s decisions. Now, decisions were made to start “the complete socialization of the press” and discontinue bourgeois papers. While “the correctness of this is debatable,” Vágó admitted, “from a political point of view it is entirely understandable.” The Directorate was now tasked to support journalists from the bourgeois press by reassigning them to countryside papers or propaganda work.²⁷² Vágó noted the political advantage: it would “place the rural papers in competent hands,” and discontinuing the bourgeois press “would surprise no one” given the proletarian dictatorship.²⁷³

Soon after, Böhm and Kunfi suggested that the civic radical *Világ* be transformed into the organ of the People’s Commissariat for Public Education.²⁷⁴ Sándor Szabados suggested *Az*

²⁶⁸ Session 11 of April 8 in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei*, 213.

²⁶⁹ Session 11 of April 8 in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei*, 215.

²⁷⁰ Minutes of the Press Directorate, Session of April 10, reprinted in “*Mindenki újakra készül...*”, vol. 4, 793.

²⁷¹ Minutes of the Press Directorate, Session of April 10, reprinted in “*Mindenki újakra készül...*”, vol. 4, 793.

²⁷² Minutes of the Press Directorate, Session of April 10, reprinted in “*Mindenki újakra készül...*”, vol. 4, 793–94.

²⁷³ Minutes of the Press Directorate, Session of April 10, reprinted in “*Mindenki újakra készül...*”, vol. 4, 794.

²⁷⁴ Session 12/a of April 11, in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei*, 241

Est ought to be made the official organ of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.²⁷⁵ In doing so, they attempted to preserve papers by bringing them under the proletarian dictatorship's umbrella. But complaints from the People's Commissariat for Financial Affairs rolled in—critical financial information continued to be leaked in the press, undermining attempts to stabilize the economy. They demanded strict censorship, and Kun once again raised a complete ban. The Revolutionary Governing Council agreed that all bourgeois papers, except those brought under state or party ownership, ought to be banned. Kunfi stood against this, stating he would not accept any measure “which exposes a large section of the workers to hardship” because of the inevitable layoffs.²⁷⁶ Hevesi replied that workers would receive 80% unemployment pay, but the paper shortage demanded action.²⁷⁷ Still, Göndör and the Press Directorate attempted “everything humanly possible to save the newspaper companies for as long as possible and to protect the jobs and thus the existence of journalists.”²⁷⁸

It had become clear that lack of paper was being used for ideological ends. For Göndör, Kunfi, Böhm, and others on the republican Left, the task was to struggle against this closure of the public sphere in cultural terms. Following renewed demands for dissolution, Pál Kéri—formerly Károlyi's personal secretary—published an article in *Az Ember* at Göndör's request.²⁷⁹ The text was nominally a critique of János Mácza, the avant-garde writer close to Lajos Kassák and the *MA* circle, but was more broadly an attack on the closure of the public sphere and the Republic of Councils' cultural policies, in which Kunfi found himself in an ambiguous position.

The debate over artistic autonomy in the Republic of Councils had erupted already in April, weeks before Kéri's intervention against the avant-garde. On one side, radical voices demanded the exclusion of bourgeois writers from cultural life entirely. Béla Uitz, the painter

²⁷⁵ Session 13/a of April 12, in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei*, 264.

²⁷⁶ Session 14/a of April 14, 1919, in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei*, 284.

²⁷⁷ Session 14/a of April 14, 1919, in *A Forradalmi Kormányzótanács jegyzőkönyvei*, 284.

²⁷⁸ Göndör, *Vallomások könyve*, 73.

²⁷⁹ Göndör states as much in *Vallomások könyve*, 115–16.

associated with Kassák's *MA* circle, insisted that "the proletarian dictatorship can only have need of art with a revolutionary social worldview. The others should step aside during the dictatorship—even if they want to help in good faith, they can only harm the proletarian dictatorship."²⁸⁰ Lajos Nagy similarly called for the silencing of bourgeois literature.²⁸¹ An anonymous *Vörös Újság* article even attacked Árpád Tóth—the progressive bourgeois poet who had written perhaps the best poem celebrating the Republic of Councils.²⁸² From the opposite direction came Kéri and Göndör's assault. Kéri's "Máca!" in *Az Ember* (April 15) and Göndör's "Who Wants to Dictate Proletarian Literature?" in *Népszava* (April 16) attacked Kassák and the *MA* circle under the banner of "accessibility" (*közérthetőség*) against their extreme formalism and avant-garde tendencies, which alienated much of the educated public. Crucially too, attacks were directed toward György Lukács and Béla Balázs, key figures in the Republic of Councils' cultural leadership under Kunfi, for their restrictive views on cultural production.²⁸³ The young József Révai, writing in *Vörös Újság*, responded with an anonymous article entitled "Crush the Cultural Counterrevolution," arguing for the inseparability of the writer's output from their political convictions. Lukács's own clarification followed immediately, supporting this position, and the united party leadership declared its support for Lukács, temporarily banning Göndör's *Az Ember* as a result.²⁸⁴ *Nyugat*, for its part, complained

²⁸⁰ Béla Uitz, "Diktatúra kell!" (Dictatorship is Necessary!), *Vörös Újság* (Apr. 10, 1919), quoted in Farkas József, "Proletárforradalom, avantgarde és tömegkultúra: A Tanácsköztársaság irodalmi vitáihoz" (Proletarian Revolution, Avant-Garde, and Mass Culture: On the Republic of Council's Literary Debates), in *„Vár egy új világ”*. *Tanulmányok a szocialista irodalom történetéből* ("A New World Awaits": Studies from the History of Socialist Literature), vol. 4, *Irodalom – szocializmus* (Literature – Socialism), ed. László Illés and Farkas József (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975), 23.

²⁸¹ Lajos Nagy, "A kommunista irodalom" (Communist Literature), *Színházi Élet* (Mar. 30–Apr. 5, 1919), quoted in quoted in József, "Proletárforradalom," 23.

²⁸² "Vigyázat!" (Attention!), *Vörös Újság* (Apr. 11, 1919), quoted in József, "Proletárforradalom," 23.

²⁸³ Pál Kéri, "Máca!" *Az Ember* (April 15, 1919); Ferenc Göndör, "Kik akarják diktálni a proletárirodalmat?" (Who Wants to Dictate Proletarian Literature?), *Népszava* (April 16, 1919), quoted in József, "Proletárforradalom," 24.

²⁸⁴ György Lukács, "Felvilágosításul" (Clarification), *Vörös Újság* (Apr. 18, 1919) and "Nyilatkozat," *Vörös Újság* (Apr. 18, 1919), both quoted in József, "Proletárforradalom," 24.

that the proletarian dictatorship “cannot mean the crushing of talents for the benefit of half-talents and the talentless, however ancient their communist political convictions may be.”²⁸⁵

The exchange over accessibility and the avant-garde’s politics thus reflected only one element of a wider debate on artistic autonomy and party discipline that had consumed the Republic of Councils’ cultural sphere. Months later, at the June 1919 party congress, Zsigmond Kunfi argued that the proletarian dictatorship had led to “the absolute stagnation of all spiritual and scientific life.”²⁸⁶ Béla Kun rejected this position: it was not cultural life that had declined, but rather “the spiritual life which stood in the service of the bourgeoisie.” In its place, a new culture would arise from the proletariat itself, but this new culture was emphatically not the literature of the avant-garde journal *MA*, which Kun dismissed as “a product of bourgeois decadence.”²⁸⁷ Lajos Kassák responded with an open letter defending *MA*’s revolutionary credentials but also the necessity of free artistic and cultural production. Kassák and the activists had supported antimilitarism during the war and worked toward the socialist transformation of the October Revolution; to label them “decadent” on the basis of their formal experimentalism was to confuse revolutionary aesthetics for bourgeois politics. Kassák nevertheless maintained his earlier position on party membership: the true artist supported the proletarian dictatorship “from outside” the party apparatus, preserving creative autonomy against what he called the “conservatism” of all party programs—including the communists.²⁸⁸

Lukács, as People’s Commissar for Public Education and Culture, attempted to navigate between these positions. In response to earlier attacks on progressive bourgeois writers from the *Nyugat* circle, Lukács had declared that the People’s Commissariat “will not officially support the literature of any direction or party.” The communist cultural program distinguished

²⁸⁵ Miksa Fenyő, “Dosztojevszkij,” *Nyugat* (Apr. 16, 1919), quoted in József, “Proletárforradalom,” 24.

²⁸⁶ József, “Proletárforradalom,” 25.

²⁸⁷ As in *Vörös Újság* (June 14, 1919), quoted in József, “Proletárforradalom,” 25.

²⁸⁸ Lajos Kassák, “Levél Kun Bélához a művészet nevében,” *MA* 4, no. 7 (June 15, 1919), quoted in József, “Proletárforradalom,” 26–27.

only between good and bad literature: “It is not prepared to throw aside Shakespeare or Goethe on the grounds that they were not socialist writers. But neither is it prepared, in the name of socialism, to unleash dilettantism upon art.”²⁸⁹ This was a far cry from the positions of those like Béla Uitz who demanded that “only revolutionary artists with a social worldview” be permitted to work under the dictatorship, while others should “step aside.”²⁹⁰ Yet even Lukács’s approach became difficult to sustain. In July, a decree required all existing journals and newspapers to seek re-authorization from the People’s Commissariat—ostensibly because of the paper shortage, though the political implications were obvious. *Nyugat*, *MA*, and the *Vasárnapi Újság* were all “suspended.”²⁹¹

By the Republic’s final weeks, the cultural debates had generated a great deal of debate and controversy without much resolution. The fundamental tensions between cultural autonomy and political discipline, between artistic experimentation and mass accessibility, between inherited bourgeois culture and a new proletarian culture yet to be born remained unresolved. What foreclosed these debates was not internal resolution but external collapse.

The Romanian army entered Budapest on August 4, 1919, and the counterrevolutionary forces that followed brought their own answers to cultural questions—answers formulated not through debate but through persecution, imprisonment, and exile. Retribution began quickly thereafter, targeting not only visible communists in the country, but also those civic radicals and social democrats who had supported Károlyi’s People’s Republic. Symptomatic of the round-ups and marginalizations of the republican Left was the case of Róbert Braun, who was arrested by the police on September 7, 1919, just over a month after the collapse of the Republic of Councils.²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Lukács, “Felvilágosításul,” quoted in József, “Proletárforradalom,” 23.

²⁹⁰ Uitz, “Diktatúra kell,” quoted in József, “Proletárforradalom,” 22–23.

²⁹¹ József, “Proletárforradalom,” 27; “*Mindenki újakra készül...*,” vol. 4, 1113.

²⁹² BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Report of September 10, 1919, f. 7–8.

On the basis of “confidential information,” the arresting detectives accused him of being in “the most intensive” contact with the city’s anarchists (particularly Károly Krausz) and Béla Kun’s circle during “the commune.”²⁹³ In the files, a small paper slip appears, unsigned and undated: “Tarcali utca 14, Dr. Róbert Braun, the personal secretary of Béla Kun.”²⁹⁴ Apparently this was enough evidence. Next to the anonymous denunciation, detectives benefitted from the actions of Budapest’s reinstated mayor, Tivadar Bódy. The day after István Friedrich’s coup d’état against Gyula Peidl’s trade union government,²⁹⁵ Bódy ordered all city institutions to suspend employees who had received promotions during the Republic of Councils, or who “actively participated in communist movements,” and to send along a list of their names.²⁹⁶

The temporary director of the Municipal Library, Dezső Kremmer, enthusiastically produced such a list: alongside Braun (the library’s deputy director) and József Madzsar (the nominal director during 1918 and 1919), the librarians László Dienes, Béla Kőhalmi, Blanka Pikler, Gabriella Szigeti, Imre Váradi, and Máté Matkovits were all accused of benefiting from and working for the dictatorship of the proletariat.²⁹⁷ In the August 29 *Fővárosi Közlöny*, the mayor announced they would all be suspended, salaries withheld, and subject to “pre-disciplinary investigation.” Matkovits, the lowest-ranked employee on the list, was simply fired. Kremmer was handsomely rewarded—officially “entrusted” with the directorship now that the upper ranks were purged.²⁹⁸

²⁹³ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Report of September 2, 1919, f. 3.

²⁹⁴ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/5601, f. 2.

²⁹⁵ See, e.g., Eva S. Balogh, “István Friedrich and the Hungarian coup d’état of 1919: A Reevaluation,” *Slavic Review* 35, no. 2 (1976): 269–86; and Lajos Varga, “1919 októbere: pártok vergődése a koalíciós tárgyalások hálójában” (October 1919: Party Struggles in the Web of Coalition Negotiations), *Múltunk*, no. 4 (2021): 113–45, for Friedrich’s attempt to create a coalition before Horthy’s entry into Budapest in November.

²⁹⁶ Mayoral Decrees (*polgármesteri rendeletek*) nos. 96.114 and 96.115 of 1919, in *Fővárosi Közlöny* 30, no. 31 (Aug. 15, 1919): 585–86.

²⁹⁷ László Remete, “Az ellenforradalom első évei (1919 augusztus–1923)” (The First Years of the Counterrevolution (August 1919–1923)), in *A Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár története* (The History of the Ervin Szabó Municipal Library) (Budapest: Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár, 1966), 217.

²⁹⁸ *Fővárosi Közlöny* 30, no. 33 (Aug. 29, 1919): 604.

Even from the beginning, it was clear the charges were either over-inflated accusations, underhanded attempts at illiberal marginalization, or outright falsifications. The right-wing *Új Nemzedék* picked up on the denunciations in October, calling the Municipal Library the city's "hotbed of Bolshevism" which had operated "at the expense and oppression of the Christian population of the capital."²⁹⁹ The antisemitic undertones were hardly muted. Braun and the librarians were featured by name, with plenty of blame heaped upon the Galileo Circle, *Szabadgondolat*, Jászi, the Society of the Social Sciences, *Világ*, and *Huszdik Század*—plus every notable social democrat. More generally, modern sociology itself was the root cause of upheaval. In the minds of *Új Nemzedék*'s editors, sociology could not be considered science, for it only generated "propaganda to subvert society."³⁰⁰ Counterrevolutionary denunciations were expressed in traditionalist, Christian, and Hungarian nationalist language. But already in everyday people's actions, denunciations had taken on the form of "the *Alltag* of everyday collaboration" with the counterrevolutionary regime, to use Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately's words.³⁰¹

Ödön Wildner, close to the civic radicals before and during the war, was likewise mentioned as an enabler. This wound up being paradoxical in the flux of events: now, the counterrevolutionary government needed experts, and Wildner was reinstated as city commissioner for public education and social policy. Kremmer's list made its way to Wildner's desk, and Wildner's commentary from August 18 was a genuine but ultimately futile attempt to clarify the facts.³⁰² In reality, Wildner noted, Madzsar hadn't worked for the Municipal Library in any capacity after November 25, 1918—months before the Republic of Councils—when he was appointed to the Ministry of Social Welfare under Kunfi. Meanwhile, Braun had

²⁹⁹ "A bolsevizmus melegágya. A Városi Könyvtár üzelmei" (The Hotbed of Bolshevism. The Municipal Library's Activities), *Új Nemzedék* 1, no. 10 (Oct. 10, 1919) 5.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, "Introduction to the Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History," *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 4 (1996): 747–67, here 756.

³⁰² Remete, *A Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár története*, 217–18.

effectively led the library, keeping his title as deputy director with no promotion. Furthermore, “in terms of political allegiances, [Madzsar] was always close to the civic radicals, and the same goes for Dr. Róbert Braun, of whose politically communist agitation I know nothing.”³⁰³ In fact, Madzsar seems to have shifted leftward only *after* the counterrevolution, radicalized in emigration and after his return later in the 1920s.³⁰⁴ Braun had been much further from the communist camp and remained so. He appears to have had no sustained contact or cooperation with anyone from the KMP during the Republic of Councils. Braun’s work, aside from scholarly activities, remained within normal public library operations.

Nevertheless, the police and state prosecutors had been placed in charge of purging the public sphere of all leftist influences, whether communist, social democratic, or civic radical. Soon after the list was published, police closed in. Detectives arrived at Tarcali utca 14 on September 7, 1919, and detained Braun. Braun was interrogated and, in the words of former Minister of Justice Sándor Erdély, “brutalized.”³⁰⁵ The day after, detectives wrote they had Braun “shipped off” to prison.³⁰⁶ Word circulated quickly. His spouse, the pedagogue Margit Grünwald, rallied support. Erdély attempted to intervene by approaching Albert Váry, the state’s deputy chief prosecutor now handling Friedrich government’s purges.³⁰⁷ Erdély had come to know Braun during the Károlyi government’s attempts to settle the national question; before the Hungarian People’s Republic, Erdély had already known Braun through his scholarly work. “On the basis of this acquaintance, it is certain that he did not hold communist principles,” Erdély wrote. The only uncertainty was Braun’s actions “under communism.” Still, Erdély argued, “the accusations against Róbert Braun are likely to prove unfounded,” and he ought to

³⁰³ Remete, *A Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár története*, 217–18.

³⁰⁴ See details in “Madzsar József,” in *Magyar életrajzi lexikon*, vol. 2, 117.

³⁰⁵ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Letter from Sándor Erdély to Albert Váry, September 13, 1919, f. 9; on Erdély, see “Erdély Sándor,” in *Magyar életrajzi lexikon*, vol. 1, 434.

³⁰⁶ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Report of September 27, 1919, f. 15.

³⁰⁷ Previously, Váry had worked in the same position during the Hungarian People’s Republic and had been the one to announce the release of Béla Kun and the other communists on March 21, 1919.

be “deprived of undeserved suffering,” particularly someone Erdély found to be “a worthy, gentle-natured, valuable man of science.”³⁰⁸

Grünwald also approached Kremmer to write on Braun’s behalf—likely knowing full well his list had been a falsification. Kremmer confirmed in his private letter to Váry that Braun had *not* received a promotion during “the proletarian dictatorship,” nor engaged in “communist agitation”—and so there were no grounds to indict him. This came in direct opposition to Kremmer’s public claims against Braun in August.³⁰⁹ Grünwald then requested their apartment building’s custodian (*házmester*) and a tenant confirm that Braun’s “way of life under the dictatorship of the proletariat in no way changed,” stating too that “he did not conduct communist agitation.”³¹⁰ Sándor Krisztics, a Municipal Library colleague, recalled Braun had intervened personally on his behalf after his arrest “during the commune,” and that Braun had not “agitated in the interest of the commune among the library clerks.” Though Krisztics noted Braun had held lectures to “strangers”—which is to say, library patrons and the general public—whose content was unknown to him.³¹¹ Pál Drescher, Kremmer’s second-in-command, further attested that Braun had met personally with Zoltán Rónai, People’s Commissar for Justice, and Sándor Turnowsky, a prosecutor at the Revolutionary Court, to free Krisztics after his arrest.³¹² According to László Remete, historian of the Municipal Library, Braun even continued paying Krisztics’s salary directly to his family, irrespective of the latter having been arrested upon suspicion of participating in a “counterrevolutionary organization.”³¹³

A second letter from Erdély to Váry later in September further insisted on Braun’s “rehabilitation,” alluding that in the police’s zealotry and incompetence they had perhaps

³⁰⁸ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Letter from Sándor Erdély to Albert Váry, September 13, 1919, f. 9–10.

³⁰⁹ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Letter from Dezső Kremmer to Albert Váry, September 15, 1919, f. 11.

³¹⁰ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Letter from Arnold Folkmann and Mrs. András Prekop to Albert Váry, September 16, 1919, f. 12.

³¹¹ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Letter from Sándor Krisztics to Albert Váry, September 19, 1919, f. 13.

³¹² BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Letter from Pál Drescher to Albert Váry, October 6, 1919, f. 26.

³¹³ Remete, *A Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár története*, 220.

arrested the wrong Róbert Braun.³¹⁴ In the end, the matter was resolved by the occupying forces. The arresting detectives reported on September 27 that Romanian troops had come to the prison ten days earlier, released a number of prisoners, and taken them to military headquarters. Braun had been among them. He was set free, pending the outcome of his case.³¹⁵

Soon after, Braun typed a fifteen-page *védőirat* (defense document) addressed to Váry, testifying to his innocence.³¹⁶ First, Braun outlined his biography and academic work in summary form, noting his sociological research and his studies and translations of Henry George's work on land reform and the single tax.³¹⁷ He noted he had drawn the boundaries of his position toward communism in 1917 during his extensive debate with Jenő Varga on *Huszadik Század*'s pages, where Braun explicitly rejected dogmatic Marxism as a universally valid framework.³¹⁸ His activities during the Károlyi government had been characterized by applying his sociological studies to the national question. He worked as an expert in Jászi's Ministry of Nationalities' Affairs, participated in the government's Committee on Foreign Affairs, and helped prepare the (unfinished and unimplemented) land reform legislation.

Part of this work resulted in a book, *The Dismemberment of Hungary and the National Question*, published in January 1919 in Hungarian with simultaneous English and French translations.³¹⁹ There, Braun expressed the same arguments that Jászi and Csécsy had during the same period. Federalization of a preserved historical Hungary and democratization of

³¹⁴ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Letter from Sándor Erdély to Albert Váry, September 26, 1919, unfoliated [f. 14].

³¹⁵ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Report of September 27, 1919, f. 15.

³¹⁶ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Róbert Braun's *védőirat*, f. 18–25.

³¹⁷ Before the World War, Braun was the main transmitter of the works of Henry George in Hungary. See Róbert Braun, "Henry George és a földjáradékadó," *Huszadik Század* 8, no. 16 (1907): 594–609; Henry George, *Vámvédelem vagy szabadkereskedelelem* (Protection or Free Trade), trans. Róbert Braun (Budapest: Világosság, 1909); Róbert Braun, "Georgeizmus és földreform," *Huszadik Század* 12, no. 23 (1911): 96–101; Henry George, *Haladás és szegénység* (Progress and Poverty), trans. Róbert Braun (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1914); as well as Henry George, *Társadalmi kérdések* (Social Problems), trans. Róbert Braun (Budapest: Világirodalom, 1921), published after his persecution by the counterrevolutionary authorities.

³¹⁸ See Róbert Braun, "Adalékok az orthodox szocialista lélektanához," *Huszadik Század* 18, no. 35 (Jan.–Jul. 1917): 576; Jenő Varga, "Az orthodox szocializmus vádja," *Huszadik Század* 18, no. 36 (Jul.–Dec. 1917): 274–75; Róbert Braun, "Ortodox szocializmus," *Huszadik Század* 18, no. 36 (Jul.–Dec. 1917): 354–55.

³¹⁹ Róbert Braun, *Magyarország feldarabolása és a nemzeti kérdés* (Budapest: Táltos, 1919); Braun, *The Dismemberment of Hungary and the Nationalities* (Budapest: Hornyánszky, 1919); and Braun, *Le démembrement de la Hongrie et la question des nationalités* (Budapest: Hornyánszky, 1919).

Central Europe would be the only way to tamp down Hungarian national chauvinism, always in symbiotic tension with “Czech, Romanian, and Serbian chauvinism.”³²⁰ When one flared up, so did the others. None of their plans could be implemented, however; when Jászi resigned, so did Braun, returning to his Municipal Library position in early 1919.

With the Republic of Councils established some weeks later, Braun remained at his post until his dismissal in the counterrevolution’s early weeks. His work there, as he relayed, was simply to preserve the institution’s autonomy, “not to tie the fate of the library to that of the Republic of Councils.”³²¹ Then there was the question of his connection to Kun, which had put the police on his trail. Braun did not deny making contact, only that it was not out of ideological affinities but rather Kun’s request for Braun to work in the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. Braun confirmed he had met with Kun but to refuse the offer, stating he “considered communism neither desirable nor possible.”³²² Yet this contact proved helpful when Braun was placed in charge of editing *Huszadik Század* after Jászi’s emigration. Braun, through Erich Frigyes Podach, contacted Kun to safeguard the journal’s autonomy in the context of the paper shortage question and the ideological narrowing of the public sphere. This was partially successful. After Jászi left in early May, Braun took over the editorship and was still able to edit and publish the delayed March and April issues despite the paper shortages. He also put out the journal’s special memorial issue on Endre Ady in August 1919, which had been prepared over the summer, before the collapse of the Republic of Councils. In fact, the journal had been shuttered *after* the counterrevolutionaries had occupied the central state institutions.

Later, Braun received a request from Philip Marshall Brown, Princeton professor, Wilson’s personal friend, and member of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, to act as guide and translator on a fact-finding trip. Brown had arrived in Hungary at Szeged, still in

³²⁰ Braun, *Magyarország feldarabolása*, 21.

³²¹ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Róbert Braun’s *védőirat*, f. 21–22.

³²² BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Róbert Braun’s *védőirat*, f. 21–22.

Entente-occupied territory, intending to make his way north to Budapest. Braun had already met American Relief Administration representatives during the period of the People's Republic and became informally known in Entente circles as a reliable interpreter and expert on the social and national questions.³²³ Though the pair did not make it to Budapest, apparently they ran into Tibor Szamuely in the company of Béla Vágó at the train station in Kecskemét. Braun suggested Brown could exchange views with “the representative of the farthest left wing of the Party,” and recalled the following scene:

[Brown] agreed, so I went over to introduce him to Szamuely and his companion, Béla Vágó, and invited them into Prof. Brown's compartment. There, the conversation proceeded, and I was the translator. In general, Szamuely expressed quite moderate ideas. I remember vividly that Prof. Brown cornered both of them by asking “Are there more of the proletariat or the bourgeoisie?” When they responded that it was the proletariat, he asked “Then why do you need the dictatorship?” This question annoyed them greatly. When they departed at the next station, I turned to Prof. Brown and told him “I am completely on your side.” He responded with a laugh.³²⁴

Afterward, Braun met Kun for a last time to convey what had happened with Szamuely, but the conversation lasted only ten minutes. “In my life,” Braun wrote, “I hardly spent a whole hour with him.”³²⁵

Braun continued to outline his work on adult education for middle-school teachers—“I told the organizer of the course, Dr. Hugó Márki, that I am not a communist and so I would not lecture in a communist spirit”—and clarified his role in the National Propaganda Committee (*Országos Propaganda Bizottság*) during the Károlyi government, working as he did “in the interest of [territorial] integrity and the republic.”³²⁶ Braun concluded by addressing his connections with anarchist circles:

³²³ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Róbert Braun's *védőirat*, f. 22–23.

³²⁴ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Róbert Braun's *védőirat*, f. 23.

³²⁵ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Róbert Braun's *védőirat*, f. 23–24.

³²⁶ See also BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Declaration of Géza Gáspár, Director of the National Propaganda Committee, October 4, 1919, f. 27.

It is true that during my time as a university student I had connections with Dr. Jenő Schmitt's circle, from which I came to know Károly Krausz, who was an 'anarchist' in a Tolstoian sense, who was the opponent of all violence on principle, and who was a propagator of human fraternity.³²⁷

It was also true he had held two lectures at the Society of the Social Sciences where Krausz had been present: one on "the advantages of the division of labor" in 1911 and another on Henry George, likely in 1909 as part of the Free School of the Social Sciences (*Társadalomtudományok Szabad Iskolája*) lecture series.³²⁸ "Both were purely informational lectures which anyone could have given," Braun insisted, "even in a Catholic young men's club, for example."³²⁹ Given all this, Braun requested Váry cancel the ongoing investigation at once.

Instead, a separate investigation was opened, for the same reasons, with the same compilation of evidence.³³⁰ These files attest that Braun was taken into custody on October 8 and again on December 27, 1919, interrogated both times.³³¹ This second investigation was closed by Váry on January 28, 1920, for lack of evidence.³³² Váry cancelled the first investigation only on March 2, 1920, also for lack of evidence.³³³ But a third was opened less

³²⁷ See, in English, András Bozóki and Miklós Sükösd, *Anarchism in Hungary: Theory, History, Legacies* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 2006); key studies in Hungarian include András Bozóki, "Anarchista elméletek Magyarországon: Batthyány Ervin és Schmitt Jenő Henrik," *Világosság* 26, no. 3 (1985): 170–78; Miklós Sükösd, "A magyar anarchista hagyományból," *Valóság* 28, no. 4 (1985): 71–89; András Bozóki and Miklós Sükösd, "Agrárszocializmus és ideális anarchizmus," *Medvetanc*, no. 2 (1987): 293–320 with documents, 321–34; and András Bozóki and Miklós Sükösd, "Az anarchizmustól a liberális szocializmusig," *Jelenkor* 31, no. 2 (1988): 140–50.

³²⁸ Róbert Braun, "A tanult és tanulatlan munka (Skilled and Unskilled Labor)," *Huszadik Század* 12, no. 23 (1911): 42–47; See an advertisement for Braun's lecture on "Henry George and the Agrarian Question" in "A Társadalomtudományok Szabad Iskolája," *Huszadik Század* 10, no. 19 (1909): 214. In the same term, talks were held by Béla Balázs, Ernő Bresztovszky, Ignotus, Oszkár Jászi, Zsigmond Kunfi, György Lukács, Zoltán Rónai, Ervin Szabó, Pál Szende, and István Varró, among others, with an opening lecture and further talk given by the German–Italian sociologist Robert Michels.

³²⁹ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Róbert Braun's *védőírat*, f. 24–25.

³³⁰ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/5601, f. 1–22.

³³¹ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/5601, Interrogation of Róbert Braun, October 8, 1919, f. 4–5; and December 27, 1919, f. 21.

³³² BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/5601, Albert Váry's cancellation of the proceedings, January 28, 1920, f. 22.

³³³ BFL VII.18.d. 1919-13/3602, Albert Váry's cancellation of the proceedings, March 2, 1920, f. 29. All of the cancellations cited Law XXXIII of 1896, On the Procedure of Criminal Prosecution (*bűnvádi perrendtartás*),

than a month later. This time one Pál Jánosi, a twenty-seven-year-old police officer, reported Braun for being Kun's "translator" and having had "friendly relations with Kun." A further unnamed witness noted Braun "could have become a communist" (*kommunista lett volna*) during the Republic of Councils.³³⁴ This investigation too was cancelled, again for lack of evidence, in June 1920.³³⁵

In all, as Margit Grünwald recalled in the late 1950s, Braun was taken in by police some twelve separate times for interrogation during this period, with their apartment searched in each instance.³³⁶ Grünwald experienced her own run-ins. During the Republic of Councils, she had been appointed to the all-girls middle school at Vilmos császár út 21 (today's Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út 23), where Flóra Peisner, the spouse of social democrat Zoltán Rónai, had also been appointed principal.³³⁷ Investigations were opened into both. In one list of suspected communist teachers, Grünwald was described as "the most ferocious communist" who "wreaked havoc upon the moral world of the children, lectured on sexual education" and had "a haughty, defiant, unruly attitude."³³⁸ Peisner was "the ultimate exponent of socialism," who "most fiercely agitated among the students" and "contributed most to the institute's debauchery."³³⁹ Both investigations were ultimately dropped for lack of evidence—even with the hyperbolic denunciations.³⁴⁰

Section 101, Point 3, which states that "if the prosecution is convinced that there is no evidence at all or that it would be extremely difficult to obtain it," the investigation must be terminated.

³³⁴ BFL VII.18.d. 1920-13/5581, Police Report, March 23, 1920, f. 3–4.

³³⁵ BFL VII.18.d. 1920-13/5581, Albert Váry's cancellation of the proceedings, June 25, 1920, f. 4.

³³⁶ Quoted in Remete, *A Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár története*, 220.

³³⁷ See BFL VII.18.d. 1920-13/1876 and BFL VII.18.d. 1920-13/8252 for two of the case files. It is worth noting that both were referred to not by their birth names or professional titles, but rather by the fact of their marriage to their husbands. In the case files, Dr. Margit Grünwald is called only "Braun Róbertné" (Mrs. Róbert Braun); Dr. Flóra Peisner, "Rónai Zoltánné" (Mrs. Zoltán Rónai). It seems that all of the investigations cited here and above were in large part conducted under István Friedrich's Prime-Ministerial Decree no. 4039 of 1919, which allowed the state prosecutor's office (*államügyészség*, i.e., in the person of Albert Váry) wide leeway to prosecute any and all supposed "crimes committed in order to establish, maintain, or restore the Republic of Councils"—meaning the prosecution of nearly any activity undertaken between March 21 and August 6 which did not explicitly aid the counterrevolution. See "A magyar kormány 1919. évi 4.039. M. E. számú rendelete," *Magyarországi rendeletek tára* 56 (1919): 651–56, here 652; and *Budapesti Közlöny*, no. 90 (Aug. 20, 1919): 2–3.

³³⁸ BFL VII.18.d. 1921-13/0682, f. 7.

³³⁹ BFL VII.18.d. 1921-13/0682, f. 5.

³⁴⁰ BFL VII.18.d. 1920-13/1876, f. 13.

Braun's case was not unique but representative of a wider trend reasserting the traditional hierarchies of the pre-war *status quo ante*.³⁴¹ Investigations were opened into those on the Left who remained and those who had gone into exile. Local press was subject to investigations too, from the communist *Vörös Újság* to the urban bourgeois *Az Est*, from the civic radical *Világ* to the organ of the social democratic women's movement, *Nőmunkás*.³⁴² The latter paper, banned the day after Friedrich's government had come to power, resumed publication only at the beginning of December with heavily censored content. Still, it was able to pose the question of whether better living conditions could be secured in a monarchy or republic, in the leadup to the January 25, 1920, elections to the National Assembly.³⁴³ Their answer was clear: only in a people's republic (*népköztársaság*), based on the state's necessary "validation of the popular will," could living conditions improve. Yet the elections came and went according to an electoral law that, while it gave women the right to vote, created such high barriers to eligibility that most women in the potential electorate were in fact barred from voting. The social democrats officially boycotted the elections, though agitation for the elections still occurred on the pages of *Nőmunkás*,³⁴⁴ even just ten days before:

Who should vote for the social democrats? Those against war, who support the republic, and who desire peace, surpluses, a wider selection of food, better clothing, who do not want idleness, who want warm homes, ought to vote social democratic. First of all, this is the wife of the worker, the woman leading the home, the female clerks, the woman peasant, the wife of the smallholder, the women who work in the factories, in the home, in the school, that is: the working woman votes for the social democrats!³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ See, e.g., Emily R. Gioielli, "'Home is Home No Longer': Political Struggle in the Domestic Sphere in Postarmistice Hungary, 1919–1922," *Aspasia* 11 (2017): 54–70.

³⁴² Case files in BFL VII.18.d. 1919-05/0001; BFL VII.18.d. 1919-05/0004; BFL VII.18.d. 1919-05/0273; and BFL VII.18.d. 1919-05/0014, respectively.

³⁴³ J. G., "Királyság, vagy köztársaság?" (Monarchy or Republic?), *Nőmunkás* 12, no. 23 (Dec. 1, 1919): 3–4.

³⁴⁴ See, e.g., "Választások küszöbén" (On the Threshold of the Elections), *Nőmunkás* 13, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 1920): 1–2; "Január 25-én" (January 25th), *Nőmunkás* 13, no. 2 (Jan. 15, 1920): 1–2.

³⁴⁵ "Kis választókatékizmus" (A Small Electoral Cathecism), *Nőmunkás* 13, no. 2 (Jan. 15, 1920): 4.

In the end, the new National Assembly included only conservative and right-wing parties, and only one woman, Margit Schlachta, representing a conservative Christian feminism within István Friedrich's and István Bethlen's Party of Christian National Unification (*Keresztény Nemzeti Egyesülés Pártja*). During and after the elections, a chill set in over the progressive public sphere. Press censorship, curtailing of universal and equal suffrage, and the persecution of individuals deemed threatening to the counterrevolutionary order all continued, now with a parliamentary majority. By harassing hundreds of prominent and lesser figures on the broadly understood Left, the counterrevolutionaries sought to lump them all into the same category irrespective of their actual ideological commitments or actions during the revolutionary period from October 31, 1918, to August 1, 1919.

Among instances of counterrevolutionary harassment and attempted marginalization— notwithstanding cases of outright physical violence and murder—Braun's investigation and interrogation was one of the more dramatic instances for the republican Left in Hungary. Imre Csécsy had a quite different experience by comparison. During the Károlyi period's final weeks, he had accepted a position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after Jászi's resignation and the functional end of the Ministry for Nationalities' Affairs. Remaining in his position after the Republic of Councils' establishment, Csécsy signed an oath of loyalty to the proletarian dictatorship and was subsequently removed from the Ministry during the counterrevolution. It seems Csécsy was threatened with internment, but no evidence has surfaced of him having been taken into custody or interrogated.³⁴⁶ Csécsy continued to write through the 1920s and most of the '30s, working from around 1927/28 to 1935 as a manager at the Phönix Insurance

³⁴⁶ See F. János Varga, "Egy magyar citoyen zsákutcája (Csécsy Imre 1893–1961)" (The Dead End of a Hungarian Citoyen), *Kritika* 12, no. 7 (1983): 23; Tibor Valuch, "Radikalizmus és demokrácia vonzásában (Csécsy Imre 1893–1961)" (In the ... of Radicalism and Democracy), in Imre Csécsy, *Radikalizmus és demokrácia: Csécsy Imre válogatott írásai* (Radicalism and Democracy: The Collected Writings of Imre Csécsy), ed. Tibor Valuch (Szeged: Aetas Könyvek, 1988), 11. Both Varga and Valuch cite a quotation where Csécsy was dismissed from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs apparently for his "particularly blatant destructive behavior" during the Republic of Councils, though neither author gives a particular reference for the original location of this quotation. I have attempted to track down formal criminal proceedings against Csécsy in this period, similar to Braun's, but have had no luck. It could well be the case that they were never initiated.

Company's Hungarian branch in Budapest.³⁴⁷ In a case more extreme than Braun's and certainly more than Csécsy's, the infamous Commissars' Trial (*népbiztosper*, July–December 1920), ten former People's Commissars who failed to make it across the border were tried on charges of incitement, *lèse-majesté*, and currency forgery. Four, including the civic radical Péter Ágoston, were sentenced to death. The remaining six were sentenced to life in prison. In the end, none of the executions were carried out, and the sentenced parties hardly spent a full year in jail: all ten were exchanged in a prisoner swap with the Soviet Union in 1921.³⁴⁸ Others were less fortunate. The White Terror swept up and killed hundreds of former revolutionaries as well as suspected collaborators, merely sympathetic individuals, or those on the wrong end of a grudge.³⁴⁹ While some were arrested, tried, and executed, like communist activist Oszkár Lévai, others were brutally killed by right-wing paramilitary forces, as in the cases of social democratic journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó, murdered by members of Gyula Ostenburg-Moravek's Ostenburg Detachment.³⁵⁰

The question of the republican Left's experiences during the Republic of Councils was much more complex than police documents, anonymous denunciations, or counterrevolutionary tribunes could establish. There was plenty of fluidity between the Hungarian People's Republic and the Republic of Councils, particularly among left-wing social democrats: Zsigmond Kunfi was named People's Commissar for Culture, with György Lukács as his deputy; Zoltán Rónai was placed in charge of judicial affairs; Vilmos Böhm was initially named People's Commissar for Social Production, later taking the military affairs portfolio before being sent as ambassador

³⁴⁷ See *Központi Értesítő* 52, no. 24 (June 16, 1927): 570; *Budapesti cím- és lakásjegyzék*, vol. 29 (Budapest: Franklin, 1928): 346; and *Központi Értesítő* 60, no. 22 (May 30, 1935): 361, for Csécsy's entry and exit from the company.

³⁴⁸ On the trial, see Erika Rév, *A népbiztosok pere* (The Commissars' Trial) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1969); on Ágoston's fate after the Republic of Councils, see Ormos, *A katedrától a halálsorig*, 159–331.

³⁴⁹ On the White Terror, see Béla Bodó, *The White Terror: Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921* (London: Routledge, 2019).

³⁵⁰ For the murders in the context of the counterrevolutionary consolidation, see Miklós Szinai, *Ki lesz a kormányzó? A Somogyi–Bacsó-gyilkosság háttere* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1988).

to Vienna in the Republic's last days.³⁵¹ Jászi went into exile early on, and eventually Mihály Károlyi did too—but before August 1919 this was rather the exception among the republican Left. As Braun's police files show, even non-Marxists from the Jászi circle who remained in Budapest still hoped to carve out spaces of intellectual autonomy. Others, like Csécsy, seem to have simply kept to their work across regimes in the hope of carrying on and potentially realizing the Octobrist ideas to which they were committed.

2.4. Conclusion

The ideas of the republican Left were fully marginalized in Hungary's public sphere from August 1, 1919, onward. In exile, the Octobrist legacy was fostered first in Vienna, later dispersing to Paris, New York City, and Oberlin, Ohio. Domestically, civic radical and social democratic communities retreated into professional, literary, and scientific work until *Századunk*, the successor to *Huszadik Század*, was founded in 1926. It was not until the mid-1930s that the Hungarian republican Left re-entered the daily life of politics in full. The social democrats boycotted the January 1920 elections and so had no parliamentary representation until 1922; even then, their showing only declined between 1926 and 1939.³⁵²

In Yugoslavia, by contrast, the failure to secure a republican state form between late 1918 and summer 1921 did not mean complete exclusion from politics, though the impact of leftist republican ideas in the National Assembly was practically nonexistent. Stjepan Radić's peasantist republicanism was only viable until 1925, when entry into government was

³⁵¹ Böhm's memoirs, *Két forradalom tűzében: Októberi forradalom, proletárdiktatúra, ellenforradalom* (Vienna: Bécsi Magyar Kiadó, 1923), written in the years immediately after his emigration, is a vivid and compelling account of the revolutionary years.

³⁵² See, e.g., Tables 24, 26, and 27 in Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 161, 174, and 181.

predicated upon jettisoning the party's republican commitments.³⁵³ The Serbian republicans in the Yugoslav Republican Party drew parliamentary representation predominantly from Serbia and Montenegro, gaining only three mandates in the 1920 Constituent Assembly elections.³⁵⁴ They failed to cross the one-percent threshold in any subsequent election and existed only as an extra-parliamentary organization for the rest of the constrained interwar parliamentary period.³⁵⁵ The same pattern held for the group around Albin Prepeluh and Dragotin Lončar, who after breaking with the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party in early 1920 propagated leftist republican ideas in the dialect of Slovenian autonomism. Anton Novačan's briefly constituted Slovenian Republican Party ran only in the Styrian electoral district in 1923, gaining 1,460 votes and no mandate; Novačan soon renounced his republicanism and retreated into diplomatic and literary life.³⁵⁶ Prepeluh and Lončar reconstituted his followers into the Slovenian Republican Party of Peasants and Workers in October 1924, united with Radić's peasant party in shared electoral lists for 1925, and then refused further cooperation after Radić's entry into Pašić's government.³⁵⁷ A final reorganization as the Slovenian Peasant Party for the 1927 elections yielded a single mandate, going to Ivan Pucelj. Although Prepeluh and Lončar seriously attempted to organize at the level of party politics, their skills were better aligned toward scientific, cultural, and theoretical work.

This was the rule of thumb for much of the republican Left across Yugoslavia and Hungary. While republican leftists were extremely active in the struggle of everyday politics

³⁵³ "Izjava S. Radića o prihvatanju monarhije i centralizma," in Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević, eds., *Jugoslavija 1918–1984. Zbirka dokumenata* (Yugoslavia, 1918–1984. A Collection of Documents) (Belgrade: Rad, 1985), 207.

³⁵⁴ "Rezultati izbora za Ustavotvornu skupštinu 28. novembra 1920.," in Petranović and Zečević, *Jugoslavija 1918–1984. Zbirka dokumenata*, 144.

³⁵⁵ "Glasovi pojedinih stranaka dobijeni na izborima 1920, 1923, 1925. i 1927. godine," in Petranović and Zečević, *Jugoslavija 1918–1984. Zbirka dokumenata*, 210.

³⁵⁶ Igor Grdina, "Kratka zgodovina Slovenske zemljoradniške in Slovenske republikanske stranke Antona Novačana," *Zgodovinski časopis* 43, no. 1 (1989): 77–95, here 84. On the party, see also Jasna Fischer, ed., *Slovenska novejša zgodovina*, vol. 1 (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2005), 257–59.

³⁵⁷ Jurij Perovšek, "Albin Prepeluh in Slovenska republikanska stranka kmetov in delavcev" (Albin Prepeluh and the Slovenian Republican Party of Peasants and Workers), *Nova revija* 8, no. 81–82 (1989): 194–98.

between autumn 1918 and summer 1921 (for the Hungarians, only until August 1919), for the rest of the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s they rather retreated into culture, or the sphere of metapolitical reflection on political problematics. This period of distance from party politics and parliamentary intrigue may be read on the one hand as a failure of the republican moment in each country. With the benefit of hindsight, it rather seems that the republican Left was gifted time for reflection and refinement. This had long-lasting consequences for the topography of republican political thought in both countries, which will become apparent over the next two chapters. The following chapter examines this retreat to culture through the republican Left's accounts of progressive pasts, their criticisms of the stagnant present, and their theorizations of an emancipatory future.

CHAPTER 3. THE RETREAT TO CULTURE

For the Hungarian and South Slavic republican Lefts, the period between 1921 and 1935 was primarily marked by what this chapter calls “the retreat to culture.” Excluded from government and marginalized in official public life, republican leftists in Hungary, Yugoslavia, and in exile turned toward culture as the field in which to develop and propagate their political thought, primarily through historical studies, cultural criticism, and political and social theory. The retreat to culture still aimed at collective human flourishing, an ostensibly political goal, though now pursued through metapolitics rather than parliamentary contestation. Out of historical studies, the republican Left sought to clarify the political community’s collective past; through cultural criticism, it contested who belonged to the political community and what that community constituted; through political and social theory, it engaged the concept of democracy and its defense amid the expansion of fascism across Europe. During this period, a key conceptual shift took place: the core concept ‘republic’ yielded fully to ‘democracy’ at the heart of the leftist republican conceptual cluster. The contestation was no longer only over the binary between monarchy and republic; a more multifaceted problem arose, centering on the types and measures of democratic rule, popular sovereignty, individual autonomy, and collective emancipation. The republican Left maintained its commitment to a republican state form in principle, but the exact meaning of that principle was no longer as self-evident as it had been.

3.1. *Conceptualizing the Progressive Past*

In late 1919, from his exile in Vienna, Oszkár Jászi was interviewed by the Hungarian civic radical journalist Károly Benedek for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.¹ The people of Hungary, Jászi argued, harbored a popular yearning for Habsburg restoration, if only to recapture the sense of stability that Austria-Hungary represented in their minds. But this image of past stability was an illusion. Not only would it be impossible for the Habsburgs to return, but it was precisely the militarism and imperialism of the Habsburg system which had been the primary cause of the World War and the upheaval which resulted. Jászi stood by the pacifist and democratic ideas of October 1918, which to his mind remained the only solution to the structural problem of imperial collapse and postimperial transition in East Central Europe. He declared directly that “if it is not possible to create a free confederation of these young [Habsburg successor] states on a democratic-republican basis, a militaristic-imperialist synthesis will result.”² The arithmetic was plain to him: small state existence without an overarching system of integration would only result in local tyrannies and future wars. The roots of the problem were set in the socio-economic inertia of the Habsburg past, which survived in Hungary through continued gentry and *haute bourgeois* rule, now dressed in the uniform of the counterrevolution.

Here, Jászi undertook to conceptualize the recent past in order to explain the present. This was an early moment in the development of the republican Left’s historical consciousness, taking the form of introspection and stock-taking of the experiences that bound together the late imperial period, the post-imperial transitions, and the early phases of the successor states’ consolidation. This differed in the Hungarian and South Slavic linguistic contexts. For the Hungarian case, considerable ink was spilled over interpreting the causes of the failure of the

¹ Carl Benedek [Károly Benedek], “Feudalstaat oder Demokratie? Ein Gespräch mit dem ungarischen Minister a. D. Oskar Jaszi” (Feudal State or Democracy? A Conversation with the Former Hungarian Minister Oszkár Jászi), *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 2042/4 (December 28, 1919), 1. During the Hungarian People’s Republic, Benedek was the press chief of the Hungarian embassy in Bern, led by Rózsa Bédy-Schwimmer.

² Ibid.

republican moment which began with the Aster Revolution. For the Yugoslav case, it was varied interpretations of the causes and results of state unification which had materialized in the same period. Still, both attempted to search for progressive trajectories in the past to structure the overarching political temporality of their project.

In the Hungarian case, the contours and changes in leftist republicanism during the counterrevolution were framed by memoir literature that reflected on the republican moment. The memoirs ought to be taken not only as personal political testimonies but more fundamentally as expressions of the changes in the leftist republicans' general historical consciousness. The temporal focus varied but can be generally subsumed into three categories. First, there were those which placed the author and their circles in a longer sweep of history, as in the early memoirs authored by Mihály Károlyi and the social democrat Jakab Weltner.³ Second, there were texts which focused on the immediate causes, course, and consequences of the Aster Revolution and the twin republics, per the recollections of Vilmos Böhm, Manó Buchinger, Ernő Garami, and Ferenc Göndör.⁴ Finally, a third group dealt with the counterrevolution and Hungarian emigration, including Oszkár Jászi and Weltner's second memoir.⁵ All of the authors defended the Octobrist ideas of the Aster Revolution and the

³ Mihály Károlyi, *Egy egész világ ellen* (Against an Entire World) (Munich: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1923), also published in German translation the following year: Michael Graf Károlyi, *Gegen eine ganze Welt: mein Kampf um den Frieden* (Munich: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1924), as well as in English, with editions published in London and New York: Count Michael Károlyi, *Fighting the World: The Struggle for Peace* (London: K. Paul, 1924) and *ibid.* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925), both of which were translated by the Manchester *Guardian* journalist Ernest Walter Dicks. By contrast, Jakab Weltner's "*Milliók egy miatt*": *emlékek* ("Millions because of One": Recollections) (Budapest: self-published, 1927) was never translated and had much less circulation.

⁴ Vilmos Böhm, *Két forradalom tüzeiben: Októberi forradalom–Proletárdiktatura–Ellenforradalom* (In the Fire of Two Revolutions: October Revolution, Proletarian Dictatorship, Counterrevolution) (Munich: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1923); Manó Buchinger, *Tanuvallomás: Az októberi forradalom tragédiája* (Testimony: The Tragedy of the October Revolution) (Budapest: Népszava, 1936); Ernő Garami, *Forrongó Magyarország: emlékezések és tanulságok* (Seething Hungary: Recollections and Lessons) (Vienna–Leipzig: Pegazus, 1922); Ferenc Göndör, *Garázdálkodásom a diktatúrában* (My Mischief during the Dictatorship) (Budapest: Világosság, 1920); Ferenc Göndör, *Vallomások könyve* (Book of Confessions) (Vienna: self-published, 1922); and Bernát Kondor, *Agitátorélmények* (The Experiences of an Agitator) (Vienna–Leipzig: Pegazus, 1923), also published later in German: Bernhard Kondor, *Ungarische Agitatoren-Erlebnisse* (The Experiences of a Hungarian Agitator) (Vienna: Vorwärts, 1929). See also Jászi's very focused *Visszaemlékezés a román nemzeti komitéval folytatott aradi tárgyalásaimra* (Recollections of My Negotiations with the Romanian National Committee in Arad) (Cluj / Kolozsvár: Lapkiadó Rt., 1921).

⁵ Oszkár Jászi, *Magyar kálvária, magyar föltámadás: a két forradalom értelme, jelentősége és tanulságai* (Hungarian Calvary, Hungarian Resurrection: The Meaning, Significance, and Lessons of the Two Revolutions)

People's Republic, and all unequivocally denounced the counterrevolution. Differences emerged in their assessments of the People's Republic and their level of criticism toward the Republic of Councils. Some were sympathetic to the goals of the Republic of Councils, mainly the social democrats, but denounced the terror and violence which they found inseparable from the White Terror which followed. Nevertheless, all agreed that the failure of the Aster Revolution lay in its inability to consolidate its achievements; failure did not lie with the ideas that guided the revolution.

The narrative of failure was more at home on the Right in Hungary. The outlines of this narrative were sketched quite early on in the Horthy era by the right-wing nationalist historian Gyula Szekfű in his *Three Generations* from 1920.⁶ Szekfű sketched an interpretation of how a liberal orthodoxy took root in the century between modern liberalism's rise as an oppositional force during the Hungarian Reform Era (*reformkor*, ~1820s–1848) and its supposed apogee during the revolutionary period beginning at the end of 1918. Liberalism, in Szekfű's rendering, was a discontinuous factor in Hungary's history, a foreign plant on native soil. He identified this stream of political thought as almost entirely to blame for historical Hungary's collapse and dismemberment; the Jews, or rather Jewish culture, bore the rest of the guilt. Szekfű linked *zsidóság*—both Jewishness as a quality and the community of Jews—to the process of industrialization and the development of capitalism, and with that the cultivation of liberalism as both political and economic ideology.

(Vienna: Bécsi Magyar Újság, 1920), published in German as *Magyariens Schuld, Ungarns Sühne: Revolution und Gegenrevolution in Ungarn* (Hungarians' Sin, Hungary's Atonement: Revolution and Counterrevolution in Hungary) (Munich: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1923), and in English as *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Hungary* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1924), likewise translated from the German by Károlyi's translator, E. W. Dickes. Again, Weltner's second memoir had much less circulation and was also self-published: *Forradalom, bolsevizmus, emigráció* (Revolution, Bolshevism, Emigration) (Budapest, 1929).

⁶ Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék: Egy hanyatló kor története* (Three Generations: The History of an Era of Decline) (Budapest: Élet, 1920). The text was revised, expanded, and republished in 1934. Part of this latter, revised text was translated into English by Dávid Oláh, with a contextual introduction by Balázs Trencsényi, as Gyula Szekfű, "Three Generations," in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945)*, vol. 4, *Anti-Modernism: Radical Revisions of Collective Identity*, eds. Diana Mishkova, Marius Turda, and Balázs Trencsényi (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 251–58. No full translation of the work exists in English.

Szekfű viewed this as anathema to the natural, proper course of Hungarian history. For him, that image of “the path not taken” largely consisted of maintaining Habsburg dynastic loyalty and fostering a form of Hungarian state (or ‘constitutional’, that is, *közjogi*) patriotism with a cultural deference to Catholicism. It was this common narrative thread that also ran through his two earlier works, 1913’s *Rákóczi Exiled* and 1917’s *The Biography of the Hungarian State*, even if the larger conclusions differed across the works.⁷ Maciej Janowski has pointed out in his comparison of the conservative historians Josef Pekař, Michał Bobrzyński, and Szekfű that this narrative-interpretive strategy was rather typical of conservative historiography in Central Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century. The turn away from Romanticism in historiography and the critique of the importance given to local democratic and anti-Western (so-called patriotic) traditions often went hand-in-hand with a certain level of antisemitism or anti-modernism. In Szekfű’s case, antisemitism was a more pronounced element in comparison. Yet this narrow view of the Hungarian national soul—tellingly, a mental construction of conservative *Geistesgeschichte*—was in fact a reappropriation of the Romantic *népies* (‘popular’) view of the pure, uncontaminated Hungarian nation residing exclusively in the countryside. As Janowski identified precisely, Szekfű’s antisemitism was “to a high degree displaced anti-modernism,” with modernity being identified with liberalism, mass politics, and the culture of the urban environment.⁸

⁷ Gyula Szekfű, *A száműzött Rákóczi 1715–35* (Rákóczi Exiled, 1715–1735) (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1913); Gyula Szekfű, *A magyar állam életrajza* (The Biography of the Hungarian State) (Budapest: Manó Dick, 1917); and published the following year in German as *Der Staat Ungarn* (The State of Hungary) (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1918). Interestingly, the title in German has a slightly different resonance: *Ungarn* would be *Magyarország* in a direct translation, echoing the Latin term *Hungaria*. ‘*Magyar állam*’ in Hungarian would rather mean ‘the Hungarian state’ or ‘the state of the Hungarians’, thus nationalizing or ethnicizing what had been in fact a multinational state. Yet this clever play between the endonyms and exonyms of the state was coherent with Szekfű’s view: the state of Hungary was, exclusively, the state of the Hungarians. All other groups on his view were merely guests or interlopers, even if linguistically assimilated or holding Hungarian state citizenship. For a full intellectual biography of Szekfű in English, see Irene Raab Epstein, *Gyula Szekfű: A Study in the Political Basis of Hungarian Historiography* (New York–London: Garland Publishing, 1987); and in Hungarian, Iván Zoltán Dénes, *A történelmi Magyarország eszménye: Szekfű Gyula, a történetíró és ideológus* (The Ideal of Historical Hungary: Gyula Szekfű, the Historian and Ideologue) (Bratislava: Kalligram; Budapest: Pesti Kalligram, 2015).

⁸ Maciej Janowski, “Three Historians,” *CEU History Department Yearbook 2001–02* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), 216. Cf. Árpád von Klimó, “Nineteenth Century Liberal Master Narrative Revisited: A

From the republican Left, Róbert Braun offered the most sustained challenge to Szekfű's narrative in two reviews in *Auróra* and *Szocializmus* in 1921 and 1922.⁹ The review in *Auróra* was Braun's first text published following his extended persecution by the counterrevolutionary system. The long shadow of that experience lurked over him even still; he published only under his initials, R. B. Although careful in his language, Braun's critique attempted to undo the very foundations of Szekfű's argument and with it so much of the vision of the past that was quickly consolidating under the new Horthy regime.

First, Braun contrasted *Three Generations* with radical nationalist Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky's *National Rebirth and the Press*, published the same year.¹⁰ While Bajcsy-Zsilinszky insisted that the Jewish press was to blame for circulating the liberal ideas that had caused the destruction of "historical Hungary," Szekfű had a much more clever and serious claim in Braun's estimation: it was not the Jewish press that had caused liberalism, but that liberalism had caused the Jewish press. Braun, of course, was quite skeptical of both claims, but found Szekfű's to be more intellectually compelling. Szekfű's argument rested on three key claims, as Braun reconstructed: "1. Széchenyi's politics were conservative. 2. With the failure of these politics, the decline of the Hungarian community (*magyarság*) began in 1840, lasting until the post-war catastrophe. 3. The liberalism which prevailed in Hungary became increasingly radical and, for example, the era following Deák was more liberal than Deák's own era."¹¹ Yet, Braun argued, precisely the inverse was rather the case, "namely: 1. Széchenyi was not a conservative, in fact he was much more liberal than the political trend which caused his downfall. 2. The golden age of Hungarian intellectual life, even if it did not cover the entire

Comparison of Gyula Szekfű and Benedetto Croce," in *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, ed. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 341–57.

