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Becoming Yugoslav: A Slovene Perspective on Yugoslav State-Building Examined Through the Political Career of Dr Anton Korošec 1918-28

by

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Abstract

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

School of History

Doctor of Philosophy

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My thesis explores the political career of the Slovene politician and Catholic priest Dr Anton Korošec within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes 1918-1928. As leader of the Slovene People's Party (SLS), Korošec entered the Yugoslav period envisioning an autonomous Slovene unit within a decentralised state structure as the ideal solution to the Slovene national question. After this vision was shattered by the adoption of the highly centralist Vidovdan Constitution in 1921, Korošec dedicated himself to securing a degree of administrative autonomy for the Slovene regions throughout the remainder of the decade. Alongside this Slovene agenda, however, he was also a committed Yugoslav statesman – indeed, possibly the only true Yugoslav statesman the kingdom possessed. He appreciated the importance of a stable, harmonious Yugoslav state in order to preserve the Slovenes as a small national entity within the hostile context of post-war Europe.

I argue that Korošec entered into the Yugoslav period invested not only in Slovene national development, but in the interests of the Yugoslav population as a whole. My thesis illustrates how he struck a careful balance between his dual Slovene and Yugoslav political agendas throughout the kingdom's first decade, using the various ministerial posts he held, as well as his 1928 premiership, to eradicate corruption and implement socio-economic reform across the state as a whole. Korošec understood that within the unstable, bitterly divided and often volatile context of 1920s Belgrade politics, the best method of achieving his Slovene autonomy ambitions was making himself and his SLS an invaluable source of Skupština support for the kingdom's major political parties. As a result, he spent the first eight years of his Yugoslav career forming close relationships with his new colleagues, as well as strengthening his existing connections developed during his pre-Yugoslav political career in Vienna. This political long game ultimately paid off well. By 1927, the Serb Radical

Party had come to view him as a suitably Yugoslav-minded political figure who could be relied upon to put the broader state ahead of his Slovene agenda when necessary. On this basis, they granted him concessions towards a degree of devolved government in the Slovene regions, in return for the SLS's support of their governments. In this way, Korošec's role within 1920s Yugoslav politics challenges the traditional view amongst historians that this period was dominated by Serb and Croat politicians and destabilised by a lack of willingness to compromise on the part of the state's key political figures. His conduct proves that compromise and political partnerships between parties whose visions for Yugoslav statehood drastically opposed one another was indeed possible in 1920s Yugoslavia, and that the pursuit of Yugoslav and national group-specific interests could be mutually inclusive.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.
8. Signature: Emma Hatto Date: 11/07/2022

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Definitions and Abbreviations

HRSS	Croat Peasant Republican Party
Oblast	Serbian/Croatian word for an administrative region
SHS Kingdom	Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes
SHS State	State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes
SKS	Independent Agrarian Party in Slovenia
Skupština	Serbian/Croatian word for Parliament
SLS	Slovene People's Party

Chapter 1- Introduction

In October 1918, the course of Slovene history was altered forever by the actions of the Slovene priest and politician Dr Anton Korošec. As leader of the Slovene People's Party (SLS), by far the most significant party on the Slovene political scene, Korošec was a well-known, experienced and respected figure within the world of Viennese politics he had inhabited up to this point in his career. He had been elected president of the newly formed National Council of Habsburg South Slavs in August 1918- a group which brought together key politicians from the South Slav political parties within the Habsburg Empire to represent the interests of their respective electorates.¹ It was in this capacity that, on 29 October, Korošec proclaimed a new State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (SHS state).² This state claimed the territories of the Habsburg Empire inhabited by these South Slav peoples, effectively liberating them from Austro-Hungarian rule. Preparations for such a move had been underway for weeks. Korošec's National Council had established a parliament of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in Zagreb in early October, building this out of the existing Habsburg administrative framework.³ Following Korošec's proclamation of the SHS state, the National Council announced that it would 'take a lead in national politics,' assuming 'formal control of the former Habsburg territories of the South Slavs.'⁴ The Slovenes were hereby free from foreign rule for the first time since the eighth century.

The proclamation of the SHS state was a purely strategic move on Korošec's part. It is best understood as reactionary to the unfolding political context of Central Europe as war drew to a close. Austria-Hungary had effectively collapsed the day prior to his proclamation of Habsburg South Slav independence, following Emperor Karl's granting the right to self-determination to all national groups of the Habsburg Monarchy.⁵ Korošec's SHS state was only intended to be a temporary measure. His ultimate goal was to bring the Slovenes and their fellow Habsburg South Slavs into a new kingdom alongside South Slavs from outside the Empire. His SHS state was merely an initial step designed to protect the Habsburg South Slav-inhabited territories from being occupied by already-established states until such a South Slav kingdom could be formally created.

¹ N. Engelsfeld, *Prvi Parlament Kraljevstva Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca- privremeno narodno predstavništvo* (Zagreb: Globus, 1989) p.13

² M. Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, The Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilisation, 1904-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) p.136

³ J. Gow and C. Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes* (London: Hurst Publishers Ltd, 2010) p.31

⁴ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, p.136

⁵ F. Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozborni poslanec na Dunaju življenje in delo 1872-1918* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1992) p.258

By October 1918, Korošec was acutely aware of the territorial threats the Habsburg South Slavs might be exposed to from neighbouring states in the absence of the legitimacy and security provided by the Habsburg Empire. From a Slovene perspective, Italian irredentism in Istria was particularly concerning. A third of Slovene-inhabited territory had been promised to Italy by the Allied Powers under the 1915 Treaty of London. This territory was home to approximately 340,000 Slovenes and 160,000 Croats.⁶ The total Slovene-speaking population in this period was just over one million.⁷ The Slovene-inhabited territories promised to Italy therefore represented a severe threat to Slovene national unity, and indeed to the survival of the Slovene language and culture. In addition to this Italian threat, Korošec was also aware of Austrian claims to the Slovene-inhabited regions of Carinthia. Home to approximately 82,000 Slovenes, Carinthia had been an Austrian crownland rather than a recognised Slovene-inhabited region prior to the Habsburg Empire's collapse.⁸ This would make it extremely challenging to secure Slovene Carinthia for inclusion within an imminent South Slav kingdom.

Korošec had embraced his ultimate statehood ambition for the Habsburg South Slavs - union with other South Slavs from independent Serbia and Montenegro - from August 1918.⁹ Indeed, the National Council had been created largely with this goal in mind. Korošec and his SLS had entered into the war fiercely loyal to the Habsburg monarchy.¹⁰ By the summer of 1918, however, the SLS, along with the Yugoslav Club of South Slav political parties over which Korošec presided within the Vienna Reichsrat, had switched allegiance. Instead, they embraced the creation of an independent Yugoslav state under the Serbian monarchy, as Habsburg collapse began to seem inevitable.¹¹ The SHS state was intended to provide a means through which Korošec could quickly and effectively extract the South Slav inhabited territories from the ruins of the Habsburg Empire. The National Council could then serve as an interim government until the envisioned Yugoslav state in union with

⁶ O. Luthar, *The Land Between: A History of Slovenia*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013) p.378

⁷ I. Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: History, Origins, Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.58

⁸ C. Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms: Textbooks and Yugoslav Union Before 1914* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1990), p.3

⁹ M. Cornwall, 'The Experience of Yugoslav Agitation in Austria-Hungary, 1917-18,' in *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, ed. Hugh Cecil and Peter H Liddle (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books Ltd, 2003) p.658

¹⁰ P. Bobič, *War and Faith: The Catholic Church in Slovenia 1914-1918* (Boston: Brill, 2012) p.42

¹¹ Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozbornski poslanec na Dunaju Življenje in delo 1872-1918*, p.245

Serbia could be formally created.¹² That the provisional SHS state is practically unheard-of today is a sign of its having fulfilled its purpose. It existed for just over a month before negotiations in Geneva between Korošec's National Council, the Serbian prime minister Nikola Pašić and Ante Trumbić's Yugoslav Committee resulted in the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS Kingdom). This was proclaimed by Prince Regent Aleksandar of the Serbian monarchy on 1 December 1918.¹³

Korošec's first experiment in political Yugoslavism was therefore a success in terms of enabling a smooth transition from Habsburg imperial rule to Yugoslav statehood for the Slovenes and other Habsburg South Slavs. The National Council in Slovenia continued to govern the Slovene lands of what became the SHS Kingdom during a brief two-month transition period.¹⁴ It existed in an increasingly limited form until the adoption of the new state's highly centralist constitution in 1921.¹⁵ But from December 1918, the Slovene population entered a new chapter of its national history, independent as one component of a broader multinational, multilingual, multi-faith entity.¹⁶ The SHS Kingdom granted the majority of the Slovene population the territorial security and legitimacy they desperately needed as a small nation.¹⁷ Furthermore, political union with their fellow South Slavs also allowed Korošec and his SLS to accomplish the cultural progression elements of their longstanding national programme. The first Slovene university was founded in Ljubljana in 1919. This was a significant development because the Slovenes had been one of extremely few Habsburg nationalities who lacked their own university.¹⁸ It was closely followed by the establishment of Slovene cultural institutions such as a national theatre, opera and orchestra, numerous museums and galleries and various new Slovene-language newspapers and journals.¹⁹ What politically active Slovenes had spent more than half a century campaigning for within the Habsburg Empire in terms of language rights was therefore achieved within a mere two years of SHS statehood. In terms of cultural and linguistic progression, Korošec's gamble with the Slovene population's future appeared to be paying off by the end of their first year as Yugoslavs.

¹² JR. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.110

¹³ A.N. Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and Yugoslavia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974) p.125

¹⁴ Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, The Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilisation, 1904-1928*, p.136

¹⁵ Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.33

¹⁶ J. Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008) p.20

¹⁷ J. Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji' in *Življenje in delo Antona Korošca*, ed. Zanko Čepič (Ljubljana: Biografija BORI, 1991) p.39

¹⁸ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.89

¹⁹ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.390

The next step in Yugoslav state-building would be far more difficult. Korošec had successfully brought the Slovenes and their fellow Habsburg South Slavs out of their former imperial political context and into a constitutional monarchy, but merely creating the new state was not enough. The new SHS Kingdom brought together peoples from the Habsburg Empire and two formerly independent states in Serbia and Montenegro. These populations became 'Yugoslav,' with two alphabets used across multiple languages and dialects, three main religions, four railway networks, five fiscal and tax systems and six customs areas.²⁰ Considerable variation also existed within the new state in terms of agrarian and legal systems, education and literacy rates.²¹ All had different experiences of participation within the political systems they had previously lived under. They consequentially had different expectations for the kingdom's new political structure and how this would best suit the needs of their own national group. Crucially, prior to the kingdom's creation, nothing had been agreed regarding its administrative structure, political system or constitution. Mindful of the aforementioned territorial threats the Slovene population faced, Korošec had urged his fellow National Council members and the Serbian government delegates in Geneva to 'first form a state, then discuss everything else.'²²

In many respects, Korošec was correct to push for the creation of the kingdom as a matter of urgency, prioritising this haste over detailed discussions as to the form the new state would take. His approach proved essential for securing the SHS Kingdom's territories which had formerly been part of the Habsburg Empire, particularly for the Slovenes. Whilst he was meeting with the Serbian government representatives in Geneva, Italian troops had already begun advancing towards Ljubljana.²³ Crucially, however, this haste meant that Korošec brought the Slovene population into union with the Serbs and Croats without having a comprehensive discussion with his new colleagues within Yugoslav politics as to the state's administrative structure.

In his work on early Yugoslav politics, Bruce Bigelow described the SHS Kingdom as having been a 'political nightmare' from the moment of its creation, due largely to its multicultural and

²⁰ J.R. Lampe, 'Unifying the Yugoslav Economy 1918-1921: Misery and Early Misunderstandings,' *The Creation of Yugoslavia 1914-1918* ed. Dimitrije Djordjević (Oxford, CA: Clio Books, 1980) p.139

²¹ L. Perović, 'The Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenians (1918-1929/ The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929-1941): Emergence, Duration and End,' *YU Historija*, 2015, p.8

²² Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.32

²³ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.378

multinational nature.²⁴ This description perfectly summarises the decade of disputes, short-lived governments, and the revolving door of prime ministers which were to characterise the 1920s Yugoslav political scene. The SLS and Stjepan Radić's Croat Peasant Party (HRSS) had envisioned autonomy along federalist lines. This would have allowed the Slovenes and Croats to maintain their own distinct national identities and exert control over their own local government and financial affairs within the kingdom.

The Serb Radical and Yugoslav Democratic parties, meanwhile, expected the kingdom to follow a centralised administrative structure.²⁵ In July 1917, Pašić and his Serbian government representatives had met with the Croat Ante Trumbić's Yugoslav Committee. This was a grouping of politically active, intellectual Habsburg South Slavs in exile during the war. It had been formed to advocate the creation of a Yugoslav state in the Allied Powers' planned redrawing of Europe's borders following the war's conclusion.²⁶ The meeting resulted in the Corfu Declaration, which called for the creation of a unified state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes under the Serbian Karadjordjević dynasty.²⁷ At the time, the Allied Powers were just beginning to consider a Yugoslav state as a post-war possibility; the Corfu Declaration was designed to push this issue.²⁸

The Corfu Declaration's key flaw was that it failed to address the administrative structure of the proposed Yugoslav state beyond the fact that it would be a constitutional democratic monarchy, with the constitution being drawn up by a constituent assembly following the state's creation.²⁹ That it listed Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in its text implied equal partnership for these three national groups, but this was not explicitly stated.³⁰ The vagueness of the Corfu Declaration and Korošec's push for haste at the Geneva Conference meant that upon the SHS Kingdom's creation, all that had been agreed upon regarding its administrative structure was that this would be later determined by a constituent assembly, as per the Corfu Declaration. In the meantime, the existing autonomous

²⁴ B. Bigelow, 'Centralism Versus Decentralisation in Interwar Yugoslavia,' *Southeastern Europe*, 1:2, 1974, p.157

²⁵ A. Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1929* (Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu Press, 2011) p.128

²⁶ A. Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and Yugoslavia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974) p.114

²⁷ V. Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History* (London Palgrave MacMillan, 2010) p.85

²⁸ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.373

²⁹ R.J Donia and J.V.A. Fine, *Bosnia and Hercegovina: A Tradition Betrayed* (London: Hurst, 1994) p.121

³⁰ Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, p.106

administrative authorities such as Korošec's National Council in the Habsburg lands would remain in place.³¹

Ultimately, the question of whether the kingdom should take on a centralised or a decentralised, federalist-style administrative structure became a burden from which its political system was never able to escape. It dominated Yugoslav politics even after the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution in 1921, hindering any real development of a state framework and a functioning political system throughout the 1920s.³² The period 1918-28 was one of great political instability for the kingdom; it experienced twenty-four governments under ten prime ministers in its first decade.³³ The majority of these governments endured mere months before infighting and lack of cooperation between their coalition members resulted in collapse. This made it extremely difficult for much in the way of state-building to take place.

Within this turbulent context, Korošec went on to become the most significant Slovene politician of the kingdom he had played such a crucial role in founding. Indeed, he was undoubtedly among its leading political figures more broadly. Though he led a small, Slovene-specific party himself in the SLS, he brought a wealth of political experience to the SHS Kingdom, having previously enjoyed a prominent, successful political career representing the Slovenes in the Vienna Reichsrat during the Habsburg era.³⁴ Additionally, his role as president of the Yugoslav Club from 1917 had enabled him to form working relationships with various other formerly Habsburg South Slav party leaders.

Korošec advocated Slovene administrative autonomy within the SHS Kingdom throughout his Yugoslav political career.³⁵ This stance was very much a continuation of his SLS's Habsburg-era policies. Following the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution, he formed a parliamentary opposition bloc along with other anti-centralism parties. He argued that only devolution along either federalist lines or the creation of autonomous administrative regions could provide the Slovenes with the cultural and linguistic freedom they needed to preserve their distinct identity,

³¹ Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and Yugoslavia*, p.125

³² A.B. Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998) p.77

³³ Bigelow, 'Centralism vs Decentralism,' p.158

³⁴ F.J. Bister, 'Življenje in delo Antona Korošca do prve svetovne vojne' in *Življenje in delo Antona Korošca*, ed. Zanko Čepič (Ljubljana: Biografija BORI, 1991) p.22

³⁵ V. Maček, *In The Struggle For Freedom*, translated by Elizabeth and Stjepan Gazi (New York: Robert Speller, 1957) p.93

while simultaneously providing them with the legitimacy and territorial security of being part of a wider state.³⁶

The SLS's popularity amongst the Slovene electorate during the interwar period demonstrates mass support for Korošec's dual pro-Yugoslav and pro-Slovene autonomy political outlooks. The party maintained 20 or more seats in the Skupština³⁷ out of the 26 available in the Slovene constituencies throughout the 1920s.³⁸ At its height, it was consistently winning sixty percent of the Slovene vote in interwar elections.³⁹ The overwhelming majority of Slovene constituencies were therefore electing SLS deputies consistently throughout the period 1918-28. This strongly suggests that Korošec's vision for Slovene administrative autonomy within the SHS Kingdom appealed to the vast majority of the Slovene electorate.⁴⁰

Korošec was not, however, merely concerned with Slovene-specific politics. He was also loyal to and firmly believed in the importance of a stable Yugoslav political system. This was because he regarded some form of Yugoslav union as the best available option for preserving the Slovenes as a national group in the hostile political environment of post-war Europe.⁴¹ His unwavering support for the SHS Kingdom, despite his fierce opposition to its centralist structure, can be seen as further continuation of his SLS's Habsburg era policies. Although the party had campaigned for an autonomous Slovene region within the Habsburg Empire where they could use their own language for administrative and educational purposes, they had remained fiercely loyal to the Habsburg Monarchy. They had sought reform within the empire rather than independence outside of it, almost up to the point of its collapse.⁴²

Korošec therefore entered the Yugoslav period recognising that participation within its political system was key to achieving his goal of Slovene autonomy. He did not view cooperation with his Yugoslav colleagues as contradictory to his anti-centralism stance. Rather, he saw it as the best means through which to demand structural and governmental administrative reform on behalf of

³⁶ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, 1926, p1

³⁷ The Yugoslav parliament in Belgrade.

³⁸ B. Balkovec, and I. Šubic Kovačević, 'Die Einzelheiten und Unterschiede Zwischen den Wahlen in Slowenien und Kroatien in den Jahren 1920-1927,' *Review of Croatian History*, 11:1, 2015, p.75

³⁹ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.342

⁴⁰ Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*, p.77

⁴¹ A. Rahten, 'Anton Korošec and the "Croatian Question" in Yugoslavia,' *Časopis povijest zapadne hrvatske*, 7:12, 2017, p.14

⁴² P. Vodopivec, 'Cesar Franc Jožef in slovinci,' *Franc Jožef*, ed. Gregor Antoličič (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva Založba, 2016) p.67

the Slovene population he represented as SLS leader. This attribute of Korošec's has been widely recognised by historians of interwar Yugoslavia and Slovenia. Janko Prunk argues that Korošec 'behaved to a greater extent like a Yugoslav than any other minister in the First Yugoslavia,'⁴³ while James Gow and Cathie Carmichael describe him as a 'supreme politician' who pragmatically retained 'principle blended with common sense.'⁴⁴ His neutral, pro-Yugoslav attitude set him apart from his Skupština colleagues; both from the Serb Radical and Yugoslav Democratic parties, who favoured centralism and a single-state approach to administration, and from the pro-Croatian autonomy HRSS. Under the leadership of the notoriously uncompromising Stjepan Radić, the HRSS fiercely opposed centralism. Its deputies consistently boycotted parliamentary sessions and disrupted Yugoslav politics throughout the 1920s as a means of demonstrating their discontent with the existing state administrative structure, as well as their desire for Croatian autonomy.

Radić's tactics almost always ruled out the possibility of an SLS-HRSS alliance. In many ways, such an alliance would have been a natural fit within the 1920s Yugoslav political scene. Both parties represented a specific non-Serb national group with a Habsburg past and a Catholic tradition, although Radić was fiercely anti-clerical. Additionally, both advocated autonomy for their respective national groups. However, Korošec viewed Radić's methods as too extreme, and as detrimental to broader state stability.⁴⁵ Instead, he prioritised building strong working relationships with the Serb Radical and Yugoslav Democratic parties. The Slovene historian Andrej Rahten suggests that he did so correctly assuming that given the strength of these two parties entering into the kingdom, 'at least one of them would remain in power' at any given time.⁴⁶ Close links with both, as well as good relations with smaller parties, such as Mehmed Spaho's Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (JMO) and Yugoslav Club parties such as Stjepan Barić's like-minded Croatian People's Party, would secure the maximum influence and opportunities possible in Belgrade.⁴⁷ As a result, he persevered in forming ties with the Serb Radicals despite his uncompromising, Serb-centric impressions of Nikola Pašić.⁴⁸

This tactic of prioritising close relations with colleagues from other parties would benefit Korošec greatly. He participated in multiple coalition governments in the interwar period, cooperating with a

⁴³ J. Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji' in *Življenje in delo Antona Korošca*, ed. Zanko Čepič (Ljubljana: Biografija BORI, 1991) p.53

⁴⁴ Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.38

⁴⁵ Rahten, 'Anton Korošec and the "Croatian Question" in Yugoslavia,' p.19

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.40

⁴⁸ N. Engelsfeld, *Prvi Parlament Kraljevstva Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, p.35

range of parties in the process. Most often, this was the Serb Radical Party, or the Yugoslav Democrats and JMO in some form of coalition government.⁴⁹ He served as a cabinet minister on twelve separate occasions, taking on the role of Minister of the Interior for longer stretches in 1927-28, as well as serving as Minister for Education, Transport and Food and Nutrition within short-lived governments during the period 1918-28. He also served as deputy prime minister in 1919, and then prime minister for a five-month period July-December 1928, presiding over a quadruple-coalition government.⁵⁰ As the leader of a Slovene-specific party which constituted a minority within this coalition, the very nature of this task necessitated cooperation and compromise. These were skills which Korošec had mastered in the Vienna Reichsrat.⁵¹ In this way, his Viennese political career can be viewed as something of a warm-up act for the challenge of his Yugoslav career which would ultimately succeed it. By the end of 1927, Korošec had successfully negotiated modest concessions towards financial autonomy and devolved government on a regional level for the Slovene lands of the kingdom by supporting the Serb Radicals in government, proving the effectiveness of his cooperation strategy.⁵²

Korošec's brief premiership is particularly significant for a variety of reasons, which will be explored in depth in later chapters. Most obviously, he was the only non-Serb to hold this position during the period of the First Yugoslavia.⁵³ He came to office following a month-long period of parliamentary crisis in the SHS Kingdom, which followed the Skupština assassinations of June 1928. This event caused political chaos within the kingdom, polarising the Skupština along centralism versus decentralism lines. The sitting Serb Radical-led coalition government was forced to resign. However, a total breakdown in trust between the Serb Radicals and the HRSS after the assassinations, which ultimately resulted in the HRSS leader Stjepan Radić's death, rendered the process of forming a new government acceptable to the whole Skupština almost impossible. As Fogelquist summarised in his economic study of Interwar Yugoslavia, to the HRSS, the post-assassinations Skupština was symbolic of 'all that was odious and wrong with the existing political order.'⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Rahten, 'Anton Korošec and the "Croatian Question" in Yugoslavia,' p.17

⁵⁰ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.38

⁵¹ S. Pribičević, *Diktatura kralja Aleksandra* (Zagreb: Globus, 1990) p.31

⁵² M. Stiplovšek, *Slovenski parlamentarizem 1927-29* (Ljubljana: Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, 2009) p.108

⁵³ Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia*, p.109

⁵⁴ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1929*, p.337

Largely as a result of his years of establishing working relationships with a variety of political parties and personalities, Korošec succeeded in forming a quadruple coalition government between his own SLS, the Serb Radicals, Yugoslav Democrats and the JMO. He brought this month-long period of parliamentary crisis to an end in the process.⁵⁵ Rather inevitably, his premiership was heavily shaped by the chaotic parliamentary context in which it had commenced. He faced a constant battle in attempting to deal with the legacy of the Skupština assassinations, balancing the anti-Croat sentiment of the Serb Radical Party his coalition government was dependent upon with attempting to appease the HRSS.

Korošec was able to hold his government together for five months. During this time, he succeeded in implementing some initial steps towards government devolution, granting greater administrative powers and financial autonomy to the kingdom's localities along national lines. This built on the Slovene concessions he had secured from the Serb Radicals the previous year. By December, however, disagreements over Korošec's handling of riots in Zagreb caused his cabinet to collapse.⁵⁶ His departure from office marked the end of the first Yugoslav parliamentary period. In the absence of a political figure capable of forming a government out of the bitterly divided Skupština still scarred by the June assassinations, King Aleksandar took matters into his own hands and proclaimed a royal dictatorship on 6 January 1929.⁵⁷ He claimed that the parliamentary system had failed due to the lack of a unifying Yugoslav identity in the kingdom.⁵⁸ He therefore attempted to create one from above during the period of his royal dictatorship. In some ways, Korošec can be seen to have failed; he could not restore a working relationship between the Serbs and Croats in the Skupština that might have prevented the commencement of the royal dictatorship. Yet he undoubtedly succeeded in holding the state's parliamentary system together for far longer than any of its other leading politicians could have managed in such conditions. This was due to his efforts throughout the 1920s to prioritise Yugoslav stability alongside Slovene-specific politics.

Historians agree almost unanimously that the king's experiment in creating an all-encompassing Yugoslav identity was not a success. Indeed, Hugh Seton-Watson dismisses his attempts to create one 'Yugoslav' nation, since 'the dictatorship was run by Serbian gendarmes and army officers' and

⁵⁵ Biondich, *The Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilisation*, p.240

⁵⁶ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.70

⁵⁷ Bigelow, 'Centralisation Vs Decentralisation in Interwar Yugoslavia,' p.160

⁵⁸ Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, p.98

was merely 'the Serbian nation writ large.'⁵⁹ Nielsen credits the royal dictatorship as representing the 'most concerted effort to create a single Yugoslav identity out of the country's motley ethnic tapestry.'⁶⁰ However, he also attests that the experiment did nothing to create one Yugoslav nation, but in fact increased ethnic tensions. These would later erupt during the Second World War.⁶¹ Wachtel argues it was the Slovene population's distinct language which allowed them to maintain their own separate identity throughout this period. This set them apart from their fellow Yugoslavs, despite Serbianising political trends.⁶² Additionally, geography rendered this attempt at Yugoslav identity-building ineffective in the Slovene inhabited regions. Korošec strongly opposed the royal dictatorship, both on the basis of it being a dictatorship and its highly centralist, all-encompassing Yugoslav identity stance. Despite his opposition, however, he was a valued member of the king's cabinet, serving as a minister for two years. He later served a prison sentence 1933-34 for his continued advocacy of Slovene administrative autonomy in the face of the Yugoslav kingdom's ban on separate tribal identities. Even this, however, was not enough to shatter his belief in Yugoslav statehood as the best option for the Slovenes and other Southern Slav peoples. Following his release from prison and the assassination of King Aleksandar in 1934, he took on a pivotal role within the government of the Serb Radical Milan Stojadinović. He continued to advocate a shift towards a federalist restructuring of the state alongside his commitment to Yugoslav stability and political unity until his death in 1940.

Korošec's interwar Yugoslav political career therefore represents a genuine, committed attempt to balance the advocacy of a specific national group within the multinational SHS Kingdom with Yugoslav-centric state-building. With this in mind, this thesis will examine specifically the first half of Korošec's political career from 1918 to 1929. It will ask how he balanced his dual Slovene and Yugoslav political personalities in this period. Within this, it will question whether he is best understood as a Slovene or a Yugoslav politician first and foremost during the first decade of the kingdom's existence. It will explore his vision for the Slovene population's place within the kingdom upon its creation, how this evolved as the political reality of the 1920s unfolded, and how he attempted to bring about state structural reform in line with this vision. It will analyse his political tactics throughout the period, arguing that he played a political long-game. By building close relationships with key Yugoslav parties and proving himself to be a capable, experienced and

⁵⁹ H. Seton-Watson, *The Sick Heart of Europe: The Problem of the Danubian Lands* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1975) p.35

⁶⁰ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.3

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*, p.77

suitably Yugoslav-minded politician when he was given the opportunity to hold ministerial posts, Korošec was ultimately able to win concessions towards the Slovene administrative autonomy he desired. In this sense, his careful strategy and willingness to compromise ultimately benefited the Slovenes greatly. Additionally, this thesis will evaluate how the Slovene opposition parties attempted to criticise and undermine Korošec and his SLS's representation of the Slovene electorate, asking why its politics came to dominate in the Slovene constituencies throughout this period. It will demonstrate how Korošec struck an equal balance between his Slovene and Yugoslav political responsibilities, viewing the success of the SHS Kingdom as an experiment in state-building as intertwined with his representation of the Slovene population. To him, there was no contradiction between the two roles.

In his work on the centralism versus decentralism debate in interwar Yugoslavia, the historian Bruce Bigelow argued that through assessing 'the reasons why Yugoslavia's interwar politicians failed to find a stable equilibrium' in terms of balance of power and the nature of government and administration within the new state, 'we can better understand the overall complexities' of the SHS Kingdom.⁶³ Equally, an understanding of the key political figures of the SHS Kingdom, and their policies in terms of both their own national group and the Yugoslav state as a wider entity, is crucial in order to make full sense not only of the state's complex political history. Placing the Slovene perspective on Belgrade politics into the history of the SHS Kingdom through Korošec can not only enhance our understanding of the Slovene experience of the SHS Kingdom, but also the interwar Yugoslav political experiment more broadly.

⁶³ Bigelow, 'Centralisation Vs Decentralisation in Interwar Yugoslavia,' p.157

Chapter 2- The Historical Context of Korošec in Yugoslavia

Introduction

An appreciation of the development of Slovene nationalism in the years prior to the SHS Kingdom's creation is essential in order to fully understand Korošec's dual pro-Yugoslav and pro-Slovene administrative autonomy political stances. The Slovenes were only just beginning to come of age politically during Korošec's youth. Through his own education, he encountered many of the problems they faced as a national minority which lacked its own recognised region within a multinational, multilingual empire. This experience shaped his politics, particularly his belief that a recognised Slovene region within a broader state entity, with administrative autonomy, was the best solution to the Slovene question.

The Slovenes are a small, predominantly Catholic ethnic group of Slav origin. The lands they inhabit have been referred to by historians and linguists as something of a 'crossroads' of Europe, surrounded by the Alps and the Mediterranean to the west, the Balkans to the south and Hungary and Eastern Europe to the east.⁶⁴ Upon the creation of the SHS Kingdom in December 1918, the Slovene population numbered just over one million.⁶⁵ Typically, intellectual Slovenes have considered their culture to be more central or even western European-orientated than aligned with Eastern Europe and their South Slav cousins in the Balkans. This can be attributed to their traditional Catholic faith and strong Habsburg cultural influence for much of their history.⁶⁶

As a population, the Slovenes were exceptionally slow to develop any kind of national sentiment, even in comparison to their Southern Slav neighbours within the Habsburg Empire. This was a result of their geographical and governmental administrative circumstances, combined with their small numbers. The Slovene population did not inhabit a recognised historic territory within the empire as did other Habsburg Slavs such as the Croats and the Czechs. Instead, they were scattered amongst a number of Austrian crownlands and provinces.⁶⁷ In Carniola, the Slovenes constituted more than ninety percent of the population.⁶⁸ In the other crownlands they inhabited, however, they were

⁶⁴ A. Lyall, 'The Making of Modern Slovenia,' *Slavonic and East European Review*, 17:50, 1939, p.405

⁶⁵ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1929*, p.11

⁶⁶ T. Cox and D. Fink Hafner, 'Into Europe? Problems and Dilemmas' in *Into Europe? Perspectives from Britain and Slovenia* (Ljubljana: Znanstvena knjižnica, Faculty of Social Sciences, 1996)

⁶⁷ C. Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) p.v

⁶⁸ *The National Archives (TNA)*, FO 373/1/16 'The Slovenes: A Handbook, Prepared under the Direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office, No.14a, London, 1919, p.15

significantly outnumbered by other national groups, namely Austrian Germans, Italians and Hungarians.⁶⁹ This fragmentation made it exceedingly difficult for Slovene speakers to develop any real, unifying sense of national identity.⁷⁰ Indeed, no concept of a Slovene national unit existed until the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, the word 'Slovene' was only loosely defined, with the Slovene population most often being referred to by the name of the region in which they lived until as late as 1811.⁷¹ In addition to being so scattered amongst various Austrian crownlands, the fact that the Slovene population stood at just one million left them numerically weak, and therefore vulnerable to foreign domination.⁷² This in itself prevented the establishment of a definite sense of Slovene national identity.

The Slovenes also lacked a historic state upon which to base a national movement. Nationalism amongst the Slavs most commonly pointed to former medieval states or empires, as these could provide legitimacy to their respective movements. This was true of the Serbs and the Croats, who had both enjoyed medieval statehood.⁷³ In contrast, the Slovene population had lost their independence to the Franks in the ninth century, before becoming part of the Holy Roman Empire, then the Austrian crownlands in 1273.⁷⁴ This meant they also lacked an established myth of national history or possession of a native nobility. Both of these were crucial elements for most nineteenth century nationalism movements.⁷⁵ This lack of a Slovene nobility, or even an established middle class, equated to the lack of a ready-made leadership for a Slovene national movement.⁷⁶ The closest the Slovenes could claim to a historic state was the Dukedom of Carinthia. The Slovene population of Carinthia had experienced a brief period of self-rule prior to Frankish rule in the Middle Ages, electing their own dukes from among the population. The Slovene activist, historian and politician Bogumil Vošnjak produced a brief publication on this medieval state in 1917, entitled *A Chapter of the Old Slovenian Democracy*. He portrayed the Carinthian Dukedom as an example of early Slovene political progressiveness, arguing the Slovene people to be politically and culturally advanced amongst Europeans.⁷⁷ Given the context of wartime Europe and the Yugoslav movement

⁶⁹ Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms*, p.249

⁷⁰ Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, p.75

⁷¹ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.3

⁷² Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.58

⁷³ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.12

⁷⁴ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.4

⁷⁵ T.B. Senčar, 'The Making of History: Discourses of Democracy and Nation in Slovenia,' *Slovene Studies*, 22:1-2, 2000, p.37

⁷⁶ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.3

⁷⁷ B. Vošnjak, *A Chapter of the Old Slovenian Democracy* (London: John Murray, 1917)

which he supported in 1917, Vošnjak claimed the Carinthian Dukedom was proof that the Slovenes were indeed a historic people with a state tradition, and therefore entitled to post-war national self-determination alongside their fellow South Slavs. It was a tenuous claim, but also the best the Slovene population had.

The 1848 Revolutions and the Birth of the Slovene National Movement

A wave of revolutions which swept through the Habsburg Empire in 1848 served as a catalyst for the development of Slovene national consciousness. Prior to this, Habsburg modernisation from the mid-eighteenth century onwards had caused some Slovene-speakers to slowly gain an awareness of their distinct language and culture, laying the foundations for an eventual national awakening. Austrian reforms under Maria Theresa and Joseph II abolished serfdom and made elementary education compulsory. This constituted instant reform for the Slovene population, who were largely serfs in this period.⁷⁸ Crucially, access to education caused the Slovene population of the Austrian crownlands to develop an interest in their own language, literature and culture. By 1810, one in seven children in the Slovene-inhabited crownlands attended school. By 1847, this had risen to one in three.⁷⁹ The Slovene population's literacy rate was among the highest in Europe by the time of the 1848 revolutions. This, along with the rise of Slovene literature led by writers such as France Prešeren, led to an increased sense of national identity which would cause educated Slovenes to question their place within the empire.

The 1848 revolutions began in Paris, but quickly spread through much of Europe. They were primarily concerned with the economic plight of the peasant masses, but soon led to demands for greater nationality rights within the Habsburg Empire after reaching Vienna on 15 March.⁸⁰ Other Habsburg nationalities such as the Hungarians and Czechs quickly responded to the revolutions by demanding territorial autonomy within the empire based on their historic state rights. The Slovenes, however, were slower to react.⁸¹ In both Ljubljana and the countryside, many Slovenes celebrated when the revolutions in Vienna ended the Metternich government's thirty-three years in power. In addition, the Slovene peasantry in the Austrian crownlands of Carniola, Carinthia and Styria enthusiastically supported calls in Vienna, Budapest and Prague to abolish feudalism, ceasing to pay land fees in anticipation of such emancipation.⁸² These uprisings continued for two months in

⁷⁸ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.6

⁷⁹ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.268

⁸⁰ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.14

⁸¹ R. Schlesinger, *Federalism in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd, 1945) p.170

⁸² Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.268

Carniola and Carinthia, with Austrian authorities declaring a state of emergency before they were finally able to suppress them. Despite their discontent with the existing system, however, the Slovenes as a population had no clear concept as to what kind of governmental and societal restructuring they wanted. This changed when the revolutions led to the rise of a group of Austrian German nationalists seeking unification of all German speakers within one pan-German state.⁸³ Prominent Slovene scholars of the period, most notably Janez Bleiweis, believed such Germanisation would pose a significant threat to their own Slovene language and culture.⁸⁴ In this way, Slovene nationalism developed mainly due to fear of German domination amongst Slovene scholars and intellectuals.