⁹ R[óbert] B[raun], "A liberalizmus bukása" (The Failure of Liberalism), *Auróra* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 15, 1921): 5–12; R[óbert] B[raun], "Új előszó egy régi könyvhöz" (A New Foreword to an Old Book), *Szocializmus* 12, no. 9 (Sept. 1922): 428–30.

¹⁰ Endre Zsilinszky, *Nemzeti újjászületés és a sajtó* (National Rebirth and the Press) (Budapest: Táltos, 1920).

¹¹ Braun, "A liberalizmus bukása," 6.

period between 1840 and 1920, is certainly within it. 3. Although one could term the era after 1867 liberal, the reality of this period was completely opposed to all of what has been recognized as liberalism's most important tenets."¹² Braun aimed to show that it was precisely the *lack* of the realization of liberalism's principles within Hungary that had caused the country's downfall.

The key example for Braun was "so-called liberal rule after 1867," which meant the government's struggle to centralize the state and nation in the wake of the *Ausgleich*. Braun termed this the state's very own "struggle against liberalism," since the guiding ideas of the regime were centralist, chauvinist, and statist, against the liberal principles of autonomy, tolerance, and self-government. How, then, could Szekfű possibly argue that liberalism had caused the country's decline when the spirit of illiberalism had guided the Hungarian government from 1867 to 1918? The illiberal state had expanded outward, into "every territory of mental and spiritual life."¹³ It was only around 1900, Braun argued, that an internal oppositional culture, "what the adherents of state culture call Jewish or Budapestian," appeared as a counterweight to the official culture of the regime.¹⁴ Yet specifying culture as urban was, for Braun, beside the point. All national culture was essentially urban culture—even state-sponsored culture. Braun gestured to Zsigmond Kemény's 1851 discussion of the reception of Széchenyi's *Credit* (1830): while the book had been burned in the countryside, Kemény had noted, it was studied intensively at urban schools.¹⁵ And this text became one of the keystone markers of Hungarian political culture in the nineteenth century, albeit retrospectively.

¹² Braun, "A liberalizmus bukása," 6.

¹³ Braun, "A liberalizmus bukása," 9.

¹⁴ Braun, "A liberalizmus bukása," 9–10. This is Szekfű's terminology, made in reference to Oszkár Jászi's discussion of national culture in his *A nemzeti államok kialakulása és a nemzetiségi kérdés* (The Formation of Nation-States and the National Question) (Budapest: Grill, 1912). See Szekfű, *Három nemzedék*, 73n1 for the language.

¹⁵ Braun, "A liberalizmus bukása," 10. Braun cites Kemény, "Gróf Széchenyi István (1851)," in *Összes munkái* (Complete Works), vol. 9, *Történelmi és irodalmi tanulmányok* (Historical and Literary Studies), ed. Pál Gyulai (Budapest: Franklin, 1907), 279.

Furthermore, Braun insisted that Szekfű ought to have clarified his concepts—‘liberalism’ and ‘conservatism’ and so on—“rather than operating with them completely arbitrarily.”¹⁶ Simply because Kálmán Tisza’s hegemonic party had been called the *Szabadelvű Párt* (‘Liberal Party’) did not mean that this group could be considered normatively *liberal* according to accepted definitions, though Szekfű even tried to address this—fruitlessly—in the introduction to the second printing of the text.¹⁷ In a subsequent review for *Szocializmus* in 1922,¹⁸ Braun returned to the problem: Szekfű simply refused to clarify what he meant, even as one of the biggest debates in Hungarian political thought during the period under consideration was precisely over liberalism’s very definition.¹⁹ Braun remained likewise skeptical of the relation Szekfű had made between the so-called Jewish Question and historical materialism—a simplistic treatment that served only to propagate the Judeo-Bolshevik myth.²⁰

For the right-wing elites and much of the reading public in Horthy’s Hungary, there was hardly an alternative on offer in the early 1920s. Yet small efforts emerged to provide different framings of the recent past. In 1923, a slim book entitled *Five Years Past* attempted to provide a more favorable view of the Aster Revolution and the People’s Republic, while firmly distancing itself from the Republic of Councils.²¹ All of the authors had been participants in the Aster Revolution.²² The legal scholar Rusztem Vámbéry focused on the entangled problem of legal continuity and legal innovation within a revolutionary moment.²³ He pointed positively to the achievements made in the realm of civil rights by the Károlyi and Berinkey governments,

¹⁶ Braun, “A liberalizmus bukása,” 12.

¹⁷ Gyula Szekfű, “Előszó” (Foreword), in *Három nemzedék*, 2nd ed. (Budapest: Élet, 1922), 3–5.

¹⁸ Braun, “Új előszó egy régi könyvhöz,” 428.

¹⁹ Braun, “Új előszó egy régi könyvhöz,” 429.

²⁰ Braun, “Új előszó egy régi könyvhöz,” 429–30.

²¹ Barna Buza et al., *Öt év múltán: a Károlyi-korszak előzményei és céljai* (Five Years Past: The Antecedents and Goals of the Károlyi Period) (Budapest: Globus, 1923).

²² The contributors included a mix of civic radicals, peasantists, Károlyists, and social democrats: Barna Buza (Minister of Agriculture, 1918–19), Lajos Dénes (Director-General of the Budapest School District, 1918–19), László Fényes (independent opposition member of Parliament, 1917–18, member of the Hungarian National Council, 1918–19), Vince Nagy (Minister of Interior, Dec. 1918–March 1919), Géza Supka (envoy to Prague, 1918–19), and Rusztem Vámbéry (member of the National Council, 1918–19); as well as the sympathetic writers Rezső Rupert and Zoltán Szász.

²³ Rusztem Vámbéry, “Jog és forradalom” (Law and Revolution), in *Öt év múltán*, 59–85.

but noted that this was hardly exceptional: whether in the French Revolution or during 1848–49 in Hungary, progress in modern European history could be narrated as the interplay between legal continuity and innovation. Revolutionary moments were key, even necessary factors in law’s further development. Here, Vámbéry attempted to normalize the Aster Revolution by interpreting its achievements through the framework of law, the fetish and idol of the counterrevolutionary authorities.

László Fényes questioned the idea that the members of the National Council had prepared a coup d’état in October 1918—a typical myth among right-wing circles at the time—stating flatly: “We didn’t want a revolution; we wanted peace, order, and democracy.”²⁴ Fényes placed the blame for the collapse on the inflexible, repressive policies of the Tisza regime. Zoltán Szász, in his contribution, tried to take a bird’s-eye view of the Károlyi period in the grander sweep of history.²⁵ He argued that, from the perspective of the philosophy of history, two main conflicts arose which drove History: humanity’s struggle for domination over nature and humanity’s struggle against domination by other humans. The Károlyi period belonged to this latter category. Yet there had been a “completely missing democratic past” among the Hungarians, which resulted in the quick appeal of authoritarianisms. The Károlyi period may have “collapsed under mournful legacies,” Szász wrote, but it nevertheless promised a better world: “the development of the Hungarian community cannot [lead to] anything else but democratization.” The Aster Revolution had been “an experiment to realize fully the progressive spirit of Hungarian democracy.”²⁶ While the Károlyi period had failed within its immediate space of experience, on Hungary’s horizon of expectation the revolutionary ideas of October 1918 still promised future democratization.

²⁴ László Fényes, “A háború elvesztése és a forradalom” (The Loss of the War and the Revolution), in *Öt év múltán*, 111–33, here 133.

²⁵ Zoltán Szász, “Az októbrizmus történelem-bölcsészeti kritikája” (The Historical-Philosophical Critique of Octobrisms), in *Öt év múltán*, 207–22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 221–22.

One of the more substantial reflections came from Oszkár Jászi in his 1920 *Hungarian Calvary, Hungarian Resurrection*.²⁷ Part memoir, part historical study, the book was one of the internationally most influential books from the Hungarian republican Left milieu in this period, translated into German and English in the following years.²⁸ While the overall argument did not substantially diverge from the memoir literature, it gained attention for its uncompromising tone against the White Terror. It provided some of the first thorough if not complete data on the victims and extent of the Terror available to the European reading public. Importantly, it interpreted the emerging Horthy regime as one with deep roots in prewar Hungarian society. The violence, authoritarianism, and subjugation which had constituted the empire lived on in Hungary's right-wing forces, Jászi argued throughout. It was the distinction of the Aster Revolution and the People's Republic to have made the first real attempt since 1848 to break with the inertia and domination of the Hungarian past. What was new was the contestation from the radical Left, whose slogans of class warfare and the betrayal of the progressive working intelligentsia deeply troubled Jászi. This became a hallmark of the Hungarian republican Left's interpretation of the past: the political community's missing democratic traditions and the confounding resilience of the authoritarian political structures inherited from the Habsburg imperial period. Both had made the goals of the Aster Revolution untenable, though this only became clear in retrospect.

Imre Csécsy offered a review of Jászi's book for domestic Hungarian audiences on the pages of *Auróra* in 1921.²⁹ The title of the text—"The Leader of Destruction"—was itself ironic, a twist on the general perception of the Hungarian Right that the civic radicals, social

²⁷ Oszkár Jászi, *Magyar kálvária, magyar föltámadás: a két forradalom értelme, jelentősége és tanulságai* (Vienna: Bécsi Magyar Kiadó, 1920).

²⁸ Oszkár Jászi, *Magyariens Schuld, Ungarns Sühne: Revolution und Gegenrevolution in Ungarn* (Munich: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1923); Oszkár Jászi, *Revolution and counter-revolution in Hungary* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1924).

²⁹ Imre Csécsy, "A destrukció vezére" (The Leaders of Destruction), *Auróra* 2, no. 3 (1921): 196–208; republished in Imre Csécsy, *Radikalizmus és demokrácia: Válogatott írásai* (Radicalism and Democracy: Selected Writings), ed. Tibor Valuch (Szeged: Aetas, 1988), 61–73. I cite from the republished version.

democrats, feminists, and liberal nationalists around Károlyi had destroyed Hungary in late 1918. Csécsy adopted this language satirically, using it to undermine the very arguments which had been hurled at Jászi by the likes of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky and above all by Szekfű. It was also, in a way, an attempt like *Five Years Past* to rehabilitate or at least make palatable for the urban intelligentsia the continued relevance of the ideas of 1918.

Csécsy opened by acknowledging the gravity of charges leveled against the revolution's leaders, noting that responsibility for the collapse extended—by the counterrevolutionaries' own logic—back to Kossuth and the revolution of 1848.³⁰ Such reasoning was absurd: the existence of historical antecedents did not prove a direct, unbroken line of revolutionary thought and action. In fact, the focus on 1848's disintegrative potential was a sleight of hand among the right-wing intellectuals, for it absolved them of examining the Aster Revolution on its own terms and in its own immediate context. What mattered for Csécsy and for the rest of the committed Octobrists was that the Aster Revolution had deliberately forsaken the implements of state violence—the army, the police, censorship—thought the naïvely believed that ideas rather than coercion would bring the revolutionary process to victory. The revolution, in Csécsy's interpretation, “failed not only as politics, but as ideology” when the balance tipped in favor of the “shallow intelligence and overconfident optimism” of the Right and the “vulgar class interests and blind fanaticism” of the Left.³¹ This echoed his statements from early 1919, diagnosing the collapse of the Aster Revolution in real time.³²

Csécsy then moved to criticize Jászi's faith in the intelligentsia and the progressive bourgeoisie as the social bases of a democratic transformation. While the intelligentsia seemed to stand above class interests, guiding democratic progress, sections of it were in fact highly

³⁰ Csécsy, “A destrukció vezére,” in *Radikalizmus és demokrácia*, 62.

³¹ Csécsy, “A destrukció vezére,” in *Radikalizmus és demokrácia*, 64.

³² Cf. Imre Csécsy, “Területi integritás” (Territorial Integrity), *Szabadgondolat* 9, no. 1 (Jan. 1919): 13–14; and OSZK K 163, File no. 2438, Imre Csécsy, “Radikalizmus, szocializmus, progressio [sic]” (Radicalism, Socialism, and Progress), [1919].

susceptible to the “pathetic, world-redemptive phraseology” of communism.³³ The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, lacked any coherent ideology, remaining indifferent to ideas even in a crucial revolutionary moment. “Idea, insight, moral principle”—none of these could mobilize the bourgeoisie; for them, “bare power” was the only thing that mattered.³⁴ And yet they remained indifferent when a fuller exercise of state power under Károlyi could have staved off both the local Bolsheviks and Horthy’s Christian nationalist forces.

Csécsy concluded with an appeal to the former Octobrists who had defected to the side of the counterrevolution. Many who had sworn themselves to the People’s Republic in November 1918 had now tried to distance themselves from their own commitments in building a new Hungary in the aftermath of the World War. But now, with Jászi’s text, the turncoats could begin to “reckon openly with the destructive ideas which they once believed in as sincerely as they now sincerely embrace the arduous task of working for the new ideas”—those of the Christian nationalist turn.³⁵ The Octobrist vision, Csécsy maintained, had maintained its coherence while Horthy’s counterrevolution was intellectually hollow and morally compromised. Jászi’s book showed this clearly enough. It had highlighted the opportunism of those who had abandoned Octobrist ideas so quickly after August 1919: “Every new era breaks with the past,” Csécsy concluded, “at the turn of an era, every new believer breaks with their old beliefs.”³⁶ Yet the progressive past, as the republican Left had conceptualized it, was marked by the continuity of ideas and sentiments of liberation, self-determination, and autonomy, not by the opportunism of changing one’s values as the situation changed. This was its more solid ideational foundation.

The circulation of the main threads of the republican Left’s interpretation of history did not remain a Hungaricum. Jászi’s *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*—one of the texts

³³ Csécsy, “A destrukció vezére,” in *Radikalizmus és demokrácia*, 70.

³⁴ Csécsy, “A destrukció vezére,” in *Radikalizmus és demokrácia*, 70.

³⁵ Csécsy, “A destrukció vezére,” in *Radikalizmus és demokrácia*, 72.

³⁶ Csécsy, “A destrukció vezére,” in *Radikalizmus és demokrácia*, 72.

at the bedrock of contemporary Habsburg Studies—was one such instance. Published in 1929 by the University of Chicago Press, *Dissolution* emerged from a broader scholarly project hosted by the press on the problem of civic education across modern states.³⁷ Writing from the distance Oberlin College, where he was offered and had taken up a professorship after some years in exile in Vienna, Jászi presented a sweeping historical argument that indicted not only the defunct Habsburg state but also its post-imperial successor in Horthy's Kingdom of Hungary. As Jászi noted in the preface, he had been “compelled to live outside of my country for the last decade” because of the failed effort “to democratize Hungary and to remold the old feudal state into a confederation of free nations.”³⁸ The book served a double purpose: it explained to an international audience why the empire had fallen, while implicitly demonstrating that the Horthy regime was simply a continuation of the empire's worst traits and institutions, now in extremist form.

Famously, the analytical framework of the book distinguished between “centripetal” forces tending toward supra- or cross-national cohesion and “centrifugal” forces driving national(ist) particularisms. Jászi's treatment of these social forces was notably asymmetrical. The centripetal forces within the Habsburg Empire—the dynasty, the army, the aristocracy, the Catholic Church, the state bureaucracy, capitalism and free trade, and the countervailing socialist movement—occupied roughly eighty pages of the text. The centrifugal forces—the long shadow of feudalism and the latifundia, the struggle between the crown and the aristocracy, national awakening, German-Magyar hegemony, and the irredentism of the “nationalities”—commanded over two hundred.³⁹ The very structure of the book reflected its central argument:

³⁷ Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929). The book was part of the University of Chicago's “Studies in the Making of Citizens” series, edited by Charles E. Merriam of the University of Chicago. Other volumes in the series examined civic education in the Soviet Union, Great Britain, the United States, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and France.

³⁸ Jászi, *Dissolution*, xvi.

³⁹ On the centripetal forces, see Jászi, *Dissolution*, 133–214; on the centrifugal forces, 215–432.

the centrifugal had overwhelmed the centripetal, and the monarchy's collapse was the inevitable result of this imbalance projected over the *longue durée*.

In the text, Jászi explicitly rejected what he termed the “Habsburg legend”—the notion, propagated by “very influential dynastic and feudal groups,” that the monarchy had been “an innocent lamb, a victim of the antagonism of German and English imperialism.”⁴⁰ Against this “historical materialism *à la Habsburg*,” which focused narrowly on diplomatic intrigues and questions of war guilt, Jászi insisted that the dissolution “grew out of the inevitable logic of a long series of social causes.”⁴¹ The deeper causes lay in the empire's social structure: its feudal foundations, its rigid absolutism, and its systematic failure to cultivate genuine civic loyalty among its peoples. The great landed estates—what Jászi called the *morbus latifundii*—had perpetuated a backward social order, particularly in Hungary, blocking the emergence of a democratic civic culture and subordinating the peasantry and national minorities to the interests of the privileged classes.⁴² “National solidarity cannot be fostered where the progress of one nation is sacrificed to the interests of the other,” Jászi argued. “No democratic civic education is possible where the real type of life is a dictatorship or the rule of caste.”⁴³ When dispersive, centrifugal social forces within a state overpower integrative, centripetal social forces, there may be no democracy—nor may there be a state in the end.

The book's role in the development of Habsburg Studies is relatively well-known. The original thesis on the collapse of the Empire, now under quite heavy revision, may be traced precisely to Jászi's interpretation. A slightly undervalued aspect relates more centrally to the book's leftist republican insistence that active civic participation and a democratic ethos are foundational, even necessary, for a successful political community. We may discern this throughout, but it becomes strikingly clear at the end. The narrative arc of the book does not

⁴⁰ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 6.

⁴¹ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 6–7.

⁴² Jászi devotes an entire chapter to the *morbus latifundii*: Jászi, *Dissolution*, 220–39.

⁴³ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 25.

lead us to a chronology and accounting of the collapse in 1918. Rather, it shifts in the concluding section to a discussion of whether proper civic education among the citizenry was even possible in Austria-Hungary. In Cisleithania, Jászi wrote, public instruction had been “entirely incapable of establishing any kind of a popular state consciousness.”⁴⁴ The schools had propagated a “nauseating Byzantinism” devoted to dynastic glorification. “The whole history as it was taught was a glorification of the dynastic force,” Jászi observed, “a kind of vast *dynastic epopoeia*.”⁴⁵ Still, dynastic education, seen in retrospect, had been a failure. As one (albeit unnamed) educator wrote, “the strangeness of the people to each other was the cause of the downfall of the old Austria and our school system did nothing to prevent it.”⁴⁶ The only institution capable of producing supranational loyalty had been the imperial army, Jászi concluded—a “dynastic island in the sea of the growing national and social struggles”—yet the flimsy dynastic patriotism it fostered could hardly bear the weight of “modern times” precisely because it created professional consciousness rather than civic consciousness.⁴⁷

For Jászi, the situation of civic education in Transleithania had been worse. The ruling Hungarian (Magyar) classes, “triumphant against the centralizing Viennese administration,” wound up promoting “a very systematic, even highly dogmatic conception of a civic education devoted exclusively to the conception of a Magyar national state,” even though ethnic Hungarians could hardly claim to have been a majority in the country.⁴⁸ Civic education, in contrast to Austria, was rather a “*feudal epopeia*,” continuing: “The whole public education, press, and cultural activity of social associations described and portrayed the history of the Magyar state as a unique effort for national independence and solidarity under the exclusive leadership of the Magyar nobility.”⁴⁹ There had been in fact no opportunity, outside of the social

⁴⁴ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 447.

⁴⁵ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 435. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁶ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 438.

⁴⁷ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 437.

⁴⁸ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 440.

⁴⁹ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 441.

democratic movement, to generate a history written from the perspective of the majority of the nation itself, comprised not of the nobility but the working classes in town and country. In sum, neither the Austrian nor the Hungarian system had created the conditions for genuine civic solidarity or for democracy for that matter; both had accelerated the country's dissolution in their own ways.

In his concluding "Retrospect and Prospect," Jászi summarized the primary causes of the state's dissolution as threefold: first, "the growing national consciousness of the various nations which could not find place for a true consolidation" within the Habsburg Empire's absolutist or semi-absolutist structures; second, "the economic and social pressure of the feudal class rule allied with a usurious kind of capitalism"; and third, "the lack of any serious kind of civic education" that could create what may, in our own day, still be called constitutional patriotism.⁵⁰ At the very end, these trends were then accelerated by three secondary factors: the realization of the inability of the nationalities to reform the Empire from within, the irredentist propaganda of surrounding states, and "the disintegrating influence of the World War which made the latent hatred of the nations burst into flame," giving the opportunity to "the dissatisfied intelligentsia" to attempt to make their own alternative structures.⁵¹

The successor states, he warned, faced "exactly the dangers of the former Habsburg monarchy: overcentralization and a system of artificial assimilation."⁵² The remedy lay in five reforms: the revision of frontiers to unite homogeneous national cultural communities; far-reaching cultural and educational autonomies given to all national minorities; decentralization and the institution of "free local government"; the elimination of protectionism; and, crucially, the "eradication of that type of intellectualism and civic education" which continued, after the Empire was dead, to produce national hatred.⁵³ Here one may read slightly against the grain,

⁵⁰ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 453.

⁵¹ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 454.

⁵² Jászi, *Dissolution*, 455.

⁵³ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 457.

observing in Jászi's text a latent critique not only of the irredentist and nationally chauvinist Horthy regime in Hungary, but also the creeping authoritarian tendencies across East Central Europe, among the successor states of the Habsburg Empire and beyond. The republican leftist critique lay precisely on the intertwined issues of an engaged, educated, and active democratic citizenry and the proper state institutions to match that democratic spirit: self-government, autonomy, and federation.

Beyond the incipient realm of Habsburg Studies, however, another venue opened the way for the partial reception of the Hungarian republican Left's ideas among a broad audience. The *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, published between 1930 and 1935 under the editorship of Edwin Seligman of Columbia and Alvin Johnson of The New School, became an unexpected conduit for these ideas to reach an educated English-speaking public, predominantly American. Jászi—with his clear American connections—as well as Róbert Braun and Rusztem Vámbéry, writing from Budapest, contributed entries, with Braun and Jászi quite explicitly attempting to place Hungarian republican thought within a broader framework of European intellectual history. Likewise, the entries revealed some of the more surprising connections in the Hungarian republican Left's orbit.

Jászi's entry on Lajos Kossuth noted that the revolutionary leader had originally conceived of the Danubian confederation idea that Jászi himself had later championed during the People's Republic. Noted too was Kossuth's path of exile, not dissimilar to that of the Octobrists: Kossuth "was obliged to flee and was interned by the Turkish government. Liberated in 1851 he made a brilliant campaign for Hungarian independence in England and America. He lived forty-five years in exile, trying to get French, Italian and later Prussian support against the Hapsburgs." Ultimately, this failed, for after the dualist system was created in 1867, Kossuth "realized that his cause was lost, at least for his lifetime. He continued to regard the Ausgleich as an impossible system doomed to collapse and set over against it the

idea of a Danube confederation, which he championed as the only constitutional framework capable of guaranteeing real independence to Hungary and the other smaller Danubian nations.”⁵⁴ One may read in Kossuth’s fate that of the leftist republicans from Hungary too.

Róbert Braun likewise contributed an entry on another figure from 1848, Mihály Táncsics, who stood politically to Kossuth’s left.⁵⁵ Braun succinctly described Táncsics as “the first Hungarian exponent of socialism,” a “Hungarian peasant socialist,” “a self-taught man,” and “a staunch republican,” as well as “the first and until 1918 the only representative of the peasant and working classes in the legislature.”⁵⁶ Táncsics, however, was not without his faults and inconsistencies, as Braun wrote, for “the vagueness of his socialist and republican ideas and his uncritical intellectual approach led him to accept these views as compatible with a fanatical nationalism.”⁵⁷ Still, Braun’s vision of Táncsics emphasized the socialist and republican dimensions over the nationalist, foregrounding Táncsics’s advocacy for the peasantry and working class through his plans for a radical solution to the problem of land reform. Braun and Jászi both followed the interpretation of Ervin Szabó’s *Social and Party-Political Struggles in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848–49*, which they both cited in their entries, the text itself published posthumously in Vienna in 1921 by Jászi with an editorial introduction.⁵⁸ There, Kossuth is rather seen as a temperamental, destructive representative of the lower gentry, and Táncsics, along with Sándor Petőfi, as the true representatives of the emancipatory wing of the revolution.⁵⁹ Szabó’s frame became the guide in constructing the

⁵⁴ Oszkár Jászi, “Kossuth, Lajos,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, eds. Edwin R. A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson, vol. 8 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1932), 594.

⁵⁵ Robert Braun, “Táncsics, Mihály,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, eds. Edwin R. A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson, vol. 14 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1934), 508–09; for more, see László Deme, *The Radical Left in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848* (Boulder–New York: East European Quarterly–Columbia University Press, 1976).

⁵⁶ Braun, “Táncsics,” *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 14, 508.

⁵⁷ Braun, “Táncsics,” *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 14, 508.

⁵⁸ Ervin Szabó, *Társadalmi és pártharcok a 48–49-es magyar forradalomban* (Social and Party-Political Struggles in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848–49), ed. Oszkár Jászi (Vienna: Bécsi Magyar Kiadó, 1921).

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Szabó, *Társadalmi és pártharcok*, 81–88; on Táncsics and the question of the liberation of the peasantry from serfdom, see Szabó, *Társadalmi és pártharcok*, 257–76.

republican Left's pantheon of 1848, focusing as it did not on aristocratic "independentist" politics but rather the potentiality of emancipation which fed the revolution from below.

From the same Vienna exile milieu that generated the posthumous edition of Szabó's history of 1848, Jászi's contributed an entry on Zsigmond Kunfi to the *Encyclopaedia* too.⁶⁰ Kunfi had spent the decade after the collapse of the Republic of Councils in exile in Vienna, working closely with the Austrian social democrats, contributing to their *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and *Der Kampf*, lecturing within the party's workers' education programs, as well as publishing for a short period the émigré socialist paper *Világosság* (Clarity, or Enlightenment) with Vilmos Böhm and Zoltán Rónai. Within the postwar Labour and Socialist International (*Sozialistische Arbeiter-Internationale*, SAI), the group around the paper formed its own member organization, the *Világosság* Socialist Émigré Group, which maintained membership in the SAI until the International's dissolution in 1940.⁶¹ Still, all of this activity could not stave off his own emotional storms and bottomless despair; Kunfi committed suicide in 1929. A selection of Kunfi's articles and essays were collected by the Austrian social democratic historian Julius Braunthal in 1930.⁶² The first volume opened with a short biography by his longtime comrade, Zoltán Rónai.⁶³ This, along with Jászi's own personal recollections, formed the bases Kunfi's biographic entry for the *Encyclopaedia*. Kunfi, in Jászi's words, had "led a strenuous fight against the reactionary regime in Hungary and against Fascism in general. In the Second International he was an authority on Danubian problems." Kunfi's primary interest, Jászi

⁶⁰ Oszkár Jászi, "Kunfi, Zsigmond," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, eds. Edwin R. A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson, vol. 8 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1932), 610.

⁶¹ For an overview of the group, see "Sozialistische Emigrantengruppe 'Világosság'" in *Zweiter Kongress der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale* (The Second Congress of the Labour and Socialist International) (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1925), 229–30; see also

⁶² Siegmund (Zsigmond) Kunfi, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, vol. 1, *Die Neugestaltung der Welt*, ed. Julius Braunthal (Vienna: Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1930); and vol. 2, *Gestalten und Ereignisse*, ed. Julius Braunthal (Vienna: Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1930). A Hungarian edition of Kunfi's collected writings was only published in 1984: Zsigmond Kunfi, *Válogatott írásai* (Collected Writings), ed. Ferenc Mucsi and Ágnes Szabó (Budapest: Kossuth, 1984). See also the biography of Kunfi written by Rózsa Köves and Tibor Erényi: *Kunfi Zsigmond életútja* (The Path of Zsigmond Kunfi's Life) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1974).

⁶³ Zoltán Rónai, "Siegmund Kunfi (1879–1929)," in Kunfi, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, vol. 1, *Die Neugestaltung der Welt*, 5–12.

emphasized, lay in “a radical educational and political reform in Hungary, the indispensable condition for which, he insisted, was the democratic alliance of workers and peasants against the feudal regime of the landed proprietors.” This formulation tied together the social democratic and civic radical strands of the republican Left, presenting them as a unified progressive front against Hungarian authoritarianism.

Socialism was likewise a large topic treated by the republican Left, either as critics of its Marxian variant or theoreticians of its liberal version. Jászi’s substantial article on socialism of course replicated this view, treating socialism as a superordinate category which contained Marxism but also a range of other variations, from guild socialism to syndicalism and so on.⁶⁴ A section on liberal socialism,⁶⁵ which was quite close to his personal political position, Jászi noted its origins in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, its roots running to Thomas Spence, William Ogilvie, Thomas Paine, and John Stuart Mill, with particularly relevance for the work of Henry George, whose *Progress and Poverty* (1879) had a great resonance among the civic radicals in Hungary. George’s works were translated first into Hungarian by Róbert Braun.⁶⁶ “The doctrine assumed its most systematic development in Germany,” Jászi wrote, “where Eugen Dühring formulated a *sozialitāres System* that stressed the decisive influence of politics on economics, in opposition to Marxian socialism.” Likewise, Jászi cited the Italian antifascist intellectual Carlo Rosselli’s *Liberal Socialism* (1930) as a key source.⁶⁷ This simple citation in fact revealed a whole network of contacts, mediated partly by the young Béla Menczer in exile in Paris and Imre Csécsy in Budapest, though this began to escape the horizon of historical studies and rather

⁶⁴ Oszkár Jászi, “Socialism,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, eds. Edwin R. A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson, vol. 14 (New York: The MacMillan Company 1934), 188–212.

⁶⁵ Jászi, “Socialism,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 14, 203–204.

⁶⁶ See note 316 in Section 2.3. above. Braun likewise translated the Georgist novel *The Story of My Dictatorship* into Hungarian in 1912: Lewis Henry Berens and Ignatius (Ignác) Singer, *Kormányzóságom története: utópia Henry George gazdasági rendszere alapján* (*The Story of My Dictatorship: A Utopia Based on Henry George’s Economic System*) (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1912).

⁶⁷ Carlo Rosselli, *Socialisme liberal*, trans. Stefan Priacel (Paris: Valois, 1930); translated into English as Carlo Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism*, ed. Nadia Urbinati, trans. William McCuiag (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

pointed toward concerns regarding the very existence of the political community.⁶⁸ We will bookmark that discussion for later. Now, let us turn toward another, more immediate link in the realm of historical studies which connected directly the Hungarian and Slovenian leftist republican milieux.

In mid-December 1927, Dragotin Lončar sat down to his correspondence; a letter had arrived from Budapest, written in German:

I just so happened to find your address in the last year's volume of *Minerva*. What a lucky coincidence.

I am currently in the process of studying Yugoslavia in greater depth. My views are essentially the same as those I expressed in the essay I wrote about the Slovenes during the war.

My big request would be: Would you be willing to help me compile a bibliography? My interest is mainly political; economic and cultural issues, only insofar as they are politically important. I have not read a thing since the war. I have been to Belgrade twice now and once to Arandelovac, but I did not see very much.

My first question would be: What are the fundamental works on the current situation? Which journals should I follow? Do you know anyone among the Serbs or Croats who could also assist me?

When I inquired about you in Belgrade, I was told that you stayed in Idrija. I would be so glad to learn more about you and your family.

As a result of the political changes, I lost my job at the Municipal Library and am currently working as an expert in an antiquarian bookstore.

I hope to hear good news from you. I send my best regards to your esteemed family.⁶⁹

Lončar's correspondent was Róbert Braun. The last time the two had been in contact was a decade before, during the war, when Braun had written a series of articles in *Huszadik Század* on the history of the Slovenian national movement.⁷⁰ (And which had been cited in Jászi's

⁶⁸ József Takáts, "Két liberális szocializmus: Jászi és Rosselli," in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus* (Budapest: Osiris, 2021), 75–158.

⁶⁹ SI AS 2099 Dragotin Lončar, t.e. 1, Róbert Braun (Budapest) to Dragotin Lončar (Ljubljana), December 2, 1927. Braun points to Lončar's contact information in *Minerva: Jahrbuch der Gelehrten Welt* 28, no. 1, "A–L" (1926): 1105.

⁷⁰ Róbert Braun, "A délszlávok és a szlovén kérdés kezdetei" (The South Slavs and the Origins of the Slovenian Question), *Huszadik Század* 18, no. 35 (Jan.–June 1917): 193–215; Róbert Braun, "A szlovén nemzeti eszme fejlődése 1848-tól Bleiweis haláláig" (The Development of Slovenian National Thought from 1848 to Bleiweis's Death), *Huszadik Század* 18, no. 35 (Jan.–June 1917): 289–316; and Róbert Braun, "A szlovén nemzeti eszme napjainkban" (Slovenian National Thought in Our Own Day), *Huszadik Század* 19, no. 37 (Jan.–June 1918): 129–

discussion of the Slovenian national movement in *Dissolution*.⁷¹) Braun had approvingly used Lončar's work to discuss the early period of Slovenian mass politics. Lončar—with the linguistic assistance of his colleague Rudolf Južnič⁷²—had even digested Braun's work and responded first in *Ljubljanski zvon* and later in Alojzija Štebi's *Demokracija*.⁷³ In the meantime, Braun had published a response to Lončar's initial critique in *Ljubljanski zvon* as well, closing the circle of reception.⁷⁴ Now, ten years later, Braun was requesting assistance for continued study.

On a sheet of paper which remains in Lončar's bequest in Ljubljana, a haphazard bibliography was written in pencil. It is not clear whether Lončar then composed a formal response and sent the recommendations to Braun. Aside from Braun's correspondence from the years of his employment in the Municipal Library, now kept in the Budapest Capital Archives, and which only include the years 1911 to 1919,⁷⁵ Braun's personal papers and correspondence have not been preserved, nor have those of his wife, Margit Grünwald. Still, we have the sources that Lončar marked down in pencil in preparation. Lončar suggested a wide range of periodicals and books broadly covering the country's various political and national camps. For the Slovenian context, Lončar suggested the Catholic review *Čas*; the socialist reviews *Naši zapiski* and *Novi zapiski*, which Lončar edited with Albin Prepeluh until 1922; as well as Ljubljana's leftist youth review, *Mladina*. For the Croatian side, Lončar recommended studying the issues

145. Cf. István Lukács, "Robert Braun o razvoju slovenske nacionalne ideje" (Robert Braun on the Development of the Slovenian National Idea), *Slavistična revija* 41, no. 2 (1993): 267–70.

⁷¹ Jászi, *Dissolution*, 259–60.

⁷² Južnič—at this moment professor of Latin, Greek, German, and Slovenian at the grammar school in Novo mesto—was born in Cegléd, Kingdom of Hungary, and retained knowledge of Hungarian, reading Braun's articles in *Huszadik Század* in the original. On Južnič, see "Južnič, Rudolf (1883–1955)," in *Slovenska biografija* (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2013), <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi262234/>; and Karel Bačer, "Južnič, Rudolf (1883–1955)," in *Obrazi slovenskih pokrajin* (Kranj: Mestna knjižnica Kranj, 2020), <https://www.obrazislovenskihpokrajin.si/oseba/juznic-rudolf/>.

⁷³ Dragotin Lončar, "Madjarska študija o Slovencih" (A Hungarian Study on the Slovenes), *Ljubljanski zvon* 37, no. 9 (1917): 503–504; Dragotin Lončar, "Madjarska študija o Slovencih," *Demokracija* 1, no. 15–18 (1918): 230–31.

⁷⁴ Róbert Braun, "Še enkrat Madjarska študija o Slovencih" (A Hungarian Study on the Slovenes, Once More), *Ljubljanski zvon* 37, no. 10 (Oct. 1917): 615–16.

⁷⁵ BFL VIII.3831.a.186 Róbert Braun Papers, 1911–1919.

of *Hrvatska* (subsequently *Jugoslovenska*) *njiva*, the review of culture and politics headed by Juraj Demetrović, formerly part of the Croatian social democratic milieu and ex-husband of the late Slovenian writer Zofka Kveder. He likewise included the city's bourgeois liberal daily *Obzor*; important too were the organs of the Croatian (Republican) Peasant Party, *Dom* and *Slobodni dom*. Lončar's recommendation of Milan Ćurčin's *Nova Evropa* from Zagreb offered Braun a broader, progressive Yugoslavist perspective. On the Serbian political scene, Lončar then pointed to the organ of the right-wing People's Radical Party, *Нови живот*, edited by Momčilo Ninčić in Belgrade; to the storied *Српски књижевни гласник*, to the pages of which the leaders of the Yugoslav Republican Party, Jaša Prodanović and Ljubomir Stojanović, often contributed; and to the Serbian newspaper of record, *Политика*. This would have provided Braun with a broad, representative overview of the main lines of debate in the country.

For monographs, Lončar likewise attempted to give space to the varied geographic, national, and political topography of the new Yugoslav state. On the constitutional question, Lončar recommended Stojan M. Protić's *Draft of the Constitution*, the Radicals' proposal for what had become the Vidovdan Constitution,⁷⁶ as well as an overview of Yugoslav constitutional law prepared by the liberal monarchist legal scholar Slobodan Jovanović.⁷⁷ For general histories, he suggested Hermann Wendel's report on South Slavic unification, written from a German social democratic perspective,⁷⁸ then Ljudmil Hauptmann's narrative of the natural and historical factors in Yugoslav national unification,⁷⁹ as well as the new edition of Konstantin Jireček's *History of the Serbs*—although this was a pre-war book published originally in German.⁸⁰ Ferdo Šišić's essential document collection on the process of Yugoslav

⁷⁶ Stojan M. Protić, *Nacrt Ustava* (Draft of the Constitution) (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1920).

⁷⁷ Slobodan Jovanović, *Ustavno pravo Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (Constitutional Law in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1924).

⁷⁸ Hermann Wendel, *Aus dem südslawischen Risorgimento* (From the South Slavic Risorgimento) (Gotha: F. A. Perthes, 1921).

⁷⁹ Ljudmil Hauptmann, *Priroda in zgodovina v jugoslovanskem razvoju* (Nature and History in the Development of the Yugoslavs) (Ljubljana: Jutra, 1922).

⁸⁰ Konstantin Jireček, *Istorija Srba* (History of the Serbs) (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1922–1923); for the original, see Constantin Jirecek, *Geschichte der Serben* (History of the Serbs) (Gotha: Perthes, 1911).

state unification during and after the World War—still used today—was included in the list too.⁸¹

For the Slovenian case in particular, Lončar indicated Albin Ogris's study of Slovenian political parties,⁸² the memoir of the Catholic politician Ivan Šušteršič,⁸³ and two texts on Slovenes in Carinthia written pseudonymously by the Slovenian nationalist Valentin Rožič.⁸⁴ The Catholic theologian Matija Slavič's study of the Slovenian-majority territories formerly part of the Kingdom of Hungary offered an overview of nationality politics in Transleithania from a Slovenian perspective.⁸⁵ The collection entitled *Documents on the Adriatic Question*, compiled by the legal scholars Vladimir Knaflič and Leonid Pitamic, provided translated primary sources about Italy's occupation and annexation of territories formerly part of Austria-Hungary and inhabited by Slovenian-speakers.⁸⁶

Lončar likewise listed a few titles on the Agrarian Question in Yugoslavia: France Veber's *Intellectual Foundations of Slavic Agrarianism*,⁸⁷ Dragiša Lapčević's *On the Agrarian Problem*,⁸⁸ as well as Albin Prepeluh's *In the Struggle for Land and Statehood*.⁸⁹ (Lončar, now writing at the end of 1927 and having worked closely with Prepeluh, clearly knew that the book was due to be published after the new year.) Finally, Lončar recommended his own studies, namely the second edition of his *The Political Life of the Slovenes* from 1921 as well as a collection of his articles under the title *Politics and History: Some Responses to the Questions*

⁸¹ Ferdo Šišić, *Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914.-1919*. (Documents on the Creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, 1914–1919) (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1920).

⁸² Albin Ogris, *Politične stranke* (Political Parties) (Maribor: Ljudska tiskarna, 1926).

⁸³ Ivan Šušteršič, *Moj odgovor* (My Response) (Ljubljana: J. Blasnik, 1922).

⁸⁴ Moravski [Valentin Rožič], *Slovenski Korotan* (Slovenian Carinthia) (Klagenfurt: Družba sv. Mohorja, 1919); and Carantanus [Valentin Rožič], *Jugoslavija in njene meje* (Yugoslavia and Its Borders), vol. 1, *Koroška* (Carinthia) (Ljubljana: Pisarna za zasedeno ozemlje, 1919). Both were written under the spell of the propaganda drive ahead of the 1920 Carinthian plebiscite.

⁸⁵ Matija Slavič, *Prekmurje* (Ljubljana: Slovenska krščansko-socialna zveza, 1921).

⁸⁶ Vladimir Knaflič and Leonid Pitamic, ed. and trans., *Dokumenti o jadranskem vprašanju* (Documents on the Adriatic Question) (Ljubljana: Tiskovna zadruga–Delniška tiskarna, 1920).

⁸⁷ France Veber, *Idejni temelji slovanskega agrarizma* (Intellectual Foundations of Slavic Agrarianism) (Ljubljana: Kmetijska tiskovna zadruga–J. Blasnik, 1927).

⁸⁸ Dragiša Lapčević, *O agrarnom problemu* (On the Agrarian Problem) (Sarajevo: Glas slobode, 1919).

⁸⁹ Albin Prepeluh, *V boju za zemljo in državo* (In the Struggle for Land and Statehood) (Ljubljana: Kmetijska tiskovna zadruga–J. Blasnik, 1928).

of the Day, published in 1923.⁹⁰ In these last two works, particularly *The Political Life of the Slovenes*, Lončar's conceptualization of the political community's past hewed in conceptual and interpretative ways with the overarching leftist republican view shared with Jászi, Braun, and Csécsy.

The text had originally been published in 1906, fully under the spell of Masarykian realism.⁹¹ Lončar led the reader on a brisk walk through modern Slovenian political history, from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, refracted through “political journals, political parties, and political personalities,” only covering thirty-three pages.⁹² While Masaryk had famously asked “The Czech Question,”⁹³ now Lončar had attempted to ask “The Slovenian Question,” namely the question of the relation of the Slovenian cultural community to the other South Slavic nations. In part, this had been a question of the extent to which Slovenian national politics, within the imperial framework, had given rise to a single political nation out of the multifaceted Slovenian cultural community, with all of its regional identities and linguistic variations. The larger question behind the text was whether a Slovenian political nation could relate equally to the other South Slavic political nations: the Serbs, Croats, and Bulgars, with their rich histories of state sovereignty. The second edition from 1921 had been expanded to include the period around the unification of the South Slavic state. The question of the Slovenian political community had changed drastically in the intervening decade and a half:

⁹⁰ Dragotin Lončar, *Politično življenje Slovencev* (The Political Life of the Slovenes), 2nd ed. (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1921); Dragotin Lončar, *Politika in zgodovina: nekoliko odgovorov na dnevna vprašanja* (Politics and History: Some Responses to the Questions of the Day) (Ljubljana: J. Blasnik, 1923).

⁹¹ Dragotin Lončar, *Politično življenje Slovencev* (The Political Life of the Slovenes) (Ljubljana: Naši zapiski, 1906).

⁹² The text first appeared serially on the pages of *Naši zapiski* in 1906, the leftist political review founded and edited by Lončar, Prepeluh, and Anton Dermota (1876–1914). See Dragotin Lončar, “Politično življenje Slovencev” (The Political Life of the Slovenes), *Naši zapiski* 4, nos. 4–10 (April–October 1906): 51–56; 67–72; 83–88; 100–103; 116–20; 131–35; and 147–152.

⁹³ T. G. Masaryk, *Česká otázka: snahy a tužby národního obrození* (The Czech Question: The Efforts and Desires of National Revival) (Prague: Čas, 1895); excerpts translated with biographic and contextual introduction in Tomáš G. Masaryk, “The Czech Question,” edited by Michal Kopeček and translated by Peter Kussi, in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945)*, vol. 3/1, *Modernism – The Creation of Nation-States*, ed. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górný, and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 199–209.

now, it was beyond doubt that a specific Slovenian political community had come into being, with both the development of mass politics based on universal male suffrage within the empire and the “liberation” of 1918 acting as the largest catalysts. The question was how to make sense of the contingent fact that Yugoslavia had come to be in the first place, for this was not a pre-ordained fact, as Lončar argued.

In part, Lončar narrated the origin of the modern national development of a Slovenian political nation as the delayed reception of French revolutionary ideas. This occurred among a wider swath of the population between 1797 and 1813, that is, from the publication of Valentin Vodnik’s *Lublanske novine* (The Ljubljana Times), the first Slovenian-language newspaper in a modern sense, to the creation of the Illyrian Provinces in the wake of the Napoleonic invasion of the Austrian Littoral. Modern conceptions of nationhood filtered slowly through the population, reaching mass proportions only by the 1860s. In the meantime, the increasingly self-conscious (and self-confident) national intelligentsia, mainly but not exclusively based in Ljubljana and Maribor, began to take up the cause of creating a single Slovenian political nation from above. By the outbreak of the Revolutions of 1848, the “United Slovenia” (*Zedinjena Slovenija*) program represented rather a minimum program in Lončar’s eyes. It would only have offered some measure of cultural and administrative-territorial integration of Slovenian-populated areas within an Austro-German-dominated Habsburg Empire. The United Slovenia program, in Lončar’s interpretation, could only generate a unified cultural community. The Slovenes had to take a further step to become a “political nation” in Lončar’s words, namely unification with the larger South Slavic cultural community in a separate—independent—state.⁹⁴

Not all options were equal, however. Lončar made a great effort to survey the various alternatives on offer by the end of the World War. Aside from the May and Corfu Declarations,

⁹⁴ Lončar, *Politično življenje Slovencev* (1921 ed.), 128–29.

Lončar likewise noted the Chicago Declaration put forward by Etbin Kristan and the Yugoslav Republican Association (JRZ).⁹⁵ Here we have an excellent moment of self-referentiality among the Slovenian republican Left. Drawing on the ideas in the Chicago Declaration, Lončar set the categories “freedom,” “popular sovereignty,” and “autonomy” as the standards of evaluation in his discussion of the alternative plans for common South Slavic statehood.⁹⁶ Ultimately, the provisions of the Corfu Declaration, which had guided the unification, the Temporary National Representation where he had been delegated, as well as the Constituent Assembly’s work—and so the Vidovdan Constitution—were a transgression of these principles in Lončar’s eyes. By contrast, the Chicago Declaration was a missed chance. Its proposals were the only ones which stood on the principle of popular sovereignty in a full sense, based as it was on constituent power rooted only in “the will of the people.”⁹⁷

These ideas were ultimately betrayed by the circumstances: the weakness of the National Council in Zagreb, the disorganization of the immediate post-imperial regional situation, and particularly the military encroachment of the Italian state. The unification process, in Lončar’s narrative, still wound up being contingent and in large part artificial and constrained by Serbian forces. The end of the war and the chaotic collapse of the empire had set up obstacles to the organic creation of a new, popular South Slavic state, but it was only fully cut off with the unification of the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs with the Kingdom of Serbia on December 1, 1918. The struggle in this new situation now became one against the integration of the Slovenian cultural community into a homogenized Yugoslav cultural community, and so the preservation of the Slovenes as a political nation unto themselves. Referring to relations with the Serbs and Croats, Lončar concluded that even in the contingent situation of 1918–19, “the new country ought to be organized in such a way that individual

⁹⁵ Lončar, *Politično življenje Slovencev* (1921 ed.), 112–13.

⁹⁶ Lončar, *Politično življenje Slovencev* (1921 ed.), 113–28.

⁹⁷ Lončar, *Politično življenje Slovencev* (1921 ed.), 113.

tribes (*pleme*) enjoy the greatest possible autonomy,” for this would be the only way to realize the task placed at their feet by History, that is, “showing whether they are capable of the greatest human art: *governing themselves*.”⁹⁸ The same question and problem reverberated elsewhere among the South Slavic leftist republicans.

Some five years before Lončar and Braun’s correspondence, in Kragujevac, the geologist and politician Jovan Žujović (1856–1936), held a lecture attempting to demonstrate historically that the Serbian political community had always been capable of governing themselves in view of their deeply rooted democratic, socialist, and republican national character. According to a report on the lecture in the Yugoslav Republican Party’s organ, *Република*—and so likely embellished a touch—apparently Žujović filled the reception hall of the city’s Hotel Takovo to capacity.⁹⁹ Certainly, in the early 1920s, Žujović was a very well-known public personality, not unlike Ljubomir Stojanović. Beyond Žujović’s scholarly work and his role as President of the Serbian Royal Academy from 1915 to 1921, he had been a prominent member of the Independent Radical Party before the unification, twice Serbia’s Minister of Education (May–July 1905; 1909–1910), briefly the country’s Minister of Foreign Affairs (August–December 1905), a senator from 1901 to 1903, and a representative in the National Assembly from 1903 to 1912.¹⁰⁰ Now, after the war, he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Yugoslav Republican Party alongside Jaša Prodanović and Ljubomir

⁹⁸ Lončar, *Politično življenje Slovencev* (1921 ed.), 129.

⁹⁹ “Шумадија је ипак луча слободе” (*Šumadija Remains a Beacon of Freedom*), *Република* 4, no. 103 (December 27, 1922), 1.

¹⁰⁰ On Žujović’s career as a geologist in Serbia before the First World War and his intellectual context, see Dejan Lukić, “A Strong Class of Serious Scholars: The Power Dynamics of Knowledge Production in the Earth Sciences in Serbia, 1880–1914,” doctoral dissertation, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, 2019. For biographies with focus also on his political work, see Aleksandar Grubić, “Јован М. Жујовић (1856–1936),” in *Живот и дело српских научника* (The Lives and Work of Serbian Scientists), vol. 1, ed. Miloje Sarić (Belgrade: SANU, 1996), 293–359; on his political biography, see Đorđe Đurić, “Јован Жујовић,” in *Срби 1903–1914: историја идеја* (Serbs, 1903–1914: An Intellectual History), ed. Miloš Ković (Belgrade: Clio, 2015), 388–401; Đorđe Đurić, *Српски интелектуалац у политици: политичка биографија Јована Жујовића* (A Serbian Intellectual in Politics: A Political Biography of Jovan Žujović) (Belgrade: Srpsko društvo za istoriju nauke, 2004); and Latinka Perović, “Naučnik i političar: Jovan M. Žujović (Prilog proučavanju srpske elite)” (A Scientist and Politician: Jovan M. Žujović [A Contribution to the Study of the Serbian Elite]), *Tokovi istorije*, no. 1–2 (1993): 55–65.

Stojanović. It came as no surprise that there was only standing room and the talk had to be delayed so that the audience could filter in.

In part too, this had to do with the political ideas Žujović represented. The region around Kragujevac, Šumadija, had been one of the few places where, at a municipal level, the Yugoslav Republican Party had outperformed many of the other countrywide parties during the elections to the Constituent Assembly. In the smaller municipalities of Brzan, Čumić, and Maršić, for example, situated within the Kragujevac electoral district (*srez*), the party had come in first place—though this was only a few hundred votes taken together.¹⁰¹ In total, the party gained 1,306 votes in the larger administrative district (*okrug*) of Kragujevac, coming in fifth place behind the Radicals, Democrats, Agrarians, and Communists.¹⁰² The region was not the party's electoral stronghold, like Montenegro wound up becoming,¹⁰³ but did have symbolic importance as the center of the First (1804) and Second (1815) Serbian Uprisings. While the Serbian Revolution had spurred the creation of the Principality of Serbia, founded on dynastic principles, Žujović argued in his lecture that it was not the resulting monarchic format which mattered, but the spirit of the uprising itself, which had been anti-imperial, republican, and democratic. In a way, the Yugoslav Republican Party wanted to tap into this underground stream of popular revolutionary sentiment. Tellingly, when the text of his address was published the following year, it bore the title *On Republicanism in Serbia*.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ “4. Округ Крагујевачки – Срез Крагујевачки” (Kragujevac District – Kragujevac Electoral District), *Статистички преглед избора народних посланика за Уставотворну скупштину*, f. 52–53. The party received 203 votes in Brzan (~48%), 127 in Čumić (~37%), and 98 in Maršić (~76%). Overall, in the Kragujevac Electoral District, the party received only 646 votes (~11%).

¹⁰² “4. Округ Крагујевачки – Резултат у целом округу Крагујевачком,” *Статистички преглед избора народних посланика за Уставотворну скупштину*, f. 56–57.

¹⁰³ The largest share of votes for the Yugoslav Republican Party came from Montenegro taken as a whole (4,613 votes), while the second-most came from the Bregalnica district (*okrug*) in what is today's northeastern Macedonia (4,137 votes). Although the core of the party was made up of sections of the urban Belgrade intelligentsia, the party only gained 2,424 votes in total between the city of Belgrade and the Belgrade *srez*. See full results in the table “Целокупан преглед у земљи,” *Статистички преглед избора народних посланика за Уставотворну скупштину*, f. 849, attached at the back of the book as a fold-out.

¹⁰⁴ Jovan Žujović, *О републиканизму у Србији* (On Republicanism in Serbia) (Belgrade: Skerlić, 1923). Republished also in Svetozar Marković, *Целокупна дела*, vol. 16, ed. Radomir Lukić et al. (Belgrade: SANU, 1996), 245–60.

For Žujović, a Yugoslav republic would have been the natural culmination of the revolutionary, republican spirit which had been passed down, generation by generation, among the citizens of Kragujevac and of the wider Šumadija region. In fact, this tradition had been inherited by all Serbs as a national tradition, Žujović argued, whether they lived in what had been Serbia before 1918 or what had now become Yugoslavia. His words carried a strong national bent (Serbs stood as the central subjects of his history, not all South Slavs), but Žujović saw the national question as rather a secondary issue. With the declaration of a common South Slav state in the autumn of 1918, the opportunity to turn this radical democratic mental outlook into political practice had appeared. But that opportunity had soon been usurped by the forces of monarchism, centralism, and reaction, crystallized in the Vidovdan Constitution. Rather than telling the story of the triumph of an idea, Žujović waxed critical. Clear antimonarchic ideas were articulated in the speech, with Žujović calling the very political foundations of the new Yugoslav state into question, dominated as it was by the Karađorđević dynasty. To that end, the question of state form held primacy above questions of intra-national cohesion or international difference.

Žujović chose to address the question of state form by dedicating the bulk of his speech to the pronouncement of a specific *history of ideas*, that is, the “history of radical democratic and republican ideas” in Serbia rather than pursuing a traditional constitutional or political history.¹⁰⁵ Žujović’s emphasis lay on the historical rather than the contemporary, the ideational and intellectual background rather than the course of diplomacy, parliamentary politics, or what we might now call public policy. In doing so, Žujović suggested a continuous tradition of thought, a full *-ism*. At the center stood a “republican-socialist school” which had developed around the earliest Serbian socialist political thinkers, Živojin Žujović (1838–1870)—Jovan’s cousin—and Svetozar Marković (1846–1875).¹⁰⁶ From this descent of republican ideas,

¹⁰⁵ Žujović, *O republikanizmu u Srbiji*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Žujović, *O republikanizmu u Srbiji*, 6.

Žujović suggested that the demand for popular sovereignty, institutionalized in a republic and founded on radical democratic principles, was the continuation of a strong and clearly defined tradition of political thought in Serbia which followed a trajectory from the Serbian revolutions to Svetozar Marković to the contemporary Yugoslav Republican Party.¹⁰⁷

For others too the personality of Svetozar Marković was a touchstone in the construction of a progressive intellectual tradition for the Serbian political community. Dragoljub Jovanović, at that moment an assistant professor (*docent*) at the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Law, engaged in such a canonization. Jovanović had spent the World War and the early transition period in Paris, where he earned his doctorate in 1923 and was affiliated with radical Yugoslavist youth in the city.¹⁰⁸ After returning to the new South Slav state in 1924, he was an initiator of the leftist Group for Social and Cultural Action in Belgrade, which published its programmatic *A Generation at the Feet of Creation* in 1925.¹⁰⁹ The same year, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of Marković's death (1875), Jovanović published two texts on Marković's place in the progressive history of the Serbian political community.¹¹⁰ Jovanović confronted a dual task in these texts: to render a critical assessment of Marković's legacy while

¹⁰⁷ Seen from another angle: Latinka Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka: Prilog istoriji socijalističke misli* (Serbian Socialists in the Nineteenth Century: A Contribution to the History of Socialist Thought), 2 vols. (Belgrade: Rad, 1985).

¹⁰⁸ Dragoljub Jovanović, *Le Rendement optimum du travail ouvrier. Étude sur les stimulants modernes de l'activité ouvrière* (Optimum Worker Productivity: A Study of Modern Stimulants to Worker Activity) (Paris: Payot, 1923).

¹⁰⁹ [Dragoljub Jovanović et al.,] *Generacija pred stvaranjem: almanah jedne grupe* (A Generation at the Feet of Creation: The Almanac of a Group) (Belgrade: Izdanja Grupa za socialnu i kulturnu akciju, 1925). The book was published with texts alternatively set in Cyrillic and Latin characters. The authors included, in order, Mihailo Konstantinović, Dragoljub Jovanović, Lujo Novak, Luka Smodlaka, Ilija M. Petrović, Mijo Mirković, Otokar Keršovani, and Mihajlo Arsić. Likewise, the Group published pamphlets by Đorđe Tasić, Katarina Bogdanović, Aleksandr Jovanović, Aleksandr Vidaković, Miloš M. Milošević, Božidar Adžija, and Svetozar Rančić in their book series.

¹¹⁰ Dragoljub Jovanović, "Светозар Марковић: педесет година после његове смрти" (Svetozar Marković: Fifty Years Since His Death), *Српски књижевни гласник* 15, no. 3 (1925): 194–206, republished as a separate pamphlet: Dragoljub Jovanović, *Светозар Марковић: педесет година после његове смрти: 1875 - 26 фебруар - 1925* (Belgrade: n.p., 1925). The second text was published in Milan Ćurčin's *Nova Evropa*: Dragoljub Jovanović, "Svetozar Marković kao društveni reformator" (Svetozar Marković as a Social Reformer), *Nova Evropa* 11, no. 13 (May 1, 1925): 390–93, also republished as part of a pamphlet: *Светозар Марковић: педесетогодишњика* (Svetozar Marković: Fiftieth Anniversary) (Zagreb: n.p., 1925), maintaining the same page numbers as the article. As part of the progressive Yugoslavist outlook of Ćurčin and the *Nova Evropa* editorial staff, texts were variously published in Cyrillic and Latin without regard for the authors' ethno-linguistic origins.

simultaneously mobilizing that legacy for a new generation facing the disappointments of Yugoslavia's centralist, capitalist, and monarchist unification. Re-reading Marković's writings, Jovanović observed, one arrives "at a clear awareness of how democracy advances extraordinarily slowly: nearly all the problems which he first posed have remained open."¹¹¹ Formal Yugoslav unification had not taken the form of a federation of "free people and equal workers" as envisioned by the republican Left.¹¹² Economic and cultural backwardness persisted; bureaucratic centralization stifled local initiative; democrats were on the defensive, once again, in the struggle to maintain basic civil rights and freedoms. The question Jovanović posed to his readers—whether Serbia or Yugoslavia had advanced since Marković's time—carried laden within it a preemptive crisis discourse which would, in retrospect, gain much more traction over the coming decade.

Jovanović's Marković emerged as a figure defined above all by his democratic spirit rather than the coherence of his specific theoretical commitments. Jovanović emphasized the primacy of Marković's character over his ideology: "By his entire nature," he wrote, Marković "was directed toward a *social ideal*, toward socialism. Good in spirit, sensitive to human suffering, and moreover combative and courageous, he would in any case have stood on the side of the people."¹¹³ Jovanović located Marković's significance in his democratic disposition and by implication its natural cohesion with the revolutionary, democratic "people" in the abstract. Marković's socialism had much to do—at least originally—with a colloquial or popular understanding of the political beyond formal theory. This resonated with Žujović's popular republican appeals in Kragujevac three years earlier, though perhaps not by chance—Jovanović cited Žujović in one of the text's few footnotes.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Jovanović, "Светозар Марковић," *Српски књижевни гласник* 15, no. 3 (1925): 194.

¹¹² Jovanović, "Светозар Марковић," 194.

¹¹³ Jovanović, "Светозар Марковић," 195. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁴ Albeit a different text than *On Republicanism in Serbia*. See Jovanović, "Светозар Марковић," 199–200, where Jovanović cites Žujović's text on Svetozar Marković published in the Yugoslav Republican Party's theoretical

However, this tendency toward popularization led Jovanović to a criticism of Marković's work, practical and theoretical. Chief among these was the fact that Marković had “consciously and willingly submitted to Russian influence,” particularly the work of Chernyshevsky, to the near-total exclusion of socialist thought from elsewhere in Europe, e.g., Proudhon or Marx.¹¹⁵ Marković's experience in Russia and his reading of Chernyshevsky, Jovanović argued, led him to misidentify the Serbian *zadruga* (communal household) with the Russian *mir* (village commune), treating both as foundations for a future socialist order. “He did not see,” Jovanović argued, “that the *mir* was a rudimentary organ of a past economic life condemned to extinction, just like our *zadruga*.”¹¹⁶ Marković's agrarian socialism rested on institutions already in decay, and his utopian vision of bypassing capitalism altogether found no purchase in Serbian economic reality.

Jovanović's critique extended beyond theory to questions of method and practice. In *Nova Evropa*, he offered a particularly pointed formulation of Marković's limitations as a social reformer: while Marković attempted to be “a scientific socialist in judging conditions in the town,” he proved to be “a pure utopian in resolving relations in the village.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Marković's plan for action had been well conceived—to prepare enlightened cadres who would organize and educate the masses on the basis of thorough knowledge of existing conditions¹¹⁸—yet toward the end of his life he abandoned this gradualist approach in favor of rapid political mobilization. His “vulgarizing work” (*vulgarizatorska delatnost*), which is to say his popularizing activity, had undeniable benefits. For the first time, Jovanović noted, broader social strata were “stirred by intellectual vibrations,” and Marković “was the first to warm

organ, *Буктиња* (The Torch), in 1925: Jovan Žujović, “Утицај Светозара Марковића на школску омладину” (The Influence of Svetozar Marković on the School Youth), *Буктиња* 3, no. 4 (April 1925): 129–46.

¹¹⁵ Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 196.

¹¹⁶ Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 197.

¹¹⁷ Dragoljub Jovanović, “Svetozar Marković kao društveni reformator,” *Nova Evropa* 11, no. 13 (May 1, 1925): 392.

¹¹⁸ Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 199.

school youth to a social ideal.”¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, more than on economic organizing, Marković placed his emphasis on political propaganda through his work in the press, particularly his newspaper, *Радењик* (The Worker).¹²⁰ “The socialist and social worker,” Jovanović concluded, had “transformed himself into a democrat-politician.”¹²¹

The consequences of this narrowly political turn, Jovanović argued, proved catastrophic for Serbian democracy in the long run, though Marković was not personally guilty. Rather, it was Nikola Pašić’s fault. After Marković’s untimely death in 1875, the Radical Party emerged in 1881, which nominally based itself on Marković’s legacy. Yet under the leadership of Nikola Pašić, its initial socialist and agrarian tendency was shed, and rightward turn toward Serbian nationalism occurred, and “all work was abandoned except the purely political in the narrowest party sense.”¹²² The Radicals descended upon the village not to improve or educate it, Jovanović wrote, but rather to “spoil it with flattery and demagoguery.”¹²³ Ultimately, for Jovanović, Marković had been “too much a social idealist and too little a social realist,” which led to the quick co-option of his memory by the increasingly authoritarian Radical Party.¹²⁴ The abandonment of patient, small-scale organizational work among the people in favor of party-based parliamentary politics had in fact left Serbian democracy without an organized social base capable of sustaining it. Marković could not have foreseen that fifty years after his death Serbia (and Yugoslavia) would possess neither democracy nor socialism.

Despite this critical assessment, Jovanović’s twin essays culminated in an appeal for Marković’s partial rehabilitation as a guide for the present. In theoretical terms, he maintained, “a large part of Marković’s conceptions remained modern: we now need more than ever an

¹¹⁹ Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 199–200.

¹²⁰ Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 201.

¹²¹ Jovanović, “Svetozar Marković kao društveni reformator,” 393.

¹²² Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 203.

¹²³ Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 203.

¹²⁴ Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 204.

agrarian socialism.”¹²⁵ Marković’s legacy could be sustained, in Jovanović’s eyes, by returning to the promise of local organization among the predominantly rural population, moving toward politics beyond parliament, and focusing on the cultivation of demands for full economic and political democratization. Interestingly, Jovanović concluded in the *Српски књижевни гласник* that Marković was also correct in his assessment that a “completely new generation” ought to carry its struggle to the field of social and state transformation at regular intervals. Jovanović asked his audience to return to Marković’s works and find in them “their own confession and program for work.”¹²⁶ “Even if one cannot accept Marković’s approach in everything,” Jovanović concluded in *Nova Evropa*, “we still warm ourselves today by his enthusiasm for social progress, and we marvel at his deep love for the working people.”¹²⁷ Interestingly, Jovanović’s texts were something of an inflection point conceptually and generationally. Where the older generation had failed to create a federal Yugoslav republic on radical democratic bases in 1921, the new generation could pick up the banner—if only they also realized the inherited wealth of their own progressive traditions. From this perspective, the historicizing project of the Hungarians was not so far off either.

3.2. *The Precarity of the Political Community*

Of course, without a political community, one’s progressive traditions became something antiquarian rather than living and dynamic. In parallel to the development of these leftist republican interpretations of the past, a great deal of text was produced on defending the

¹²⁵ Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 205.

¹²⁶ Jovanović, “Светозар Марковић,” 206.

¹²⁷ Jovanović, “Svetozar Marković kao društveni reformator,” 393.

integrity of the political community against dissolution induced from outside or, in some cases, from within. The Slovenian context gives us a good entry point into these debates.

At the beginning of 1921, a petition advocating for wide-ranging cultural autonomy for the Slovenes within a South Slavic federation began to circulate among the intelligentsia of Ljubljana. The text was drafted by Dragotin Lončar, Albin Prepeluh, and Fran Erjavec, all of whom had broken with the JSDS earlier the same year in part because of the chaos of its internal factional struggles and splits, but also in part because of its tendency toward integral Yugoslavism under pressure from the communist challenge on the radical Left. The “Autonomist Declaration of Slovenian Cultural Workers” (*Avtonomistična izjava slovenskih kulturnih delavcev*) was published in February 1921 in the new, postwar series of *Naši zapiski* (Our Notes).¹²⁸ Lončar, Prepeluh, and Erjavec explicitly argued that “national and state unification does not necessarily imply mechanical unification; on the contrary, the conditions in Yugoslavia require an organic development [toward unification] which takes into account the existing structures of economic and cultural life and, on that basis, continues to build toward a higher synthesis.”¹²⁹ This meant, in their vision, a state perceived as “unified” when viewed externally (common foreign policy, foreign trade regulations, etc.), but one which was internally differentiated, retaining broad-ranging autonomies for each constitutive political and cultural community in the state. Viewing the “already sufficiently fragmented Slovenian Lands” (i.e., split between Italy, Austria, Hungary, and the new South Slavic state) as reason enough to consolidate the territory’s autonomy, they also advocated for the same among other national groups, “in the name of peaceful coexistence, progress, and mutual fraternal unity.”¹³⁰

¹²⁸ See [Dragotin Lončar, Albin Prepeluh, and Fran Erjavec,] “Izjava” (Declaration), *Naši zapiski* 13, no. 2 (1921): 25–26. For more context, see Fran Erjavec, *Avtonomistična izjava slovenskih kulturnih delavcev leta 1921 (iz spominov)* (The Autonomist Declaration of Slovenian Cultural Workers, 1921—From the Memoirs) (Buenos Aires: Slovenska kulturna akcija, 1958), 20–21, who also confirms the declaration’s authorship. The text was republished in Serbo-Croatian in Petranović and Zečević, eds., *Jugoslavija 1918–1984. Zbirka dokumenata*, 164–65.

¹²⁹ Lončar, Prepeluh, and Erjavec, “Izjava,” 25.

¹³⁰ Lončar, Prepeluh, and Erjavec, “Izjava,” 25–26.

Having been signed by forty-one of the most prominent Slovenian intellectuals—across the political spectrum, we may add, from the clerical Catholics to national liberals, peasantists to social democrats, and the Masarykians—the document immediately became a key node of contestation. All of this while the new Constituent Assembly was just beginning its uncertain work. As Prepeluh wrote skeptically in the article following the Declaration: “Will the new state regulations created by the Constituent Assembly be such that they will not simply collapse in the near future under the weight of everyday life? To place oneself at the head of a new state and give it new regulations—that is a difficult and dangerous undertaking. This truth was already recognized by the old sage Machiavelli.”¹³¹

The Slovenian liberal intelligentsia, grouping now around the Yugoslav Democratic Party, were perhaps the strongest advocates for integral Yugoslavism next to the communists (until 1923).¹³² Their tirade against the declaration and the cause of Slovenian autonomism began even before the relevant issue of *Naši zapiski* had gone to print. On February 17, 1921, a small blurb in *Slovenski narod*, the main liberal paper in Ljubljana, read: “We have been informed that a ‘Declaration for the Political Autonomy of Slovenia’, for which signatures are being collected among cultural workers, will be published in *Naši zapiski* if fifty names are

¹³¹ Albin Prepeluh, “Ob sestanku konstituante” (On the Convocation of the Constituent Assembly), *Naši zapiski* 13, no. 2 (1921): 27–30, here 27. Prepeluh’s translation of Machiavelli into Slovenian, a work in progress since 1916 or 1917, was finally published in 1920: Niccolò Machiavelli, *Vladar* (Ljubljana: Zvezna tiskarna, 1920). See also Igor Lukšič, “Prepeluhova recepcija Machiavellijevega dela *Il Principe*” (Prepeluh’s Reception of Machiavelli’s *Il principe*), *Borec* 41, no. 1 (1989): 106–11.

¹³² For more on the Slovenian liberals, see Jurij Perovšek, *O demokraciji in jugoslovanstvu: slovenski liberalizem v Kraljevini SHS/Jugoslaviji* (On Democracy and Yugoslavism: Slovenian Liberalism in the SHS Kingdom/Yugoslavia) (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2013); and for a comparative study, albeit skeptical of the common label ‘liberalism’, see Oskar Mulej, *Liberalism after the Habsburg Monarchy, 1918–1935: National Liberal Heirs in the Czech Lands, Austria, and Slovenia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024). See also Banac, *The National Question*, 141–225, particularly the sections on “The Democrats” and “The Democratic Centralists” for an overview of the early framing of *narodno jedinstvo* as both ruling and contested ideology. On the communists’ position, see Latinka Perović, *Od centralizma do federalizma: KPJ u nacionalnom pitanju* (From Centralism to Federalism: The Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the National Question) (Zagreb: Globus, 1984); and Jurij Perovšek, ed., *Razprava o nacionalnem vprašanju v KPJ leta 1923* (The 1923 Discussion on the National Question in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia) (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1990); and for the Slovenian communists in particular: Jurij Perovšek, *Samoodločba in federacija: Slovenski komunisti in nacionalno vprašanje 1920–1941* (Self-Determination and Federation: Slovenian Communists and the National Question, 1920–1941) (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2012).

collected. The initiative for this declaration was apparently launched by the editor, Dr. Dragotin Lončar. Do our cultural workers have no more urgent business than to concern themselves with such ‘declarations’, which only serve to further the interests of the clergy and can only harm our cause?”¹³³ Of course, for the leftist republicans among the Slovenian autonomists, it was not the same cause. As Lončar had written already in 1913, undifferentiated unification into a single nation of Yugoslavs would only serve to impoverish the political community, its culture and science—and perhaps too open the way to political tyranny.¹³⁴ The same principle guided the Autonomist Declaration here.

The text even made its way onto the floor of the Constituent Assembly. Bogumil Vošnjak, from the liberal stream but elected on the list of Ivan Pucelj’s Independent Agrarian Party (*Samostojna kmečka stranka*), attacked the Autonomist Declaration in the session of April 21, 1921. Referring to a comment made by Janko Šimrak of the Catholic clerical Croatian People’s Party (*Hrvatska pučka stranka*) the previous day, positively evaluating the idea of instituting cultural autonomies within the country, Vošnjak harshly criticized the Autonomist Declaration, denouncing it as a product of “cultural snobbism” and profoundly “anti-state” in its character, going as far as to claim that “the spiritual fathers of this manifesto were two librarians of the former *Hofbibliothek* in Vienna.” To this, he added that, “if the whole country is not at the same level of evolution, it was not our people’s fault,” indirectly blaming the Austrians and Hungarians, of whom the “spiritual fathers” of the Autonomist Declaration had been servants.¹³⁵ To Vošnjak, anything other than the integral Yugoslavist vision threatened the very existence of a common South Slavic state.

¹³³ “Deklaracija za politično avtonomijo” (A Declaration for Political Autonomy), *Slovenski narod* 54, no. 38 (Feb. 17, 1921): 4.

¹³⁴ Dragotin Lončar, response to the questionnaire on the Yugoslav Question in *Veda* 3, no. 4–5 (1913): 381–84.

¹³⁵ Statement of Bogumil Vošnjak in Session 20 of the Constituent Assembly, April 21, 1921, in *Стенографске белешке Уставотворне скупштине* 1, no. 13 (1921): 11.

A reply only came months later, from two of the declaration's signatories, Franc Kidrič and Ivan Prijatelj, both literary historians and professors at the University of Ljubljana. In a short note published in the storied urban liberal outlet *Slovenski narod*, Kidrič, Prijatelj, and a group of faculty from the newly established University of Ljubljana argued against Vošnjak's insinuation that the supporters of the Autonomist Declaration had signed "under the influence of the old Austrian mentality (*avstrijskanstvo*)," which they rejected as "unfounded and untrue." They likewise suggested that Vošnjak was on the verge of libel for indirectly suggesting that the supposed "spiritual fathers" of the Declaration were in the service of the Austrian state because they had worked in the *Hofbibliothek* in Vienna. The list of Slovenes who had worked there *and* signed the Declaration was not a long one—in fact it had only been Prijatelj and Kidrič. They demanded an apology.¹³⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly, they did not get one. Vošnjak responded in *Slovenski narod*, insisting that he was only "responsible to the Assembly and to no one else."¹³⁷ Vošnjak doubled down, insisting again that Kidrič and Prijatelj had been the "spiritual fathers" of the Autonomist Declaration and that their motive was clear: autonomism, or more precisely, the "union of federalism and autonomism," which were holdover "political ideas of the nations of former Austria." Unwilling to clarify further, Vošnjak engaged in rhetorical misdirection, suggesting that the signatories had in fact abrogated "the foundation of university life," apparently only because Kidrič and Prijatelj were faculty at the university. In his view, the Autonomist Declaration now pushed "university teachers into the hands of political parties"—advocacy for cultural autonomism now equated the politicization of the only Slovenian university. Yet this was only problematic if one viewed universities as eminently non-political spaces. Ultimately, Vošnjak had argued for the necessary teleology of national and state unification and

¹³⁶ "Univ. prof. dr. Fran Kidrič in dr. Ivan Prijatelj," *Slovenski narod* 54, no. 149 (July 7, 1921): 4.

¹³⁷ "Izjava dr. Bogumil Vošnjak," *Slovenski narod* 54, no. 163 (July 24, 1921): 3. Fran Erjavec also reconstructs the exchange: Erjavec, *Avtonomistična izjava*, 24–29.

centralization under a single sovereign, a hallmark of monarchist thought in interwar Yugoslavia. Prijatelj, completely incensed, broke with the liberals, refused to publish in their papers and even stepped down from the board of the Tiskovna zadruga, the primary publishing house of the Slovenian liberal public sphere.¹³⁸

As the historian Ervin Dolenc observed, the brand of leftist autonomism defended by Prepeluh, Lončar, Erjavec, and the other signatories (Prijatelj and Kidrič, but also Fran Albrecht and Milko Kos, among others) could never gain mass support, if only because that support was directed toward Korošec's Slovenian People's Party on the Catholic Right, which in the same period maintained a distinctly similar program.¹³⁹ Likewise, the autonomists who made up the core of the Slovenian republican Left predominantly represented a movement of intellectuals, not a mass movement with support to be found beyond Ljubljana. The "autonomist opposition," as historian Ivo Banac termed them,¹⁴⁰ was a deeply heterogeneous group. Starting from quite different starting points and on the basis of widely divergent modes of justification, they ultimately arrived at the same conclusion: the only way to secure the survival of the common political community was to guarantee the cultural autonomy of each constitutive national group in the country. With the inertia of a dynastic monarchy, centralist state bureaucracy, and a political class largely committed to preserving integral cultural Yugoslavism as a means to maintain their own material, social, and cultural positions, it was no wonder that there were certain structural obstacles blocking the wider reception of these ideas.

Around the time of Vošnjak's denunciation of the Autonomist Declaration on the floor of the Constituent Assembly, Prepeluh and Lončar, through the J. Blasnik Publishing House, began to print a new weekly paper: *Avtonomist*, which ran from 1921 to 1924. The paper carried

¹³⁸ Erjavec, *Avtonomistična izjava*, 29–30.

¹³⁹ Ervin Dolenc, *Med kulturo in politiko: kulturnopolitična razhajanja v Sloveniji med svetovnima vojnama* (Between Culture and Politics: Cultural-Political Divergences in Slovenia between the Two World Wars) (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2010).

¹⁴⁰ Banac, *The National Question*, 340–78.

on the spirit of the Autonomist Declaration and the critical bent of *Naši zapiski*, which tended to be more theoretical, and the polemical ethos of Alojzija Štebi's *Demokracija*, which had ceased publication in 1919. On the pages of *Avtonomist*, ideas of republicanism and federal restructuring of the multinational Yugoslav state became a mainstay, with most of the editorials written alternatively by Prepeluh and Lončar.¹⁴¹ While the influence of the paper was certainly limited at first to the circles of progressive Ljubljana intellectuals, it still had some longer-term ripple effects. The young Edvard Kardelj, for example, became a paper boy for *Avtonomist*. While in his later memoirs he recollected that he took the job first and foremost to help his parents support the family, he still acknowledged the sympathy he developed for the republicanism and federalism expressed by Prepeluh and Lončar on the pages of the paper.¹⁴² If anyone had even partially implemented the basic points of the *Avtonomist* program, particularly state federalism and the democratization of the economic sphere, it was Kardelj after 1945.

More immediately, however, was the crystallization of Lončar and Prepeluh's self-consciously republican position. The distinction between democratic character or democratic spirit and democratic institutions became a defining feature of the republican Left's conceptualization of democracy. Democracy was to be both a tool of decision-making as well as its condition and character. Such ideas were clear in texts which strode the line between conceptualization of the progressive past and a view toward the democratic future. An excellent

¹⁴¹ See, e.g., "Po tretji obletnici" (On the Third Anniversary), *Avtonomist* 1, no. 35 (Dec. 5, 1921): 1–2; "Kaj hočemo?" (What Do We Want?), "Avtonomija in avtonomija" (Autonomy and Autonomy), and "Križa centralizma" (The Crisis of Centralism), *Avtonomist* 2, no. 27 (July 8, 1922): 1–2; "Več luči" (More Light), *Avtonomist* 3, no. 5 (February 3, 1923): 1; or "Stara avtonomija – nova avtonomija" (Old Autonomy, New Autonomy), *Avtonomist* 4, no. 11 (March 15, 1924): 1.

¹⁴² Edvard Kardelj, "Iz uspomena na revolucionarni rad" (From Recollections on Revolutionary Work), in *Problemi naše socijalističke izgradnje* (Problems of Our Socialist Construction), vol. 5 (Belgrade: Kultura, 1964), 297. Kardelj expressed the same memory earlier in an interview with *Mladost* (Youth), the organ of the National Youth of Yugoslavia (*Narodna omladina Jugoslavije*), the successor of the interwar Union of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije*): "Dosledni put revolucionara" (The Consistent Path of a Revolutionary), *Mladost: List Narodne Omladine Jugoslavije* 4, no. 131 (April 16, 1959): 2. Interestingly, the same interview was published twenty years later in Hungarian translation, on the occasion of Kardelj's death, in *Magyar Szó* (Hungarian Word, published in Novi Sad): Edvard Kardelj, "Gyermekéveim, ifjúkorom" (My Childhood, My Youth), *Magyar Szó* 36, no. 41 (Feb. 12, 1979): 10.

example which engaged in these problems already in the 1920s was the text *Why Are We Republicans?*, written by Albin Prepeluh and Dragotin Lončar in the context of the creation of the Slovenian Republican Party of Peasants and Workers, though this text predates the party by six months or so. In the text, Prepeluh and Lončar attempted to trace their own political program back along a lineage of democratic thought with its roots in the ancient Hellenic notion of *demokratia*.¹⁴³ In the text, Slovenians are portrayed as originally a democratic people, with the medieval ritual of enthronement of their princes on the *Gosposvetsko* Plain (Zollfeld in today's Carinthia, Austria) as the key representation of this fact. The ceremony hinged on the act of a free peasant delegating power to the next prince; in the interpretation of Prepeluh and Lončar, this meant a delegation of popular sovereignty, and so democracy as a particularly Slovenian trait. More recently, Peter Štih has shown that this ritual of enthronement was falsely transfigured into a Slovenian national myth when in fact it had only regional resonance in what became modern Carinthia. Furthermore, the ritual had no democratic characteristics in any modern sense, owing to the fact that no such system of governance existed during the Middle Ages in the eastern Alps, and so was merely a symbolic ritual which rather reinforced lines of feudal lordship.¹⁴⁴ Although Prepeluh and Lončar's modernist interpretation was predicated on the democratic meaning of the ritual—a sort of backward projection—the larger point was to develop a contrast with the eventual loss of Slovenian autonomy and the intervening seven centuries of German-dominated feudal structures. It was only with the World War and the circulation of twin conceptions of national self-determination by Lenin and Wilson—Prepeluh

¹⁴³ Slovenski republikanci [Albin Prepeluh and Dragotin Lončar], *Mala politična šola za slovenske kmete in delavce* (Small Political Lessons for Slovenian Peasants and Workers), vol. 1, *Zakaj smo republikanci?* (Why Are We Republicans?) (Ljubljana: Avtonomist–J. Blasnik, 1924). An English translation of excerpts from the text, with a biographical and contextual introduction, can be found in Cody James Inglis, “Albin Prepeluh: Why Are We Republicans?,” in *Political Transformations in the Interwar Period: The Case of Slovenian Political Thought*, ed. Isidora Grubački and Marko Zajc (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2026), 91–104.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Štih, “On the Modern (Mis)Understanding of Old History in the Case of the Enthronement of the Carinthian Dukes,” in *The Middle Ages between the Eastern Alps and the Northern Adriatic: Select Papers on Slovene Historiography and Medieval History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 56–70.

and Lončar cited Wilson in particular—that the Slovenian political nation became a self-conscious subject of popular sovereignty and so democratic statehood.¹⁴⁵

Here, there is a repetition of the political temporality of the national past that Lončar had sketched: the loss of democratic “old rights” (*stara prava*) tied to the pre-feudal free peasantry, the foreign imposition of feudalism by German lords (that is, the Habsburgs), and the slow reintegration of democratic consciousness into the cultural nation from the Enlightenment onward, particularly picking up steam through Romanticism. By 1848, the program of a United Slovenia began to give political tones to the program of cultural integration of all (imagined) Slovenes, which only resulted in full political nationhood in 1918. However, by the mid-1920s, this appeared increasingly unstable, and the promise of democracy quite tenuous. Thus the radical denial of this precarious position for the political community was to be found precisely in the preservation of Slovenian identity as an inherently democratic identity, in the republic as the proper form of state, in federalism as an aspect of securing the wider political community within Yugoslavia, and in humanity as the linking force which guaranteed the superordinate preservation of the wider Yugoslav political community.

An interesting albeit different conception of the political community came out of the same Socialist Youth milieu came with the profound postwar work of Alojzija Štebi. Beyond her texts in *Demokracija*, Štebi published *Democratism and the Community of Women* in 1918, shortly before Yugoslav unification.¹⁴⁶ There, she entered into the debates on women’s suffrage in terms of a feminism colored by her dual influence by the social democratic and civic radical intellectual circles in Ljubljana. Isidora Grubački identified the bases of what she termed Štebi’s civic feminism as “political rights for women, sexual difference and motherhood, opposition to

¹⁴⁵ Prepeluh and Lončar, *Zakaj smo republikanci*, 18–19.

¹⁴⁶ Alojzija Štebi, *Demokratizem in ženstvo* (Democratism and the Community of Women) (Ljubljana: Slovenska socialna matica, 1918).

charity, and the importance of women's social and public work for the state.”¹⁴⁷ This engaged conception of women's work distinguished Štebi's position from within the main feminist organization in the new Yugoslav state, the National Women's Alliance (*Narodni ženski savez* / *Narodna ženska zveza*, hereafter NŽS/NŽZ). That organization had been based mainly on charitable and philanthropic causes and was close to the ruling conservative circles in the country.¹⁴⁸ A key figure in the left wing of the group, Štebi's advocacy of universal and equal suffrage within the NŽS/NŽZ likewise further differentiated her views within the organization. Ultimately she led a group out of the NŽS/NŽZ to form the more radical Feminist Alliance (*Feministička alijansa*, FA) in 1923, following the editorial reorientation of the journal *Женски покрет* (The Women's Movement) toward this group already in 1922.¹⁴⁹ With the broadening of the organization, its name was changed once more to the Alliance of Women's Movements (*Alijansa ženskih pokreta*, AŽP) in 1926.¹⁵⁰ Soon after, in 1927, Štebi took over the editorship of *Женски покрет* with Serbian feminist, literary critic, and librarian Darinka Stojanović.¹⁵¹ The primary goal of these new organizations, self-consciously feminist, progressive, and modern, had been to “liberate women by acquiring political rights and by introducing reforms, both in terms of changing the laws, and in terms of changing social customs, all in order to achieve complete equality between men and women.”¹⁵² Organization around the problem of

¹⁴⁷ Isidora Grubački, “Political Transformations of Interwar Feminisms: The Case of Yugoslavia,” doctoral dissertation (Central European University, Vienna, Austria, 2023), 204.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 205; Isidora Grubački and Irena Selišnik, “The National Women's Alliance in Interwar Yugoslavia: Between Feminist Reform and Institutional Social Politics,” *Women's History Review* 32, no. 2 (2023): 242–60; and Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, “Yugoslav Women's Movement and ‘The Happiness to the World’,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 31, no. 4 (2020): 724–44.

¹⁴⁹ Isidora Grubački, “Međuratni liberalni feminizam: Narodni ženski savez i odnos humanitarnog i socijalnog pitanja u dvadesetim godinama 20. veka” (Interwar Liberal Feminism: The National Women's Alliance and Its Relation to the Humanitarian and Social Questions in the 1920s), in *Женски покрет (1920–1938): зборник радова* (*Ženski pokret (1920–1938): A Collection of Studies*), ed. Jelena Milinković and Žarka Svirčev (Belgrade: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2021), 25.

¹⁵⁰ Grubački and Selišnik, “The National Women's Alliance,” 246–47.

¹⁵¹ Jovanka Poljak and Olivera Ivanova, “Библиографија часописа Женски покрет” (A Bibliography of the Journal *Ženski pokret*), in *Женски покрет (1920–1938): Библиографија* (*Ženski pokret (1920–1938): A Bibliography*) (Belgrade: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2019), 32.

¹⁵² [Alojzija Štebi, Milena Atanacković, et al.,] “Правила Феминистичке алијанције у држави С.Х.С.” (Regulations of the Feminist Alliance in the State of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes), *Женски покрет* 4, no. 9–10 (1923): 455; my translation follows Grubački and Selišnik, “The National Women's Alliance,” 247.

suffrage aligned completely with the social democratic and civic radical streams which flowed into the broad language of leftist republican opposition.

As Branislav Gligorijević pointed out, already at the turn of 1918 and 1919, the question of women's suffrage became unavoidable, with political strategists in each of the main parties asking about what could be gained—or lost—in giving women the right to vote.¹⁵³ In part, the question turned over just how wide the political community could be. Jaša Prodanović made it clear in his statements in the Temporary National Representation that the Yugoslav Republican Party fully endorsed the equal and universal suffrage of men and women,¹⁵⁴ as did Etbin Kristan in the name of the social democratic contingent in the Constituent Assembly,¹⁵⁵ where both insisted that only full suffrage for women could complete their idea for a republican format for the state. Štebi herself likewise participated in the 1921 Assembly for Women's Suffrage, held conspicuously in Belgrade during the Constituent Assembly, as the delegate from Ljubljana.¹⁵⁶ Alongside her texts on the rights of women and social welfare through the 1920s, Štebi also had a hand in collecting voices in support of women's rights from beyond the Feminist Alliance's immediate membership.

Links were made to the republican Left beyond national lines. In 1926, Jaša Prodanović once more appeared on the pages of *Женски покрет* when he was invited to discuss the Yugoslav Republican Party's position on the woman's question. There, he asserted again his and the party's desire to achieve the full equality of men and women through active suffrage

¹⁵³ Gligorijević, *Parlament i političke stranke*, 68–69.

¹⁵⁴ Statement of Jaša Prodanović, June 12, 1920, in *Стенографске белешке Привременог народног представништва Краљевства Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца* (Stenographic Notes of the Temporary National Representation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes), vol. 4 (Zagreb: Zemaljska tiskara, 1921), 579; see also “Женско право гласа пред народним представништвом” (Women's Suffrage at the National Representation), *Женски покрет* 1, no. 4–5 (1920): 10–16.

¹⁵⁵ Statement of Etbin Kristan, April 14, 1921, in *Стенографске белешке Уставотворне скупштине* 1, no. 7 (Belgrade, 1921), 15.

¹⁵⁶ See “Велика скупштина за женско право гласа” (The Grand Assembly for Women's Suffrage), *Женски покрет* 2, no. 4 (1921): 124–27.

rights.¹⁵⁷ The plank was retained in the party's post-Vidovdan program,¹⁵⁸ and would be restated in the party's resolutions from 1927 too.¹⁵⁹ Though we must remark that women did not emerge as a separate category in the party's views on economic democracy, only that, through general, equal, direct, and secret suffrage, women would become fully equal and active citizens in social and economic life too. In Mihailo Ilić's remarks on the economic program of the Yugoslav Republican Party—based again on Charles Gide's cooperativism as a non-statist path to economic democracy—gender had no particular role in the new economic order the Serbian republicans envisioned, subsumed as it was within superordinate categories of 'worker', 'intellectual', and 'peasant'.¹⁶⁰

Štebi and her interlocutors within the FA, AŽP, and around *Женски покрет* rather specified women's economic role beyond active political rights to be gained. Štebi's textual production in particular remained quite active throughout the 1920s and '30s, though the longer studies in *Женски покрет* produced between 1921 and 1925 soon gave way to smaller one-page notes on a number of topics relating to the women's movement at home and abroad, local debates around feminism and social conditions in Yugoslavia, as well as some general political reflections and biographic sketches. Thus her work shifted from purely intellectual-scholarly to more predominantly organizational as the 1920s wore on.

Her longer texts from the first half of the 1920s demonstrate in greater detail the depth and richness of her civic feminist position. At its core lay the concept of the active citizen, closer in its character to the conceptions of republican citizenship desired by the women's

¹⁵⁷ Jaša M. Prodanović, "Републиканска странка и женско питање: предавање у Женском покрету 2. VI. 1926" (The Republican Party and the Woman's Question: A Lecture Held before *Ženski pokret*, June 2, 1926), *Женски покрет* 7, no. 6 (1926): 178–86.

¹⁵⁸ *Начела програм и статут Југословенске републиканске странке* (Principles of the Program and Statute of the Yugoslav Republican Party) (Belgrade: Štamparija „Југославија“ M. Nedeljkovića, 1924), 8.

¹⁵⁹ Ljubomir Stojanović et al., *За републику: рад годишњег конгреса Југословенске републиканске странке* (For a Republic: Report of the Annual Congress of the Yugoslav Republican Party) (Belgrade: Štamparija "Tucović", 1928). The congress was held December 25, 1927, in Jagodina.

¹⁶⁰ Mihailo Ilić, *Економско-социални програм Југословенске републиканске странке* (The Socio-Economic Program of the Yugoslav Republican Party) (Belgrade: Moderna štamparija "Vuk Karadžić", 1922).

movement in Austria-Hungary during the First World War, as observed by Birgitta Bader-Zaar.¹⁶¹ Its outlines, of course, had been partially conditioned by her formative intellectual experiences in the republican leftist milieu in Ljubljana, both civic radical (Masarykian) and social democratic, and organizationally by her wartime editorial work on *Ženski list* (The Women's Paper), the outlet of the social democratic women's organization in Carniola.¹⁶² For Štebi, the political and the ethical were intertwined, if not inseparable. True citizenship, in her reading, could only proceed according to the “harmonious coexistence of all”—a deeply ethical category—based not only on equal rights, but also equal duties applied to men and women alike.¹⁶³ This derived from two streams: international peace and international economic equality. Following the 1924 resolutions of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Štebi restated positively on the pages of *Женски покрет* that a permanent peace could only be secured through “the equality of both sexes, all races, and the equality of nations.” The specific duties of the feminist movement within the international peace movement were to agitate for “the political rights of women, the equality of men and women before the law, the free access of women to all professions previously forbidden to them, comprehensive protection of motherhood, the protection of children, etc.,” as well as “the self-determination of nations, a just peace, protection for national minorities, [and] complete disarmament.”¹⁶⁴ These conditions could only be met, however, with a matching scheme of economic democracy, founded on the bases of international organizations which linked humanity together in eliminating “the greatest social injustice,” namely, “the unlimited ownership of land by

¹⁶¹ Bader-Zaar, “Women's Citizenship and the First World War,” 277.

¹⁶² Marta Verginella, “Štebi, Alojzija (Lojzka) (1883–1956),” in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms. Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loutfi (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 530.

¹⁶³ Alojzija Štebi, “Država in dolžnosti” (The State and Duties), *Женски покрет* 5, no. 9 (Nov. 1924): 381–87, here 382 and 387.

¹⁶⁴ Alojzija Štebi, “K miru” (Toward Peace), *Женски покрет* 5, no. 7 (Sept. 1924): 279–83, here 279 and 281. Report continues in Alojzija Štebi, “K miru” (Toward Peace), *Женски покрет* 5, no. 8 (Oct. 1924): 309–13.

individuals, in uncontrolled production and consumption.”¹⁶⁵ Clearly, for Štebi, the political community quickly escaped the confines of the nation-state.

To that end, Štebi argued, feminists had to abandon their political neutrality and begin to agitate within political formations with clear internationalist and feminist programs. Active participation in the political community of the nation-state would naturally expand its boundaries to reach solutions to international problems. Such active political work would give women a common share not only in the election of representatives, officials, or in economic production, but also the more general “successes and failures of public work” alongside men.¹⁶⁶ “[P]articipation in political life is not the privilege of certain people,” she wrote, “but the duty of all citizens. Every citizen of a country, whether a woman or man, has a duty to take part in the most important branch of social activity,” that is, the public life of the political community.¹⁶⁷ Here in particular one may sense the stronger harmonic resonance between the leftist republican and feminist conceptions of citizenship and freedom.

Still, this conception had its practical limits within the conservative interwar Yugoslav state. With the failure of republican leftists to enact a full democratic reform of the state at the Constituent Assembly in 1921, women remained without the right to vote. The efforts of Štebi and the other members of the FA, then the AŽP, thus articulated these views of the political community within the context of their cultural work: the changing of attitudes, mentalities, and customs. This was certainly part and parcel of the wider retreat to culture broached by the leftist republican milieux in Hungary, Yugoslavia, and in exile. Time and again, the problem of the outlines of the Yugoslav political community and women’s place within it were mulled over by the feminists close to Štebi’s civic feminist position.

¹⁶⁵ Štebi, “Država in dolžnosti” (The State and Duties), *Женски покрет* 5, no. 9 (Nov. 1924): 386.

¹⁶⁶ Alojzija Štebi, “Za novi smer u feminističkom pokretu” (For a New Direction in the Feminist Movement), *Женски покрет* 6, no. 7 (Sept. 1925): 241–46, here 241.

¹⁶⁷ Alojzija Štebi, “Mišljenje javnosti i feminizam u Jugoslaviji” (Public Opinion and Feminism in Yugoslavia), *Женски покрет* 5, no. 9 (Nov. 1924): 376–79, translated into English with an introduction by Isidora Grubački in *Aspasia* 16 (2022): 103–109. Here I use Grubački’s translation in *Aspasia* 16 (2022): 108.

In the Hungarian context, feminist links with the male-dominated republican Left were much more fragile owing, on the one hand, to the fragmentation of the exiled Octobrist movement as well as the relative domination of what Judith Szapor called the “anti-emancipatory agenda” of the conservative women’s movement in counterrevolutionary Hungary.¹⁶⁸ After 1919, the Feminist Association (FE) remained at the core of the liberal (and civic radical) wing of the women’s movement; to their left stood the social democrats’ women’s organization. It was out of this latter structure that Anna Kéthly rose to the fore.

Elected first in 1922 out of the MSZDP list for Budapest’s first electoral district, Kéthly became the youngest MP (she was thirty-two) and the second woman delegate after the conservative Catholic Margit Schlachta, who had been elected in 1920. (Schlachta was forbidden by the Catholic Church from running in the 1922 elections,¹⁶⁹ leaving Kéthly as the only woman delegate in the Hungarian Parliament between 1922 and 1944.) While the elections of 1920 had been marred by the White Terror, constant police and gendarme supervision of the elections, and an increasingly hostile public sphere, women were still technically provided the vote in terms comparatively more open than what had been passed under Károlyi during the People’s Republic.¹⁷⁰ Both men and women over the age of twenty-four were allowed to vote in 1920, albeit with stricter literacy requirements for women. The share of the electorate rose to nearly 60% of the adult population.

Yet by 1922, a conservative, gendered suffrage order was restored on the initiative of István Bethlen and his broader program of “consolidation.” A new electoral law was introduced which limited the voting rights of men, raised the age of women voters to thirty, and instituted

¹⁶⁸ Judith Szapor, *Hungarian Women’s Activism in the Wake of the First World War: From Rights to Revanche* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1–14, here 4; cf. Judit Acsády, “Diverse Constructions: Feminist and Conservative Women’s Movements and their Contribution to the Reconstruction of Gender Relations in Hungary after the First World War, 1918–1923,” in *Aftermaths of War: Women’s Movements and Female Activists*, ed. Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 309–33.

¹⁶⁹ Szapor, *Hungarian Women’s Activism*, 113.

¹⁷⁰ Szapor, *Hungarian Women’s Activism*, 131–32.

the open vote everywhere in the country. Secret ballots were kept in Budapest, but only for only party list voting. Outside of the capital, in the rural cities with so-called municipal legislative rights (*törvényhatósági jogú városok*)—Baja, Debrecen, Győr, Hódmezővásárhely, Kecskemét, Komárom, Miskolc, Pécs, Sopron, Szeged and Székesfehérvár—one could only vote secretly for single candidates; party lists were discontinued.¹⁷¹ The open vote in the villages, however, was not the same as a ballot, for the voter had to declare vocally their chosen candidate in public, in front of the local electoral committee, with the vote then recorded next to the voter's name in the electoral "minutes."¹⁷² The electorate was reduced from 60% to 40% of the general population—thus structurally the parliamentary façade of the Horthy–Bethlen regime was a coerced minoritarian system. It was no wonder, then, that the marginalized FE joined ranks with the constrained social democrats, endorsing Anna Kéthly in the deeply problematic 1922 elections.¹⁷³

Alongside her articulate parliamentary speeches, Kéthly complemented her visibility in parliament with more reflective texts in *Szocializmus*, the theoretical organ of the social democrats refounded in 1922. There, she began to articulate a vision of the political community which, much like Štebi, was founded on the premise that democratic citizenship could only be realized with the full, active inclusion and participation of women. Yet here Kéthly's own social democratic tendencies prevailed, framing active citizenship not only within harmonious coexistence and common public work, as Štebi would have it, but rather the larger undertaking of working-class liberation.

¹⁷¹ See Ágnes Szabó, "A konszolidáció kezdete – 1922" (The Beginning of the Consolidation: 1922), in *Parlamenti választások Magyarországon 1920–1990* (Parliamentary Elections in Hungary, 1920–1990), ed. György Földes and László Hubai (Budapest: Napvilág, 1999), 85–104; and Zoltán Paksy, "Választások Bethlen módra – 1922" (Elections, Bethlen-Style: 1922), in *Parlamenti választások Magyarországon 1920–2010*, 3rd ed., ed. György Földes and László Hubai (Budapest: Napvilág, 2010), 83–109. Paksy's updated text replaced Szabó's in the third edition of the book.

¹⁷² Paksy, "Választások Bethlen módra," 93.

¹⁷³ Szapor, *Hungarian Women's Activism*, 143.

Through the 1920s, Kéthly argued for the incompleteness and inadequacy of representative democratic institutions in the country, past and present. In a lecture delivered at the 1926 summer school of the WILPF, published as “Peace Work in Parliament” in *Szocializmus*, she argued quite directly that “most parliaments were not born from universal, secret suffrage, and that from parliaments not only one class or another was completely absent, ... but an entire *sex* too.”¹⁷⁴ The primary pressure for true democratization, then, had come from women and from the working class both before 1914 and, sadly, afterward as well. The war had upset what appeared to be a progressive trajectory for the full realization of women’s emancipation in terms of active political rights too, Kéthly argued, though now alongside women’s emancipation the new auxiliary task was to bring forth a “pacifist majority and a pacifist governing party” in all countries.¹⁷⁵ Only in that way could full parliamentarism be realized hand-in-hand with the end of war itself. Yet this meant a long struggle “in the family, in the schools, and—if possible—in the churches too.”¹⁷⁶ Voting in occasional elections and passing legislation in parliament was not enough, for one had to work constantly beyond parliament in order to realize true democracy on pacifist bases.¹⁷⁷ In a way, this was a call to women in countries without universal and equal suffrage to continue to participate in active political life beyond the ballot box.

Further, in 1929, Kéthly more explicitly tied political and economic emancipation together in an article entitled “Women’s Day.”¹⁷⁸ Although published in the April edition of *Szocializmus*, Kéthly did not mark out March 8 in particular, but rather commemorated the resolutions of the 1910 International Socialist Women’s Conference in Copenhagen. Spring 1929, she argued, ought to be seen as the general ten-year anniversary of the realization of

¹⁷⁴ Anna Kéthly, “Békemunka a parlamentben” (Peace Work in Parliament), *Szocializmus* 16, no. 10 (Oct. 1926): 348.

¹⁷⁵ Kéthly, “Békemunka a parlamentben,” 349.

¹⁷⁶ Kéthly, “Békemunka a parlamentben,” 350.

¹⁷⁷ Kéthly, “Békemunka a parlamentben,” 353.

¹⁷⁸ Anna Kéthly, “A nők napja” (Women’s Day), *Szocializmus* 19, no. 4 (April 1929): 105–108.

women's active and passive suffrage in most European countries, the large goal of the 1910 Copenhagen Conference. Likewise, it was the fiftieth anniversary of August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* (1879), whose translation into Hungarian had its own memorialized history within the country's social democratic movement.¹⁷⁹

While the achievement of various forms of women's suffrage across much of Europe had been a success, Kéthly argued that it was incomplete without economic emancipation. Women had a "dual task" in such a situation: to work for the liberation of the working class in general, which she noted "is impossible without the equality of the sexes," and to work toward "recognizing, clarifying, and resolving" women's "physical constitution, motherhood, and role in the family" and its concomitant issues. Implicitly, what we may now call the burdens of care work and emotional labor within the family, meaning also the attention given to children's development both physical and mental.¹⁸⁰ Socialism, Kéthly argued, could resolve the pressures on women through their economic and political emancipation as well as guarantee their equality with men. The previous year, for example, in a report on the Third International Women's Conference within the Labour and Socialist International, Kéthly had argued that it was only socialism which could achieve equality, for only socialism could resolve the pressures and problems related to motherhood, childcare, and peace by uprooting capitalism completely.¹⁸¹

While Kéthly had declared in 1922 that "we don't need a special women's policy,"¹⁸² she did insist on differences in men's and women's capacity for certain kinds of work,

¹⁷⁹ The book—*Die Frau und der Sozialismus*—was first translated into Hungarian as *A nő és a szocializmus* in 1895 as a collective translation work. The second edition was translated and published in 1907—with 1918 and 1919 reprints during Hungary's "republican moment"—by the social democratic journalist Béla Somogyi. Somogyi, as known, would be murdered in Budapest in February 1920 by Horthyist militias during the White Terror. The next, third edition, from 1928 kept Somogyi's translation, but was updated according to the new 1922 German edition by Soma Braun and given an introduction by Kéthly herself. The next and most recent edition in Hungarian, in a new translation by Vera Nyilas, would be published in 1957 and reprinted in 1976.

¹⁸⁰ Kéthly, "A nők napja," 105–106.

¹⁸¹ Anna Kéthly, "A nők a Szocialista Munkás-Internacionáléban" (Women in the Labour and Socialist International), *Szocializmus* 18, no. 9 (Sept. 1928): 326–31.

¹⁸² As quoted in Jean-Pierre Liotard-Vogt, "'The Most Important Thing Is That a New Society Can Come Into Being': Anna Kéthly (1889–1976), a Stubborn and Stalwart Fighter in the Struggle for Democratic Socialism, Women's Rights, and Trade Union Rights," in *Through the Prism of Gender and Work: Women's Labour Struggles*

demanding gender- or sex-specific labor protections. In part, this had to do with Kéthly's essentialization of women's roles as mothers alongside their abilities as workers. Working conditions which were not conducive to pregnancy and child-rearing, for example, ought to be tightly controlled for women employees. In the current situation they were not, and so "today child laborers are the most exploited pariahs of production, while women are thrice over slaves to production."¹⁸³ Here, Kéthly used a deeply republican—neo-Roman even—language to delineate between the members of the political community and the "pariahs" and "slaves," those beyond the political community or unfree in relation to it precisely because of their dependent status to the relations of production.

There is something also quite telling about the dates of these articulations, between 1926 and 1929. What about the period from 1922 to 1925? There is no doubt that Kéthly certainly spoke on these topics, but the force and vigor and precision of her arguments were not honed until later. In a way, it was as if she and the other social democratic representatives were fighting with one hand tied behind their backs. In fact, they were: to further curb the influence of the Left, István Bethlen had struck a compromising deal with the MSZDP leadership to allow the party to participate in the 1922 elections. The terms of the so-called Bethlen–Peyer Pact, signed in December 1921, forced the social democrats to organize politically in urban centers only, giving up their strategy among agrarian laborers in the countryside. This explains in part Kéthly's seemingly "orthodox" focus on the urban working class, and above all working women, in the workshops and factories of Budapest. Further, in exchange for amnesty for those who participated in the Aster Revolution, the People's Republic, and the Republic of Councils—as well as the end of censorship over the social democratic press—the MSZDP agreed to renounce participation in "active propaganda" against Hungary at home and abroad.

in *Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond, 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Selin Çatagay et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 485–511, here 495.

¹⁸³ Statement of Anna Kéthly, Session 90 of November 17, 1927, in *Képviselőház naplója*, vol. 6 (1927), 398. Partially quoted in Liotard-Vogt, "Anna Kéthly," 496, from where I found the reference.

Thus Kéthly and company rarely denounced Hungary as such in this period, but rather superordinate structures like capitalism. The party likewise had to “cooperate with the civic (*polgári*) classes [the bourgeoisie and gentry] in the economic field.” In public political life, the party was required to “renounce political strikes, break with the liberal bloc, refrain from supporting civic [radical] demagoguery and Octobrist elements,” and, as the government’s loyal opposition, could not “engage in factional demagoguery, nor engage in republican propaganda.”¹⁸⁴ Thus they used a republican *language* of freedom from domination rather than explicit use of the concept ‘republic’ as a particular state form. Here, they picked up on the older, even early modern semantic layers within republican thought—perhaps unknowingly—namely the preservation of the autonomy of the individual, the guarantee of the common good, and the struggle against the dissolution of the political community, here understood in Kéthly’s (and Štebi’s) terms as the active inclusion and participation of women as full political and economic subjects equal to men.

A fascinating element in these previous vignettes was the international linkages, like both Štebi and Kéthly’s ties to the WIPLF and the Hungarian social democrats’ close links to the Labour and Socialist International. Less institutional were the Hungarian Octobrists’ personal connections to the Italian antifascist group *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Liberty,

¹⁸⁴ “Dr. Bencs Zoltán miniszteri titkár összefoglaló jelentése a Bethlen kormány és a jobboldali szociáldemokrata vezetők tárgyalásairól” (The Summary Report of State Secretary Dr. Zoltán Bencs on the Negotiations between the Bethlen Government and the Right-Wing Social Democratic Leaders), document 62 in *Dokumentumok a magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom történetéből*, vol. 1, 1919–1929, ed. Mrs. Mátyás Imre, Magda S. Mándi, and Ágnes Szabó (Budapest: Kossuth, 1964), 152. The full text was published by László Réti as an annex to his *A Bethlen–Peyer-paktum* (The Bethlen–Peyer Pact) (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1951). The signatories were, from the government’s side, István Bethlen, Kunó Klebelsberg, Pál Tomcsányi, Lajos Hegyeshalmy, and Nándor Bernolák. From the social democrats: Károly Peyer, István Farkas, and Ferenc Miakits. State Secretary Zoltán Bencs took the stenographic notes. In 1927, Bencs wrote a critical overview of the Aster Revolution which closely followed the official Christian nationalist line: Gyula Nyíry [Zoltán Bencs], *Az októberi forradalom demokráciája* (1918–19) [The Democracy of the October Revolution, 1918–1919] (Budapest: Hornyánszky, 1927). The responses from the *Világosság* Group around Kunfi was damning, beginning a full investigation of the MSZDP by the Labour and Socialist International which included Otto Bauer and Karl Kautsky on the investigative committee. See International Institute of Social History Archives (Amsterdam), ARCH00712 Karl Kautsky Papers, Folder G-14: “Das ungarische Schiedsgericht, 1925” (The Arbitration Court for Hungary, 1925), 24 f. The final report of the SAI Committee was published in “Internationale Kommission für Ungarn,” in *Zweiter Kongreß der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale*, 109–12.

GL) and their leaders, Carlo and Nello Rosselli, in exile in Paris. These links, hinted at above in Jászi's 1934 discussion of the history of socialism for the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, provided a sort of comparative backdrop to discern the varied responses to authoritarian projects, the exile experience, and the precarity of the political community as seen in republican eyes.

For the Hungarian Octobrists—Jászi in the United States, Imre Csécsy in Hungary, and Béla Menczer in France—as well as Carlo and Nello Rosselli, now in Paris after escaping from prison in Italy, the crisis of fascism in Europe was no longer only a narrowly political or economic problem but now also a broadly human-existential question. More specifically, both groups asked how political communities could preserve themselves in an age of mass mobilization and ideological extremism. Both employed republican political languages filtered through a non-Marxian conception of socialism. As József Takáts has shown, both Jászi and Carlo Rosselli arrived at strikingly similar conclusions in their respective works on liberal socialism, each written initially without knowledge of the other's efforts.¹⁸⁵ Both sought to articulate a non-authoritarian alternative to both capitalism and communism, one rooted in the democratization of parliamentary institutions, of society, and of the economy as well.

Carlo Rosselli's *Liberal Socialism*—completed in prison and published for the first time in French translation in 1930¹⁸⁶—emerged from his reflection on the early defeat of Italian socialism at the hands of fascism after the World War. For Rosselli, the socialist movement needed to become liberalism's heir, the bearer of a dynamic idea of freedom embedded within a radically democratic process which went beyond parliamentary politics.¹⁸⁷ Popular sovereignty, representation, minority rights, and the rejection of force constituted what Rosselli

¹⁸⁵ Takáts, "Párhuzamos eszmerajzok: Jászi Oszkár és Carlo Rosselli," in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 95.

¹⁸⁶ Carlo Rosselli, *Socialisme liberal*, trans. Ștefan Priacel (Paris: Valois, 1930); translated into English as Carlo Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism*, ed. Nadia Urbinati, trans. William McCuiag (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁸⁷ Marco Bresciani, *Learning from the Enemy: An Intellectual History of Antifascism in Interwar Europe* (London: Verso, 2024), 53–61; cf. Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism*, 86–87.

called a minimum “pact of civility” for a new Italian state, a republic no less.¹⁸⁸ In his view, “liberty can never be won through tyranny or dictatorship, or even through being granted from above. Liberty is a conquest, a self-conquest, which is preserved only through the continual exercise of one’s faculties and individual autonomies.”¹⁸⁹ This identification of a liberal-democratic method with the practice of self-government placed Rosselli’s thought squarely within the republican tradition, concerned above all with the preservation of civic liberty against domination.

With Rosselli, as Marco Bresciani argues, GL’s members were willing to take seriously the fascist solutions that set out to establish new political, social, and economic systems in the face of the general crisis afflicting Europe.¹⁹⁰ Yet rather than mimicking them, or offering a conventional “third way” between liberalism and socialism, GL sought ultimately to excavate what Rosselli identified as the “the progressive actualization of the idea of liberty and justice” at the core of the socialist tradition.¹⁹¹ This involved not merely the formal political freedoms associated with bourgeois liberalism—which “attempts to halt the historical process at its present stage, to perpetuate its own commanding position, to transform into a privilege what was once a right deriving from its undeniable pioneering work”¹⁹²—but also the real freedoms that came with economic emancipation and social equality.

Jászi’s own articulation of liberal socialism was developed in his “Anti-Marx,” a manuscript written in his Viennese exile around 1920–21.¹⁹³ The text shared many of Rosselli’s

¹⁸⁸ Bresciani, *Learning from the Enemy*, 60; Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism*, 94.

¹⁸⁹ Takáts, “Párhuzamos eszmerajzok,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 107; Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism*, 94.

¹⁹⁰ Bresciani, *Learning from the Enemy*, 34–42.

¹⁹¹ Takáts, “Párhuzamos eszmerajzok,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 101; Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism*, 78.

¹⁹² Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism*, 87.

¹⁹³ Never published in Jászi’s lifetime, but published twice in the 1980s under two different names abroad and “at home”: Oszkár Jászi, *Marxizmus, vagy liberális szocializmus* (Marxism or Liberal Socialism), ed. Péter Kende (Paris: Magyar Füzetek, 1983); and Oszkár Jászi, *A kommunizmus kilátástalansága és a szocializmus reformációja* (The Uncertainty of Communism and the Reformation of Socialism), ed. János Gyurgyák and Szilárd Kövér (Budapest: Századvég–Hét Torony, 1989). The name “Anti-Marx” for the unpublished manuscript can be found in Jászi’s notebooks and correspondence from the 1920s. See Takáts, “A bécsi főmű: Marxizmus, vagy liberális szocializmus” (The Vienna Magnum Opus: Marxism or Liberal Socialism), in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 23–58.

concerns, yet differed in important respects. Both thinkers rejected Marxism's determinism and its subordination of freedom to historical necessity. Both insisted that the desired socialist transformation of society had to be understood as a moral reform or moral revolution—what time and again appeared as the necessity of “democratic spirit” over institutions merely labelled “democratic.” Both were European federalists and so advocates of supranational political integration.¹⁹⁴ Yet where Rosselli's liberal socialism was revolutionary in character, calling explicitly for an antifascist insurrection, Jászi remained essentially reformist in his thought. Moreover, Jászi wrote as a partial outsider to the socialist movement, though he had plenty of personal links with Hungarian, Austrian, and British social democrats of all stripes, while Rosselli had positioned himself as a voice of generational renewal within the Italian socialist movement.