The Slovenes lacked political experience almost entirely at this point in their history. The Slovene political activists who emerged from the revolutions were lawyers, writers, priests and other intellectuals.⁸⁵ Slovene scholars in Vienna founded the *Slovenija* society in April 1848, which soon produced the first comprehensive Slovene political programme.⁸⁶ Known as the *United Slovenia* programme, this demanded the creation of a unified 'Kingdom of Slovenia' within the Habsburg Empire, with its own provincial diet.⁸⁷ It called for Austria to remain independent from Frankfurt; the *Slovenija* society regarded this as essential in order to avoid Germanisation of the Habsburg Empire's minority groups. Additionally, the programme demanded that the Slovene language be adopted in all schools in Slovene-inhabited regions as well as in local government administration, and the establishment of a Slovene university. Crucially, *United Slovenia* was by no means a demand for Slovene independence.⁸⁸ The *Slovenija* society scholars remained loyal to the Habsburg Empire, but desired structural reform within it. They envisaged the Slovene population encompassing an autonomous unit within a federal-style empire, allowing them administrative, economic and cultural independence. This vision for the Slovene nation slowly evolved into trialism after the creation of the Dual Monarchy in 1867.⁸⁹ This was the concept of a triple rather than dual monarchical structure for the Habsburg Empire, to include a third, unified South Slav kingdom with the same degree of territorial autonomy as the Hungarians had secured by the Dual Monarchy.

⁸³ H. Seton-Watson, *The Sick Heart of Europe*, p.15

⁸⁴ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.v

⁸⁵ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.280

⁸⁶ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.15

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.17

⁸⁹ Bobič, *War and Faith: The Catholic Church in Slovenia 1914-1918*, p.169

United Slovenia's modest goals highlighted the great disadvantage at which the Slovene population found itself linguistically in 1848, even in comparison to the other national minorities within the Habsburg Monarchy. The Slovenes were one of extremely few nationalities within the empire to lack their own university; others included the Slovaks, Romanians and Ruthenians.⁹⁰ Slovene students seeking higher education were forced to study outside of the Slovene lands, usually in Vienna, Graz, Prague or Krakow. This did not pose a major barrier to Slovenes in accessing higher education. Between 300 and 400 Slovene students were enrolled in Austrian universities and higher schools during the 1870s. By 1914, this had risen to 930.⁹¹ These are respectable numbers considering the small size of the Slovene population. But while the lack of a Slovene university did not prevent Slovenes from pursuing higher education, it did hinder the development of an academic scene in the Slovene lands themselves. Furthermore, as is evident from the *United Slovenia* programme, the main defining aspect of Slovene national identity in this period was language. The lack of a Slovene university therefore hindered the development of the main component of Slovene identity which set them apart from the South Slav peoples around them.

Alongside the lack of a Slovene university, the language of school instruction was a pressing issue for the developing Slovene national movement for similar reasons. Education in the Slovene lands was regulated by Austrian laws in the nineteenth century.⁹² In contrast, the Serb and Croat-inhabited lands of the empire had their own education laws. In theory, Austrian education law authorised the use of any language demanded by forty or more students living within a four-kilometre radius of a particular school. But in reality, enforcement of this was at the discretion of the relevant local authorities.⁹³ In Carniola, where the Slovenes made up more than ninety percent of the population, accessing Slovene-language education was rarely an issue. In the other Slovene-inhabited crownlands, however, it was much more difficult. Elementary education in the Slovene language tended to only be available in rural settings, if at all, while German dominated in secondary education.⁹⁴ Slovene was available as a school subject in some gymnasiums outside of Carniola, but German remained the sole language of instruction in the majority.⁹⁵ The situation was particularly dire in Slovene Carinthia, where there were no gymnasiums offering a Slovene language class until

⁹⁰ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.356

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms*, p.54

⁹³ Ibid, p.28

⁹⁴ P.Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) p.46

⁹⁵ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.286

as late as 1889.⁹⁶ The Slovene population had an exceptionally high literacy rate in this period- just fifteen percent were illiterate by 1910.⁹⁷ But the majority had no access to Slovene medium education beyond elementary level, as a result of German resistance to the establishment of Slovene-language gymnasiums.⁹⁸ This further hindered national awareness amongst them.

The evolving Slovene national movement therefore prioritised the use of the Slovene language rather than German for educational purposes, as well as for local administration and commerce. Slovenes began to be elected to the Vienna Parliament from July 1848; the Slovene population had a greater awareness of the importance of political representation following the revolutions, and those eligible therefore voted for Slovene candidates. During this initial phase of Slovene political activity, Slovene national consciousness amongst literate Slovenes was strengthened considerably through literature. In July 1848, the Ljubljana-based *Slovenija* society began to print a newspaper in response to the revolutions, entitled *Slovenija*.⁹⁹ This was the first Slovene-language political publication. Over the next few decades, Slovene-language reading societies were founded across the Slovene lands. Twelve had been established by 1864, and this grew to fifty-seven, with a combined membership of 4000, by 1869.¹⁰⁰ These provided highly literate, educated Slovenes with access to political publications in their own language, as well as a place to meet and share perspectives on the position of the Slovene population within the empire.

Korošec's Path to Politics

This was the Slovene political context into which Anton Korošec was born in 1872. He was raised in a peasant family in the village of Biserjane, a tiny, rural Slovene community in Ščavnica, North-Eastern Slovenia.¹⁰¹ The Slovene historian Feliks Bister, who has worked extensively on Korošec's Viennese political career, presents his background as the root of his Slovene nationalist politics. It is certainly true that Korošec's own educational experiences highlighted the difficulties of being part of a minority ethnic group within the Habsburg Empire. He began his education at the village church school. Here, he would have been taught in the Slovene language, but also encountered German as

⁹⁶ Bister, *Življenje in delo Antona Korošca do prve svetovne vojne*, p.6

⁹⁷ Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms*, p.57, and TNA, FO 421/341, Mr Kennard to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 'Serb-Croat-Slovene State Annual Report 1925,' Belgrade, 26 January 1926, p.35

⁹⁸ Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria*, p.47

⁹⁹ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.15

¹⁰⁰ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.301

¹⁰¹ Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozbornski poslanec na Dunaju Življenje in delo 1872-1918*, p.11

the 'mandatory national language' of Austria.¹⁰² A knowledge of German was crucial for Slovene speakers in this period, not only because it was the language of business and administration throughout the Slovene regions, but also because of the lack of Slovene-language secondary education outside of Carniola, the only Austrian crownland in which the Slovenes constituted a majority.¹⁰³ Korošec attended a gymnasium in Maribor which introduced a Slovene class in 1888, following extensive lobbying from Slovene deputies in the Vienna parliament on the basis that the school's student population at the time consisted of more Slovenes than Austrians. As he began his gymnasium education in 1885 and graduated in 1892, however, Korošec was denied the opportunity to study in his own language for much of his secondary-level education.¹⁰⁴ Instead, he was taught in German alongside Austrian-German students. This experience heightened his awareness of the Slovene population's position of linguistic and cultural inferiority within the Austrian crownlands. Furthermore, it undoubtedly laid the foundations for his later belief in autonomy within the SHS Kingdom as the best option for the Slovenes.

After graduating from the gymnasium, Korošec studied philosophy and theology in Maribor, and was ordained as a priest in 1895.¹⁰⁵ It was during his theological studies that he first met Dr Janez Krek, a professor of theology, who at the time was head of the SLS. Over the course of the 1880s, two distinct political parties had emerged out of the Slovene national movement: the Slovene Liberal Party, which was pan-Slav minded and mostly supported by middle class Slovenes in urban settings, and the SLS, which held more conservative values and tended to be backed by the peasant masses.¹⁰⁶ The Maribor Seminary was very much the heart of SLS politics by the turn of the century, with a number of political societies and publications based there.¹⁰⁷ Much of the SLS party elite had become involved in politics through theology, and Korošec was no exception. Under Krek's guidance, he discovered a talent for journalism. During his studies in Maribor, he published a number of articles on the agrarian question and the position of the Slovene population within the empire.¹⁰⁸ In these, he argued that Slovene national identity would be better protected from German domination within a recognised and delimited Slovene region.¹⁰⁹ Korošec's focus gradually

¹⁰² Ibid, p.13

¹⁰³ P. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, p.106

¹⁰⁴ Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozbornski poslanec na Dunaju Življenje in delo 1872-1918*, p.13

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.19

¹⁰⁶ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.43

¹⁰⁷ I. Štuhec, 'Odgovor dr Antona Korošca na socialna okrožnice na podlagi nekaterih njegovih spisov,' in *Življenje in delo Antona Korošca*, ed. Zanko Čepič (Ljubljana: Biografija BORI, 1991) p.117

¹⁰⁸ These were mostly for the Slovene Catholic journal *Lipica*, run by Maribor-based theologians.

¹⁰⁹ Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozbornski poslanec na Dunaju Življenje in delo 1872-1918*, p.12

began to shift towards politics during his time at the Maribor Seminary, and his interest in Slovene nationalism continued following his graduation. In November 1902, he ran for election for the first time in the Styrian provincial assembly elections, but lost out to the more experienced Slovene Liberal candidate, Ivan Kočevar.¹¹⁰ Following this setback, Korošec returned to academia, commencing his doctorate in theology in autumn 1902. He graduated in 1905, and immediately returned to politics. He ran for election again in summer 1906, this time with the backing of prominent Slovene politicians in the Vienna Reichsrat. He won this election by a landslide majority over both the German and Slovene Liberal candidates, and was sworn in as MP for Celje district on 7 June 1906.

Korošec soon made an impression in Vienna, being elected to various parliamentary committees including the Press Committee. During his first weeks as MP for Celje, he also proposed the allocation of emergency aid to the north-eastern Slovene region of the Drava plain and to Haloze, which had suffered extensive storm damage the previous month.¹¹¹ He successfully secured this aid, proving himself as a capable advocate for the Slovene people within the national assembly right from the start of his Viennese political career.¹¹² This ability to assert himself as a politician representing a national minority group within a large, multinational political system would serve him well during the period of the SHS Kingdom. The SLS also gained prominence in this period, winning a record 19 seats in the 1911 Reichsrat elections.¹¹³ This surge in popularity was prompted by the adoption of universal male suffrage in Cisleithania from 1907; this prompted an interest in politics amongst the Slovene peasantry.

Towards Yugoslavism

The SLS, as well as the Slovene population more broadly, entered the war fiercely loyal to the Habsburg Monarchy. Under Krek's leadership, the party continued to push for a trialist restructuring of the empire. In May 1917 Korošec, in his capacity as president of the Yugoslav parliamentary club within the Reichsrat, delivered a document which would become known as the May Declaration. This called for the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs of the Habsburg Empire to be unified in an autonomous South Slav state, transforming the existing dual monarchy into a triple one.¹¹⁴ Unlike

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p.19

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.42

¹¹² Pribičević, *Diktatura kralja Aleksandra*, p.31

¹¹³ Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozbornski poslanec na Dunaju Življenje in delo 1872-1918*, p.96

¹¹⁴ Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, p.52

previous SLS calls for trialism, this demanded an immediate solution rather than laying out a long-term vision. The May Declaration gained rapid support from the Slovene and other South Slav populations of the empire. By spring 1918, it had been signed by over 200,000 people, and was supported by the majority of the South Slav parties within the Reichsrat. As a result, Korošec became a key activist pushing for the creation of a South Slav administrative unit within the kingdom. The Corfu Declaration between the Serbian government and the self-proclaimed Yugoslav Committee in July 1917 laid the foundations for a potential Yugoslav state outside of the Habsburg Monarchy. But the SLS maintained its loyalty to the empire until as late as summer 1918, condemning the Yugoslav Committee's actions as treason.

Korošec became SLS leader following Krek's death in October 1917. His succession marked a slight intensification of the SLS's trialist policies. His Yugoslav Club held a series of meetings in November that year aimed at bringing about the triple monarchy it envisioned. Korošec spent much of the early months of 1918 visiting various Slovene regions, as well as Dalmatia. He spoke in favour of a Habsburg future for the South Slavs, within an autonomous entity.¹¹⁵ Everything changed in May, when the Austrian Prime Minister Ernst Seidler formally denounced the idea of a united South Slav state within the empire.¹¹⁶ Korošec quickly grew frustrated with this stance. He recognised the threat to the Slovenes' territorial security as Habsburg collapse began to seem inevitable. He therefore came around to the idea of a unified Yugoslav monarchy as laid out in the Corfu Declaration. This resulted in the creation of his National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, from which he would declare the SHS state in October, beginning the Slovenes' journey to Yugoslav statehood.

In switching allegiance from the Habsburg Monarchy to the imminent SHS Kingdom, Korošec effectively transferred the SLS's Slovene nationalism goals from one political entity to another. Entering into the kingdom in December 1918, the party's goals were the same as those drafted under the *United Slovenia* programme in 1848. Like his predecessors, Korošec valued the territorial security with which the Slovenes could be provided through inclusion within a broader state entity such as the SHS Kingdom. He recognised that they were too small a nation to survive without this, particularly in the face of Italian irredentism. As opposed to inclusion within Austrian crownlands, the Yugoslav solution placed the Slovenes within a specifically South Slav state entity, in which they were one of three named peoples which constituted the new kingdom.

¹¹⁵ Cornwall, 'The Experience of Yugoslav Agitation in Austria-Hungary, 1917-18,' p.668

¹¹⁶ Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.30

Entering into the SHS Kingdom, Korošec viewed autonomy as the best administrative option to preserve the Slovenes' distinct national character, in particular their language. SLS policy in the 1920s therefore prioritised Slovene autonomy through a federal-type model, along with the freedom to use the Slovene language within Slovene regional administration and education, and the creation of a Slovene university. He recognised the importance of building stable state framework in order to provide the Slovenes with the territorial security and safety in numbers they so desperately needed. He therefore entered into the SHS Kingdom ready and willing to utilise his Viennese political experience to cooperate with other Yugoslav politicians from a variety of backgrounds, and to balance Yugoslav state-building with Slovene interests. The extent to which he would be able to do this, however, would be dependent upon his new colleagues sharing this mindset.

If Korošec embarked on his new Yugoslav political career expecting it to largely mimic the democratic system he was accustomed to in Vienna, he would have been bitterly disappointed. The Yugoslav parliamentary system was far from stable prior to the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution in 1921. This period featured a number of collapsed governments and key cabinet resignations, including Korošec himself, as the state's structure was fought over in the constituent assembly. The state's successive governments became increasingly short-lived as the post-Vidovdan era unfolded, culminating in five separate governments in 1924 alone. Parliamentary life stabilised somewhat over the next two years, until the Serb Radical Vukićević's premiership was brought to an abrupt end by the Skupština assassinations. Korošec's own premiership which followed was characterised by a struggle to pick up the pieces.

Korošec's 1920s Political Career: an Overview

Korošec had entered into the SHS Kingdom as deputy prime minister to the Serb Radical Protić.¹¹⁷ He served as Minister for Food and Nutrition under Protić's first government from the state's creation, before being appointed Minister for Transport under his second government in April 1920. He resigned from this post at the end of the year, in an expression of his discontent with the centralist direction in which discussions over the state's constitution were heading.¹¹⁸ He then led

¹¹⁷ TNA, FO 536/1, 'An Interview with Dr Korošec,' *The Epoha*, 1 February 1919. This interview was translated by the Belgrade Embassy.

¹¹⁸ 'Izstop SLS iz deželne vlade,' *Slovenec*, 14 December 1920, p.1

his SLS in walking out of the Skupština over the Vidovdan Constitution's centralist nature on 14 June 1921.¹¹⁹

It would be three years before Korošec would enter government again. Instead, he devoted this period of his Yugoslav political career to advocating a federalist-style restructuring of the kingdom to allow for Slovene administrative autonomy. In spring 1923, he was a founding member of an anti-centralism Opposition Bloc within the Skupština. This consisted of the SLS, HRSS and JMO, and was expanded to include Davidović's Yugoslav Democrats after Pribičević's faction of the party broke away to form the Independent Democrats in March 1924.¹²⁰ Radić later abandoned the Opposition Bloc in November 1924 in order to enter into government with the Serb Radicals and Independent Democrats, a move which Korošec fiercely condemned. In summer 1924, the Opposition Bloc formed a short-lived government under Davidović's leadership, with the absence of only Radić's HRSS. Korošec served as Minister for Education within this government.¹²¹ The Opposition Bloc parties came to office determined to implement reform, frustrated by the ministerial corruption and financial mismanagement which had plagued the Serb Radical-dominated governments in power since the adoption of the constitution. However, the Davidović administration lasted only three months before it collapsed and was replaced by a highly centralist Pašić-Pribičević coalition.¹²² As a result, it had extremely limited opportunity to bring about lasting reform in terms of both the kingdom's dysfunctional political system and its centralist, Serb-minded state structure.

The collapse of Davidović's government in October 1924 marked the start of a period of successive, short-lived Serb Radical governments. The composition of the Skupština in this period meant that even the Serb Radical Party, the largest party in terms of deputy representation, was not sizable enough to govern without the support of at least one other party through a coalition. Between October 1924 and February 1927 the Yugoslav government consisted of some form of Serb Radical coalition with one or both of Pribičević's Independent Democrats and Radić's HRSS. Due to frequent disagreements and a lack of willingness to compromise between these parties, none of the Serb Radicals' coalition governments in this period endured more than a year.

¹¹⁹ Rahten, 'Korošec and the Croat Question,' p.21

¹²⁰ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.40

¹²¹ J. Gašparič, *Izza parlamenta: Zakulisje jugoslovanske skupščine, 1919-1941* (Ljubljana: Modrijan založba, 2015), p.37

¹²² Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.251

Korošec's second prolonged period within the anti-centralist Skupština opposition bloc concluded in February 1927, when he reached an agreement with the then-Serb Radical Prime Minister Uzunović. At the time, Uzunović's coalition government with Radić's HRSS was on the brink of collapse, as a result of both parties making multiple corruption allegations against the other, including election fraud in the January municipal elections.¹²³ Korošec agreed with Uzunović that his SLS would formally support the Serb Radicals in the Skupština, in exchange for concessions towards financial autonomy for the Slovene regions. He then entered into a formal, quadruple coalition government with the Serb Radicals and the SLS's Opposition Bloc partners, Davidović's Yugoslav Democrats and Spaho's JMO, following the September 1927 general elections. In exchange for SLS participation in this coalition, he negotiated further concessions towards Slovene administrative autonomy on a regional level with the new Serb Radical Prime Minister Vukičević.¹²⁴ This will be explored in depth in later chapters. This period of Korošec's cooperation with and within Serb Radical governments from February 1927 until Vukičević's resignation in June 1928 represented both a significant development towards his Slovene national ambitions and a triumph for his political tactics. He played a political long game, earning the trust of the Serb Radical elite through diligent handling of his 1920s ministerial posts, promoting himself as committed Yugoslav statesman and fostering close ties with other significant Yugoslav parties. By the end of 1927, this strategy seemed to be working well for Korošec. He had succeeded not only in securing these modest Slovene concessions in line with his national agenda, but also in establishing himself as a key Yugoslav politician who could be relied upon to bring stability to an otherwise precarious cabinet.

Korošec's premiership was heavily shaped by the circumstances under which he came to office—arguably more so than any other prime minister of the interwar period. The June 1928 Skupština assassinations and their chaotic aftermath presented him with a significant challenge. On 28 June, the Montenegrin Serb deputy Punisa Račić of the Serb Radical Party responded to a bitter dispute with Radić's HRSS during a Skupština session by drawing a revolver.¹²⁵ He opened fire on Radić and a number of his fellow HRSS deputies. Two were killed instantly and three were wounded, including Stjepan Radić himself, who later died of his injuries. The incident caused political chaos within the kingdom. Despite Vukičević's efforts to write off Račić as a lone wolf attacker unrepresentative of Serb Radical Party mentality, the HRSS concluded that the government parties could no longer be

¹²³ Biondich, *The Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilisation*, p.224

¹²⁴ Gašparič, *Izza Parlamenta*, p.37

¹²⁵ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.58

trusted.¹²⁶ Vukičević resigned on 4 July, and the HRSS spent the next month demanding the Skupština be dissolved, new elections be held and the state constitution be revised. It claimed that the kingdom's centralist nature was responsible for the hostilities between HRSS and Serb Radical deputies which had resulted in the attack.¹²⁷

In this chaotic political context, Korošec was given the mandate to form a government by King Aleksandar, and successfully brought together his own quadruple coalition government as a result of his having spent the first decade of Yugoslav parliamentary life fostering close working relationships with other political parties of various outlooks and orientations. He had correctly predicted that such connections would put him in the best possible position to form a government at any given moment within the kingdom's Skupština composition, in which no party ever won an all-out majority.¹²⁸ In this way, Korošec's premiership can be viewed as the ultimate test of his interwar political strategy. This final period of 1920s Yugoslav parliamentary life would prove him to be a firm believer in both a Yugoslav state and the tactics of forming close links with other parties and working within the political system to advocate reform, which he had mastered during his former Viennese political career. His success in this endeavour, however, was not dependent solely on his own tactics. Crucially, it also relied upon the cooperation of his coalition partners and the wider Skupština's willingness to engage in both parliamentary life and Yugoslav state-building. These factors would bring about his government's downfall.

¹²⁶ 'Stanko Majcen on the assassination of Croatian ambassadors in the Skupština, 1928,' *Jugoslavija 1918-34: Zbirka dokumenta*, ed. Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević (Belgrade: Izdavačka radna organizacija rad, 1985) p.259

¹²⁷ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.59

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3- Literature Review

Writing in the aftermath of Slovene independence in 1991, the Slovene historian Janko Prunk declared the writing of a political biography of Korošec in the period of the SHS Kingdom to be 'one of the urgent tasks of Slovene historiography.'¹²⁹ This was on account of the central role he played within Yugoslav politics in this era. Almost thirty years later, however, this historiographical void remains. The current lack of a focused study of Korošec's 1920s Yugoslav political career can be explained at least in part by the numerous difficulties in researching this period of his life. He left behind no memoirs, and the SLS's own records have been lost to history.¹³⁰ Few complete records have survived of his speeches from this era of his political career. He served as co-editor for a number of SLS-orientated Slovene language newspapers during the interwar period, including *Slovenec*. However, these newspapers rarely credit their articles to specific authors. As Ivan Štuhec has emphasised in his work on Korošec's political outlook, this lack of sources makes it difficult to piece together a thorough sense of his character.¹³¹ Surviving Yugoslav ministerial records do little to bridge this gap. This seems to be largely a consequence of the rapid turnover of governments experienced in the SHS Kingdom. Yugoslav politicians such as Korošec had very limited time in which to implement policies and establish any degree of continuity and long-term planning before the government of which they were a part collapsed. Other possible explanations accepted amongst Slovene historians include the destruction of records during the Second World War and the subsequent communist period, as well as inadequate record-keeping. This heightens the importance of Korošec's articles for the Slovene Catholic conservative journal *Socialna Misel*, as well as the SLS-controlled Slovene press more broadly. Korošec's 1920s political outlook can be reconstructed through these.

Korošec, his SLS, and indeed the Slovene element of the SHS Kingdom, have been largely neglected within general histories of Interwar Yugoslavia. No studies currently exist in English focused specifically on the Slovene experience throughout the 1920s. General Yugoslav histories of the period typically focus on the Serbs and Croats, with little to no mention of the Slovenes. Dejan Djokić, Ivo Banac, Vesna Drapac, Andrew Baruch Wachtel, Alex Dragnich and Christian Axboe Nielsen

¹²⁹ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji' in *Življenje in delo Antona Korošca*, ed. Zanko Čepič (Ljubljana: Biografija BORI, 1991) p.35

¹³⁰ Slovene historians such as Andrej Rahten speculate that SLS official documentation may have been destroyed at some point during either WWII, or the period of the Communist Yugoslavia, under which the party was banned and its leaders were forced into exile.

¹³¹ Štuhec, 'Odgovor dr Antona Korošca na socialna okrožnice na podlagi nekaterih njegovih spisov,' p.120

have all written key monographs on the problems and failings of the First Yugoslavia. Djokić's work in particular is highly political. He presents the kingdom's problems as primarily a result of 'competing Serb and Croat ideologies' originating prior to the new state's creation, which he maintains prevented the establishment of a stable political system and state structure.¹³² He builds on Banac's argument in his 1984 work *The National Question in Yugoslavia* that interwar Yugoslav unity was constantly undermined by conflicts between its Croat and Serb political elements. This, Banac claims, 'laid the foundations for the country's instability.'¹³³

Similarly, Djokić's work *Pašić and Trumbić* presents the kingdom's initial years as predominantly shaped by Serb and Croat politicians. He emphasises the new state's founding peoples as being the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, while simultaneously neglecting this Slovene element and Korošec entirely.¹³⁴ Nielsen portrays the kingdom's collapse in 1941 as a consequence of its failure to establish a sense of all-encompassing Yugoslav identity, while also highlighting the lack of political unity and cooperation between Serbs and Croats.¹³⁵ He devotes little attention to the Slovenes within this context. He does, however, include Korošec's representation of both the Slovene and the Yugoslav populations more broadly within his argument, to a greater extent than other histories of the kingdom. Indeed, he argues that Korošec's pursuit of high policy in Belgrade would become 'one of the main tactical weapons' within Yugoslav politics of the period.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, Dragnich's study focuses upon the role of Pašić and his Serb Radicals in shaping the 1920s Yugoslav political scene, although he does acknowledge Korošec's crucial role in bringing the state into being.¹³⁷ He highlights tensions between Pašić's Serb Radicals and Trumbić's Yugoslav Committee in the years immediately prior to the kingdom's creation and following its creation in December 1918. He argues that, entering into the kingdom, Pašić sought to maintain a separate 'Serb' identity. He opposed federalism on the basis that it would leave the Serb population 'scattered' across regional boundaries.¹³⁸ He therefore favoured centralism instead. As Dragnich emphasises, this centralism versus federalism debate would become the root cause of much of the new state's failure to establish a stable government during the 1920s.

¹³² D. Djokic, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (London: C Hurst & Co., 2007), p.2

¹³³ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.6

¹³⁴ D. Djokic, *Pašić and Trumbić* (London: Haus Publishing Ltd, 2010)

¹³⁵ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.36

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and Yugoslavia*, p.101

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.133

Meanwhile, Vesna Drapac has criticised the majority of 'general histories' of the first Yugoslavia for addressing 'key events, movements and personalities' but failing to examine these within the broader context of the populations it encompassed.¹³⁹ She argues that the history of Yugoslavia is 'inherently transnational' and cannot be understood without consideration of this fact. Her work addresses the non-Serb and Croat elements of the kingdom to a greater extent than most studies. She acknowledges that its creation was not a product of 'coherent dialogue' between the Serb government and Korošec's National Council. Nor was it the result of 'synthetic Yugoslav culture or a shared Yugoslav identity.'¹⁴⁰ On this basis, she deems compromise as the most effective tactic within interwar Yugoslav politics. She also emphasises the importance of accepting the state framework and working within it for its politicians, 'with the view that the situation could be changed for the better, as could the views of their centralist adversaries.'¹⁴¹ Although she is not directly highlighting Korošec here, this was essentially his 1920s strategy.

Bigelow has covered the centralism versus federalism issue, describing the process of deciding on a state structure in the initial years as a 'political nightmare.'¹⁴² He views this debate as inevitably intertwined with issues of identity. Officially, the Yugoslavs were one ethnic group with one national identity. However, historians such as Nielsen and Drapac present the kingdom's failure to establish any sense of shared identity amongst its population as one of the primary causes its collapse in 1941.¹⁴³ James Evans has also covered this, emphasising that in 1918, there was a tendency amongst western observers to portray the newly Yugoslav peoples as a single 'Slavic' race.¹⁴⁴ In reality, he argues, the kingdom's population was made up of various national groups with their own histories, languages, cultures and identities who brought to it different expectations and priorities.

Oto Luthar's edited volume *The Land Between* and Cathie Carmichael and James Gow's *Slovenia and the Slovenes* both cover the history of the Slovenes as a people from their origins through to the present day. They address the Slovene national movement and its aims from the Habsburg era through to the period of the SHS Kingdom, including Korošec's political representation of the Slovene population during the 1920s. However, many historians of the First Yugoslavia, such as John Lampe, leave out the Slovene element, instead presenting the Croat experience as representative of

¹³⁹ Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, p.1

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p.90

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p.340

¹⁴² Bigelow, 'Centralisation Vs Decentralisation in Interwar Yugoslavia,' p.157

¹⁴³ Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, p.1

¹⁴⁴ Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia*, p.15

the Habsburg South Slavs.¹⁴⁵ This approach is overly simplistic, and fails to facilitate a complete understanding of how the Slovenes experienced 1920s political developments and state-building. In contrast, Gow and Carmichael reason that ‘political, cultural, geographical, linguistic and economic’ factors ‘impeded earlier state formation’ for the Slovenes. Consequently, by the nineteenth century they were a predominantly ‘Catholic peasant people’ severely lacking in political experience.¹⁴⁶ This compliments Banac’s assessment of the Slovene political movement which emerged from the 1848 revolutions as a ‘long-term’ project which evolved gradually over the following decades, rather than quickly developing a clear nationalist agenda.¹⁴⁷

A small number of focused studies of the Slovene population’s situation prior to the SHS Kingdom’s creation do exist. These do not cover Korošec’s career, but nonetheless provide invaluable context for understanding his Yugoslav outlook. Carole Rogel has written extensively on the evolution of Slovene politics prior to 1914,¹⁴⁸ while Pavlina Bobič has covered the Slovenes, Catholicism, and Habsburg loyalties during the war itself.¹⁴⁹ Both present SLS politics as intrinsically linked to Slovene Catholic conviction and theological circles, although not heavily tied to the Church itself in terms of political interactions. Similarly, Pieter Judson has emphasised in his work on the politics of language frontiers in the Habsburg Empire that rural Slovene-speaking peasants would typically first encounter Slovene national sentiment through their interactions with the nationally conscious Slovene clergy.¹⁵⁰ In this way, the Slovenes’ traditional Catholic faith and their emerging sense of national identity were intertwined. However, as Rogel and Bobič illustrate, the strength of the Slovene population’s traditional Catholic faith also influenced the SLS’s prolonged loyalty to the Habsburg Empire, and its being so slow to embrace the idea of a Yugoslav Kingdom alongside the Orthodox Serbs.

These histories of the pre-Yugoslav period typically illustrate how the perspectives of foreign observers played a key role in the South Slav movement which ultimately resulted in the creation of the SHS Kingdom. Drapac in particular emphasises the importance of foreign observers, including R.W. Seton-Watson and Henry Wickham Steed, in the development of the South Slav idea during the period approximately 1880-1914. She points to the ‘steady flow’ of articles on the topic published

¹⁴⁵ J.R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country*, p1

¹⁴⁶ Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.14

¹⁴⁷ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.113

¹⁴⁸ C. Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p.v

¹⁴⁹ Bobič, *War and Faith: The Catholic Church in Slovenia 1914-1918*, p.9

¹⁵⁰ Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, p.118

by such figures, which shaped how the politics of the region were perceived in the years prior to the war.¹⁵¹ However, foreign observers were extremely slow to embrace the idea of a South Slav state which would include the Slovenes. This was mostly for strategic reasons. In 1911, Seton-Watson concluded in *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy* that 'strategy and geography' made it impossible for the Slovene population to be included in 'any unified Southern Slav state.'¹⁵² Here, he referred to the fact that the Slovenes were scattered across a number of Austrian crownlands, rather than inhabiting a specific, recognised Slovene region. The recent Slovene-English edited volume entitled *The Slovenes in the Eyes of the Empire* has used British Foreign Office material from the years immediately following the conclusion of the war to assess how the Slovenes were perceived by the Allied Powers in 1918.¹⁵³ These Foreign Office sources demonstrate an understanding of the Slovenes as a national group which had much in common with their Croat and Serb neighbours but, crucially, possessed their own distinct language, history and culture that necessitated their being treated as a separate people.¹⁵⁴ British observers also appreciated that the right to use the Slovene language for both administration and education within Slovene-inhabited regions was the Slovene national movement's primary goal prior to 1918. They were not, however, particularly interested in advocating the Slovene population's right to national self-determination via a South Slav entity.

A limited number of biographies of Korošec exist in the Slovene language. Most notable amongst these are Feliks Bister's *Anton Korošec: državnozborni poslanec na Dunaju življenje in delo 1872-1918*¹⁵⁵ and Miroslav Stana-Miros's *Ožitev dr Antona Korošca*.¹⁵⁶ Bister's work offers an extremely thorough examination of Korošec's Habsburg political career. It begins with his family background and early education in rural Styria, and then examines his exposure to Slovene nationalist politics through his theological training in Maribor and his first political experiences as an SLS deputy within the Vienna Reichsrat, concluding with the creation of the SHS Kingdom in 1918. Although Bister does not cover the interwar period, this background helps to contextualise Korošec's Habsburg, and later Yugoslav, political stance. He emphasises how Korošec was raised on the dualist border

¹⁵¹ Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, p.31

¹⁵² Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.vi

¹⁵³ *Slovinci v očeh imperija/The Slovenes in the Eyes of the Empire*, ed. Ernest Petrič, Miha Pogačnik, Janez Šumrada, Peter Vodopivec, Andrej Rahten (Ljubljana: Center za evropsko prihodnost, 2007)

¹⁵⁴ P. Salmon, 'The Foreign Office Historical Section and the Origins of the Peace Handbooks,' in *Slovinci v očeh imperija/The Slovenes in the Eyes of the Empire*, ed. Ernest Petrič, Miha Pogačnik, Janez Šumrada, Peter Vodopivec, Andrej Rahten (Ljubljana: Center za evropsko prihodnost, 2007), p281

¹⁵⁵ F.J.Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozborni poslanec na Dunaju življenje in delo 1872-1918* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1992)

¹⁵⁶ M. Stana-Miros, *Ožitev Dr Antona Korošca* (Maribor: Založba za Alternativno Teorijo, 1991)

between Austria and Hungary, in a Slovene-inhabited region dominated by Austrian Germans. He encountered the lack of access to Slovene language education typical for the region through the majority of his own higher education as a result.¹⁵⁷ This compliments Charles Jelavich's work on the state of Slovene language education within the Habsburg Empire more generally, as well as Judson's work on language frontiers.¹⁵⁸ Both Bister and Jelavich emphasise how the Slovene population of Styria constituted a 'definite minority' of approximately twenty nine percent.¹⁵⁹ Their depictions of German language domination in Korošec's home region illustrate how his educational experiences undoubtedly shaped his political outlook. He came to realise the importance of autonomy for the Slovenes, were they to secure the right to practise administration and education in their own language. Ivan Štuhec, meanwhile, has specifically addressed Korošec's relationship with Catholicism, and how he perceived the relations between the SLS and the Church during the early interwar period.¹⁶⁰ He briefly analyses Korošec's early writings on social issues during his theological training in Maribor, illustrating how he became involved in Slovene politics through this route. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter on Korošec's political thinking.