The link between the two thinkers was Béla Menczer. Imprisoned by the Horthyist Hungarian state in 1922 for circulating leaflets against the White Terror alongside the young Gyula Illyés, he emigrated after nearly a year in prison.¹⁹⁵ Menczer briefly lived in Vienna before departing for Paris, then circulating in Berlin before returning to Paris after the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party to power. While later becoming a staunch Catholic conservative in the course of the 1940s, in the 1930s he was still close to the Hungarian civic radical tradition, or, as József Takáts observed, kept “very personal views, close to the individualist revolutionary tradition (Proudhon in France, Gustav Landauer in Germany), and with a directly anti-Marxist and anti-materialist philosophical outlook.”¹⁹⁶ After returning to Paris in 1933, Menczer became involved with GL, met Rosselli personally for the first time, and began to contribute articles to their *Quaderni di Giustizia e Libertà* in which he offered an analysis of Nazism that departed from conventional Marxist interpretations by emphasizing psychological and

¹⁹⁴ Takáts, “Párhuzamos eszmerajzok,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 108.

¹⁹⁵ “Menczer Béla,” in *Magyar életrajzi lexikon (1978–1991)*, ed. Ágnes Kenyeres (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994), 611–12.

¹⁹⁶ Takáts, “A cikkíró mint tanár és történész,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 117.

religious-cultural factors.¹⁹⁷ In 1934, Menczer even drafted a memorandum to Rosselli which envisioned creating “a new International around Giustizia e Libertà,” recognizing it as “the only truly active antifascist organization” at that time.¹⁹⁸ While later critical of the antifascism of the exile groups in Paris, as depicted in his autobiography written already in a right-wing mindset in the 1970s, he still retained some limited sympathy for Rosselli’s work in particular.¹⁹⁹

Imre Csécsy, who co-edited *Századunk* in Budapest during the 1930s, occupied a position somewhat further from the revolutionary liberal socialism of GL, though through Menczer still received information about the group.²⁰⁰ Throughout the mid-1930s, Csécsy maintained correspondence with Menczer and showed keen interest in GL’s activities as well as in Gaetano Salvemini’s work—who had a great influence on the Rosselli brothers and the GL’s intellectual circle—though Salvemini in the meantime had made his way to Harvard University.²⁰¹ After the Rosselli brothers’ assassination in June 1937, Csécsy did not hesitate to publish Menczer’s obituary for Carlo and Nello in *Századunk*, in a way mediating GL’s intellectual legacy to the remnants of the Hungarian civic radicals in Hungary and abroad.²⁰²

Importantly, one can find a great deal of resonance between the ideas of the Hungarian republican Left, as explored throughout this dissertation, and the intellectuals around GL. Thinkers like Leone Ginzburg and Emilio Lussu, for example, developed federalist proposals that connected the critique of fascism to a broader reconfiguration of state sovereignty. Ginzburg embraced Proudhonian rather than Marxian ideas, advocating a bottom-up transformation of the state through local and regional councils as “the only liberal form of our

¹⁹⁷ Takáts, “A cikkíró mint tanár és történész,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 122.

¹⁹⁸ Takáts, “A cikkíró mint tanár és történész,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 127–128.

¹⁹⁹ Béla Menczer, *Bread Far from My Cradle*, ed. Zoltán Balázs (Budapest: Ludovika University Press, 2023), 119. “Carlo Rosselli tried to see further and lay deeper foundations for a European intellectual revolutionary revival. He did not succeed.”

²⁰⁰ Takáts, “Az elmaradt találkozás,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 84.

²⁰¹ Takáts, “Három magyar nekrológ,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 132–33.

²⁰² Takáts, “Három magyar nekrológ,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 134. Takáts reproduces the full text of the draft obituaries of Carlo and Nello Rosselli on the following pages, along with Csécsy’s editorial correspondence: *ibid.*, 135–56. The published version is: Béla Menczer, “A Rosselli-testvérek halálára” (On the Death of the Rosselli Brothers), *Századunk* 12, no. 6–7 (Aug.–Sept. 1937): 247–49.

time, the formulation and presidium of concrete liberties.”²⁰³ (One hears an echo from the works of Prepeluh and Lončar, Jászi and Csécsy.) Lussu, drawing on his Sardinian regionalism, argued that the crisis of modern democracy resulted from unchecked state centralism, which had suppressed spontaneous popular initiatives and culminated in fascism—a long-term legacy of the centralism and monarchism of the main line of the Risorgimento.²⁰⁴ The GL’s vision of the overthrow of fascism in Italy would result therefore in a federal republic based on the preservation of local autonomy and the principle of self-government.²⁰⁵ This was not so foreign to the visions of the Hungarian and Yugoslav republican Lefts on what ought to come after the Horthy and Karađorđević regimes, respectively. Seen from an outside perspective, then, the variety of republican thought cultivated by the non-Marxist Left in the Hungarian and Yugoslav contexts was part of a much wider network of thinkers aiming for a quite radical transformation of post-imperial Europe.

For Jászi, Rosselli, and their interlocutors, the failures of both bourgeois liberalism and Marxist socialism, particularly in its Bolshevik form, had opened the door to fascism. The task now, with the rise of fascism beyond Italy, was to construct a new political synthesis that would retain liberalism’s commitment to individual freedom and constitutional government while embracing socialism’s demand for economic democracy and social justice. As József Takáts observed, both Jászi and Rosselli believed in returning socialism to its original principles before its subordination to Marxist dogma.²⁰⁶ Rosselli himself insisted that the national myth, too, must be absorbed into this new socialism, for “only the organic synthesis of various national communities will lead one day to the federation of nations.”²⁰⁷ All shared the fundamental republican concern with the precarity of free political communities in an age of ideological

²⁰³ Bresciani, *Learning from the Enemy*, 86.

²⁰⁴ Bresciani, *Learning from the Enemy*, 86.

²⁰⁵ Bresciani, *Learning from the Enemy*, 86–87.

²⁰⁶ Takáts, “Párhuzamos eszmerajzok,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 96.

²⁰⁷ Takáts, “Párhuzamos eszmerajzok,” in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 105.

extremism. In Menczer's 1937 obituary for Carlo Rosselli, he portrayed the assassinated leader as embodying the civic virtues of the Roman republican tradition, a Florentine citizen whose democracy was rooted in "the conscience and dignity of the citizen, the self-evident respect for the free citizen," explicitly citing Machiavelli's *Discorsi* as proof enough.²⁰⁸ In a way, Rosselli's murder was a symbol for just how precarious the Italian political community had become. It likewise stood as a warning for all others now that the spread of fascism appeared unstoppable.

3.3. *A Debate on Democracy*

An auxiliary discussion to the problem of the precarity of the political community lay the kaleidoscopic debate over democracy.²⁰⁹ This debate was omnipresent during the entire interwar period (preceding it and going beyond it too) but took on an entirely new level of urgency after the fallout of the Great Depression and the National Socialists' rise to power in Germany. For the republican Left in Hungary and Yugoslavia, the responses to this debate began to link together the leftist republican political temporality. Interpretations of the political community's temporalization in the past and the present—as a precarious, but potentially emancipatory construction—began to give way to a profound worry over whether the political community had a future. At times, as in the previous section, this concern was linked intimately to whether the cultural community and the political community were one and the same. Now, in a moment when fascism was triumphant in Italy and Germany and right-wing authoritarian

²⁰⁸ József Takáts, "Három magyar nekrológ," in *Jászi és a liberális szocializmus*, 138; Menczer, "A Rosselli-testvérek halálára," *Századunk* 12, no. 6–7 (Aug.–Sept. 1937): 248.

²⁰⁹ See an overview in Trencsényi, "Crisis of Democracy," in *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics*, 167–93.

politics were on the rise across East Central Europe, the presumption that an emancipatory political community could be built out of a pre-existent cultural community began to be shaken.

In Hungary, where the Gömbös regime was attempting a corporatist reform of state and society, the limited, formalist parliamentary democracy built by the preceding Bethlen regime appeared as inadequate as ever. While the ruling Party of National Unity (*Nemzeti Egység Pártja*) remained dominant in parliament, the rise of Gömbös marked the concomitant rise of a mixed corporatist and fascist wing within the party.²¹⁰ It was unclear whether the rise of fascism in the ranks of parliament was linked to an immediate growth in the number of fascist true believers among the general population. In large part, this had to do with the fact that franchise was limited, popular demonstrations of opposition were curtailed by all possible means, and parliamentary outcomes were largely detached from popular opinion because of the Bethlen-era restrictions in the electoral system. As Róbert Braun reflected in one text oriented toward an international audience, Hungary's parliamentary system was "now again, although in lesser degree, the assembly of 'gentlemen' which it was before the war."²¹¹ Even with this traditionalist bulwark within the institutions of political representation and legislation, it was the case that smaller formations of fascist groups continued to grow outside of the ranks of the Party of National Unity in the years after Gömbös's rise to the office of Prime Minister.²¹²

²¹⁰ József Vonyó, "Gömbös Gyula jobboldali radikalizmusa" (The Right-Wing Radicalism of Gyula Gömbös), and Rudolf Paksa, "Szélsőjobboldali mozgalmak az 1930-as években" (Extreme Right-Wing Movements in the 1930s), in *A magyar jobboldali hagyomány*, 243–74 and 275–304, respectively; also, Miklós Lackó, "A magyar politikai-ideológiai irányzatok átalakulása az 1930-as években" (The Transformation of Hungarian Politico-Ideological Streams in the 1930s), in *Válságok – választások*, 316–63, particularly 320–47 on the variations on the political Right. In English, see the overview in Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness*, 247–312.

²¹¹ Róbert Braun, "Legislative Assemblies; Hungary," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 9, 390.

²¹² As in the case of the various national-socialist parties of the period, all modelled in one way or another on the Nazi Party in Germany. See Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary*, 137–63; Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1970), 121–74; Miklós Lackó, "A magyarországi nyilas mozgalom történetéhez" (A Contribution to the History of the Arrow Cross Movement in Hungary), *Századok*, no. 1 (1963): 783–809; Miklós Lackó, *Nyilasok, nemzetiszocialisták 1935–1944* (Arrow Cross Men, National Socialists, 1935–1944) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1966); Kálmán Szakács, *Kaszáskeresztesek* (Scythe-Cross Men) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1963). Lackó's book was translated into English: Miklós Lackó, *Arrow-cross Men, National Socialists, 1935–1944* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969).

The consolidation of fascist tendencies at the heights of the interwar Hungarian state—for the Hungarian republican Left had perceived what would come to be called fascism already in the White Terror—pushed the republican Left toward deeper introspection on the question of democracy. In a series of debate articles published in their theoretical organ *Századunk*, the Hungarian civic radicals tried to probe the problems and promises of contemporaneous democratic thought and action. The first article was offered up by Rusztem Vámbéry under the title “The Limits of Freedom.”²¹³ There, he insisted on a distinction between individual and social or political freedom. Rather than individual freedom merely as the absence of all possible constraint (per Schopenhauer), Vámbéry sided with the Spinozist positive conception of freedom, namely that the superiority of social and political freedom lay in its “positive right” to restrict the mental and physical freedom of an individual “only to that extent determined by the will of the majority in the interests of the community.”²¹⁴ In other words, an individual’s freedom had to be limited to exist in society, but could not be limited arbitrarily. This conception of the limits of freedom, based on community interest, filtered then into a broader conception of the relation between social and economic freedom: social domination and economic exploitation being two sides of the same coin. By contrast, the necessity of guaranteeing not only individual freedoms but also social and political freedoms in a collective sense could act as a counterweight to the imposition of social domination and economic exploitation. By and large, Vámbéry was arguing for a version of liberty which went beyond the classical liberal (and capitalist) notion of non-intervention, an idea which resonated greatly with the republican idea of non-domination and the “positive” Spinozist conception of freedom as the power to realize oneself within a political community.²¹⁵ Importantly, too, Vámbéry

²¹³ Rusztem Vámbéry, “A szabadság határai” (The Limits of Freedom), *Századunk* 9, no. 7 (1934): 265–73.

²¹⁴ Vámbéry, “A szabadság határai,” 265.

²¹⁵ On freedom as non-domination, or the “neo-Roman” (republican) theory generally, see the main works: Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Pettit, “Keeping Republican Freedom Simple: On a Difference with Quentin Skinner,” *Political Theory* 30, no. 3 (2002): 339–56; Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Skinner,

insisted that this ought to be contrasted with the supposed liberation from economic forces promised in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union. Relinquishing collective social and political freedom did not guarantee safeguards against economic deprivation, Vámbéry argued.²¹⁶ Over the long run, it may be the case that collectivist economic programs provide humanity as a whole with basic material guarantees—but that was up to history. Still, Vámbéry observed, any deepening of collectivist tendencies in the economic field must be matched by ever-expanded spheres of social and political freedom, above all the necessary freedoms of conscience and opinion, whether held privately or expressed publicly. The circulation of criticism in a collectivist society was a necessary corrective against potential abuses of centralized power. This had not been obtained either in Germany, Italy, or the Soviet Union.

The question of the distribution of power loomed large in Imre Csécsy's article "Has Democracy Failed?"²¹⁷ Perhaps one of Csécsy's best-known texts, the article argues that while the institutions of democracy have begun to fail across Europe, this was caused not by 'democracy' itself in the abstract, but by the invalidation of necessary democratic principles through various forms of intellectual dilution and compromise with authoritarian tendencies. Originally, the article had been a lecture given at a meeting of the Hungarian Cobden Alliance (*Magyar Cobden Szövetség*) in January 1935, then published in shorter form in the February edition of *Cobden*, the Alliance's journal.²¹⁸ This latter version, more closely aligned with the spoken version of the lecture, was prefaced with an abridged introductory remark by Ödön

"Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power," in *Republicanism and Political Theory*, eds. Cecile Laborde and John Maynor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 83–101. Spinoza features marginally in Pettit's or Skinner's basic accounts of republican freedom, in large part because Spinoza maintained a "positive" conception of freedom as active integration into a political community beyond the neo-Roman "negative" minimum of non-domination which Pettit and Skinner attempted to trace. The corrective was offered by Raia Prokhovnik: see particularly "Liberty and Sovereignty in the Political Works," chapter 7 in her *Spinoza and Republicanism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 200–36.

²¹⁶ Vámbéry, "A szabadság határai," 270, 273.

²¹⁷ Imre Csécsy, "Megbukott-e a demokrácia?" (Has Democracy Failed?), *Századunk* 10, no. 1 (1935): 1–20.

²¹⁸ Imre Csécsy, "Megbukott-e a demokrácia?" (Has Democracy Failed?), *Cobden: Gazdasági és társadalmi folyóirat* 2, no. 2 (Feb. 1935): 85–87. The Hungarian Cobden Alliance was named after Richard Cobden (1804–1865), the British pacifist and advocate of free trade. Apparently Csécsy's talk was particularly well-attended, as reported in *Magyar Hírlap* (The Hungarian Paper) 45, no. 10 (Jan. 12, 1935): 7.

Halasi-Fischer, presiding over the event. The membership of the Cobden Alliance, Halasi-Fischer observed, could only answer “no” to the question posed by Csécsy’s lecture title, for “no matter what blows and attacks my befall us [democrats], we need an idea that builds the organization of human society on the principles of human dignity and self-determination (*önrendelkezés*),” further arguing that “these ideals are too strong for any historical upheaval to destroy their truth.”²¹⁹ The World War proved that democratic institutions were only democratic in name, Csécsy argued, for the “spirit” of democracy had not entirely won over the organizations of the progressive bourgeoisie or the working class. Now, with the consolidation of fascism in Italy and the rise of the National Socialists in Germany, the democratic “reconstruction” of Europe was under threat. In both cases the defection from democratic ideals was not a deficiency of those ideas themselves, but rather humanity’s ability to live up to them.

An interesting link in this problem area is the question of economic liberalism, which Csécsy distinguished as a sort of middle path or “third way” between collectivism and monopolism. Both, Csécsy warned, are outcomes of the limitation of political and social freedom of the political community; only economic liberalism in a strict sense can be compatible with democracy in the true sense. Economic choices have to be left to the realm of individual choice, but this does not mean a descent into a purely *laissez-faire* scheme. Rather, as Csécsy noted, democratic decision-making has to be allowed within the realm of economic production on the basis that, “since democracy aims to minimize both resistance to laws and the force required to enforce them, permitting the greatest possible freedom seems most practical in all spheres, including in the economy.”²²⁰ This is not the freedom of managers and capitalists to dispose of the labor of others as they please, but rather that the “equal freedom” idealized in the liberal political sphere ought to be retained within the economic sphere as well.

²¹⁹ Introduction to Csécsy, “Megbukott-e a demokrácia?” (Has Democracy Failed?), *Cobden: Gazdasági és társadalmi folyóirat* 2, no. 2 (Feb. 1935): 85.

²²⁰ Csécsy, “Megbukott-e a demokrácia?” (Has Democracy Failed?), *Századunk* 10, no. 1 (1935): 8.

All must have an equal say in the debate over the use of resources and labor in the production of goods.

Based on this admittedly heterodox definition of economic liberalism, Csécsy goes further to question whether the pre-war arrangements in the fields of politics and economics were either democratic or liberal. To both, he answers “no.” Under these labels, what in fact occurred was “the marginalization of the true majority of the country,” meaning the working class, the peasantry, and the progressive (working) intelligentsia.²²¹ The result was a certain dispossession of the democratic spirit from these classes during and after the war, with the working class at first turning toward revolutionary means, tempted by Bolshevism, then later toward fascism. The peasantry retreated into inward-looking conservatism verging on political and civic apathy. The progressive intelligentsia, along with the petty bourgeoisie, had in turn lost moral leadership precisely because of their complicity in the destructive and dispossessive political projects of the pre-war and wartime period. Now, two decades after the outbreak of the World War, the world had returned to a state of crisis, and the old democratic forms again—and much more quickly this time—proved inadequate precisely because they were based on a pre-war state of affairs which had been merely “restored” after 1918. Still, Csécsy observed, “even if we saw its [democracy’s] future as hopeless, we would still believe in its truth,” namely that the democratization of the political, social, and economic spheres, when conducted in accordance with the guarantee of basic human rights and civic freedoms, would ultimately mean the reduction of coercion and domination to an absolute minimum.²²²

In sum, Csécsy’s vision of a new democracy would not look like the old liberal democracy understood in its nineteenth-century sense. “In organizing the new democracy,” he wrote, “the working class will once more play the leading role alongside the intellectual elite. Stated plainly: the moral impotence of the bourgeoisie makes it unfit for leadership; the

²²¹ Ibid., 12–13.

²²² Ibid., 15.

peasantry can be shaken out of its intellectual quietism at most by its own interests. These two classes can only be ‘spectators’ of the new democracy; only democracy itself can educate them to one day, perhaps, become true democrats.”²²³ In the meantime, the destruction of dictatorships became the main task for the progressive democratic forces in society.

Oszkár Jászi’s contribution, entitled “An Old Debate in New Light,” responded to both Csécsy and Vámbéry directly, picking up on a problem that the preceding authors had implicitly raised but not developed in detail. Jászi’s question turned on whether nominally democratic states may resort to the use of force to secure their survival and continued existence. At first, Jászi brought this current discussion into dialogue with an older debate at the roots of modern civic radicalism in Hungary.²²⁴ In 1903, that debate had taken place in response to an article published by Bódog Somló on “The Theory of Social Development and Some of Its Practical Implications,”²²⁵ part of a regular series of public discussions held by the *Társadalomtudományi Társaság* before the World War. Among the participants were Rusztem Vámbéry, Laura (Pollacsek) Polányi, as well as Jászi and Somló.²²⁶ The common question then, as three decades later, ultimately concerned the status of freedom of thought and action: was it an absolute (natural) right, or could it be limited in the interest of social progress? Somló and Jászi had argued in 1903 that while most classical natural rights were historically contingent products of the bourgeoisie’s struggle against feudalism, freedom of thought rather represented a genuine element of human progress. Pikler, by contrast, had maintained that “freedom of thought should be restricted, curtailed or even suppressed by force if necessary in the interests of public happiness.”²²⁷ Laura Polányi had rather focused on the state’s capacity for violence

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Oszkár Jászi, “Régi vita új megvilágításban” (An Old Debate in New Light), *Századunk* 10, no. 3 (1935): 110–20.

²²⁵ Bódog Somló, “A társadalmi fejlődés elméletéről és néhány gyakorlati alkalmazásáról” (On the Theory of Social Development and Some of Its Practical Implications), *Huszadik Század* 4, no. 5 (1903): 397–409.

²²⁶ See summaries of the debate responses in *Huszadik Század* 4, no. 6 (1903): 465–71; on Laura Polányi, the sister of Karl (Károly) and Michael (Mihály) Polányi, see Judith Szapor, *The Hungarian Pocahontas: The Life and Times of Laura Polányi Stricker, 1882–1959* (New York: East European Monographs–Columbia University Press, 2005).

²²⁷ Jászi, “Régi vita,” 112.

in 1903, asking whether “a phase of development, a state, a circle of interests” should not make use of all of its resources and capacities—including violence or coercion—to secure its “self-preservation and self-defense.”²²⁸ On the one hand, this was a general problem for authoritarian and democratic states alike, for neither would be willing to simply “make concessions and disarm forces so that new forces in the opposite direction can develop more freely.”²²⁹ Yet democratic states now, in 1935, seemed to have made precisely that fateful concession.

On the question of one’s freedom of thought beyond action, Jászi reaffirmed his older position, rooting it more explicitly in evolutionary rather than static conception of natural law. He acknowledged that foundational values cannot be established by purely scientific means; that they are a matter of reason, or even faith on the part of the social individual. He enumerated a list of arguments in favor of freedom of thought from this basis: that thought is the dynamic factor in social development; that restricting thought impedes progress; that truth cannot be determined by majority vote or dictatorial decree; that every state tends toward an ideology that preserves its rule rather than toward truth; that the history of science shows that today’s mistakes or errors may become tomorrow’s truths; that as culture advances, the danger of false propaganda diminishes; and that every new truth begins as a minority conviction opposed by the majority.²³⁰

From this, Jászi engaged directly with Emil Lederer’s analysis of the failure of democracy given recently in lecture form at Jászi’s home institution, Oberlin College—a common theme shared with Csécsy’s intervention. Lederer, formerly of the universities at Heidelberg and Berlin and now in emigration from Nazi Germany at the New School for Social Research in New York City, had argued that the postimperial European democracies of Central Europe had failed because they could not distinguish between “abstract and concrete freedom,”

²²⁸ Laura Pollacsek’s (Polányi’s) intervention in *Huszadik Század* 4, no. 6 (1903): 467

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Jászi, “Régi vita,” 114–15.

which in practical terms meant that they extended freedom to movements opposed to the very ideational foundations of the new democracies.²³¹ Against Lederer's view that an excessive "freedom of propaganda" destroyed democracy in Germany and Austria, Jászi went further, arguing that even the most permissive freedom of propaganda would not have ruined these republics. At least, provided that they had achieved three fundamental conditions: a reliable army loyal to the republic and the suppression of all irregular armed forces; an administrative and educational apparatus committed to the new order; and rapid land reform sufficient to consolidate popular support beyond the city.²³² The failure had been structural and institutional, not attributable to an excess of so-called liberal tolerance or democratic idealism.

At this point, Jászi rounded back to the question of whether a democratic state could use force to preserve itself. In a footnote responding directly to Csécsy's concern on this question, Jászi wrote "Yes—force!" and so ostensibly brought back Laura Polányi's cautious point made in 1903.²³³ Coercion was a constitutive element of state power; if one wanted to have a democratic state, they would also have to have coercion, and so use it to defend themselves. Csécsy's interpretive error, Jászi argued, was to confuse liberal democracy with moral anarchism. One did not need to sacrifice democracy's institutions in order to save its idea.

Jászi based this on a qualitative distinction between democratic and dictatorial force. While the true democrat has an aversion to violence—even despises it as a crude and base instrument—they will and ought to use it if compelled, but in a minimal rather than maximal way. The maximal way, the fetishization of violence, was rather an attribute shared in common by the individuals and institutions of dictatorial rule, particularly in fascism with its even aesthetic preference for destruction. Tied to this distinction within the realm of violence, Jászi likewise introduced the difference between expressing opinions and inciting action, a point

²³¹ Ibid., 111.

²³² Ibid., 117.

²³³ Ibid., 117n8.

which linked the problem of the freedom of thought with the use of state violence and coercion to preserve itself. Freedom of thought may well encompass expressions of opinion in the press, verbally in assemblies, or visually in art—or even in the form of political propaganda, religious dogma, and even scientific and technological advancement. But the circle of the freedom of thought does not include the unlimited, unchecked *implementation* of these ideas, particularly those that descend into libel, falsification, and the undermining of the constitutional order in a democratic state. Rather, Jászi insisted—as did Vámbéry and Csécsy—that democratic decision-making has to be at the core of the state’s reactions to the external world. There can be no arbitrary rule by decree as a norm, and if arbitrary, even violent rule must be initiated by the state through a democratic decision and can only be directed at those who clearly step over the boundary from speech into action, and in particular that action which undermines the democratic state’s very being.²³⁴ We may also suggest the converse, which Jászi did not do here: in a dictatorial state, in a state where neither freedom of thought nor action exists, thoughts and actions which undermine the authoritarian state rather serve the democratic interest.

Of the various responses to these articles, let us pick out a final one for the Hungarian case, namely that of Aurél Kolnai, who in the intervening decade had converted to Catholicism but had not (yet) crossed into the realm of political conservatism. Kolnai’s “Democracy and Reality” represented the most forthright defense of what he himself termed the “realist” position.²³⁵ Kolnai explicitly endorsed “the possibility and legitimacy of democratic force and the restriction of rights,” rejecting all forms of “democratic suicide.”²³⁶ Kolnai’s diagnosis of the democratic crisis began with his identification of a rise in moral aestheticism in the postwar world. Within the “bourgeois”—conservative—camp, a desire for “open Bolshevism” increasingly made itself apparent as a vanguard implementing a pre-determined order on the

²³⁴ Ibid., 117–19.

²³⁵ Aurél Kolnai, “Demokrácia és valóság” (Democracy and Reality), *Századunk* 10, no. 7 (1935): 261–70.

²³⁶ Kolnai, “Demokrácia és valóság,” 261.

world. By contrast, the radical Left began to favor “the Italian dictatorship over the Yugoslav one, or the German over the Austrian,” likewise to understand “the Cheka and the Gestapo as ‘tragic necessities,’” yet increasingly “dismisses Masaryk with a wave of the hand in view of the Czechoslovak government’s nationalist machinations.”²³⁷ What Kolnai perceived was a twisting of the political poles, a syncretization of what was formerly understood as distinctly “reactionary” or “progressive” on the basis of a false moral imperative to generate a completely new order in the world which broke with political modernity as previously understood.

Against this position, Kolnai defended the inevitability of moral compromise in political life. He analyzed at length the Austrian context, where he had lived since fleeing ahead of the White Terror in 1919. While one might regret that political Catholicism in Austria did not ally with the Left to preserve a minimum of democracy in the fledgling republic, one cannot regret—from the democratic standpoint—the fact that the Dollfuß government deprived the Nazi movement of electoral agitation and suppressed it by force, regardless of the number of its supporters. In doing so, corporatist Austria wound up rendering significant service to democratic ideals, albeit inadvertently.²³⁸

Still, such a problem did raise the specter of popular support for anti-democratic positions, as seen in both the German and Austrian contexts. On this, Kolnai denied that a numerical majority possesses any inherent democratic legitimacy when it aims at abolishing the democratic process itself. “If the majority were to suspend the very game of forming majorities and minorities, this is merely antidemocratic force, no different than if ‘a lieutenant and six soldiers’ had done the same”—a side-eyed reference to the White Terror and Horthy’s installation as regent a decade and a half before.²³⁹ For Kolnai, democrats are under no logical or moral obligation to surrender power to movements that would abolish democratic

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid., 269.

²³⁹ Ibid., 265.

institutions; this was in fact the great mistake and tragedy of the Aster Revolution in Hungary. Instead, a temporary minority dictatorship to preserve the constitutional order would have been and would always be preferable to constitutional suicide. Here, Kolnai cited US President Lincoln: “I broke the Constitution to save the Union.”²⁴⁰

Interestingly, Kolnai’s political Catholicism began to intertwine with his previous civic radical commitments, a republican line of thought imbued with the Austrian and Hungarian experiences after 1918. In Kolnai’s ideal democracy, there would not be absolute equality, but rather a sliding scale of civil liberties in which democracy’s enemies would not enjoy the same rights as the democratic forces. He cited Jászi’s distinction between expressing opinion and inciting action, discerning in it the kernel of this idea of “graduated” or “classed” rights. Yet even with all anti-democratic propaganda and organization prohibited, Kolnai noted, ultimately “there is no democracy without democrats exercising power.”²⁴¹ A democratic state cannot resign the use of force.

Out of this debate series, a link with the Yugoslav context was forged. At some point in 1935, Csécsy had written to the Serbian agrarian politician Jovan M. Jovanović (Pižon) in the former’s capacity as editor of *Századunk*, asking for a discussion of the fallout from the apparent end of the January 6 Dictatorship now that King Aleksandar Karađorđević had been assassinated. Jovanović contributed an article under the title “Democracy and Dictatorship in Yugoslavia,” published in early 1936. Upon receipt of the article, Csécsy wrote to Jovanović, thanking him for his contribution, “the line of thought of which is in complete harmony with our own.”²⁴² Csécsy recognized that Jovanović was unable to include a discussion of the national minorities in the country, “particularly that of the Hungarians,” but still invited him to

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 269.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 270.

²⁴² Imre Csécsy (Budapest) to Jovan M. Jovanović (Belgrade), January 2, 1936, OSZK K 136, ő.e. 420.

contribute some further discussion “on this complex of problems at a later date.”²⁴³ This would not occur; Jovanović would pass a few years later, in 1939.

In the article, Jovanović framed democracy’s global struggle as the choice between “the rule of the people” and the “rule of an individual or a single principle.” On the one side lay “government by the most capable independent individuals” while “the other demands obedience to a single man....”²⁴⁴ Thus, against fascism’s elevation of the corporate state model in Italy, the implementation of National Socialism’s racial doctrine in Germany, and the supposed dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union, Jovanović defended a popular version of democracy as “the victory of humanism.”

The empirical core of Jovanović’s essay was his analysis of King Alexander Karađorđević’s coup d’état of January 6, 1929, which suspended the constitution and inaugurated a period of personal rule which officially lasted until 1931, but continued in various guises until the eve of the Axis invasion of the country in April 1941. Jovanović rejected the official justification of the dictatorship, namely that the parliamentary conflict between Serbs and Croats had become unavoidably violent in the wake of the shootings in the *Skupština* which ultimately took Stjepan Radić’s life. What appeared to be a “national” Serb–Croat crisis, he insisted, could and should have been resolved through parliamentary means: new elections, a caretaker government, or a transfer of power to the minority. Any of these solutions, he wrote, “would have been far better than carrying out the putsch.”²⁴⁵ Even the new constitution octroyed in September 1931, which nominally restored the parliamentary system, left the essential apparatus of dictatorship intact, namely the subordination of civil rights to the whims of a personal regime. There was no longer a parliamentary budget veto, no power to topple parliamentary governments, no immunity for deputies, no free elections, no ministerial

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Jovan M. Jovanović, “Demokrácia és diktatúra Jugoszláviában” (Democracy and Dictatorship in Yugoslavia), *Századunk* 11, no. 1 (1936): 1–7, here 1.

²⁴⁵ Jovanović, “Demokrácia és diktatúra Jugoszláviában,” 5.

responsibility, no judicial independence, no press freedom, and no right of assembly. The parliament, Jovanović argued, was essentially selected by the Ministry of Interior, that is, by the police and gendarmes. Elections were conducted under their supervision and under explicit threats that the government would take revenge on dissenters and their families.²⁴⁶ To Jovanović's mind, however, this only solidified what had still been the case even under the surface of the royal dictatorship: "democratic institutions stand closest to the people."²⁴⁷ In part, this had to do with the democratic character of the Serbs, for "democracy is in our people's blood," Jovanović declared, "together with its institutions."²⁴⁸ The dictatorship, however, had betrayed these foundational aspects of Serbian national character.

3.4. *Conclusion*

What became key here was a translation of the republican Left's political temporality, carefully nurtured during the 1920s and first half of the '30s, into the realm of active politics. It is not the case that the republican Left in either the Hungarian or South Slavic contexts gave up on their cultural works. These visions were constitutive of the more active political ideas they articulated and actions they took when the opportunity arose in the following decade and a half. Still, it is telling that the turn to active politics coincided with a certain tightening of the horizons of expectation between absolute catastrophe and the realization of complete human emancipation. For many, it was a thin line to walk.

During the war, the choice of active or passive resistance was key to not only preserving this set of political ideas, but also to fight for the survival of the very political community itself.

²⁴⁶ Jovanović, "Demokrácia és diktatúra Jugoszláviában," 5.

²⁴⁷ Jovanović, "Demokrácia és diktatúra Jugoszláviában," 6.

²⁴⁸ Jovanović, "Demokrácia és diktatúra Jugoszláviában," 5.

While in the Yugoslav context the republican Left had largely opted for the partisan resistance, others, particularly in the Serbian case, in fact chose the Četnik movement as the bearers of the political community's survival. In part, I argue, this was a larger failure of the republican Left in the Yugoslav case to more carefully distinguish between the national community and the political community. In the Hungarian case, however, these almost perfectly overlapped. This meant that the republican Left could work relatively cohesively with other forces to the Left and Right in various forms of resistance to struggle for a new, democratic Hungary. The wider splits only occurred after the war, as I demonstrate, but along fault lines that were already made clear in this chapter.

Thus, by the end of the war, the military defeat of fascism across Europe pushed sections of the republican Left back into power in Hungary and Yugoslavia. While the Hungarians enjoyed a greater share of power in the postwar "democratic interlude," it was also the case that the Yugoslav context was not in fact completely dominated by a Stalinized communist movement. In both cases, key republican ideas fostered during the "retreat to culture" were expressed widely in the debates over state form, democracy, and freedom after liberation. It was not by chance then that the declaration of the republic in both cases was conducted with nods to the republican intellectual inheritance from the previous period.

CHAPTER 4. THE RETURN TO POLITICS

The preceding chapters traced the formation of republican political thought in Hungary and Yugoslavia from the turn of the century through the consolidation of authoritarian rule in the interwar period. This chapter follows the conceptual and institutional trajectories of the republican Left from the mid-1930s, when the popular front strategy opened new possibilities for political cooperation among antifascist forces, through the wartime destruction and reconstitution of the public sphere, to the postwar debates over the meaning of “people’s democracy” that accompanied the founding of new republican states in both countries. The central question is how republican leftists in Hungary and Yugoslavia attempted to define a democratic form adequate to the conditions of postwar East Central Europe—one that could sustain both individual political freedom and collective social transformation—and why the conceptual space for that project contracted so rapidly between 1945 and 1948.

4.1. *Popular Fronts*

The threat of fascism and right-wing authoritarianism had been present in the minds of democrats across East Central Europe throughout the 1920s. Hungary had been the first among the post-imperial successor states to form a right-wing authoritarian regime. By the middle of the 1930s, nearly all states from the Baltic to the Aegean, with the partial exception of Czechoslovakia, had shed all semblances of liberal democracy or functional parliamentarism. Hungary furthered its drift toward open fascism under the premiership of Gyula Gömbös from 1932 to 1936. In Yugoslavia, the proclamation of the January 6 Dictatorship in early 1929 was followed by only a partial liberalization in 1931; the fundamental structures of the dictatorship persisted for nearly another decade, until spring 1941. The victory of fascism in Germany

(1933) and Austria (1934) only furthered the sense of collapse for the republican leftist intelligentsia—and indeed for the various moderate conservative, liberal democratic, and communist oppositional streams too. In Moscow, the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935 resolved to instruct communist parties on the continent to construct broad-based alliances of workers, peasants, the intelligentsia, and even the progressive bourgeoisie in each European country. This shift opened the way to broader political and organizational cooperation between the republican and communist Lefts in Hungary and Yugoslavia. In both countries, the communist movements had been officially illegal for nearly a decade and a half, having been subject to regular state violence and organizational suppression. The republican Left, particularly its civic radical and social democratic core, remained marginalized to periodical communities and coffeehouse discussions. Yet even within this shared structural constraint, the popular front experience diverged significantly between the Hungarian and Yugoslav contexts. In Yugoslavia, the communist movement retained substantial organizational capacity and was able to broker actual alliances with social democrats, civic radicals, and progressive peasantist intellectuals in this period, most successfully in Slovenia.

In Hungary, by contrast, the popular front remained largely a theoretical construction. It was a set of ideas debated in journals rather than a functioning political coalition. Only the wartime experience would change this. Skepticism of the meagre and deeply sectarian Hungarian communist movement persisted; for the Hungarian republican Left, the betrayal and then failure of communist forces in 1919 had warranted a deep distrust toward any further institutional cooperation, and the intransigence of the communist forces in denouncing the social democrats as “social fascists” and the civic radicals as inconsequential bourgeois through the 1920s only furthered the estrangement. In the details, however, there was much more informal cooperation in the first half of the 1930s. Here we can think of the League against the Death Penalty (*Halálbüntetés Ellenes Szövetség*), formed in May 1932 in the wake of

Szilveszter Matuska's train bombings and the subsequent arrest of the communists Imre Sallai and Sándor Fürst on false charges related to the bombing.¹ The League was led by Eugénia Miskolczy Meller, the president of the Feminists' Association, and included figures ranging from modernist and avant-garde artists, civic radicals, liberals, and communists to social democrats, as well as *Nyugat* writers young and old. We may also identify Rusztem Vámbéry's legal defense of Mátyás Rákosi during his second trial in early 1935 as another moment when the protection of civil rights trumped apparently harsh ideological differences.²

Periodical communities maintained the foundation for any attempts at cooperation. In part, this was based in the more traditional theoretical journals of the period, namely the civic radicals' *Századunk* (1926–1939) and the social democrats' *Szocializmus* (1922–1938). Importantly too, there was the incorporation of a new generation of intellectuals onto the scene in the first half of the 1930s. Within social democratic circles, the brilliant Illés Mónus took over the editorship of *Szocializmus* as well as the daily *Népszava* in 1934. The same year, Imre Csécsy joined Rusztem Vámbéry and István Varró on the editorial board of *Századunk*. Then there were the younger progressive writers, many of whom had been born just around the turn of the century or in the years before the First World War: Péter Veres (1897), Pál Ignotus (1901), Gyula Illyés (1902), Attila József (1905), Ferenc Fejtő (1909), Ferenc Erdei (1910), István Bibó (1911), and Imre Kovács (1913). This group was hungry for social reform in the static, “consolidated” society which had been presided over by Bethlen and Horthy up to the early 1930s.

¹ József Tasi, “József Attila és a Halálbüntetés Ellenés Szövetség” (Attila József and the League against the Death Penalty), *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 26, no. 1 (1980): 90–110. The League was initially formed by the Feminists' Association and the Miklós Bartha Society, a syncretic reformist organization with both right-wing and leftist tendencies. See also the online exhibition by the Budapest Capital Archive (*Budapest Főváros Levéltára*) entitled “A vádlott József Attila – A költő pereit” (Attila József, the Accused – The Poet's Trials), in particular Part III, on the “Röpirat-per” (Leaflet Trial), 1932–1935, http://archivkiallitasok.archivportal.hu/jozsefattila/harmadikper/3_3.html, last accessed January 1, 2026.

² Rusztem Vámbéry, ed., *A Rákosi-per* (The Rákosi Trial) (Budapest, 1935).

One avenue to remedy the ills of society was to engage in a sociographic investigation of the main site of poverty and destitution, namely the rural village. Such a program of research and social reform had been on the agenda of the *Társadalomtudományi Társaság* already around the turn of the century, with Róbert Braun himself having authored the first modern Hungarian text in this genre: *The Psychology of the Village*.³ But with the counterrevolutionary marginalization of the civic radicals and the demonization of modern sociological methods in the wake of 1919, there was a partial gap in the generational transmission of knowledge. This is exemplified well by the writer Gyula Illyés. As a youth, Illyés had participated in the events of the “republican moment” of 1918–19, but emigrated in 1922 ahead of potential incarceration for anti-regime actions taken with Béla Menczer. He settled in Paris, enrolling at the Sorbonne and making links with the Hungarian emigration around Mihály Károlyi.⁴ During his years there, as he later recalled, it was not the sociographic work of Braun, Jászi, or the rest of the *Huszadik Század* circle with which he became familiar, but rather the novels of André Gide and the sociological studies of Célestin Bouglé.⁵⁶ From the world of French literary realism and Durkheimian sociology, Illyés returned to Budapest in 1926, securing a job in the Phönix Life Insurance Company through Imre Csécsy.⁷ He began to write regularly for *Nyugat* and became increasingly drawn to the concrete social problems of the impoverished rural peasantry through his connections with Attila József and László Németh.

In parallel, a new version of sociographic writing—*falukutatás*, variously translatable as ‘village exploration’ or ‘village research’—began to emerge among the socially conscious

³ Róbert Braun, *A falu lélektan* (The Psychology of the Village) (Budapest: Politzer, 1913).

⁴ “Menczer Béla,” *Magyar életrajzi lexikon* (1978–1991), ed. Ágnes Kenyeres (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994), 611.

⁵ “Illyés Gyula, Illés,” *Magyar életrajzi lexikon* (1978–1991), 403.

⁶ Gyula Illyés and György Litván, “Jászi Oszkáról” (On Oszkár Jászi), *Kortárs* 27, no. 11 (1983): 1785–791, here 1788.

⁷ Gyula Illyés, “Csécsy Imre,” in *Iránytűvel* (Compass in Hand), vol. 2 (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1975), 467–69.

youth both in Hungary and among the Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia and Romania.⁸ The program in Hungary was tied to relieving the inert conditions of social and material misery among the rural population. This had been the program of the radical youth in Szeged around the Gábor Bethlen Circle and from 1930 the Szeged Youth Arts Collegium (*Szegedi Fiatalok Művészeti Kollégiuma*), in which the young Gyula Ortutay and Ferenc Erdei were involved. There was also the Miklós Bartha Society in Budapest, whose leaflet *Out to the Village!*, co-authored by Dániel Fábián and Attila József, was one of the first programmatic texts of this new wave.⁹ In that text, concern for the social misery of the peasantry was linked to an ethnicized vision of the Hungarian political community, apparently in decline and threatening to disappear.

By 1933, Illyés's own sociographic text "Devastation" (*Pusztulás*), published in *Nyugat*, reflected precisely these problems. Subtitled "Travel Notes," it followed Illyés on a trip to Zengővárkony, northeast of Pécs. Moving among the villages in Baranya, Illyés documented what he perceived as demographic collapse: ethnic German immigration into the region chafed against local Hungarians' practice of having only one child (the so-called *egyke* problem), leading Illyés to conclude that all of western Hungary was "in mortal danger."¹⁰ He even proposed a new inheritance law which would have partially nationalized the lands of peasant

⁸ Represented by the Sarló (Sickle) movement in Czechoslovakia, which soon fostered links with the communist movement in the country. See Ildikó Bajcsi, *Kisebbségi magyar küldetés Csehszlovákiában: a sarlós nemzedék közösségi szerepvállalása Trianon után* (The Mission of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia: The Community Involvement of the Sarló Generation after Trianon) (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2021); László Sándor, ed., *A Sarló hatósugarában: Tanulmányok, cikkek, dokumentumok* (In the Sarló's Range: Studies, Articles, Documents) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1988); and László Sándor, ed., *Ez volt a Sarló: Tanulmányok, emlékezések, dokumentumok* (This Was the Sarló: Studies, Recollections, Documents) (Budapest: Kossuth–Bratislava: Madách, 1978). In Romania, the "village seminars" organized by the journal *Erdélyi Fiatalok* (Transylvanian Youth) invited representatives of the Sarló movement as well as the various "village researchers" from Hungary. See Miklós Csapody, *Egy nemzedék iskolája: az Erdélyi Fiatalok, 1929–1933* (A Generation's School: The Transylvanian Youth, 1929–1933) (Budapest: Korona, 2009).

⁹ See László Kosa, "falukutatás" (village exploration or village research), in *Magyar néprajzi lexikon*, vol. 2, *F–Ka*, ed. Gyula Ortutay (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979), 34–40; Dániel Fábián and Attila József, *Ki a faluba!* (Out to the Village!) (Hódmezővásárhely: Törekvés Könyvnyomdavidallalat, 1930).

¹⁰ Gyula Illyés, "Pusztulás: Úti jegyzetek" (Devastation: Travel Notes), *Nyugat* 26, no. 17–18 (1933): 189–205, here 197.

families with less than four children to address both the persistent problem of large landownership and what he saw as the displacement of ethnic Hungarians in the region.¹¹

The literary historian Béla N. Horváth—and before him Miklós Lackó—argued that this twin commitment of Illyés positioned him as a bridge between the emerging “village explorers,” who still tended in right-wing ethno-nationalist directions, and the social democratic and civic radical (republican) Left.¹² Yet the response from Róbert Braun in *Századunk* was entirely critical. Illyés, he argued, had not matched his local ethnographic observations with the concrete data from the Central Statistical Office, which rather demonstrated that the Hungarian population had *grown* in the decade between 1920 and 1930 and the German population had, in fact, shrunk.¹³ Further, Illyés’s construction of the Germans as foreigners in Hungary belied a rather narrow conception of Hungarianness. There were at least three conceptions of Hungarian identity, Braun observed: “linguistic, political, and ethnic or racial (*faji*).” The three do not coincide, which meant that “it is not a scientific but an emotional question of what each person accepts as the basis for belonging to the Hungarian nation.”¹⁴

Illyés’s response in *Nyugat* insisted that Braun had missed the point: the *egyke* phenomenon presented a mortal danger to the “roots, foundation, and lifeforce of the ethnic Hungarian community (*magyarság*)” and its prevalence was due to strictly economic reasons.¹⁵ In Illyés’s opinion, Braun was the only one who threw the decline of the Hungarians in Transdanubia into doubt.¹⁶ Braun rather argued that Illyés had ignored all of the studies on the

¹¹ Illyés, “Pusztulás,” 203–204.

¹² Béla N. Horváth, “Illyés helye és szerepe a népi-urbánus vitában” (Illyés’s Place and Role in the *népi-urbánus* Debate), in *Nép és nemzet: Illyés Gyula* (People and Nation: Gyula Illyés), vol. 1, 1902–1944 (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2021), 167–206; Miklós Lackó, “A nemzedéki tömörülésről és a szakadásról: a népi mozgalom kezdetei” (On Generational Cohesion and Division: The Beginnings of the *Népi* Movement), in *Válságok – választások: Történeti tanulmányok a két háború közötti Magyarországról* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1975), 13–51.

¹³ Róbert Braun, “Pusztul-e a magyarság?” (Is the Hungarian Community Dissolving?), *Századunk* 8, no. 8–10 (1933): 252–56; and Róbert Braun, “A hivatalos statisztika” (The Official Statistics), *Nyugat* 26, no. 19 (Oct. 1, 1933): 279–81.

¹⁴ Braun, “Pusztul-e a magyarság?”, 254.

¹⁵ Gyula Illyés, “A magyarság pusztulása” (The Devastation of the Hungarians), *Nyugat* 26, no. 20 (1933): 340.

¹⁶ Gyula Illyés, “Pusztul-e a magyarság? Válasz Braun Róbert cikkére” (Is the Hungarian Community Dissolving? A Response to Róbert Braun), *Századunk* 9, no. 1 (1934): 73–74.

egyke phenomenon published on the pages of *Huszadik Század* and *Századunk*, relying instead on conservative and clerical sources.¹⁷ The editors of *Századunk* (Csécsy, Vámbéry, Varró) made this abundantly clear in an editorial note as part of the debate, concluding that “the conservatives [which Illyés cited] avoid pointing to anything in their causal investigation that might reveal that the foundations and institutions they consider necessary are in fact rotten to the core, ripe for demolition. The progressives hold that the *egyke*, like so many other deep-seated, fundamental problems, is merely a symptom.”¹⁸ Although ostensibly a divergence in methodological approach, a more fundamental clash of worldviews was at play. For the younger generation around Illyés, the ontological insecurity around the potential dissolution of the political community had taken on increasing urgency, while for Braun the radicalization of ethnic nationalism into a racial conception of the nation went hand-in-hand with the rise of fascism.

The debate itself had a much greater resonance. As Illyés later reflected in an interview with historian György Litván, the smaller debate with Braun was, in fact, the moment when the larger so-called *népi-urbánus* debate broke out between rural populist and urban progressive factions within the Hungarian intelligentsia.¹⁹ One of the first efforts of the *népi* writers was to form their own journal, *Válasz* (Answer), in 1934, thus creating a center for their own periodical community. Soon enough, however, the *népi* movement began a turn to the political Right, and in 1935 attempted to create a united reformist front—the New Spiritual Front (*Új Szellemi Front*)—with the Gömbös government.²⁰ This came to nothing, and Illyés dedicated himself

¹⁷ Róbert Braun, “Pusztul-e a magyarság? Viszonzás Illyés Gyulának” (Is the Hungarian Community Dissolving? A Further Response to Gyula Illyés), *Századunk* 9, no. 1 (1934): 75–76.

¹⁸ Editorial note to Illyés, “Pusztul-e a magyarság?”, 75.

¹⁹ Illyés and Litván, “Jászi Oszkáról,” 1788.

²⁰ Horváth, “Illyés helye és szerepe,” 179–90; cf. Charles Gati, “The Populist Current in Hungarian Politics, 1935–1944,” doctoral dissertation (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1965), 50–112.

rather to the articulation of a leftist *népi* vision, linking him closer to the established civic radical and social democratic core of the republican Left.²¹

For the younger *urbánus* writers, much of their energy went into fighting on two fronts at once: for a radical democratic renewal in the country and against the ever-present and worsening wave of antisemitic attacks. Pál Ignótus—the son of Hugó Ignótus, the famous *Nyugat* writer—as well as Ferenc Fejtő and Attila József appeared as an intellectual center of this younger group. Telling in this case is József’s “Around the United Front,” which harkened back to an earlier period of revolutionary cooperation broadly on the Left while picking up on discussions that would ultimately materialize after 1935, namely the idea of a popular front of antifascist forces. József clearly argued for a return to open class struggle and the unity of the working class but also a turn away from the narrow notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only means to build socialism.²² Instead, he insisted on a broad-based conception of the working classes, understood not only as another term for the urban proletariat, but explicitly including the peasantry, agrarian workers, and progressive intellectuals too.

In 1936, József, Ignótus, and Fejtő founded their own journal, *Szép Szó* (Argument), offering the young generation of progressive *urbánus* writers their own literary outlet. In the meantime, the *népi* writers had consolidated their work around *Válasz* and began to make contact with the leftist students in Budapest around the University Circle (Egyetemi Kör). Their meetings eventually developed into political-organizational discussions about creating a popular front, not unlike what had happened in France and Spain. The result was the announcement of the March Front, symbolically conducted on March 15, 1937. The University

²¹ István Papp recently picked up on this confluence of thought too: István Papp, “A paraszt republikánus – Emlékezés Illyés Gyulára” (The Peasant Republican: Reflections on Gyula Illyés), *A Politikatörténeti Intézet blogja*, merce.hu, November 6, 2022, <https://pti.merce.hu/2022/11/06/a-paraszt-republikanus-emlekezés-illyes-gyulara/>, last accessed January 1, 2026.

²² Attila József, “Az egységfront körül” (Around the United Front), in Attila József, *Összes tanulmánya és cikke 1930–1937*, ed. György Tverdota and András Veres (Budapest: L’Harmattan–József Attila Társaság, 2017), 648–54, here 652.

Circle had invited writers from both camps to speak in front of the National Museum in downtown Budapest, where Sándor Petőfi had delivered his revolutionary “*Nemzeti dal*” in 1848. When Imre Kovács read aloud the twelve points of the new manifesto, the crowd of approximately five thousand responded with cries of “Long live the March Front! Long live *népi* Hungary!”²³ The right-wing press objected in the aftermath that the word ‘Christian’ was not included in the program.²⁴

The twelve-point program largely synthesized the longstanding demands of the Hungarian republican leftist opposition, now reworking them to address the crisis-laden domestic and international situations which seemed to have solidified into a permanent state by the late 1930s.²⁵ The first four points addressed the country’s political framework: the democratization of the country; guarantees for freedom of thought, speech, press, assembly, and organization; universal, equal, and secret suffrage without any corrective mechanisms; and the prevention of parliamentary representatives from serving on corporate boards. The middle points addressed economic transformation and, implicitly, the question of who constituted the political community, the *demos*. The fifth point called for the expropriation of all landholdings over 500 cadastral holds, a threshold that would have affected a relatively small number of large estates but that carried enormous symbolic weight given the concentration of land in Hungary. Points six through ten elaborated a vision of economic democracy: breaking the power of banks, cartels, and monopolies; introducing progressive taxation; guaranteeing work and a forty-hour week; establishing minimum wages above the biological subsistence level; and ensuring freedom for workers’ economic organizations. These demands positioned workers (*dolgozók*), understood generally, as both the subject and object of political transformation, a majority composed of peasants, industrial laborers, and the progressive intelligentsia. Point eleven

²³ Gati, “The Populist Current,” 120–22.

²⁴ Gyula Borbándi, “A Márciusi Front éve” (The Year of the March Front), *Új Látóhatár* 5, no. 2 (1962): 121–33, here 123; quoted also in Gati, “The Populist Current,” 122.

²⁵ “Márciusi ifjúság” (The March Youth), *Válasz* 4, no. 4 (1937): 256.

extended this logic into education, calling for tuition rates to be tied to income and merit-based selection to open secondary and higher education to the lower classes.

Perhaps most importantly, the twelfth and final point situated Hungary within a regional framework, calling openly for “Hungarian revision” but linking this specifically to “respect for the right of self-determination for the peoples of the Danubian Basin (*a dunavölgyi népek számára*) on the question of national affiliation.”²⁶ The March Front positioned this program against both “pan-Slav and pan-German imperialist endeavors,” calling finally for “the realization of the idea of Danubian sovereignty and confederation”—again, a long-standing tradition of (con)federalist thought which linked Kossuth and Táncsics to Jászi, Braun, and Csécsy, and, now, to the young *népi* writers.²⁷ The formulation itself was deliberately ambiguous, for on the one hand it satisfied Hungarian irredentist and revisionist sentiment while simultaneously proposing a supranational framework that would render the existent borders much less significant. The reference to the “pan-Slav threat” drew immediate criticism from the communist press, with József Révai noting that the Front, despite its honorable intentions, had not entirely escaped out from under “fascism’s false slogans.”²⁸

The responses from the civic radical and social democratic camps were initially positive but soon became critical. Pál Ignotus, writing in the *Magyar Hírlap* three days after the event, welcomed the Front’s “brave, rational, intelligent stand.”²⁹ Within two months, however, his tone shifted. In his “Left-Wing Masochism,” he accused the Left of shamefully celebrating

²⁶ “Márciusi ifjúság” (The March Youth), *Válasz* 4, no. 4 (1937): 256.

²⁷ Although neither István Bibó nor Ferenc Erdei were present at the event, Erdei in particular had a strong influence on the text of the declaration, and his own ideas were rooted in the turn-of-the-century sociographic and sociological work of Braun, Jászi, and the *Huszdik Század* circle. See Illyés and Litván, “Jászi Oszkáról,” 1788; István Bibó, “Levél Borbándi Gyulához” (Letter to Gyula Borbándi), in István Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 3, 1971–1979, ed. Tibor Huszár et al. (Budapest: Magvető, 1986), 295–373; and István Bibó, “Interjú sorozat Bibó Istvánnal” (An Interview Series with István Bibó), in *Bibó István munkái* (The Works of István Bibó), vol. 12, *Visszaemlékezések* (Recollections) (Budapest: Argumentum, 2012), 53–54.

²⁸ József Révai, “Van-e pánszláv veszély?” (Is there a Pan-Slav Threat?), in *Dolgozók Lapja, 1937–1938* (The Workers’ Paper, 1937–1938) (Budapest: Szikra, 1955), quoted in Konrád Salamon, *A Márciusi Front* (The March Front) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), 80.

²⁹ Pál Ignotus, “Tizenkét pont” (Twelve Points), *Magyar Hírlap* 48, no. 62 (March 18, 1937): 4.

writers who, like Géza Féja, had only recently emerged from right-wing milieus and who continued to flirt with ethno-nationalist and antisemitic rhetoric. The Left, Ignotus charged, had now opened itself up to “every reactionary striver, every loudmouth baptized in the swastika.”³⁰ The leftist writer György Bálint responded in *Gondolat*, defending the Front’s writers against the charge of fascist sympathies and arguing that their trajectory toward democratic values ought to be welcomed, not dismissed.³¹ Ignotus quickly responded in *Szép Szó* that his support for the program remained intact and his reticence toward the right-wing nationalists within the *népi* movement had stayed the same; it was the contradiction between these two which irked him the most.³²

Ferenc Fejtő also jumped into the wave of criticism directed toward the *népi* writers. Similar to Ignotus, he focused on the limited vision of the “village explorers” when it came to the political community. This came through plainly in Péter Veres’s work *The Alföld Peasantry*, published the previous year.³³ Fejtő’s review in *Szocializmus* pointed out that Veres’s vision of agrarian socialism was limited to Hungarians construed in a biological “racial” (*faji*) sense; Fejtő, a Jew, wondered whether any socialism which was limited to racial features was not simply another version of the fascism which had cropped up across Europe.³⁴ Veres’s response, also in *Szocializmus*, stated that Jewish assimilation had purely been an urban phenomenon: the “Jews had never intermarried with the Hungarian blood-tribe [*vértörzs*], the peasantry, not even accidentally,” and so the rural, agrarian socialism of which Veres wrote could only reflect the existent conditions on the ground.³⁵ Fejtő argued in response that Veres’s own words belied his

³⁰ Pál Ignotus, “A baloldali mazochizmus” (Left-Wing Masochism), *Az író beleszól...* 1, no. 1 (May 1937), quoted in Salamon, *A Márciusi Front*, 67.

³¹ György Bálint, “‘Baloldali mazochizmus’ vagy szektademokrácia?” (‘Left-Wing Masochism, or Sectarian Democracy?’), *Gondolat* 3, no. 3–4 (1937), quoted in Salamon, *A Márciusi Front*, 68.

³² Pál Ignotus, “Cáfolat” (Rebuttal), *Szép Szó* 5, no. 16 (1937): 96.

³³ Péter Veres, *Az Alföld parasztsága* (The Alföld Peasantry) (Budapest: Oravetz, 1936).

³⁴ Ferenc Fejtő, “A ‘faji’ szocializmusról” (On ‘Racial’ Socialism), *Szocializmus* 27, no. 6 (1937): 253–58.

³⁵ Péter Veres, “‘Faji’ szocializmus vagy ‘tisza’ szocializmus? Válasz Fejtő Ferencnek” (‘Racial Socialism or ‘Pure’ Socialism? A Response to Ferenc Fejtő), *Szocializmus* 27, no. 7–8 (1937): 295–302, here 300.

racialist, *Blut und Boden* conception of the political community, excluding Jews through a narrowly biological conception of the Hungarian nation.³⁶

This reflected the concerns of Róbert Braun a few years earlier. There were many potential conceptions of the Hungarian political community, but all of them were essentially emotional ones—and none able to be scientifically delimited through genetic distinctions. The debate had reached a new level in the first half of 1934, after László Németh published a section of his memoirs in the Hungarian-Yugoslav literary journal *Kalangya*, which revealed his own antisemitic attitudes toward assimilated Jewish authors, namely toward Hugó Ignótyus.³⁷ This generated a far-ranging debate, drawing in the elder Ignótyus and the younger, along with Béla Zsolt and Lajos Hatvany for the *urbánus* side, and Gyula Illyés, László Németh, Lajos Fülep, Zsigmond Móricz, and Pál Kardos on the side of the *népi* writers.³⁸ In the end, as the civic radical Béla Zsolt wrote:

The events in Germany quickly pulled the rug out from under the burgeoning *völkisch* ideology and fledgling race-romanticism (*fajromantika*) of László Németh and Gyula Illyés. All further debate on this subject has now come to an end. Nationalism is a myth, and the self-indulgent and pleasing literary and political game with the concept ‘race’ (*faj*) lost its evocative and nourishing background the very moment it was revealed that the German epic was nothing more than a criminological report and a case study of sexual pathology. However convinced we may be of the good faith of László Németh, Gyula Illyés, and the others, without the mystification of Hitlerism, its emotional overvaluation, this offensive literary politics would never have been born—which, in the final instance, desired to select writers on racial (*faji*) bases. Well, we may not have won the debate, but our debate partners were almost certainly defeated by the collapse of their own illusions, shattered by crude and repugnant facts.³⁹

³⁶ Ferenc Fejtő, “Fajkérdés és szocializmus” (The Racial Question and Socialism), *Szocializmus* 27, no. 7–8 (1937): 302–13.

³⁷ László Németh, “Ember és szerep” (Man and Role), *Kalangya* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 1934): 39–47, partially republished as document 4 in *A népi-urbánus vita dokumentumai 1932–1947*, ed. Péter Sz. Nagy (Budapest: Rakéta, 1989), 27–29. Németh was thirty-three (!) when he began work on his memoirs.

³⁸ The first twenty documents or so of *A népi-urbánus vita dokumentumai 1932–1947*, cited above, give a representative yet incomplete example of the texts. Importantly missing is Pál Ignótyus’s acerbic “Ki hát a ‘filosemita’?” (Who, Then, Is the ‘Philosemite’?), published in Béla Zsolt’s *A Töll* 6, no. 5 (1934): 174–84 and republished in Pál Ignótyus, *Jegyzetek a szabadságról* (Notes on Freedom), ed. András Bozóki (Budapest: Gondolat, 2010), 235–51, as well as in Géza Komoróczy, ed., *Zsidók a magyar társadalomban (1790–2012)* (Jews in Hungarian Society), vol. 2, *Írások az együttélésről, a feszültségekről és az értékekről (1790–2012)* (Texts on Coexistence, Tensions, and Values, 1790–2012) (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2015), 67–74.

³⁹ Béla Zsolt, “A vita vége” (The End of the Debate), *A Töll* 6, no. 5 (July 8, 1934): 172–74, here 74, republished in *A népi-urbánus vita dokumentumai*, 141–43.

In the intervening three years, it is striking just how much to the Left one segment of the *népi* writers had been drawn. By early 1938, the March Front faced mounting pressure from the Horthy regime, which banned meetings, confiscated publications, and prosecuted a number of *népi* writers for their sociographic work.⁴⁰

Even in Hungary's increasingly repressive and conflictual context, Ferenc Erdei asked his friends István Bibó and Béla Reitzer to prepare a revised version of the March Front program. The two young legal scholars—with Erdei, former classmates at the Szeged gymnasium, then students together under the tutelage of the legal scholar Barna Horváth at the University of Szeged—produced a draft in the first months of 1938 that significantly reworked both the content and the sequence of the March Front's original twelve-point declaration.⁴¹ Their draft placed Hungarian revision first rather than last, reframing it as a matter of enforcing the rights to self-determination of the “peoples of the Danubian Basin,” of excluding “all great power imperialism from the Danubian Basin,” as well as ensuring “the complete preparedness of Hungarian national defense and a domestic policy that secures the basis for an independent Hungarian foreign policy.”⁴² That domestic policy envisioned a “fortification of judicial independence” as well as the implementation of “local administration on the basis of popular self-government (*népi önkormányzat*).” Yet the program likewise incorporated demands not far from the right wing of the *népi* movement, demanding “the leading role of Hungarians” in public life and the “elimination” of the influence of assimilated Germans and Jews “who, despite their assimilation, continue to pursue separate interests.”⁴³ In the same breath they

⁴⁰ On Géza Féja's trial, see *A “Viharsarok” a bíróság előtt: Féja Géza pere (Viharsarok before the Court: The Trial of Géza Féja)*, ed. Péter Veres, Gyula Illyés, and Ferenc Erdei (Budapest: Márciusi Front, 1937); On Imre Kovács's, see the collected court documents in Imre Kovács, *A néma forradalom (The Silent Revolution)* (Budapest: Cserépfalvi–Gondolat–Tevan, 1989), 143–202.

⁴¹ István Bibó and Béla Reitzer, “A Márciusi Front programtervezete” (The March Front Program Draft), in István Bibó, *Összegyűjtött írásai (Collected Writings)*, vol. 2, ed. Iván Zoltán Dénes (Budapest–Bratislava: Kalligram, 2018), 28–30.

⁴² Bibó and Reitzer, “A Márciusi Front programtervezete,” 28.

⁴³ Bibó and Reitzer, “A Márciusi Front programtervezete,” 29.

argued that full minority rights would have to be implemented too, though clearly not on the basis of social equality.

At the end, however, Bibó picked up a leftist republican language. In adding an entirely new twelfth point, he argued that the “spirit of servility” which punctuated Hungarian public life would have to be erased, meaning the cultivation of a “public spirit” which could subject all authority to critique and “remove the compulsion to bow down before power,” a deeply rooted aspect of the malformed political consciousness of the Hungarian working class, the peasantry, and even the middle classes.⁴⁴ In the end, the Bibó-Reitzer revision was never formally adopted. When the Front attempted to hold its anniversary meeting in March 1938, the police dispersed the group and attempted to arrest Imre Kovács.⁴⁵ In June, *Válasz* published a final farewell statement, insisting on the continued struggle for radical land reform, the elimination of “glaring injustices” in income inequality, and Hungarian independence.⁴⁶

The *népi* writers were not the only periodical community to splinter from government repression. The closure of *Válasz* occurred only shortly after the entry into force of Law XV of 1938, the First Jewish Law, introduced by the Darányi government in the wake of the *Anschluss*.⁴⁷ Among its provisions, the law created a press chamber (*sajtókamara*), subjected directly to the office of the prime minister, which limited Jewish membership—as owner, editor, or staff member of a newspaper or journal—to twenty percent and more broadly meant that journalists could no longer be considered free professionals.⁴⁸ Publishing without

⁴⁴ Bibó and Reitzer, “A Márciusi Front programtervezete,” 30.

⁴⁵ Gati, “The Populist Current,” 143.

⁴⁶ “Búcsú az olvasótól” (Farewell to the Reader), *Válasz* 5, no. 6 (June 1938): 309–10.

⁴⁷ “XV. törvénycikk a társadalmi és a gazdasági élet egyensúlyának hatályosabb biztosításáról” (Law XV of 1938 on Ensuring a More Effective Balance between Social and Economic Life), in *Az 1938. évi törvények gyűjteménye* (Collection of Laws from 1938) (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1938), 149–53.

⁴⁸ Vince Paál, “Sajtószabályozás és sajtószabadság a Horthy-korszakban” (Press Regulations and Press Freedom in the Horthy Era), in *Tanulmányok a magyar sajtószabadság történetéhez 1867–1944* (Studies on the History of Hungarian Press Freedom, 1867–1944) (Budapest: Médiatudományi Intézet, 2019), 232–33.

membership or a license was liable to stringent prosecution.⁴⁹ The Second Jewish Law (Law IV of 1939), introduced before the occupation of Transcarpathia, reduced the number of Jews in the free professions as well as in industry, finance, and commerce to six percent, likewise introducing a twin religious and racial definition of Jewishness.⁵⁰

Before the press chamber officially began its work in June 1939, *Szocializmus* discontinued publication. Soon after, the republican Left's key organs were closed: *Századunk*, *Szép Szó*, the leftist *Gondolat*, and even Lajos Kassák's *Munka*. On the final page of the final issue of *Századunk*, published in September 1939, Csécsy included quotations from Hugo Grotius and Nietzsche: "The free mixing of one people with another should not be prevented, for it benefits human society and harms no one," went Grotius; "Madness is the exception in individuals, but the rule among crowds, parties, and peoples," wrote Nietzsche.⁵¹ The key outlets in the republican Leftist public sphere had been closed, leaving only a disparate group of outlets to express dissenting views, and even then, subject to regular censorship.

In this period, the republican Left in Hungary not only lost its publishing outlets, but some of its sharpest minds too. Róbert Braun had died unexpectedly of an illness in February 1937. Attila József committed suicide in December the same year. In 1938, Ruztem Vámbéry emigrated to the United States and Pál Ignóty to the United Kingdom. Ferenc Fejtő made his way to France, but not without a brief prison stay in February. The cause was an article he had written in *Népszava* after a lecture he had given in Makó in memory of Attila József, in which he observed that the plain-speaking peasantry was a better "guarantee of the country's order, cultural progress, and beautiful European identity as opposed to the increasingly corrupt

⁴⁹ "XVIII. törvénycikk az állami rend megóvása végett szükséges sajtórendészeti rendelkezésekről" (Law XVIII on Press Regulations Necessary for the Preservation of State Order), in *Az 1938. évi törvények gyűjteménye*, 162–67.

⁵⁰ Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 24.

⁵¹ See *Századunk* 15, no. 7 (1939): 288.

intellectual middle class, drunk on the power of their clerical positions.”⁵² He emigrated before his full sentence was declared by the courts.⁵³ Csécsy, however, remained with his family in Budapest, as did many others from the *népi* Left. *Nyugat* remained functional until Mihály Babits’s death in 1941, after which Gyula Illyés established a short-lived successor, *Magyar Csillag*, which closed in the wake of the Nazi invasion in spring 1944. As Pál Ignótyus recalled some decades later, the Hungarian Left’s intellectual resistance to fascism was nearly destroyed after 1938, with so many important outlets closed and so many of the Left’s brightest minds in exile. As a result, the center of the intellectual resistance began to shift to the Right, toward those “fanatics of a mellowed national chauvinism” like Pál Teleki, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, Dezső Szabó, and Gyula Szekfű, who were perhaps more anti-German than genuine antifascists.⁵⁴

The March Front’s brief existence and the impassioned debates around the *népi* writers’ conceptions of the political community, democracy, and socialism revealed both the possibilities and the limits of antifascist cooperation in late Horthyist Hungary. The March Front’s original twelve-point program showed that a common program of democratic transformation could unify social democrats, civic radicals, *népi* writers, and even some sympathizers of the illegal communist movement. The criticisms levelled by Pál Ignótyus and Ferenc Fejtő pushed against the more chauvinist expressions of the *népi* writers by renovating republican leftist political ideas against a younger, more radical form of ethnic nationalism. They were sympathetic in principle to the *népi* writers’ goals of political and economic democratization, but the civic radicals and social democrats remained extremely wary of

⁵² Ferenc Fejtő, “Makói beszélgetés” (A Conversation in Makó), *Népszava* 66, no. 25 (Feb. 13, 1938): 11–12, here 12.

⁵³ As recounted from Ágnes Széchényi, “François Fejtő and Hungary in the 1930s,” *Cahiers d’études Hongroises et Finlandaises*, vol. 16, *Hommage à François Fejtő*, ed. Judit Maár (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010), 153n4.

⁵⁴ Paul [Pál] Ignótyus, “Radical Writers in Hungary,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 2 (1966): 149–67, here 166. This was a shortened version of a longer text which would appear two years later in German: Paul [Pál] Ignótyus, “Die intellektuelle Linke im Ungarn der ‘Horthy-Zeit’” (The Intellectual Left in Horthy-Era Hungary), *Südost-Forschungen* 27 (1968): 148–241.

biologized rhetoric around the political community and its logical consequence: the propagation of racialized conceptions of the *demos*. Nevertheless, the concepts, language, and thrust of these earlier debates were now integrated into the new generation's own discussions, in the shadow of European fascism.

Let us turn now to Yugoslavia, where the situation around forming popular fronts differed markedly. The most successful attempts were made in the Slovenian Lands, where the communist movement, though illegal, had retained substantial organizational capacity and links to the adjacent progressive intellectuals within the republican Left. Yet the story of the popular front in Yugoslavia cannot be reduced to communist initiative alone. The intellectuals on the republican Left had set the intellectual groundwork for the very "slogans" of the popular front strategy now taken up by the communist Left: the self-determination of the political community within a federal framework and the escape from domination in both political and economic life through the radical democratization of both spheres.

A key issue was cultural identity. The debates over the cultural identity of the political community in Hungary found a striking parallel in Yugoslavia, though the terms of the controversy differed. Where the Hungarian *népi-urbánus* debate revolved around the relationship between ethnic and civic conceptions of the political community, the Slovenian debate centered on whether Slovenians constituted a distinct cultural community or were merely a variant within a larger Yugoslav cultural whole. This question had deep roots in Slovenian intellectual history,⁵⁵ but it acquired fresh urgency after the proclamation of the January 6 Dictatorship in 1929, when the Karađorđević regime's program of integral

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Jernej Kosi, *Kako je nastal slovenski narod: Začetki slovenskega nacionalnega gibanja v prvi polovici 19. stoletja* (How the Slovenian Nation Was Born: The Origins of the Slovenian National Movement in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century) (Ljubljana: Sophia, 2013); and Božidar Jezernik, *Yugoslavia without Yugoslavs: The History of a National Idea*, trans. Lucy Stevens and Vuk Šećerović (New York: Berghahn, 2023), particularly the introduction.

Yugoslavism threatened to dissolve the distinctiveness of the various South Slavic cultural communities.

The focal point of the renewed debate was Josip Vidmar's *Kulturni problem slovenstva* (The Cultural Problem of Slovenian Identity), published in May 1932. Vidmar, a literary critic associated with the younger generation of progressive urban intelligentsia clustered around the journal *Ljubljanski zvon*, wrote explicitly against the Yugoslav unitarist position then dominant among Slovenian liberals, who held that Slovenians, as a numerically small nation, could not sustain an independent cultural life and would inevitably merge into a broader—but effectively Serbo-Croatian—cultural sphere. Vidmar rejected this argument, drawing on the intellectual lineage of Franc Prešeren and Ivan Cankar. The Slovenian language itself, Vidmar argued, was “the medium which maintains Slovenian identity in the Slovenian lands.”⁵⁶ Drawing on Cankar's claim from 1913 that “any Yugoslav question in a cultural or even linguistic sense does not exist for me at all,” Vidmar maintained that the Yugoslav question was “exclusively a political problem.”⁵⁷ His argument rested on two claims: that national character (*narodni značaj*) constituted an irreducible spiritual structure expressed first through language and then through art and literature; and that small nations were fully capable of sustaining significant cultural achievements. Famously invoking Slovenia as the site of “a new Athens or Florence,”⁵⁸ Vidmar argued that the “numerical inferiority” of the Slovenian people was no grounds for complete cultural integration.⁵⁹

The book's publication provoked an immediate controversy. The poet Oton Župančič, perhaps the most prominent Slovenian literary figure of the interwar period, responded obliquely in September 1932 with an essay on the Slovenian-American writer Louis Adamič,

⁵⁶ Josip Vidmar, *Kulturni problem slovenstva* (The Cultural Problem of Slovenian Identity) (Ljubljana: Tiskovna zadruga, 1932), 63.

⁵⁷ Ivan Cankar, “Slovenci in Jugoslovani” (Slovenes and Yugoslavs), *Zarja* 3, no. 557 (Apr. 15, 1913)—no. 559 (Apr. 17, 1913), quoted in Vidmar, *Kulturni problem slovenstva*, 64.

⁵⁸ Vidmar, *Kulturni problem slovenstva*, 92.

⁵⁹ Vidmar, *Kulturni problem slovenstva*, 72–76.

who had emigrated as a child and now wrote exclusively in English.⁶⁰ In fact, Adamič was at that moment a Guggenheim fellow living in Slovenia, so the return of the prodigal son added further weight to Župančič's text.⁶¹ In Župančič's narrative, Adamič had remained Slovenian "in the depths of his spirit, in the instinctive impulse, in the secret essence which gives his work its special color and tone" even while writing in a foreign language. At the same time, Župančič attacked the "vigilant guardians" (*budni stražarji*) of Slovenian identity who sought to confine Slovenianness within narrow, parochial boundaries.⁶² The younger intellectuals around Vidmar prepared critical rejoinders for *Ljubljanski zvon*, but the journal's publisher, the liberal Printing Cooperative (*Tiskovna zadruga*), refused to print their responses. The crisis escalated into a full editorial rupture; the journal's editor-in-chief, Fran Albrecht, resigned in protest, explaining that the responses had been "calm and substantive refutations" rather than hostile attacks.⁶³ Vidmar's own unpublished response accused Župančič of obscuring his true position behind "nervously self-willed logical contradictions."⁶⁴ The affair effectively split the liberal cultural establishment in Ljubljana, with Albrecht, Vidmar, and their allies founding a new journal, *Sodobnost* (The Present), in 1933 as a cultural organ aligned with Slovenian autonomist ideas; both Albin Prepeluh and Dragotin Lončar began to contribute to its pages soon after its founding.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Oton Župančič, "Adamič in slovenstvo" (Adamič and Slovenian Identity), *Ljubljanski zvon* 52, no. 8 (1932): 518.

⁶¹ See Louis Adamic, *The Native's Return: An American Immigrant Visits Yugoslavia and Discovers His Old Country* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934); see also his portrait of Vidmar in Louis Adamic, *My Native Land* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943), 132–35.

⁶² Župančič, "Adamič in slovenstvo," 519.

⁶³ Fran Albrecht, "Uvod" (Introduction), in *Kriza Ljubljanskega zvona* (The Crisis of *Ljubljanski zvon*), ed. Fran Albrecht (Ljubljana: Kritika, 1932), 7.

⁶⁴ Josip Vidmar, "Župančič in slovenstvo" (Župančič and Slovenian Identity), in Albrecht, ed., *Kriza Ljubljanskega zvona*, 27–31.

⁶⁵ For example, Albin Prepeluh, "Problem mladine" (The Problem of the Youth), *Sodobnost* 1, no. 11 (1933): 481–85; Dragotin Lončar, "Dr. Janko Serbec (od 19. oktobra 1834. leta do 25. januarja 1909. leta). Družboslovna skica v okviru njegovih narodnopolitičnih in gospodarsko-socialnih načel" (Janko Serbec, 1834–1909. A Sociological Sketch in the Frame of His National-Political and Socio-Economic Principles), *Sodobnost* 3 (1935): 75–79, 123–28, 182–87, 282–86, 430–33, 472–74, then republished under the same title as a standalone pamphlet in 1937.

The communists' response to Vidmar came from a quite different direction. Writing under the pseudonym Tone Brodar in the new leftist literary journal *Književnost*, the young Edvard Kardelj published a lengthy, serialized critique, "The National Question as a Scientific Question," in 1932 and 1933. Kardelj accused Vidmar of leaving the category 'culture' completely undefined and divorced from its material foundations.⁶⁶ The national question, Kardelj insisted, was fundamentally a social question rooted in class struggle; cultural demands were merely "weapons" in national struggles, not their ultimate content.⁶⁷ Although Kardelj ultimately agreed with Vidmar's concern for the survival of the cultural community, it was Vidmar's "opportunistic" presentation of the problem which had done little to further the cause of national liberation.⁶⁸

For the intellectuals on the republican Left, it was not entirely obvious that they had simply ignored material conditions. Albin Prepeluh had continued his work on the agrarian question, and in his *In the Struggle for Land and the State* (1928), he surveyed agrarian movements across East Central Europe and beyond, concluding that in predominantly agrarian countries it was the peasant and not the urban proletariat who became "the new bearer of the social movement," the leading force in what Prepeluh called the "peasant-worker movement."⁶⁹ In the Slovenian context, this movement would have to focus on land reform, for most agrarian laborers did not own land, rather working on the estates of large landowners, much of which was unproductive forest, a situation rooted in the concentration of land in the hands of a predominantly German nobility.⁷⁰ While the initial drive for land reform in Yugoslavia (1919)

⁶⁶ Tone Brodar [Edvard Kardelj], "Nacionalno vprašanje kot znanstveno vprašanje" (The National Question as a Scientific Question), *Književnost* 1, no. 5 (1932–33): 165.

⁶⁷ Brodar [Kardelj], "Nacionalno vprašanje," *Književnost* 1, no. 1 (1932–33): 6.

⁶⁸ Brodar [Kardelj], "Nacionalno vprašanje," *Književnost* 1, no. 7 (1932–33): 242. See also Jurij Perovšek, *Samoodločba in federacija: Slovenski komunisti in nacionalno vprašanje 1920–1941* (Self-Determination and Federation: Slovenian Communists and the National Question, 1920–1941) (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2012), 171–79, on the debate.

⁶⁹ Albin Prepeluh, *V boju za zemljo in državo: socijalno-politično pismo* (In the Struggle for Land and the State: A Socio-Political Letter) (Ljubljana: Kmetijska matica, 1928), 4.

⁷⁰ Prepeluh, *V boju za zemljo in državo*, 116–17.

had gone some way in breaking up the large estates, it did not touch the large forest holdings which made up nearly 45% of productive land in the Slovenian countryside.⁷¹ Further land reform and, importantly, the education of the peasantry in effective agricultural techniques and in their social position would be necessary.⁷² In a further text on the agrarian movement in Slovenia, Prepeluh more openly called for a “peasant democracy” (*kmetska demokracija*) to “transform today’s unsustainable social coexistence.”⁷³ He founded the non-party Union of Agrarian Interests (*Zveza agrarnih interesentov*) in November 1928,⁷⁴ created to pressure the government into enacting radical land reform and to begin building a peasant-worker movement. The formal land reform legislation of June 1931 preserved, in the Union’s view, the “feudal land-owning system” through loopholes; the Union argued for an absolute maximum of 50 hectares of arable land or 200 hectares of forest per individual.⁷⁵ Beyond the technical aspects, there was an element of alliance-building. An independent peasantry which worked the land as their own, Prepeluh argued, was crucial for the reconstruction of the country, and a system which continued to force the Slovenian peasant into a position of servility and poverty would ensure the collapse of the entire system.⁷⁶

In parallel, both Prepeluh and Rudolf Golouh had been appointed to the assembly of the Dravska Banovina, the regional government which covered the Slovenian Lands after the new constitution of 1931.⁷⁷ They were the only two assembly members who refused to join the regime’s Yugoslav National Party.⁷⁸ Their political independence afforded them latitude in

⁷¹ Prepeluh, *V boju za zemljo in državo*, 116–17.

⁷² Prepeluh, *V boju za zemljo in državo*, 120–23.

⁷³ Albin Prepeluh, *Kmetski pokret med Slovenci po prvi svetovni vojni* (The Agrarian Movement among the Slovenes after the First World War) (Ljubljana: Kmetijska matica, 1928), 44.

⁷⁴ Albin Prepeluh, *Naš veliki socialni problem: agrarna reforma* (Our Great Social Problem: Land Reform) (Ljubljana: Zveza slovenskih agrarnih interesov, 1933), 15–20.

⁷⁵ Prepeluh, *Naš veliki socialni problem*, 33.

⁷⁶ Prepeluh, *Naš veliki socialni problem*, 101–107.

⁷⁷ Miroslav Stiplovšek, “Prizadevanja Rudolfa Golouha in Albina Prepeluha za omilitev socialnih posledic gospodarske krize v banskem svetu Dravske banovine 1931–1935” (The Efforts of Rudolf Golouh and Albin Prepeluh to Ameliorate the Social Consequences of the Economic Crisis in the Assembly of the Dravska Banovina, 1931–1935), *Zgodovinski časopis* 65, no. 144 (2011): 412–37.

⁷⁸ Miroslav Stiplovšek, “Prizadevanja Rudolfa Golouha in Albina Prepeluha za udejanjenje banovinske in občinske samouprave v banskem svetu Dravske banovine 1933–1935” (The Efforts of Rudolf Golouh and Albin Prepeluh

articulating a vision of democratic self-government at odds with the trend toward administrative centralism. Golouh, who served as head of the Employment Service in Maribor, proposed a dedicated poverty fund financed through compulsory contributions, aiming not at “charity” but meaningful employment through public works and direct assistance.⁷⁹⁸⁰ Through subsequent sessions, both fought to ensure that the fund’s disbursement prioritized industrial workers and the rural poor—particularly landless laborers and forest workers whom Prepeluh identified as “in the worst position.”⁸¹ Both insisted that effective social policy required genuine self-government (*samouprava*) at the provincial and municipal levels. The appointed Assembly, Prepeluh argued, lacked the democratic legitimacy necessary to compel the central government’s compliance; only an elected assembly with legislative authority would possess “an entirely different power” in negotiations with Belgrade.⁸² When the regime moved forward with municipal elections in 1933, Prepeluh criticized the law’s provision for open rather than secret balloting, arguing that genuinely “free elections” required conditions in which voters could decide “according to their own conviction, and not under the influence of those on whom they depend.”⁸³ Golouh likewise defended municipal autonomy, refusing to take “responsibility for helping to destroy the autonomy of municipalities.”⁸⁴ The link between municipal and provincial self-government and the provision of social relief were both means to address the lack of democratic self-determination for the political community. Even if citizens were given the right to elect their representatives, how could they do so freely, unbound from any form of dependency or domination? This was the core of the leftist republican language incubated over the intervening years. Genuine democracy—“peasant democracy” for Prepeluh—required the

to Implement Banovina and Municipal Self-Government in the Assembly of the Dravska Banovina, 1933–1935), *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 50, no. 1 (2010): 57–74, here 59.

⁷⁹ Stiplovšek, “Prizadevanja Rudolfa Golouha in Albina Prepeluha” (2011): 423–24.

⁸⁰ Stiplovšek, “Prizadevanja Rudolfa Golouha in Albina Prepeluha” (2011): 424.

⁸¹ Stiplovšek, “Prizadevanja Rudolfa Golouha in Albina Prepeluha” (2011): 427.

⁸² Stiplovšek, “Prizadevanja Rudolfa Golouha in Albina Prepeluha” (2010): 69–70.

⁸³ Stiplovšek, “Prizadevanja Rudolfa Golouha in Albina Prepeluha” (2010): 67–68.

⁸⁴ Stiplovšek, “Prizadevanja Rudolfa Golouha in Albina Prepeluha” (2010): 69.

sort of federalist and autonomist conception of cascading sovereignty which had been explored earlier in this dissertation.

Soon enough and in a surprising twist, King Aleksandar I was assassinated in Marseilles in 1934. The premiership of Milan Stojadinović (1935–1939) which followed, with its corporatist leanings and increasing dependency on foreign direct investment from Nazi Germany, could hardly be seen as an emancipatory gain for the Yugoslav political community. It was in this context that popular front structures emerged in the Slovenian Lands, in part as a “classical” agreement struck between oppositional parties and in part as a mass movement from below. The most significant organizational form was the Peasant-Workers’ Movement (*Kmečko-delavsko gibanje*, KDG), which served as the core of the broader popular front effort.⁸⁵ What distinguished this formation was its attempt to reconstitute the boundaries of the political community itself, drawing together workers fragmented across trade unions, peasants organized through agrarian cooperatives, and the Catholic masses who might be won over from the Slovenian People’s Party for a common antifascist program.⁸⁶

That program, published in 1935, emphasized Slovenian aspirations for autonomy and democratization. Under the slogan “Slovenia for the Slovenes” (*Slovenijo Slovencem*), the movement called for an end to economic subordination within the centralized Yugoslav state and for the equality of the Slovenian language. Its demands extended to concrete social grievances: a halt to compulsory tax collection, the cancellation of debts for the economically weak, and interest-free credits for peasant cooperatives. These economic provisions were linked to political ones: freedom of the press, assembly, and organization; freedom of religious belief; a general amnesty for political prisoners; and the abolition of the Law on the Protection of the

⁸⁵ Alenka Nedog, “Nekatera vprašanja iz ljudskofrontnega gibanja na Slovenskem v letih 1935–1937” (Some Questions from the Popular Front Movement in the Slovenian Lands, 1935–1937,” *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 6, no. 1–2 (1966): 77.

⁸⁶ Nedog, “Nekatera vprašanja,” 78.

State.⁸⁷ The conjunction of national cultural and political autonomy with social justice and democratic freedoms placed the movement squarely within the republican tradition that Lončar and Prepeluh had articulated since the early 1920s. By 1936, the KDG had consolidated its presence through mass actions and mass gatherings across northern Styria, Prekmurje, and the border regions with Italy and Croatia; when authorities banned such assemblies, organizers simply relocated across the internal administrative border.⁸⁸

By April 1937, a leadership committee for the movement had been established comprising four members: two communists and two representatives of “bourgeois” groupings, namely the lawyer Vekoslav Kukovec and Dragotin Lončar.⁸⁹ Lončar, as this dissertation has demonstrated, brought the accumulated weight of two decades’ worth of reflection on Slovenian autonomy and democratic self-governance to the coalition. He remained wedded to a vision of “true democracy” as self-rule by the working people, premised on the autonomy of each nation within a larger political community.⁹⁰ His participation in the popular front was a logical extension of these principles under a mounting fascist threat. Still, communist assessments from the period characterized him as “conceited” (*uobražen*) and even “Führer-like” (*firerski*),⁹¹ descriptions which may rather have been the markers of an independent intellectual not accustomed to the imposition of democratic centralism. Lončar remained skeptical of the communists’ philosophical materialism, having written critically of Marxist philosophy already at the turn of the century.⁹² At the same time, he acknowledged Marxism’s contributions to scientific economic analysis. This was quite a typical leftist republican

⁸⁷ Nedog, “Nekatera vprašanja,” 78.

⁸⁸ Nedog, “Nekatera vprašanja,” 79–80.

⁸⁹ Dušan Živković, *Narodni front Jugoslavije 1935–1945* (The Yugoslav Popular Front, 1935–1945) (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju–Narodna knjiga, 1978), 92.

⁹⁰ Jurij Perovšek, “Dragotin Lončar,” in *Politika in moderna: Idejnopolitični razvoj, delovanje in zareze v slovenski politiki od konca 19. stoletja do druge svetovne vojne* (Politics and Modernity: The Development, Activity, and Incisions of Political Ideas in Slovenian Politics from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Second World War) (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2022), 205–22, here 218.

⁹¹ Živković, *Narodni front Jugoslavije*, 92.

⁹² Perovšek, “Dragotin Lončar,” 212.

sentiment: Marxism accepted as a legitimate methodological-interpretive frame, not as an all-encompassing worldview.

Within the context of the KDG, Lončar continued to hold that democracy required the emancipation of working people from domination by capital, but that this emancipation could not be achieved through the violent methods and ideological monopoly characteristic of Soviet Bolshevism. “Whoever truly has the majority of the people behind them does not need naked violence,” he wrote in *Slovenska vas* (The Slovenian Village), “for they are sustained by the satisfaction and thus the trust of the population.”⁹³ Writing further in *Slovenska vas* in September 1937, he defended his collaboration with the Croatian Peasant Party leader Vladko Maček on precisely these grounds: Slovenes could only secure their autonomy through alliance with those who shared their democratic and federalist principles.⁹⁴ Through 1937, however, Lončar’s preference for Maček’s alliance over closer cooperation with the communists produced a split in the front’s leadership, and he eventually withdrew from active participation.⁹⁵ Later the same year, Albin Prepeluh passed away unexpectedly at the age of fifty-six, which was undoubtedly a blow to Lončar and the local agrarian republican movement.⁹⁶ Two years later, Lončar attempted to reconstruct that political environment, founding the Slovenian Peasant-Worker Party (*Slovenska kmečko-delavska stranka*) with Rudolf Dobovišek and a group of young Slovenian peasantists, though it also remained a marginal party like the one he had founded with Prepeluh fifteen years before.⁹⁷ As the historian Fran Zwitter observed, Lončar’s political influence had always been “limited to narrow circles, primarily among the intelligentsia,” for he was “more of a teacher and moral critic than a

⁹³ Dragotin Lončar, “Za svobodo in resnico” (For Freedom and Truth), *Slovenska vas* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 1938): 1, quoted in Perovšek, “Dragotin Lončar,” 215.

⁹⁴ Dragotin Lončar, “Kdo smo?” (Who Are We?), *Slovenska vas*, 1, no. (Sept. 15, 1937): 2, quoted in Perovšek, “Dragotin Lončar,” 218.

⁹⁵ Živković, *Narodni front Jugoslavije*, 92–93.

⁹⁶ Lončar wrote his obituary: Dragotin Lončar, “Abditus,” *Sodobnost* 5 (1937): 481–87.

⁹⁷ Perovšek, “Dragotin Lončar,” 218.

politician.”⁹⁸ Yet his political-organizational marginality should not obscure the significance of his intellectual contribution.

In April 1938, a month after the *Anschluß*, the Paris-based antifascist periodical *European Voices* collected short responses from a group of progressive intellectuals in Slovenia, including Oton Župančič, Fran Kidrič, Ferdo Kozak, Edvard Kocbek, and Lončar’s former collaborator Vekoslav Kukovec.⁹⁹ A more reflective text was solicited from Lončar.¹⁰⁰ National Socialism, he remarked, was based on the nationality principle, yet it was based on a deeply violent conception of the nation which denied the equality of others. Collective security, Lončar reminded the readership, could only be based on equality among nations, irrespective of size or characteristics.¹⁰¹ That sort of arrangement in Central Europe could only be found in the idea of a “United States of the Danubian Basin,” he argued, pointing to precedents advocated by Palacký and Masaryk.¹⁰² Before the year was over, Lončar once again took to the pages of *European Voices* on the occasion of the Munich Agreement:

I would like to briefly summarize my position on recent world events in the following two basic principles: 1. As a member of a small nation whose very existence is threatened, I see it as an absolute necessity that a general liberation of the minorities of all cultured peoples be carried out in the spirit of free self-determination. Any unilateral solution that favors only the large nations is not an act of reconciliation, but an arbitrary exercise of power that creates new injustices. The suppression of the small and the domination of the large – that is not true peace among nations. 2. The coexistence of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs should be based on national equality, so that our mother country may be administered organically and freely, in accordance with its nature.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Fran Zwitter, “Dragotin Lončar,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 8 (1954): 185.

⁹⁹ Oton Župančič et al., “Stimmen Sloveniens zum ‘Anschluß’,” (Voices from Slovenia on the *Anschluß*), *Europäische Stimmen* 3, no. 8 (1938): 237–40. *European Voices*, a “biweekly for the Danubian states and Southeastern Europe,” was published in English, German, and French by the Est-Verlag in Zürich and edited in Paris by Georges Berneil and Éliane Brault, in London by Elizabeth Wiskemann, and in Zürich by Josef Halperin.

¹⁰⁰ Dragotin Lončar, “Nach dem ‘Anschluß’ – erst recht kollektive Sicherheit!” (After the ‘*Anschluß*’ – First True Collective Security!), *Europäische Stimmen* 3, no. 8 (May 1938): 241–42.

¹⁰¹ Lončar, “Nach dem ‘Anschluß’,” 241.

¹⁰² Lončar, “Nach dem ‘Anschluß’,” 241.

¹⁰³ Dragotin Lončar, “Das ist kein wahrer Völkerfriede!” (That Is Not True Peace among Nations!), *Europäische Stimmen* 3, no. 19/20 (Oct. 1938): 547.

In August 1940, Lončar likewise published a front-page editorial for the antifascist paper *Slovenija*, entitled “West or East?”, picking up on these same issues.¹⁰⁴ He argued that Slovenes required “inner balance to find the right path out of today’s distress,” combining their Western cultural heritage with a new orientation toward the progressive forces of the East.¹⁰⁵ The common political task for Slovenes and other Slavic peoples was to prepare the conditions for “a political and social order in which all Slavic and non-Slavic nations will feel free and secure in their autonomous existence.”¹⁰⁶ Lončar argued against romantic conceptions of pan-Slavism, which he dismissed as a “reactionary delusion” sprung from the same nationalist mentality “from which [integral] Yugoslavism itself was born.”¹⁰⁷ Here too we find a resonance with his and Ivan Cankar’s ideas from 1913 on the necessity of the preservation of an independent Slovenian cultural community within a superordinate South Slavic political community. For Lončar now as then, the Slovenian nation could only join a common state as an equal and autonomous partner, never as a subordinated unit.

If Lončar represented the continuity of civic radical and agrarian socialist conceptions of democracy into the popular front period, Edvard Kocbek embodied a different trajectory: the emergence of a younger generation of Catholic intellectuals who broke with the clerical establishment in the name of antifascist solidarity. Born in 1904, Kocbek had been formed in the milieu of interwar Slovenian Catholic youth activism,¹⁰⁸ and during periods in Berlin and France in the late 1920s and early ‘30s encountered Christian existentialism and personalism, particularly the circle around Emmanuel Mounier’s journal *Esprit*, which would shape his mature thought. By the mid-1930s, he had established himself as a gifted poet and essayist,

¹⁰⁴ Dragotin Lončar, “Zahod ali Vzhod?” (West or East?), *Slovenija* 9, no. 32 (Aug. 9, 1940): 1.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Perovšek, “Dragotin Lončar,” 219.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Perovšek, “Dragotin Lončar,” 220.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Perovšek, “Dragotin Lončar,” 220.

¹⁰⁸ Veljko Stanić, “Edvard Kocbek: A Reflection on Spain,” in *Political Transformations in the Interwar Period: The Case of Slovenian Political Thought*, ed. Isidora Grubački and Marko Zajc (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2026), 213–214.

collaborating with the distinguished Catholic journal *Dom in svet*. A series of essays published between 1935 and 1941 on Kierkegaard, Maritain, and Bergson testified to his effort to articulate a Catholic position that could transcend the reactionary clerical politics dominant in Slovenian Catholicism.¹⁰⁹

The catalyst for Kocbek's public break with the Catholic establishment came in April 1937, when *Dom in svet* published his essay "A Reflection on Spain."¹¹⁰ The dominant Catholic view, including in Slovenia, held that the Spanish Civil War represented a holy crusade against Bolshevism. Kocbek rejected this consensus entirely. Drawing on material from *Esprit* and the testimony of Spanish Catholic republicans, he argued that the war's causes were social rather than religious, rooted in the agrarian question and the historic complicity of the Spanish Church with large landholding. Fascism, far from defending Christian civilization, represented the organized defense of bourgeois and clerical privilege through the cynical exploitation of religious sentiment.¹¹¹ The essay opened with a critique of "bourgeois Christianity": "The bourgeois is a man with a double face," Kocbek wrote, "a deceitful double, a man of 'goodwill' on the outside and a non-believer, sceptic, and even cynic on the inside."¹¹²

The response within Slovenian Catholic circles was immediate. The Catholic Printing Society demanded that the editorial board of *Dom in svet* have Kocbek retract his claims; when they refused, the journal was effectively suspended.¹¹³ The Ljubljana bishop Gregorij Rožman issued a formal condemnation, declaring Kocbek's claims "completely erroneous and contrary to the position and teaching of the Catholic Church."¹¹⁴ Kocbek's response was further

¹⁰⁹ Stanić, "Edvard Kocbek," 220.

¹¹⁰ Edvard Kocbek, "Premišljevanje o Španiji" (A Reflection on Spain), *Dom in svet* 5, no. 1–2 (1937): 90–105; excerpt republished in English translation in Stanić, "Edvard Kocbek," 221–24.

¹¹¹ Stanić, "Edvard Kocbek," 220–221.

¹¹² Stanić, "Edvard Kocbek," 222.

¹¹³ Janko Prunk, *Pot krščanskih socialistov v Osvobodilno fronto slovenskega naroda* (The Path of Christian Socialists into the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation) (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1977), 159–160; see also [France Koblar, France Stelè, and Franc Vodnik,] *Dom in svet v letu 1937 (Dom in svet in 1937)* (Ljubljana, n.p., 1938); and Marjan Dolgan, ed., *Kriza revije Dom in svet leta 1937: Zbornik dokumentov* (The Crisis of the Journal *Dom in svet*, 1937: A Collection of Documents) (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2001).

¹¹⁴ Prunk, *Pot krščanskih socialistov*, 160.

radicalization. In early 1938, he launched a new journal, *Dejanje* (Action), which he edited until the occupation in 1941. In its opening programmatic statement, he insisted that Slovenes were entering “a purely political period” which required “reorientation in the direction of action.”¹¹⁵ The very survival of the political community demanded one to overcome ideological fragmentation: “The Slovenian people instinctively feel that this inconsistent national creation brings them an ever-greater lack of freedom, expressed in extreme economic dependence, and ever greater human insincerity expressed in cultural irrelevance,” Kocbek argued; “And exactly because we have not developed a precise, responsible sense of our concrete life, especially in the economic and political fields, our fate has always been decided on foreign soil, not on our own.”¹¹⁶

Dejanje’s political vision drew together several strands: the personalist humanism Kocbek had absorbed from Mounier; the critique of both fascist reaction and Stalinist dogmatism; and a commitment to national self-determination that aligned with the broader republican tradition. Like Lončar, Kocbek rejected Yugoslav unitarism and called for a federalist solution. Unlike Lončar, however, he was prepared to work actively within a coalition that included communists, provided the coalition respected the autonomy of its constituent groups. The journal consistently attacked the clericalism prevalent in Slovenia (“the most unworthy mentality among contemporary Christians,” he wrote in 1940) while maintaining a critical distance from historical materialism.¹¹⁷

The divergent trajectories of Lončar and Kocbek illuminate the complexity of the Slovenian popular front experience. Both rejected political monopolies; both advocated national autonomy within a federalized framework; both opposed fascism and the Stojadinović government’s quasi-fascist positioning. They represented different political generations and

¹¹⁵ Edvard Kocbek, “Slovenski človek” (The Slovenian Person), *Dejanje* 1, no. 1 (1938): 3.

¹¹⁶ [Edvard Kocbek,] “Poziv vsem Slovencem!” (A Call to All Slovenes!), *Dejanje* 1, no. 4 (1938): 113–14.

¹¹⁷ Prunk, *Pot krščanskih socialistov*, 164–165; Edvard Kocbek, “Kristjan v svetu” (A Christian in the World), *Dejanje* 3, no. 8 (1940): 294.

different conceptions of the path forward. Lončar, the Masarykian, remained committed to a vision of civic education and gradual democratization that kept him suspicious of communist methods, even as he shared many of their immediate goals. Kocbek, the Christian socialist, was prepared to embrace a Kierkegaardian leap of faith into political action and to find in the broad antifascist coalition the vehicle for a new kind of Catholic politics.

4.2. *Popular Resistance*

The end of the popular front period coincided with a slew of drastic changes in the international and domestic scenes. In Yugoslavia, Prince Pavle Karađorđević—ruling the country as regent since Aleksandar's assassination in 1934—dismissed Stojadinović in the wake of the December 1938 elections, when the United Opposition headed by Vladimir Maček of the Croatian peasantists had overperformed and gained 45% of the vote.¹¹⁸ In his stead, Pavle appointed Dragiša Cvetković as Prime Minister. Cvetković finally came to an agreement with Maček on August 26, 1939, to allow for some structures of Croatian national-political autonomy within Yugoslavia. A Croatian Banovina was created within the unitarist Yugoslav state and Maček became deputy prime minister in Belgrade, while the autonomous entity retained devolved administrative and legislative powers as well as a governor (*ban*) in the person of Ivan Šubašić. It appeared that, at least in the Croatian case, some sort of territorial structures for national autonomy had been introduced and that Yugoslavia could be federalized. Aside from the inconvenient fact that it was impossible to delimit the Banovina on ethnic lines, its creation spurred speculation about creating similar units for the Serbs and the Slovenes. However, the

¹¹⁸ Calic, *A History of Yugoslavia*, 119.

debates around creating similar federative states within a Yugoslav frame would be left unresolved, at least until some years later.

Less than a week after the Cvetković–Maček Agreement was signed, Nazi Germany invaded and occupied Poland. Faced with an extremely grim international situation and conditioned further by the already pro-German orientation in the country's trade and foreign policy developed under Stojadinović, Pavle and the Cvetković government agreed to sign the Tripartite Pact in late March 1941.¹¹⁹ On the morning of March 27, two days after the Pact was signed, generals Bora Mirković and Dušan Simović launched a military coup against Pavle and Cvetković, followed by massive street demonstrations.¹²⁰ A little more than a week later, on April 6, German forces commenced their invasion of Yugoslavia.¹²¹ Italian and Hungarian ground troops joined on April 11. Less than two weeks after, the entire Yugoslav armed forces had surrendered. Simović and the royal government evacuated first to Athens, then to Jerusalem, and onward to London, where they would remain for the rest of the war.¹²²

In the wake of the government's exile, the Axis powers' systems of occupation were established. A puppet Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH) was announced on the evening of April 10 by Slavko Kvaternik in the name of the Croatian fascist Ustaša movement.¹²³ Germany proceeded to occupy and annex the northern regions of Slovenia while operating a military government with quasi-civilian local administration under Milan Nedić in Serbia.¹²⁴ The Italians occupied and annexed the southern regions of Slovenia,

¹¹⁹ Calic, *A History of Yugoslavia*, 121.

¹²⁰ James Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934–1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 258–59.

¹²¹ Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 44–46.

¹²² Stevan K. Pavlowitch, "Yugoslavia in Exile: The London-based wartime government, 1941–45," in *New Perspectives on Yugoslavia: Key Issues and Controversies*, ed. Dejan Djokić and James Ker-Lindsay (London: Routledge, 2011), 100–16.

¹²³ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 52–55. Kvaternik's declaration of independence was followed by an announcement by Vladimir Maček who, in relinquishing his domestic political leadership, requested that "all the followers of the Croatian Peasant Party ... remain at their posts and cooperate loyally with the new government." Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 53.

¹²⁴ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 63.

including Ljubljana.¹²⁵ Italy likewise occupied further territories on the Adriatic coast, including the Bay of Kotor, and treated Montenegro as a military occupation zone.¹²⁶ Albania, as an Italian protectorate, annexed territories populated in the majority by ethnic Albanians, including part of southern Montenegro, nearly all of Kosovo, and western Macedonia.¹²⁷ Bulgaria occupied and annexed the rest of Macedonia and a small portion of eastern Serbia. Hungary occupied the Bačka, Baranja, Međimurje, and Prekmurje; before the end of the year, these regions were “reincorporated” into the Lands of the Crown of St. Stephen.¹²⁸

The leftist republicans in the Yugoslav context found themselves in a radically altered situation. Josip Broz Tito, in his capacity as Secretary General of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, sought contacts with the existent bourgeois parties in the country, including the Yugoslav Republican Party in particular.¹²⁹ Contact was made with Jaša Prodanović, who in turn informed Ivan Ribar, Tito’s envoy, that a large part of the Republican Party’s leading members had already gone over to Draža Mihailović’s royalist Četnik forces; another, smaller group had already made contact with the communists.¹³⁰ Among those had been Jaša’s son, the lawyer Borislav Prodanović, who joined the early Partisan formations. In the meantime, Jaša had retreated from political life, dedicating himself to scholarly work even as he came under further surveillance and intimidation by the quisling Serbian police and the Gestapo. In July 1942, he and Milica Prodanović, Borislav’s wife, were arrested and taken to the Banjica Concentration Camp as hostages.¹³¹ Through the intervention of Mladen Žujović—Jovan

¹²⁵ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 61.

¹²⁶ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 61.

¹²⁷ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 61–63.

¹²⁸ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 63. The Hungarian Parliament formally annexed these territories into the Hungarian administrative state structures in late December 1941; see “1941: XX. törvénycikk” (Law XX of 1941), in *Az 1941. évi törvények gyűjteménye* (Collection of Laws from 1941) (Budapest: A Magyar Kir. Belügyminisztérium, 1942), 279–81.

¹²⁹ Ivan Ribar, *Uspomene iz narodnooslobodilacke borbe* (Memories from the People’s Liberation War) (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod JNA “Vojno delo”, 1961), 24, quoted in Aleksandar Lukić, “Jaša Prodanović u Drugom svetskom ratu,” in *Intelektualci i rat 1939.–1947.: Zbornik radova* (Intellectuals and War, 1939–1947: A Collection of Studies), vol. 2, ed. Drago Roksandić and Ivana Cvijović Javorina (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, 2013), 384.

¹³⁰ Lukić, “Jaša Prodanović u Drugom svetskom ratu,” 384.

¹³¹ Lukić, “Jaša Prodanović u Drugom svetskom ratu,” 385; cf. Sima Begović, *Logor Banjica 1941–1944*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1989), 114.

Žujović's nephew—Jaša was released the following day; Milica spent a month in the camp.¹³² The rest of their war was spent in Belgrade.

Slightly more precarious was the case of Dragoljub Jovanović, who spent most of the occupation in hiding at his siblings' houses in Belgrade's Mali Mokri Lug.¹³³ Already in summer 1941, Jovanović informed Tito that the National Peasant Party (*Narodna seljačka stranka*)—which he had formed not more than a year previously out of the left wing of the Agrarian Workers' Union (*Savez zemljoradnika*)¹³⁴—stood with the Partisans. Overtures from the Četnik movement were rejected.¹³⁵ Jovanović did not join the Partisans personally, citing his poor health and the lack of safe transport out of occupied Belgrade.¹³⁶ Hunted by the quisling police, he remained in hiding and completed scholarly and political writing: a French translation of his *Socialism and the Peasantry*, which remains unpublished, his *Agrarian Socialism*,¹³⁷ and the completed manuscript of his “green book,” *Rural and Cooperative Culture*, on which he had worked since 1933.¹³⁸

Mihailo Ilić, a close interlocutor of both Prodanović and Jovanović and one of the main intellectuals among the Serbian republicans, did not share the same fate. Ilić was rounded up in Belgrade by the Gestapo and the quisling police on November 4, 1941, along with about 150

¹³² Lukić, “Jaša Prodanović u Drugom svetskom ratu,” 385.

¹³³ Nadežda Jovanović, “Предговор” (Foreword), in Dragoljub Jovanović, *Медаљони* (Portraits), vol. 1 (Belgrade: Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2008), 16.

¹³⁴ Nadežda Jovanović, *Земљорадничка левица у Србији: 1927.-1939. године* (The Agrarian Worker Left in Serbia, 1927–1939) (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1994).

¹³⁵ Jovanović, “Предговор,” 16; cf. Dejan A. Milić, *Др Драгољуб Јовановић: Човек који је дисао борбом* (Dragoljub Jovanović: A Man Who Breathed Struggle) (Belgrade: Demokratska stranka, 2007), 53–54; and Nadežda Jovanović, *Живот за слободу без страха: студија о животу и делу др Драгољуб Јовановић* (A Life for Freedom without Fear: A Study of the Life and Work of Dragoljub Jovanović) (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2000), 362–81.

¹³⁶ Jovanović, “Предговор,” 16.

¹³⁷ Dragoljub Jovanović, *Селјачки социјализам* (Agrarian Socialism), ed. Momčilo Isić and Srđan Jovanović (Belgrade: Porodica D. Jovanovića–Piro: Istorijski arhiv u Pirotu, 2023).

¹³⁸ Momčilo Isić, “Предговор” (Foreword), in Dragoljub Jovanović, *Рурална и задружна култура* (Rural and Cooperative Culture), ed. Momčilo Isić and Srđan Jovanović (Belgrade: Porodica D. Jovanovića–Piro: Istorijski arhiv u Pirotu, 2023), 7.

other intellectuals, and interned in the Banjica camp.¹³⁹ A broad net had been cast over those who had been deemed “anti-German,” as well as those who were claimed to be “freemasons” and/or “communists.”¹⁴⁰ While most of the group was released in the following months, Ilić was kept alongside his colleague from the Faculty of Law, Đorđe Tasić.¹⁴¹ Both had worked in an official capacity on federalizing Yugoslavia within the existent constitution in the leadup to the Cvetković–Maček Agreement.¹⁴² In the end, both were executed by the Gestapo. In the third volume of his *Portraits*, Dragoljub Jovanović speculated that the “Greater-Serbian faction” (*великосрби*) among the Serbian police had kept Ilić in the camp precisely because he had participated in the legal framing of the Cvetković–Maček Agreement, upending Serbian hegemony in the centralist and unitarist state. The “anticommunist faction” (*антикомунисти*) had done so to keep him from going over to the Partisans.¹⁴³ Ilić had been clearly recognized as a leftist republican intellectual, having been the editor of the short-lived antifascist paper *Napred* (Progress, 1939–1941) as well as of the book series “Politics and Society,” which published progressive social scientific works from leading Serbian intellectuals, including Dragoljub Jovanović in its last installment.¹⁴⁴ According to Gestapo reports recovered by Sima Begović:

The misfortune of Dr. Mihailo Ilić resulted from the actions of Dr. Walter Gruber, a correspondent for the German News Agency [*Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro*, DNB] who was Himmler’s informant in Belgrade “on British propaganda in Yugoslavia and its impact.” In one report from December 1939, Gruber mentioned Professor Ilić, who was the publisher of the weekly paper *Napred*, among those persons carrying out British propaganda. He was not released with the other intellectuals because his pamphlets and journalistic

¹³⁹ Begović, *Logor Banjica*, vol. 1, 157; cf. Sima Begović, “Професори и академици у логору на Бањици” (Professors and Academics in the Banjica Camp), in *Универзитет у Београду: 1838–1988* (The University of Belgrade, 1838–1988), ed. Dušan Tatić (Belgrade: University of Belgrade, 1988), 241–61.

¹⁴⁰ Begović, *Logor Banjica*, vol. 1, 157.

¹⁴¹ Begović, *Logor Banjica*, vol. 1, 160.

¹⁴² Jovanović, *Медаљони*, vol. 3, 364.

¹⁴³ Jovanović, *Медаљони*, vol. 3, 364.

¹⁴⁴ Dragoljub Jovanović, *Socijalizam i seljaštvo* (Socialism and the Peasantry) (Belgrade: Politika i društvo, 1941). An overview of the publishing activities of the “Politics and Society” group is given in Božidar S. Marković, “Izdavačka zadruha »Politika i društvo«” (The “Politics and Society” Publishing House), *Sociološki pregled* 18, no. 3–4 (1984): 285–95.

writings were based on “the ideas of French republican democracy and, later, the Popular Front.” According to investigators, Ilić’s negative activities were also reflected in the fact that he advocated for closer ties between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union as well as for an understanding with the Croatian opposition. On the basis of a subsequent report by their confidant “141,” who characterized Ilić as the leader of leftist elements in the pre-war University of Belgrade and the founder of the “Politics and Society” association—which was sympathetic to the British—the leadership of the Gestapo in Belgrade decided to execute Ilić.¹⁴⁵

Ilić was shot on March 20, 1944.¹⁴⁶

Further to the west, in the Italian occupation zone in Slovenia, a slightly different trajectory opened up for the republican Left. Once the occupation had begun, Dragotin Lončar retreated completely from political life. As a Masarykian committed to the power of small work (*drobná práce*), “he could not understand a movement that wanted to solve the Slovenian national question by calling for armed struggle,” as Fran Zwitter later remembered.¹⁴⁷ Already in his 1909 study on Janez Bleiweis, Zwitter pointed out, Lončar had counterpoised the poets Jenko and Prešeren: Lončar was more sympathetic to Prešeren’s advocacy of a distinct Slovenian identity articulated within a universal fraternity of nations, while Jenko represented the Romantic illusion that armed struggle could bring about national liberation.¹⁴⁸ Conversely, Lončar also rejected cooperation with the anti-communist Slovenian Alliance (*Slovenska zaveza*), refusing to attend meetings convened by Bishop Gregorij Rožman in September and October 1942.¹⁴⁹ Although his health had become a serious issue—he had developed macular degeneration and was almost completely blind by the end of the war¹⁵⁰—politically Lončar had

¹⁴⁵ Begović, *Logor Banjica*, vol. 1, 161.

¹⁴⁶ Aleksandar A. Miljković, “Profesor Mihailo Ilić,” *Sociološki pregled* 18, no. 3–4 (1984): 297–302, here 297.

¹⁴⁷ Zwitter, “Dragotin Lončar,” 185.