Within the existing historiography, Andrej Rahten has written most extensively on Korošec and his SLS in the interwar period. His work deals with the party's experiences of Belgrade government, as well as Korošec's personal dealings with his colleagues within the new Belgrade political context.¹⁶¹ He presents the SLS as heavily focused upon Slovene autonomy throughout this period, though equally mindful of the importance of establishing a stable, functioning democracy. Furthermore, he highlights Korošec's having been an active participator within both coalition governments and multi-party opposition blocs throughout the 1920s.¹⁶² He presents him as realistic, practical and opportunistic in his approach to Yugoslav politics. Similarly, Banac describes the SLS under Korošec's leadership as a prime example of 'compromise as a method of gaining political advantage' amongst Yugoslav parties which 'fought for the autonomy of their national and confessional groups.'¹⁶³ Prunk's work on Korošec's Yugoslav political activities builds on these assessments of his character, arguing that his interwar career highlights the problems and failings of the kingdom's political

¹⁵⁷ Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozbornski poslanec na Dunaju Življenje in delo 1872-1918* p.13

¹⁵⁸ Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms*, p.28

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Štuhec, 'Odgovor dr Antona Korošca na socialne okrožnice na podlagi nekaterih njegovih spisov,' p.119

¹⁶¹ A. Rahten, *Slovenska Ljudska Stranka v Beograjski Skupščini: Jugoslovanski klub v parlamentarnem življenju kraljevine SHS 1919-1929* (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2002)

¹⁶² Ibid, p.121

¹⁶³ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.340

system more broadly.¹⁶⁴ This further reinforces the value of analysing Korošec's political career in order to better comprehend the interwar period. Additionally, Prunk has noted the lack of sources available to historians concerning Korošec, emphasising that in the absence of party papers or memoirs, newspapers are an invaluable source. He also reiterates that Korošec was one of very few Slovenes to take on a leading role within Yugoslav politics, arguing that this was particularly impressive given his peasant origins.¹⁶⁵

Stana-Miros's short biography analyses Korošec's Yugoslav political life. It presents him as something of a national hero for the Slovene people, having successfully brought them out of the Habsburg Empire and then continued to fight for their national interests within the SHS Kingdom. He focuses heavily on the Slovene element of Korošec's political personality over the Yugoslav, and, to a certain extent, his Catholic faith and focus on economic improvement during the 1920s.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, Stana-Miros praises him as an 'indispensable protagonist, a tactician,' in terms of his approach to both Yugoslav politics and advocating on behalf of the peasantry and working classes.¹⁶⁷ The brevity of his study, however, allows for limited detail as to Korošec's policies and political relationships. Stana-Miros claims that Korošec's advocacy of Slovene autonomy paved the way teleologically for eventual Slovene independence in 1991. This is no great surprise since his study was published in 1991, the year in which Slovenia declared its independence. Indeed, this context is crucial when considering Stana-Miros's portrayal of Korošec's politics. His author's note, written at the moment of Slovene independence, touches upon Korošec's legacy. It argues that he was not only the most important personality on the Slovene interwar political scene, but also within Yugoslav politics more broadly.¹⁶⁸ He credits Korošec as personally responsible for bringing the Slovenes into political union with their South Slav neighbours through his role as president of the National Council. Building on this, he suggests that the Slovenes' disappointing national progression during the 1920s can largely account for the SLS's continued dominance in the Slovene constituencies throughout the interwar period. He claims that the Slovene electorate felt the kingdom had not delivered them the national freedoms it had promised; this was primarily a result of its centralist structure. They therefore continued to back the SLS overwhelmingly in elections, given Korošec's advocacy of administrative autonomy for the Slovene regions. This assessment of Stana-Miros's is overly simplistic. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, Korošec did secure notable

¹⁶⁴ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.35

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p.36

¹⁶⁶ Stana-Miros, *Ožitek Dr Antona Korošca*, p.114

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p.8

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p.7

concessions towards Slovene administrative autonomy during the latter half of the 1920s. The fact that the Slovene electorate continued to back the SLS in such overwhelming numbers does, however, imply that they shared Korošec's vision for the Slovenes' place within the kingdom as a financially and administratively autonomous Slovene region.

Although there may have been a tendency in 1991 to perceive Korošec in an overly positive light due to the arrival of Slovene independence, it is worth noting that Stana-Miros's description of his political personality compliments those of historians writing at less pivotal moments in Slovene national development. Gow and Carmichael also highlight Korošec's active participation within multiple Belgrade governments as a means of pushing for concessions towards Slovene autonomy.¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Banac and Drapac both present Korošec as willing to accept a limited degree of Serb domination in the initial years. Drapac maintains that the Serb-dominated nature of Yugoslav politics 'did not particularly concern the Slovenes' prior to the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution.¹⁷⁰ Korošec and his SLS were appeased by the 'noteworthy gains' made towards their Slovene national agenda during this initial period, such as the establishment of the University of Ljubljana in 1919. Similarly, Banac assesses that it was only after Vidovdan that the Slovenes became dissatisfied with this Serb Radical domination.¹⁷¹ He illustrates how Korošec responded to the constitution by attempting to bring about state structural reform not through boycotting tactics like Stjepan Radić's HRSS, but by working alongside the Serb Radicals to win concessions towards administrative autonomy for the Slovene regions. Lampe also supports this view. Despite largely neglecting the Slovene experience in his work, he does point to Korošec's argument that 'even a bad Yugoslavia is better than no Yugoslavia' for the Slovenes, given the territorial security being part of a large South Slav entity brought them.¹⁷² In this way, the existing historiography presents him as a committed parliamentarian and Yugoslav statesman.

More specifically, Korošec is recognised by historians as having devoted considerable time and energy to fostering close relations with politicians from various other key Yugoslav parties. This was a quality which set him apart from his colleagues in this period. Banac has described him as a 'man for every cabinet' on the basis of this attitude.¹⁷³ He could be relied upon to cooperate with colleagues whose political outlook opposed his own, such as the Serb Radicals, if he believed such

¹⁶⁹ Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.38

¹⁷⁰ Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, p.109

¹⁷¹ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.341

¹⁷² Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, p.3

¹⁷³ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.342

cooperation to be in the interests of state stability. Luthar's *The Land Between* presents him as highly opportunistic in his approach to Yugoslav politics. He was often fraternising with rival parties in order to secure SLS influence with which to attempt to secure concessions towards Slovene administrative autonomy.¹⁷⁴ This strategy would serve him well during his 1928 premiership. Nielsen is one of the few historians to cover Korošec's time in office within a broader historical study of the First Yugoslavia. He points to the fact that the majority of his fellow cabinet ministers were either non-Serbs or from the Serbian regions, rather than urban centres such as Belgrade.¹⁷⁵ This feature of his government set it apart from others of the 1920s. It was undeniably made possible by Korošec's prior collaborations with various parties from the moment of the kingdom's creation. Similarly, Prunk emphasises Korošec's attempts to facilitate a resolution between the warring Serb Radical and Peasant Democrat Coalition factions of the divided Skupština he inherited, as well as to convince the latter to participate in parliamentary life.¹⁷⁶ He firmly believed in working within the political system as the best means to bring about reform, and actively encouraged his Yugoslav colleagues to follow his example.

Korošec's position regarding the preservation of the Slovenes' distinct identity within their new multinational context is arguably key to understanding his Yugoslav political stance. It has, however, been touched upon only to a limited extent within the existing historiography. Prunk acknowledges the topic's importance; however, he provides little detail as to how Korošec perceived the correlation between the Slovene population's distinct identity and their evolving relationship with the SHS Kingdom.¹⁷⁷ Other historians have commented more generally on the importance of the Slovene language within Slovene national identity. Bobič highlights that the very birth of the Slovene national movement was intrinsically linked to language; its initial demand was 'for the Slovene language to be introduced in schools and the administration.'¹⁷⁸ Fink Hafner and Fox illustrate how the Slovenes were a highly literate people from the mid-nineteenth century. The fight for both a Slovene university and the ability to use the language within school settings therefore became a natural focal point within the evolving Slovene nationalist movement.¹⁷⁹ Luthar's *The Land Between* implies that something of a revolution in Slovene culture followed the founding of the

¹⁷⁴ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.387

¹⁷⁵ Nielson, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.60

¹⁷⁶ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.50

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p.35

¹⁷⁸ Bobič, *War and Faith: The Catholic Church in Slovenia 1914-1918*, p.9

¹⁷⁹ D. Fink Hafner and T. Cox, 'Into Europe? Problems and Dilemmas.' In *Into Europe? Perspectives From Britain and Slovenia*, ed. Danica Fink-Hofner and Terry Cox (Ljubljana: Znanstvena Knjižnica, Faculty of Social Sciences, 1996), p.12

University of Ljubljana within less than a year of the Slovenes' entry into the SHS Kingdom. The university's establishment was followed by that of numerous other Slovene cultural institutions throughout the 1920s such as a theatre, radio station, orchestral society and museums.¹⁸⁰ Wachtel has written on identity and culture within the First Yugoslavia, arguing within his study that Korošec viewed the continued development of the Slovene language as essential to protect the Slovene population's distinct identity.¹⁸¹

The existing historiography has also devoted little attention to Korošec's and the SLS's involvement in territorial disputes and national security as Europe's borders were withdrawn in the aftermath of the war. Initially, this omission is surprising, because so much was at stake for the Slovene population which Korošec had invested so much into bringing into union with their fellow South Slavs. It was the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 which defined the borders of the successor states which emerged from the ruins of Austria-Hungary. This included the SHS Kingdom, which faced border disputes with six out of the seven states with which it shared a border; those with Austria and Italy affected the Slovene population.¹⁸² There are a limited number of studies which focus on the Slovene territorial disputes specifically, such as Barker's *The Slovene Minority of Carinthia*¹⁸³ and Rahten's chapter on the Paris Peace Conference in *The Slovenes in the Eyes of the Empire*.¹⁸⁴ However, these provide minimal detail about Korošec's role within these disputes. They focus instead on the sequence of events which ultimately led to the loss of Slovene-inhabited territories to Italy, or on the Yugoslav delegation at the Paris Peace Conference of which Korošec and his SLS were not a part. Rahten suggests that Slovene interests were sacrificed somewhat at the Paris Peace Conference in favour of the Serbs and Croats. He acknowledges that inevitably, 'the Yugoslav delegates had different views' on the territorial demands to be presented as the Yugoslav Delegation's priorities at the conference.¹⁸⁵ This variation correlated with the delegates' own national identities.

¹⁸⁰ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.391

¹⁸¹ Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*, p.88

¹⁸² I.J. Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference: a study in frontier-making* (London: Yale University Press, 1963) p.96

¹⁸³ T.M. Barker, *The Slovene Minority of Carinthia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984)

¹⁸⁴ A. Rahten, 'The Paris Peace Conference and the Slovenes,' *Slovinci v očeh imperija/The Slovenes in the Eyes of the Empire*, ed. Ernest Petrič, Miha Pogačnik, Janez Šumrada, Peter Vodopivec, Andrej Rahten (Ljubljana: Center za evropsko prihodnost, 2007) pp285-305

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.288

Additionally, Rahten and Barker have suggested that both the Slovene political representation and the Yugoslav Delegation as a whole were complacent over the territorial disputes with Austria. They falsely assumed that the Allied Powers would side with the SHS Kingdom over Austria, a defeated power.¹⁸⁶ This interpretation is certainly consistent with the surviving source material. As will be explored in later chapters, Korošec was surprisingly silent regarding both the Paris Peace Conference and subsequent negotiations that led to the loss of Slovene territories to Italy and the Carinthian plebiscite which saw Slovene Carinthia vote to be part of Austria rather than the SHS Kingdom. This accounts for this gap in the historiography. With this in mind, later chapters of this thesis will explore possible explanations for this oversight on Korošec's part.

To conclude, there is a clear need for a detailed study of Korošec's 1920s Yugoslav political career within the existing historiography. As both indisputably the most significant Slovene politician of the interwar period and a committed Yugoslav statesman (possibly the only true Yugoslav statesman of his time), examination of Korošec's 1920s political outlook offers an invaluable insight into early Yugoslav state-building. His Yugoslav career also represents the overwhelmingly dominant Slovene perspective regarding the unfolding Yugoslav political scene and state structure. This perspective is largely absent from current histories of the period. Historians writing about the SHS Kingdom have tended to neglect Korošec and the state's Slovene element almost entirely in favour of focusing on the Serbs and Croats. This does not allow for a complete understanding of how the kingdom was experienced by its founding national groups. A number of shorter, focused studies do exist of specific aspects of Korošec's political career during the 1920s. However, these tend to focus on his representation of the Slovene population, his path to politics and his Catholic faith, rather than his dual Slovene and Yugoslav political outlooks and activities in Belgrade. Furthermore, historians of the pre-Yugoslav period identify the protection of Slovene identity and language rights as the primary aims of SLS nationalism, along with the idea that administrative autonomy for a recognised Slovene region was the best means of achieving this. In this way, the existing historiography makes clear that Korošec's stance on Yugoslav state-building and the position of the Slovenes within this new multinational entity represented a direct continuation of his SLS's Habsburg political approach. With this in mind, the following chapters will explore how Korošec's policies and tactics adapted in response to his new Yugoslav context as the turbulent instability of the 1920s Belgrade political scene unfolded.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p.294

Chapter 4- Becoming Yugoslav: Korošec's Statesmanship in the Initial State-Building Period December 1918-1921

Introduction

The period from the creation of the SHS Kingdom in December 1918 up until the passing of the Vidovdan Constitution in June 1921 was one of great uncertainty in terms of state building. As we have seen, the kingdom had been created in considerable haste in order to secure its territories, given the looming threat of irredentism from bordering states. For the Slovene population, the advancement of Italian forces towards Ljubljana posed the most significant threat to ambitions of independence via union with their Yugoslav cousins. On the basis of this threat, Korošec in his capacity as president of the SHS state had encouraged the Serbian and Yugoslav Committee delegations at the Geneva Conference to prioritise forming the new kingdom first and foremost. He reasoned that the administrative structure, constitution and other technicalities could be agreed upon at a later date. Failure to secure the kingdom's territories in time, however, would bring about an abrupt end to the Yugoslav project before it had even begun.

This haste promoted by Korošec did indeed prove essential in order to bring the Slovene population into the new SHS Kingdom. As he was meeting with Pašić and Trumbić in Geneva, the Italian army had already seized control of Trieste, and begun to occupy significant quantities of Slovene-inhabited territory in line with the Treaty of London as it advanced on Ljubljana.¹⁸⁷ He therefore viewed securing the Slovene capital and as much of the remaining Slovene-inhabited former Austrian crownlands as priority. He recognised that if these regions were first claimed by Italy, the SHS Kingdom's chances of winning them back would be slim. However, this haste meant that Korošec and his SLS, and indeed all other major political players involved, entered into union with one another as Yugoslavs without having first agreed on a state administrative structure or interim government. Furthermore, they had held no discussions as to what being 'Yugoslav' meant, and with no real sense of shared identity beyond the fundamentals of all being considered Southern Slavic peoples. To the Slovenes, Croats and Bosnians, who had previously lacked an independent state of their own, the SHS Kingdom meant safety in numbers and territorial security in the hostile environment that was post-war Europe. To the Serbs and Montenegrins, however, who had possessed their own independent states prior to the war, it represented something very different. This lack of a shared vision for Yugoslav statehood amongst the kingdom's politicians would prove a

¹⁸⁷ Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, p56

persistent issue in its initial years, culminating in the constituent assembly's bitterly divided views on the Vidovdan Constitution in 1921.

This chapter will examine Korošec's understanding of the kind of state he was bringing the Habsburg South Slavs into in December 1918, in terms of its administrative structure and parliamentary experience. It will ask how this understanding evolved throughout the initial Yugoslav period 1918-1921, and how Korošec reacted to his new Yugoslav political context as it veered towards centralism and Serb domination. Additionally, it will explore how he perceived the SLS's place within the new political system, and how he adapted himself and his policies to suit this transition from Vienna to Belgrade. It will demonstrate that Korošec had envisioned a Yugoslav state in which the Slovenes enjoyed administrative autonomy as a recognised Slovene region, while simultaneously participating fully within Belgrade parliamentary life. He therefore responded to Serb Radical ambitions for a centralist state structure by using the parliamentary system to illustrate why he believed a federalist model would best suit the interests of the non-Serb populations. Alongside this, it will illustrate how Korošec embraced his new role as a Yugoslav statesman and an advocate for Slovenes and non-Slovenes alike. It will question whether his political conduct in this initial period can be best described as 'Slovene-minded' or 'Yugoslav-minded,' as well as asking how effectively he was able to balance these overlapping, but in many ways fundamentally separate political viewpoints as the SHS Kingdom took shape. It will conclude by asking whether Korošec's preoccupation with Yugoslav state-building and the constitutional process in this period can explain why he failed to publicly champion the cause of the Carinthian Slovenes in the lead-up to the 1920 Carinthian plebiscite.

The Challenges of Yugoslav Statehood

In order to make sense of the challenges the SHS Kingdom faced in terms of establishing a functioning state framework and political system in its initial years, it is necessary to understand that the national groups which on 1 December 1918 became Yugoslavs possessed no one shared history, language or culture. This puts the mere proclamation of the kingdom as a multi-national South Slav entity at odds with the vast majority of critical theory on nations and nationalism. Banac has argued in his major work on Yugoslav national identity in the initial years that nations are typically founded upon 'certain historical premises.'¹⁸⁸ This assertion has profound implications for the success of a Yugoslav state building project, because at the time of the kingdom's creation in 1918, there was no historical precedent for a state encompassing a grouping of nations which each possessed their own

¹⁸⁸ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.23

established national identities outside of the Yugoslav context. Writing a decade prior to the violent collapse of the second, communist Yugoslavia, Banac explained the struggles the SHS Kingdom faced in its initial years as stemming partly from this lack of a historical state premise, though he did argue that the Serbs' and Croats' possession of a 'collective memory of their medieval statehood' could fulfil this criteria for the Yugoslav nation as a whole. However, this meant that entering into the initial Yugoslav period in 1918, there was no consensus amongst Serb, Croat and Slovene statesmen, historical or otherwise, as to what a unified state should look like. There was simply no precedent for Yugoslav statehood.

Banac noted an additional, and arguably more significant problem in terms of accurately defining the SHS Kingdom as a 'nation:' that 'modern national ideologies' usually emphasise 'the ability of language to provide an instant national identity.'¹⁸⁹ He suggested that in principle, national identity theory dictates that 'a single nation cannot be multilingual.'¹⁹⁰ In his work on the origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson pinpointed the development of the printing press and subsequent emergence of publications in local languages across Europe as having enabled the rise of nationalism.¹⁹¹ Similarly, Ernest Gellner's theory of nationalism perceives a literate elite as essential in order for a sense of national identity to emerge.¹⁹² In this way, Gellner too emphasises the importance of language within the development of a distinct sense of national identity. Although this does not rule out the possibility of durable national identities being built within multinational nation states, it implies that at least some shared sense of literate identity is fundamental.

In contrast, the political theorist Anthony Smith has argued that while having a common language is a significant indicator of a nation, it is not an essential attribute.¹⁹³ Interestingly, he viewed the Yugoslavs as an example of how nations could feature cultural variations, pointing to the then-communist Yugoslavia's multi-faith nature in his 1986 study. However, he saw the Yugoslav state as indeed possessing a 'unified language' of its own, citing Serbo-Croatian.¹⁹⁴ His work on nations and nationalism makes no reference to the Slovenes and their distinct language, or indeed to other former Yugoslav peoples such as the Macedonians or Albanians. This simplifying of the language

¹⁸⁹ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.22

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edition (London: Verso, 2016) p.57

¹⁹² E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) p.9

¹⁹³ A.D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) p.27

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

situation within what was Yugoslavia makes it difficult to determine to what extent Smith views the concept of a 'Yugoslav' nation as having ever truly been achievable for its citizens. What is clear, however, is that the newly created Yugoslav kingdom into which Korošec brought the Slovenes was far from the natural unification of South Slavs its founders would have the Allied powers believe. This would make the task of establishing the kingdom's administrative structure, and indeed what it would look like in broader economic, cultural and societal terms, a particularly complex one during the initial period 1918-21.

As a result, December 1918 until 1921 can be seen as a time of negotiation, transition, and arguably a battle of wills, as the various political parties which became 'Yugoslav' after 1 December 1918 fought over whether the new state would take on a federalist or centralist state structure. This can be simplified as a standoff between Korošec's SLS and Radić's HRSS, who both favoured regional autonomy for the non-Serb peoples of the kingdom via a federalist model, and parties such as Pašić's Serb Radicals and Davidović's Yugoslav Democrats, who desired a centralist framework along the lines of the old Serbian constitution. As Bigelow so aptly put it in his work on the centralism versus decentralism debate in this period, the kingdom was 'plagued with the problem of finding its identity' as a result of its multinational nature upon establishment and the lack of prior discussion as to what a unified Yugoslav state would look like administratively.¹⁹⁵ This problem was so fundamental for pro-autonomy and pro-centralism parties alike that it did not end with the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution in 1921. Rather, it continued to be fought over both directly and indirectly in the Skupština throughout the 1920s. Ultimately, both Radić himself and Korošec's fledgling 1928 government can be seen as the final casualties of this political struggle; and more poignantly, so too can Yugoslav democracy itself, given that the latter ended with the commencement of the Royal Dictatorship in January 1929.

In his brief overview of Korošec's theological and political careers published in 1991, Stana-Miros highlighted that the Slovenes were initially enthusiastic at the prospect of unification with the Serbs.¹⁹⁶ This was because the proclamation of the SHS Kingdom had marked the end of a brief period of uncertainty. Since the creation of the SHS state, Korošec and his National Council, Trumbić and his Yugoslav Committee and Pašić and the Serbian government had all struggled to strike a balance between their different ideas as to the administrative form a Yugoslav kingdom should take

¹⁹⁵ Bigelow, 'Centralisation Vs Decentralisation in Interwar Yugoslavia,' p.157

¹⁹⁶ Stana-Miros, *Ožitev Dr Antona Korošca*, p.7

at the Geneva Conference.¹⁹⁷ In this sense, therefore, the creation of any Yugoslavia at all represented stability and the territorial security the Slovenes badly needed.

Stana-Miros views the SLS elite as having quickly lost this initial enthusiasm for the new SHS Kingdom. He claims that this disillusionment was the result of two main factors: the highly centralist nature of the Vidovdan Constitution and its implications for SLS Slovene nationalist ambitions, and the loss of a third of Slovene-inhabited territories to Austria and Italy.¹⁹⁸ Similarly, Wachtel argues that the kingdom was plagued with problems from the moment of its creation, as 'utopian pre-war ideals of brotherhood and integration' clashed with the political, cultural and economic differences which in fact set the various national groups included within the new state apart from one another.¹⁹⁹ Lampe offers a more comprehensive and optimistic insight as to the impact of these factors. He argues that the territorial disputes faced by the new SHS Kingdom served as something of a unifying experience for its political leadership of various Southern Slavic backgrounds. Meanwhile, the issue of establishing a constitutional framework from scratch 'tore them apart.'²⁰⁰

It is difficult to know how Korošec perceived the creation of the SHS Kingdom, given the lack of sources which allow direct access to his thinking. But the view shared by these historians as to how the SLS elite viewed this development certainly fits with how Korošec conducted himself throughout the initial years, suggesting that their interpretation describes his experience of the initial years to a certain extent. His attitude towards and satisfaction with the kingdom evolved drastically as the political reality it represented gradually unfolded. Initially, he appeared highly optimistic. He viewed the kingdom as a means of achieving the SLS's modest national aspirations for the Slovenes specifically. Simultaneously, he was content with the territorial security and legitimacy with which the new state, as a broader, multi-ethnic entity with perceived historic right to exist, provided the Slovenes within the European context. As will be shown, Korošec's ideal outcome for the Slovenes in terms of national identity was for them to maintain their cultural and linguistic Slovene-ness. He wanted the Slovene region to take control of its own regional administration through a federalist model, while simultaneously gaining a sense of shared Yugoslav identity and solidarity with their Serb, Croat and other Southern Slav cousins. This was similar to the position of the Slovenes within the Habsburg Empire by 1914 and the SLS's goals for further development of the Slovene nation within this context; linguistic and administrative autonomy within the broader state, rather than

¹⁹⁷ Rahten, *Korošec and the Croat Question*, p.16

¹⁹⁸ Stana-Miros, *Ožitev Dr Antona Korošca*, p.7

¹⁹⁹ Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*, p.67

²⁰⁰ Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, p.101

independence from it. Korošec's policies upon entering into the SHS Kingdom in 1918 can therefore be viewed as direct continuation of his SLS's former Habsburg aims. Remaining true to the Slovenes' modest national ambitions they had held for more than half a century, he adapted his party's goals and political tactics for their new Yugoslav reality.

In December 1918, therefore, Korošec viewed the new state as the best possible option for the Slovenes in terms of achieving his party's long-term national goals. He was initially prepared to accept a degree of Serb domination, viewing this as something of a necessary compromise. Indeed, Vladko Maček, who would become leader of the HRSS after Radić's death in 1928, recalled in his memoirs a conversation with Korošec in which he had insisted that the Slovenes had nothing to lose from Yugoslav statehood, because 'only a union of all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes' could possibly hope to liberate the latter from foreign rule.²⁰¹ Korošec recognised that union with the former Serbian state had provided the Habsburg Slavs he represented with a degree of legitimacy in terms of their national aspirations. More specifically for the Slovenes, union with the Serbs provided the military might needed to defend their borders against Italian irredentism as well as potential threats from Austria and Hungary, given that the Slovenes had no army of their own.²⁰² To Korošec, the obvious benefit to the Slovenes of this Serb military support was worth enduring Serb dominance within the new state's political system and broader administrative structure, especially all the while that the Slovene region enjoyed an initial period of de-facto autonomy. It was determined that until the constituent assembly could vote on a constitution, the Slovene National Council would continue to manage local-level administrative affairs within the Slovene lands to a limited extent as the Interim National Government of Slovenia.²⁰³ This was essentially the SLS's goal for the Slovene lands under the Habsburgs, and the setup therefore suited Korošec. As the passing of a highly centralist constitution began to seem inevitable from early 1921 onwards, however, his placidity began to fade. He became more outspoken against the Serb Radicals' and the Democrats' favoured centralist state framework, publicly voicing his view that only a federalist state administrative model, allowing for regional autonomy, would allow the Kingdom to work for all of its citizens, rather than merely the Serb population. As we will see, he arguably left taking this stance until it was far too late; by the point at which he began actively opposing centralism, the passing of the Vidovdan Constitution was already inevitable.

²⁰¹ Maček, *In The Struggle For Freedom*, p.94

²⁰² *TNA*, FO 536/1, 'An Interview With Dr Korošec,' *The Epoha*, 1 February 1919

²⁰³ Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.34

Reality also began to set in for Korošec in terms of government efficiency in this period. His public statements and political conduct in 1921 in particular imply that he had realised Yugoslav parliamentary life was to be very different from the more civilised, measured conduct he had been used to in Vienna. Additionally, he took a strong stance against corruption, particularly within the government ministries, as it began to emerge during the initial years. This era provided him with a glimpse into the political reality which awaited him later in the 1920s. Instability, bitter inter-party feuds and short-lived, minority governments prone to sudden collapse were a major feature of the period 1918-1921, although these problems would intensify significantly from the mid-1920s onwards.

These initial Yugoslav experiences seemed to instil in Korošec the importance of establishing strong working relationships with other political parties: both those which shared the SLS's outlook, and larger parties whose policies were not entirely compatible with the SLS, but which represented the closest thing to a natural alliance with a larger party. This was typically Davidović's Yugoslav Democratic Party throughout the early to mid 1920s. Though the Democrats were pro-centralism compared to the SLS's pro-federalism stance, they represented a more moderate form of centralism than the Serb Radicals. Collaboration with Davidović's party therefore gave Korošec and his SLS a far greater chance of entering into government as part of a coalition than they would have had without utilising this tactic.²⁰⁴ Korošec was respected in Belgrade for his wealth of political experience. As leader of the Yugoslav Club, he was able to utilise this experience in order to form a collaboration of like-minded parties within the Belgrade Skupština. These relationships gave the SLS strength in numbers deputy-wise which it simply did not have alone. The trend of forming close relationships with as many acceptable political parties and leaders as possible can be seen in Korošec's political activities in the pre-Vidovdan and immediately post-Vidovdan period. It was a strategy which would come to serve him particularly well in 1927, when this groundwork allowed the SLS to enter into government with Vukićević in exchange for concessions towards Slovene autonomy, and then again in the case of Korošec's own coalition government in July 1928.

²⁰⁴ It is important to remember that while the SLS dominated in the Slovene constituencies throughout the 1920s, as a Slovene-specific party, it held extremely limited influence and popular appeal outside of these regions.

Finding the SLS's Place Within the New State's Political Framework

The establishment of the SHS Kingdom created an entirely new political context which Korošec and his SLS would have to master were they to continue to hold significant power in the Slovene constituencies, let alone to gain influence within Yugoslav politics more broadly. His wealth of experience representing the SLS within the Vienna Reichsrat would still have benefited him greatly within this new content. However, Belgrade politics and a South Slav state which united territories from the Habsburg Empire with two formerly independent states with disparate political and cultural traditions inevitably presented a different challenge to that of the Habsburg context he was familiar with.

During the period 1918-1921, therefore, Korošec was attempting to figure out how the SLS, as a Slovene-specific party, fitted into the new, South Slav state. This process was crucial in order to establish how he and the SLS could take on a significant role within Yugoslav politics as a Slovene-specific party. In addition, he needed to establish which of his new Yugoslav colleagues and the other parties within Belgrade politics would be the most natural allies for the SLS within the Skupština. He had entered into the kingdom with an already established network of political allies in the Yugoslav Club of which he was president.²⁰⁵ Founded in the final years of the Habsburg monarchy, this parliamentary alliance between the SLS, the Croatian People's Party and a number of minor former Habsburg parties survived well into the Yugoslav parliamentary era.²⁰⁶ He would build on this network during the initial Yugoslav period, as he attempted to establish a degree of SLS influence outside of its Slovene support base.

Indeed, Korošec established further links with the Croatian People's Party in the period 1918-1921. He prioritised this over any attempts to forge a working relationship with Radić's HRSS, despite the latter being undoubtedly the more significant party in the Croat regions. The Croatian People's Party won 13 seats in the 1920 Constituent Assembly elections in comparison to the HRSS's 50.²⁰⁷ It then slowly faded into relative insignificance throughout the 1920s as Radić's HRSS ideology became increasingly dominant in Croatia.²⁰⁸ This prioritisation was undoubtedly in part due to Korošec's existing link with the Croatian People's Party and its leader Stjepan Barić through the Yugoslav Club. Consolidating an existing connection within the new Yugoslav political context was certainly a more

²⁰⁵ Rahten, *Slovenska ljudska stranka v beograjski skupščini*, p.67

²⁰⁶ I. Ivašković, 'The Vidovdan Constitution and the Alternative Constitutional Strategies,' *Zbornik PFZ*, 68:3-4, 2018, p.538

²⁰⁷ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.123

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

efficient strategy than building a new network of like-minded colleagues from scratch. It can also be partly attributed, however, to Korošec's early realisation that Radić's fierce anti-clericalism and extreme tactics rendered SLS and HRSS politics largely incompatible, despite their similar autonomist stances.²⁰⁹ While he recognised the importance of establishing close links to other Yugoslav parties, Korošec was equally realistic. He saw greater value in forging alliances with smaller parties whose outlooks were similar to the SLS's, recognising that these were more likely to provide crucial backing in the Skupština than strained relations with larger parties whose ideology was incompatible with his own, such as Radić's HRSS.

Korošec had initially hoped to merge his SLS with Barić's Croatian People's Party, like-minded Serb and other Yugoslav politicians to form a 'Yugoslav People's Party.'²¹⁰ He first began to voice this hope in January 1919, announcing in the press that he aimed for the SLS to find 'joint, purposeful work' with socialist-orientated Croat and Serb politicians within the new Yugoslav political context. This, he hoped, would ultimately lead to the creation of a 'mighty Yugoslav People's Party' in time.²¹¹ In preparation for integration into such a Yugoslav, rather than specifically Slovene, political entity, the SLS attempted briefly to rebrand itself as the VLS, or 'All-Slovene People's Party.'²¹² This subtle name change was intended to signify Korošec's desire for the party to collaborate with other, non-Slovene politicians who shared its Christian values, and who also prioritised improving the working and economic conditions of the peasantry through expansion of the agricultural and workers unions across the Slovene regions and the rest of the kingdom. These existing unions and their impact on the peasantry was Janez Krek's legacy. Korošec outlined this peasant and worker-centric approach to Yugoslav politics in a statement published in *Domoljub* in January 1919.²¹³ Two months later, he clarified that his VLS was not seeking to form close links with larger Skupština parties such as the Democratic Party, as had been rumoured in the Serbian and Croatian press. Rather, he claimed that the SLS wanted to have 'its hands completely untied.'²¹⁴ Its priority was to establish close links with other politicians and parties which shared its core values and policies. This talk of entering into a broader Yugoslav party was not merely an effort to better the SLS's chances of entry into government, but rather a genuine attempt at collaboration in order to form an enlarged, Yugoslav party, true to the SLS's core values while also capable of election to government. This can be viewed

²⁰⁹ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.36

²¹⁰ Rahten, Korošec and the Croat Question, p.20

²¹¹ 'Jugoslovanska ljudska stranka,' *Domoljub*, 23 January 1919, p.2

²¹² 'VLS hoče imeti nevezane roke,' *Slovenec*, 4 March 1919, p.2

²¹³ 'Dr Korošec govori,' *Domoljub*, 23 January 1919, p.2

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

as Korošec acknowledging that realistically, the SLS could only hope to form part of a government coalition in its existing form.²¹⁵ Expanding to become a broader Yugoslav party to include deputies from non-Slovene backgrounds was the only way it could hope to broaden its appeal outside the Slovene constituencies, and therefore win a Skupština majority.

Ultimately, this Yugoslav People's Party Korošec envisioned was never established. This was perhaps due to his strategy of attempting to persuade like-minded non-Slovene politicians to join the SLS under its VLS rebranding, rather than establishing a new Yugoslav People's Party with which to attract new membership straight away.²¹⁶ Nonetheless, he continued to strengthen his ties with Barić and the Croatian People's Party throughout the period 1918-1921. As part of these efforts, he made a number of visits to Dalmatia, the Croatian People's Party's political heartland, in addition to regularly meeting with Barić when there were significant political developments. In April-May 1919, Korošec embarked on his first visit to Dalmatia since entering into the SHS Kingdom's first cabinet as deputy prime minister and Minister for Food and Nutrition. In Split, he attended a Croatian People's Party meeting on Barić's invitation. Here he laid out his plans for the creation of a joint, Yugoslav People's Party to merge his own SLS with like-minded Christian socialist parties such as the Croatian People's party.²¹⁷ The main goal of this Yugoslav People's Party, he declared, would be to 'help individuals, the poor and needy.'²¹⁸

Korošec was well-received in Split, and later on in Dubrovnik. This was due in part to the fact that, as leader of the Yugoslav Club and former president of the interim State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, he was regarded as a liberator throughout Dalmatia. Furthermore, according to *Slovenec's* report on the visit, the Dalmatian population generally perceived him as having 'at every opportunity advocated for this neglected country,' and as having 'new ideas' regarding 'power and order' in the new SHS Kingdom.²¹⁹ This perception of Korošec is particularly noteworthy, because it implies that despite his being the Slovene leader of a Slovene-specific party, the Dalmatian population regarded him as genuinely committed to improving the position of workers and peasants in non-Slovene regions such as Dalmatia. In this sense, in summer 1919 Korošec was regarded in Dalmatia as a truly Yugoslav-minded politician.

²¹⁵ 'VLS hoče imeti nevezane roke,' *Slovenec*, 4 March 1919, p.2

²¹⁶ Rahten, Korošec and the Croat Question, p.20

²¹⁷ 'Dr Korošec v Splitu,' *Slovenec*, 29 April 1919, p.4

²¹⁸ Rahten, Korošec and the Croat Question, p.20

²¹⁹ 'Dr Korošec v Splitu,' *Slovenec*, 3 May 1919, p.2

More crucial to Korošec's warm welcome in Dalmatia, however, were his efforts to resolve post-war supply issues in his capacity as Minister for Food and Nutrition.²²⁰ He had barely been in the role a month at the time of his visit to Dalmatia, but he was praised throughout the region for his efforts to bring about 'revision of the food office,' as well as the 'suspensions and arrests of officials of the highest ranks who have sinned against the nation' by manipulating the budget for their own financial gain.²²¹ Moreover, his return visits to Dalmatia two years later were equally well-received by the populations of Split and Dubrovnik. His visit to the region in April 1921 coincided with his having been particularly outspoken regarding the potential passing of the centralist Vidovdan Constitution through the Constituent Assembly. As a result of this stance, he was met enthusiastically by 'thousands of people' during his public appearances.²²² He received a similar reception in June 1921- immediately prior to the vote on ratification of the Vidovdan Constitution- when speaking alongside Barić at a Croatian People's Party rally in Split.²²³ His attendance built upon an already established tradition: Barić and his fellow Croatian People's Party deputies had previously attended a number of SLS meetings in Ljubljana.²²⁴ Together, Korošec and Barić explained the Yugoslav Club's decision to withdraw from the Constituent Assembly for the vote on the Vidovdan Constitution, and both were met with a wholly positive response by the Dalmatian masses.

Summer 1921 was a period in which Barić's Croatian People's Party, already dominant in the Dalmatian constituencies, was rapidly gaining further support. This was due to Davidović's Democratic Party's support for a centralist constitution. Favouring a federalist-style state framework, Dalmatian voters who had typically backed the latter party were turning to Barić's Croatian People's Party as a pro-federalism alternative. Therefore, that Korošec received such a warm welcome in Split and Dubrovnik implies that, despite his failure to merge the SLS and Croatian People's Party into one Yugoslav Party, supporters of the latter viewed the former as a like-minded group with a compatible political programme, and indeed as a natural ally. In this sense, he had nonetheless successfully established a strong political collaboration with Barić's Croatian People's Party in this initial Yugoslav period. In building upon this existing connection through the old Yugoslav Club, he was able to establish a natural ally in the Croatian People's Party. In doing so, he won popularity amongst the Dalmatian population, on the basis of representing a political party which shared Barić's Christian, socialist, pro-autonomy outlook.