¹⁴⁸ Zwitter, “Dragotin Lončar,” 184; cf. Dragotin Lončar, *Dr. Janez Bleiweis in njegova doba. Postanek in razvoj narodno-političnega programa Slovencev do razcepljenja v konservativno in liberalno stranko* (Janez Bleiweis and His Era: The Rise and Development of the Slovenes’ National-Political Program until the Split into Conservative and Liberal Factions) (Ljubljana: Naši zapiski, 1910); and Dragotin Lončar, “Simon Jenko,” *Sodobnost* 3 (1935): 590–93.

¹⁴⁹ Bojan Godeša, *Kdor ni z nami, je proti nam: Slovenski izobraženci med okupatorji, Osvobodilno fronto in protirevolucionarnim taborom* (Who Isn’t with Us Is against Us: Slovenian Intellectuals between Occupation, the Liberation Front, and the Counterrevolutionary Camp) (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1995), 202, 209.

¹⁵⁰ Zwitter, “Dragotin Lončar,” 181.

“remained skeptical of the politics of the counterrevolutionary camp during the interwar period, and completely refused to cooperate with the occupational authorities.”¹⁵¹

Of the progressive camp, more active resistance was taken up by Josip Vidmar and Edvard Kocbek. Both entered into antifascist resistance soon after the Axis invasion. It was at the Vidmar family villa in Ljubljana where the inaugural organizational meeting was held for what would become the Liberation Front (*Osvobodilna fronta*, OF).¹⁵² Representatives from the communists (Boris Kidrič, Aleš Bebler, Boris Zihelr), the Christian socialists (Tone Fajfar), the “left wing” of the Sokols (Josip Rus), and a group of “cultural workers” around *Sodobnost* (Josip Vidmar, Fran Šturm, and Ferdo Kozak) formed the core. By the end of 1941, nearly eighteen different factions and groups had joined, though this would narrow in the following years.¹⁵³ An Executive Committee of the OF (*Izvršni odbor Osvobodilne fronte*, IOOF) was elected with five members: Kidrič, Fajfar, Rus, Vidmar, and Kardelj. Through the later addition of Kocbek, France Lubej, and Franc Leskošek, the OF was led from autumn 1941 to early 1943 by a committee of eight, with four communists, two Christian socialists (Fajfar and Kocbek), one Sokol member (Rus), and one representative of the cultural workers, Vidmar.

In parallel, in June 1941, the first set of OF “slogans” was published in *Slovenski poročevalec* (The Slovenian Reporter), the wartime organ of the Communist Party of Slovenia (*Komunistična partija Slovenije*, KPS).¹⁵⁴ The national liberation struggle aimed at providing

¹⁵¹ Godeša, *Kdor ni z nami*, 209; Zwitter, “Dragotin Lončar,” 184–85.

¹⁵² Eva Mally, *Slovenski odpor: Osvobodilna fronta slovenskega naroda od 1941 do 1945* (Slovenian Resistance: The Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation, 1941–1945) (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2011), 53–67, and

¹⁵³ Mally, *Slovenski odpor*, 73–99, on the main groups, and 99–111 on the smaller formations. For example, Črtomir Nagode and the *Stara pravda* (Old Rights) peasantist group as well as Angela Vode and the Yugoslav Women’s Council (*Jugoslovanska ženska zveza*) initially joined the OF, but soon left after disagreements arose about the extent to which the OF should engage in armed struggle against perceived enemies and collaborators among the Slovenian population. Not by chance both were tried after the war in 1947, with Nagode executed and Vode sentenced to twenty years in prison. Vode was released in 1953. See Peter Vodopivec, ed., *Usoda slovenskih demokratičnih izobražencev: Angela Vode in Boris Furlan, žrtvi Nagodetovega procesa* (The Fate of the Slovenian Democratic Intelligentsia: Angela Vode and Boris Furlan, Victims of the Nagode Trial) (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2001).

¹⁵⁴ “Gesla našega osvobodilnega boja” (The Slogans of Our Liberation Struggle), *Slovenski poročevalec* 2, no. 4 (June 22, 1941): 1. The newspaper was originally published in two issues in 1938 but discontinued, thus as an underground Partisan paper it was revived in its “second” year, 1941.

the Slovenian nation with the “right to self-determination, including the right to secession and unification with other nations,” the unification of the Slovenian nation with Slovenes in Carinthia and along the Littoral, “harmony and unity” (*sloga in enotnost*) among the peoples of Yugoslavia and on the Balkan peninsula, and “brotherhood and peace among nations.”¹⁵⁵ By the end of the year, the “foundational points” (*temeljni točki*) of the OF were published as well.¹⁵⁶ The fourth, sixth, and seventh points pointed more specifically to the new order envisioned by the progressive coalition: the struggle was to “activate” the “popular majority” to fight for its “national and human rights,” to “create a new form of active Slovenian identity” institutionalized within the “Slovenian nation in its entirety,” represented now by the OF, which would introduce “consistent people’s democracy” (*dosledna ljudska demokracija*) after the war.¹⁵⁷

The discourse around democracy within the OF was conditioned in large part by the leftist republican intellectual inheritance traced in this dissertation. This had to do with the authorial work of Vidmar and Kocbek alongside the more canonized figures of Kidrič and Kardelj, though it must be noted that neither Kidrič nor Kardelj were strangers to this line of thought. Kidrič’s father, the literary historian France Kidrič, had signed Prepeluh, Lončar, and Erjavec’s Autonomist Declaration in 1921, while Kardelj had delivered Prepeluh and Lončar’s *Avtonomist* weekly paper as a youth. Through the 1930s, on the pages of *Književnik*, *Dejanje*, and *Sodobnost*, the propagation of leftist republican thought began to intertwine with the Marxist political theory now being taken up by Kidrič and Kardelj within the KPS. While the communists would have rejected any bourgeois roots to their thinking, on questions of the

¹⁵⁵ “Gesla našega osvobodilnega boja” (The Slogans of Our Liberation Struggle), *Slovenski poročevalec* 2, no. 4 (June 22, 1941): 1; republished in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji*, vol. 1, March 1941–March 1942, ed. Tone Ferenc et al. (Ljubljana: Inštitut za zgodovino delavskega gibanja, 1962), 42–43; and Mally, *Slovenski odpor*, 116–17.

¹⁵⁶ “Izjava,” (Declaration), *Slovenski poročevalec* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 6, 1942): 1–2; republished in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji*, vol. 1, 255–56.

¹⁵⁷ *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji*, vol. 1, 255–56.

autonomy of the political community and the federal principle, the ideas of the republican and communist Lefts increasingly harmonized. With the invocation of the concept ‘people’s democracy’ in the OF program, we find a point of confluence.

Two key terms structured the discourse: *ljudska oblast* (“popular government”) and *ljudska demokracija* (“people’s democracy”), which were closely related but not synonymous. The formulation of each was deliberately vague; each committed the OF to a democratic order beyond the liberal model and deferred questions of social transformation to the postwar period. For non-communist participants like Kocbek and Vidmar, this language could be read as compatible with their republican and pluralist aspirations; for the communist leadership, it still pointed toward a revolutionary transformation even though it lacked precise contours.¹⁵⁸ The institutional expression of this commitment began to take shape in autumn 1941. At the third session of the Supreme Plenum on September 16, 1941, the plenum reconstituted itself as the Slovenian National Liberation Committee (*Slovenski narodnoosvobodilni odbor*, SNOO), claiming governmental authority over the Slovenian people.¹⁵⁹ There had been debate over whether the body ought to be named the “Slovenian National Liberation Council” (*svet*) rather than “Committee” (*odbor*); the participants agreed that the time was not yet ripe to suggest a transformation toward popular government based on a council vision.¹⁶⁰ The term “Committee” still retained comfortable parliamentary connotations which would hardly have alienated the OF’s bourgeois interlocutors. In its program, the SNOO insisted upon the equality and unity of the Slovenian nation, arguing that the new institutional setup meant “a new step toward

¹⁵⁸ Vida Deželak Barič, “Osvobodilna fronta v soočenju z vprašanji demokracije in narodne emancipacije” (The Liberation Front Confronted with Questions of Democracy and National Emancipation), in *Osamosvojitve 1991: Država in demokracija na Slovenskem v zgodovinskih razsežnostih* (Independence 1991: State and Democracy in the Slovenian Lands in Historical Dimensions), ed. Mitja Ferenc, Jurij Hadalin, and Blaž Babič (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2011), 132.

¹⁵⁹ Mally, *Slovenski odpor*, 119–20; Janko Pleterski, “Osvobodilna fronta slovenskega naroda in program Zedinjene Slovenije” (The Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation and the United Slovenia Program), in *Študije o slovenski zgodovini in narodnem vprašanju* (Studies in Slovenian History and the National Question) (Maribor: Obzorja, 1981), 381–92, here 383–84.

¹⁶⁰ Mally, *Slovenski odpor*, 120.

freedom, a new step toward liberation and the unification of all Slovenes, a new step into the era, when the Slovenian people will be the rulers of their own land.”¹⁶¹

On May 17, 1942, as the Partisan movement expanded in the Italian-occupied Ljubljana Province, the IOOF issued a decree establishing “popular government” (*narodna oblast*) on liberated territory.¹⁶² This involved the creation of a network of National Liberation Committees (*Narodnoosvobodilni odbori*, NOO) at local, district, and regional levels, elected through universal, equal, and direct suffrage extended to all citizens over eighteen years of age.¹⁶³ This expansion of suffrage went well beyond the prewar Yugoslav legislation as well as the imperial Austrian provisions after 1905. Yet the electoral procedure did not include secret ballot voting, but rather public “manifestations” of approval for “politically suitable candidates.”¹⁶⁴ The establishment of a central National Liberation Council (*Narodnoosvobodilni svet*, NOS) on June 27, 1942, then marked the separation of state functions from the OF political movement.¹⁶⁵ While the commissioners (*poverjeniki*) comprising the NOS largely overlapped with the IOOF membership,¹⁶⁶ Kidrič still saw in the system a “new democratic power” that placed democratic legitimacy in the movement’s ability to embody popular aspirations from the bottom up.¹⁶⁷ Marijan Breclj, a Christian socialist close to the communists, offered a characteristic formulation later, in 1944: “Democracy is not that everyone may assert their will regardless of general interests; democracy is that the popular will which actually pursues general interests is enabled to assert itself.”¹⁶⁸ Thus the autonomy

¹⁶¹ *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 1, 117.

¹⁶² Eva Mally, “Demokracija in demokratičnost v Osvobodilni fronti” (Democracy and Democratic Tendencies in the Liberation Front), *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 51, no. 1 (2011): 201.

¹⁶³ Mally, “Demokracija in demokratičnost,” 201.

¹⁶⁴ Mally, “Demokracija in demokratičnost,” 201.

¹⁶⁵ Mally, “Demokracija in demokratičnost,” 201.

¹⁶⁶ *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji*, vol. 2, 174–76.

¹⁶⁷ Boris Kidrič, “Nova slovenska demokracija” (A New Slovenian Democracy), *Slovenski poročevalec* 3, no. 31 (Aug. 3, 1942), 1.

¹⁶⁸ Mally, “Demokracija in demokratičnost,” 200.

of the individual was subject to that of the political community, in a partial inversion of the leftist republican vision of the two remaining in harmony.

The democratic character of this emerging institutional order remained contested during the coalition period of the OF. Kocbek recalled being told directly by communist interlocutors that, “as long as you are not in the party, you are necessarily against it, even if you are in the OF, for whoever stops halfway is necessarily suited for the role of Kerensky.”¹⁶⁹ The historian France Škerl noted that the problem placing the Christian socialists and the KPS into regular friction was the former’s “worldview” (*svetovni nazor*) and their ability to articulate it freely as an equal one among others.¹⁷⁰ These fractures were papered over at the end of February 1943, when the Dolomite Declaration ensured the hegemony of the KPS within the OF, redefining it as a “unified popular political and national organization of the Slovenian nation” with the KPS taking on an “avant-garde role” and insisting that “others among the founding groups of the OF will not organize independent parties or political organizations.”¹⁷¹ The declaration was signed by all parties on February 28 and March 1, 1943.¹⁷²

At the end of April, a gathering of OF activists provided some space for the main factions to reflect on the new state of affairs. The three speeches were given by Josip Vidmar, Edvard Kardelj, and Edvard Kocbek. On the leading role of the KPS, the three speakers struck quite different tones. Vidmar, though “not a party member” himself, offered the most emphatic endorsement: the KPS was the OF’s “vanguard” and “shock troop in the struggle for freedom,” and its “popular mentality” guaranteed “genuinely democratic sovereignty for the Slovenian nation.”¹⁷³ Only the KPS, with its “sharply defined, scientifically grounded, progressive

¹⁶⁹ Mally, “Demokracija in demokratičnost,” 189; Barič, “Osvobodilna fronta,” 130.

¹⁷⁰ France Škerl, “Osvobodilna fronta in socialna preobrazba slovenskega naroda (1941–1943)” (The Liberation Front and the Social Education of the Slovenian Nation, 1941–1943), *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 11, no. 1–2 (1971–1972): 7–36, here 22.

¹⁷¹ *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 15.

¹⁷² Mally, *Slovenski odpor*, 346.

¹⁷³ Josip Vidmar, speech to OF activists, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 312.

political mentality,” could bring “clear unity” to the ideologically heterogeneous coalition.¹⁷⁴ Kardelj argued that the OF did not need “a coalition” of separate groups but a unification of “workers and peasants” led exclusively by the KPS,¹⁷⁵ framing this in terms of historical necessity: the KPS was “the manifestation of this revolutionary role of the working class,” and its leading position had emerged naturally from “the historical role of the proletariat.”¹⁷⁶ Kocbek’s address was more introspective. The Christian socialists had accepted “Marxism-Leninism as a socio-political method” along with the “strategy and tactics of the liberation struggle as conceived by the Communist Party of Slovenia.”¹⁷⁷ Yet Kocbek immediately qualified this: Christians wanted to be “full-blooded activists, without limitation of material or insight,” not “subordinate students” or “revolutionaries of a second or third category.”¹⁷⁸ He called for trust between partners and warned against treating party membership as an “automatic distinction” among those who ought to be equal.¹⁷⁹

On the national question, Vidmar articulated the clearest vision of Slovenian autonomy. The OF’s program from the very beginning had established that after liberation it would guarantee “the unification of all Slovenes and all of Slovenian territory into a Unified Slovenia (*Združena Slovenija*)” and that only the OF could guarantee that the Slovenian nation “would, in the future, have every right to truly democratic self-determination regarding its own destiny.”¹⁸⁰ The right to self-determination was “no longer in question” among the Slovenes in Vidmar’s view.¹⁸¹ Kardelj situated Slovenian liberation within a broader anti-imperialist frame, beginning historically with 1848.¹⁸² Now, armed national liberation had to connect with “the struggle against the main enemy of socialism”—imperialism—with the Soviet Union serving

¹⁷⁴ Vidmar, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 311.

¹⁷⁵ Edvard Kardelj, speech to OF activists, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 325.

¹⁷⁶ Kardelj, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 326.

¹⁷⁷ Edvard Kocbek, speech to OF activists, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 335.

¹⁷⁸ Kocbek, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 337.

¹⁷⁹ Kocbek, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 338.

¹⁸⁰ Vidmar, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 308.

¹⁸¹ Vidmar, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 310.

¹⁸² Kardelj, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 317–18.

as “the true vanguard of small and oppressed nations.”¹⁸³ Kocbek did not address the national question directly; his focus remained on the internal character of Christian participation, though he did insist upon the autonomy of the human, much in line with his personalist views.

The speakers’ conceptions of democracy likewise diverged. For Vidmar, democracy was guaranteed precisely through the KPS’s leadership.¹⁸⁴ Kardelj defined democratic transformation as the process by which the “popular masses” moved toward “progressive positions” under party guidance.¹⁸⁵ Kocbek offered a different vision entirely. Christians sought a “life order” (*življenjski red*) in which every participant would be “obligated and unified” in solving common tasks while remaining “non-obligated and free” to express their “spiritual and cultural worldviews” without repression.¹⁸⁶ Kocbek’s conception of civic obligation in public affairs but complete autonomy in personal ones represented the throughline in leftist republican thought even in a moment when institutional pluralism was being repealed.

The Kočevje Assembly (*Kočevski zbor*) of October 1–3, 1943, marked the culmination of the articulation of federal principles for the new Yugoslavia. Following elections held between September 20 and 25, some 562 delegates from across Slovenia assembled in Kočevje to pass the OF’s program ahead of the Second Session of AVNOJ. It was the largest representative gathering in the history of the Slovenian national movement to that point.¹⁸⁷ Representatives from beyond the OF included Ivan Ribar, the president of AVNOJ, as well as representatives from the Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin resistance movements.¹⁸⁸ Boris Kidrič reaffirmed the principle of self-determination (*samoodločba*), declaring that an entirely new Yugoslavia had begun to grow on this foundation.¹⁸⁹ Kardelj’s address asserted that “the

¹⁸³ Kardelj, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 325.

¹⁸⁴ Vidmar, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 312.

¹⁸⁵ Kardelj, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 326.

¹⁸⁶ Kocbek, April 30, 1943, in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, vol. 6, 337.

¹⁸⁷ Mally, “Demokracija in demokratičnost,” 202; Barič, “Osvobodilna fronta,” 136.

¹⁸⁸ Franc Škerl, “Jugoslovanska ideja pri Slovencih v dobi narodnoosvobodilna boja do Drugega zasedanja AVNOJ” (The Yugoslav Idea among the Slovenes in the Period of the National Liberation Movement before the Second Session of AVNOJ), *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 14, no. 1 (1974): 203–39, here 230.

¹⁸⁹ Mally, *Slovenski odpor*, 288.

Slovenian people will indeed constitute a distinct federative unit in the future Yugoslavia, where they will be their own masters,” and “there can be no more doubt about the federal organization of the future Yugoslavia.”¹⁹⁰ The federal principle was framed as a necessary outcome of recognizing the distinct characters of the various South Slavic cultural communities. Kardelj extended the vision to “the brotherly Bulgarian people,” who would also join this “society of South Slavic peoples.”¹⁹¹ The idea of a South Slavic federation beyond interwar Yugoslavia’s borders had already appeared in the texts of the Slovenian autonomists around Prepeluh and Lončar, and before that in the work of Etbin Kristan within the Yugoslav Socialist Federation in Chicago. The final resolution of the Kočevje Assembly guaranteed the OF’s role of ensuring that “a free and united Slovenia [joins] a free and united Yugoslavia,” being the “true and equal homeland of the South Slavic peoples.”¹⁹² Likewise, it insisted that the OF was the only “legal popular government on Slovenian territory.”¹⁹³ Three elements articulated at Kočevje marked a conceptual departure from earlier declarations: the character of the People’s Liberation Army as an army of all South Slavs rather than of any single nation; the federative principle of the future state’s organization; and the emphasis on popular will as the basis for the new Yugoslav community. As the historian Franc Škerl noted, these new elements “were all ... in their content also in opposition to the elements on which the old Yugoslavia had rested.”¹⁹⁴

Less than a month later, the Second Session of AVNOJ began on November 29, 1943. Through its declarations and resolutions, AVNOJ constituted itself as the supreme legislative and executive representative body on the territory of liberated Yugoslavia. AVNOJ established the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (*Nacionalni komitet oslobodenja*

¹⁹⁰ Quoted in Škerl, “Jugoslovanska ideja,” 232.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Škerl, “Jugoslovanska ideja,” 232.

¹⁹² “Resolucija sprejeta na zboru odposlancev slovenskega naroda, 3. oktobar 1943.” (Resolution Passed at the Assembly of Delegates of the Slovenian Nation, October 3, 1943), in *AVNOJ i revolucija: tematska zbirka dokumenata 1941–1945*. (AVNOJ and the Revolution: A Thematic Collection of Documents, 1941–1945), ed. Slobodan Nešović and Branko Petranović (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1983), 415–16.

¹⁹³ “Resolucija sprejeta na zboru odposlancev slovenskega naroda,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 415.

¹⁹⁴ Škerl, “Jugoslovanska ideja,” 231; quoted also in Mally, *Slovenski odpor*, 288.

Jugoslavije, NKOJ) as an organ with the executive capacities of a people's government, electing Kardelj as one of the Committee's vice presidents and Kocbek as Commissar for Education.¹⁹⁵ Likewise, AVNOJ revoked the legitimacy of the royal government in exile and accepted that Yugoslavia would be built "on the democratic federative principle as a state community of equal peoples,"¹⁹⁶ enumerating six federative states: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia.¹⁹⁷

In early 1944, Moša Pijade traveled to liberated territory in Slovenia with Ivan Ribar and Marko Vujačić as members of the AVNOJ Presidium to work with the Slovenian members of AVNOJ and NKOJ (including Vidmar, Kardelj, and Kocbek), the OF, and the KPS to prepare drafts of fundamental laws for the future Yugoslavia.¹⁹⁸ Pijade observed that "there exist individual countries which are members of the federation, but the federation itself, as a whole, hardly exists beyond a single principle decision" made at Jajce.¹⁹⁹ To remedy this, they proposed legislation on the name of the state, a declaration on popular government and basic rights, laws governing the procedures and jurisdictions of AVNOJ, NKOJ, and the national governments, a law on the National Liberation Councils, a new electoral law, and a law on the equality of languages.²⁰⁰ Similar legislation would have to be implemented by each constituent country, declaring that they had "voluntarily entered into Democratic Federal Yugoslavia as an equal union of countries ... on the basis of true self-determination."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵ *Prvo in drugo zasedanje AVNOJ* (The First and Second Sessions of AVNOJ), ed. Moša Pijade and Slobodan Nešović et al. (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1973), 251–52.

¹⁹⁶ "Predlog deklaracije Drugega zasedanje Protifašističnega sveta narodne osvoboditve Jugoslavije" (Draft of the Declaration of the Second Session of AVNOJ), *Prvo in drugo zasedanje AVNOJ*, 234.

¹⁹⁷ "Predlog odluka o zgraditvi Jugoslavije na federativnem načelu" (Draft Resolution on the Construction of Yugoslavia on the Federal Principle), *Prvo in drugo zasedanje AVNOJ*, 238.

¹⁹⁸ Mally, *Slovenski odpor*, 295.

¹⁹⁹ "Referat Moše Pijade za uvod u diskusiju o zakonskim projektima, 7. april 1944" (Intervention of Moša Pijade to Introduce Discussion on the Legislative Projects, April 7, 1944), in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 504.

²⁰⁰ "Referat Moše Pijade," in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 505.

²⁰¹ "Predlog Moše Pijade za davanje inicijative zemaljskim antifašističkim većima za izradu deklaracije o narodnoj vlasti i pravima građana, 31. mart 1944" (Proposal by Moša Pijade to Give Local Anti-Fascist Councils the Initiative to Draft a Declaration on Popular Government and the Rights of Citizens, March 31, 1944), in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 509–510.

Two key texts emerged: the declarations on popular government and the fundamental rights of citizens, both acting as a temporary constitution before a new Constituent Assembly could be called after the war.²⁰² The working declarations grounded the legitimacy of the new state not in legal continuity with the prewar kingdom but in the revolutionary fact of the national liberation struggle. As the declaration asserted: “In Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, all power belongs to the People’s Liberation Committees, which arose as organs of the struggle for liberation and developed into organs of genuinely popular government by historical necessity and the will of the people themselves during the liberation war, and which represent the basic organs of state power.”²⁰³ Power was institutionalized in a hierarchical structure of elected councils rising from the village level to AVNOJ itself, with elected representatives at every level subject to recall by a majority of their voters.²⁰⁴

The second declaration on the fundamental rights of citizens defined the democratic character of the state in terms that intellectuals within the republican leftist stream had articulated in the decades previously: “Democratic Federative Yugoslavia is democratic because it rests on the fullest democratic rights of citizens, on the principle that the people themselves elect the organs of state power, on the unity of legislative and executive power, on the principle of full popular sovereignty.”²⁰⁵ While the rejection of the separation of powers went beyond the republican leftist vision, the articulation of popular sovereignty as the basis of the democratic order hewed closely with the various visions of “true democracy,” “peasant democracy,” and so on. All citizens were conceived of as equal, with equal freedoms of belief, expression, press, association, and organization. Public education and health would be offered

²⁰² Mally, *Slovenski odpor*, 295.

²⁰³ “Nacrt deklaracije o narodnoj vlasti, mart 1944” (Draft of the Declaration on Popular Government, March 1944), in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 512.

²⁰⁴ “Nacrt deklaracije o narodnoj vlasti,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 512.

²⁰⁵ “Nacrt deklaracije o osnovnim pravima nacija i građana Demokratske federativne Jugoslavije, april 1944” (Draft of the Declaration on the Fundamental Rights of Nations and Citizens of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, April 1944), in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 515.

free of charge.²⁰⁶ Suffrage was extended to all citizens who had reached eighteen years of age, “without difference in nationality, race, religious conviction, degree of education, property status, or place of residence.”²⁰⁷ Yet this inclusive vision was bounded by the logic of antifascist struggle: the declarations explicitly excluded “the mentally incapacitated and those who in any form served the enemy and fascism.”²⁰⁸ Those found to have committed “treason, serving the enemy, and spying for the enemy” could be sentenced to death by firing squad.²⁰⁹

What sort of democracy was this new democracy? As Edvard Kocbek later remarked to a gathering of Slovenes in Belgrade after liberation, the new democracy being constructed could continue without particular political parties and could avoid the danger of single-party control over public life; the new political order was founded on respect for individual and collective rights.²¹⁰ Kocbek was not naïve—he had participated actively in the construction of these drafts with Pijade and the others in spring 1944. Yet within two years his position would change. In an internal consultation at the Central Committee of the KPS in October 1946, Kocbek recognized that the new democracy had only been announced “in the name of the people,” but now “all power is borne and exercised by a particular circle of people whom the people themselves cannot control.”²¹¹ The lack of popular control over the government had always been a key leftist republican concern. It appeared that even in the name of the people the political community had been stripped of its own sovereignty.

For the Hungarian republican Left, the wartime experience unfolded quite differently, though eventually their ideas were betrayed in much the same way. With the closure of most of

²⁰⁶ “Nacrt deklaracije o osnovnim pravima,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 517.

²⁰⁷ “Nacrt deklaracije o narodnoj vlasti,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 512–13; “Nacrt deklaracije o osnovnim pravima,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 516–17.

²⁰⁸ “Nacrt deklaracije o narodnoj vlasti,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 513.

²⁰⁹ “Nacrt deklaracije o narodnoj vlasti,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 513.

²¹⁰ Edvard Kocbek, *Osvobodilni spisi* (Liberation Writings), vol. 2 (Ljubljana: Društvo 2000, 1993), 122–25, quoted in Mally, “Demokracija in demokratičnost,” 200.

²¹¹ Edvard Kocbek, “Govor v CK KP Slovenije 4. oktobra 1946” (Speech at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia, October 6, 1946), in *Revija 2000*, no. 50–51 (1990): 217, quoted in Mally, “Demokracija in demokratičnost,” 200.

the republican Left's outlets and the emigration or death of many of its brightest minds in 1938, fewer opportunities appeared to openly discuss the creation of a democratic order. Still, these issues appeared with such force in the postwar period that it is necessary to retrace some of these lines of thought, even if some key texts remained only in manuscript form until decades later.

In the wake of the passage of the Second Jewish Law, the newly formed liberal-conservative antifascist outlet *Magyar Nemzet*, edited by Sándor Pethő, began to run a column entitled “Szellemi honvédelem” (Intellectual National Defense) written by Zoltán Szabó.²¹² Modelled on the Swiss *Geistige Landesverteidigung* movement, the initiative intended to create a common front for intellectuals to defend the Hungarian political community's autonomy from fascist threats, while insisting upon the necessity of reforms.²¹³ While the movement placed itself on the basis of Hungarian nationalism,²¹⁴ there was still a thin civic radical stream which attempted to articulate such a view beyond exclusivism. Csécsy's 1940 essay “What Is Freedom?,” which appeared in Zoltán Szabó's edited volume *The Diary of the Intellectual National Defense*, did precisely this.²¹⁵ The essay grounded freedom in Hungarian national identity itself. The survival of “a small, solitary people among a hundred enemies for a thousand years in the Danube valley” was attributed to the political community's will to preserve its own freedom, that the Hungarians would remain Hungarians only “as long as we respect and desire freedom.”²¹⁶ This allowed Csécsy to claim that fascist ideology was not merely wrong but fundamentally un-Hungarian, an “alien idea” against which “Hungarian reason and honor”

²¹² Beginning with Zoltán Szabó, “‘Jámbor szándék’: 1. A szellemi honvédelem szükségessége” (Devout Intention: 1. The Necessity of the Intellectual National Defense), *Magyar Nemzet* 2, no. 137 (June 18, 1939): 11.

²¹³ Sándor Pethő, “Szellemi honvédelem – szociális honvédelem” (Intellectual National Defense – Social National Defense), *Magyar Nemzet* 2, no. 269 (Nov. 26, 1939): 1.

²¹⁴ János Johancsik, “A Magyar Nemzet ‘szellemi honvédelme’ és az antifasiszta függetlenségi mozgalom (1938–1939)” (*Magyar Nemzet's ‘Intellectual Spiritual Defense’ and the Antifascist Independence Movement, 1938–1939*), *Századok* 104, no. 1 (1970): 97–117; cf. József Martin, “Szabó Zoltán és a szellemi honvédelem,” *Holmi* 25, no. 3 (2013): 303–310.

²¹⁵ Imre Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság?” (What Is Freedom?), in *A Szellemi Honvédelem naplója* (The Diary of the Intellectual National Defense), ed. Zoltán Szabó (Budapest: Magyar Nemzet, 1940), 139–42.

²¹⁶ Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 139.

must be mobilized.²¹⁷ Csécsy insisted that “dark, freedom-opposing ideas are besieging Hungarian public consciousness today. Against ideas one can only fight successfully with ideas; against despotic aspirations there is no more effective weapon than freedom of thought.”²¹⁸

Csécsy traced the philosophical foundations of freedom to Christianity’s “revolutionary idea” that every person, as a child of God, possesses the freedom to choose between good and evil.²¹⁹ From the infinite worth and autonomy of the individual flowed the demand that “the person who is free in his conscience should not be the slave of earthly wills either.”²²⁰ This grounding allowed Csécsy to present democracy not as a foreign import but as the logical fulfillment of a tradition shared with Christian Europe since Saint Stephen.²²¹ Freedom’s political expression was democracy, while its economic expression was centered on “free commerce” based on “individual initiative and responsibility, free from privileges and restrictions.”²²² In political terms, democracy’s essence lay in citizens determining the limits of selfish forms of freedom through open and free discussion and through law.²²³ Democracy “by no means signifies the unlimited rule of the majority,” for “it cannot deprive the minority of its rights to freedom.”²²⁴ Freedom cannot be established through “coercion or violence,” and any democratic order worthy of the name could only exist to guarantee one’s freedom “from every kind of arbitrary power.”²²⁵

Around the *Szellemi Honvédelem* gathered a group of progressive intellectuals which spanned the *népi–urbánus* dividing line. Another such outlet was the Cooperative of Artists, Writers, and Researchers (*Művészek, Írók, Kutatók Szövetkezete*, MIKSZ), founded in summer 1939; the cooperative form, aside from its egalitarian character, required only commercial

²¹⁷ Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 142.

²¹⁸ Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 142.

²¹⁹ Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 139.

²²⁰ Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 139.

²²¹ Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 139–40.

²²² Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 140.

²²³ Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 140.

²²⁴ Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 140.

²²⁵ Csécsy, “Mi a szabadság,” 140–41.

registration rather than political approval.²²⁶ The founding members included figures from across the antifascist spectrum—*népi* writers like Ferenc Erdei and József Darvas, the legal scholar István Bibó, Ernő Berda and the Socialist Graphic Artists' Group, as well as Csécsy himself, elected to the cooperative's oversight board in March 1940.²²⁷ MIKSZ organized cultural events, memorial evenings dedicated to Attila József, and discussion forums.²²⁸

Of these, in late June 1940, MIKSZ hosted a debate evening entitled “Cultivated People – Free Nation” (*Művelt nép – Szabad nemzet*).²²⁹ Erdei spoke; Csécsy attended but declined to intervene.²³⁰ Erdei's contribution, subsequently published in Zsigmond Móricz's *Kelet Népe*,²³¹ argued that the traditional culture of the *jobbágy* (serf) was “the magnificent achievement of a social underworld strictly enclosed, subordinated, and burdened.”²³² But now that world was disappearing, displaced by the cultural and economic transformation of the peasantry under capitalism. But in this Erdei saw potential for the renewal of peasant cultural and political consciousness and with it a new social order in the country, “such a social order as can guarantee the assertion of the liberated forces, and such a selection process as can place the best values in the most appropriate positions.”²³³ This was ultimately a political task: “a thorough political transformation” was necessary to achieve “a social system that can generally give space for general advancement.”²³⁴ “We feel it our duty,” he wrote, “to remain outside and demonstrate for a better order,” and those who shared “the same faith and hope” must “take on community with us.”²³⁵

²²⁶ György Vértess, “A MIKSZ-ről” (On MIKSZ), *Alföld* 15, no. 4 (1964): 353–59; here 353–54.

²²⁷ Vértess, “A MIKSZ-ről,” 357.

²²⁸ Vértess, “A MIKSZ-ről,” 355–56.

²²⁹ Announced, among other publications, in *Népszava* 68, no. 128 (June 9, 1940): 4.

²³⁰ Imre Csécsy, “‘Művelt nép – Szabad nemzet’: Levél Erdei Ferenchez” (Cultivated People – Free Nation: A Letter to Ferenc Erdei), *Jelenkor* 2, no. 17 (1940): 10.

²³¹ Ferenc Erdei, “A jobbágykor s a ma parasztkultúrája” (The Era of Serfdom and Today's Peasant Culture), *Kelet Népe* 6, no. 13 (July 1, 1940): 5–6.

²³² Erdei, “A jobbágykor s a ma parasztkultúrája,” 5.

²³³ Erdei, “A jobbágykor s a ma parasztkultúrája,” 6.

²³⁴ Erdei, “A jobbágykor s a ma parasztkultúrája,” 6.

²³⁵ Erdei, “A jobbágykor s a ma parasztkultúrája,” 6.

Csécsy's response, published as an open letter in the Catholic antifascist review *Jelenkor* in September 1940, pushed back on the limits of cultural programs divorced from political freedom. Despite having read "every significant book and article on the Hungarian people and land," Csécsy responded that ultimately he was "not an actual peasant" and could not speak to the problem of peasant culture directly.²³⁶ But he doubted that Erdei could too: "To truly know them, it would not be enough to live among them; I would have to take up their life-forms as well. And you know best that such assimilation is impossible."²³⁷ Literary representations of peasant life remained "mediated," which meant "more and higher than life, but precisely for this reason not life itself."²³⁸ The solution was ultimately political, though in a different way from what Erdei had suggested: "As long as the people themselves cannot say what they want and how they would want it, and what and why they do not want something else, for as long as there is no way for them to measure their own goals against the aspirations of other classes and groups in free debate, until then everyone who is not a peasant will always view peasant affairs only somehow from the outside."²³⁹ Cultural programs could not substitute democratic participation; "culture will only reach the people when we do not offer it as a gift, but when they demand it for themselves as their right—along with their other rights."²⁴⁰ "I do not know the peasant," Csécsy concluded, "but I am certain that they have some opinion about all this."²⁴¹ The task was to create the conditions for "free speech about themselves, their rights, their interests, and yes, about this country too."²⁴²

Mihály Babits passed in August 1941, against the background of Hungary's invasion of Yugoslavia in April and the USSR in June. His death meant not only the loss of a heralded poet

²³⁶ Csécsy, "Művelt nép – szabad nemzet," 10.

²³⁷ Csécsy, "Művelt nép – szabad nemzet," 10.

²³⁸ Csécsy, "Művelt nép – szabad nemzet," 10.

²³⁹ Csécsy, "Művelt nép – szabad nemzet," 10.

²⁴⁰ Csécsy, "Művelt nép – szabad nemzet," 10.

²⁴¹ Csécsy, "Művelt nép – szabad nemzet," 10.

²⁴² Csécsy, "Művelt nép – szabad nemzet," 10.

but the collapse of “a protective wall” around a beleaguered intellectual community.²⁴³ *Nyugat* was immediately suppressed, the authorities using the fact that the publishing license had been in Babits’s name to close the journal entirely.²⁴⁴ In this context, Gyula Illyés organized and edited the *Babits-emlékkönyv* (Babits Memorial Book), conceived as both a memorial and an act of resistance against the increasingly violent and destructive authorities: “The progressive Hungarian intelligentsia gathered one last time under a mourning banner before the Hitlerian times,” Illyés later wrote.²⁴⁵ The seventy-six contributors represented a deliberately broad coalition, spanning generations and political orientations: “from Imre Csécsy through Áron Tamási to Gyula Szekfü.”²⁴⁶ Illyés deliberately included thirty-five authors who “were not Aryan, or only half so” in a provocation directed at the antisemitic Press Chamber.²⁴⁷

Csécsy’s contribution, “The Apolitical Poet,” addressed the charge that Babits had retreated into the ivory tower and spent the years after 1919 as merely an apolitical poet apathetic to the social struggles on the ground in Hungary.²⁴⁸ *Nyugat*’s revolution at the turn of the century had been one for literary freedom, Csécsy argued, yet literary freedom could not be “a thing-in-itself,” for it had no meaning “if in other areas of communal life tyranny rules.”²⁴⁹ *Nyugat*’s struggle had always run parallel to a broader movement for “a freer and more scientific social perspective and, as its lesson, a political transformation in the ‘Western’ sense.”²⁵⁰ Babits’s so-called ivory tower was in fact “only a watchtower on the common

²⁴³ István Vas, *Azután* (Afterward) (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1990), 241, quoted in Ágnes Kelevéz, “A Babits Emlékkönyv” (The Babits Memorial Book), in *Kegyelet és irodalom. Kultusztörténeti tanulmányok*, ed. Zsuzsa Kalla (Budapest: PIM, 1997), 70; see also Miklós Radnóti, *Napló* (Diary), ed. Tibor Melczer (Budapest: Magvető, 1989), 176–177, quoted in Kelevéz, “A Babits Emlékkönyv,” 69.

²⁴⁴ István Horváth, “Adalékok a *Babits Emlékkönyv* szerkesztéséhez” (Contributions to the Editing of the *Babits Emlékkönyv*), in *Szerkesztő a vészidőszakban* (An Editor in Times of Danger), vol. 2. *Levelek Illyés Gyulához 1935–1945* (Letters to Gyula Illyés, 1935–1945) (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2016), 21–76, here 22–23.

²⁴⁵ Gyula Illyés, “Babits szemébe nézni” (To Look into Babits’s Eyes), *Tiszatáj* 17, no. 11 (Nov. 1963): 1, quoted in Kelevéz, “A Babits Emlékkönyv,” 408.

²⁴⁶ Kelevéz, “A Babits Emlékkönyv,” 404.

²⁴⁷ Oszkár Gellért, *Kortársaim* (My Contemporaries) (Budapest: Művelt Nép, 1954), 224, cited in Horváth, “Adalékok,” 26.

²⁴⁸ Imre Csécsy, “Az apolitikus költő” (The Apolitical Poet), republished in *Radikalizmus és demokrácia: Csécsy Imre válogatott írásai*, ed. Tibor Valuch (Szeged: Aetas, 1988), 193–96.

²⁴⁹ Csécsy, “Az apolitikus költő,” 193–94.

²⁵⁰ Csécsy, “Az apolitikus költő,” 194.

battlefield.”²⁵¹ In a siege, the sentinel’s task was “no easier, indeed it can be more dangerous and more responsible.”²⁵² Babits “only despised the present, only did not consider the debates of the simple-minded worthy of the spirit.”²⁵³ His faith was in “the spirit above fate,” meaning “the European spirit of humanism and the Hungarian spirit, which can only be eternal insofar as it is European.”²⁵⁴ What Babits had practiced was “certainly politics too, at all times, only with supra-political means,”²⁵⁵ undergirded by “this humanism, to which Babits remained faithful until death, amid a thousand dangers.”²⁵⁶

In the same period, and in a much more overtly political way, the Hungarian democratic emigration in the United States crystallized around Oszkár Jászi and Rusztem Vámbéry, the latter now teaching at the New School for Social Research. Their organizational vehicle was the American Federation of Democratic Hungarians (*Demokratikus Magyarok Amerikai Szövetsége*, DMASZ), bringing together the New York circle around Vámbéry and László Fényes with Jászi at Oberlin and a Chicago group of leftist émigrés that included László Moholy-Nagy.²⁵⁷ Their chief publication was *Magyar Fórum*, launched in April 1942 with Vámbéry as editor-in-chief, which declared its intention to continue “in level, spirit, and method” the tradition of *Huszadik Század*, *Nyugat*, and *Századunk*.²⁵⁸

The emigration addressed three interlocking problems in this period: Hungary’s democratic deficit, the Danubian federation, and the prospects of postwar reconstruction. On the first, Vámbéry was unsparing. In his *Foreign Affairs* article “The Tragedy of the Magyars,” he traced Hungarian authoritarianism to the failure of a “self-conscious bourgeoisie” to develop;

²⁵¹ Csécsy, “Az apolitikus költő,” 194.

²⁵² Csécsy, “Az apolitikus költő,” 194.

²⁵³ Csécsy, “Az apolitikus költő,” 194–95.

²⁵⁴ Csécsy, “Az apolitikus költő,” 195.

²⁵⁵ Csécsy, “Az apolitikus költő,” 196.

²⁵⁶ Csécsy, “Az apolitikus költő,” 196.

²⁵⁷ Litván, *A Twentieth-Century Prophet*, 438–39.

²⁵⁸ Györgyi Markovits, “Egy New York-i magyar folyóirat a második világháború idején” (A New York Hungarian Journal during the Second World War), *Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár évkönyve 1972*, ed. Imre Bata et al. (Budapest: OSZK, 1975), 410.

rather, “the leaders in trade and industry were Magyarized Germans and Jews” who, upon achieving success, “promptly joined the nobility.”²⁵⁹ “Nation” meant “merely the ruling classes and those who conformed to their ideology,” while the peasant masses remained the voiceless “people.”²⁶⁰ “No wonder the Hungarian ruling class was stunned by the unexpected dual shock—the simultaneous collapse of the Habsburg Empire and of their imaginary realm” in 1918.²⁶¹ On the pages of *Magyar Fórum*, Vámbéry made the point even sharper: “Hungarian democracy and Hungarian independence, which are inseparable from one another, can only be built by the qualified representatives of the Hungarian people,” which clearly did not include the remnants of the gentry or the post-1919 reactionaries in the government and state.²⁶² On the question of federation, Jászi’s serialized essay “Federal Plans” in *Magyar Fórum* concluded that genuine federation could not be imposed by fiat but required organic preconditions: a “minimum of popular culture (*népies kultúra*)” as well as shared “political and moral principles.”²⁶³ The failure of the League of Nations was due to its being “undermined primarily by the great powers.”²⁶⁴ Vámbéry approached federation from the nationality question, proposing “the cantonal system in all the Danubian countries” combined with great-power oversight.²⁶⁵ This would render territorial disputes “an administrative problem” rather than a potential for armed conflict, with Vámbéry insisting that friendship and trust among the “Danubian peoples” as well as a “strong central federated power” could save the region from German and Russian imperialism.²⁶⁶

Regarding reconstruction, Jászi’s “On the Question of a United Hungarian Front” rejected categorically the argument that the discussion of postwar aims should be postponed:

²⁵⁹ Rusztem Vámbéry, “The Tragedy of the Magyars: Revisionism and Nazism,” *Foreign Affairs* 20, no. 3 (1942): 478.

²⁶⁰ Vámbéry, “The Tragedy of the Magyars,” 487.

²⁶¹ Vámbéry, “The Tragedy of the Magyars,” 480.

²⁶² Rusztem Vámbéry, “A magyar kérdés” (The Hungarian Question), *Magyar Fórum* 1, no. 2 (1942): 36.

²⁶³ Oszkár Jászi, “Federációs tervek II” (Federation Plans, Part 2), *Magyar Fórum* 1, no. 2 (1942): 31.

²⁶⁴ Jászi, “Federációs tervek II,” 32.

²⁶⁵ Vámbéry, “The Tragedy of the Magyars,” 488.

²⁶⁶ Vámbéry, “The Tragedy of the Magyars,” 488; Vámbéry, “A magyar kérdés,” 37.

“The wartime struggle cannot be separated from the war’s aims! Free people want to know for what goals they are fighting and risking their lives.”²⁶⁷ The call for a “united front” with the conservative emigration around Tibor Eckhardt was merely a means to “save for the oligarchy whatever can still be saved.”²⁶⁸ Jászi insisted that “Hungarian differences can be debated in a civilized manner and with honest arguments” in a projection of total unity in the war against fascism and “polite discussion on the peace front.”²⁶⁹ Vámbéry’s analysis centered on the land question: even radical land reform could not absorb the “three million beggars” produced by Hungarian feudalism. Education would be necessary “to destroy the psychological vestiges of a squirearchy which has lost its economic foundations.”²⁷⁰ The “economic prerequisites of democracy have to be established ... in a country in which hitherto the very notion of democracy has been missing.”²⁷¹ Ultimately, however, this was contingent upon the postwar organization of the country and the region, in which the old ruling class would have to be displaced, “lest the fate of the Hungarian intelligentsia [*sic*] turn into the tragedy of the Magyar people.”²⁷²

Back in wartime Hungary, Bibó’s writings approached the same constellation of problems from a jurisprudential vantage point. His 1942 lectures in Cluj (now occupied Kolozsvár) on twentieth-century legal philosophy situated Hungarian democratic thought within the broader European tradition of normative jurisprudence. In tracing modern legal theory from Rudolf Stammler through Hans Kelsen, Bibó positioned Bódog Somló as one of

²⁶⁷ Oszkár Jászi, “A magyar egységfront kérdéséhez” (On the Question of a United Hungarian Front), *Magyar Fórum* 1, no. 3 (July 1942): 55–56. Also republished in Oszkár Jászi, *Jászi Oszkár publicisztikája: válogatás* (The Publications of Oszkár Jászi: A Compilation), ed. György Litván and János F. Varga (Budapest: Magvető, 1982), 449–52.

²⁶⁸ Jászi, “A magyar egységfront kérdéséhez,” 56.

²⁶⁹ Jászi, “A magyar egységfront kérdéséhez,” 56.

²⁷⁰ Rusztem Vámbéry, *The Hungarian Problem* (New York: The Nation, 1942), 46.

²⁷¹ Vámbéry, *The Hungarian Problem*, 45–46.

²⁷² Vámbéry, “A magyar kérdés,” 38; Vámbéry, *The Hungarian Problem*, 46–47.

the four principal figures of normative positivism alongside Gyula Moór.²⁷³ This was more than antiquarian interest or the fidelity of a young legal scholar to their forebearers: Somló had been a founding figure of *Huszadik Század* and a key theorist of the civic radical circle, and Bibó's treatment of his legacy constituted a tacit acknowledgment of the intellectual tradition that Jászi and Vámbéry defended in exile. Bibó's 1943 review of Mannheim's *Diagnosis of Our Time* engaged more directly with the political problems that preoccupied the emigration too.²⁷⁴ Bibó endorsed Mannheim's argument that modern mass society required a "Third Way" between laissez-faire liberalism and totalitarian planning, what he termed "planning for freedom."²⁷⁵ This resonated with the debates among Hungarian republican Left: where Jászi and Vámbéry had argued that postwar federation required prior democratic transformation, and where Csécsy had insisted that democracy and independence were inseparable, Bibó now endorsed a position that made conscious social planning compatible with the preservation of freedom. The old civic radical faith in spontaneous progress had to give way to "militant democracy"—a democracy that actively defended its foundational values.²⁷⁶ Bibó expressed reservations about Mannheim's assignment of a central role to the sociologist, noting that the "new order of values" would rest not on scientific expertise alone but on those who possessed "moral, scientific, and political credibility and vocation" simultaneously.²⁷⁷ Most significant was Bibó's adoption of Mannheim's framework for understanding the crisis of European values: fascism's "simplified value system" could outcompete the incoherent pluralism of democratic societies.²⁷⁸ The reconstruction of democracy required the conscious regeneration of

²⁷³ István Bibó, "A 20. század jogbölcselete" (Twentieth-Century Legal Philosophy), in *Bibó István összegyűjtött írásai* (István Bibó's Collected Writings), vol. 3, *Az önrendelkezés legitímása* (The Legitimacy of Self-Determination), ed. Iván Zoltán Dénes (Budapest: Kalligram, 2020), 290–309, here 305.

²⁷⁴ Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of Our Time: Wartime Essays of a Sociologist* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1943); István Bibó, "Korunk diagnózisa" (Diagnosis of Our Time), *Társadalomtudomány* 23, no. 4–5 (1943): 454–74, republished in István Bibó, "Korunk diagnózisa" (Diagnosis of Our Time), in *Bibó István összegyűjtött írásai* (István Bibó's Collected Writings), vol. 3, 322–41. I cite from the republished version.

²⁷⁵ Bibó, "Korunk diagnózisa," 323.

²⁷⁶ Bibó, "Korunk diagnózisa," 323–24.

²⁷⁷ Bibó, "Korunk diagnózisa," 340.

²⁷⁸ Bibó, "Korunk diagnózisa," 324.

“paradigmatic experiences”—the images, examples, and narratives through which societies transmit their deepest commitments.²⁷⁹

A further node in that discussion was drafted by Csécsy for *Népszava* the same year but left unpublished after the censorship office rejected it.²⁸⁰ Csécsy’s commemoration of Ervin Szabó, written on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Szabó’s death, situated him within the intellectual world of *Huszdik Század*. Csécsy emphasized Szabó’s capacity to collaborate with thinkers who did not share his Marxist convictions: his “critical spirit was far ahead not only of his own time but of the confused present as well.”²⁸¹ Szabó’s friendship with Jászi embodied a culture of reasoned debate that had since vanished: “It was a wonderful age, incomprehensible today: people of opposing worldviews did not seek to kill one another but to persuade through argument.”²⁸² Against the backdrop of wartime Hungary’s ideological conformism, Csécsy retrieved Szabó’s anti-statist socialism as an alternative to both fascism and Stalinist orthodoxy. Szabó had warned that bureaucratized, centralized forms of collective economic planning would merely replace capitalist exploitation with bureaucratic domination: “State socialism would be nothing other than a society in which surplus value would be appropriated not by several classes ... but by a single class: the bureaucracy.”²⁸³ Now, “in the socialist world of ideas, the spirit of dogmatism has once again gained the upper hand.”²⁸⁴ Szabó had been an entirely heterodox thinker, insisting upon human freedom beyond the collectivist tendency to dissolve the human into the revolutionary mass—aligning the republican leftist tradition with those who resisted the “total state.”²⁸⁵ Csécsy placed his hope on the regenerative power of

²⁷⁹ Bibó, “Korunk diagnózisa,” 333.

²⁸⁰ OSZK K 163, ö.e. 2451, Imre Csécsy, “Szabó Ervin és a Társadalomtudományi Társaság” (Ervin Szabó and the Society for Social Sciences), *Népszava*, October 1943. The text was only published four decades later as Imre Csécsy, “Szabó Ervin és a Társadalomtudományi Társaság” (Ervin Szabó and the Society for Social Sciences), in *Radikalizmus és demokrácia*, 197–203. I cite from this republished version.

²⁸¹ Csécsy, “Szabó Ervin és a Társadalomtudományi Társaság,” 201.

²⁸² Csécsy, “Szabó Ervin és a Társadalomtudományi Társaság,” 199.

²⁸³ Csécsy, “Szabó Ervin és a Társadalomtudományi Társaság,” 199.

²⁸⁴ Csécsy, “Szabó Ervin és a Társadalomtudományi Társaság,” 201.

²⁸⁵ Bibó, “Korunk diagnózisa,” 322.

democratic culture, stating that “we nonetheless trust that a calmer development will everywhere restore free criticism to its rightful place.”²⁸⁶

There was no calmer development. On Sunday morning, March 19, 1944, Germany invaded its ally, Hungary. The occupation had come as a surprise to nearly everyone outside the highest political circles.²⁸⁷ Csécsy wrote in his diary that he heard of the occupation through a series of telephone calls from his friends. As he reacted in his diary: “Everything is the logical consequence of Horthy–Bethlen–Gömbös rule. Their politics, their Hungary failed for good today. And it’s possible that *this* Hungary couldn’t have failed any other way.”²⁸⁸ By and large, hardly anyone had prepared for the possibility of occupation. Passports prepared for fifty prominent members of the Left by Kállay’s Minister of Interior had never been distributed.²⁸⁹ As a result, partially organized antifascist oppositional forces—nearly all of whom had been part of the Intellectual National Defense, MIKSZ, or the Hungarian Historical Memory Committee (*Magyar Történelmi Emlékbizottság*)²⁹⁰—were caught completely off-guard. In the early hours of March 19, Prime Minister Kállay was able to warn Hungary’s foreign missions and had his son send warnings “to persons and institutions likely to be endangered ‘beginning with the left-wing parties, prominent Anglophiles and the representatives of the Jews.’”²⁹¹

However, this was hardly enough. A new, extreme right-wing government was created under Döme Sztójay on March 22.²⁹² Horthy stayed on as head of state, legitimizing the German

²⁸⁶ Csécsy, “Szabó Ervin és a Társadalomtudományi Társaság,” 201.

²⁸⁷ Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. 2, 221–41.

²⁸⁸ János F. Varga and Imre Csécsy, “Csécsy Imre: Napló 1940–1949 (részletek)” (Selections from the Diary of Imre Csécsy, 1940–1949), *Kritika* 12, no. 8 (Budapest, 1983): 18. The diaries are kept in OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2370–2373.

²⁸⁹ Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. 2, 231n4.

²⁹⁰ In February 1942, the Hungarian Historical Memory Committee (*Magyar Történelmi Emlékbizottság*) was founded. On March 15 the same year, the Committee’s 1848 anniversary celebrations featured anti-war speeches in front of the Petőfi statue in Budapest’s V. District with over a thousand in the crowd. The speeches were given from a wide range of antifascist intellectuals, including among others Gyula Szekfű, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, Gyula Illyés, Árpád Szakasits, József Darvas, and Imre Kovács. For the text of the speeches, see *Petőfi útján* (In Petőfi’s Footsteps) (Budapest: Horizont, 1942).

²⁹¹ Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. 2, 244.

²⁹² *Budapesti Közlöny* 78, no. 67 (March 23, 1944): 1–2. See also the laudatory profiles of the cabinet in the far-right, antisemitic *Függetlenség* 22, no. 67 (March 23, 1944): 1–3.

occupation with a symbolic glaze of state continuity. The persecution of Jews, refugees, Roma, and oppositional forces commenced without hesitation. Antifascist intellectuals were rounded up. On April 1, Csécsy met with a friend and asked if they were waiting for someone. “Other than the Gestapo, nobody,” the friend replied.²⁹³ By early April, nearly 3,500 Jews had already been arrested by the Security Police of the SS.²⁹⁴ By mid-April, that number had doubled,²⁹⁵ and on April 28, the first train from the internment camp at Kistarcsa was sent to Auschwitz.²⁹⁶ Leading figures in the Independent Smallholders’ and Social Democratic parties, as well as some members of parliament, had been arrested in the second half of March.²⁹⁷ Few figures successfully went underground, notably Árpád Szakasits and Anna Kéthly of the Social Democrats and Zoltán Tildy and Béla Varga of the Smallholders.²⁹⁸ Within two weeks, the leading personalities of the oppositional public sphere had either been put in custody or had gone into hiding. On March 30, the Minister of Interior, Andor Jaross, recommended the formal banning of the Social Democratic Party, the Independent Smallholders’ Party, and the Hungarian Peasant Union—though this was purely symbolic, for they were already practically destroyed.²⁹⁹

As Randolph L. Braham observed, the first wave of arrests was meant “to eliminate the actual and potential leaders of the anti-German Hungarian opposition,” remove the aristocratic protectors of the Jewish communities, and instill an environment of intimidation.³⁰⁰ This proceeded with the active cooperation of the Sztójay government and no initial resistance from Horthy, who had “given the government a free hand in the issuance of Jewish decrees.”³⁰¹

²⁹³ Varga and Csécsy, “Csécsy Imre: Napló 1940–1949 (részletek),” 19.

²⁹⁴ Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1, 511.

²⁹⁵ Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1, 512.

²⁹⁶ Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1, 514.

²⁹⁷ For a more extensive list, see Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. 2, 254–56; cf. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1, 510–11.

²⁹⁸ Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, vol. 2, 255–56; Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1, 511.

²⁹⁹ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1, 528.

³⁰⁰ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1, 514.

³⁰¹ MNL OL K 27 Minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvek 1867–1944, March 29, 1944, Agenda Point 66, f. 127–128; cf. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1, 521–23.

Through March and April, flows of communication were heavily restricted, focused on all elements of the antifascist, oppositional, and Jewish public spheres: newspapers and journals were banned, the post censored, and radio, telegram, and telephone transmissions placed under centralized supervision.³⁰² This proceeded legally, in accordance with laws proposed by Hungary's prewar civilian government starting in the late 1930s.³⁰³ Sztójay's Decree 10.600 of 1944 empowered the Prime Minister's Office to ban any periodical endangering "the preservation of state order,"³⁰⁴ building on Imrédy's Decree 4.950 of 1938.³⁰⁵ Decrees 10.800 and 11.300, published on April 30 and June 25, directed the population to gather works by Jewish authors and have them destroyed by the authorities.³⁰⁶ Among those intellectuals linked with the republican Left, Rózsa Bédy-Schwimmer, Vilmos Böhm, Manó Buchinger, Pál Ignóty, Oszkár Jászi, Zsigmond Kunfi, Anna Lesznai, Illés Mónus, Rusztem Vámbéry, and Béla Zsolt were listed. From April to September, the State Secretary for Press Affairs, Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa, systematically dismantled the rest of the public sphere, altogether closing down 126 newspapers.³⁰⁷

Against this background, the underground Magyar Front (*Magyar Front*) was established in Budapest in the middle of May as a coalition of the Social Democratic, Communist, Smallholder, and National Peasant parties.³⁰⁸ Under the slogan "For the Democratic Hungarian Nation," the Magyar Front advocated popular front tactics combined

³⁰² See László Márkus, Miklós Szinai, and Miklós Várhelyi, eds., *Nem engedélyezem! A cenzúra bizottság dossziéjából* (Not Approved! From the Dossier of the Censorship Committee) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1975), 40–43; Éva Gorda, "A cenzúra működése 1939–1945 között Magyarországon" (The Function of Censorship in Hungary between 1939 and 1945), *Hadtudományi Szemle* 1, no. 2 (2008): 113–20; Vince Paál, "Sajtószabályozás és sajtószabadság a Horthy-korszakban" (Press Regulations and Press Freedom in the Horthy Era), in *Tanulmányok a magyar sajtószabadság történetéhez 1867–1944* (Studies on the History of Hungarian Press Freedom, 1867–1944) (Budapest: Média tudományi Intézet, 2019), 236.

³⁰³ See *Budapesti Közlöny* 78, no. 76 (April 4, 1944): 3.

³⁰⁴ "A 10.600/1944. M. E. számú rendelete," *Budapesti Közlöny* 78, no. 79 (April 7, 1944): 4–5.

³⁰⁵ "A 4.950/1938. M. E. számú rendelete," *Budapesti Közlöny* 72, no. 157 (July 17, 1938): 1–5.

³⁰⁶ "A 10.800/1944 M. E. számú rendelete," *Budapesti Közlöny* 78, no. 97 (April 30, 1944): 5–6; "A 11.300/1944 M. E. számú határozata," *Budapesti Közlöny* 78, no. 142 (June 25, 1944): 14–15.

³⁰⁷ Per István Pintér's estimates. See Pintér, *Hungarian Anti-Fascism*, 136.

³⁰⁸ István Pintér, *A Magyar Front és az ellenállás (1944. március 19.–1945. április 4.)* (The Magyar Front and the Resistance (March 19, 1944–April 4, 1945)) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1970), 60–65.

with a “new war of liberation” (*szabadságharc*). The ultimate goal was “the defeat of the German invaders and their collaborators, peace with the Allies, and the laying of the foundations for a democratic, free Hungary in every sense.”³⁰⁹ But this would be more difficult than the statement let on, for as German and Hungarian forces were rolled back toward Budapest through autumn 1944, they began to ransack the country. The total value of goods and entire industrial zones carried westward was later estimated at roughly \$800 million.³¹⁰ Still, although the occupational and quisling forces began to devastate in the material condition of the country, in the growing area of territory under Red Army control, village councils were established by the local population relatively spontaneously, though overarching structures of collaboration between municipalities were lacking.

Underground antifascist forces began to organize themselves in Debrecen and Szeged in late October. The regional daily *Délmagyarország* was revived as the organ of the Magyar National Independence Front (*Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Front*, MNFF). At the beginning of this process, an early and key intervention into the debate on democracy appeared, written by Ferenc Erdei, now editor-in-chief of *Délmagyarország*. On November 26, 1944, Erdei wrote about the historical necessity of land reform in the new Hungary.³¹¹ The lack of such reform had robbed the country of a truly free smallholding peasantry, what Erdei called the “foundation of democratic national development.”³¹² Without land reform, there would be no “progress,” no “radical democracy,” and no “viable form of national recovery.” Only land reform could make the rural masses “the broad and secure foundation of the liberated country.”³¹³ Thus the

³⁰⁹ “A demokratikus pártok kiáltványa a magyar nemzethez” (The Declaration of the Democratic Parties to the Hungarian Nation) in *A Magyar Front* (The Magyar Front), eds. Gyula Kállai, István Pintér, and Attila Sipos (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1984), 191–95.

³¹⁰ Mária Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy: Hungary between East and West, 1944–1947* (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2011), 9.

³¹¹ Ferenc Erdei, “A földreform történelmi szüksége” (The Historical Necessity of Land Reform), *Délmagyarország* 1, no. 7 (Nov. 26, 1944): 5; also republished in Ferenc Erdei, *Politikai írások* (Political Writings), vol. 1, eds. Kálmán Kulcsár and György Gyarmati (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), 244–46.

³¹² Erdei, “A földreform történelmi szüksége,” 5.

³¹³ Erdei, “A földreform történelmi szüksége,” 5.

reconstruction of Hungary would have to place on new material and politics bases, with the peasantry as the core of the new *demos* at the intersection of the political and economic spheres.

On December 2, the MNFF program was accepted by the enlarged group, including the Social Democrats, the Communists, the Smallholders, the Peasantists, the Civic Democratic Party (*Polgári Demokrata Párt*, PDP), and representatives of the trade unions. The program was published the following day in *Délmagyarország*.³¹⁴ It opened with a stark assessment: the country had been plunged into “the gravest catastrophe in our history” by leaders who had sold out Hungary to Hitler’s imperialist war. “Since Mohács, the country has never been in such a grave situation,” they wrote. Unlike Horthy, who had “understood” that the German alliance led to ruin but “could not bring about a turn in his policies” because “he did not want to rely on either the people or the army,” the MNFF proclaimed that the people themselves would now take the country’s fate into their own hands. The MNFF’s programmatic vision drew directly from the conceptual vocabulary of the Hungarian republican Left. The program called for universal, secret, equal, and proportional suffrage for both parliamentary and local elections. It demanded freedom of the press, assembly, and association; the restoration of jury trials; and full religious liberty. Laws “contrary to democracy” were to be annulled. Land reform was presented as the “foundation of Hungarian democracy”; cartels and large banks would be placed under state control; subsoil resources and power plants would be nationalized. An eight-hour workday, paid vacation, collective bargaining rights, and the right to strike would be guaranteed. In foreign policy, the “reactionary fantasy of Greater Hungary” had to be abandoned “once and for all.” In its place, the program envisioned good neighborly relations with “the new Yugoslavia” and “democratic Czechoslovakia,” as well as close friendship with the Soviet Union. It now appeared, at least in the liberated territories in the country’s east, that

³¹⁴ “Magyarország demokratikus ujjaépítésének és felemelkedésének útja: A Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Front programja” (The Path of Hungary’s Democratic Reconstruction and Ascension: The MNFF Program), *Délmagyarország* 1, no. 13 (Dec. 3, 1944): 3.

a new, democratic Hungary could finally be established. It would be the first such attempt since 1918, and perhaps only the second or third time in the country's history.

4.3. *Popular Democracies*

Back in liberated Belgrade, the surviving members of the Serbian republicans began to emerge. Jaša Prodanović, who had retreated into his scholarly work during the war, had fully expected to be arrested after the arrival of the Partisans because of the widespread collaboration of many from the Yugoslav Republican Party (JRS) with the Četniks.³¹⁵ On November 14, 1944, when Edvard Kardelj and Aleksandar Ranković arrived in an automobile to pick him up, it wasn't to take him in for interrogation, but rather to deliver him before the thundering crowd which had gathered at the Kolarac People's University for the founding congress of the Unified People's Liberation Front (*Jedinstven narodnooslobodilački front*, JNOF) for Serbia.³¹⁶ (Though tactlessly they apparently also informed him in the same moment that his son, Borislav, had died in Partisan service and grandson, Jaša, was missing in action.)³¹⁷ As depicted in Dragoljub Jovanović's *Portraits*, the reserved Prodanović "was not used to such rowdy scenes," though "he was confused but probably thrilled" by the electric environment. "He was swept up in the general enthusiasm. He spoke little, though of course mostly against the monarchy and for a republic. Then they elected him to the Executive Committee of the Front."³¹⁸

Jovanović himself did not have such a straightforward transition. Still in occupied Belgrade just before the Partisan–Soviet offensive, Jovanović circulated a leaflet praising the

³¹⁵ Lukić, "Jaša Prodanović u Drugom svetskom ratu," 386.

³¹⁶ Lukić, "Jaša Prodanović u Drugom svetskom ratu," 386. Dragoljub Jovanović, in his *Медаљони*, vol. 3, 226—written while imprisoned after his show trial in October 1947—recalled that Prodanović was taken to the congress on November 11 or 12. It was rather on November 14. Živković, *Narodni front*, 361.

³¹⁷ Jovanović, *Медаљони*, vol. 3, 226.

³¹⁸ Jovanović, *Медаљони*, vol. 3, 226; Živković, *Narodni front*, 362.

Serbian people's contributions to the liberation effort while asking his followers in the People's Peasant Party (NSS) to keep their heads held high as Serbs, even in a moment when it seemed that "everyone is intentionally tearing apart and humiliating it [Serbian identity]."³¹⁹ As liberating forces entered Belgrade, Jovanović issued another leaflet: *Brother Peasants!*³²⁰ There, he argued that the groups which now made up the NSS had pushed for a positive orientation toward the Soviet Union since the 1920s and that "in the National Liberation Movement under Marshal Tito, our party participated as a whole from the beginning to the present, made countless sacrifices, and lost its most important fighters, peasants, and intellectuals."³²¹ The peasantry deserved above all to "enjoy the fruits of victory, of the new state and social order in a democratic and federal Yugoslavia."³²² A week later, he was arrested by Slobodan Penezić of the Department for the Protection of the People (*Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda*), nominally for emphasizing the NSS's role over the Communist Party in the leaflet.³²³

The consolidation of power by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was not immediate. On November 1, 1944, Josip Broz Tito and Ivan Šubašić, representing the royal government-in-exile, agreed to form a provisional council of ministers to lead Democratic Federal Yugoslavia until the election of a Constituent Assembly.³²⁴ The agreement recognized that the Yugoslav people had fought specifically "for a new, democratically founded, independent, and federal state community,"³²⁵ and insisted that all parties would strive "for the will of the people to be respected at every turn," committing to "the fundamental and general principles of that

³¹⁹ Dragoljub Jovanović, *Sloboda od straha* (Freedom from Fear) (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić–Naučna knjiga, 1991), 375, quoted in Milić, *Драгољуб Јовановић*, 54–55.

³²⁰ Dragoljub Jovanović, "Браћо сељаци" (Brother Peasants), in *Студије, расправе, чланци, белешке, прикази, збори и изјаве*, vol. 1, ed. Momčilo Isić and Stela Damnjanović-Ćirić (Belgrade: Porodica D. Jovanovića–Pirrot: Istorijski arhiv, 2022), 581.

³²¹ Jovanović, "Браћо сељаци," 581.

³²² Jovanović, "Браћо сељаци," 581.

³²³ Milić, *Драгољуб Јовановић*, 55.

³²⁴ See "Sporazum Nacionalnog komiteta oslobođenja Jugoslavije i kraljevske jugoslovenske vlade, 1. novembar 1944." (Agreement of NKOJ and the Royal Yugoslav Government, November 1, 1944), in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 643.

³²⁵ "Sporazum Nacionalnog komiteta oslobođenja Jugoslavije i kraljevske jugoslovenske vlade," in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 643.

constitutionalism which is inherent to all true democratic states.”³²⁶ By early March 1945, the council of ministers was named. Among those who filled the ministerial positions, two figures in the republican Left appeared: Jaša Prodanović as Minister for Serbia and Edvard Kocbek as Minister for Slovenia.³²⁷ The government’s guiding platform, issued two days later, subordinated the immediate military goal of defeating fascist forces to a broader vision of democratic transformation, committing itself to preserving the democratic rights won during the liberation war, “expressed primarily in the structure of popular government” (*narodna vlast*). Civil liberties were to be guaranteed “to the fullest extent possible in present wartime conditions.”³²⁸ The federal principle appeared as the foundation of national reconciliation, the declaration insisting that the common state was “not some accidental creation, but a historical necessity without which the freedom of each of its individual nations is impossible.”³²⁹ Cooperatives were assigned “an important role in the reconstruction of the country,” while “full freedom and assistance to private initiative in the economy” was guaranteed.³³⁰ Most significantly, the government committed to holding “free elections for the Constituent Assembly on the basis of universal, secret suffrage” as soon as possible, with the freely elected body having “the final word on the decisions and laws” made by AVNOJ.³³¹ The declaration closed with an appeal to the people’s aspiration for “true democracy” (*istinska demokratija*), by which “our peoples have found and embraced new foundations of popular government and wish to be the builders and managers of their own destiny.”³³²

³²⁶ “Sporazum Nacionalnog komiteta oslobođenja Jugoslavije i kraljevske jugoslovenske vlade,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 643.

³²⁷ “Obrazovanje jedinstvene vlade Tito–Šubašić, 7. mart 1945.” (The Formation of the Unified Tito–Šubašić Government, March 7, 1945), in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 656–57.

³²⁸ “Deklaracija vlade Tito–Šubašić od 9. marta 1945.” (The Declaration of the Tito–Šubašić Government, March 9, 1945), in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 657–58.

³²⁹ “Deklaracija vlade Tito–Šubašić,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 657–68.

³³⁰ “Deklaracija vlade Tito–Šubašić,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 658–59.

³³¹ “Deklaracija vlade Tito–Šubašić,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 660.

³³² “Deklaracija vlade Tito–Šubašić,” in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 660.

The problem of identifying what sort of democracy ought to be established was expressed at lower levels too. In Vojvodina, the Hungarian-language organ of the JNOF, *Szabad Vajdaság* (Free Vojvodina), envisioned a “new Eastern Europe” emerging out of the war.³³³ “Above all, the first task is democratic reconstruction: securing popular rule, broadening democratic rights and freedoms, building self-government.” Among the minority Hungarian community, the preservation of cultural and linguistic autonomies was a key issue, but new democratic forms of self-government promised to create conditions for equal cooperation among nations. “If we build a democracy of the working people at home,” the editors wrote, “we will also build a community of self-loving peoples in the new Eastern Europe.”

In an unpublished manuscript from June 1945, the historian Dušan Kermavner—who had edited the memoirs of Henrik Tuma and Albin Prepeluh before the war³³⁴—commented on the new Yugoslav state. The old bureaucratic apparatus had stood above “the people” and looked down on them as “ignorant” and “stupid.” The new Yugoslavia, created through the bottom-up “struggle of the popular masses,” now gave those masses a claim to governance. “The new popular government is being built with deep faith in the creative power of the popular masses.”³³⁵ Kermavner’s text responded to an article by Edvard Kardelj in *Borba* from May 30, 1945, in which Kardelj argued that “the state apparatus which we are now building must correspond in its forms to the democratic character of government by the popular masses.”³³⁶ The People’s Liberation Councils, first founded as local organs of self-government in August

³³³ “Uj Keleturópa” (A New Eastern Europe), *Szabad Vajdaság* 2, no. 28 [2] (February 5, 1945): 1.

³³⁴ Dušan Kermavner, “Urednikove dopolnitve” (Editorial Addition), in Henrik Tuma, *Iz mojega življenja* (From My Life), ed. Dušan Kermavner (Ljubljana: Naša založba, 1937), 419–73; Dušan Kermavner, “Albin Prepeluh – Abditus: Njegov idejni razvoj in delo” (Albin Prepeluh – Abditus: His Intellectual Development and Work), in *Pripombe k naši prevratni dobi* (Remarks on Our Revolutionary Age), ed. Dušan Kermavner (Ljubljana: J. Blasnik, 1938), 295–562.

³³⁵ Dušan Kermavner, “Kakva je naša nova, narodna državna uprava?” (Of What Type is Our New, Popular State Administration?) (1945–46?), NUK Ms 1962 Kermavner Dušan, Folder 7, f. 1–3.

³³⁶ Edvard Kardelj, “Снага народних маса” (The Power of the Popular Masses), *Борба* 10, no. 130 (May 30, 1945): 1.

1941 and standardized by the AVNOJ Presidium after 1942,³³⁷ had disrupted the top-down administration of the old state. Kermavner deemed this institutionalization of popular sovereignty “true democracy” (*prava demokratija*): every citizen was enabled “to participate in the management of their community, of the state.”³³⁸ To maintain this, a “constant struggle” (*stalna borba*) against “clerical, bureaucratic practices” remained necessary.³³⁹ The councils “at the same time elect and oversee their own executive bodies,”³⁴⁰ meaning that in the new situation “our people are no longer *subjects* of the authority of lords and their bureaucrats but have become the *bearers* of their own authority.”³⁴¹

Centralized legislative authority still remained with AVNOJ. At the Yalta Conference, the Allies insisted that AVNOJ should be “extended to include members of the last Yugoslav Parliament (Skupshtina) [*sic*] who have not compromised themselves by collaboration with the enemy,” forming a temporary parliament, and that all wartime legislation ought to be approved by a Constituent Assembly.³⁴² In late March 1945, the AVNOJ Presidium approved such a measure,³⁴³ delegating the task to Kardelj’s Ministry for the Constituent Assembly.³⁴⁴ Fifty-three former parliamentarians from the 1938 United Opposition were included, as well as sixty-eight others from extra-parliamentary groups including the NSS and JRS.³⁴⁵ On August 7, 1945, both Jaša Prodanović and Dragoljub Jovanović were approved as new members; the Republican

³³⁷ See “Nacrt odluke o mesnim organima narodne vlasti, decembar 1942” (Draft Decision on the Local Bodies of Popular Government, December 1942), in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 288–89.

³³⁸ Kermavner, “Kakva je naša nova, narodna državna uprava,” NUK Ms 1962, Folder 7, f. 1.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 2.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.* For an analytic description of the functions of the People’s Liberation Councils, see Branko Petranović, “Osnovne ustanove revolucije” (The Foundational Institutions of the Revolution), in *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988* (The History of Yugoslavia, 1918–1988), vol. 2, *Narodnooslobodilački rat i revolucija* (The People’s Liberation War and the Revolution) (Belgrade: Nolit, 1988), 193–238.

³⁴¹ Kermavner, “Kakva je naša nova, narodna državna uprava,” NUK Ms 1962, Folder 7, f. 3.

³⁴² “Report of the Crimea Conference,” in *United Nations Documents, 1941–1945* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1947), 142–48, here 147.

³⁴³ *Законодавни рад Претседништва Антифашистичког већа народног ослобођења Југославије и Претседништва Привремене народне скупштине ДФЈ* (The Legislative Work of the AVNOJ Presidium and the Presidium of the Provisional People’s Assembly of the DFJ), ed. Slobodan Nešović (Belgrade: Prezidijum Narodne skupštine FNRJ, 1951), 70–80, here 80.

³⁴⁴ Branko Petranović *Političke i pravne prilike za vreme Privremene vlade DFJ* (The Political and Legal Situation in the Period of the Provisional Government of the DFJ) (Belgrade: Institut za društvenih nauka, 1964), 141.

³⁴⁵ Petranović *Političke i pravne prilike*, 140–42.

Party received eleven seats in total, Jovanović's NSS nine.³⁴⁶ By August 10, AVNOJ was restructured as the Provisional National Assembly.³⁴⁷

In parallel, the Popular Front of Yugoslavia (*Narodni front Jugoslavije*, NFJ) was formed out of JNOF, holding its founding congress between August 5–7, 1945. The NFJ did not have the character of a “classical political party” but was rather a broader socio-political organization emphasizing “agitational and propagandistic functions.”³⁴⁸ While the JNOF and NFJ were both led by the Communist Party, the NFJ did act as a coalition of progressive parties, beyond the JRS and NSS the Agrarian Workers' Union, the Independent Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, the Social-Democratic Party, the Croatian Republican Peasant Party, the Democratic Party, as well as non-party representatives of Bosnian Muslims and unaffiliated liberal intellectuals.³⁴⁹ Between them there were quite different shades of opinion, with Milan Grol's liberal democratic but centralist and monarchist vision within the Democratic Party representing the most “conservative” position in the oppositional civic camp.³⁵⁰

In the leadup to the congress, Dragoljub Jovanović published two articles in *Политика* and the JNOF organ *Глас*.³⁵¹ He framed the approaching congress as unprecedented: for the first time in twenty-five years, progressive political actors would meet freely, having previously encountered one another only in “prisons, forests, or camps.”³⁵² Over a thousand delegates would represent a “progressive Yugoslavia” (*napredna Jugoslavija*) that had existed only in

³⁴⁶ See Petranović, *Političke i pravne prilike*, 229, for the list; also *Tretje zasedanje AVNOJ in zasedanje Začasne ljudske skupščine Demokratične federativne Jugoslavije* (7.–26. avgust 1945), ed. Slobodan Nešović (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1975), 71–72.

³⁴⁷ “Rezolucija o proglašenju Antifašističkog veća narodnog oslobođenja za Privremenu narodnu skupštinu DFJ, 10 august 1945” (Resolution on the Declaration of AVNOJ as the Provisional National Assembly of the DFJ, August 10, 1945), in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 759–60; also *Tretje zasedanje AVNOJ*, 123–27.

³⁴⁸ Živković, *Narodni front Jugoslavije*, 410–12.

³⁴⁹ Živković, *Narodni front Jugoslavije*, 412.

³⁵⁰ Živković, *Narodni front Jugoslavije*, 410.

³⁵¹ Dragoljub Jovanović, “Пред први конгрес ЈНОФ-а Југославије: Који су данас задаци Народноослободилачког фронта?” (Before the First Congress of JNOF: What Are the People's Liberation Front's Tasks Today?), *Политика* 42, no. 12048 (July 25, 1945): 1–2, reproduced in Jovanović, *Смјудје, расправе*, vol. 1, 587–91; and Dragoljub Jovanović, “Уочи првог конгреса ЈНОФ-а Југославије: Напредна Југославија на окупу” (On the Eve of the First JNOF Congress: Progressive Yugoslavia Gathers), *Глас* 4, no. 44 (July 31, 1945), reproduced in Jovanović, *Смјудје, расправе*, vol. 1, 591–96. I quote from the reproduced version.

³⁵² Jovanović, “Уочи првог конгреса ЈНОФ-а Југославије,” 591.

fragments under the old regime.³⁵³ Workers and peasants were to be the “main pillars” (*glavni stubovi*) of the new state, as were those who “suffered most from national division, from hegemony and chauvinism.”³⁵⁴ The Front’s role would be to serve as “a bearer, defender, and controller of state policy” rather than a mere party.³⁵⁵ Jovanović explicitly rejected the notion of the Popular Front as “a temporary organization with concrete tasks, a coalition or bloc of parties” and envisioned instead “a lasting, permanent, and far-reaching creation that is ideologically grounded, has its own worldview.”³⁵⁶ Where fascism had produced a comprehensive philosophy, “old bourgeois democracy was not capable of responding with the same freshness and dynamism.”³⁵⁷ None of the constituent parties ought to press particularist claims: “Some will not demand a peasant or cooperative state, just as others will not demand the abolition of private property or a full Soviet system.”³⁵⁸ Jovanović enumerated his core principles around democracy and federalism: “state integrity and independence of Yugoslavia,” “brotherhood among our peoples,” “democracy, popular government, freedom for the people, above all for those who work,” and “South Slavic and Balkan solidarity.”³⁵⁹ Yet he acknowledged a tension between political democracy and material improvement, namely that some civic rights may have to be suspended in order to kick-start the economy through nationalization and labor regiments. “This is the old question,” he wrote: “bread before freedom, or freedom before bread. We will submit to the necessities of planned economy, even if we must temporarily renounce certain privileges of full freedom.”³⁶⁰

Edvard Kardelj, during his speech at the NFJ congress, addressed directly the question of parties within the Front. He rejected two “extremes”: the view that unity was incompatible

³⁵³ Jovanović, “Уочи првог конгреса ЈНОФ-а Југославије,” 591.

³⁵⁴ Jovanović, “Пред први конгрес ЈНОФ-а Југославије,” 590.

³⁵⁵ Jovanović, “Уочи првог конгреса ЈНОФ-а Југославије,” 593.

³⁵⁶ Jovanović, “Уочи првог конгреса ЈНОФ-а Југославије,” 593.

³⁵⁷ Jovanović, “Уочи првог конгреса ЈНОФ-а Југославије,” 593.

³⁵⁸ Jovanović, “Уочи првог конгреса ЈНОФ-а Југославије,” 594.

³⁵⁹ Jovanović, “Пред први конгрес ЈНОФ-а Југославије,” 589–90.

³⁶⁰ Jovanović, “Уочи првог конгреса ЈНОФ-а Југославије,” 594.

with parties and the view that a mere agreement among party leaderships would suffice. The Front was “a bloc of workers, peasants, and middle strata,” and parties could exist within it provided they expressed the interests of those groups rather than those of the “reactionary forces.” Kardelj rejected an “ordinary coalition of parties” (*obična partijska koalicija*) which “cannot mobilize the masses because it lives from compromises at the top,” insisting that the Front took “the everyday interest of the popular masses and their state community as the measure for determining its political line.” Democracy meant mass participation and popular control—but not multiparty parliamentary competition.³⁶¹ Jovanović’s speech was more personal, framing the Front’s principles as “rules of our political service to the people.” He stressed that “there cannot be Yugoslavia without unity and brotherhood, and there cannot be unity and brotherhood without federation, which means without democracy and equality.”³⁶² Power, for Jovanović, needed to arise from the bottom and be directed upward, not the other way around. The NFJ provided a means to channel or institutionalize that popular power, to “control over the authorities so that they do not become lordly” and to “rap on the knuckles” of comrades who demand “cakes and meat for lunch.”³⁶³ The scanty peasant representation at the Congress was a symptom of sectarianism at the local level. Vlada Simić of the Republican Party spoke in celebratory terms: the Republicans had stood for federalism, national equality, republicanism, and social democracy since 1918—principles now enshrined in the Front’s program. The historian Branko Petranović agreed, observing that the Republicans’ “pre-war program, in its basic tenets, already reflected the program ideas of the JNOF [and later the NFJ—CJI].”³⁶⁴ The NFJ program insisted that “brother and unity of nations within a federation

³⁶¹ Edvard Kardelj, Speech at the Founding Congress of the NFJ, August 5, 1945, in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 796–802.

³⁶² Dragoljub Jovanović, Speech at the Founding Congress of the NFJ, August 5, 1945, in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 802–806.

³⁶³ Jovanović, Speech at the Founding Congress of the NFJ, 806.

³⁶⁴ Petranović, *Političke i pravne prilike*, 176.

is irreconcilable with a monarchic form of government,” and so plainly linked the federal principles to the realization of republican ideals.³⁶⁵

In his *Portraits*, Jovanović argued that Prodanović and the Republicans “had wanted the Front to be a kind of coalition of parties and groups, just as we [in the NSS] wanted, whereas the communists imagined it as a collection of individuals of whom only the communists were organized and subject to [party] discipline with a leading a decisive role.”³⁶⁶ The question of coalition versus unified formation had emerged most explicitly in Kardelj’s and Jovanović’s interventions. Kardelj’s rejection of multiparty coalition meant that every party member was simultaneously to be a member of the basic Front organization. Jovanović’s criticism implied the same point from a different angle: the harmony achieved at the top had not reached the base, and the exclusion of peasants showed the dangers of organizational forms focused too narrowly on the industrial proletariat. Neither speaker articulated a fear of a completely homogenized formation; both accepted that the Front must be more than a coalition. Whereas Kardelj stressed discipline and unity of will, Jovanović focused on tolerance, mutual respect, and the representation of the peasantry as the numerical majority. Their disagreement concerned whose interests the Front would ultimately serve: Kardelj argued that reactionary elements sought to “enrich themselves on the capital the Front won through its heroic struggle against the occupier.”³⁶⁷

In the leadup to the elections in November,³⁶⁸ a unified Popular Front list was created, though with multiple candidates representing different groups, in total 758 candidates running for 348 mandates.³⁶⁹ Jaša Prodanović led the second electoral list in Serbia, while Jovanović stood as an “alternative candidate” in the Belgrade municipal list; Vidmar and Kocbek led the

³⁶⁵ Petranović, *Političke i pravne prilike*, 183.

³⁶⁶ Jovanović, *Медальони*, vol. 3, 226.

³⁶⁷ Kardelj, Speech at the Founding Congress of the NFJ, 801.

³⁶⁸ See Petranović, *Političke i pravne prilike*, 187–201, for details about the leadup to the elections.

³⁶⁹ Petranović, *Političke i pravne prilike*, 201–202.

main list for Slovenia.³⁷⁰ In Belgrade, both Prodanović and Jovanović spoke at the November 5 election rally.³⁷¹ Prodanović commemorated those fallen during the liberation struggle but pointed out that the Popular Front still faced challenges: “The warrior’s sword has liberated our country, but the diplomatic pen has not yet confirmed the unification of those of our regions that were separated from us.” He framed the Popular Front’s program as coinciding with the Republican Party’s on all key points, from federalism—the “mortal enemy” of centralism—to women’s suffrage, to the nationalization of “the main sources of national wealth.” A republic had not yet been formally declared, but popular republican sentiments had been secured “in the hearts and souls of the vast majority.” Jovanović followed on the podium,³⁷² presenting the elections as a plebiscite on the new order and declaring that “Serbia has understood the directives of the Popular Front.” He emphasized that the Front sought “the people’s trust not for ourselves as individuals, but for the Popular Front as the general political organization of Yugoslavia.” Federalism was again the precondition of equality: “Serbia will vote because it desires that equal peoples live in Yugoslavia, and that can only be if we are a federation.”

Unsurprisingly, the NFJ lists won all seats on November 11.³⁷³ Two weeks later, on November 29, 1945, the Constituent Assembly began its work. Vlada Simić was elected president of the Federal Assembly, Josip Vidmar president of the Assembly of the People.³⁷⁴ The two chambers then read out a proposal by the Serbian delegations to transform Democratic Federal Yugoslavia into a republic. The resolution insisted that during Yugoslavia’s pre-war existence, “its peoples were unable to realize their eternal aspirations for national equality and social justice,” and that “the unpopular rule of the hegemonic clique created an ever-deepening

³⁷⁰ *Борба* 10, no. 231 (Sept. 23, 1945): 2; *Борба* 10, no. 235 (Sept. 27, 1945): 2.

³⁷¹ *Борба* 10, no. 268 (Nov. 5, 1945): 1.

³⁷² *Борба* 10, no. 268 (Nov. 5, 1945): 1.

³⁷³ See the table given in Petranović, *Političke i pravne prilike*, 203.

³⁷⁴ Slobodan Nešović, ed., *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupštine (29. novembra 1945–1. februara 1946)* (The Sessions of the Constituent Assembly, November 29, 1945–February 1, 1946) (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1977), 23, 31.

chasm and discord among them.”³⁷⁵ Through the liberation struggle, the peoples had defended their “independence and freedom” while the Karađorđevićs “fled abroad, leaving the peoples of Yugoslavia to their fate.”³⁷⁶ Liberation brought a “fraternal and democratic community of equal nations,” requiring a “people’s republic” (*ljudska republika* and *narodna republika*).³⁷⁷ The new Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia would be formed on federal bases, a “community of equal nations who have freely expressed their will to remain united in Yugoslavia.”³⁷⁸ The monarchy was abolished, the Karađorđević dynasty deposed and “deprived of all rights.”³⁷⁹ The Federal Assembly voted 344 in favor with five abstaining.³⁸⁰ In the Assembly of the People, Edvard Kocbek spoke for Slovenia:

We now eliminate from our national life that false formal authority which stood above all actions and cessations of the old political order. And that is why this action by both chambers in the capital of Yugoslavia is so historically significant and particularly decisive for us Slovenians. We Slovenians are a small nation that lost our right to national rule just at the beginning of our independence; for over a thousand years, we have constantly experienced foreign royal, imperial, and apostolic majesties who not only oppressed their subjects, but also morally drank the blood of this nation. And that is why perhaps no nation of Yugoslavia signs this declaration with such determination and clarity as we Slovenians. This statement of ours, this decision, is further strengthened by the awareness that it was not only we Slovenians who won it, but all the fraternal nations of Yugoslavia. Our greatest joy is that this declaration was proposed by our brother Serbs, that this declaration is accepted by the entire Yugoslav state, brother Croats, brother Montenegrins, brother Macedonians, brother Bosnians and Herzegovinians. Therefore, I think that we Slovenians have no choice but to finally give this realization a breath of fresh air by exclaiming: Long live the new popular sovereignty of our peoples!³⁸¹

Aleksa Tomić of the Republican Party linked the idea of the republic with the notion that “there is only one force in the world, namely conscience in the service of justice, and only one glory

³⁷⁵ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 25.

³⁷⁶ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 25.

³⁷⁷ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 25.

³⁷⁸ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 26.

³⁷⁹ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 26.

³⁸⁰ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 29.

³⁸¹ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 34–35.

in the world, namely the spirit that serves truth.”³⁸² Tomić closed with an anecdote: “Fourteen years ago, by these walls, bloody Aleksandar was driving around in a car with a certain famous politician who mediated between political people.” When Aleksandar told his companion to inform Jaša that he had “closed up shop”—the National Assembly—Prodanović replied: “If you are a man and his [the king’s] friend, tell him that I will not die before I close up shop on the other side of the road,” meaning the royal palace.³⁸³ Gesturing to Jaša on the Assembly’s dais: “Now look at the old man, silent because of his modesty. He lived to see the shop closed, but he didn’t just lock it up, he had it sealed and closed forever.”³⁸⁴ The Assembly of the People voted 157 in favor, nine abstaining.³⁸⁵ By half past five, Yugoslavia was a republic.³⁸⁶

The work of the Constituent Assembly then quickly turned toward drafting the constitution. On December 1, Jovanović praised the creation of the Presidium as a collective executive organ, insisting that Yugoslavia was “creating a new type of state, a new type of republic” governed by “a body, a collective, a community, a world of people, elected by the Constituent Assembly in a common session of both houses.”³⁸⁷ This was suitable for a “composite state,” for it allowed “all our nations to be represented at the same time.”³⁸⁸ It meant that it was not simply that Tito would become “one man who would stand in place of the king,” but that collective executive power would allow “our peoples to come to the top of the state administration one by one through their representatives.”³⁸⁹ Jovanović supported Kardelj’s bid for a collective presidency as consistent with “the profound democratic spirit of the Serbian people.”³⁹⁰ Ivan Ribar, as the longtime president of AVNOJ and of the initial Yugoslav

³⁸² *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 37.

³⁸³ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 39.

³⁸⁴ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 39.

³⁸⁵ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 39.

³⁸⁶ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 40–41.

³⁸⁷ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 53.

³⁸⁸ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 53.

³⁸⁹ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 53.

³⁹⁰ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 54.

Constituent Assembly in 1921, was delegated as president of the presidium.³⁹¹ Prodanović, Jovanović, and Vidmar were all elected members alongside Tito, Kardelj, and Đilas.³⁹² Simić and Jovanović were elected to the Federal Assembly's Constitutional Committee, while Prodanović and Kocbek were elected to the same committee within the Assembly of the People.³⁹³ It was within these committees that the greatest debate broke out over the future constitution, becoming the final moment when such opposition could be expressed before the gradual liberalization of the system from the early 1950s onward.³⁹⁴

Things came to a head on December 11 and 12. Prodanović, speaking in the Constitutional Committee on December 11, framed the constitutional question as one of institutional safeguards against executive overreach: "Dead laws are nothing if they are not brought to life, and dead laws are only brought to life by people."³⁹⁵ Drawing on the English model, he argued that laws should only be interpreted liberally, never restrictively. He warned from past experience, for in the old Yugoslavia, constitutional freedoms had been progressively narrowed "first by implementing legislation, then by interpretation, then by ministerial decrees," until "from the first constitutional provision to its execution, there is almost no freedom."³⁹⁶ His solution envisioned robust provisions for popular referenda, modeled on the Swiss cantonal system, drawing on the older Republican Party program and his own texts in *Буктиња* from the 1920s.

Jovanović's intervention in the Federal Assembly operated on a different register entirely. He acknowledged that the constitution ensured territorial integrity, established the republic on federal bases, and affirmed popular sovereignty—achievements in harmony with

³⁹¹ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 56.

³⁹² *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 56.

³⁹³ *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine*, 72 and 78.

³⁹⁴ See sections of the draft constitution republished in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 856–58.

³⁹⁵ Jaša Prodanović, Speech at the Constitutional Committee of the Assembly of the People, December 11, 1945, in *Уставотворни одбори Савезне скупштине и Скупштине народа: стенографске белешке, 10 децембар 1945–4 јануар 1946* (The Constitutional Committees of the Federal Assembly and the Assembly of the People: Stenographic Notes, December 10, 1945–January 4, 1946) (Belgrade: Narodna skupština FNRJ, n.d. [1947]), 500.

³⁹⁶ Prodanović, Speech of December 11, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 502.

his own positions. Yet he distinguished between “objective” and “subjective” security: Yugoslavia might be legally constituted as a republic, but whether its peoples had internalized their common belonging remained uncertain.³⁹⁷ Despite the ostensibly federal structure, the constitutional text only guaranteed that “all power is state power,” leaving no genuine space for autonomous self-governance.³⁹⁸ More provocatively, Jovanović named what the text left unspoken: the Communist Party had become a “super-guarantee” (*supergarantija*) of political unity operating outside of formal constitutional channels.³⁹⁹ He drew an explicit parallel with Article 126 of the Soviet Constitution, which designated the Communist Party as the leading nucleus of all organizations.⁴⁰⁰ The extreme emphasis on state unity through homogenization had created “a large number of opponents” artificially, individuals who “by their conviction if not by their feeling” would otherwise have supported the new state order.⁴⁰¹ The result would be the creation of a loyal bureaucratic class divorced from the toilers engaged in productive labor. This identification of party and state, Jovanović warned, amounted to a “single-party system” (*jednopartijski sistem*) that contradicted the pluralist aspirations of the Popular Front.⁴⁰²

The responses the following day were harbingers of the events that followed. Kardelj rejected the charge of centralism by redefining its terms: the unity of popular government was not bureaucratic centralization but the organic expression of revolutionary democracy established during the liberation struggle.⁴⁰³ The councils that structured Yugoslav governance had emerged spontaneously from the drive of the people to liberate themselves; if Jovanović found this system centralist, it was because he measured it against bourgeois parliamentarism

³⁹⁷ Dragoljub Jovanović, Speech at the Constitutional Committee of the Federal Assembly, December 11, 1945, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 22.

³⁹⁸ Jovanović, Speech of December 11, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 25.

³⁹⁹ Jovanović, Speech of December 11, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 25.

⁴⁰⁰ Jovanović, Speech of December 11, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 29.

⁴⁰¹ Jovanović, Speech of December 11, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 31.

⁴⁰² Jovanović, Speech of December 11, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 35.

⁴⁰³ Edvard Kardelj, Speech at the Constitutional Committee of the Federal Assembly, December 12, 1945, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 58.

rather than its own self-generated principles.⁴⁰⁴ Further, Jovanović's warnings about one-party rule "echoed the propaganda of international reaction" and would "make all opponents of popular government quite happy."⁴⁰⁵ Moša Pijade argued that the constitution was "the work of the people, the work of the popular struggle," built upon the sacrifice of thousands.⁴⁰⁶ To suggest it might be "imposed" upon the people was to deny the armed struggle's popular support. The principle of popular sovereignty had been proclaimed already at the Second Session of AVNOJ, though Pijade insisted this merely institutionalized what had already appeared on the ground.⁴⁰⁷ Jovanović, like Goethe's Faust, suffered from having two souls: "*Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach, in meiner Brust.*"⁴⁰⁸

Vladimir Simić occupied an ambiguous middle ground, noting the constitution's omission of legislative initiative and its weak referendum provisions.⁴⁰⁹ He also raised a question that no one else had yet addressed: the constitution's silence on nationalization. A mixed economy required clear boundaries. Without explicit provisions for gradual nationalization, the constitutional order might evolve toward a centralized, statist economy.⁴¹⁰ The Republicans' position remained inspired by Mihailo Ilić's texts on solidarism à la Charles Gide, with their criticism of state rather than popular control over the means of production centering on the fact that a centrally planned economy only masked price signals, creating distorted surpluses and shortages, while parallel managerial authority usurped actual democratization in the economic sphere.

What emerged from these two days was less a dialogue than a demonstration of incompatible premises. For Jovanović, democracy required institutional pluralism, autonomous

⁴⁰⁴ Kardelj, Speech of December 12, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 59–61.

⁴⁰⁵ Kardelj, Speech of December 12, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 61.

⁴⁰⁶ Moša Pijade, Speech at the Constitutional Committee of the Federal Assembly, December 12, 1945, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 71.

⁴⁰⁷ Pijade, Speech of December 12, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 74.

⁴⁰⁸ Pijade, Speech of December 12, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 76.

⁴⁰⁹ Vladimir Simić, Speech at the Constitutional Committee of the Federal Assembly, December 12, 1945, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 51–52.

⁴¹⁰ Simić, Speech of December 12, in *Уставотворни одбори*, 53–54.

intermediate bodies, and institutionalized popular sovereignty as a check upon centralized power. For Kardelj and Pijade, democracy meant the unity of working people organized through councils and led by the Communist Party. That legitimacy arose from its historical role in leading the liberation struggle, which, less than a year after the end of open hostilities, weighed in the minds of the participants. Jovanović's speech marked him, in communist eyes, as completely unreliable rather than a representative of a loyal opposition.

The constitution was passed and ratified at the end of January 1946.⁴¹¹ Prodanović was named vice president of Tito's government next to Kardelj. From this moment on, Prodanović's role slumped to that of a symbolic continuity with the old Serbian republican stream. The party's newspaper *Република* received a subsidy from the Popular Front, but Prodanović was increasingly treated as an "oppositional figure" and no longer wrote regularly for the paper.⁴¹² Jovanović, on the other hand, vocalized his dissent more readily. On agricultural cooperatives, he insisted on their independence from state control and that trust be given to local peasantry outside a quota system.⁴¹³ On the proposed law regulating public prosecutors, he argued that within a single-party state the prosecutor could only be the tool of that party, and so the law would "legalize the omnipotence that the prosecutor has in practice," meaning the "incarnation of the dictatorship of one party, the guarantee of a one-party system."⁴¹⁴ The "entire people are kept in fear" and under the guise of liberation a new form of domination would appear.⁴¹⁵ By the end of July 1946, Jovanović had been stripped of his position in the Serbian National Assembly and hounded out of the Faculty of Law.⁴¹⁶ He was arrested in May 1947 on charges of espionage and sentenced in October to nine years, the procedure of the prosecution following

⁴¹¹ Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, January 31, 1946, in *AVNOJ i revolucija*, 858–62.

⁴¹² Jovanović, *Медаљони*, vol. 3, 228.

⁴¹³ *Prvo redovno zasedanje Saveznog veća i Veća naroda* (Belgrade: Narodna skupština FNRJ, n.d. [1947]), 416–24.

⁴¹⁴ *Prvo redovno zasedanje*, 502.

⁴¹⁵ *Prvo redovno zasedanje*, 500.

⁴¹⁶ Milić, *Драгољуб Јовановић*, 59.

the very same Law on Public Prosecutors he had so harshly criticized.⁴¹⁷ Jovanović recalled that Prodanović's *Република*, though only sparingly brought into the prison, provided him with “true food for the soul” in captivity.⁴¹⁸

Prodanović had been deeply critical of Jovanović's removal, he had already made it clear that he did not intend to take on the role of active opposition, for after all his lifetime political goal, the creation of the South Slavic republic, had been realized.⁴¹⁹ Instead, he turned toward finishing his large project *The History of Political Parties and Currents in Serbia*, published in 1947.⁴²⁰ It represented the culmination of nearly twenty years of scholarly labor,⁴²¹ and attempted to transcend the limits of earlier conservative historiography on Serbia's political history published by Živan Živanović and Slobodan Jovanović. Where these previous accounts largely confined themselves to treaties, dynastic genealogies, and the deeds of rulers, Prodanović turned to political conditions, party programs, ideological currents, and figures drawn from the broader population.⁴²² The first (and only) volume traced Serbian politics from the First Serbian Uprising (1804) to the Timok Rebellion (1883) within a broader tension between centralism and autonomism. A work tracing Serbia's nineteenth-century political development published in 1947 carried different resonances than it would have in 1921 or 1931; after the war, the same narrative could be read as a prehistory of the revolutionary transformation, yet it remained focused on the bottom-up struggle against centralizing tendencies, and so can readily be interpreted as a layered critique of the consolidating regime.

⁴¹⁷ *Борба* 12, no. 235 (Oct. 2, 1947): 5.

⁴¹⁸ Jovanović, *Медаљони*, vol. 3, 228.

⁴¹⁹ Jovanović, *Медаљони*, vol. 3, 228.

⁴²⁰ Jaša M. Prodanović, *Историја политичких странака и струја у Србији* (The History of Political Parties and Currents in Serbia) (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1947).

⁴²¹ As described in Kosta Milutinović, review of Prodanović, *Историја политичких странака*, in *Зборник Матице српске: серија друштвених наука*, no. 4 (1952): 167.

⁴²² See Kosta Milutinović, “Књижевни и научни лик Јаше Продановића” (The Literary and Scientific Character of Jaša Prodanović), in *Споменица Јаше М. Продановића* (Memorial Book for Jaša M. Prodanović), ed. Borislav Miljković (Belgrade: Kultura, 1958), 110–20.

Within a year, Prodanović was elected a full member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences.⁴²³ On June 1, 1948, he passed away at 82 years old.⁴²⁴ The obituary in *Борба* was front-page news:

The victory over the monarchy as the embodiment of national oppression, tyranny, economic enslavement, lawlessness, and arbitrariness was won by new forces from which a powerful revolutionary national liberation movement flourished. Led by the Communist Party, this movement during the National Liberation War also won the victory of those ideas for which such honorable political veterans as Jaša Prodanović had fought. Connected with the creation of the new Yugoslavia not only because of its democratic essence, the achievement of social justice, brotherhood and unity, the purity and uncompromisingness of the people's government in the persecution of fraud and corruption, but also by the blood of his sons who fell in the struggle for liberation, Prodanović, quite naturally, found himself in the first days after the liberation of Belgrade among the builders of the new state. His experience and sober view of many problems of state and national life were rightly appreciated and represented a useful contribution to the general efforts aimed at the rapid reconstruction and development of the country.⁴²⁵

He was buried in Belgrade's Novo groblje with full state honors. Tito wrote to Persa Prodanović, Jaša's wife, that Jaša had been "a prominent and consistent republican fighter" who "filled his entire fruitful life until the last day of his old age with noble work for the good of our working people." Ivan Ribar regretted the loss of his "thirty-year friend, a long-time political worker and fighter for truth, justice, and freedom."⁴²⁶ Later that month, Milovan Đilas opened the meeting of the Plenum of the Federal Committee of the Popular Front with a further commemoration, recalling Prodanović as "a consistent fighter for democratic freedoms" and "one of the most prominent patriotic figures of Yugoslavia and especially of Serbia."⁴²⁷

None of the others, aside from Josip Vidmar, received such recognition during their lifetimes. Dragoljub Jovanović remained in prison until 1955 and retreated from public life until

⁴²³ *Борба* 13, no. 70 (March 22, 1948): 2.

⁴²⁴ *Борба* 13, no. 132 (June 2, 1948): 1.

⁴²⁵ *Борба* 13, no. 132 (June 2, 1948): 1.

⁴²⁶ *Борба* 13, no. 132 (June 2, 1948): 1.

⁴²⁷ *Борба* 13, no. 147 (June 20, 1948): 1

his death in 1977.⁴²⁸ Edvard Kocbek was largely inactive in the federal parliament from the Constituent Assembly onward, though he remained a delegate and was elected vice president of the Presidium of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia in 1947. With the publication of his novel *Fear and Courage* in 1951, he was marginalized from public life, with only few of his works published in the following decades. Josip Vidmar joined the Communist Party at its Fifth Congress in 1948 after the Tito–Stalin Split; from 1952 to 1976, he was the president of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.⁴²⁹ While the Split was certainly dramatic,⁴³⁰ little changed for the republican leftists. Many were marginalized once again, pushed out of politics and into culture for a second and final time.

The developments in Hungary which began in autumn 1944 were altogether different. Horthy's ill-fated armistice proclamation of October 15, 1944, precipitated the definitive collapse of the regent's authority and the installation of Ferenc Szálasi's Arrow Cross regime.⁴³¹ German occupational forces, in cooperation with the quisling government, had already prepared for such a move and acted quickly. The country's armed forces were left disoriented, and units summoned to Budapest sided with German troops against the government.⁴³² Horthy was deposed, the government resigned, and months of unrestrained terror followed. The day after the coup, István Bibó was arrested for having issued false identity papers to Jews.⁴³³ After three days in German internment, he was released and went into hiding with his family in the basement of the Reformed Theological Academy on Ráday utca in Pest.⁴³⁴ Illés Mónus, arrested

⁴²⁸ Milić, *Драгољуб Јовановић*, 66.

⁴²⁹ Franc Zadavec, "Vidmar, Josip," in *Slovenski biografski leksikon*, vol. 13, *Trubar–Vodaine*, ed. Alfonz Gspan, Jože Munda, and Fran Petre (Ljubljana, Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1982), online edition at <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi783877/>.

⁴³⁰ Perhaps the best overview remains Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁴³¹ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 182. The Hungarian civilian administration largely proved to be a willing assistant in the destruction of the country's Jews until Horthy's order in early July 1944 halting deportations—two months after they had begun. Some sections of civil society and the neutral diplomatic legations became more developed centers of resistance, but this was hardly enough. The Christian churches had a rather ambivalent role. For more on the churches' role, see Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary*, 192–221.

⁴³² Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 8.

⁴³³ Bibó, *Visszaemlékezések*, 74.

⁴³⁴ Bibó, *Visszaemlékezések*, 75.

after the German invasion in March, escaped on the day of the coup but was found by Arrow Cross militiamen, who executed him and threw his body into the Danube.⁴³⁵

Imre Csécsy spent the occupation with his family in their apartment in Buda's Krisztinaváros. In mid-January 1945, as the siege of the city was underway, German SS troops briefly held Csécsy while they searched his apartment for radio transmission equipment.⁴³⁶ He had come under surveillance after the coup: it appeared that he regularly sat in front of one of his windows speaking into a microphone and tapping a telegraph key. Rather, as he explained, he smoked a pipe while typing away at his typewriter.⁴³⁷ After four hours of searching, they were convinced he was hiding neither equipment nor people; they suggested he draw the curtains while he wrote. Less than a month later, Soviet troops were in Buda. Slowly, newspapers from the social democrats and peasantists began to appear. "The Radical Party would now have to be formed," Csécsy wrote in his diary on February 19, 1945.⁴³⁸ Bibó and his family came out of hiding, as did Kéthly and many more. Imre Kovács attempted to cross Soviet lines to Debrecen, where Erdei was already working as the provisional Minister of Interior, but was promptly placed in a Soviet prisoner of war camp at Gödöllő; he was released some weeks later and returned to Budapest in mid-February.⁴³⁹ By April, the Provisional National Assembly and Government had moved to Budapest from Debrecen.⁴⁴⁰

The same month, Csécsy was invited to lecture at the reconstituted Galileo Circle. "Left and Right" attempted to rediscover the intellectual bonds of the Aster Revolution of 1918: free-thinking, scientific commitment, the struggle for truth and justice, and humanism beyond

⁴³⁵ István Pintér and Ágnes Szabó, "Mónus Illés (1888–1944)," in *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 34, no. 1 (1988): 166–211, here 210–11; cf. Péter Sipos, "Mónus Illés," in *A magyar szociáldemokrata kézikönyve*, ed. Lajos Varga (Budapest: Napvilág, 1999), 433.

⁴³⁶ Varga and Csécsy, "Napló – 1940–1949," 21–22.

⁴³⁷ Varga and Csécsy, "Napló – 1940–1949," 22.

⁴³⁸ Varga and Csécsy, "Napló – 1940–1949," 22.

⁴³⁹ István Tóth, "A parasztpárti vezető (1939–1947)" (The Leader of the Peasant Party, 1939–1947), in *Kovács Imre centenáriuma. Tudományos emlékülés a Politikatörténeti Intézetben* (The Centenary of Imre Kovács: A Memorial Conference at the Institute for Political History), ed. Levente Sipos (Budapest: Napvilág, 2013), 133–34.

⁴⁴⁰ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 16.

nationalist myopia, all of which now “point toward socialism and democracy.”⁴⁴¹ The debate over democracy would become the key issue for the republican Left and indeed the entire country in the months and years that would follow.⁴⁴² These ideas appeared later in the month, when Csécsy, accompanied by Zsigmond Kende and Sándor Flamm—all of whom were former Galileo Circle members before and during the First World War—approached another old Galileist, Mátyás Rákosi, at the Communist Party’s offices.⁴⁴³ While the Radical Party had already been legally formed in March 1945,⁴⁴⁴ it still required some support from the governing powers beyond the Provisional National Government, namely the Communist Party and the occupying Soviet forces. While Rákosi was skeptical of what exactly the party’s role would be in the new Hungary, Csécsy set out the party’s near-term plan, namely to “reeducate as socialists those upstanding people who today feel and represent themselves as bourgeois.”⁴⁴⁵ The Radical Party’s role was not simply to represent bourgeois liberal opinion, as with the new Civic Democratic Party (*Polgári Demokrata Párt*, PDP), but to act as a conduit to turn the country’s middle classes in a leftist political direction.

Later, at the beginning of June, Csécsy gave a lecture entitled “On Democracy” to the Buda branch of the Teachers’ Union. “What do we really mean by ‘democracy’?” he asked, for “if we ask ten people, we would hear at least ten different definitions.”⁴⁴⁶ Different understandings arose in different historical eras. Ancient democracy was equivalent to “the rule

⁴⁴¹ Imre Csécsy, “Baloldal és jobboldal” (Left and Right), *Magyar Nemzet* 1, no. 7 (May 9, 1945): 1; the talk was reviewed, for example, in the National Peasant Party’s *Szabad Szó*: “‘A demokrácia minden ember szabadságának védelmét jelenti’: Csécsy Imre előadása a Galilei-körben” (“Democracy Means the Defense of Each Person’s Freedom”: Imre Csécsy’s Lecture at the Galileo Circle), *Szabad Szó* 47, no. 13 (April 11, 1945): 4.

⁴⁴² See, e.g., Konstantin Medgyesi, “Demokrácia-diskurzus(ok) Magyarországon az 1945 és 1949 közötti időszakban és időszakról” (Democracy Discourse(s) in Hungary in and about the Period from 1945 to 1949), doctoral dissertation, University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary, 2017; Éva Ständeisky, *Demokrácia negyvenötben* (Democracy in ’45) (Budapest: Napvilág, 2015); and János M. Rainer and Éva Ständeisky, ed., *A demokrácia reménye: Magyarország, 1945* (Democracy’s Hope: Hungary, 1945) (Budapest: Az 1956-os Intézet, 2005).

⁴⁴³ János F. Varga, “A Radikális Párt delegációja Rákosi Mátyásnál” (The Radical Party Delegation to Mátyás Rákosi), *História* 2, no. 2 (1980): 24–25.

⁴⁴⁴ János F. Varga, “A Magyar Radikális Párt újjáalakulása 1945-ben” (The Recreation of the Hungarian Radical Party in 1945), *Történelmi Szemle*, no. 1 (1975): 96–106, here 98.

⁴⁴⁵ Varga, “A Radikális Párt delegációja,” 24.

⁴⁴⁶ OSZK K 163, ö.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 1.

of the people” (*népuralom*); the modern version was the institutionalization of freedom in the state (*a szabadság államrendje*). “And even more different—and it ought to be—is contemporary democracy which is now forming.”⁴⁴⁷ The modern form was distinguished by a system of common values, as seen in the Declaration of the Rights of Man or the American Declaration of Independence, which Csécsy summarized as “everyone’s “right to life, freedom, security, and protection.”⁴⁴⁸ Freedom was constrained at the moment it infringed on others; law codified these moments. Likewise, such a conception relied on an idealized unified popular will (*közakarat*), which Csécsy rejected: humans were too different in their interests and traditions for that ideal to ever arise in reality.⁴⁴⁹ The question of majority rule was not democratic either, for there would always be a minority whose interests were transgressed. “Masaryk wrote somewhere that democracy is nothing more than free debate,” Csécsy noted,⁴⁵⁰ though he conceded that truth would need to be expressed by a capable “intellectual elite” (*szellemi elit*); democracy on this model would be “the validation of the intellectual elite in state life.”⁴⁵¹ Yet this too was an ideal type within bourgeois democracy, where what should have been common values were the bourgeoisie’s particular values. “Our task, that of today’s democrats, is to realize fully the ideas of the Good and the Beautiful in complete clarity,” and in that way realize what had been called “mass democracy,” “social democracy,” and now “people’s democracy.”⁴⁵² Csécsy’s vision differed from the collectivist theorizations now circulating however. While he argued for the limitation of “unlimited property,” he insisted that “the small industrial worker, the small trader, the small peasant” ought to work freely without the intervention of “any big figures, any power” from above, free from domination.⁴⁵³ Freedom

⁴⁴⁷ OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 1–2.

⁴⁴⁸ OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 5.

⁴⁴⁹ OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 6.

⁴⁵⁰ OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 7.

⁴⁵¹ OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 7–8.

⁴⁵² OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 9.

⁴⁵³ OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 9.

would have to be understood more expansively: “everyone may freely and fully develop their physical and mental powers and acquire those life values that are as much a right to every human being as to life itself.”⁴⁵⁴ Rights required duties as well, meaning active participation in the political community.⁴⁵⁵

Among the intellectuals on the republican Left, there was little doubt that a new sort of democracy was forming. An attempt to define it was hosted by the University of Budapest in a public lecture series, soon thereafter published in book form. Ferenc Erdei directed his analysis toward the material foundations of democratic politics. The main issue plaguing the creation of a democratic political community in Hungary had been the lack of land reform, which arrested democratic development, an argument he had already made during the early days of liberation.⁴⁵⁶ Authentic democracy required dissolving the *latifundia*; workers and peasants who answered primarily to private employers could never exercise meaningful political freedom. ‘Democracy’ in this rendering was a dynamic “militant democracy” (*harcos demokrácia*) serving “the liberation of the people.”⁴⁵⁷ While Erdei had in his position attempted to deal with in his ministerial capacity, the land reform existed as a ministerial decree rather than a piece of legislation. On this, he consulted with Bibó, who suggested returning decision-making power to the Provisional National Assembly to avoid a crisis of legitimacy.⁴⁵⁸ Erdei, albeit slightly incensed, asked Bibó to write a text on the problem, which he then published in the peasants’ *Szabad Szó* as “The State Form of Democratic Hungary.”⁴⁵⁹ Legitimacy (*törvényesség*), Bibó argued, derived from public conviction (*közmeggyőződés*) and governmental performance. A legitimate government “can be resolute and flexible, courageous

⁴⁵⁴ OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 9.