²²⁰ 'Tedenske novice: Jugoslavije,' *Domoljub*, 1 May 1919, p.4

²²¹ 'Dr Korošec v Splitu,' *Slovenec*, 3 May 1919, p.2

²²² 'Zadnje sredstvo,' *Slovenec*, 12 April 1921, p.1

²²³ 'Politične novice,' *Slovenec*, 21 June 1921, p.2

²²⁴ 'Odstop dr Korošca in slovenske dež vlade,' *Domoljub*, 15 December 1920, p.1

Korošec's Ministerial Posts

December 1918-1921 constitutes the period when Korošec spent the most time consistently within the cabinet during the 1920s. He was made Minister for Food and Nutrition in April 1919 during the first premiership of the Serb Radical Stojan Protić. This position involved an additional focus upon post-war restructuring of the state, both to repair wartime damages to the existing infrastructure and to begin the process of creating one unified state infrastructure across the whole of the new kingdom.²²⁵ Korošec held the post until the collapse of Protić's first cabinet in August 1919. He then entered briefly into opposition, until he was made Minister for Railways and Transport upon the formation of Protić's second cabinet six months later.²²⁶ He was given this second ministerial post as a result of Protić and his Serb Radical party being thoroughly impressed with his conduct while in office as Minister for Food. The Serb Radicals praised him for having worked 'unselfishly and impartially,' and for being 'one of those rare ministers who are incorruptible.'²²⁷ In a new, experimental political context in which corruption and bribery within the ministries had already proven to be a severe threat to state efficiency and stability, these qualities, combined with his extensive Viennese political experience and Yugoslav mindset, made Korošec a highly desirable member of any coalition cabinet. With this in mind, his policies and conduct in his first post as Minister of Food and Nutrition will be examined here. The following discussion provides detailed snapshots of his political activities in the initial period, in order to allow for an in-depth analysis which an overview of both his ministerial posts would not. Korošec's post as Minister for Food and Nutrition has been chosen in order to explore his style of government, how he approached the issues of state-building and corruption, and, perhaps most crucially, why he so impressed the Serb Radicals that under various leaders throughout the 1920s, he was invited into their cabinets again and again.

Almost from the moment of his appointment as Minister for Food and Nutrition, Korošec made clear his intentions to implement reform and to address supply issues across the new state, which remained unresolved in the immediate aftermath of the war. He commenced this task by hosting a conference in early April 1919 to discuss the dire state of food supplies and nutrition, vowing to

²²⁵ Stana-Miros, *Ožitev Dr Antona Korošca*, p.46

²²⁶ M. Ratej, 'Korošec vihti bič nad železničarji,' *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 45:1, 2010, p.27

²²⁷ 'Laž se drži laži,' *Domoljub*, 4 December 1919, p.2

address these issues during his time in office.²²⁸ By the end of the month, he was already making progress in this endeavour. He announced plans to introduce slight restrictions to the freedom of trade concerning food produce across the kingdom.²²⁹ This, Korošec said, was as a result of his conclusion that permitting free trade 'did not bring about any improvement in nutrition.'²³⁰ On the contrary, free trade was allowing for corruption, with low-quality produce being sold at a premium. On the basis of this, he announced new legislation, which would permit only registered merchants to buy food to sell on. This initial measure brought about rapid improvements. Less than a month later, Korošec's Ministry of Food was able to source legitimate, high-quality flour supplies for Dalmatia, Bosnia and Montenegro. These regions of the kingdom were in particularly dire need of emergency food supplies as a consequence of wartime destruction.²³¹ By mid-June, reports from these regions stated that the situation was much improved, and this swift action on Korošec's part made a positive impression on the Serb Radical elite.²³² They viewed him as having taken to the post with due diligence and consideration, proving himself to be a capable and trustworthy candidate for ministerial positions.

It is noteworthy that Korošec was able to ensure these emergency supplies were quickly and efficiently distributed to the localities most in need of aid through utilising the temporary, interim provincial governments.²³³ This same system would be lost to the centralism imposed by the Vidovdan Constitution after 1921, despite his efforts to ensure the continuation of a degree of provincial administrative autonomy beyond the initial state-building period. The fact that he had made such effective use of the provincial governments during this initial pre-constitution period does, however, add significant weight to Korošec's argument that the imposition of centralism would prevent the kingdom from working in the interests of all the national groups included within it. As Minister for Food and Nutrition, he had experienced first-hand the efficiency of resolving issues affecting specific regions through provincial rather than central government. Moreover, he had won the approval of the Serb Radicals, staunch advocates of centralism, for his handling of food shortages through the provincial governments. This would have made proposals during the period of Protić's second government to scrap the interim provincial government system in favour of a

²²⁸ 'Za prehrano,' *Slovenec*, 8 April 1919, p.5

²²⁹ 'Gospodarska obvestila,' *Domoljub*, 24 April 1919, p.5

²³⁰ 'Dr Korošec dobro dela,' *Domoljub*, 15 May 1919, p.4

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² 'Tedenske novice: Dr Korošec,' *Domoljub*, 5 June 1919, p.6

²³³ *Ibid.*

centralist state structure all the more nonsensical to him, consolidating his federalist position that he would go on to maintain throughout the 1920s and beyond.

In addition to these measures to ensure the quality of food supplies, Korošec took steps to ensure that Yugoslav produce was distributed to the regions of the Kingdom facing shortages as a priority, rather than allowing it to be exported abroad by farmers and merchants for a greater profit. He had taken on the Minister for Food post particularly mindful of the supply issues affecting the south-western regions of the new state. Upon discovering that landowners in Slavonia and the Banat region of Serbia were producing such a surplus of grain that they were selling to suppliers across the borders in Romania and Hungary for a premium, he ordered for surplus grain in these regions to be requisitioned. It could then be distributed to those regions of Dalmatia, Bosnia and Montenegro most adversely affected by food shortages.²³⁴ He acknowledged in his announcement of this plan to the Skupština that to requisition grain from rich landowners in Slavonia and the Banat was by no means an ideal solution. He argued, however, that to do so was in the best interests of the Yugoslav state as a whole, given the severity of food shortages faced in the affected regions.²³⁵

Korošec's plan was initially met with opposition from local farmers and landowners. It was justified, however, by the Ministry of Food on the grounds that it would be immoral to stand by and allow the peasantry in Dalmatia, Bosnia and Montenegro to starve whilst landowners in other regions of the kingdom were making a profit by exporting the very supplies the former provinces desperately needed. Korošec's success in addressing the food supply issue up to this point seemed to work in his favour here. At a Yugoslav Agricultural Union meeting in mid-June 1919, representatives of unions across the kingdom rather predictably expressed concern at his requisition plans.²³⁶ Aside from this, however, most of the Agricultural Union representatives expressed satisfaction with his conduct as Minister for Food thus far; they were optimistic that he would resolve food supply issues completely. This optimism was on the basis of his success up to that point in ensuring that 'impoverished parts of our country are provided for,' in addition to the Slovene-occupied regions he and the SLS represented.

The Serb Radical party elite shared this positive view of Korošec's conduct as Minister for Food. Already by the time he announced his plans to requisition surplus grain in the Banat and Slavonian

²³⁴ 'Rekvizicije,' *Domoljub*, 12 June 1919, p.2

²³⁵ 'Prehrana,' *Domoljub*, 17 March 1920, p.1

²³⁶ 'Jugoslovenska kmečka zveza,' *Slovenec*, 11 June 1919, p.1

regions, reports from the capital stated that 'all Belgrade political circles' held him in the highest regard as a result of his conduct as Minister for Food and Nutrition.²³⁷ The general consensus amongst Skupština deputies from both the government parties and the opposition was that his policies had caused nutrition to 'greatly improve' in just two months. Furthermore, he had shown 'energy and diligence' in his handling of the post-war supply issues, rightfully prioritising the regions of the new SHS Kingdom most in need of aid. In this way, he proved himself to be suitably Yugoslav-minded. He was committed to improving living conditions across the new state as a whole, not merely in the Slovene region. Indeed, his requisition plan proves that he believed in prioritising providing aid to impoverished regions of the kingdom above all else. He was also happy to penalise more prosperous regions economically in the name of improving conditions in those worst affected by post-war damages and supply shortages, even though he had to have known his proposed tactics would prove unpopular with some. He was truly invested in the SHS Kingdom as a multinational state, recognising that were it to succeed, he might need to prioritise the development of non-Slovene regions in order to improve standards across the kingdom as a whole.

Korošec's requisition plans, however, were never imposed. The collapse of Protić's government in August occurred before he could put them into practice. The successive Davidović administration stalled on addressing the issue of food shortages at first, but by December 1919, it had accepted that Korošec's requisition plan was the best solution to the problem, and that should have been implemented when first proposed six months earlier.²³⁸ This can be viewed as an acknowledgement of Korošec's expertise and reasonable, responsible and Yugoslav-orientated decision-making on the part of the Davidović administration. Additionally, his conduct as Minister for Food and Nutrition was highly regarded by the Serb Radical elite retrospectively. In December 1919, four months after his departure from the Ministry, the Serb Radicals reflected on his time in office as a period in which there had been order and stability there. They noted that he had established this despite taking on the post in April, 'the worst time of the year,' not to mention in the immediate aftermath of the war.²³⁹ In March 1920, shortly after Korošec entered into Protić's second cabinet as Minister for Transport, the SLS newspaper *Domoljub* too reflected on the state of food supplies in the SHS Kingdom, a year on from Korošec's taking on the post of Minister for Food and Nutrition. It pointed to a general feeling in the Slovene regions that since his departure from that post, there had been a

²³⁷ 'Tedenske novice: Dr Korošec,' *Domoljub*, 5 June 1919, p.6

²³⁸ 'Rekvizicije,' *Domoljub*, 25 december 1919, p.7

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

gradual decline in supplies of wheat, corn and barely, which showed no signs of improving any time soon.²⁴⁰

The overall impression in the months following Korošec's departure from his first ministerial post, therefore, was that he had conducted himself with honesty and integrity. He had been pragmatic; his requisition policy was not popular, but he had acknowledged that this was the best solution to a temporary post-war problem. As a short-term measure, it was in the interests of the kingdom as a whole. In this way, Korošec proved himself to be suitably Yugoslav-minded and prepared to prioritise the regions most in need of intervention, regardless of whether or not they were Slovene. He also laid the foundations for further collaborations with the Serb Radicals. As has already been discussed, Korošec quickly realised upon the SHS Kingdom's formation that one of either the Serb Radicals or Yugoslav Democrats would most likely be in power within any given government during the 1920s, having entered into the new state as the largest parties.²⁴¹ He had therefore set out to establish solid working relationships with these parties. Impressing Protić and the Serb Radical elite with his conduct as Minister for Food set him up well for participation within future Serb Radical cabinets. Furthermore, this early groundwork arguably enabled him to later form agreements with the Uzunović and Vukičević administrations in exchange for Slovene concessions in 1927 and 1928, and to convince the Serb Radicals to join his own coalition cabinet in 1928.

Korošec on Social Issues

During the first three years, Korošec also faced the daunting task of reframing his and his SLS's political outlook to reflect the Slovenes' new pan-Slav political reality. It is important to reiterate here that at the time of the new state's formation, he had been leader of the SLS for barely a year; he had taken on the post following his predecessor Krek's death in October 1917. He had proven during his first year as SLS leader that he was both highly capable and readily adaptive. He adapted his 1917 May Declaration and its calls for a South Slav administrative unit within the Habsburg Empire as the solution to the Slovene question as Habsburg collapse became inevitable in 1918, quickly embracing Yugoslavism as the now-best option for the Slovenes within a restructured post-war Europe.²⁴² He entered into the SHS Kingdom as one of its most experienced politicians. However, he did so relatively new to the role of party leader. He had also gained his wealth of political experience within a vastly different context to that of the Belgrade Skupština. The initial

²⁴⁰ 'Prehrana,' *Domoljub*, 17 March 1920, p.1

²⁴¹ Rahten, Korošec and the Croat Question, p.19

²⁴² Cornwall, 'The Experience of Yugoslav Agitation in Austria-Hungary, 1917-18,' p.658

SHS years was therefore something of a moment of truth for him, in which he needed to prove his capabilities as party leader.

The initial Yugoslav period presented Korošec's first true opportunity to lay out his own vision for the Slovenes moving forward, and to establish how both the SLS and the Slovene population as a whole would fit into their new Yugoslav reality. His own vision for the Slovenes' place within the kingdom as conveyed through the Slovene press in these years suggests that he viewed 'Slovene' and 'Yugoslav' as being separate, but intrinsically linked. He focused largely on the Slovenes' coming of age as a nation now that they were free of Habsburg rule, laying out his vision for a prosperous, administratively autonomous Slovene enclave within a broader, fully functioning multi-Slav entity. The problems associated with constructing from scratch the latter, however, meant that his attention constantly reverted back to Yugoslav state-building more broadly.

Korošec's primary concern in terms of ensuring Slovene national progression in the initial Yugoslav years was undeniably the process of drafting a state constitution. This was due to his own adamant belief that regional autonomy via a federalist administrative model was the only arrangement that would suit the Slovenes with their distinct language and culture; he was not willing to sit back and allow Pašić's Serb Radicals to impose centralism in direct contradiction with SLS policies.²⁴³

Korošec's response to the Vidovdan Constitution and his efforts to promote regional autonomy for the Slovenes and other non-Serb national groups via a federalist state framework will be examined separately in this chapter. Aside from the constitution issue, however, his main priorities in terms of the Slovenes' national progression within their new Yugoslav context can be broadly divided into two categories: workers' rights and education.

Almost from the moment of the kingdom's creation, Korošec established himself as an advocate of the workers. In January 1919, just one month into the new state's existence, he issued a statement outlining the issues his SLS would prioritise moving forward. In this, he promised that both the workers and the peasantry would be given special attention, in order to improve living and working conditions of these populations.²⁴⁴ He highlighted the fact that the SLS possessed its own regional agricultural and cooperative unions, signposting these subsections of the Slovene population to these as vehicles through which they could not only voice their grievances, but also expect to see real, practical change. Furthermore, he laid out his belief that 'the care of the peasantry' should be

²⁴³ Rahten, *Slovenska ljudska stranka v beograjski skupščini*, p.68

²⁴⁴ 'Dr Korošec govori,' *Domoljub*, 23 January 1919, p.2

prioritised within the new kingdom were it to succeed. He pledged that the SLS would 'take the lead' on advocating for the peasantry, setting an example for all other Yugoslav parties.

This statement did not detail specific policies Korošec intended to push in order to bring about such improvements in the living and working conditions of the workers and peasantry. However, his campaign within the Ministry for Food and Nutrition to improve produce standards and distribution issues across the kingdom surely demonstrated his dedication to this cause, and he seemed to continue actively identifying peasant and worker issues throughout the initial period. In a later statement, he condemned the heavy tax burden that post-war reconstruction was placing on the Slovene peasants and workers, who were paying higher rates than their counterparts in poorer regions of the kingdom such as Bosnia, Vojvodina and Southern Serbia.²⁴⁵ He promised that his SLS were working with the Skupština to demand that 'taxes be equal everywhere' in the state, because it believed that 'we are all brothers... completely equal, no one should... have more duties and rights.' True to his word, Korošec would continue to push for a tax decrease for the working classes and peasantry throughout the decade. He finally secured the abolition of personal income tax for these groups following negotiations with the Serb Radicals in 1927. In this way, he proved himself to be committed to advocating on behalf of the peasants and workers who made up the SLS's traditional support base, retaining the SLS's pre-Yugoslav outlook and values.

Education was another social issue which Korošec seemed eager to prioritise from the start. This, like his attention to workers' rights, can be seen as a continuation of the SLS's Habsburg policies. The right to use the Slovene language for education and administration, as well as the establishment of a Slovene university, had been key to SLS manifestos during the Habsburg period. The mere creation of the SHS Kingdom had in theory resolved the language issue within education, because it removed the issue of German imposition in Slovene-inhabited regions. With the use of the Slovene language for education in Slovene schools secured, Korošec turned his attention instead to educational reform, not just in the Slovene regions, but across the kingdom as a whole. In March 1919, he gave an interview to the Serbian newspaper *Epoch* in his role of deputy prime minister, outlining his new campaign for the regulation and 'thorough reform' of education across the state.²⁴⁶ He declared that 'new generations should no longer know illiterates,' and called for a drive to enrol children in rural settings into compulsory education. As we have seen, illiteracy was considerably less of an issue in the Slovene lands as it was in the other regions of the SHS Kingdom.

²⁴⁵ 'Dr Korošec o volitvah,' *Domoljub*, 6 October 1920, p.1

²⁴⁶ 'Država SHS: Dr Korošec o ureditvi šolstve,' *Slovenec*, 27 March 1919, p.2

Slovene illiteracy rates were as low as nine percent at the time of the state's creation, while in Southern Serbia and Bosnia and Hercegovina, it was as high as eighty percent.²⁴⁷ In his pledge to eradicate illiteracy, therefore, Korošec was almost certainly referring to the broader kingdom, proving himself once again to be fully invested in the Yugoslav experiment. He called for the establishment of 'the greatest possible number of teacher training colleges and vocational schools' in order to improve the standard of education offered to students, arguing that the best way to achieve this was to nationalise the school system. Furthermore, he argued that 'French and English must be introduced' and prioritised in schools and the university 'so that we can lean on the west culturally and economically.' He was therefore linking educational reform to the kind of future Yugoslav state he envisioned, laying the foundations through language education for a western-orientated society.

As the adoption of a centralist constitution began to seem inevitable, Korošec came to associate the newly established University of Ljubljana with the protection and preservation of the Slovenes' distinct language and culture within the multinational kingdom. By January 1921, he had become concerned that Serb and Croat politicians within the Serb Radical and Yugoslav Democratic parties were 'sorry that a Slovene University was established at all,' and wanted to divert its funding to reform the faculties of law and medicine at the universities of Belgrade and Zagreb respectively instead.²⁴⁸ In light of these concerns, he wrote to the Ministry of Education, protesting that the severe delay in allowing the university to open all of its faculties in full despite the university having secured a loan to fund this was a major blow to Slovene cultural development, and should be the concern of all Slovenes.²⁴⁹ He argued that the university's new academic staff were ready to start work, and committed to working 'for the mental prosperity of the nation' as a whole. Ultimately, the university was permitted by Belgrade to open fully later in the year, resolving this particular issue. But as later chapters will demonstrate, this was not the last time the University of Ljubljana's funding would be threatened by the Serb centralists during the 1920s. Korošec would be forced to return to the issue again in 1927.

In reiterating his commitment to workers' issues and education during the initial period, Korošec established a degree of continuity between his SLS's Habsburg and Yugoslav political priorities. Furthermore, he linked these priorities back to the Slovene autonomy he was determined to

²⁴⁷ TNA, FO 373/1/16 'The Slovenes: A Handbook, Prepared under the Direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office, No.14a, London, 1919, p.35

²⁴⁸ 'Demokrati in ljubljanska univerza,' *Slovenec*, 8 January 1921, p.1

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

guarantee through a federalist-style constitution. Commenting on Yugoslav domestic policy in December 1919, Korošec claimed that decentralist policy was best suited to ensuring improved living and working standards in the Slovene regions. He argued that it 'would not harm public unity' to allow 'broad self-government in the municipalities, counties and provinces.'²⁵⁰ This was on the basis that even with a strong, efficient, centralised state administration, 'there will still be a thousand cases that will be resolved more quickly and better' if handled on a 'municipality, district or province' level, given the differing 'local, economic, social and cultural conditions' in the Slovene regions compared to Belgrade. Similarly, the SLS 1920 election manifesto argued that centralism was undermining productivity and access to essential goods for the workers and peasantry. Overly complicated Belgrade-imposed customs procedures meant severe delays in the distribution of produce, as well as unnecessary bureaucracy in terms of dealing with issues such as ensuring access to pensions for industrial workers.²⁵¹ Regional administrative autonomy, Korošec argued, would allow the SLS within a Slovene regional government to more effectively handle these issues on a local level.

Korošec's Views on State Administrative Structure

The process of drafting and passing a constitution for the new kingdom was undoubtedly the most significant political issue of the initial period. As we have seen, Korošec had brought the Habsburg Southern Slavs into the kingdom without agreeing its administrative form, and this process therefore had to take place in the aftermath of unification. The kingdom was to be presided over initially by a provisional government, which consisted of members of the former Serbian parliament, along with their nearest equivalents from the former Habsburg regions and other integrated territories in proportion to the seats they had held in their last pre-war parliaments within their respective former states and empires. This unelected interim national parliament was convened on 10 December 1918. It remained in place until Constituent Assembly elections could be held in November 1920.²⁵² The Constituent Assembly would go on to pass the Vidovdan Constitution in June 1921.

Korošec and his SLS elite opposed the centralist Vidovdan Constitution because of their views on centralism itself and the severe restrictions to provincial autonomy it imposed. Additionally, however, they found the proposed constitution unacceptable because of the nature of the interim

²⁵⁰ 'O naši notranji politiki,' *Slovenec*, 23 December 1919, p.1

²⁵¹ 'Slovenskoo ljudstvo!' *Slovenec*, 26 October 1920, p.1

²⁵² Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, p.121

administrative system it was due to replace, which effectively amounted to exactly what the SLS had advocated as the best solution to the Slovene national question since 1848.²⁵³ Following the kingdom's creation, the National Council was renamed the Interim National Government of Slovenia in the Slovene lands. Based in Ljubljana, this provincial government had authority over internal, economic and judicial affairs within these Slovene-inhabited regions. It also controlled education and agriculture.²⁵⁴ This government was constructed according to the political landscape in these regions as of the 1911 elections in the Habsburg Empire. Josip Pogačnik of the SLS served as prime minister, with six members of his cabinet of twelve being from the SLS, five from Slovene branch of the Davidović's Yugoslav Democratic Party, and one from the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party.²⁵⁵ Pogačnik's coalition government proved highly effective in contrast to the political instability unfolding within broader Yugoslav state politics even in this early period. Despite its success, however, this system of Slovene regional government was dissolved following the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution, which allowed for just one, central, Belgrade-based parliament. The Slovene-occupied regions of the SHS Kingdom were instead divided for administrative purposes into a Ljubljana oblast and a Maribor oblast, which were governed centrally from Belgrade.²⁵⁶

It is clear, therefore, that the SHS Kingdom presented the perfect political administrative reality for the Slovenes in the initial two and a half years of its existence. This made the loss of this administrative autonomy in 1921 especially frustrating for Korošec, and it also explains why he went on to make this a defining feature of SLS party policy throughout the rest of the decade. Histories of the First Yugoslavia's initial years do generally highlight the SLS's fierce opposition to the Vidovdan Constitution when it came to be voted upon by the Constituent Assembly. Korošec led the SLS in abstaining from the vote on the new state's constitution, along with Radić's HRSS, the Communist Party and a number of smaller socialist and peasant parties.

Korošec's response and criticism in the Constituent Assembly debates surrounding the form a constitution should take, however, has been almost entirely ignored by historians. He first began to openly express his concerns regarding the direction in which the debates were headed in late 1920. As early as July 1919, however, there were subtle signs of what was to come were the Serb centralists to triumph in the constitutional process. That summer, reports emerged that Crown Prince Aleksandar, his entire court staff and number of cabinet ministers such as Korošec himself,

²⁵³ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.384

²⁵⁴ Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.36

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Stana-Miros, *Ožitev Dr Antona Korošca*, p.7

Davidović, Marinković and the Serb military general Hadžić, had attended a service at a local Catholic church in Belgrade for a Roman Catholic holiday.²⁵⁷ This service, including the hymns, was conducted 'entirely in the Serbian language,' with speeches of thanks to the royal household also given in Serbian.

This might seem relatively uneventful, but in reality, the incident conveyed a great deal as to the crown prince's attitude towards the new SHS Kingdom he presided over. The Serb-speaking population of the SHS Kingdom was predominantly Orthodox, with the Slovenes and Croats making up the majority of the Catholic population. This calls into question Crown Prince Aleksandar's decision to conduct this Catholic service entirely in his own native Serbian language, rather than additionally incorporating Croatian and Slovene as the languages of the majority of his kingdom's Catholic population. The most likely explanation is that this choice was simply not thought through by the royal household, which was used to presiding over a Serb, rather than multi-ethnic entity. The underlying message of this decision to conduct a Catholic service entirely in the Serbian language, however, was that 'Serbian' had already, even at this early stage in the Yugoslav experiment, been adopted by both Crown Prince Aleksandar and the then-Serb Radical prime minister Stojan Protić as the SHS Kingdom's default language. The SHS Kingdom was a political context in which both language and religion played crucial roles in defining national identity. By conducting this service celebrating a festival important to the Croat and Slovene populations entirely in the Serbian language, therefore, Protić and the Crown Prince conveyed at best a lack of sophisticated awareness of the multinational nature of the new state beyond a basic appreciation of the Catholic religion. At worst, this move can be seen an attempt to establish 'Serbian' as 'Yugoslav,' and therefore representative of the whole state as an all-encompassing national identity.

Although a minor event, therefore, this Belgrade Catholic service can be seen as representative of the atmosphere in which discussions around drafting the new state's constitution unfolded in late 1920-June 1921. Korošec's SLS had anticipated a federal-style Yugoslav state with administrative autonomy granted to the various national groups within it, whereas the Serbs envisioned a centralist model, which was inevitably based heavily around Serb national identity and political tradition. In theory, the process of drafting the Vidovdan Constitution should therefore have represented a compromise between these two contrasting stances. In reality, however, Korošec perceived the new constitution as an imposition of Serb centralism from above. He would spend the rest of the 1920s attempting to win concessions towards Slovene autonomy in response to this.

²⁵⁷ 'Država SHS: Praznik sv RT v Belgradu,' *Slovenec*, 21 June 1919, p.3

Korošec began to voice concerns over the centralist direction in which Constituent Assembly talks appeared to be heading as early as December 1920, just one month after its election. By 8 December, reports were emerging in Ljubljana that the SLS was already growing frustrated with the Council of Ministers responsible for drafting the constitution. This was due to rumours that it would propose a centralist state structure, something which Korošec maintained would equate to the 'economic, political and cultural death of Slovenes.'²⁵⁸ This was the first time any serious suggestion of a centralist state structure for the SHS Kingdom had been made. In its coverage of the issue, *Domoljub* argued that already in the first two years of the new state's existence, the Slovene lands had suffered economically because of its legislation being controlled from Belgrade. *Domoljub* claimed that the interim Slovene provincial government had successfully intervened whenever possible in order to serve the best interests of the Slovene people. It worried, however, that the imposition of centralism would render any localised governmental structures which remained in place effectively powerless. This would leave the Slovene population at the mercy of poor financial and legislative decision-making in Belgrade. Interestingly, *Domoljub* also argued that in drafting plans to implement a centralist state structure, the 'men in the Belgrade government' were proving themselves to be 'no less ardent opponents of Slovenia than the gentlemen in Rome or Vienna.' This is noteworthy, as the SHS Kingdom had only recently lost approximately a third of the Slovene-occupied regions to Italy and Austria respectively. Through *Domoljub*, the SLS was therefore conveying a clear message: failure to ensure that the state's constitution was written to suit the interests of the Slovenes would result in further blows to the preservation of the Slovene nation.

In the months that followed, Korošec gained a reputation as a fierce advocate of regional autonomy, as opposed to the centralist state framework favoured by the Serb Radicals and Yugoslav Democrats. This was a position which rendered him 'somewhat isolated' within the then-Serb Radical prime minister Vesnić's pro-centralism cabinet.²⁵⁹ When Vesnić was forced to resign in late December, Nikola Pašić met with Korošec and expressed interest in forming a coalition with the SLS. Korošec informed him that he and the SLS would enter his government only if plans for the state constitution were altered to allow 'complete self-government of Slovenes and Croats.'²⁶⁰ When Pašić refused to consider this, Korošec warned him that 'centralism would ruin the state,' as political developments within the kingdom thus far had demonstrated that 'it is impossible to successfully rule the whole

²⁵⁸ 'Centralizem?' *Domoljub*, 8 December 1920, p.1

²⁵⁹ 'Demokratski ministri in avtonomija,' *Slovenec*, 10 December 1920, p.1

²⁶⁰ 'Ustavotvorna skupščina,' *Domoljub*, 22 December 1920, p.2

state from Belgrade alone.²⁶¹ In doing so, he made his priorities as both SLS leader and as a Yugoslav statesman clear. He was not willing to sacrifice Slovene administrative autonomy in exchange for a ministerial post, or even multiple ministerial posts for SLS deputies. This position was reinforced by a statement issued following an SLS leadership meeting on 9 December, which rejected any proposition of a centralist constitution, and ruled out any possibility of SLS deputies voting in favour of such in the Skupština.²⁶² Instead, the SLS would continue its 'fight for Slovene autonomy.' Furthermore, Korošec reiterated his position when Pašić asked him to consider his offer again in January 1921. He made it clear that the SLS would not enter any government with any of the Skupština parties until Slovene and Croat rights to regional administrative autonomy was recognised in the draft constitution. Indeed, he vowed to oppose any administration which attempted to impose centralism on the Slovenes and Croats.

Korošec's Opposition to the Vidovdan Constitution

As the Constituent Assembly debates began to head with more certainty towards a centralist constitution, Korošec became increasingly critical of this state administrative structure. But rather than aggressively condemning the proposed centralist constitution in a similar manner to Stjepan Radić and his HRSS, Korošec focused upon outlining why he believed centralism was not suited to the SHS Kingdom. In mid-April 1921, the Constituent Committee finalised its highly centralist constitution proposal. The draft was met with support from the then-government parties, which included the Serb Radicals and the JMO, but with fierce opposition from the pro-federalist parties including the SLS, HRSS and the Communist Party. *Domoljub* argued that the proposal was 'not actually a constitution at all,' but an 'economic, political, social and religious slaughterhouse' for the Slovene and Croat elements of the kingdom.²⁶³ It predicted that if the proposed constitution was adopted, it would result in a 'fierce struggle between the Serb Radicals and advocates of regional autonomy, led by Korošec and the SLS.

In response to this proposed constitution, Korošec delivered a speech to the Constituent Assembly on 15 April. He argued that the proposal 'paid little attention to economic and social needs' outside of the Serb regions. Furthermore, it opened the state's economy to exploitation. He expressed his fears that the peasant masses would quickly fall into poverty were such a constitution to be

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² 'Boj za samoupravo Slovenije,' *Domoljub*, 15 December 1920, p.1

²⁶³ 'Boj SLS proti centralizmu,' *Domoljub*, 19 April 1921, p.2

implemented. Additionally, he objected to plans to divide the larger ethnic provinces of which the kingdom was comprised into smaller administrative units governed entirely from Belgrade. He argued that to do so would be economically harmful to these regions, and that the Slovene lands in particular should remain as one administrative region, due to the Slovene population's small size.²⁶⁴ He believed that to divide the Slovene lands into a Ljubljana and a Maribor oblast would be to the detriment of Slovene interests. On the contrary, he argued that the Yugoslav population's differing cultures, histories and socio-economic realities necessitated a regional approach. A one-size-fits-all approach based on the Serb region's needs simply would not work for the Slovenes, or indeed for the Croats or other non-Serb peoples within the kingdom. Korošec argued that the Slovene region needed its own provincial assembly, which could adapt Yugoslav legislation to make it 'suitable for Slovene peasants, workers and craftsmen.'²⁶⁵ He expressed his concerns that such adaptation would not be possible under the terms of the proposed constitution, claiming that 'the Serbian tribe denies us self-government' because Pašić was afraid that to allow the Slovenes and other national groups any concessions towards autonomy at all would inspire anti-state sentiment. The irony of this Serb Radical stance, according to Korošec, was that 'a constitution that satisfies the nation will in itself shatter anti-state sentiment.'

These words of caution are particularly poignant when considering the circumstances of the Skupština assassination in 1928. Korošec's warning was ignored, however, by those who advocated centralism within the Constituent Assembly, and Pašić's government pushed ahead with its plans to put what would become known as the Vidovdan Constitution to a vote. Ultimately, it was ratified on 28 June 1921 by a mere 13 votes. 163 of the 419 Constituent Assembly members abstained from voting in protest against the new constitution's imposition of centralism from Belgrade, and its restriction of provincial authority.²⁶⁶ The SLS were among those who abstained. Korošec had led his party in walking out of the Constituent Assembly a month earlier, when a vote on 12 May had made clear that the centralist bloc within the assembly was just strong enough to push the constitution through with only minor amendments.²⁶⁷ He came to the realisation that the Vidovdan Constitution would pass in its proposed form whether the SLS voted for it or not. He therefore led his party in a public boycott against it along with Barić's Croatian People's Party, Radić's HRSS and the Communist Party, having correctly concluded that this action would represent a more powerful statement of

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, p.107

²⁶⁷ TNA, FO 421/341, Sir A Young to Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 'Serb-Croat-Slovene State Annual Report 1921,' Belgrade, 6 April 1922, p.14

protest against a centralist state administrative structure. Reflecting on the Vidovdan Constitution in 1980, John Lampe has argued that the Constituent Assembly vote on its ratification is 'remembered as much for who did not vote as for who did.'²⁶⁸ In boycotting the vote, Korošec established himself firmly as an anti-centralist figure amongst the SHS Kingdom's political elite. He consolidated his position as an advocate of regional autonomy via a federalist model. This was not only on the basis of the Slovene population he represented as SLS leader, but because he believed this state administrative framework would best serve the SHS Kingdom's entire, multi-ethnic population.

Perhaps more revealing as to the nature of Korošec's conduct as a political leader, however, is how he reacted to the eventual ratification of the Vidovdan Constitution. He issued a formal statement on this in his capacity as SLS leader, in which he mourned the now inevitable loss of the Slovene interim government, which would be disbanded under strict centralism imposed by the Vidovdan Constitution.²⁶⁹ He announced that the Slovene interim government encouraged the mayors of the Slovenian municipalities to convene a 'solemn session' to mark this development, as opposed to organising 'celebrations' in their municipalities on the occasion of the Vidovdan Constitution. He declared that he and the SLS 'recognise the legitimacy of the Constitution,' having been ratified by the Constituent Assembly the previous week. However, he argued that this had occurred 'against the will of the vast majority of the Slovene people,' given that the SLS, which represented the largest Slovene party in the Constituent Assembly, had abstained. This argument of Korošec's is somewhat flawed. The Slovene Liberal and Slovene Agrarian parties, which voted in favour of the constitution, would indeed fade into relative electoral insignificance from the 1923 elections onwards while the SLS only grew in strength in comparison. This fact alone implies that the vast majority of the Slovene electorate desired Slovene regional administrative autonomy, as advocated by the SLS. In 1921, however, the SLS held 15 Slovene seats in the Constituent Assembly out of an available 40, compared to the Slovene Liberals' and the Slovene Agrarians' 13 and 12 respectively.²⁷⁰ He therefore had little evidence to support this claim at the time of making it.

Korošec concluded his statement by emphasising that he and the SLS opposed the Vidovdan Constitution specifically due to it containing articles which were 'directed against our democratic, economic, national and religious-moral principles.' He vowed the SLS would work within the system

²⁶⁸ Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, p.125

²⁶⁹ A. Korošec, 'Županom in občinskim odbornikom SLS,' *Slovenec*, 5 July 1921, p.1

²⁷⁰ Balkovec, and Šubic Kovačević, 'Die Einzelheiten und Unterschiede Zwischen den Wahlen in Slowenien und Kroatien in den Jahren 1920-1927,' p.75

to change this.²⁷¹ He reinforced this position during a speech delivered to the Skupština in November that year, outlining that the SLS 'do not want everything to be governed from a single centre' in Belgrade as imposed by the Vidovdan Constitution. Here, he expressed again his concern that centralism had already 'created general discontent in the country,' which if left unaddressed could ultimately result in 'complete collapse.'²⁷² In making this statement, Korošec was perhaps drawing on lessons learned from his Habsburg political career prior to the creation of the SHS Kingdom. As the war concluded, he had witnessed first-hand Emperor Karl's frantic attempts to hold his crumbling empire together by offering to its various national groups a federalist restructuring, under which they would be granted self-determination as autonomous units within the empire as national parties such as the SLS had spent the last decade campaigning for.²⁷³ When summoned to a private audience with the emperor to discuss this proposal, Korošec, then president of the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, famously answered 'Ihre Majestat, es ist zu spät' (your majesty, it is too late).²⁷⁴ The Habsburg Southern Slav territories would be declared part of the new SHS Kingdom just over a month later.

Korošec would have learned a valuable lesson in successful governance of multinational state entities from this experience. Ignoring demands for regional autonomy from national groups within such a population amounted to something of a ticking time-bomb; the resulting tension could erupt at any moment, destroying the state's stability in the process. In this way, his November 1921 speech on centralism can be seen as a warning to his pro-centralist colleagues: allowing government devolution to the provinces via a federalist restructuring was surely a preferable option to allowing Slovene and Croat discontent to escalate until it ultimately resulted in the kingdom's collapse. A highly experienced, observant statesman, Korošec had left the Habsburg Empire behind for the SHS Kingdom having learnt the lessons of its demise. He was a firm believer in Yugoslavism as the best option for the Slovenes, and he was therefore determined not to allow the new kingdom to suffer the same fate.

Despite his exaggerated claim concerning the extent to which the SLS could be seen as representative of the total will of the Slovene constituencies, Korošec's statement regarding the ratification of the Vidovdan Constitution represented a diplomatic, mature response to the imposition of the very state structure he viewed as so detrimental to both Slovene and broader

²⁷¹ A. Korošec, 'Županom in občinskim odbornikom SLS,' *Slovenec*, 5 July 1921, p.1

²⁷² 'Govor Dr Korošca,' *Domoljub*, 23 November 1921, p.1

²⁷³ Rahten, Korošec and the Croat Question, p15

²⁷⁴ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.377

Yugoslav interests. Furthermore, it represented a stark contrast to the response of Radić's HRSS, which went on to boycott Yugoslav parliamentary participation entirely for long periods of the 1920s.²⁷⁵ Both during the process of drafting the state constitution and in the aftermath of its ratification, Korošec maintained his view that only administrative autonomy within the SHS Kingdom could provide the Slovenes as a national group with the balance of self-determination and territorial security he believed they needed. This can be viewed as a direct continuation of the SLS's policies from the Habsburg period; he simply transferred the party's goals from one state to the next. In this way, he demonstrated an unwavering commitment to his vision for Slovene administrative autonomy, as well as continued loyalty to the modest Slovene nationalist ideology established by his mentor and predecessor Krek. This continuation of SLS Habsburg policy can also be seen in how Korošec reacted to the drafting and eventual ratification of a highly centralist constitution which removed all possibility of the devolved government model he had advocated for the Slovene-inhabited regions. He did not resort to boycotting the parliamentary system which had allowed such a centralist state structure to be imposed. Rather, he limited his criticisms of centralism and the Vidovdan Constitution to rationally explaining why he believed this was detrimental to the interests not only of the Slovene people, but the multi-ethnic citizens of the new SHS Kingdom as a whole. He would spend the next decade consistently calling for the constitution to be adapted to allow for the introduction of devolved government in the Slovene regions. Through his handling of the process of adopting a state constitution, therefore, Korošec proved himself to be both Slovene and suitably Yugoslav-minded in his political thinking. He established himself as the voice of Slovene national interests within their new Yugoslav context, but equally demonstrated an acute awareness of the delicate balance of nationalities within the new state, and the relationship between these and political stability.

Korošec's Lack of Involvement in Slovene Territorial Issues

As a final point, it is necessary to acknowledge the marked absence of Korošec's involvement in discussions of the territorial issues relating to Slovene-inhabited lands claimed by both the SHS Kingdom and foreign powers in this initial state-building period. This is somewhat surprising, particularly given his persistent support for a federalist state structure as the best solution for preserving the Slovene population's distinct identity. Territorial disputes affecting the Slovene regions did feature heavily in the SLS-controlled newspapers in the initial Yugoslav years, particularly

²⁷⁵ J. Irvine, A, *The Croat Question: Partisan Politics in the Formation of the Yugoslav Socialist State* (San Francisco, CA: Westview Press, 1993) p.41

the question of Carinthia in the build-up to the 1920 plebiscite, which ultimately saw the Slovene-dominated region vote to be part of independent Austria. Korošec, however, barely featured in this coverage. He concerned himself somewhat with preparations for the Paris Peace Conference in the immediate aftermath of the kingdom's creation. On 8 December 1918, he had sent a telegram from his new political base in Belgrade to the National Council in Ljubljana, in which he reported that the Yugoslav delegation for the conference had been appointed by Crown Prince Aleksandar and would be departing imminently to represent Slovene interests.²⁷⁶ In late January, he gave a speech in the Skupština on the Italian claims to Slovene-inhabited territories along the Adriatic coast. In this, he expressed hope that the American president Woodrow Wilson would see through greedy Italian ambitions at the Paris Peace Conference and would not allow Trieste and the rest of Slovene Istria to be lost to the SHS Kingdom.²⁷⁷ Korošec insisted that the Yugoslav delegation would not surrender these regions to Italian control, because 'Goriša and Trieste are blood from our blood... and where have you seen a nation or man selling his own blood?'

The reality, however, would prove very different. Historians generally agree that the Slovenes as a population were let down in three key respects at the conference. The first of these was that the allies felt honour-bound by the territorial promises made to Italy in the 1915 Treaty of London.²⁷⁸ The second was that the Serb-dominated delegation which was supposed to represent Slovene interests was in reality willing to sacrifice Slovene-inhabited regions to Italy in order to protect Serb interests in Albania and Macedonia, who had their own border disputes with the new SHS Kingdom.²⁷⁹ Thirdly, the Slovene members of the delegation made a poor impression; the British delegate Harold Nicholson described Bogumil Vošnjak as 'very imperialistic, no good at all' after meeting with him in Paris.²⁸⁰

Ultimately, the Yugoslav Delegation was forced to sign the Treaty of Rapallo in November 1920, which resulted in significant Slovene territorial losses equating to almost a third of the total Slovene-speaking population.²⁸¹ Korošec was uncharacteristically silent within the Slovene press on both this

²⁷⁶ 'Brzobjavka dr Korošca iz Belgrada,' *Slovenec*, 9 December 1918, p.1

²⁷⁷ 'Dr Korošec govori,' *Domoljub*, 23 January 1919, p.2

²⁷⁸ Rahten, *The Paris Peace Conference and the Slovenes*, p.287

²⁷⁹ A. Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na konferenciji mira 1919-20* (Belgrade: Zavod za izdavanja udžbenika SR Srbije, 1969) p.22

²⁸⁰ Barker, *The Slovene Minority of Carinthia* p.112

²⁸¹ D. Rupel, 'Forward' in *Slovinci v očeh imperija/The Slovenes in the Eyes of the Empire*, ed. Ernest Petrič, Miha Pogačnik, Janez Šumrada, Peter Vodopivec and Andrej Rahten (Ljubljana: Center za evropsko prihodnost, 2007) p.269

and the outcome of the Carinthian plebiscite of 10 October 1920. He also failed to launch an active campaign to convince Carinthian Slovenes to vote to be a part of the SHS Kingdom. A combination of factors may explain this. Barker has suggested in his study of the Carinthian plebiscite that there was a degree of complacency in Ljubljana. *Slovenec* and *Domoljub* launched relatively last-minute attempts to swing the vote and reported in the days immediately prior to the plebiscite that the British and French would not allow Austria to take control of the entire region in question.²⁸² This may have created a degree of complacency as the Slovene population headed to the polls- although it is thought that the vast majority of Slovenes voted in favour of Yugoslav citizenship.²⁸³ Another possible explanation is Korošec's focus on internal affairs in this period; specifically, the constituent assembly debates over the kingdom's ultimate state administrative framework. As the plebiscite approached, Korošec was busy arguing that only a federalist-style state structure could serve the interests of the entire Yugoslav population and allow for reform, development and cultural preservation based on each region's respective needs. He had no track record with foreign policy in 1920. Mindful of this, he perhaps dedicated himself fully to the debates over the new constitution which were happening simultaneously, misguidedly trusting the Yugoslav Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference to handle the Slovenes' territorial disputes.

A final factor which may have played a role is Korošec's own health. On 14 September, less than a month from the October Carinthian plebiscite and two months prior to the Treaty of Rapallo, he was admitted to a Maribor hospital with typhoid fever.²⁸⁴ He remained there for weeks. Upon his discharge, he threw himself back into SLS meetings before recovering enough to make the journey back to Belgrade, mindful of the fact that he had been forced to take a step back at a crucial moment in both Slovene and broader Yugoslav political development. His focus, however, was firmly on the constitutional debates. On 30 September, he returned to duty with a speech at a SLS trustee meeting in Styria, in which he talked at length on the constituent assembly elections approaching in November, but he failed to acknowledge the Carinthian plebiscite taking place in a mere ten days. He argued that he had brought the Slovene population out of Austria because they were dissatisfied with their inferior status as a national group.²⁸⁵ Therefore, it was only right that the Slovenes now demanded 'the strictest equality' within the new kingdom. In a way, this statement could be taken as indirectly referring to the Carinthian plebiscite as well as the constituent assembly elections. Korošec was perhaps implying that Austria had already proven itself

²⁸² Barker, *The Slovene Minority of Carinthia*, p.163

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ 'Domače novice,' *Domoljub*, 15 September 1920, p.3

²⁸⁵ 'Dr Korošec o volitvah,' *Domoljub*, 6 October 1920, p.1

to be an unviable option for the Slovenes; a future within the SHS Kingdom was the only realistic option. If this was his intention, it was far too subtle given his failure to otherwise address the upcoming plebiscite. The Slovene-inhabited regions of Carinthia claimed by Austria were lost the following month.

Conclusions

The initial Yugoslav period from December 1918-1921 undoubtedly set the scene for the state's 1920s political life, both in terms of the political instability which would unfold and Korošec's response to the new working environment in which he found himself. Rather than consolidating a state administrative structure and political framework which would best serve Slovene national interests, as he had hoped, the Vidovdan Constitution created a highly centralised administration which stripped the Slovenes of any possibility of a devolved regional government. This in turn set the stage for Korošec's 1920s political agenda; he would spend much of the next decade fighting to win back concessions towards Slovene regional autonomy.

Despite this major setback in terms of his Slovene political aims, however, this was a period in which Korošec established himself as both a capable, committed Yugoslav statesman, and a reliable, composed and level-headed advocate for the Slovene entity within the new kingdom. As he worked to find the SLS's place within the new Yugoslav political system, he prioritised forming close working relationships and alliances with other parties. He did so in recognition of the fact that his SLS was too Slovene-specific to win significant influence within the Skupština, and he would therefore need such relationships with other parties in order for the SLS to enter into government as part of a coalition. Given the absence of a larger party on the Yugoslav political scene which shared the SLS's core values, Korošec focused upon further consolidating his relationship with the Croat People's Party, in what can be viewed as a continuation of his Habsburg political conduct. Though his goal of establishing a broader Yugoslav People's Party to hold mass appeal across the whole kingdom failed, Korošec nonetheless succeeded in strengthening a working relationship which would benefit him greatly when he came to form his own coalition in July 1928. In addition, his collaborations with the Croat People's Party in this period boosted his image in Dalmatia, and also provided him with a valuable ally in opposing the Vidovdan Constitution in 1921.

Alongside his efforts to form closer ties with the Croat People's Party, Korošec used his role as Minister for Food and Nutrition to gain the trust and respect of the Serb Radical Party. This was far

from a natural alliance, but, as will be demonstrated in later chapters, as the 1920s unfolded he was able to build on his reputation amongst the Serb Radicals in order to secure modest concessions towards Slovene administrative autonomy, and ultimately to form his 1928 government in the chaotic aftermath of the Skupština assassinations. He had entered into the new kingdom acutely aware of the importance of good working relationships with larger parties; he had learned this during his pre-Yugoslav career in Vienna. In gaining the trust and respect of the Serb Radicals in this initial period, therefore, he understood that he was laying the groundwork for a future coalition government, or at least some kind of agreement to secure Slovene autonomy at a later date. Rather than simply condemning the Serb Radicals as supporters of centralism, Korošec understood that the best way to secure his modest Slovene ambitions was to work within the political system, rather than against it. Realising that establishing a functioning, stable Yugoslav state framework was just as important for Slovene prosperity as was securing a degree of regional autonomy, he began the Yugoslav period as an advocate for both Slovene and Yugoslav issues. While he remained loyal to the Slovene regions, he made clear that he would not prioritise them over non-Slovene regions of the kingdom in greater need of government funding and attention. In this sense, he was truly a Yugoslav statesman.

Although Korošec was unable to prevent the passing of the centralist constitution he opposed so adamantly, he did find another way to claw back a sense of Slovene distinctiveness within the post-Vidovdan kingdom. As preparations were made for the constitution to be adopted, the Serb Radicals and Democrats announced in the Skupština their intention to give the Serb King Petar a posthumous title: 'Petar the Great, Liberator of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.'²⁸⁶ Korošec objected to this fiercely on the behalf of the Croats and Slovenes, and the Skupština decided instead that the late king should be named 'Petar the Great Liberator.' Although this issue was relatively minor- the title had little practical significance- the symbolism of this amendment as insisted upon by Korošec is clear. The Slovenes might have been robbed of their chance of Slovene administrative autonomy for the time being, but they would not be referred to as 'liberated' by the Serbs, and therefore in their debt. Rather, under Korošec's measured and experienced leadership, the Slovenes had liberated themselves, and would spend the 1920s working towards doing so again.

²⁸⁶ 'Ime Kralja Petra,' *Domoljub*, 31 August 1921, p.5

Chapter 5- Dr Anton Korošec: Locating the Slovene Perspective Within Interwar Yugoslavia, 1922-1926

Introduction

Korošec's lack of memoirs or personal papers, in addition to the absence of surviving Slovene People's Party records from the period, renders gaining an insight into his Yugoslav political thinking an incredibly difficult task. He did, however, write a number of articles for the Slovene Christian Conservative journal *Socialna Misel* (Social Thought), which was published in Ljubljana between 1922 and 1927. This was a monthly intellectual journal, printed in the Slovene language and advertised as featuring opinion pieces covering social and cultural life in the Slovene lands. Korošec's own articles addressed a wide variety of themes. Most notably, he used his writings for *Socialna Misel* as a vehicle through which to explore his SLS's political options and policies, the relationship between the party and Catholicism, his views on the development of the Slovene language and its place within the newly created SHS Kingdom, his issues with the state's administrative structure and post-war reconstruction.

These articles encompass the immediate aftermath of the Vidovdan Constitution, as well as his time as part of the pro-federalism opposition within the Skupština before and after his time as Minister for Education within Davidović's three-month coalition government in summer 1924. He did not pen articles for the journal during his periods of participation within Davidović's administration; his SLS's support of the Serb Radicals in the Skupština in exchange for concessions towards Slovene financial autonomy in early 1927; or when his party formed a coalition government with the Radicals under Vukičević's leadership from September 1927. There are a few possible explanations for these gaps. He perhaps chose to focus on government participation in these periods. Alternatively, given that the majority of his articles for the journal outlined a vision for the Slovene people's place within the SHS Kingdom which did not align with the political outlook of the party he was in government alongside, it is plausible that he refrained from penning opinion pieces which might spark tension with his coalition partners. Regardless of the explanation for these hiatuses, however, the articles Korošec did write in this period offer an invaluable insight as to his political perspective at key moments throughout his time outside the sitting government as the 1920s unfolded.

Additionally, his writings for *Socialna Misel* provide a sense of the Slovene electorate's own understanding of their place within the new Yugoslav political context as a national group with its own distinct identity. The journal itself would not have been read by the majority of the Slovene

population of the period; as an intellectual publication offering Christian Conservative perspectives on Slovene social, cultural, agricultural and political issues, it appealed to a niche readership. However, it would have been widely accessible, due to the Slovene population's exceptionally high literacy rate and the thorough distribution of reading rooms supplied with contemporary Slovene-language publications throughout the Slovene-inhabited regions.²⁸⁷ More importantly, the SLS was overwhelmingly dominant in the Slovene constituencies throughout the 1920s as Korošec was writing his *Socialna Misel* articles. His political outlook as both a Slovene and a Yugoslav statesman is therefore representative of the Slovene electorate's preferred stance regarding their place within their new Yugoslav political context, and the social and economic issues most important to them as voters. Indeed, Korošec himself triumphantly declared to his readership in 1926 that the SLS could truly be considered the 'programme of the Slovene nation,' due to the fact that 'in all elections for the national assembly, the Slovene people, after a tremendous majority, pronounced themselves SLS.'²⁸⁸ This interpretation has been largely confirmed by historians of the period. Most notably, Banac commented in his work on the initial Yugoslav years that the SLS was not the only Slovene party, though it certainly seemed that way,' as it was the 'only genuine voice of Slovene aspirations.'²⁸⁹ Korošec's political opinions as expressed through *Socialna Misel* therefore comprised the dominant Slovene perspective on the broader Yugoslav political scene.

This chapter will explore the themes Korošec covered in his *Socialna Misel* articles in the period 1922-26. It will ask how he used this platform to promote his SLS as he desired it to be perceived not only by the Slovene electorate, but by the Yugoslav political scene more broadly. It will explore how he outlined his vision for the SLS's gradual evolution from a Slovene-specific party centred around traditional Catholic values and issues affecting the Slovene workers and peasantry into one appealing to Christians of all Yugoslav nationalities. This can be seen as a response to the initial Yugoslav period 1918-21 where, as we have seen, he quickly realised that such broader state-wide appeal was necessary for the SLS to gain any real influence within the Belgrade Skupština outside of multi-party coalitions. It will also question the extent to which Korošec's articles demonstrated a commitment to Yugoslav political issues in addition to Slovene, as well as asking how he viewed the Slovenes' progression as a national group since entering into the SHS Kingdom in December 1918. It will demonstrate how he presented the Slovenes' 'coming of age' nationally as intrinsically linked with the SLS, reinforcing this idea that his party was the only true voice of the Slovene people.

²⁸⁷ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.391

²⁸⁸ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.3

²⁸⁹ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.341

Finally, we will ask how suitable the SHS Kingdom was in Korošec's eyes for the Slovenes as an alternative state entity to Habsburg Austria. He saw both central government in Belgrade and the loss of Slovene territories to Italy as obstructing Slovene national progression. He therefore used his *Socialna Misel* articles to lay out his own alternative vision for the place of the Slovenes' place within the new state. For him, Slovene national progression revolved heavily around the development of language and culture, as well as progress towards Slovene administrative autonomy in order to preserve these elements of distinct Slovene identity within the wider Yugoslav state context. When centralism and government instability instead came to dominate 1920s Yugoslav politics, he utilised *Socialna Misel* to explore how the Yugoslav state framework could be restructured in order to better suit his ambitions for the Slovenes.

Korošec on Slovene National Progression

Korošec demonstrated a detailed, accurate and sophisticated awareness of the historical context and significance of the Slovenes' entry into the SHS Kingdom through his writings for *Socialna Misel*. This is most apparent in his articles *On the Political Programme of the Slovenes* (O političnem programu Slovencev) and *The Development of the Political Life of the Slovenes in Styria from 1848 to Today* (Razvoj političnega življenja Slovencev v Štajerski od 1848 do danes). It can also be seen in *Class, Status, Profession* (Razred, stan, stroka). The first of these, written in 1926, is comprised of two parts. In the first part, Korošec outlined the position of the Slovenes as a largely unrecognised minority group within the Habsburg Empire, starting from the 1848 revolutions as a moment of Slovene national awakening.²⁹⁰ He analysed the development of a Slovene national consciousness amongst educated Slovenes and how until 1918, this filtered down to the broader Slovene population through Slovene language publications. In the second part, he assessed contemporary Slovene political developments within the SHS Kingdom with this historical context in mind. He followed a similar structure in *The Development of the Political Life of the Slovenes*. This article opens by establishing the position of the Slovenes as a national group within Habsburg Styria, before dissecting how the Slovene national movement evolved in the region up to 1924, five years into the Yugoslav experiment.²⁹¹ *Class, Status, Profession* is the least accessible of Korošec's *Socialna Misel* articles for the average Slovene reader due to its heavy focus on societal structures, class and Christian socialist theory. Published in 1922, this too begins with an overview of the history of the

²⁹⁰ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.1

²⁹¹ A. Korošec, 'Razvoj političnega življenja Slovencev v Štajerski od 1848 do danes,' *Socialna Misel*, July 1924, p.133

Slovene people in terms of ‘oppressors and the oppressed,’ the Slovenes being the ‘oppressed’ and the Austrians and Hungarians being their pre-Yugoslav ‘oppressors.’ Korošec then devoted the second part of this article to conveying his party’s hopes for a revised state structure, as opposed to the centralism imposed by the Vidovdan Constitution the previous year.²⁹² Use of this structure, first establishing the history of the Slovene national movement and then using this as a starting point from which to explore Slovene national progression over the last century, allowed him to present the SHS Kingdom as having proved itself to be an imperfect solution for the Slovene national question by the mid-1920s. Consideration of the Slovene national movement’s starting point and initial goals allowed *Socialna Misel*’s readers to appreciate the potential of an administratively restructured SHS Kingdom to fulfil Korošec’s political and social ambitions for the Slovenes as a population.

Korošec also used his *Socialna Misel* articles to highlight the link between Catholicism and the origins of Slovene politics in the mid-nineteenth century. His 1924 article noted that the Catholic Church in the Slovene lands had always been ‘faithful’ to Slovene political activities.²⁹³ It also emphasised the instrumental role that the Slovene Catholic Clergy had played in the emergence of Slovene political journal and newspaper publications after the 1848 revolutions. The sudden surge in such Slovene-language publications had enabled the rapid spread of a sense of distinct Slovene identity.²⁹⁴ He pointed specifically to the emergence of publications such as *Slovenski narod* and *Slovenski gospodar* in Maribor. By 1924, Maribor was the second largest city in the Slovene regions of the SHS Kingdom, but it had been a place of significant Catholic prestige since the nineteenth century.²⁹⁵ As we have seen, it was also a major recruitment ground for the SLS from the moment of the party’s creation; Korošec himself had first become involved in Slovene politics during his theological studies in Maribor.²⁹⁶ Building on this, he argued that the Old Slovene political movement out of which the SLS had been born had been loyal to the Catholic Church first and foremost, upholding its values above political ambitions.²⁹⁷ Similarly, in his 1926 article, he explained the spread of a unified sense of Slovene national identity throughout the Slovene-inhabited regions of the Habsburg Empire by the

²⁹² A. Korošec, ‘Razred, stan, stroka,’ *Socialna Misel*, April 1922, p.122

²⁹³ A. Korošec, ‘Razvoj političnega življenja Slovencev v Štajerski od 1848 do danes,’ *Socialna Misel*, July 1924, p.133

²⁹⁴ A. Korošec, ‘O političnem programu Slovencev,’ *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.1

²⁹⁵ In 1859, in a significant move within Slovene Catholic circles, the seat of the Lavantian Diocese was relocated to Maribor.

²⁹⁶ Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozbornski poslanec na Dunaju, življenje in delo 1872-1918*, p.23

²⁹⁷ A. Korošec, ‘Razvoj političnega življenja Slovencev v Štajerski od 1848 do danes,’ *Socialna Misel*, July 1924, p.135

early 1900s as facilitated by the Catholic rallies organised by the SLS in this period.²⁹⁸ In this way, ordinary Slovenes were introduced to national identity politics through their already-established sense of Catholic faith and belonging. This was the same tactic the SLS utilised to attract new party members from Maribor theological circles in this period. Korošec therefore created a sense of the Slovenes' political awakening, in addition to the SLS itself, as intertwined with their traditional Catholic faith. As the only Slovene-specific political party of any significance which incorporated Christian teachings into its political outlook, his SLS was therefore the natural party of the Slovene nation.

These articles exploring the evolution of Slovene politics and national consciousness illustrate Korošec's detailed, sophisticated understanding of the history of both his own political party and its main rival in the Slovene Liberals. In *The Development of the Political Life of the Slovenes in Styria*, he explained how conflicts between the Slovene Clerical and Slovene Liberal movements which emerged as separate Slovene political parties by 1892 mirrored those within Austrian political circles at the time.²⁹⁹ These two distinct Slovene parties appeared due to disagreements over both the place of Catholicism within politics and policy priorities. Korošec explained that the Slovene Liberals tended to appeal to urban-based skilled worker and intellectual Slovenes. Meanwhile, the Slovene Clericals, who would become his own SLS, prioritised issues affecting peasant and rural worker rights such as working conditions, access to Slovene-language education and reducing taxation. He emphasised the grassroots politics of his predecessor Krek, who had 'worked practically for the Slovene nation' to engage rural Slovenes with national politics. From 1894 until his death in 1917, Krek had established numerous workers' associations and peasant cooperatives throughout the Slovene regions.³⁰⁰ These aimed to improve peasant and rural worker living and working conditions in line with the issues these demographics themselves identified as being most relevant to them.³⁰¹ Indeed, Korošec recounted how Krek had founded his first 'Catholic Workers Society' in 1894 in response to the rapid development of Slovene industry. He had wanted to create a platform through which the industrial workforce could demand fairer pay and working conditions, and by 1917 had successfully strengthened the economic position of the Slovene workers through this venture. These arguments reinforced Korošec's earlier claim in his *Class, Status, Profession* article

²⁹⁸ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.1

²⁹⁹ A. Korošec, 'Razvoj političnega življenja Slovencev v Štajerski od 1848 do danes,' *Socialna Misel*, July 1924, p.133

³⁰⁰ J. Robertson, 'Communism as Religious Phenomenon: Phenomenology and Catholic Socialism in Yugoslav Slovenia, 1927-1942,' *Journal of History Ideas*, 81:2, 2020, p.285

³⁰¹ A. Korošec, 'Razvoj političnega življenja Slovencev v Štajerski od 1848 do danes,' *Socialna Misel*, July 1924, p.135

that the SLS had always been 'active in caring for their party organisations.'³⁰² He therefore conveyed a sense of his SLS's politics as always revolving around both traditional Catholic values and grassroots politics aimed at improving the living and working conditions of the peasantry and rural working classes. Given that the vast majority of the Slovene electorate of the 1920s fell into both these categories, he hereby firmly consolidated the SLS's image as the party of the Slovene people through his writings for *Socialna Misel*.

Korošec also made use of his detailed understanding of the Slovenes' history in order to emphasise to *Socialna Misel's* readers their own history as a people. This highlighted the progression his SLS had made towards its manifesto aims since entering into the SHS Kingdom. Both his 1924 and 1926 articles stressed that the Slovene population of the Habsburg Empire had not even possessed their own crownland.³⁰³ Instead, they were 'scattered across the provinces in Habsburg Austria.'³⁰⁴ This placed them in a far weaker position in terms of securing the right to utilise their own language for education and administration in Slovene-inhabited regions in comparison to other minority groups of the empire such as the Croats and Czechs, who did possess their own recognised regions.³⁰⁵ Korošec reflected that these circumstances hindered the Slovene population of Austria in fully developing their own 'political personality' as one of so many national minorities.³⁰⁶ Nor could they expect to hold any significant influence as to the empire's political, social or economic policy. However, he argued, it was easier for the Slovenes to establish political influence and shape the future of the new Yugoslav state, because they were a 'large minority' within this new context.

Korošec's use of the word 'minority' here is particularly interesting. The Slovenes were not officially considered a minority within the SHS Kingdom. Rather, they were one of the three founding Yugoslav peoples represented in the state's official name. He therefore seems to be referring to the fact that the Slovene population of the kingdom was significantly smaller than the Serb and Croat elements. Serbs constituted 38.83 percent of the kingdom's population at the point of its creation in 1918, with Croats constituting 23.77 percent.³⁰⁷ In contrast, just 8.53 percent of the overall Yugoslav population was Slovene. Indeed, the German population of the kingdom was half the Slovene

³⁰² A. Korošec, 'Razred, stan, stroka,' *Socialna Misel*, April 1922, p.122

³⁰³ A. Korošec, 'Razvoj političnega življenja Slovencev v Štajerski od 1848 do danes,' *Socialna Misel*, July 1924, p.133

³⁰⁴ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.1

³⁰⁵ Rogel, *The Slovenec and Yugoslavism*, p.3

³⁰⁶ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.1

³⁰⁷ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.9

figure, at 4.27 percent. Therefore, although the Slovenes were not an official minority group, they were overwhelmingly outnumbered by Serbs and Croats. Korošec insisted in his writings, however, that they were in a far stronger position as a national group than they had been in within the Habsburg Empire. They held more influence as one of the kingdom's founding nations, the lands they inhabited were recognised as Slovene regions, and they were free to use the Slovene language for education and administration.³⁰⁸

Despite this, Korošec took care to emphasise that the Slovene national struggle was far from over, as the SHS Kingdom had not yet provided them with the guarantee of linguistic, cultural and administrative freedom. He argued that since 'parliamentary life began' in the SHS Kingdom, 'the dangers have become bigger, but at the same time our resistance forces are increasing.'³⁰⁹ This was because the centralist state structure imposed by the Vidovdan constitution placed the Slovenes' distinct national identity under potential threat. Ideally, Korošec wrote, the Slovenes needed as much independence as possible within the kingdom in order to preserve their unique language and culture. He suggested that this could take the form of either Slovene regional administrative autonomy or a federalist-style restructuring of the entire state.³¹⁰ He went so far as to claim that in the political climate of 1926, those amongst the Slovene population who desired a degree of administrative autonomy and freedom to control their own local affairs within the state must 'ready themselves for political struggles.' He assured his *Socialna Misel* readers that he did not expect the Slovenes to have to 'surrender their language and their national individuality.' Rather, his concerns related to the continued imposition of centralism, and the ongoing struggle of pushing for concessions towards administrative autonomy in the Slovene regions of the kingdom. The five year-period of Yugoslav political developments and state building since the adoption of Vidovdan had only strengthened his conviction that the SLS's enduring policy of Slovene administrative autonomy was essential in order for the kingdom to suit the interests of its Slovene population.

Party Policies: The SLS as More Than Merely a 'Catholic Party'

Throughout the period 1922-26, Korošec used his *Socialna Misel* articles to explore his SLS's key policies regarding the Slovenes' position, as well as to define its fundamental character. His 1923 article *Catholics and the Party* can be viewed as an attempt to break away from the stereotype that

³⁰⁸ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.1

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p.3

the SLS's politics revolved solely around Catholicism. He began this article by reiterating that the SLS was 'not a church, not a religious party.' Rather, it was a 'political party expressing a clearly-defined cultural, social and economic programme,' which assessed 'all questions of public life from the Christian world viewpoint,' striving for 'all forces of religious life' to contribute to state and society.³¹¹ He hereby presented his party as influenced by, but not governed exclusively by Catholic teachings. Interestingly, he refers to 'religious life' here, rather than to 'Catholic' or 'Christian' life. He may have simply intended 'religious life' to be interpreted as meaning the Slovenes' traditional Catholicism. Given the SLS's inclusion within the Skupština opposition bloc along with Davidovič's Yugoslav Democrats and Spaho's JMO at the time of the article's publication, however, it seems reasonable to suggest that his use of 'religious life' was a subtle reference to the kingdom's multicultural and multi-faith composition. He understood that as a small party representing a specific national group within the kingdom, it was necessary for his SLS to work with other political personalities and parties, regardless of religion. Only through such alliances could the party gain the influence it needed within Belgrade politics to secure a degree of administrative autonomy for the Slovene regions.

The main argument made in *Catholics and the Party* was that an annual Catholic rally soon to be hosted in Ljubljana should be viewed as entirely separate from SLS meetings, despite being organised by the party. Korošec evidently viewed the annual Ljubljana Catholic rally as a potential means of attracting new SLS members. Despite taking care to reiterate that the SLS was not merely a Slovene Catholic party throughout the article, he did make frequent reference to it as a party centred specifically around Christian morals, unlike the majority of Yugoslav political parties in this period.³¹² He acknowledged that although the rally was not an official SLS event, it was well-attended by SLS politicians. It therefore seems likely that attendees would have been exposed to SLS propaganda, and this potential for attracting new supporters to the party offers a possible explanation for his eagerness to promote the rally as an independent gathering, open not just to Slovene Catholics. Indeed, Korošec argued that 'it would not be wise' for the rally to be selective in who it allowed to attend, for there might be Catholic members from other political parties to whom it appealed.³¹³ He would later build on this in his 1926 *Socialna Misel* article *On the Political Programme of the Slovenes*, highlighting Catholic rallies as important not only for preserving Slovene religious life, but also for engaging the Slovene population with politics.³¹⁴

³¹¹ A. Korošec, 'Katoliki in Stranke,' *Socialna Misel*, July 1923, p.148

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid, p.149

³¹⁴ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.2

In addition, Korošec claimed in *Catholics and the Party* that the SLS was not a party merely for Slovene Catholics; it also welcomed supporters from other Christian denominations. This was because the SLS wanted to be 'a party for the whole Slovene nation.' It therefore encouraged those from 'other Christian churches' to engage with its politics; indeed, he reported that there were already Protestants among the SLS's supporters.³¹⁵ Protestant Slovenes were in fact far from a significant potential support base for the SLS. The Slovenes were an almost exclusively Catholic people in this period, with Carinthia being home to the lowest percentage of Catholics out of all the Slovene regions of the SHS Kingdom at 94.85 percent.³¹⁶ Nonetheless, in emphasising the SLS's openness to non-Catholic members, Korošec was reinforcing the idea that the SLS was not dominated by Catholic ideology. Rather, he wanted it to be perceived as a Slovene party advocating a federalist restructuring of the kingdom, which also upheld traditional Christian Conservative values.

Korošec also turned his attention to the fact that a sizable number of Slovenes lived outside the new Yugoslav borders. He presented the SLS as invested in serving as a unifying force of sorts, allowing displaced Slovenes to maintain a link with those inside the kingdom. As previously touched upon, he was surprisingly absent from both the Paris Peace Conference discussions regarding the fate of the 300,000 Slovenes who would ultimately end up on the Italian side of the border, as well as in the lead-up to the 1920 plebiscite which saw part of Slovene Carinthia vote to join Austria.³¹⁷ His commentary on their plight through *Socialna Misel* therefore offers a rare insight as to how he viewed this issue. While discussing the imminent annual Ljubljana Catholic rally in *Catholics and the Party*, Korošec emphasised that 'all the Slovenes of our country' wished to attend the event, as did the Slovene populations outside the kingdom's borders in Italy and Austria.³¹⁸ He hereby presented the rally as not only a religious gathering, but also a cultural one which could 'unite people in the Catholic conviction' across state borders, allowing Slovenes outside the kingdom to maintain a shared sense of Slovene identity.³¹⁹

It is not clear whether Slovene Catholics beyond the Yugoslav state borders had attended the Ljubljana Catholic rallies in the past, or whether they did indeed attend this one. Korošec did not

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Bobič, *War and Faith: The Catholic Church in Slovenia 1914-1918*, p.9

³¹⁷ Stana-Miros, *Ožitev Dr Antona Korošca*, p.54

³¹⁸ A. Korošec, 'Katoliki in Stranke,' *Socialna Misel*, July 1923, p.149

³¹⁹ Ibid.

present his readers with this information in either *Catholics and the Party* or subsequent *Socialna Misel* articles. Nor did he provide an estimate as to how many Slovenes, from within the SHS Kingdom or otherwise, might attend the Ljubljana Catholic rally. However, the fact that he presents the event as appealing to Slovene populations abroad demonstrates an ability to subtly alter his approach to promoting such events in order to attract different audiences, in the process promoting his SLS and seeking to increase its support base. He was opportunistic and pragmatic. He understood the importance of consolidating the SLS's position as the party of the Slovene people, in the eyes of both the Slovene electorate and Belgrade political circles, in order to win the influence needed to bring about Slovene administrative autonomy. Presenting the party as appealing to Slovenes both inside and outside of the SHS Kingdom further strengthened this image.

Reflections on SLS Policies, Yugoslav Stability and State Structure

Several of Korošec's *Socialna Misel* articles explored his SLS's policies and views regarding Yugoslav state structure and political developments. *Class, Status, Profession* is a theory-heavy piece which considers how Yugoslav politics and society in the early 1920s can be understood within the framework of Christian socialist theory.³²⁰ Korošec argued that the state, as the 'highest, decisive and direction-giving power,' had a responsibility to 'embody the principle of absolute, theoretic democracy' in order to ensure the same rights are afforded to all citizens, regardless of their social class and profession.³²¹ Context is particularly crucial here. *Class, Status, Profession* was published a year after the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution, which the SLS had strongly opposed on the basis of its potential for Serbian dominance.³²² In reinforcing this idea of state responsibility to ensure equal rights for all Yugoslavs, therefore, Korošec was perhaps alluding to the extent to which a central, Belgrade-based state administrative framework could adequately represent non-Serb, rural peasant minorities such as the Slovene population.