⁴⁵⁵ OSZK K 163, ő.e. 2485, Imre Csécsy, “A demokráciáról” (On Democracy), June 1, 1945, f. 10.

⁴⁵⁶ On the land reform, see Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, 107–17.

⁴⁵⁷ Ferenc Erdei, “Népi demokrácia” (People’s Democracy), in *Demokrácia* (Democracy) (Budapest: A Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kára, 1945), 11.

⁴⁵⁸ Bibó, *Visszaemlékezések*, 94.

⁴⁵⁹ István Bibó, “A demokratikus Magyarország államformája” (The State Form of Democratic Hungary), *Szabad Szó* 47, no. 61 (June 10, 1945): 1; republished in István Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 5–11. I quote from the republished version.

and magnanimous, forceful and yielding at the same time,” whereas one lacking this foundation becomes “rigid and floundering, jealous of its prestige and internally uncertain.”⁴⁶⁰ The democratic government’s legitimacy rested on the total bankruptcy of the preceding regime and the positive achievements of land reform, which redirected “five hundred years of diseased social and economic development back onto the broad road of democratic European development.”⁴⁶¹ Against those who insisted the Assembly’s irregular origins disqualified it from legislating, Bibó struck back: to claim that assemblies produced by Bethlen’s or Gömbös’s manipulated suffrage could legislate with legitimacy while the Provisional Assembly could not amounted to “a conscious or unconscious weakening of the legitimacy of the present democratic government.”⁴⁶² The Assembly ought to codify the government’s decrees and continue to legislate.⁴⁶³

The question of democratic theory was simultaneously being posed within the social democratic milieu. A September 1945 issue of *Szocializmus* collected four essays under the rubric of democracy’s crisis. László Faragó argued that Weimar had collapsed not because democracy failed in the abstract but because a purely political democracy proved defenseless against capitalist interests that instrumentalized democratic procedures from within.⁴⁶⁴ The remedy was a “monopoly democracy” (*monopol demokrácia*) in which democratic freedoms were reserved for those committed to preserving them, as against the “suicidal democracy” (*öngyilkos demokrácia*) that had permitted its own destruction.⁴⁶⁵ Zoltán Horváth read the Atlantic Charter and Potsdam decisions as successive recalibrations of the international democratic ideal,⁴⁶⁶ while in East Central Europe, correctives to democratic formalism were

⁴⁶⁰ Bibó, “A demokratikus Magyarország államformája,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 7.

⁴⁶¹ Bibó, “A demokratikus Magyarország államformája,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 8.

⁴⁶² Bibó, “A demokratikus Magyarország államformája,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 10.

⁴⁶³ Bibó, “A demokratikus Magyarország államformája,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 10.

⁴⁶⁴ László Faragó, “Öngyilkos demokrácia” (Suicidal Democracy), *Szocializmus* 29, no. 2 (Sept. 1945): 82–86, here 82.

⁴⁶⁵ Faragó, “Öngyilkos demokrácia,” 85.

⁴⁶⁶ Zoltán Horváth, “A demokrácia átalakulása” (The Transformation of Democracy), *Szocializmus* 29, no. 2 (Sept. 1945): 87–91, here 87–89.

not deformations but necessary adaptations to historically anti-democratic political cultures.⁴⁶⁷ János Erdődy argued that Hungarian democracy was not yet a condition but an aspiration, merely a “signpost” (*irányjelzés*).⁴⁶⁸ Emma Lederer then offered a typological and historical analysis of despotism, absolutism, and dictatorship as distinct autocratic forms, insisting on the historicization of the concept of democracy in relation to each so as to avoid terminological and political confusion.⁴⁶⁹ For each of the social democrats, a transitional form of government was necessary in which democratic freedoms would be actively defended against those who had historically exploited them.

Fear and uncertainty became the key concepts structuring public discourse next to ‘democracy’. By December 1945, Bibó observed that the fledgling democratic state was in a deep crisis. His text was published in *Valóság*, the journal of the communist youth organization MADISZ.⁴⁷⁰ Hungarian democracy lived in fear, he argued, because it was split in two: “it fears proletarian dictatorship, and it fears reaction.”⁴⁷¹ These fears reinforced each other reciprocally, but it was a false choice, “a stupidly posed alternative” between continuity with the Horthy regime and radical transformation led by the communist camp.⁴⁷² Bibó’s essay analyzed interlocking crises of the occupation, communist tactics, the fight against reaction, coalition-building, and Hungary’s European context. The occupation loomed large because the Soviet army was an imposing and strange presence, for it was “a fighting army, a total war, and a people’s army.”⁴⁷³ The Hungarian population had only experienced such a force on its territory in 1848, 1526, and 1514, and the encounter “completely filled life with certain elements of

⁴⁶⁷ Horváth, “A demokrácia átalakulása,” 90–91.

⁴⁶⁸ János Erdődy, “Demokrácia és írás” (Democracy and Writing), *Szocializmus* 29, no. 2 (Sept. 1945): 92–94, here 92.

⁴⁶⁹ Emma Lederer, “Deszpotizmus, abszolutizmus, diktatúra” (Despotism, Absolutism, Dictatorship), *Szocializmus* 29, no. 2 (Sept. 1945): 95–98.

⁴⁷⁰ István Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága” (The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy), *Valóság* 1, no. 2–4 (1945): 5–43, republished in Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 13–79.

⁴⁷¹ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 15.

⁴⁷² Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 15.

⁴⁷³ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 16.

incalculableness” (*kalkulálhatatlanság*), stripping citizens of the capacity for political judgment.⁴⁷⁴ Democracy, for Bibó, was neither formal procedure nor majority rule, and parliamentarism was “merely one of the possible democratic governmental practices.” In the given situation in Hungary, a coalition sharing common “rules of the game” (*játékszabályok*) had to be created and those rules pursued with “excessive loyalty” precisely because the underlying worldviews remained so deeply contested.⁴⁷⁵ Yet the Communist Party’s tactical habits, its tendency to claim all credit and assign all blame elsewhere, corroded the reciprocal trust on which coalition politics depended.⁴⁷⁶ On the other hand, the Smallholders’ electoral victories raised the prospect that conservative and reactionary elements now rallied to the largest non-communist party out of fear rather than democratic conviction.⁴⁷⁷ Bibó’s proposed resolution was a “limited revolution” (*határolt forradalom*): revolutionary in its social content but bounded by democratic norms and conducted through legal channels.⁴⁷⁸ The country’s democratic forces had to agree on reformed administration, autonomous self-government for municipalities, expanded education, and economic associations based on democratic self-management among workers.⁴⁷⁹ Hungary’s coalition might serve as “a practical model, a synthesis of Anglo-Saxon and Soviet-Russian styles of democracy” for a divided Europe,⁴⁸⁰ taking on a role analogous to that of Belgium after the French Revolution, offering “a fertile example and model for the resolution of the tensions tormenting the entire world.”⁴⁸¹

The public debate organized by *Valóság* in early 1946 drew responses that crystallized the fault lines. György Lukács classified Bibó’s essay as objectively a “right-wing critique”

⁴⁷⁴ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 18.

⁴⁷⁵ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 24.

⁴⁷⁶ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 22–24.

⁴⁷⁷ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 58ff.

⁴⁷⁸ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 54–57.

⁴⁷⁹ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 57.

⁴⁸⁰ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 78.

⁴⁸¹ Bibó, “A magyar demokrácia válsága,” in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 78–79.

(*jobbaldali kritika*).⁴⁸² Bibó had treated mass sentiments as autonomous political facts rather than epiphenomena of class relations, elevating two “fears” to an equivalence that obscured their different social bases. The fear of reaction corresponded to a real threat; the fear of proletarian dictatorship was largely ideological propaganda.⁴⁸³ By treating both symmetrically, Bibó arrived at “a false ‘polarization’ standpoint.”⁴⁸⁴ Lukács rejected Bibó’s call for “consolidation” as echoing the Bethlen-era formula.⁴⁸⁵ Against procedural emphasis on democratic rules, Lukács counterposed a class-based conception: democracy’s development could “only take shape in struggle,” including against the right-wing reaction’s “attempts to exploit formal democracy’s ‘rules of the game’” to “obstruct genuine democratic construction.”⁴⁸⁶

Bibó rejected the characterization as a right-wing critique: since one cannot criticize the Communist Party from further left, external criticism necessarily appears rightist—but this does not make it so in an objective sense.⁴⁸⁷ His attention to mass fears addressed “real psychological facts” irreducible to class analysis, citing fascism’s uneven emergence across countries with comparable class structures.⁴⁸⁸ Revolutionary social transformation must proceed within the coalition’s constraints, he argued, requiring a specific “technique of revolution” available in the given moment rather than one artificially created or imposed.⁴⁸⁹ Lukács had charged that Bibó sought a conception of democracy between France/Yugoslavia and Franco’s Spain to be implemented,⁴⁹⁰ but as Bibó responded it was rather that a conception had to be synthesized out

⁴⁸² György Lukács, “‘A demokrácia válsága’ – vagy jobbaldali kritikája?” (“The Crisis of Democracy” – Or Right-Wing Criticism?), *Valóság* 2, no. 1–2 (1946): 86–97, republished in Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 83–115, here 83–84.

⁴⁸³ Lukács, “‘A demokrácia válsága’ – vagy jobbaldali kritikája,” in Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 87–95.

⁴⁸⁴ Lukács, “‘A demokrácia válsága’ – vagy jobbaldali kritikája,” in Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 93.

⁴⁸⁵ Lukács, “‘A demokrácia válsága’ – vagy jobbaldali kritikája,” in Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 99–100.

⁴⁸⁶ Lukács, “‘A demokrácia válsága’ – vagy jobbaldali kritikája,” in Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 101.

⁴⁸⁷ Bibó, response to Lukács, in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 105.

⁴⁸⁸ Bibó, response to Lukács, in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 106.

⁴⁸⁹ Bibó, response to Lukács, in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 107.

⁴⁹⁰ Lukács, “‘A demokrácia válsága’ – vagy jobbaldali kritikája,” in Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 102–105.

of the real influences in Hungary, namely British and American bourgeois democracy and the Soviet model.⁴⁹¹

In the same exchange, the social democrat Zoltán Horváth likewise faulted Bibó for neglecting “social perspectives” (*szociális szempontok*),⁴⁹² observing that “it is difficult to make democracy in a country where there are few democrats.”⁴⁹³ He accused Bibó of being “destructive rather than constructive,”⁴⁹⁴ and put his trust in the “fighters for democracy” who represented common interests, an intelligentsia that had been “at a terrible distance from the great mass of the nation.”⁴⁹⁵ Horváth’s intervention here drew on a position worked out in “Militant Democracy,” published in *Szocializmus* shortly after the November 1945 elections.⁴⁹⁶ There he situated democracy within a longer arc, arguing that each incarnation of “popular rule” (*népuralom*) had in practice amounted to the dominance of one stratum over others.⁴⁹⁷ Even the Anglo-Saxon democracies operated within limits imposed by capitalist economic structures, and Weimar demonstrated the fatal consequence of dogmatic adherence to democratic formalism.⁴⁹⁸ Democracy under postwar conditions thus had to become “militant” (*harcos*): granting rights only to those who accepted democratic principles, defending the masses against those with a dominant position in the economy. (Horváth’s vision corresponded closely to Karl Loewenstein’s ideas from the late 1930s, though the text lacks footnotes, so it is not possible on this example to reconstruct the exact pathways of reception.⁴⁹⁹) The goal for Horváth was the creation of “bastions” in public life and in education that could cultivate the key republican

⁴⁹¹ Bibó, response to Lukács, in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 108.

⁴⁹² Zoltán Horváth, response to Bibó, in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 109.

⁴⁹³ Horváth, response to Bibó, in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 110.

⁴⁹⁴ Horváth, response to Bibó, in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 110.

⁴⁹⁵ Horváth, response to Bibó, in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 110.

⁴⁹⁶ Zoltán Horváth, “Harcos demokrácia” (Militant Democracy), *Szocializmus* 29, no. 3–5 (Oct.–Dec. 1945): 147–53.

⁴⁹⁷ Horváth, “Harcos demokrácia,” 147–48.

⁴⁹⁸ Horváth, “Harcos demokrácia,” 148–50.

⁴⁹⁹ Karl Loewenstein, “Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights, I,” *The American Political Science Review* 31, no. 3 (June 1937): 417–32; and Loewenstein, “Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights, II,” *The American Political Science Review* 31, no. 4 (Aug. 1937): 638–58. Cf. Jan-Werner Müller, “Militant Democracy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law*, ed. Michel Rosenfeld and András Sajó (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1253–269.

idea that the voluntary renunciation of rights can only end in the destruction of the political community.⁵⁰⁰ The end normative horizon for Horváth was “*akrácia*” (‘non-ocracy’), a society without domination.⁵⁰¹

With the November 1945 elections, the Smallholders won 245 mandates, followed by the Social Democrats (70), the Communists (69), the National Peasant Party (23), and the Civic Democratic Party (2).⁵⁰² Csécsy’s Radical Party, with barely 5,700 votes, did not enter parliament. Yet the concept ‘republic’ began to reappear in public life and in parliamentary debates.⁵⁰³ A January 1946 public opinion poll confirmed that preference for the republic won a majority across the population in urban and rural areas alike.⁵⁰⁴ The writer György Bölöni, close to the republican Left emigration in Paris, observed in the National Assembly that although Hungary was “*de facto* a republic,” it needed a specific constitutional act, for “the guarantee of a Hungarian people’s republic (*magyar népköztársaság*) is an indispensable requisite for Hungarian democracy.”⁵⁰⁵ Zsigmond Kende in *Haladás* greeted the republic as a long-standing plank in the civic radicals’ platform and insisted it was the only means to preserve democracy in the country.⁵⁰⁶ After some parliamentary and extra-parliamentary debate among the parties,⁵⁰⁷ the act reconstituting Hungary as a republic after nearly three decades was passed

⁵⁰⁰ Horváth, “Harcos demokrácia,” 152–53.

⁵⁰¹ Horváth, “Harcos demokrácia,” 151.

⁵⁰² See Table 1, “Az érvényes szavazatok pártokénti megoszlása” (The Distribution of Valid Votes by Party), in Mihály Bihari, *Magyar politika, 1944–2004. Politikai és hatalmi viszonyok* (Hungarian Politics, 1944–2004: Political and Power Relations) (Budapest: Osiris, 2005), 74.

⁵⁰³ Gizella Föglein, *Államforma és államfői jogkör Magyarországon 1944–1949* (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), 56–74.

⁵⁰⁴ See Image 48 in István Feitl and Mária Palasik, “Magyar Köztársaság – 1946” (Hungarian Republic, 1946), in *Demokratikus köztársaságok Magyarországon: Történeti album* (Democratic Republics in Hungary: A Historical Album), ed. István Feitl, Márta Gellériné Lázár, and János Kende (Budapest: Napvilág, 2007), 94; cf. István Feitl, “A második magyar köztársaság emlékezete” (In Memory of the Second Hungarian Republic), in *Másik huszadik század* (The Other Twentieth Century) (Budapest: Napvilág, 2024), 93–100.

⁵⁰⁵ György Bölöni, Speech at Session 5 of the National Assembly, December 5, 1945, in *Nemzetgyűlési napló*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1945), 171–72.

⁵⁰⁶ Zsigmond Kende, “A demokrácia mint államszervezési elv és mint világnézet” (Democracy as a Principle of State Organization and as a Worldview), *Haladás* 1, no. 11 (Dec. 8, 1945): 2.

⁵⁰⁷ For details, see Föglein, *Államforma és államfői jogkör*, 60–74.

on January 31, 1946, with Zoltán Tildy of the Smallholders elected President the following day.⁵⁰⁸

László Faragó reflected on the new republic in comparative perspective, setting the Third Hungarian Republic alongside its predecessors. None of the three had been born from an autonomous domestic movement, he declared: 1849 followed from the Parisian and Viennese revolutions, 1918 from the Habsburg collapse, and 1945 from the destruction of fascism across Europe.⁵⁰⁹ Faragó analyzed each republic's class basis and contradictions: 1849 had been a revolution of the lesser nobility, 1918 a bourgeois revolution fatally weakened by the rivalry between social democrats and communists, and 1945 a transformation that could not properly be called a revolution, since liberation came from without.⁵¹⁰ Ultimately, however, the Third Republic was the only one which had offered "true rights (land, suffrage, a unicameral parliament, a constitutional republic)," but did not have the same spiritual depth as the first two, with their "Petőfis and Aranyas" and their "Adys, Jászis, Szabós, and Kunfis."⁵¹¹ Still, one advantage distinguished the Third Republic, namely that it was now surrounded by a republican and democratic Europe, east and west alike, and this external environment represented its strongest guarantee.⁵¹² The Third Republic, then, may not have been constructed out of a domestic movement against the monarchy but out of the contingency of the wartime collapse, but nevertheless remained the only democratic chance for the country.

The same issue of *Szocializmus* carried a multi-author debate on "the understanding of democracy," the ever-pressing issue.⁵¹³ Anna Kéthly framed the discussion urgently: the coalition parties had never clarified their understandings of democracy, and the resulting

⁵⁰⁸ See Sessions 12 and 13 of January 31 and February 1, 1946, respectively, in *Nemzetgyűlési napló*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1945), 298–348 and 349–54.

⁵⁰⁹ László Faragó, "Három magyar köztársaság" (Three Hungarian Republics), *Szocializmus* 30, no. 3–4 (Mar.–Apr. 1946): 127–34, here 127–28.

⁵¹⁰ Faragó, "Három magyar köztársaság," 128–31.

⁵¹¹ Faragó, "Három magyar köztársaság," 133.

⁵¹² Faragó, "Három magyar köztársaság," 134.

⁵¹³ Anna Kéthly, "Vita a demokrácia értelmezése körül" (A Debate on the Understanding of Democracy), *Szocializmus* 30, no. 3–4 (Mar.–Apr. 1946): 97–102.

ambiguity now manifested in visible dysfunctions.⁵¹⁴ Fascist economic interests had not disappeared; instead, they retained the press, the bureaucracy, and financial networks, attempting to enter the democratic framework through the Smallholders' Party.⁵¹⁵ If Hungarian democracy did not degrade into "a shameful historical interlude," a clear boundary had to be drawn through a precise definition of what democracy required.⁵¹⁶ Kéthly directed attention to the charge that democracy entailed mob rule, and to the claim that equality came at the expense of freedom—objections resting on a "deliberate confusion" in which capitalist constraints on liberty were never acknowledged while the extension of rights to the laboring majority was branded tyranny.⁵¹⁷ The old ruling class, having failed to modernize and provide for its population, had forfeited any claim to leadership.⁵¹⁸

Pál Justus extended Kéthly's framework, insisting that 'democracy' as an unmodified noun was empty. Every actual democracy had been the political expression of a particular class constellation.⁵¹⁹ The democratic tradition had passed from Robespierre's revolutionary popular sovereignty to Jefferson's agrarian republicanism to the bourgeois parliamentary model, different in each iteration.⁵²⁰ Democracy's only reliable guarantor was a strong socialist movement, and popular rule without the organized working class was "plainly fraudulent."⁵²¹ Democracy now proliferated with modifiers—new democracy, workers' democracy, militant democracy, true democracy, people's democracy—symptoms of deeper uncertainty, for if the people's rule required the qualifier "of the people" to distinguish it from something else, then precisely the popular content had been called into question.⁵²² Faragó posed a typology of four

⁵¹⁴ Kéthly, "Vita a demokrácia értelmezése körül," 97.

⁵¹⁵ Kéthly, "Vita a demokrácia értelmezése körül," 98.

⁵¹⁶ Kéthly, "Vita a demokrácia értelmezése körül," 99.

⁵¹⁷ Kéthly, "Vita a demokrácia értelmezése körül," 99–100.

⁵¹⁸ Kéthly, "Vita a demokrácia értelmezése körül," 100–101.

⁵¹⁹ Pál Justus, "Demokrácia és szocializmus" (Democracy and Socialism), *Szocializmus* 30, no. 3–4 (Mar.–Apr. 1946): 102–106, here 102–103.

⁵²⁰ Justus, "Demokrácia és szocializmus," 103–104.

⁵²¹ Justus, "Demokrácia és szocializmus," 106.

⁵²² Justus, "Demokrácia és szocializmus," 105.

attitudes toward Hungarian democracy: those copying the external model, those defending a holding pattern, those advocating an “after-the-fact revolution,” and the pessimists who doubted a democracy born without revolutionary experience could endure.⁵²³ He found himself closest to “militant democracy,” yet acknowledged that Hungary’s anti-democratic dispositions had not vanished; the answer was the slow work of education, for only in that way could democracy become “the organized state order of freedom.”⁵²⁴ (A very Csécsyan phrase.) The symposium’s theoretical anchor was an excerpt from the late German social democrat Arthur Rosenberg’s *Demokratie und Sozialismus*,⁵²⁵ translated by Justus, which insisted that there existed no “democracy in itself,” but only concrete democratic movements carried by specific social forces.⁵²⁶ Rosenberg’s typology of bourgeois democracies as social, imperial, liberal, and colonial reinforced the argument that only concrete analysis of which classes held power could distinguish genuine popular self-governance.⁵²⁷ That no genuinely democratic polity had ever been destroyed from within offered grounds for cautious optimism.⁵²⁸ János Erdődy drew the sharpest conclusion in his short text: the country’s population had been kept in deliberate ignorance, and democracy in Hungary was a capacity to be built rather than a regime to be proclaimed.⁵²⁹ For the social democrats, then, it was clear that democracy had as much to do with the intellectual capacity for democracy as it did with the organization of democratic structures within and beyond the state.

⁵²³ László Faragó, “A demokrácia kilátásai” (The Horizons of Democracy), *Szocializmus* 30, no. 3–4 (Mar.–Apr. 1946): 106–112, here 108–109.

⁵²⁴ Faragó, “A demokrácia kilátásai,” 110–11.

⁵²⁵ Arthur Rosenberg, *Demokratie und Sozialismus* (Democracy and Socialism) (Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1938); translated into English as Arthur Rosenberg, *Democracy and Socialism: A Contribution to the Political History of the Past 150 Years*, trans. George Rosen (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1939).

⁵²⁶ Arthur Rosenberg, “A demokrácia általános bírálata” (The General Criticism of Democracy), *Szocializmus* 30, no. 3–4 (Mar.–Apr. 1946): 112–16, here 112.

⁵²⁷ Rosenberg, “A demokrácia általános bírálata,” 113–14.

⁵²⁸ Rosenberg, “A demokrácia általános bírálata,” 116.

⁵²⁹ János Erdődy, “Magyar demokrácia” (Hungarian Democracy), *Szocializmus* 30, no. 3–4 (Mar.–Apr. 1946): 116–18, here 117–18.

These debates unfolded against intensifying coalition conflict. The republic's constitutional framework, Act I of 1946, had established a unicameral assembly, a presidency, and separation of powers and was passed with very little debate or horse trading.⁵³⁰ Yet Act VII of 1946, the criminal defense statute, emerged from protracted negotiations in which each partner sought to ensure its provisions could not be turned against itself.⁵³¹ Dezső Sulyok of the Smallholders and Béla Zsedényi of the Hungarian Independence Party, for example, attempted to include protections against single-party rule; the Communist and Social Democratic representatives rejected any formulation that might constrain the extra-parliamentary institutions—the people's tribunals, the economic councils, the political police—through which the workers' parties exercised influence disproportionate to their electoral mandate.⁵³² As Palasik observed, the resulting law's vagueness would later “provide a legal basis that enabled the leadership of the Communist Party, with the help of the police and the courts, to eliminate other parties.”⁵³³

The Communist leadership had never accepted the Smallholders' electoral mandate as legitimate. On March 5, 1946, Rákosi formed the Left Bloc (*Baloldali Blokk*), uniting the Communist Party, the Social Democrats, the trade unions, and the National Peasant Party into a sub-coalition directed against the Smallholders.⁵³⁴ Mass demonstrations in February and March, orchestrated by the Communists but often escalating beyond their control, pressured the Smallholders into expelling around twenty deputies, among them figures of real public standing such as Sulyok and István Vásáry, though the party retained its parliamentary majority.⁵³⁵ Throughout 1946, the Communists proved unable to break the Smallholders' hold on the electorate or to forge a left-wing majority through persuasion. By December, public support for

⁵³⁰ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 55–56.

⁵³¹ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 58–60.

⁵³² Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 58–60.

⁵³³ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 60.

⁵³⁴ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 64; Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, 127–28.

⁵³⁵ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 63–66; Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, 132–33.

the coalition government itself had collapsed from sixty-four per cent in March to thirty-three per cent.⁵³⁶ It was in this atmosphere of stalemate and disillusion that the state security services, in mid-December 1946, stumbled upon traces of what the Communist leadership would fashion into a weapon: the so-called anti-republic conspiracy.⁵³⁷

The conspiracy that the Communist Party now constructed around the Hungarian Brotherhood Community (*Magyar Testvéri Közösség*), a defunct interwar secret society, served as the instrument for dismantling the Smallholders' leadership.⁵³⁸ The initial arrests in December 1946 ensnared a handful of figures linked to both the Community and the Smallholders' centrist group. Rákosi and his associates then extended the investigation in ever-widening circles, fabricating through coerced confessions an organized plot against the republic.⁵³⁹ The principal targets were Béla Kovács, the Smallholders' general secretary and Rákosi's most formidable rival, and Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy. When the National Assembly refused to lift Kovács's parliamentary immunity—voting in favor of a parliamentary investigative committee in a display of institutional resistance that alarmed Rákosi—the Communist leadership turned to the Soviet occupation authorities.⁵⁴⁰ On February 25, 1947, Soviet military police arrested Kovács under the terms of the armistice agreement, charging him with participation in “anti-Soviet armed terrorist groups,” accusations that were never substantiated and never repeated in the subsequent trial proceedings.⁵⁴¹

Bibó's response, published on the first anniversary of the republic, asked what the conspiracy revealed about the deeper structure of anti-democratic sentiment in the country. Anti-Semitism, anti-communism, and hostility toward peasant ascent had generated serious opposition, yet all three converged because none was strong enough alone to reverse the

⁵³⁶ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 99–100.

⁵³⁷ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 101.

⁵³⁸ Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, 217–23.

⁵³⁹ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 101–103.

⁵⁴⁰ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 110–12.

⁵⁴¹ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 117–18; Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, 225–28.

postwar transformation.⁵⁴² The resulting compound reproduced the Horthy-era formula, the only differences being that democracy was now obligatory and fascism internationally discredited. The decisive question was that the conspirators were “heading toward one and the same descent” into reaction.⁵⁴³ He dismissed attempts to construct alternative legal bases for governance as “fantasy.”⁵⁴⁴ Monarchy suited a static society; the republic was uncomfortable for those who could not bear “the public rise of the masses and plebeians.”^{545 546}

The republic required active institutional consolidation. Bibó identified two priorities: grounding political authority firmly in the constitutionally designated institutions, since effective power could not be left to extra-parliamentary forces functioning as “popular representation, head of state, and government all at once” without legal foundation;⁵⁴⁷ and the development of democratic “rules of the game,” which the conspiracy itself demonstrated were “beginning to work for democracy.”⁵⁴⁸ Republican legitimacy constituted “the most important bastion of Hungarian democracy,” for “every other alleged legitimacy is either dead, or compromised, or both.”⁵⁴⁹

With Kovács removed, Rákosi obtained authorization to move against Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy.⁵⁵⁰ In late May 1947, he presented fabricated transcripts implicating Nagy and forced his resignation by telegram while he was out of the country. The government was reorganized under the compliant Lajos Dinnyés of the Smallholders, who assumed the premiership.⁵⁵¹ As these political machinations played out, an old journal returned to the

⁵⁴² István Bibó, “Összeesküvés és köztársasági évforduló” (Conspiracy and the Anniversary of the Republic), *Válasz* 7, no. 2 (1947), republished in *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 2, 443–49, here 447. I quote from the republished version.

⁵⁴³ Bibó, “Összeesküvés,” 448.

⁵⁴⁴ Bibó, “Összeesküvés,” 456.

⁵⁴⁵ Bibó, “Összeesküvés,” 457.

⁵⁴⁶ Bibó, “Összeesküvés,” 457.

⁵⁴⁷ Bibó, “Összeesküvés,” 458.

⁵⁴⁸ Bibó, “Összeesküvés,” 459.

⁵⁴⁹ Bibó, “Összeesküvés,” 459.

⁵⁵⁰ Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, 233–34.

⁵⁵¹ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 125–28; Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, 234–35.

intellectual scene. At the beginning of 1947, Imre Csécsy began to republish *Huszadik Század*, the civic radical organ from the turn of the twentieth century, and now both predecessor and successor to *Századunk*. Alongside *Haladás*, the newspaper of the Hungarian Radical Party edited by Béla Zsolt, the civic radicals slowly began to revive their own periodical community from the previous decades. Across a series of texts in the first volume, Csécsy developed a comprehensive and internally consistent account of democracy, political community, and human autonomy that sought to chart a course between the individualist and collectivist conceptions of democracy that marked the Western tradition and the Soviet experiment, respectively. The overarching argument was that neither form, taken alone, constituted a complete or adequate democracy. Both were partial, transitional, and experimental, and the task of Central European democrats—Hungarian democrats above all—was to work toward a synthesis that preserved the essential achievements of each while transcending their respective limitations.

In “Intelligentsia and Bourgeoisie in Democracy,” Csécsy began from the concrete problem of the Hungarian bourgeoisie’s exclusion from the postwar democratic order, constructing a historical narrative that traced the progressive alliance of workers, peasants, and the productive intelligentsia from the revolutionary republican moment of 1918–19 through the counterrevolutionary period that followed. The Hungarian bourgeoisie had repeatedly failed to carry out its own progressive class struggle against feudalism, and this failure was not merely political but moral and intellectual. The bourgeoisie lacked what Csécsy termed a vocational consciousness (*hivatástudat*) and defaulted instead to a downward-facing class consciousness that aligned it with reaction rather than with the forces of democratic progress.⁵⁵² The consequence for the postwar period was that the progressive democracy that had emerged under coalition governance had been born without the bourgeoisie and would proceed without it

⁵⁵² Imre Csécsy, “Értelmiség és polgárság a demokráciában” (Intelligentsia and Bourgeoisie in Democracy), *Huszadik Század* 35, no. 1 (1947): 18–45, here 31.

unless that class undertook a fundamental reorientation of its political thinking. Csécsy argued directly that the bourgeoisie had to grasp “that the world does not exist for its sake, as it previously imagined,” and that its sole remaining claim to existence as a class rested in the service it could render to democratization as a collective project.⁵⁵³ This was not merely a practical accommodation to altered power relations but a demand for a more fundamental “Copernican turn” in bourgeois self-understanding, one that would place the people (*nép*) rather than the propertied classes at the center of the political order.

Later, Csécsy’s “Peace with Czechoslovakia!” extended this argument into the international sphere, casting Hungarian–Czechoslovak reconciliation as a prerequisite for broader, democratic integration of Central Europe. Csécsy presented the Danubian region as a “laboratory” for the world-historical experiment of reconciling the Western and Eastern variants of democracy within a geopolitical space that belonged fully to neither.⁵⁵⁴ Czechoslovakia, with its Slavic ties to the Soviet Union and its older Western democratic tradition rooted in the legacy of Masaryk, occupied the most favorable position for such a synthesis, but Hungary too had a bridging role to play, though not as a nation acting alone, but as one pillar of a Danubian intermediary zone between ideological world-regions. Here, Csécsy argued against the collective punishment of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, the justification resting on same democratic principles that undergirded Csécsy’s domestic commitment: individual responsibility, the inviolability of democratic norms even under conditions of justified fear, and the necessity of distinguishing democratic self-defense from the methods used by the regimes democracy claimed to have superseded.

The most theoretically ambitious of the five texts, “Individual and Collective Democracy,” supplied the conceptual architecture for this program. Csécsy constructed a historical typology of democratic forms in which ancient democracy figured as mere majority

⁵⁵³ Csécsy, “Értelmiség és polgárság a demokráciában,” 40.

⁵⁵⁴ Imre Csécsy, “Békét Csehszlovákiával!,” *Huszadik Század* 35, no. 2 (1947): 100–10.

rule (*népuralom*), which was unlimited in scope and ultimately self-destructive, being the regime under which Socrates could be condemned to death by the vote of a corrupted assembly.⁵⁵⁵ Modern democracy, born of the eighteenth-century revolutions, corrected this deficiency by grounding the political order in inviolable individual rights—life, liberty, equality before the law, freedom of conscience and expression—that no majority could legitimately override. This conception of “individual democracy” placed the human being, the *individuum*, at the center of the state: “not the person for the state, but the state for the person.”⁵⁵⁶ Yet individual democracy had been captured by the haute bourgeoisie, whose property rights during the period of reaction following the French Revolution hardened from instruments of personal liberation into mechanisms of class domination; the result was that democracy was stuck for the rest of the nineteenth century as merely bourgeois class rule.⁵⁵⁷ The Soviet experiment thus represented a fundamental break with that tradition, where “collective democracy” created the material prerequisites of freedom: building the theater, in Csécsy’s metaphor, rather than merely declaring everyone’s right to attend.⁵⁵⁸ But the cost had been the suppression of those individual civil and political rights without which no political order could claim to be genuinely democratic.⁵⁵⁹ This had functioned under a so-called single-party system, which for Csécsy was a contradiction in terms. The concept of a party possessed political meaning only in the plural, and an arrangement in which a single organization held an “unlimited, uncontrollable, and irreplaceable” possession of political power could not constitute a democracy regardless of the social content it claimed to represent.⁵⁶⁰ Even in an ideal future communist society, Csécsy insisted, the basic rights articulated in the American Declaration of Independence and the

⁵⁵⁵ Imre Csécsy, “Individuális és kollektív demokrácia” (Individual and Collective Democracy), *Huszadik Század* 35, no. 4 (1947): 257–81, here 260.

⁵⁵⁶ Csécsy, “Individuális és kollektív demokrácia,” 262.

⁵⁵⁷ Csécsy, “Individuális és kollektív demokrácia,” 265.

⁵⁵⁸ Csécsy, “Individuális és kollektív demokrácia,” 274.

⁵⁵⁹ Csécsy, “Individuális és kollektív demokrácia,” 274.

⁵⁶⁰ Csécsy, “Individuális és kollektív demokrácia,” 274–275

French Declaration of the Rights of Man would remain relevant; they were, in his formulation, “classical” and “eternally valid.”⁵⁶¹

Because of “Individual and Collective Democracy,” *Huszadik Század* received quite a few letters to the editor. In an editorial note entitled “Let’s Clarify the Concepts,” Csécsy issued a short statement to distill his interpretive framework into a terminological intervention, proposing “collective democracy” (*kollektív demokrácia*) as a more precise designation than the pleonastic “people’s democracy” (*népi demokrácia*).⁵⁶² The substantive identity of the two terms was not altered, for what distinguished the present stage in Hungary from its previous experience with bourgeois democracy was precisely the leading role of the worker-peasant masses. But Csécsy insisted that terminological precision served a larger polemical purpose: to keep the conceptual space of democracy open, subject to critical definition rather than dogmatic closure.

Finally, “The Citizen and Socialism” returned to the practical question of bourgeois conduct under conditions of social transformation.⁵⁶³ Csécsy argued that the antagonism between bourgeois and worker was not absolute but mediated by overlapping interests and by the prevalence of “mixed types” who were simultaneously proprietor and proletarian, as the smallholder who also worked as a day-laborer, or the physician who combined private practice with salaried employment.⁵⁶⁴ The deepest anxiety of the thinking person, however, concerned not the economic arrangement but what Csécsy called “the fate of the spirit,” meaning whether individuality, freedom of conscience, and the right to a private life, that is, “everything that constitutes the highest value of life for the human being as a spiritual being,” could survive under conditions of state omnipotence and collective production.⁵⁶⁵ Csécsy’s answer was the

⁵⁶¹ Csécsy, “Individuális és kollektív demokrácia,” 272–273.

⁵⁶² [Imre Csécsy,] “Tisztázzuk a fogalmakat: népi demokrácia – kollektív demokrácia” (Let’s Clarify the Concepts: People’s Democracy – Collective Democracy), *Huszadik Század* 35, no. 5 (1947): 405.

⁵⁶³ Imre Csécsy, “A polgár és a szocializmus” (Citizen and Socialism), *Huszadik Század* 37, no. 5 (1947): 355–62.

⁵⁶⁴ Csécsy, “A polgár és a szocializmus,” 356–357

⁵⁶⁵ Csécsy, “A polgár és a szocializmus,” 359.

self-consciously “Girondin” position: a synthesis of the valuable elements of both systems, achieved not through mere compromise but through democratic experimentation and free debate. The Girondin, he observed, stood at the most dangerous point in any conflict and was never heeded in time. The consolation was that “history ultimately always proves them right, although usually only when it is already too late.”⁵⁶⁶

By the summer of 1947, the Communist Party had moved to consolidate its hold.⁵⁶⁷ Rákosi pressed for new elections; the Ministry of the Interior compiled electoral registers to deprive nearly half a million citizens of their right to vote, directed above all against the Social Democrats. The new electoral law introduced the “blue slip” system of absentee voting, exploited by Communist activists who traveled between polling stations and voted repeatedly. In the August 31 elections, these abuses yielded an estimated sixty thousand fraudulent votes. Still, 77.7 percent of voters cast their ballots for parties other than the Communists, while the smaller parties formed from the remnants of the Smallholders captured some thirty-five percent of the vote.⁵⁶⁸

It was in this narrowing interval that Oszkár Jászi, the doyen of Hungarian civic radicalism, returned to Central Europe. His relationship with Hungary remained fraught,⁵⁶⁹ and as early as 1945, he had confided that Hungary was already “a persona non grata, even more so than anyone else” to him.⁵⁷⁰ The initiative for a formal invitation came from Dezső Keresztury, the minister of education, who noted that “it is extraordinarily important from a foreign-political standpoint that the Hungarian youth come to know Oszkár Jászi’s teachings as soon as possible.” Csécsy’s daughter, Magda, helped press the case.⁵⁷¹ Jászi secured funding from the

⁵⁶⁶ Csécsy, “A polgár és a szocializmus,” 362.

⁵⁶⁷ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 139–42.

⁵⁶⁸ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 140.

⁵⁶⁹ György Litván, “Fate Calls Me... Jászi Oszkár 1947 végi duna-völgyi búcsúlátogatása” (Fate Calls Me... Oszkár Jászi’s Final Farewell Trip to the Danubian Basin, 1947), *Beszélő* 2, no. 12 (1997): 34–50, here 34.

⁵⁷⁰ Litván, “Fate Calls Me,” 34.

⁵⁷¹ Litván, “Fate Calls Me,” 35.

American Philosophical Society and the Social Science Research Council.⁵⁷² Jászi traveled first to London, then to Prague and Košice, where he confronted “the Hungarian minority catastrophe” amid collective deportations and forced Slovakization.⁵⁷³ He arrived in Budapest on October 20, 1947, escorted from the station by Csécsy. He told journalists that he had come as “a private individual, and besides, I am not a politician.”⁵⁷⁴ He met Rákosi, whom he judged “very charming” and “a good talker,” qualities that struck him as irrelevant to the underlying coercion in the system.⁵⁷⁵ He spoke with Bibó and Nándor Keszthelyi about the Western orientation of the country, passive resistance, and agrarian reform.⁵⁷⁶ He conferred with Károly Peyer, the veteran Social Democrat, and with the civic radicals Kende and Zsolt, who told him not to “strengthen the reaction.”⁵⁷⁷

The culmination came on October 29, at the Martinovics Freemasonic Lodge, where Jászi delivered the only public address of his trip before an audience of 550. Csécsy took shorthand notes. Jászi warned that “without a moral foundation, every democratic experiment will only create new class rule and new mechanisms of oppression,” yet declared himself an optimist, for “the ideas of freedom, equality, and human dignity cannot be suppressed for long, because the fundamental ancient values of human nature always reassert themselves in the conscience of humanity, with ever greater intensity.”⁵⁷⁸ By Csécsy’s account, the speech had the character of a last testament: “This evening, instead of going to sleep quickly, he composed his next day’s speech and dictated it to me. It was a shattering experience ... I felt as if I were hearing a final decree.”⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷² Oszkár Jászi, “Danubia: Old and New,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 93, no. 1 (Apr. 1949): 1–31, here 1.

⁵⁷³ Litván, “Fate Calls Me,” 36.

⁵⁷⁴ Litván, “Fate Calls Me,” 37.

⁵⁷⁵ Litván, “Fate Calls Me,” 37.

⁵⁷⁶ Litván, “Fate Calls Me,” 38.

⁵⁷⁷ Litván, “Fate Calls Me,” 38.

⁵⁷⁸ Litván, “Fate Calls Me,” 38–39.

⁵⁷⁹ Litván, “Fate Calls Me,” 38.

Jászi left Budapest on November 11, traveled through Prague to Paris, and returned to New York on November 24. By the end of December, he had begun composing what would become “Danubia: Old and New,” delivered at Oberlin College in February 1948. Jászi preferred the term “Danubia” to “Eastern” or “Southeastern” Europe, insisting on the cultural and political coherence of the former Habsburg lands.⁵⁸⁰ His observations on Hungary were trenchant. Budapest was more damaged than Vienna, yet retained a vitality rooted in its rural-peasant life.⁵⁸¹ The political system was “in all its essentials” a Marxist dictatorship in which the Communists employed a subtler strategy than Béla Kun had in 1919; they did not call it dictatorship but “democracy of the Eastern type,” a “people’s democracy” in which cooperation with non-Marxian parties served only as a transitional phase toward the full Soviet model.⁵⁸² His “non-Marxian liberal socialist” friends, naming Csécsy and Kende, attempted to persuade him that “the face of our democracy is disfigured by warts and pimples, but it is nevertheless a true democracy which will grow and purify itself.”⁵⁸³ Jászi treated this conviction with a mixture of sympathy and sorrow: these were men who had suffered persecution under the Horthy regime and the Nazis, and who now found themselves working freely for the first time.⁵⁸⁴ Yet his conversation with Peyer left a lasting impression: Peyer told him, with hounded expression, that “they will destroy me soon; this is sure ... I know too much about their system.”⁵⁸⁵

In its epilogue, composed after the February 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia, Jászi observed that in Hungary things had taken their “dialectically inevitable course towards the final establishment of dictatorship, or speaking more reverentially, towards a full ‘people’s

⁵⁸⁰ Jászi, “Danubia: Old and New,” 1.

⁵⁸¹ Jászi, “Danubia: Old and New,” 16.

⁵⁸² Jászi, “Danubia: Old and New,” 17.

⁵⁸³ Jászi, “Danubia: Old and New,” 23.

⁵⁸⁴ Jászi, “Danubia: Old and New,” 24.

⁵⁸⁵ Jászi, “Danubia: Old and New,” 24.

democracy’.”⁵⁸⁶ Events had moved quickly at the beginning of 1948. Around the moment of the coup in Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party forced the exclusion of over forty leaders from within the Social Democratic Party, among them Anna Kéthly, to the advantage of Árpád Szakasits and the internal left wing of the party.⁵⁸⁷ With the forced merger of the Social Democrats with the Communists that summer, creating the Hungarian Workers’ Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*), the space for democratic debate in the press and in parliament began to close with a finality that none of the republican leftist intellectuals in Hungary had thought possible. Jászi, however, had judged it to be inevitable given the conditions. The new Danubia had come no closer to freedom and national reconciliation than the old.

4.4. Conclusion

The trajectories traced in this chapter revealed a shared conceptual project among the republican Left. While pursued under divergent conditions, they ultimately arrived, by 1948, at a common impasse. In both Hungary and Yugoslavia, republican leftists sought to articulate a form of democracy that could not be reduced to its bourgeois-liberal or Soviet variants. They sought a wider conception of the political community based on the *vita activa* and shared democratic values. They sought an escape from all forms of domination, whether political or economic. The popular front period of the mid-1930s generated the institutional and intellectual preconditions for this project in the periodical communities, cross-class alliances, and programmatic syntheses that linked political freedom to social transformation and democratization. In Yugoslavia, these alliances achieved rather structured organizational form, most successfully in the Slovenian context. In Hungary, they remained largely confined to the

⁵⁸⁶ Jászi, “Danubia: Old and New,” 29

⁵⁸⁷ Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*, 142.

pages of journals and the programs of short-lived organizational cooperation. Yet in both cases, the conceptual vocabulary that republican leftists developed—federalism, popular sovereignty, institutional pluralism, the autonomy of bodies of self-government and the democratic responsibility of the individual and the nation—persisted through the war and into the postwar reconstruction period, providing the terms in which the meaning of “people’s democracy” would be contested.

The wartime period sharpened these commitments while radically altering the conditions under which they could be expressed. Yugoslavia’s self-liberation through the Partisan movement gave non-communist republicans an initial legitimacy within the new order: Prodanović, Jovanović, Vidmar, and Kocbek all occupied positions of formal authority in the new state’s architecture. Hungary’s republican Left, by contrast, endured the destruction of their public sphere and emerged from the war in a political landscape shaped by external liberation and Soviet occupation. The asymmetry mattered for what followed. Yugoslav republicans entered the postwar period as recognized participants in a revolutionary project whose democratic content they sought to define; Hungarian republicans entered it as reconstituted actors in a coalition whose terms were set by forces largely beyond their control.

The postwar debates on democracy nonetheless converged on a set of structural problems that transcended the two national contexts. One was the question of whether the political community could be constituted through a coalition of autonomous parties or only through a unified front organized from below. The question of whether formal constitutional safeguards could check the concentration of power in a single party also emerged. Likewise, the question of whether individual rights and collective social transformation could be pursued simultaneously rather than sequentially circulated in the minds of the republican leftists. The answers they offered—among others, Dragoljub Jovanović’s critique of the concentration of power in a nominally federalized state, Bibó’s arguments in favor of a “limited revolution,” or

Csécsy's synthesis of "individual and collective democracy"—represented both local responses to local crises, as well as sustained attempts to theorize a democratic form adequate to the conditions of postwar East Central Europe. That these attempts were foreclosed by communist consolidation did not diminish their intellectual substance or relevance, however. Rather, the speed and thoroughness of their foreclosure reveals the extent to which the conceptual space they occupied had become, by 1947 and 1948, the most dangerous ground in the politics of both countries. By the time Jászi arrived in Budapest in October 1947 and heard his old comrades insist that the face of their democracy, however disfigured, remained a true one, the terms of debate had already been settled by forces that had not fully participated in the same discussion.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has traced the formation, articulation, and eventual dissolution of republican political thought on the Left in Hungary and Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1948. Through close readings of civic radical, social democratic, peasantist, and left-liberal texts across the Hungarian, Slovenian, and Serbo-Croatian linguistic contexts, the preceding chapters reconstructed a political language whose constitutive elements—radical democratization, popular sovereignty, federalism, collective self-determination, and a wide, civic conception of the political community—remained remarkably consistent even as the conditions under which they were expressed changed beyond recognition. What conclusions can be drawn from this investigation at the level of comparative and conceptual argument?

The first concerns the internal structure of leftist republican political thought itself. The multilingual conceptual history offered in the introduction demonstrated that the terms ‘*köztársaság*’ and ‘*republika*’ carried early modern layered semantic content into the middle of the nineteenth century, the conceptual *Sattelzeit* toward modernity. Their early modern meanings—autonomy, independence, self-government, the common affairs of the body of citizens—were not simply displaced by the modern opposition between republic and monarchy that crystallized around 1848. They persisted as a kind of substratum beneath the ideologized surface, available for reactivation under changed circumstances. What the chapters of this dissertation showed was that by the interwar period, and above all during the “retreat to culture” of the 1920s and early 1930s, the concept ‘republic’ ceased to function as the organizing center of the leftist republican conceptual cluster. It was ‘democracy’ understood not in its thin, procedural sense but as the rooting of popular self-rule, collective autonomy, and substantive freedom from domination that came to occupy the position one might expect ‘republic’ to hold. The remaining conceptual architecture of leftist republican thought returned, as it were, to the early modern semantic layers of ‘republic’: independence, self-determination, the active life of

the political community, and the shared concern for its fate and common values. Federalism and a civic, non-ethnic conception of the political nation furnished the more distinctly modern elements of the cluster, but even these bore traces of older conceptions of political community as something wider than the modern ethnic nation and nation-state.

This displacement of the supposed core concept has implications for how we understand the morphology of political ideologies more generally. Michael Freedén's influential model holds that ideologies are structured around core concepts whose presence and arrangement define the ideology as such; peripheral and adjacent concepts complete the architecture but do not determine its identity. Yet the case examined here suggests a rather different dynamic. If one were to approach leftist republican political thought in Hungary and Yugoslavia as an "ideology" in Freedén's sense, one would expect 'republic' to occupy the core and to remain there as the structuring principle of the entire formation. What occurred instead was that the nominal core concept was hollowed out and its semantic content redistributed across a wider cluster: 'democracy', 'autonomy', 'self-determination', 'federation', and 'popular sovereignty'. None of these individually assumed the anchoring function that Freedén's model assigned to core concepts. The ideational formation persisted largely with its commitments and internal coherence intact, but its center of gravity shifted. This suggests that in contexts of political marginalization, where a language of politics cannot be articulated through the normal channels of state power and party competition, the morphological stability that Freedén attributes to ideologies may not obtain. The structure of the ideational formation becomes more diffuse, more adaptive, and less dependent on the fixed place of any single concept at the center of a language or discourse of politics.

The particular circumstances of the republican Left's marginalization proved decisive for this conceptual reorganization. In both Hungary and Yugoslavia, the republican Left was excluded from the commanding heights of political power for virtually the entire period under

consideration, barring the brief Hungarian “republican moment” of 1918–19 and the contested postwar reconstruction in both countries from 1944 to 1948. During the intervening decades, republican political thought was articulated primarily in the metapolitical sphere: in cultural periodicals and scholarly works, through literary criticism and memoir literature, and in the programmatic documents of marginal political organizations and short-lived organizational alliances. This condition of marginalization meant that the concept ‘republic’ could only appear with full force at those moments when the republican Left was able to contest the construction of new state orders, as in 1917–1919 and 1945–46. Between these moments, the concept receded, not because its adherents abandoned it, but because on the one hand its polemical edge had dulled in contexts where monarchic, authoritarian forms of rule seemed consolidated, but also that those same structures marginalized through law, censorship, and state violence any substantive discussion on state form. What remained operative were the deeper commitments encoded in the republican language: the insistence on popular sovereignty against concentrated power centers, on federalism against centralism, on a civic political community against ethnic exclusivism, and on substantive freedom to realize oneself against domination in all spheres of life. The retreat to culture of the 1920s and early 1930s may be read as a defensive maneuver, but in fact it generated a great deal of intellectual foment. It was precisely in the periodical communities, the historical writing, and the theoretical debates of the 1920s and 1930s that the conceptual vocabulary was refined, tested, and prepared for the moment when direct political contestation would again become possible—if it would again become possible.

The comparison between the Hungarian and Yugoslav cases sharpens these observations. Despite shared conceptual commitments, the two contexts diverged in ways that illuminate the relationship between political structure and intellectual production. In Yugoslavia, the persistence of a restricted but functioning parliamentary system through 1929, and the survival of a relatively open associational if not political life even under the royal

dictatorship meant that republican leftists retained at least marginal institutional footholds. The Slovenian context proved particularly significant: the periodical communities around figures like Prepeluh and Lončar, and later the broad coalition that formed the Workers' and Peasants Movement demonstrated that republican ideas could achieve organizational expression even under severe constraints. In Hungary, by contrast, the initial extreme violence of the White Terror and the depth of the counterrevolutionary consolidation after 1921 pushed republican thought almost entirely to the margins and into exile. Political expression was carefully constructed in cultural terms, eventually in the reformation of a leftist republican public sphere around journals like *Századunk*, *Válasz*, or *Szocializmus*. Yet this very confinement also produced a remarkable theoretical density, as shown in the debates over democracy in the 1930s and '40s, which achieved a level of sophistication and refinement that contrasted greatly with the contingencies of practical politics. When the postwar opening arrived, the Hungarian republican Left could draw on this accumulated theoretical capital to articulate visions of a political order that went far beyond the inherited liberal democratic model from earlier in the century, pointing toward a radicalization of the republican concept.

The comparison also reveals a shared vulnerability. In both contexts, the republican Left theorized the political community as something wider than the cultural or ethnic nation, insisting that the bearer of sovereignty ought to be a civic collectivity constituted through democratic participation rather than through blood, language, or confession. This was not merely an abstract commitment to democracy and an imagined *demos*, but was a direct response to the aggressive ethnicization of politics that characterized the interwar period in both countries. Republican leftists answered with ideas of the distinction between cultural and political communities, thus theorizing federalism and decentralized self-government as the institutional forms adequate to mediate common affairs among complex political communities. Still, as this dissertation attempted to show, this very breadth of vision rendered the republican

Left vulnerable to cooptation by more authoritarian forces. The postwar concept of “people’s democracy” appeared, at first glance, to vindicate the republican Left’s long-standing commitments: popular sovereignty, social transformation, the overcoming of bourgeois formalism, the construction of a new political community on a democratic and federal basis. The ambiguity of the concept, however, proved to be a resource exploitable above all by those who commanded the instruments of state power and coercion. By 1948, the semantic space of “people’s democracy” had been captured by communist parties whose understanding of popular sovereignty bore little resemblance to the pluralist, federalist, and participatory visions that republican leftists had elaborated over the preceding three decades. The speed with which this capture occurred revealed that the conceptual ground the republican Left occupied had become, by the late 1940s, the most dangerous terrain in the politics of both countries precisely because it offered a democratic alternative that could not be reduced to either to the Western or Eastern models of individual or collective democracy.

That itself provides us with an opening to a bigger problem, namely how to narrate the uneven topography of political modernity in Europe. If we were to take the “neo-Roman” conception of republicanism and apply it to this case, we would not come up with a very productive interpretive model. It would register some conceptions of freedom as non-domination, certainly, but would miss the more constitutive elements of state decentralization through supra-national organization, the struggle against ethnic or even racial conceptions of the political community, or even the extent to which modern conceptions of mass democracy were key to the leftist republican vision. Likewise, the conceptual changes around 1848 and the adaptation and translation of modern liberal democratic conceptions, the development of local social democratic and communist traditions, as well as the rich language of agrarianism would not register a notion of republicanism rooted primarily in Renaissance civic humanism. This was a republicanism forged under the particular modern conditions of authoritarian governance,

the cohabitation of industrial capitalism and semi-feudal agrarian structures, the collapse of the multinational empires and post-imperial transition, the radicalization of mass political movements, and the persistent threat (and eventual realization) of crisis, collapse, and total war. To take the East Central European case of leftist republicanism seriously *as* a European case is thus to pluralize the history of republican thought itself, revealing that the intellectual resources for thinking about collective self-governance, supranational federalism, the escape from domination in the political and economic realms, and the relationship between cultural diversity and political unity were as richly developed on the peripheries of Europe as in its putative centers.

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Fővárosi Közlöny (Budapest, 1919)
Haladás (Budapest, 1945–1948 → see *Huszadik Század* and *Világ*)
Huszadik Század (Budapest, 1914–1919, 1947–1949 → see *Haladás*, *Századunk*, and *Világ*)
Književnost (Ljubljana, 1932–1935)
Köztársaság (Budapest, 1918–1919; Paris [= *La République*], 1925)
Ljubljanski zvon (Ljubljana, 1914–1941 → see *Sodobnost*)
Magyar Csillag (Budapest, 1941–1944)
Munkások Újsága (Budapest, 1848)
Naprej (Ljubljana, 1917–1921 → see *Demokracija* and *Naši zapiski*)
Naša vas (Celje, 1921–1922 → see *Republikanec*)
Naši zapiski (Ljubljana, 1920–1922 → see *Avtonomist* and *Novi zapiski*)
Nova Evropa (Zagreb, 1920–1941)
Novi zapiski (Ljubljana, 1922 → see *Avtonomist*)
Népszava (Budapest, 1914–1944 → see *Szocializmus*, *Az Ember*, and *Világosság*)
Nyugat (Budapest, 1914–1941 → see *Magyar Csillag*)
Политика (Belgrade, 1918–1948)
Proletarec (Chicago, 1914–1920 → see *The Slovenian and Jugo-Slav Review*)
Република (Belgrade, 1920–1927, 1945–1948 → see *Буктиња*)
Republikanec (Celje, 1922–1923 → see *Slobodni dom* and *Slovenski republikanec*)
Slobodni dom (Zagreb, 1920–1925 → see *Republikanec* and *Slovenski republikanec*)
Slovenija (Ljubljana, 1932–1941 → see *Slovenska zemlja*)
Slovenska zemlja (Ljubljana, 1935–1936, 1940)
Slovenski republikanec (Ljubljana, 1924–1925 → see *Kmetški list*)

Sodobnost (Ljubljana, 1933–1941)
Српски књижевни гласник (Belgrade, 1920–1941)
Szabad Szó (Budapest, 1936, 1938–1944, 1945–1948)
Századunk (Budapest, 1926–1939 → see *Huszadik Század* and *A Toll*)
Szép Szó (Budapest, 1936–1939)
Szocializmus (Budapest, 1914–1918, 1922–1938, 1945–1948 → see *Népszava* and *Világosság*)
The Slovenian and Jugo-Slav Review (Chicago, 1917–1919 → see *Proletarec*)
Tovább (Debrecen, 1938)
Uradni list (Ljubljana, 1918–1941)
Válasz (Budapest, 1934–1938, 1946–1948 → see *Tovább*)
Valóság (Budapest, 1945–1948)
Világ (Budapest, 1914–1948 → see *Bécsi M. Újság*, *Haladás*, *Huszadik Század*, and *Századunk*)
Világosság (Vienna, 1920–1924, 1930–1933; Paris, 1939–1940 → see *Itt az írás*)

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