Having established the importance of a state framework which worked in the interests of the Yugoslav population as a whole, Korošec then used the remainder of his *Class, Status, Profession* article to emphasise how Christian socialist parties such as his own SLS were best suited to represent the interests of the peasantry and working classes. He explained how, like Marxists, Christian

³²⁰ A. Korošec, 'Razred, stan, stroka,' *Socialna Misel*, April 1922, p.121

³²¹ Ibid, p.122

³²² F. Šuklje, 'Centralism and Autonomy in Jugoslavia,' *The Slavonic Review*, 2:5, 1923, p.331

socialist parties 'want to organise human society differently.'³²³ They were, however, considerably more moderate in their approach. Korošec insisted that the SLS-associated peasant cooperatives and workers' unions founded by Krek had transformed the economic and social circumstances of these groups in the Slovene lands. They were 'of great importance for all economic life,' allowing their members to resolve 'professional matters' through the strength in numbers provided by being part of a community.³²⁴ He argued that the next logical step was to implement such cooperatives and unions across the state as a whole, encouraging peasant and worker populations to take on an active role in improving their economic circumstances. These organisations, he maintained, would work most efficiently for the workers they represented if they were differentiated according to professional groups. He wrote that ultimately, the SLS envisioned the establishment of an 'economic parliament,' built out of these cooperatives and unions. In this way, he used the article to lay out his vision for enabling the working classes and peasantry to play an active role in improving their socio-economic circumstances. He reiterated the proven effectiveness of cooperatives and trade unions in working towards this goal, while firmly establishing his party as having a strong tradition of working in the interests of these demographics.

In 1926, Korošec actively criticised the state of the Yugoslav government in two *Socialna Misel* articles. This criticism was naturally focused on the kingdom's centralist state structure, and the extent to which this limited the government's ability to work in the interests of the localities, including the Slovene regions.³²⁵ Throughout *On the Political Programme of the Slovenes*, he argued that restructuring the state along federalist lines would best suit the Slovenes, given their distinct identity, culture and language. Additionally, he highlighted the strength of the economy in the Slovene regions in comparison to other areas of the kingdom, maintaining that administrative autonomy would better allow the Slovene nation to strengthen its economy and 'shape its own destiny.'³²⁶ He concluded by dismissing the SHS Kingdom's democratic system as 'more formal than real,' because centralism equated to 'state absolutism.' He warned that there would be continued 'political struggles' outside the Serb regions as long as centralism remained in place.

In contrast, he turned his attention to the state of European parliamentarism more broadly in *Crisis of Parliamentarism*. In this, he drew similar conclusions on the danger of state governments failing to work in the interests of their populations to *On the Political Programme of the Slovenes*. He

³²³ A. Korošec, 'Razred, stan, stroka,' *Socialna Misel*, April 1922, p.122

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.3

³²⁶ Ibid, p.4

pondered that 'most European countries' were experiencing a parliamentary crisis of some description because 'parliaments of general and equal voting rights no longer meet the expectations and demands of the masses.'³²⁷ Within the Yugoslav context, he gave the example of a lack of agrarian reforms since the state's creation; here, he again reiterated his SLS's established role as an advocate for the Slovene peasantry.³²⁸ He additionally highlighted high levels of unemployment. This was resulting in high levels of immigration. Korošec acknowledged that these problems could not be blamed entirely on the lack of a 'strong, socially-orientated' party within the Yugoslav government. Indeed, he noted that even in European states which did have a socialist-orientated party in government such as Austria, Germany, Poland and the UK, 'most of the problems of economic democracy remain unresolved.' He attributed this problem across Europe, including in the SHS Kingdom, to a post-war trend of weak parliaments which were incapable of adequately addressing such issues, particularly economic and cultural concerns relevant to the peasant and working-class masses. In making these observations, Korošec sought to further establish his SLS as a rare party which recognised the flaws of contemporary European politics. This reinforced to *Socialna Misel* readers that the SLS was the only party which was truly capable and committed to fighting for reforms to enable the existing political system to function more efficiently.

Korošec on Slovene Literary and Cultural Development within the SHS Kingdom

Notably, Korošec's key argument in favour of implementing a degree of Slovene administrative autonomy within the new state was that this devolution was essential in order to preserve the Slovenes' unique language and culture within their new Yugoslav context. He used his 1926 *Socialna Misel* article the progress made in further developing Slovene as a literary and academic language in the years since the kingdom's creation. As we have seen, he viewed the growth of Slovene language publications and the birth of the Slovene national movement from 1848 onwards as intrinsically linked. It therefore seems logical that he perceived the continued development of Slovene as a language of academic, literary and journalistic prowess as an indicator of the effectiveness of the Yugoslav experiment for the Slovene population.

In the article, *On the Political Programme of the Slovenes*, Korošec reported that the establishment of the University of Ljubljana in 1919 had caused a surge in Slovene language academic

³²⁷ A. Korošec, 'Križa Parlamentarizma,' *Socialna Misel*, December 1926, p.265

³²⁸ *Ibid*, p.267

publications.³²⁹ This had begun within scientific disciplines, but quickly spread to arts and humanities as the university expanded. This was hugely significant because previously, the lack of a Slovene university had hindered the development of Slovene as an academic language. Korošec would go on to request additional funding for the university to further expand its faculties later in 1924.³³⁰ Furthermore, this Yugoslav-era surge in Slovene-language academic publications had boosted the book trade in the Slovene regions. Korošec's assessment compliments a 1923 article in the British *Slavonic Review* about Slovene academia and culture, which commented that the faculties of arts and Slavonic studies at the Slovene university have developed particularly rapidly.³³¹ Ljubljana had become a thriving city with an emerging cultural scene. The university in particular was praised for its hospitality, particularly towards foreign students.

Additionally, Korošec suggested that these literary developments had the potential to act as a unifying force for all Slovenes, including those outside the SHS Kingdom. He presented the surge in Slovene language publications following the establishment of the University of Ljubljana as a great cultural progression. Within this context, he turned his attention again to 'our brothers left in other countries.'³³² He expressed hope that the continued strengthening of the Slovene language as one of academic and literary prestige would allow cultural unity to be maintained with these Slovene populations outside the SHS Kingdom's borders. In doing so, he consolidated the long-established concept of the Slovene language being a fundamental - if not the most fundamental - element of Slovene national identity. Its linguistic distinctiveness and wealth of literary publications linked Slovenes outside the kingdom's boundaries with those within it. The Slovene population had already maintained its distinct identity through centuries of imperial domination by 1926. This perhaps gave Korošec confidence that such a linguistic and cultural link would be enough to preserve it in Italy and Austria.

Conclusions

Korošec's *Socialna Misel* articles from the period 1922-1926 reveal him to be a Yugoslav-minded Slovene statesman with an acute sense of both the Slovene population's history as a national group and their position within the SHS Kingdom. In turn, he understood how the SLS was traditionally

³²⁹ A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.3

³³⁰ *Archives of Yugoslavia*, Stenografske Beleške Narodne Skupštine, 1925/26, 2, 8 February 1925, p.1

³³¹ NBJ, 'Impressions from a Journey of Study in Slovenia,' *The Slavonic Review*, 2:4, 1923, p.171

³³² A. Korošec, 'O političnem programu Slovencev,' *Socialna Misel*, January 1926, p.4

perceived on the Yugoslav political scene, particularly in terms of its Catholic orientation. He recognised *Socialna Misel's* potential as a medium through which to convey how he, as the SLS's leader and the most prominent Slovene politician on the Yugoslav political scene, wanted the Slovene population to interpret their national development since the kingdom's creation, as well as their place within it. Writing for the journal also constituted a prime opportunity to clearly define his party's political orientation, policies and target audience within an intellectual context.

With this in mind, Korošec acknowledged the traditional role of the Slovenes' Catholic faith within SLS party policy. Moreover, he emphasised the origins of the Slovene nationalism movement as intrinsically linked to Catholicism, though not directly associated with the church itself. He encouraged the journal's Slovene readership to consider their Habsburg history; specifically, he reiterated through his articles the progress they had made as a national group since 1918. Although he acknowledged that the Yugoslav question was yet to provide a perfect solution for the Slovenes in terms of regional autonomy within a wider state entity, he also recognised that this could be achieved through devolved local government administration. His criticisms of the state's centralist structure were presented alongside his proposed policies to implement reforms that would allow the kingdom to work in the economic and social interests not only of the Slovene, peasant-majority population, but the peasant and worker masses across the population as a whole. Alongside this, the emphasis he placed upon the protection and development of Slovene language and culture within the Slovenes' Yugoslav context demonstrates both an awareness of the benefits of Yugoslav statehood and an understanding of it being a fundamental aspect of Slovene identity. Regional administrative autonomy could be won through gradually securing concessions within the Belgrade political system, because early successes such as the establishment of the first Slovene university and the continued flourishing of Slovene language publications preserved the Slovenes' distinct identity within their new Yugoslav context.

Korošec equally demonstrated an appreciation that widening the party's appeal as far as realistically possible was important, were it to gain any significant influence on the Belgrade political scene. His early Yugoslav experiences serving in Serb Radical cabinets would have taught him the importance of this. He was capable of earning the respect of dominant Skupština parties such as the Serb Radicals on the basis of his own political conduct, but he lacked the backing of a large party relevant on a kingdom-wide scale. This made it easier for pro-centralist forces to ignore his Slovene autonomy ambitions. By insisting through his *Socialna Misel* articles that the SLS was not merely a Catholic party for Catholic voters, Korošec also hinted that the party was ready and willing to work with other

Skupština parties and politicians, even if they did not share its own political outlook. He was prepared to play a political long-game of winning the trust of the key players in Belgrade politics in order to ultimately secure concessions towards the Slovene autonomy he viewed as so vital to preserving Slovene identity. As we will see, this tactic paid off well for him later in the decade.

Chapter 6- Critical Voices on Korošec's Politics: The Response from the Slovene Opposition 1924-1925

Introduction

In order to gain a more complete understanding of Korošec's 1920s Yugoslav political career, it is important to consider how he was perceived by his political opponents. Korošec faced criticism from a number of political factions; the Serb Radicals, Stjepan Radić's HRSS and Svetozar Pribičević's Independent Democrats are the most obvious sources. In this chapter, however, I will focus on critical voices on Korošec from the Slovene opposition, since this topic has remained largely unexplored within the existing historiography. Indeed, it would be easy to assume from the works currently available on this period that there was no Slovene opposition as such; it is hardly mentioned. This chapter remedies this by placing the Slovene opposition back into the narrative. Newspaper articles from papers representing Slovene opposition perspectives will illustrate how these parties presented Korošec and the SLS to their readerships. It will construct a sense of the true Slovene political landscape of the 1920s, which was far more complex than simply SLS domination and the resounding failure of other major Yugoslav political parties to establish much in the way of support in the Slovene constituencies.

This case study will cover the period January 1924 to June 1925, for to embrace the Slovene opposition parties' criticisms of Korošec over the whole decade would be too ambitious. This approach allows for a focused analysis of one of the most intense periods of 1920s Belgrade politics. Indeed, this eighteen-month period featured Korošec's continued attempts to forge a working relationship with Stjepan Radić and persuade him to cooperate with the opposition bloc in the Skupština of which he himself was a part, as well as the 1925 election campaign and results.³³³ It will be demonstrated that Slovene regional politics in this period was characterised by the same centralism versus federalism debate which dominated the broader Yugoslav political scene. This was an issue on which the Slovene electorate sided with Korošec consistently throughout the 1920s. The key areas in which he faced criticism from the two main sources of opposition in the Slovene constituencies in this period will be explored through this chapter. These two main opposition parties were the Slovene Liberals and the Independent Agrarian Party In Slovenia (SKS). This analysis will be conducted using articles from the three major Slovene opposition newspapers of the 1920s: the Slovene Liberals' *Jutro* and *Domovina*, and the SKS's *Kmetijski List*. We will address a number of

³³³ This is with the exception of the SLS's participation in Davidović's short-lived 1924 government.

key questions, including how these opposition parties used their newspapers to criticise Korošec's policies, and his interactions and collaborations with his colleagues. We will then explore how they attempted to undermine the SLS in order to present their own parties as the only political entities truly representing the best interests of the Slovene population. Additionally, we will ask how these three newspapers wished their readership to understand Korošec, exploring the tactics they used to portray him as an inadequate spokesman for the Slovene people in Belgrade, both inside and outside of government.

Some additional focus will be given to how the SLS's own newspapers *Slovenec* and *Domoljub* responded to these criticisms. This perspective is essential in order to understand how these SLS-controlled news agencies predicted and reacted to Slovene opposition party criticisms of Korošec, attempting to undermine this coverage in turn and dismiss it as unfounded. Furthermore, it will reveal that there was a great degree of overlap in terms of how the Slovene Liberals and SKS criticised Korošec, and the main aspects of his political persona and decision-making which they found problematic. They were united in their disdain for him and his party despite their own differing political outlooks. Finally, this chapter will turn to the SLS's landslide victory in the February 1925 general election. It will ask how these Slovene opposition newspapers attempted to explain the Slovene electorate's continued mass support for Korošec and the SLS, despite their efforts to highlight his dishonesty, his tendency to deviate from his own policies once in government, and his attempts at collaboration with, in their eyes, undesirable, politically incompatible personalities such as Radić of the HRSS and Davidović of the Yugoslav Democrats.

Some key background information regarding these three Slovene opposition newspapers is essential in order to place their criticisms of Korošec into their relevant contexts. *Jutro*, *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* were all Slovene-language publications aimed specifically at Slovene-speaking audiences. As has already been noted, the Slovene-speaking population of the SHS Kingdom had an exceptionally high literacy rate in this period; just 8.85 percent were illiterate upon its creation.³³⁴ This was a result of Austria's nineteenth-century education reforms and a heavy focus on language within the Slovene national movement as it expanded in the decade prior to the war.³³⁵ Reading rooms were also widespread across the Slovene lands by 1918, becoming the centre of most Slovene towns. They were frequented not only by the middle classes, but also by rural merchants and

³³⁴ TNA, FO 421/341, Mr Kennard to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 'Serb-Croat-Slovene State Annual Report 1925,' Belgrade, 26 January 1926, p.35

³³⁵ Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms*, p.57

wealthier, educated peasants and workers.³³⁶ This was part of a broader tradition; the reading public had engaged heavily with Slovene newspaper and journal publications from the late Habsburg period in towns and wealthier rural settings.³³⁷ Slovene language publications flourished further after 1918.³³⁸ They benefited from a culture of widespread circulation of both daily and weekly newspapers and journal publications established in the late nineteenth century.³³⁹

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the majority of the Slovene-speaking population of the kingdom would have had both access to and the ability to read newspaper publications such as the Slovene Liberals' *Domovina* and *Jutro* and the SKS's *Kmetijski List*, at least in the towns and wealthier rural settings. Additionally, *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* were written using particularly accessible style and language. This made them more easily understandable for less educated and less politically informed Slovene speakers than *Jutro*, which was more sophisticated in its use of language and level of detail regarding political developments in Belgrade. Regardless of the reach of these newspapers, however, the manner in which Korošec's policies were presented in their articles reveal how the Slovene Liberals and the SKS wanted him to be perceived by the Slovene-speaking population.

Jutro, *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* each had different political perspectives and target audiences. However, they tended to be largely united in their understanding of Korošec's flaws. *Jutro* was a daily newspaper controlled by the Slovene Liberal faction of Davidović's Yugoslav Democrats. This faction later left the Yugoslav Democrats to instead become a part of Svetozar Pribičević's Independent Democrats when it split with Davidović in March 1924. Printed in Ljubljana, *Jutro*'s target audience was the Ljubljana-based intelligentsia. It was therefore most widely read by urban-based, middle-class, nationally conscious Slovenes: the demographic which made up the Slovene Liberals' traditional support base. By the 1920s, *Jutro* had gained a reputation throughout the Slovene-inhabited regions for high-quality, reputable journalism. As a result of this success, regional branches of the paper were later founded in Gorenjska and Primorska.³⁴⁰ *Jutro* switched allegiance from Davidović's Yugoslav Democrats to Pribičević's Independent Democrats in line with the Slovene Liberals in March 1924. In the period 1924-25, the paper was therefore pro-Pribičević and anti-Davidović, pro-centralism and pro-Yugoslav assimilation.

³³⁶ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.301

³³⁷ Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms*, p.241

³³⁸ Luthar, *The Land Between*, p.390

³³⁹ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.vii

³⁴⁰ 'V Belgradu,' *Domoljub*, 19 March 1924, p.2

Meanwhile, *Domovina* was a pro-centralist Slovene-language weekly heavily influenced by the Slovene Liberal leader Gregor Žerjav. After March 1924, it therefore supported the Independent Democrats. The language used in its articles tended to be simpler than that used in *Jutro*. This, combined with the fact that it presented a weekly summary of political developments in Belgrade as opposed to daily updates like *Jutro*, made it more accessible to audiences beyond the Slovene-speaking intelligentsia. *Domovina's* target audience was wealthier peasants, rural labourers and craftsmen. It can therefore be seen as a Slovene Liberal newspaper aiming to attract readers from beyond the party's traditional support base, to whom *Jutro* already appealed. It aimed to instil a sense of national consciousness in its readership - Yugoslav rather than Slovene, due to the Slovene Liberals' pro-Yugoslav assimilation and centralism stance. Indeed, it wished to connect Slovenes with their Serb and Croat fellow countrymen, naturally steering them towards the Independent Democratic Party in terms of political allegiance. As a news source, *Domovina* generally featured a greater proportion of opinion pieces than *Jutro*. This was because it was targeting Slovenes outside of the intelligentsia, who were typically less familiar with political affairs. It deliberately tried to guide its readership towards a pro-Yugoslav, unitarist political mindset, which the Slovene peasantry and working classes had not traditionally identified with.

In contrast, the weekly newspaper *Kmetijski List* was the organ of Ivan Pucelj's SKS. Its journalism focused on farmers' rights, reducing taxes and crop prices, and other issues affecting agriculture in the Slovene regions. The target audience of both the newspaper and the SKS more broadly was the educated peasantry, rural craftsmen and workers. This was the same target audience as Korošec's SLS. The SKS, however, placed greater emphasis upon these agrarian issues, and lacked the Christian element of the SLS. *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* would merge in 1941 to form one joint publication entitled *Domovina in Kmetijski List*. This demonstrates that by the end of the first Yugoslav period, there was considerable readership and political orientation overlap between these two newspapers. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, there were already notable similarities between the publications in 1924-25 in terms of their criticisms of Korošec's conduct as both a Slovene and a Yugoslav statesman.

The Slovene Liberal Opposition

An understanding of the histories and political stances of the parties behind these three opposition newspapers is essential in order to understand how this opposition differed in perspective from the

SLS, as well as to place the criticisms Korošec faced from these sources into the appropriate context. The Slovene Liberals and the SKS constituted the main opposition to his SLS during the 1920s, but neither posed a serious political challenge. We will explore why their political outlooks failed to attract mass support amongst the Slovene electorate.

Žerjav's Slovene Liberals struggled consistently to win significant support among the Slovene electorate simply because of their political outlook.³⁴¹ Despite the Slovene population's high literacy rate, they were mostly peasants living in rural settings.³⁴² Indeed, the cities of Ljubljana and Maribor constituted the only noteworthy urban settings within the Slovene lands during the 1920s. This meant that Žerjav's Slovene Liberals held extremely limited appeal for the majority of Slovene voters. Liberal politics tended to attract urban-based, middle-class, skilled labourers, who were greatly outnumbered by the peasant masses.³⁴³ Furthermore, the Slovene Liberals tended to keep religion out of its politics, in a trend which can be traced back to the party's origins. In 1870, the fledgling Slovene national movement had split to create the first two Slovene political parties: the Slovene Clericals, who would eventually become the SLS, and the Slovene Liberals. The Slovene Liberals modelled their party upon western-style intellectual tradition and embraced pan-Slavism, leaving no place for Catholicism within their politics.³⁴⁴ This lack of Catholic focus allowed the Slovene Liberals to instead accentuate the Slovenes' linguistic and cultural similarities with the Croats and Serbs within their political stance, despite the latter's Orthodox faith. Indeed, they occasionally criticised Korošec for his own Catholic faith, accusing him of embracing Christianity as part of a calculated political persona rather than a genuine Catholic conviction.³⁴⁵

This Pan-Slavic approach to politics led to the Slovene Liberals integrating into Davidović's Yugoslav Democratic Party upon the creation of the SHS Kingdom in 1918. In stark contrast to Korošec's SLS, Žerjav's Slovene Liberals embraced centralism. The Slovene Liberals particularly identified with Pribičević's highly centralist politics within their new wider party.³⁴⁶ Whilst Korošec was promoting Slovene regional autonomy via a federalist state restructure following the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution, the Slovene Liberals within the Yugoslav Democratic Party, and then the Independent

³⁴¹ P. Troch, 'Yugoslavism Between the World Wars: Indecisive Nation Building, *Nationalities Papers*, 38:2, 2010, p.240

³⁴² Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.6

³⁴³ Bobič, *War and Faith: The Catholic Church in Slovenia 1914-1918*, p.11

³⁴⁴ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.36

³⁴⁵ *Archives of Yugoslavia*, Stenografske Beleške Narodne Skupštine, 1921-22, 2, 25 March 1922, p.35

³⁴⁶ A. Rahten, 'Anton Korošec and the "Croatian Question" in Yugoslavia,' p.18

Democratic Party after March 1924, took a very different stance.³⁴⁷ They argued instead that the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs constituted one national group, which could only hope to create a shared sense of Yugoslav identity and culture through unitarism.³⁴⁸ Andrew Wachtel has explained this Slovene Liberal allegiance to Pribičević's political perspective on the basis that the Slovene population was, by the very nature of its geography and distinct language, able to maintain naturally both a physical and a cultural distance from Belgrade.³⁴⁹ This meant that they were less affected by, and consequently less concerned with, Pašić and the Serb Radicals' attempts at Serbianisation, which Korošec and his SLS typically associated with a centralist state structure.

The Slovene Liberals therefore viewed centralism as essential for allowing the creation of such shared Yugoslav identity within the new state. As Yugoslav politics became increasingly unstable throughout the 1920s with its rapid turnover of short-lived, precarious coalition governments, the Slovene Liberal element of Pribičević's Independent Democrats came to view politicians like Korošec and Radić as creating unnecessary political divisions. In the eyes of the Slovene Liberals, they and their tribal, national group specific politics were undermining attempts at building a Yugoslav society through integrated politics and a central administration. The irony is that Korošec was in fact more Yugoslav-minded than the vast majority of interwar Yugoslav political figures.³⁵⁰ This has been noted by multiple historians of the period. The Croatian historian Ivo Banac wrote of him in 1984 that he was 'forgiven everything because he seemed indispensable' within the Yugoslav political sphere.³⁵¹ He was one of few Slovenes to take on a leading role within the SHS Kingdom, and he did so mindful of the Slovene population's need of a stable Yugoslav state to provide them with territorial and political security, due to their small numbers.³⁵² He was therefore equally invested in both Slovene and Yugoslav national progression. In this way, Korošec's SLS and the Slovene Liberals represented two fundamentally different ideologies regarding the type of Yugoslavism which would best suit the Slovenes. This difference provided the Slovene Liberal opposition with ample opportunity to publicly criticise Korošec's representation of the Slovene electorate.

³⁴⁷ H. Matković, 'Pojava i etape razvoja Samostalne demokratske stranke 1924-1929,' *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 3:1, 1971, p.8

³⁴⁸ Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*, p.77

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.53

³⁵¹ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.343

³⁵² Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.36

In his work on the First Yugoslavia, Banac has summarised the Slovene Liberals' opposition to the SLS in this period as essentially a question of 'centralism versus autonomy.'³⁵³ The Slovene electorate faced a choice between Korošec's programme of autonomy and Žerjav and Pribičević's centralist stance. It can be reasonably concluded that centralism was not a popular concept amongst the Slovene electorate in the 1920s. They overwhelmingly and consistently elected SLS deputies to 20 to 21 out of the 26 Skupština seats allocated to the Slovene region in the three general elections of the 1920s. This was in comparison to the 4, 6 and 4 seats won in these elections respectively by Slovene Liberal candidate while running as the Democrats and Independent Democrats.³⁵⁴ In the 1920 constituent assembly election, however, one year prior to the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution, Slovene Liberal candidates within Davidović's Yugoslav Democrats were elected to 13 out of the 40 available seats in the Slovene regions. The SLS won 15 seats in this election, meaning that the Slovene Liberals Party had begun its Yugoslav political career on a practically equal footing with Korošec. The rapid decline in the Slovene Liberals' electoral performance in comparison to the SLS in the aftermath of Vidovdan implies that the vast majority of the Slovene electorate valued autonomy over a centralist state structure. The Yugoslav Democratic Party consequently lacked appeal in the Slovene lands from this point onwards.

Centralism versus Autonomy on the Slovene Political Scene

Statistics from the three Yugoslav general elections of the 1920s therefore show that the Slovene Liberals failed to pose any great challenge to the SLS's domination of the Slovene political scene after Vidovdan. Nonetheless, they continued to represent Korošec's main political opposition of the 1920s, and his main source of criticism both within Slovene politics and in the Slovene language. This fact undoubtedly further cemented the importance of autonomy within the SLS's own political agenda. Autonomy was more than just a key feature in Korošec's politics. It was also the main aspect of SLS policy which set it apart from its most significant opponents in the Slovene constituencies. This perhaps explains why Korošec continued to champion autonomy throughout the 1920s, despite at various points cooperating with colleagues and parties in parliament who reinforced the SHS Kingdom's centralist administrative structure. He recognised that promotion of Slovene autonomy was an aspect of the SLS's manifesto which appealed greatly to the Slovene electorate. Furthermore, the Slovene Liberals would never advocate it themselves while part of

³⁵³ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.343

³⁵⁴ Balkovec, and Šubic Kovačević, 'Die Einzelheiten und Unterschiede Zwischen den Wahlen in Slowenien und Kroatien in den Jahren 1920-1927,' p.75

broader Yugoslav parties with centralist ideologies. Chameleon-like, he modelled the SLS according to the issues he identified as being the most important to the Slovene electorate, and therefore most likely to win the SLS votes. This ensured continued mass support of his politics, and it was a well-established political tactic of the SLS.

Janez Krek's grassroots, Christian socialist legacy was also continued by Korošec during the 1920s. As we have seen, by 1924 it had attracted Slovene-speaking peasants and workers to the SLS, as well as many of the Slovene intelligentsia.³⁵⁵ It therefore seems highly likely that Korošec employed this same strategy regarding the SLS's position on autonomy. He recognised that the SLS's pro-federalism stance set it apart from its main political rival, and indeed that popular support for his own party had strengthened and for the Slovene Liberals had declined as the latter adopted an increasingly Yugoslav centralist stance. On this basis, he continued to present the concept of Slovene autonomy as of the highest priority for his own party. His political style was highly opportunistic, however, in that while he remained loyal to the SLS's signature policies, he took advantage of opportunities to enter government and strengthen ties with other larger Yugoslav parties as they presented themselves. He was willing to engage in such collaboration even if these parties' own political outlooks were not overly compatible with his own. This was arguably an astute strategy in terms of placing himself and the SLS in the best position possible to win concessions towards greater Slovene autonomy. But it left Korošec vulnerable to censure and ridicule from the Slovene Liberal opposition, in addition to another, less powerful source of Slovene-based criticism.

The Slovene Agrarian Opposition

The SKS was the third most significant political force within the Slovene regions after the SLS and Slovene Liberals. Extremely little has been written on the SKS, possibly as a result of its poor electoral performances after those to the Constituent Assembly in 1920.³⁵⁶ It failed to ever establish itself as a notably player on the Slovene political scene, let alone the Yugoslav. The party had been founded in 1919 by Ivan Pucelj. It mostly attracted the support of wealthier, educated peasants and rural intelligentsia in the Slovene regions, due to the liberal nature of its agrarian politics.³⁵⁷ In

³⁵⁵ Robertson, 'Communism as Religious Phenomenon,' p.285

³⁵⁶ Balkovec, and Šubic Kovačević, 'Die Einzelheiten und Unterschiede Zwischen den Wahlen in Slowenien und Kroatien in den Jahren 1920-1927,' p.75

³⁵⁷ O. Mulej, 'Post-Liberalism, Anti-Clericism and Yugoslav Nationalism: The Slovene Progressive Political Camp in the Interwar Period and Contemporary Czech politics.' *Stred. Časopis pro mezioborova studia Stredni Evropy*, 1, 2014 p.74

theory, it should have appealed to a similar demographic to Korošec's SLS. This was certainly its target audience, and there was a certain degree of overlap between the two parties' political stances. Like the SLS, Pucelj's SKS prioritised improving the living and working conditions of the Slovene peasantry. In this respect, it constituted a slightly more extreme version of Korošec's own outlook. Crucially, however, the SKS had evolved out of the Slovene Liberal Party as an attempt to rival the SLS in the Slovene countryside. As a result, it maintained the Slovene Liberals' pro-Yugoslav unity, pro-centralism position, despite being a specifically Slovene party; it did not merge with a larger Yugoslav party upon the creation of the SHS Kingdom as the Slovene Liberals did.³⁵⁸

The SKS had enjoyed success comparable to the Slovene Liberals and the SLS in the 1920 Constituent Assembly elections. It won 8 out of 40 of the seats available, compared to the Slovene Liberals' 13 and the SLS's 15.³⁵⁹ This was a particularly impressive feat given that the SKS was a newly established Slovene political party. The SLS and Slovene Liberals each had three decades' experience as separate political parties by this point. However, the SKS then made the mistake of siding with the Serb Radical government coalition and voting in favour of the Vidovdan Constitution in June 1921.³⁶⁰ Its centralist, pro-Yugoslav unitarism perspective at this point was perhaps due to the influence of leading party member Bogumil Vošnjak, who had written extensively on Yugoslav unity and the need for integration within a future South Slav state during the war.³⁶¹ Like the Slovene Liberals, the SKS appeared to suffer the consequences of backing the centralist constitution for the remainder of the 1920s. This is clearly illustrated by the 1923 and 1925 Yugoslav general election results. In the first of these, the SKS failed to win a single Skupština seat. In the second, a total of one SKS delegate was elected to the Skupština. This presented a stark contrast to the party's performance at the start of the 1920s.³⁶² The SKS therefore posed an opposition to Korošec's SLS which lacked political representation in Belgrade entirely for the duration of 1924, and barely improved on this position in the February 1925 election.

Akin to the situation of the Slovene Liberals, it appears that backing Vidovdan lost Pucelj's SKS support amongst its Slovene electorate which it was never able to win back. Following its crushing

³⁵⁸ N. Steinbacher, 'Liberalizem na slovenskem podeželju- politični profil Ivana Pucelja,' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Maribor, 2012, p.41

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ TNA, FO 421/341, Sir A Young to Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 'Serb-Croat-Slovene State Annual Report 1921,' Belgrade, 6 April 1922, p.14

³⁶¹ B. Vošnjak, *Jugoslav Nationalism: Three Lectures* (London: Polsue, 1916) p.19

³⁶² Balkovec, and Šubic Kovačević, 'Die Einzelheiten und Unterschiede Zwischen den Wahlen in Slowenien und Kroatien in den Jahren 1920-1927,' p.75

defeat in the 1925 general election, the SKS merged with Albin Prepeluh's tiny and largely insignificant Slovene Agrarian Labour Republican Party in 1926.³⁶³ This merge resulted in the 'Slovene Peasant Party,' which adopted Prepeluh's position on the centralism versus autonomy debate rather than advocating Slovene autonomy along similar lines to Korošec's SLS.³⁶⁴ Despite this, the new party still failed to win support amongst the Slovene electorate. The SKS's experience of the 1920s Slovene political scene can therefore be taken as further evidence that the Slovene electorate strongly opposed centralism as a state administrative structure. They viewed themselves as a demographic distinct from the other Yugoslav peoples with whom they now shared a state. Consequently, they desired - or at least supported the concept of - Slovene regional autonomy within the Kingdom, as was central to Korošec's political programme.

In comparison to the SLS, Pucelj's SKS placed greater emphasis upon policies to improve the living and working conditions of the peasants and skilled workers, particularly a reduction in taxation. Both parties marketed themselves towards the same rural-based, Slovene peasant and worker demographic.³⁶⁵ Where the two parties differed drastically was their positions regarding a centralised state. It therefore seems highly likely that the SLS's programme for Slovene autonomy was the reason it continued to attract a mass following amongst the Slovene peasants and workers, while the SKS consistently failed to find its own support base amongst the Slovene electorate.³⁶⁶

In this way, 1924-25 was a period in which the Slovene political opposition to Korošec and his SLS failed to make any real impact in the Slovene-inhabited regions of the SHS Kingdom. This was despite *Jutro*, *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List*'s criticisms of his conduct, their attempts to highlight the failings of his participation within Davidovič's short-lived coalition government in summer 1924, and an election campaign in which they explicitly pointed to his inadequacy as a politician and his inability to keep to the promises he had made to the Slovene electorate. Despite this criticism, the SLS emerged triumphant in the February 1925 election, proving that Korošec's hold on Slovene voters was one which the Slovene opposition parties, for all their attempts to discredit him, simply could not touch.

³⁶³ Prepeluh's party had never had a candidate elected to either the Constituent Assembly or the Skupština.

³⁶⁴ Steinbacher, 'Liberalizem na slovenskem podeželju- politični profil Ivana Pucelja,' p.41

³⁶⁵ 'Klerikalci in davki,' *Kmetijski List*, 22 January 1925, p.2

³⁶⁶ Biondich, *The Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilisation*, p.384

Use of Derogatory Language to Refer to the SLS Deputies

One of the many ways in which *Jutro*, *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* were united in their attempts to stress Korošec's and his SLS's political incompetence was through their shared use of a derogatory nickname for the party's Skupština deputies. *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* both made frequent use of the term 'clerical tigers' (klerikalni tigri) to mock SLS politicians with a typical stab at the 'church in politics.' Usage of this term usually coincided with strongly worded opinion pieces. These either condemned Korošec's vision of Slovene autonomy or highlighted the SLS's failure to fulfil the promises his party had made to the electorate during previous Yugoslav election campaigns. As standard practice, however, all three newspapers referred to SLS deputies as the 'clericals' in their articles, and to the party's general political outlook as 'clerical.'³⁶⁷ In the leadup to the February 1925 general election, for example, *Domovina* urged its readership to 'turn your back on clerical tiger society!' and to vote instead for the Independent Democrat candidates.³⁶⁸ Similarly, it boldly predicted of the forthcoming election that 'one thing is for sure... the number of tigers will be severely reduced' to a maximum of twelve.³⁶⁹ *Kmetijski List* made similar claims. In a November 1924 article, the SKS newspaper argued that the Slovene electorate had made a grave mistake in sending '21 tigers to Belgrade last year' in the 1923 election. Now, however, they had seen through the 'tigers' and their false promises and would not be so foolish as to elect them again.³⁷⁰ In reality, the SLS went on to win 20 seats in the February 1925 election, just one less than they had won in 1923.³⁷¹

As the general election approached, *Domovina's* accusations became more specific and deputy focused. It claimed that 'Korošec and his clerical tigers' were invested in politics purely for their ministerial salaries,' and reflected on the SLS's landslide victory in the 1923 elections in an article entitled 'the complete collapse of clerical tiger politics.'³⁷² The paper stated that those who voted for the 'clericals' were 'deceived by clerical promises' which had turned out to be lies.'³⁷³ This same article claimed that the 'clerical' deputies were not only dishonest, but also incompetent. Belgrade politics had proven too much for them, and left '21 tigers defeated on the ground,' unable to push through their policies in the face of Serb Radical opposition. This was a common theme within

³⁶⁷ 'Kulukarji besne,' *Kmetijski List*, 23 January 1924, p.1

³⁶⁸ 'Reši se, kdor se hoče rešiti!' *Domovina*, 3 February 1925, p.3

³⁶⁹ 'Zakaj bom volil Narodni blok?' *Domovina*, 9 January 1925, p.1

³⁷⁰ 'Korošček volilni govorali; Volilna gesla se iščejo,' *Kmetijski List*, 26 November 1924, p.1

³⁷¹ Balkovec, and Šubic Kovačević, 'Die Einzelheiten und Unterschiede Zwischen den Wahlen in Slowenien und Kroatien in den Jahren 1920-1927,' p.75

³⁷² 'Resen klic vsem, ki žele sebi in svojim dobro,' *Domovina*, 16 January 1920, p.1

³⁷³ 'Popoln polom klerikalne tigrovske politike,' *Domovina*, 28 March 1924, p.1

Domovina's articles in this period. In June 1924, in anticipation of the Slovene municipal elections, the paper told its readership to 'ask the clerical tigers where Korošec's autonomy is... nowhere to be seen!'³⁷⁴

Kmetijski List's own criticisms of Korošec tended to relate to his failings to fulfil his promise to the electorate to reduce taxation. It frequently referred to the four SLS cabinet ministers in Davidovič's three-month administration as 'old tigers'³⁷⁵ when criticising them for failing to reduce the tax burden on the Slovene population prior to this government's collapse.³⁷⁶ Yet this trend was also seen in *Domovina*. Writing in August 1924 concerning the SLS's failings to bring about a tax break for the Slovene peasantry during his time thus far in government, *Domovina* argued that Korošec knew full well that he would not be able to keep the promise he had made to the Slovene electorate to do just this. 'All intelligent people know,' *Domovina* insisted, that taxation must be increased in the aftermath of a war.³⁷⁷ In making such a promise, the 'clerical tigers' had 'made a mockery of the people's will.'

Domovina took this further a month later, boldly declaring to its readership that 'the clerical tigers are just like any rural priests.'³⁷⁸ They were using their ministerial salaries to 'create paradise on earth' for themselves. Meanwhile, they promised the Slovene peasant-majority electorate who had elected them to such positions of authority only 'paradise after death.'³⁷⁹ In this way, *Domovina* depicted Korošec and his SLS deputies as corrupt, power-hungry clergy, more interested in the financial benefits which politics could offer them than actively using their positions to fulfil their electoral promises. The use of the word 'tiger' invoked images of these men as hot-headed and ferocious, rushing into decisions regarding deals with other Yugoslav parties in Belgrade without fully thinking these through. It also implied an aggressive, domineering edge to the SLS's political conduct. It suggested that Korošec and his deputies were prioritising their own re-election and rise to power in Belgrade politics over the policies on which they had been elected. Thus this use of language was intended not only to degrade the SLS, but also to subtly encourage *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* readers to regard Korošec with contempt, and to dissuade them from electing SLS deputies. This in itself was a form of propaganda.

³⁷⁴ 'Možje naprednjaki, demokrati- občinske volitve so pred vrati!,' *Domovina*, 13 June 1924, p.1

³⁷⁵ 'Davčne oblasti, nehajte!' *Kmetijski List*, 29 October 1924, p.1

³⁷⁶ 'Dr Korošec,' *Kmetijski List*, 22 October 1924, p.2

³⁷⁷ 'Prilika za izpolitnitev obljub,' *Domovina*, 8 August 1924, p.1

³⁷⁸ 'Ne smeemo pozabiti,' *Domovina*, 19 September 1924, p.1

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

Though less derogatory in its tone, numerous *Jutro* articles from the period also reduced the SLS deputies to ‘clericals.’ Reporting on the SLS’s entry into Davidovič’s coalition government in late July 1924, *Jutro* condemned ‘the clergy’ for selling out their vision of Slovene autonomy in their pursuit of power. It argued that the SLS’s decision to form a government with the centralist Democratic Party was proof that the ‘clerical communique’ had failed to achieve its goals; it was now grasping onto power through any means available.³⁸⁰ In the aftermath of the SLS’s 1925 general election victory in the Slovene constituencies, *Jutro* criticised the ‘clerical party’ for failing to reform the state bureaucracy as it had promised. It complained that the ‘clericals’ had in fact been ‘openly hostile’ towards civil servants during their three-month period in government. Moreover, in his role as Minister for Education, Korošec had simply fulfilled the wishes of the ‘clerical organisations’ in terms of whom he had dismissed and appointed to ministerial positions.³⁸¹

Jutro failed to give details regarding this accusation, and so it is difficult to judge its legitimacy. Regardless of its factual basis, however, this article forms part of a clear pattern of using the term ‘clerical’ in reference to Korošec’s SLS while being particularly critical of its conduct. *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* also partook of this language, which most likely represented attempts to reduce the SLS to merely a Catholic party in the eyes of their Slovene readership. For the Slovene Liberals and the SKS with their liberal political outlook, the SLS’s simply being a Catholic party led by a Catholic priest was a basis of criticism. *Domovina* regularly argued that the ‘clerical party’ wanted the Slovene electorate to perceive it as a people’s party. In reality, it claimed, the SLS was nothing but a band of ‘clergy and laity’ who were benefiting financially from the Slovene electorate’s gullibility.³⁸² Similarly, throughout the period 1924-25, *Kmetijski List* anticipated that it was only a matter of time before the Slovene electorate ‘began to realise the harmfulness of clerical politics.’³⁸³ Korošec and his ‘clerical deceivers’ had been fooling the Slovene peasantry into believing that they represented their best interests, when in fact they could count on the SKS alone to fight for the ‘benefit of the peasant.’³⁸⁴

‘Clerical tigers,’ or simply ‘clerical,’ was evidently either terminology to refer to SLS deputies which had been mutually agreed upon by the main Slovene opposition parties, or which had adopted by

³⁸⁰ ‘So že zopet avtonomisti: tragikomedija klerikalne politike,’ *Jutro*, 27 July 1924, p.1

³⁸¹ ‘Politične beležke,’ *Jutro*, 20 February 1925, p.2

³⁸² ‘Klikarstvo v klerikalni stranki,’ *Domovina*, 17 April 1925, p.1

³⁸³ ‘Kulukarji besne,’ *Kmetijski List*, 23 January 1924, p.1

³⁸⁴ ‘Samostojneži so z nami!’ *Kmetijski List*, 4 June 1924, p.1

both the Slovene Liberals and the SKS in order to present something of a united front in their criticisms of Korošec. The SLS had not referred to itself as the Clerical Party for two decades at this point, having been renamed in 1905.³⁸⁵ In making a point of repeatedly using this terminology, *Domovina*, *Jutro* and *Kmetijski List* were effectively reducing the SLS to merely Catholic clergy - the implication being that they had no place in politics. By 1924, the party had evolved considerably from its Slovene Clerical Party beginnings, due largely to Krek's efforts to transform it into a grassroots Christian socialist movement during the early 1900s.³⁸⁶ Nor did Christian teachings dominate the SLS's Yugoslav-era political programme to the extent which might be expected given the party's history, Korošec's own background as a Catholic priest, and the strong link between theological training and entry into the SLS. The party possessed a wealth of political experience by 1918. It was not merely a group of Catholic clergy trying their hand at politics, as the nickname 'clericals' suggests. Furthermore, the opposition did not produce an abbreviation in renaming the SLS deputies the 'clericals.' The name 'Slovene People's Party' did not feature any reference to the party's Catholic orientation. Indeed, Korošec's *Socialna Misel* articles reveal that he was keen for the SLS to be perceived as more than simply a Catholic party. Rather, he saw it as one with which all who valued Christian morals, the preservation of national identities and issues relating to peasant and skilled worker welfare could identify. Therefore, by frequently referring to 'clericals' in such a derogatory manner, these opposition papers were not only trying to defame their opponent, but also to reduce it to a band of corrupt, self-interested clergy in the minds of the Slovene electorate.

Use of Caricatures as a Means of Propaganda

Another method of defamation used by these newspapers was that of caricatures and political satire. Caricatures of Korošec and other key Yugoslav political figures featured several times in editions of both *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* in the period 1924-25. Notably, they appeared most frequently in *Kmetijski List* in the two months prior to the February 1925 general election. It therefore seems relevant that these were the two of the three newspapers whose target audience consisted of educated, wealthier peasants, workers and craftsmen, and whose use of language as publications tended to be simpler and more accessible than *Jutro*. Caricatures were an effective tool to aid the communication of a political message to readers of these newspapers with both lower levels of literacy and limited comprehension of political affairs. *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* typically accompanied their caricatures with a short poem or prose section which related the topic in

³⁸⁵ Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, p.28

³⁸⁶ Robertson, 'Communism as Religious Phenomenon,' p.285

question to Slovene rural life. Caricatures were therefore an effective form of propaganda to ensure that these newspapers' critical message reached as many of the Slovene electorate as possible. They were a more accessible means of communication for the peasant and worker demographic which turned out to vote for the SLS time and time again.

Domovina made particular use of caricatures to reinforce its message about corruption. Namely, Korošec was so desperate for a cabinet position and the power this would bring him and the SLS that he would work with anyone and resort to anything in order to achieve this. In January 1924, it published a satirical cartoon entitled 'A Wheel of Kulakers,' which depicted the then-prime minister Nikola Pašić playing a flute, pied-piper-esque, while four figures danced around him.³⁸⁷ Korošec



Figure 1: 'Kolo kulukarjev,' *Domovina*, 11 January 1924, p.5

danced to Pašić's left, identifiable by his dog collar and priesthood attire. Another figure is intended to represent Dr Vladimir Ravnihar, a Ljubljana Liberal and fierce advocate of centralism, who that

³⁸⁷ 'Kolo kulukarjev,' *Domovina*, 11 January 1924, p.5

year joined Pašić's Radical Party. This caricature was accompanied by a poem, which ridiculed Korošec and his colleagues as represented alongside him in this piece. It referred to them as 'children,' who flocked to Pašić's side at the sound of his flute playing and blindly 'give him thanks.'³⁸⁸ *Domovina* therefore suggested that Korošec was dancing to Pašić's tune. He would agree to anything the Serb Radicals proposed if he stood to benefit personally, and readily abandon the plight of the Slovene peasantry who had elected him in his pursuit of power through cooperation with Pašić. Subtly, *Domovina* was reinforcing the idea that the Slovene Liberals constituted the only political representation the Slovene electorate could rely upon to represent their interests with honesty and integrity.



Figure 2: 'Možnar za klerikalne grehe,' *Domovina*, 11 April 1924, p.7

In a second 1924 caricature, *Domovina* presented Korošec as weak, fickle and an unsuitable advocate for the Slovene electorate. It simultaneously introduced Pribičević in his new role as leader of the Independent Democratic Party, of which the Slovene Liberals were now a part. Žerjav's party now not only faced the task of winning new support amongst the Slovene electorate, but also of convincing their existing support based to now vote for them as Independent Democrats. *Domovina's* caricature 'Možnar za klerikalne grehe' can be seen as an attempt to tackle both of

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

these challenges. The article featured three satirical illustrations accompanied by a descriptive poem. This again presented Korošec as the greedy, power-hungry enemy of the Slovene electorate, and Pribičević as their saviour. The first illustration depicts a grotesque, giant-like Korošec in his dog collar, greedily holding up the mortar of a pestle and mortar.³⁸⁹ The contents of the pestle were intended to represent the 'interests of all Slovenes.' The accompanying section of the poem describes how Korošec, Radić and Mehmed Spaho had gathered together for a 'consultation;' this is almost certainly intended to represent these leaders' opposition bloc. The second illustration depicts Pribičević arriving to seize the pestle and mortar from Korošec. The poem explains how Pribičević, after realising that the opposition bloc's intention was to seize power for their own corrupt interests, used the mortar to grind the clerical sins: their so-called successes.³⁹⁰ In the process, *Domovina* claimed, the fictional Pribičević had 'crushed the kulak to dust.' This reinforced the idea presented in the paper's 'Wheel of Kulakers' piece that while Korošec's SLS claimed to be the voice of the Slovene peasantry and workers, their cooperation with Pašić and willingness to drop their policies of autonomy and tax reductions in pursuit of ministerial positions and financial gain made them the friends of the landowners rather than the peasantry. It also presented Pribičević to *Domovina's* readership as a political leader they could rely on to put their interests above those of the large landowners and the clergy.

It is noteworthy that both these *Domovina* caricatures placed their representations of Korošec and his colleagues into rural, agricultural settings for the purposes of their message. These were surroundings which would have been familiar and relatable for the vast majority of *Domovina's* target audience- far more so than the Belgrade political scene. Presenting a rural context made *Domovina's* anti-Korošec message easier for its target audience to make sense of, increasing the chances that they too would view him as corrupt, power-hungry and unfit to represent the Slovene electorate. He was, according to the Slovene Liberals, only interested in strengthening the SLS's own influence in Belgrade politics. It did not matter to him if he sacrificed Slovene autonomy in the process.

The peasant orientated SKS also utilised political satire as a means of criticising Korošec's political character through *Kmetijski List*. A January 1925 edition of the paper featured a cartoon entitled 'Elections' which showed Korošec walking towards the polls, dragging behind him a figure clearly intended to represent the peasant population. This peasant figure was depicted hunched over, with

³⁸⁹ 'Možnar za klerikalne grehe,' *Domovina*, 11 April 1924, p.7

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

a chain around his neck linking him to Korošec.³⁹¹ Pašić rode on the peasant's back dressed in a top hat and tailcoat, holding a cheque for 800,000 dinars. Behind them followed the Slovene Liberal leader Žerjav, dressed in matching attire and holding both a whip and a smaller cheque for 300,000 dinars, and a representation of Albin Prepeluh, drawn half the size of his fellow political leaders and smoking while riding on a child's wooden horse. Prepeluh's depiction in this image was almost certainly an attempt to portray him and his party as insignificant and a wasted vote, given their lack of electoral success and influence within Belgrade politics. In the accompanying text, *Kmetijski List* argued that the Slovene rural classes had been enslaved by the SLS. They had voted loyally for the party again and again despite Korošec's lack of commitment to bringing about positive change for the peasantry while in government.³⁹² *Kmetijski List* informed its readers that any among them who wanted 'honesty in public life... to fight corruption... the welfare of the middle and working classes' should vote for 'the Agrarian Party, of which our independent agricultural party is a part.'³⁹³

³⁹¹ 'Volitve,' *Kmetijski List*, 16 January 1925, p.3

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

VOLITVE

dne 8. februarja bodo odločile Vašo usodo za dolgo dobo let. Zato bodite previdni in dobro pomislite, komu bode zaupali svojo volilno krogeljico.

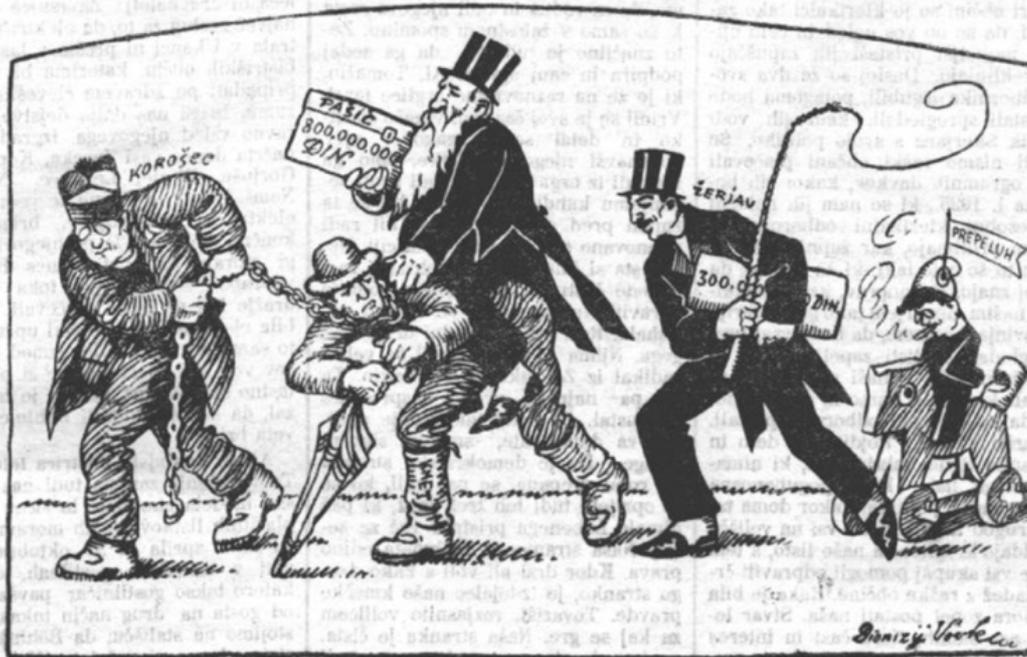


Figure 3: 'Volitve,' *Kmetijski List*, 16 January 1925, p.3

This same illustration was reprinted on the front page of *Kmetijski List* on 4 February, just four days prior to the general election. Here, it was accompanied by a short dialogue between a Slovene farmer and Korošec, Pašič, Žerjav and Prepeluh, printed in enlarged font.³⁹⁴ In this dialogue, the figure representing the Slovene peasantry pleads with the politicians holding him in chains: 'gentlemen, I can't anymore! Let someone else work a little!' Korošec and his fellow party leaders respond to this plea by laughing and telling the peasant 'why should we work, when we have you?' The intended message is clear. Through this combination of imagery and text, *Kmetijski List* endeavoured to instil in its readers a sense that Korošec was simply using the Slovene peasants as a path to government. He was not truly interested in bettering their social and economic

³⁹⁴ 'Untitled Cartoon 1,' *Kmetijski List*, 4 February 1925, p.1

circumstances through tax reductions and land reform. He and his party were like Radić, Žerjav and the somewhat irrelevant Prepeluh. As a result, only a vote for the SKS candidates within the Agrarian Party would bring about real change for the Slovene peasantry.

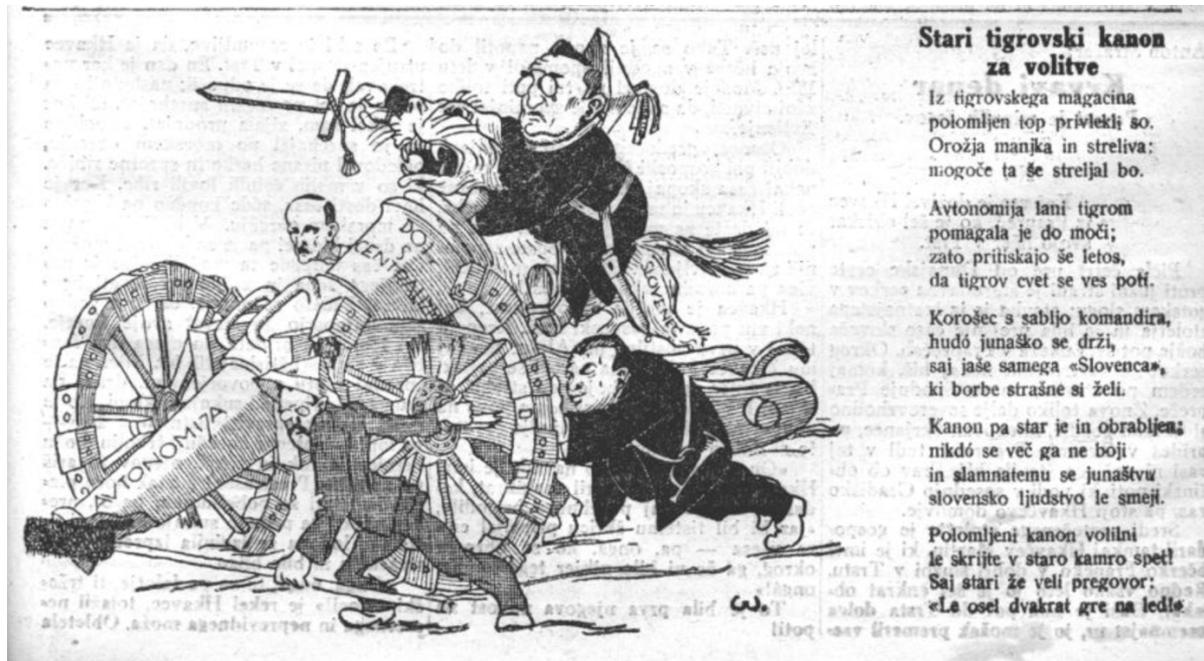


Figure 4: 'Stari tigrovski kanon za volitve,' *Domovina*, 21 November 1924, p.1

Both *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* also utilised political cartoons as a tool through which to actively inspire their readers to vote for their respective parties during the 1925 election campaign. They presented the SLS as old and backward, as well as using such imagery to imply a brighter future for Slovene voters if they were to back their respective parties over the SLS. In late November 1924, *Domovina* published a caricature piece entitled 'The Old Tiger Cannon For Elections' (Star tigrovski kanon za volitve), making use of the Slovene Liberals' and SKS's adopted derogatory nickname for the SLS. This front-page article consisted of a cartoon of Korošec riding an old, wooden cannon like a Roman emperor aboard a chariot, being pushed along by a group of smaller, tired-looking figures.³⁹⁵ He is depicted brandishing a sword and a flag labelled 'Slovenec,' pointing to the SLS's most prominent party-controlled newspaper of the period. Printed on the body of the cannon are the words 'autonomy' and 'down with centralism.' The accompanying text in the form of a short poem explains how, in anticipation of the February election, 'a broken cannon was pulled from the tiger warehouse.' Despite the cannon's missing ammunition, the 'tigers' hope it will still fire. They have reinstated their pro-Slovene autonomy message for this election campaign, since it brought them

³⁹⁵ 'Stari tigrovski kanon za volitve,' *Domovina*, 21 November 1924, p.1

victory in the Slovene constituencies in the 1923 election. However, the poem continues, Korošec's cannon is 'old and worn out.' As a result, 'no one is afraid of him anymore, and the Slovene people only laugh' in the face of Korošec's attempts to portray himself as their hero.³⁹⁶ In this way, *Domovina* ridiculed Korošec and encouraged its readers to perceive him as a laughingstock, simply recycling old policies on the basis of what he deemed most likely to secure the SLS an election victory. He had no intention of actively following these election promises through.

Kmetijski List's second caricature published in its final edition prior to the 8 February election conveyed a similar message to *Domovina's* 'The Old Tiger Cannon for Elections.' This illustration depicted Korošec in his cassock, blessing a figure representing the Slovene peasantry and workers.³⁹⁷ The figure is hunched over, struggling under the weight of multiple sacks tied to his back. These sacks bear labels including 'kulaks,' 'rent increase,' '500 percent personal land income tax' and 'taxes and excise duties.' They represent the various forms of tax burden the Slovene peasant and worker population still faced in 1925 - and which Korošec had failed to relieve them of during his three-month period in Davidovič's cabinet in 1924. In the accompanying caption, the figure representing the Slovene peasantry cried out in vain to Korošec, as a Christian, to show mercy and relieve him of his heavy burden. Behind the peasant figure, representations of Pašić and Žerjav carry between them a sack labelled 'tax from taxes.' Here, the SKS attempted to show that taxation of the peasants and workers had become ludicrously high. If this continued, then soon, even their taxes would be taxed. Despite the peasant character clearly struggling under the weight of the tax burdens, the priest Korošec blesses him, ignoring his plight. The implication is that he is thanking the peasants for enduring the financial strain they have been placed under in order that he, Pašić and Žerjav can grow richer as the peasantry grows poorer in turn. *Kmetijski List's* inclusion of Žerjav portrayed in a negative light is interesting. *Domovina* did not ridicule or condemn Pucelj, the SKS leader, through its own use of political satire. Its own criticisms were limited to Korošec and the other major Yugoslav political leaders. Given that the Slovene Liberal faction of the Independent Democratic Party held considerably more power in the Slovene regions, with four Skupština seats to the SKS's zero, it seems likely that *Domovina* made this omission because the Slovene Liberals simply did not perceive Pucelj and the SKS as a real threat. It therefore focused on criticisms of Korošec instead, recognising that the SLS's domination of the Slovene political scene meant that attracting formerly loyal SLS voters to their own movement was the only route to electoral victory. The SKS, with its small support base and lack of Skupština representation, was insignificant.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ 'Untitled cartoon 2,' *Kmetijski List*, 4 February 1925, p.3



Kmet: „Za božjo voljo, če ste kristjani, nikar več ne nakladajte, saj vidite, da se že lomim pod bremenom!“

Gospôda: (Pašič, dr. Korošec, dr. Žerjav in Prepeluh): „E, kaj, dokler boš tako neumen, da nas boš volil, boš tudi nosil, kar ti bomo naložili!“

Figure 5: 'Untitled cartoon 2,' *Kmetijski List*, 4 February 1925, p.3

Kmetijski List published a third and final caricature in its election week edition, building further on this theme of the Slovene peasant electorate coming to a realisation regarding Korošec's inadequate representation of them in the Skupština. This caricature showed an enlarged, angry peasant figure grasping a whip, looming over a series of smaller figures begging on their knees, representing Korošec, Žerjav, Pašič, Prepeluh and Ljudevit Pivko, another Slovene Liberal member of Pribičević's Independent Democrats.³⁹⁸ *Kmetijski List* printed this caricature along with a caption in which the Slovene peasant figure informed the politicians begging him for mercy that 'I've obeyed you for a long time, but things only get worse. That is why I will now elect my professional Agricultural Party!'

³⁹⁸ 'Untitled cartoon 3,' *Kmetijski List*, 4 February 1925, p.5



Figure 6: 'Untitled cartoon 3,' *Kmetijski List*, 4 February 1925, p.5

All of these caricatures therefore represent a turning point for the Slovene electorate, portraying the Slovene peasantry viewing Korošec as corrupt, power-hungry and unlikely to bring about any real improvement in their circumstances if elected to government. *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* presented these Slovene peasant and worker epiphanies to their target audiences in the hope of inspiring a similar realisation amongst them, turning them against Korošec and the SLS and towards their own parties in the process. Caricatures were a visual tool through which these newspapers could convey a political message more accessible to Slovene voters with both lower levels of literacy and limited understanding of political affairs. Furthermore, the rural settings of these caricatures made them relatable to the Slovene peasant-majority electorate, or at least more relatable than the world of Belgrade politics, which was removed from Slovene rural life. *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List*

therefore combined easily comprehensible poetry and prose with caricatures in order to portray Korošec as self-interested, corrupt and an inadequate spokesman for the Slovene population of the Kingdom in Belgrade. This impression was designed to encourage the Slovene electorate to turn away from his politics. Simultaneously, portrayals of the Slovene peasantry taking an active stance against the SLS aimed to inspire the Slovene electorate to take such action themselves.

Korošec's Deviation From SLS Policies

One of the major themes which featured within opposition press criticisms was the idea that Korošec would do and say anything he thought might ensure electoral success for his SLS. As well as being exposed to some extent through *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List's* political satire pieces, this theme also dominated articles of a more traditional journalistic style in all three newspapers. *Domovina* encouraged its readership to view Korošec as fickle, changing the SLS's political programme constantly. In an article published in April 1924, it provided a brief overview of the SLS's ever-evolving loyalties. In 1914, *Domovina* claimed, under Krek's leadership the SLS had encouraged the Slovene peasantry to fight on behalf of the Habsburg Empire.³⁹⁹ Towards the end of the war, it had then switched to promoting Yugoslavism. This stance quickly changed to advocacy of Slovene regional administrative autonomy following the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution. *Domovina* argued that rather than responding to the circumstances in which the Slovene population of first the Habsburg Empire, and then the SHS Kingdom found themselves, Korošec was merely taking the stance which he believed would win him the support of the Slovene electorate.⁴⁰⁰ He would then abandon this stance in Belgrade if he saw an opportunity to form an alliance with another party, even if it lacked the SLS's core values. On this basis, *Domovina* concluded that the Slovene electorate should vote for Žerjav's Slovene Liberals within the Independent Democrats instead.

Jutro took *Domovina's* position a step further. It argued that distrust for Korošec was growing within the Skupština, due to his Yugoslav colleagues noticing his tendency to present himself as somewhat politically ambiguous, prioritising entry into government or political clubs over remaining loyal to SLS policy.⁴⁰¹ It reported in early July 1924, immediately prior to the SLS entering into Davidovič's government, on rumours that Korošec had held talks with Pašič at Lake Bled. It claimed that these talks were intended to 'negotiate at what price the clergy would be willing to leave the opposition

³⁹⁹ *Domovina*, 'Kazovano vlačugarstvo klerikalne politike,' 11 April 1924, p.1

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ 'Nezaupanje napram klerikalcem v opozicijskem bloku vre,' *Jutro*, 3 July 1924, p.1

bloc and directly or indirectly support the current government.'⁴⁰² Ultimately, this did not happen. Pašić's government collapsed, and the SLS instead entered into government with the opposition bloc at the end of the month. *Jutro* reported that it had interviewed a member of the opposition bloc, who had chosen to remain anonymous. This unnamed deputy claimed that the opposition bloc was all-too familiar with Korošec's conduct. He accused Korošec of 'always leading negotiations on two sides,' complaining that 'the ambiguous policy of the clergy is one of the most difficult internal flaws of the opposition bloc.' In this way, *Jutro* presented Korošec not only as prone to deviating from SLS policies, but also opportunistically jumping between negotiations and alliances with various colleagues.

Jutro's underlying message was clear. The Slovene electorate had no guarantee that the SLS would remain true to the policies upon which they had been elected. *Domovina* would later revisit this theme in May 1925. It insisted that Korošec was now a 'political dead-man.'⁴⁰³ He had practised this tactic of political ambiguity for so long that the Serb Radicals were no longer prepared to work with him, and it would not be long before the opposition bloc cut ties with him, too. In reality, this was not the case. Korošec would go on to enter into negotiations with the Serb Radicals throughout 1927 in order to secure considerable concessions towards the Slovene regional autonomy his party had been advocating since the adoption of Vidovdan. This does, however, illustrate the impression *Domovina* wanted to create of Korošec for its readership: running out of allies and practising a political strategy which it predicted would fail him sooner or later.

Kmetijski List also heavily criticised Korošec for deviating from SLS policies. As a result of its own agrarian mentality, it tended to focus on issues relating to taxation. In April 1924, reflecting on the year since the last elections, it argued that the Slovene electorate should have lost all their trust in Korošec since, his SLS's electoral victory in the Slovene constituencies and its promise to reduce the tax burden on the peasantry, taxation had increased in the last year.⁴⁰⁴ *Domovina* echoed this, criticising Korošec and the SLS for ever having promised to lessen the tax burden on the peasantry in the first place when he lacked the power and influence in Belgrade to do so.⁴⁰⁵ Both called on him to admit that the SLS's election promises of tax breaks were fraudulent. Similarly, in the aftermath of the Davidović government's resignation in October 1924, *Kmetijski List* published an article entitled 'Tax Authorities, Stop It!' (Davčne oblasti, nehahte!). This condemned Korošec for allowing

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ 'Beležke,' *Domovina*, 1 May 1925, p.7

⁴⁰⁴ 'Pomagači radikalov,' *Kmetijski List*, 3 April 1924, p.3

⁴⁰⁵ 'Prilika za izpolnitev obljub,' *Domovina*, 8 August 1924, p.1

personal income tax to continue into the new year.⁴⁰⁶ It argued that this tax was ‘strangling’ the Slovene lands. Many of its predominantly peasant population just met the threshold to be taxed under the criteria for this as it stood, but they were left in a dire financial position after paying it. *Kmetijski List* argued that if Korošec was truly committed to reducing the burden of personal income tax on the Slovene peasantry, as he had claimed to be prior to entering into government, then he would have pressured the Ministry of Finance to bring about the ‘abolition of, or at least mitigation of, this cruel tax law.’⁴⁰⁷

Whether or not Korošec in his role as Minister of Education had truly possessed the necessary influence to bring about the abolition of personal income tax is debatable, let alone in the mere three-month period of the Davidović government. *Kmetijski List*, however, was determined to convince its readership that he had indeed possessed the ability to lessen the burden of this tax on the Slovene peasantry during his time in office. His failure to address this therefore proved him to be no different to other greedy Yugoslav politicians such as Pašić, Pribičević and Žerjav, prioritising the kulaks over the needs of the ordinary peasantry. This message subtly undermined Korošec’s image as an advocate for the Slovene peasant majority, by suggesting that only agrarian political representation such as the SKS would truly prioritise their needs.

Just two months later, *Kmetijski List* published an additional article which built upon this theme of Korošec’s failure to adequately represent peasant interests. Adopting *Domovina’s* frequently utilised tone in the lead-up to the February 1925 elections, *Kmetijski List* claimed that he and his SLS would temporarily adopt any political stance it felt might guarantee them the support of the Slovene electorate. Whether or not it was truly committed to these policies was another matter altogether.⁴⁰⁸ It pointed out that the SLS had originally been a conservative party when it was formed in the late nineteenth century; it had taken on its grassroots, socialist-style rhetoric under Krek’s leadership. It was this shift in ideology which caused the party to gain mass support amongst the Slovene electorate. *Kmetijski List* argued that despite the SLS’s claims to represent the political left, in fact ‘only the Slovene Agrarians can be trusted to pursue such policies.’ In this way, therefore, *Kmetijski List* presented Korošec as wholly unreliable, and the SKS as the suitably peasant-minded alternative party in the Slovene constituencies.

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Davčne oblasti, nehajte,’ *Kmetijski List*, 29 October 1924, p.1

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ ‘SLS na umiku,’ *Kmetijski List*, 17 December 1924, p.2

Kmetijski List argued that in preparation for the 1923 elections, Korošec had taken the view that ‘no motto was radical enough.’ He had therefore promised the Slovenes autonomy ‘as strong as any other country in the world’ if they voted for SLS candidates, because he appreciated that this was a policy which would win over the electorate.⁴⁰⁹ After the 1923 elections, however, he had spent four months colluding with Stjepan Radić, attempting to convince him to pursue his ambition of Croat autonomy through the political system, rather than the HRSS’s traditional tactic of boycotting the Skupština. This might seem like a logical move on Korošec’s part. Both he and Radić desired autonomy for the Slovenes and Croats they represented respectively. Working together to push for a revision of the constitution would, in theory, work in both parties’ favours. *Kmetijski List*, however, argued that it was hypocritical of Korošec to even consider working with Radić. This was because he advocated Slovene autonomy via a federalist restructuring of the state, while Radić desired a republican model. Here, *Kmetijski List* demonstrated that it could be somewhat pedantic in its criticism of Korošec, conveniently interpreting his attempts to pursue SLS party policy as deviating from electoral promises and thus attempting to persuade its Slovene readership that he could not be trusted.

Korošec’s Political Networking in Belgrade

The opposition press’s criticism of Korošec’s efforts to form working relationships with other parties in Belgrade can be divided into three categories: his role within Davidović’s three-month coalition government, his participation within the federalist opposition bloc, and his attempts to forge a working relationship with Radić. Of the three opposition newspapers, *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* were the most explicitly critical of Korošec’s conduct while serving as Minister of Education within Davidović’s summer 1924 government. *Jutro* tended to be more moderate, criticising Korošec’s conduct on the basis of particular political developments rather than through opinion pieces. The SKS was open to the possibility of Korošec’s role in government being a success as they perceived it. However, the party expressed cautious optimism regarding Davidović’s government through *Kmetijski List*. It highlighted the fact that the SLS’s four ministerial positions within Davidović’s cabinet represented more power than the Slovenes had ever held before in the SHS Kingdom, or indeed, within any state in which they had been included.⁴¹⁰ It also expressed its expectation that this Slovene cabinet representation would ensure that the new government went on to ‘fulfil the promises made by the SLS to the Slovene people.’ Indeed, it argued that not just the SLS’s electoral

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ ‘Nova vlada,’ *Kmetijski List*, 30 July 1924, p.1

promises, but the 'needs of Slovenia' could be 'easily covered if Slovenia's representatives in this government do their duty.'⁴¹¹ The SKS hereby sent a clear message. Korošec had been handed the perfect opportunity to implement Slovene autonomy via a revision of the constitution, as well as to bring about tax relief for the rural classes he had been advocating since 1921. Failure to achieve these policies would be purely a reflection of his political incompetence.

This stance seems unreasonable. While SLS deputies did indeed constitute a far greater share of this Davidović cabinet than they would in any other cabinet of the 1920s, they were still a minority within the government coalition. Korošec's own position of Minister for Education did not grant him authority regarding state administrative structure or taxation. He would therefore have to rely upon winning over the centralist Davidović were he to have any hope of securing concessions towards Slovene autonomy, even from within the government. The SKS, however, appeared determined to measure his success in government according to these criteria. Reflecting on the Davidović's government in the immediate aftermath of its collapse, *Kmetijski List* commented with sarcasm that 'Dr Korošec is certainly of the opinion that the people can bear the tax burden very well.'⁴¹² In late October 1924, it particularly criticised him for failing to use Davidović's brief premiership to address the 'unjust personal income tax' that the peasantry faced, despite having four 'tigers' in the cabinet. It reflected that the SKS had anticipated 'a little more seriousness and love for the people from Korošec' during his time in government, writing him off as incompetent and having failed the Slovene electorate. This is an excessively harsh critique given the short duration of Davidović's government; Korošec was hardly in his ministerial post long enough to address the taxation issue. Nonetheless, this *Kmetijski List* perspective demonstrates the SKS's unforgiving attitude towards him in this period. The party had high expectations as to what he should achieve. It viewed anything less as a marked failure.

Domovina's articles from the period echo this *Kmetijski List* sentiment. Announcing the collapse of the Davidović administration on 17 October 1924, it claimed that Korošec's three-month period as a cabinet minister was more than enough for the SLS to implement reform: 'whatever they wanted, they could do and achieve' even in a short space of time.⁴¹³ It pointed out that the SLS had entered government promising to 'bring order to the country' and to 'suppress corruption.' Indeed, anti-

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² 'Dr Korošec,' *Kmetijski List*, 22 October 1924, p.2

⁴¹³ *Domovina*, 'Žalosten konec vlade feederalistov in klerikalnih avtonomistov,' *Domovina*, 17 October 1924, p.1

corruption policies had been a key aspect of SLS manifestos since 1920.⁴¹⁴ This was in addition to Korošec's vow to the Slovene people that the 'golden age of autonomy' was upon them, and that the SLS would, as part of the Davidović government, 'fulfil to the voters all that they had promised before and after the elections.' *Domovina* condemned the SLS for failing to achieve these aims during its recent three-month period in government. It argued that Korošec had not fulfilled 'a single promise' he had made prior to forming the coalition with Davidović. This proved him and his party to be incompetent, and to have failed those who voted SLS in the last election. In turn, it insisted that Korošec had held considerable power within the government, since the SLS's participation within it had been essential for a government majority. Therefore, Korošec's inability to implement his election policies was a result of his own inadequacy. He was not truly committed to policies which would benefit the Slovene electorate.

Like *Domovina*, *Jutro* too expressed disdain for Korošec right from the announcement of his participation within Davidović's government. It welcomed Korošec to the cabinet with an article condemning the deal they had struck with Davidović's Yugoslav Democrats, protesting that after fourteen days of negotiations in Belgrade, he and his SLS had 'sold a united Slovenia and its autonomy for a bowl of lentils.'⁴¹⁵ Žerjav and the Slovene Liberals also objected to his ambitions for Slovene autonomy, so they would have had no objections were he to abandon this. What they did object to, however, was their perception that the SLS had cast aside the policies it had been elected on the basis of in order to enter into government with the pro-centralist Yugoslav Democrats. They believed Korošec had sold out this promise for no Slovene gain.

The SLS paper *Domoljub* addressed this tough criticism a month later. It argued that the struggle for Slovene administrative autonomy would be 'long and fierce,' and that the SLS would continue the fight from within Davidović's government.⁴¹⁶ It claimed that the most viable route to securing such autonomy was to convince those parties in the Skupština who favoured a centralist state model that a federalist restructuring was in fact the best way forward for all of its citizens. Participation within the Davidović administration would allow the SLS to establish themselves as an indispensable force within Belgrade politics. Korošec could then propose the convening of a new constituent assembly, once he was certain the SLS had won the major Skupština parties over to his view that agreement between the three Yugoslav tribes on key political issues was 'impossible' without amending the

⁴¹⁴ *Slovenec*, 'Slovensko ljudstvo!' 26 October 1920, p.1

⁴¹⁵ 'So že zopet avtonomisti: tragikomedija klerikalne politike,' *Jutro*, 27 July 1924, p.1

⁴¹⁶ 'Kako daleč smo?' *Domoljub*, 20 August 1924, p.1

centralist constitution. *Domoljub* therefore perceived SLS entry into Davidovič's government not as marking abandonment of autonomy as *Jutro* claimed, but as an important step towards achieving this goal by working within the system. One month following the collapse of Davidovič's government, *Domoljub* again came to Korošec's defence over his failure to implement this policy while in the cabinet. It protested that the SLS's 21 deputies were not enough for them to make a decisive impact in the Skupština.⁴¹⁷ This was why Korošec had spent the last few years constantly searching for the best allies available to his SLS at any particular moment. Political collaborations strengthened the SLS's voice in the Skupština. In entering into government with Davidovič, Korošec was taking advantage of the opportunity to prove that the SLS were a safe pair of hands, willing to cooperate with other political parties and share power in exchange for small concessions towards their own Slovene administrative autonomy policy.

Jutro's opinion of Korošec's conduct while part of the Davidovič government did not improve from this point. Reflecting on the Davidovič-Korošec-Spaho coalition four months on from its collapse, it argued that 'there is not a single instance that the SLS' while in government had 'ever advocated for the improvement of... vital issues of the state.'⁴¹⁸ The paper was particularly critical of the fact that, or so it claimed, Korošec had failed to improve working conditions for teachers when Minister for Education. Moreover, it argued that at times, his department had acted in an openly hostile manner towards 'both the bureaucracy and the teachers.' Yet *Jutro* failed to provide examples to support this claim. The main basis seems to be Korošec's dismissal of the former head of the Art Department at the Ministry for Education, Risto Odavič, citing corruption.⁴¹⁹

The SLS's *Domoljub*, however, highlighted some possible explanations for the Slovene Liberals' dissatisfaction with Korošec's conduct as Minister for Education from July to October 1924. Soon after the formation of the Davidovič government, *Domoljub* had predicted that the Slovene Liberals would be angered by Korošec's appointment as Minister for Education, because he planned to further consolidate the legislation protecting the place of Christian education in schools. Believing that religion had no place in the classroom, the Slovene Liberals had been actively campaigning to abolish such Christian education.⁴²⁰ Korošec had used his time as Minister for Education to issue 'several ordinances regarding Slovene textbooks in Slovene schools.'⁴²¹ This is particularly relevant

⁴¹⁷ 'Kaj pravi dr Korošec,' *Domoljub*, 26 November 1924, p.1

⁴¹⁸ 'Politične beležke,' *Jutro*, 20 February 1925, p.2

⁴¹⁹ 'Mučen konflikt ministra prosvete,' *Jutro*, 12 October 1924, p.1

⁴²⁰ 'Konec nasilja nova vlada,' *Domoljub*, 30 July 1924, p.1

⁴²¹ 'Delo Vlade,' *Domoljub*, 27 August 1924, p.2

because it represents another fundamental difference in political perspective between Korošec and the Slovene Liberal opposition during this period; they later criticised Korošec for placing too much emphasis on the Slovene language in educational settings.⁴²² While the SLS were accentuating the role of Christianity within Yugoslav daily life, Žerjav's Slovene Liberals preferred to keep religion out of both politics and wider society. Given that the Slovene-speaking population was almost entirely Catholic in this period, this offers a possible explanation as to why Korošec's SLS remained the party of the Slovene people throughout the 1920s while the Slovene Liberals struggled to gain political representation. The SLS continued to prioritise - or at least give the public impression of prioritising - the issues they knew were central to the lives of their traditional electorate. This ensured their continued electoral success.

Korošec's Attempts to Work with Radić

Korošec also attracted considerable criticism from the Slovene Liberals and the SKS in this period over his attempts to form a working relationship with Radić, or at least to persuade him to abandon his Skupština boycott and participate in Yugoslav parliamentary life. Korošec had never formed close ties with Radić and the HRSS, despite the similarities between their political programmes. Cooperation between them was hindered by Radić's pro-republican orientation and disdain for Christian politics.⁴²³ Furthermore, Korošec disapproved of Radić's boycotting tactics; as we have seen, his own SLS sought to work within the Yugoslav political system to achieve the reforms it desired rather than resorting to such disruptive mechanisms.

Radić had joined Korošec's opposition bloc along with the JMO in spring 1923. This bloc would be expanded to include Davidović following Pribičević's split with the Yugoslav Democratic Party in 1924.⁴²⁴ Korošec and Radić therefore represented the same opposition movement, despite lacking a close relationship. Indeed, *Domovina* had criticised Korošec for such an association as early as January 1924, arguing that he would need to cut all ties with the HRSS if he wanted to be taken seriously in Belgrade political circles.⁴²⁵ Korošec was met with further disapproval from the Slovene Liberal and SKS opposition press when Radić travelled to Moscow in June that year, having been invited by the Soviet government to join their Peasant International Movement. Radić had intended

⁴²² 'Beležke, *Domovina*, 3 April 1925, p.8

⁴²³ Rahten, 'Anton Korošec and the "Croatian Question" in Yugoslavia,' p.19

⁴²⁴ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.40

⁴²⁵ 'Kako je bratej?' *Domovina*, 18 January 1924, p.5

for this to be a shock move to startle the Yugoslav government into granting Croatia concessions towards autonomy. Ultimately, however, it resulted in great difficulties not only for the HRSS, but also for the other opposition bloc parties. In late July, *Kmetijski List* reported that Korošec was 'going crazy' trying to repair the damage done to the opposition bloc's reputation by Radić colluding with the Bolsheviks.⁴²⁶

This tone was replicated in *Jutro* and *Domovina* as the fallout from Radić's actions continued long beyond summer 1924. In September, *Jutro* reported with disapproval that Korošec had spent the day in Zagreb trying to persuade Radić to cooperate with the rest of the former opposition bloc, which was now in government under Davidović's premiership.⁴²⁷ Davidović's administration was becoming increasingly vulnerable to pressure from the Serb Radicals and Independent Democrats at this time. Korošec hoped that the support of Radić's HRSS in the Skupština would consolidate the government's position. *Jutro* scathingly questioned what negotiations with Radić could possibly have to do with Korošec's then-position as Minister for Education; it commented that he should stick to his job title, rather than engage in so-called separatist activities.⁴²⁸ A month later, *Domovina* reported on a speech Radić had given at a rally in the Croatian village of Krašič, where he had launched an explicit, relentless attack on the clergy unlike anything *Domovina* claimed to have heard 'from the mouth of even the most faithless liberal.'⁴²⁹ The paper questioned how Korošec could continue attempting to persuade Radić to cooperate with the government after such an attack. Indeed, *Domoljub* too admitted in the aftermath of the Davidović administration's collapse that the regime had been further weakened by Radić's provocative speeches and refusal to work with Korošec, despite their similar political goals.⁴³⁰ It thereby admitted that the Slovene opposition's criticisms of Korošec for failing to win over Radić were somewhat justified.

As late as June 1925, both *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* were still pointing to Korošec's increasing frustration with Radić's continued refusal to cooperate with the SLS and the rest of the opposition bloc, despite in so many ways being natural political allies. Instead, Radić was reportedly conducting secret negotiations with Pašić's national bloc.⁴³¹ In April that year, *Domovina* addressed reports in the SLS newspapers *Slovenec* and *Domoljub* that the HRSS was pursuing a policy of 'hesitation and

⁴²⁶ 'Radić,' *Kmetijski List*, 23 July 1924, p.2

⁴²⁷ 'Politično potovanje g Korošca,' *Jutro*, 14 September 1924, p.2

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ 'Kako govori zaveznik naših klerikalcev o škofih in o duhovniščini,' *Domovina*, 3 October 1924, p.1

⁴³⁰ 'Kaj pravi dr Korošec,' *Domoljub*, 26 November 1924, p.1

⁴³¹ 'Nervoznost g. Korošca,' *Kmetijski List*, 10 June 1925, p.1

cunning.⁴³² It was attempting to jump between allegiances with whichever party Radić believed might benefit them at any given moment. *Domovina* commented how it was ironic that the SLS papers were constructing this impression of Radić for their readers, because this description also applied to Korošec's own conduct. It pointed out that Korošec had spent much of the early Yugoslav period actively avoiding all association with Radić. He then recruited him for his anti-centralism opposition bloc in 1923, only to disown him again when his politics became too extreme and separatist for their liking. He then tried to secure his support again in 1924 when the Davidović government was struggling to hold its own in the Skupština. In this way, *Domovina* portrayed Korošec and the SLS as hypocritical, criticising Radić for a tactic they themselves were employing regularly.

In contrast, *Kmetijski List* criticised Korošec for being too hard on Radić in June 1925, perhaps as a result of its own peasant outlook. The SKS argued that to give speeches at SLS rallies so openly condemning Radić would only give Pribičević and Žerjav the material they needed to further critique his conduct. But this, they insisted, could only prove an advantage to the Slovene Agrarians, who might be able to attract former SLS voters if Korošec fell from grace. Meanwhile, *Domovina* viewed Korošec's June 1925 speeches, in which he had condemned Radić's attempts to form an alliance with Pašić, as evidence that the SLS was running out of allies. Even they were no longer willing to work with Radić. *Domovina* claimed somewhat tenuously that Korošec's failure to win over Radić was yet further proof of his autonomy policy being out of touch with reality.⁴³³ It argued that the correct way forward for the Slovene population was not the federalist restructuring of the Kingdom that Korošec advocated. Rather, the Slovenes should become 'Yugoslavs' rather than Slovenes, embracing the centralist system already in place and the position adopted by the Slovene Liberals within the Independent Democrats.⁴³⁴ In this way, both Radić's unpredictability and the fact that the HRSS had natural overlap with SLS policies regarding autonomy allowed the Slovene Liberals and the SKS to manipulate a variety of situations involving Radić in this period. They used the latter's conduct to present Korošec as running out of allies in the Skupština, and as incapable of forming working relationships with the party that in many ways was the most natural fit alliance-wise for his own SLS.

⁴³² 'Beleške,' *Domovina*, 3 April 1925, p.8

⁴³³ 'Dr Korošec priznava zavežnost,' *Domovina*, 12 June 1925, p.1

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

The Outcome of the February 1925 Election

In the years 1924-25, there was a clear pattern in how Slovene opposition newspapers attempted to discredit Korošec through their news coverage. The SLS had achieved a landslide election victory in 1923. The need to highlight Korošec and his party's faults to the Slovene electorate would have seemed pressing to the Slovene Liberals and SKS heading into the February 1925 election campaign, since breaking the SLS's hold over the Slovene constituencies was their only route to Skupština representation. They therefore presented Korošec as an unreliable, self-interested political figure who would abandon his trademark autonomist cause in an instant if he believed this would grant him further power and influence in Belgrade. Despite their efforts, however, in the 1925 elections, the Slovene electorate once again elected SLS deputies to 20 out of the 26 Slovene constituency seats in the Skupština. This raised some difficult questions for the Slovene opposition press. Newspaper articles seemed to be having little impact in terms of attracting new supporters to their respective Slovene opposition parties in this period. Their attempts to highlight Korošec's contradictions and failings as the voice of the Slovene electorate apparently had no effect on the election results.

Instead, *Domovina* attempted to counteract the Slovene Liberals' crushing defeat by focusing on the gains made by the Independent Democrats across the Kingdom as a whole. Its coverage of the election results celebrated a 'great victory for the National Bloc' in its immediate coverage of the February 1925 election results. It emphasised that the pro-centralist government coalition between Pribičević's Independent Democrats and Pašić's Serb Radicals had won more than half of the Skupština seats, with Žerjav and his Slovene Liberal colleague Pivko elected in the Slovene constituencies.⁴³⁵ It boldly claimed that the election had therefore ended 'just as we had predicted to our friends and readers countless times,' while conveniently neglecting to mention that it had in several previous editions also predicted massive SLS losses in the Slovene constituencies. When it did address the disappointing election results, *Domovina* claimed the Slovene electorate had, 'to their own detriment,' voted 'overwhelmingly' against the national bloc.⁴³⁶ As a result, the SLS had lost just one of the 21 Skupština seats won in the previous general election. *Domovina* despaired that the Slovene people had 'inflicted wounds upon themselves' and would 'again have nothing from the clergy for the next four years.'⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ 'Sijajna zmaga narodnega bloka v državi,' *Domovina*, 13 February 1925, p.1

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

Kmetijski List was less scathing of the SLS's election victory, perhaps because the SKS viewed Korošec's political outlook as the lesser of the evils in comparison to Žerjav's Slovene Liberals.⁴³⁸ It responded to the election results with an article entitled 'Thank You,' printed on the front page of its post-election edition and written by the SKS leader Pucelj himself. He expressed gratitude to those amongst the Slovene electorate who had 'faithfully preserved' the values of the Agrarian party in the Slovene lands by voting SKS, 'despite the pressure of the clergy, the democrats, the radicals, and the entire government apparatus.'⁴³⁹ He urged SKS supporters to 'continue along the planned path!' and fight for agricultural rights. Furthermore, he commended them for not giving in to the 'frantic agitation of the clericals' in the leadup to the election. This is somewhat misleading. The SKS had gained a tiny proportion of the vote compared to the SLS, as is evidenced by the election results breakdown per Slovene constituency published on the same page of *Kmetijski List*. Nonetheless, it clearly depicts the contrast between the Slovene Liberals' and the SKS's reactions to the election results. The Slovene Liberals attempted to present the results as a disappointment for the SLS, when in reality they were anything but. The SKS was more realistic. *Kmetijski List* encouraged its support base to continue backing the Slovene agrarian movement, while simultaneously acknowledging that it had failed to win support significant enough to secure Skupština representation. It could not compete with the appeal held by Korošec's SLS.

At this stage, perhaps still reeling from the election results, *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* offered no explanation for Korošec's convincing victory. A month later, however, *Domovina* reported on a speech given by Pribičević in the Skupština while reflecting on the election. He claimed that 'the struggle with the clergy is the struggle of the entire culturally progressive world.'⁴⁴⁰ He vowed to investigate all allegations of corruption within the Yugoslav political system from 1919 onwards during his time in government as part of the new national bloc government, declaring it necessary 'for clerical slander to be fully exposed.' This statement seemed particularly targeted at Korošec and the SLS. *Domovina* went on to note that the Slovene Liberal leader Žerjav had claimed in the aftermath of the recent elections that the clergy had been rigging the elections in the Slovene constituencies for years.⁴⁴¹ It provided no evidence to support this claim, and no charges of corruption were ever brought against Korošec or any other members of the SLS. A *Jutro* article published two weeks on from the elections conveyed a similar tone. Rather than claiming electoral fraud, *Jutro* reminded its readers that Korošec had proven time and time again that he was

⁴³⁸ 'Zahvala,' *Kmetijski List*, 11 February 1925, p.1

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ 'Obračun s klerikalci v Narodni skupščina,' *Domovina*, 27 March 1925, p.1

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

incapable of achieving his own political programme. During his periods in government, he had consistently failed to reduce taxation for the peasantry or take steps towards autonomy as the SLS had promised in their election manifestos.⁴⁴² It therefore questioned why the majority of the Slovene electorate were still voting for the SLS. In this way, both *Domovina* and *Jutro* continued their attempts to undermine Korošec and the SLS's victory in the immediate aftermath of the election, encouraging their respective readers to think of this result as illegitimate and detrimental for Slovene interests.

Conclusions

Looking beyond the period 1924-35, even after the SKS was incorporated into the pro-Slovene autonomy Slovene Peasant Party, it failed to compete with Korošec's SLS. The latter had already firmly established itself as the advocate of Slovene autonomy within the Yugoslav political system. Additionally, Korošec had proven himself to be acceptably concerned with improving living and working conditions for the Slovene peasant majority. The SLS had been the dominant party in the Slovene lands since the Habsburg period, and it was therefore perceived as a safe, reliable vote. Older members of the Slovene electorate would have observed this trend personally. Under Korošec's leadership, the SLS succeeded in maintaining its image among voters as the voice of the Slovene people, further consolidating on this position throughout the 1920s.

By 1925, the SLS had established a monopoly over the Slovene voters with which neither the Slovene Liberals nor the SKS could compete. *Jutro*, *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List* all attempted to counteract this SLS dominance. Through their discussions of Korošec's conduct, they attempted to portray him as unreliable, self-interested, and with a tendency to abandon his own party's policies if he saw an opportunity to forge an alliance with another key Yugoslav party which did not fit the SLS's own outlook. Key to these newspapers' narratives throughout 1924 was that Korošec and the SLS had so far failed to achieve any of the policies laid out in their 1923 election manifesto. This idea became more dominant after the collapse of the Davidović government.

There are three potential explanations as to why these critical press perspectives on Korošec failed to lessen the SLS's dominance in the Slovene constituencies in the February 1925. One is that SLS voters did not read these newspapers, knowing them to be associated with opposition parties they

⁴⁴² 'Politične beležke,' *Jutro*, 20 February 1925, p.2

had no interest in. They were therefore preaching to already converted audiences in their criticisms of Korošec's conduct as a Slovene and Yugoslav statesman. Another is that the SLS had gained such a reputation as the sole party of the Slovene people by the mid 1920s that it had become the party the Slovene peasantry and rural classes backed unquestionably. A final possibility is that SLS voters did indeed have at least some awareness of *Jutro*, *Domovina* and *Kmetijski List's* anti-Korošec content, but other factors compelled them to continue backing the SLS. Notably, the SLS was the only one of the main Slovene political parties to promote autonomy consistently throughout the 1920s. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest another possibility: that some form of Slovene autonomy within the SHS Kingdom was a key issue for the majority of the Slovene electorate as it was for Korošec. Their distinct sense of identity, thanks to their separate language, culture, and history as a national group, caused the Slovene electorate to prioritise this issue in casting their ballots. Regardless of the true explanation, however, it is clear that newspaper articles were not a very effective means of anti-Korošec propaganda in the period 1924-25.

Chapter 7- 'A Man For Every Parliament:' Korošec's Unlikely Alliance with the Serb Radicals and his Dual Yugoslav-Slovene Political Agendas 1927-28

Introduction

The period of Korošec's participation in the Serb Radical Uzunović and Vukićević administrations from January 1927 to June 1928 is one of the most insightful as to the former's approach to Belgrade politics, and how he balanced his representation of Slovene interests with issues of broader state stability. Despite this, it is an era which has featured sparingly within histories of Yugoslavia. Korošec's involvement in these governments, his interactions and collaborations with his colleagues and his efforts to jointly represent both Slovene specific and broader Yugoslav interests have featured even less. This is no great surprise in itself. As already demonstrated, Korošec tends to feature only in the historiography concerning the establishment of the new state, and to a limited extent, up to the passing of the Vidovdan Constitution. Yet the absence within existing histories of his political activities during the period of these two Serb Radical governments is still surprising, since during this period, he was able to make considerable progress towards a degree of devolved government in the Slovene regions in line with what he had advocated since 1921. This progress was quietly negotiated, perhaps because it was Slovene-specific, and therefore of little interest to the SHS Kingdom more broadly. It has also failed to receive the recognition it deserves because of a tendency among historians to focus on more turbulent, politically unstable periods of interwar Yugoslavia. Djokić, for instance, has argued that the 1920s were a period in which the Serb and Croat elements of the kingdom's political system struggled to find a compromise between their differing visions of Yugoslav statehood.⁴⁴³ But he skims over Korošec's 1927-28 collaborations with the Serb Radicals in exchange for concessions towards a degree of Slovene financial and administrative autonomy, despite these proving that such compromise was indeed possible within 1920s Yugoslav politics, should the parties and politicians involved be willing to engage in it.⁴⁴⁴

Within the context of the politically volatile 1920s, Korošec's participation in Uzunović's government from January to April 1927, and then Vukićević's until June 1928, was a period of relative governmental stability. Indeed, Vukićević's time in office constituted one of the most enduring

⁴⁴³ Djokić, *Illusive Compromise*, p.1

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.64

premierships of the 1920s, despite standing at just fourteen months. It was the longest-standing government following Nikola Pašić's death in December 1926, which left his Serb Radical Party bitterly divided and lacking a natural successor.⁴⁴⁵ It constitutes an invaluable period to examine in order to construct a detailed picture of Korošec's political career. It can offer the most stable, long-term insight as to the balance he struck between promoting his Slovene-specific agenda and pinpointing his and the SLS's place within central Belgrade politics in the post-Vidovdan period. Perhaps more importantly, it helps us understand how he fitted into the delicate balance of parties and the drastically contrasting political perspectives after July 1928. Korošec's time within successive governments from February 1927 through to his own resignation as prime minister in December 1928 is also the longest period he himself spent continuously in government in the post-Vidovdan era. He was made Minister of the Interior within the Vukićević administration in February 1928 and held this post for the remainder of the year, including during the period of his own premiership.⁴⁴⁶ Again, this constitutes notable ministerial continuity within the context of the unstable 1920s with its revolving door of prime ministers and cabinets.

As we have seen, Korošec is recognised by many historians as a neutral, rational figure of stability and inter-party cooperation, particularly during the politically turbulent 1920s. In his work on the initial Yugoslav period, Ivo Banac described Korošec as a 'man for every cabinet' in recognition of his willingness to work with even parties and political personalities with whom he and his SLS had little in common if he viewed this cooperation as in the interest of state stability.⁴⁴⁷ This is high praise from Banac: Korošec is one of very few early Yugoslav politicians to come off well from his examination of the kingdom's early state-building period. These peace-making and cooperative elements to Korošec's political character have been noted by a number of other historians. The Slovene historian Bevc has described him as 'one of the ablest and most highly respected Yugoslav politicians,' emphasising his tendency to prioritise state stability above Slovene-specific interests when he felt this was necessary.⁴⁴⁸ Similarly, Prunk has credited Korošec for having behaved 'to a greater extent like a Yugoslav than any other minister in the First Yugoslavia.'⁴⁴⁹ This assessment of his political character seems particularly relevant within the context of his cooperation with the administrations of 1927-28. Additionally, Andrej Rahten has highlighted that Korošec entered into

⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, the fact that Vukićević was succeeded in July 1928 by Korošec's own premiership, which consisted of a coalition between the same four parties as in Vukićević's government, means that this era of SHS politics can be viewed as one of relative governmental continuity to an even greater extent.

⁴⁴⁶ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.38

⁴⁴⁷ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.341

⁴⁴⁸ Bevc, p.4

⁴⁴⁹ Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.53

his new political environment in 1918 endeavouring to establish solid working relationships with the two most significant now-Yugoslav political parties, the Serb Radicals and the Yugoslav Democrats. This alone set him and his SLS apart from the dominant Serb and Croat political parties of the period, for whom inter-party relations were simply never a priority. For Korošec, however, the fact that the Slovenes constituted a mere nine percent of the Yugoslav population necessitated such a tactic. He correctly assumed that at least one of the Serb Radicals and the Yugoslav Democrats would be a government party at any given moment for at least the first decade of the kingdom's existence.⁴⁵⁰ Amicable relations with both parties would therefore increase the SLS's chances of gaining the maximum influence possible within successive governments for the foreseeable future. This in turn would put him in the best possible position to secure concessions towards Slovene administrative autonomy.

This tactic was something of a gamble because it effectively meant ruling out strong ties with Croatian politicians. As Radić's HRSS came to dominate in the Croatian constituencies, it became clear that his stance was so incompatible with that of the Serb Radicals and Yugoslav Democrats that the SLS could not possibly hope to count Radić's support in the Skupština while simultaneously hoping to maintain a good working relationship with the latter parties. Korošec therefore had to make do with strengthening the SLS's existing ties with Barić's Croatian People's Party in terms of Croatian support in the Skupština, though this failed to secure much in the way of electoral backing due to the latter's lack of popular support and Skupština influence. Ultimately, however, this strategy of Korošec's proved to be a carefully calculated decision based on years of Habsburg political experience in utilising inter-party connections to achieve the greatest degree of influence possible for a relatively small party representing a small, specific national group such as the Slovene electorate. By stepping in to provide the Skupština backing needed in order to prevent the Uzunović administration from collapsing in February 1927, providing essential support to the Serb Radicals again by supporting Vukićević's government in April, and then entering into Vukićević's quadruple coalition after the September 1927 elections, before then taking on the role of Minister of the Interior in February 1928, Korošec proved he could be counted upon to bolster government stability. Moreover, he was prepared to prioritise this above working only with parties who shared his own political outlook, and indeed to put Yugoslav affairs ahead of Slovene when necessary. Korošec was in this sense truly a 'man for every cabinet.' Having made themselves indispensable, the Slovenes had finally 'arrived' in Belgrade.

⁴⁵⁰ Rahten, Korošec and the Croat Question, p.17

With this in mind, this chapter examines Korošec's time within these Serb Radical Uzunović and Vukićević governments. It will ask to what extent he can be viewed as a stabilising force within these two administrations, and how he conducted himself in his attempts to play this role. Building on this, it will assess whether the period of these administrations was among the most politically stable of the 1920s in terms of government endurance as a direct result of his support of them, and his policy of ensuring Yugoslav government above all else, including Slovene ambitions. It will be asked whether Korošec's ability to take on an impartial, peacekeeping role in the Skupština in this period was solely due to his pragmatic, Yugoslav-minded approach to politics, or whether being the Slovene leader of a Slovene-specific party aided him in being viewed as 'neutral' within the Skupština. This chapter will then examine Korošec's policies. It will question how far he was able to remain loyal to his SLS election manifesto while a member of a Serb Radical government, asking how compatible his values and were with those of Uzunović and Vukićević. Within this, how Korošec and the SLS-controlled Slovene press attempted to justify the SLS's participation within these two Serb Radical governments will be explored. Finally, we will ask how successfully he was able to strike a balance between his Slovene and Yugoslav political personalities, and how far he was able to utilise his position as something of a peacekeeping force, preventing precarious coalition governments from losing their Skupština majority in order to secure concessions for the Slovene regions.

Korošec's Concessions for the Slovenes

Supporting both Uzunović's and then Vukićević's governments allowed Korošec to secure modest concessions for the Slovene population he represented as SLS leader. These concessions were consistent with SLS election manifestos throughout the 1920s, and indeed with the traditional goals of the Slovene nationalist agenda, in that they related specifically to establishing a degree of Slovene control over the regional administration, as well as to the advancement and protection of Slovene culture and language.⁴⁵¹ Therefore, while the majority of these concessions were relatively minor, they represented a major development within the context of the SLS's modest national ambitions.

As we have seen, Korošec believed that a federalist-style restructuring of the SHS Kingdom would best suit the Slovene population's need for territorial security via inclusion within a broader state entity. In addition, a federalist-style state administrative framework could allow the Slovenes a limited degree of administrative autonomy, in order to preserve their distinct language-based

⁴⁵¹ Rogel, p.17

Southern Slav identity and culture alongside their fellow Yugoslav citizens. The imposition of centralism in 1921 thwarted Korošec's vision. In response, he spent most of the next six years within the Skupština opposition firmly consolidating the SLS's goal of Slovene administrative autonomy, as well as trying to establish a stable, functioning central government featuring participation and cooperation from representatives from all Yugoslav national groups. His entry into Davidović's cabinet in summer 1924 should have provided him with a long-awaited opportunity to negotiate concessions towards this Slovene autonomy. However, the short-lived, precarious nature of this government granted him little time for this.

Yet Korošec went on to secure modest concessions for the Slovenes during the governments of 1927-28. This was due to two main factors. The fact that the Vukićević administration endured far longer than the majority of previous governments meant that Korošec was able to push for Slovene financial and cultural concessions over a longer period than had been previously possible. Moreover, that he had previously built up a working relationship with the preceding Uzunović administration meant that he had already laid the groundwork for securing further Slovene concessions from the Serb Radicals. This government continuity allowed him more scope for negotiation than he had enjoyed during his short-lived coalition with Davidović in 1924. More importantly, the SLS had entered both governments in order to provide them with the crucial additional support needed in order to secure a Skupština majority. This fact alone put him in a stronger position to negotiate concessions than at any previous point in the decade. He knew that the Serb Radicals were dependent upon the SLS's support in the Skupština. Therefore, in entering into each of these governments, he effectively transformed his relatively small party of just twenty deputies into one of the most powerful parties in Yugoslav politics. This resulted in a greater willingness amongst the Serb Radical leadership in this period to fulfil Slovene-specific demands within reason.

We will first examine the modest concessions Korošec was able to win for the Slovene regions in this period relating to administrative and cultural issues, as well as his major victory in negotiations towards a devolved Slovene regional government: the Bled Agreement of July 1927. This is an extremely broad topic which could lend itself to a thesis in its own right, and this chapter therefore offers snapshots. These specific focuses have been chosen in order to provide a sense of the issues he viewed as most pressing. Furthermore, examination of these Slovene-specific concessions construct a sense of how Korošec balanced his Slovene ambitions alongside his new-found influence within successive Serb Radical governments, and the potential he therefore held to encourage key

Skupština parties to cooperate with one another within the Yugoslav political system in the name of achieving a degree of governmental stability.

Korošec had agreed to join the Uzunović government in February 1927, following the SLS's triumph in the January municipal elections. That the SLS then dominated the Slovene regional assemblies, combined with the fact that Uzunović desperately needed additional Skupština support to save his government from collapse, placed Korošec in a strong position from which to negotiate a degree of financial autonomy for the Slovenes. He pushed for the devolution of economic and financial decision making from Belgrade to the existing Slovene administrative regions of Ljubljana and Maribor, to be managed by these newly elected regional assemblies.⁴⁵² On 1 February, Uzunović announced a new partnership between his fragile Serb Radical government and the SLS, having successfully negotiated with its leader Korošec.⁴⁵³ This gave Uzunović just enough of a majority in the Skupština to hope that his government could now focus its attention on domestic policy. Korošec entered into this new partnership on the condition that financial reform be implemented. He was particularly concerned with the mismanagement of the annual budgets which had plagued the state throughout the 1920s.⁴⁵⁴ Uzunović committed himself both to this and to drawing up a 'detailed programme' as to how a certain degree of self-government could be implemented on a regional level; this was a promising development towards the devolved administrative structure Korošec had long advocated.

Two days into his agreement with Uzunović, Korošec had an audience with King Aleksandar. During this meeting, he argued that the 'first and most urgent need' was to resolve financial mismanagement and social inequalities across the country. In turn, he emphasised that government stability and inter-party cooperation were essential in order to achieve these aims.⁴⁵⁵ He made clear that while he had agreed that his party would support the pro-centralist Serb Radical government in the Skupština in order to provide it with a working majority, he was far from abandoning his own programme for Slovene regional autonomy. Rather, he planned to continue taking steps towards this through further negotiation with Uzunović, starting with the unification of the Ljubljana and Maribor oblasts into one single Slovene administrative unit. This was on the basis that having already achieved this would make the process of establishing a united, autonomous Slovene

⁴⁵² Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.282

⁴⁵³ 'Pred novo vlado,' *Slovenec*, 1 February 1927, p.1

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ 'Nova vlada,' *Domoljub*, 3 February 1927, p.1

province at a later date 'much easier.'⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, *Slovenec* reported that Korošec had entered into the Uzunović government purely to 'expand the competence of the local governments' following the January municipal elections, as this would allow the Slovenes to ultimately manage their own affairs.⁴⁵⁷

In this way, Korošec struck a careful balance between his Slovene and Yugoslav political agendas. He agreed to support the Uzunović government in order to spare the country yet another premature government collapse, but he had done so with a clear plan to secure a degree of local-level self-government for the Slovene regions, in line with his party goals. This plan was the first of many steps towards his long-term vision for the Slovenes' redefined place within the kingdom; ever pragmatic and realistic, Korošec sought small concessions which might be deemed acceptable by the Serb Radicals, rather than making demands for a drastic restructuring which was bound to be met with hostile opposition.

Korošec's hard stance on securing concessions towards a limited degree of Slovene self-government ultimately paid off. Within the first month of the new arrangement, Uzunović promised to revise the 1927-28 budget law to grant effective financial autonomy to the Ljubljana and Maribor regions via their newly elected regional assemblies.⁴⁵⁸ This meant that decisions on public spending in the Slovene regions would no longer be imposed from Belgrade and vulnerable to the corrupt behaviour of Belgrade-based officials - a major victory for the Slovene autonomy programme.⁴⁵⁹ Instead, municipal-level financial decisions could be made entirely by the Ljubljana and Maribor regional assemblies.⁴⁶⁰ This allowed them to prioritise funds for underdeveloped rural regions and industries in the Slovene regions which had been neglected by Belgrade.⁴⁶¹

Moreover, this agreement appears to have instigated further discussions about financing the regional assemblies across the kingdom as a whole. Just days prior to the collapse of the Uzunović administration on 16 April 1927, the Ministers of Finance, Agriculture and Social Policy met in Belgrade to reach an 'agreement in principle' on granting a budget for 'self-government' via an

⁴⁵⁶ 'Hrvatski federalist o vstopu SLS v vlado,' *Slovenec*, 13 February 1927, p.2

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Gašparič, *Izza parlamenta*, p.39

⁴⁵⁹ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.282

⁴⁶⁰ Stiplovšek, *Slovenski parlamentarizm 1927-29*, p.108

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, p.128

increased delegation of financial and administrative responsibilities to the regional assemblies.⁴⁶² Had the government survived long enough for this to be implemented, it would have given other non-Serb regions of the kingdom the same de-facto devolved government status as Korošec had already secured for the Slovenes.

Perhaps of greater relevance for the Slovene regions, however, were reports that same week that progress had been made towards securing the right for the Ljubljana Stock Exchange to trade on the global market, independently of the state.⁴⁶³ This was a process which had begun during Korošec's brief coalition with Davidović in 1924. A decree was signed by the then-Minister of Finance Mehmed Spaho to grant this concession to the Ljubljana Stock Exchange, but the collapse of Davidović's government in October 1924 meant that the scheme was never implemented. Korošec was able to revive these plans during the brief two-month period he spent within Uzunović's government February-April 1927. It was a development warmly received within Slovene economic circles, who hoped that it would allow the Ljubljana Stock Exchange to recover from years of neglect under the Serb Radicals and Independent Democrats.⁴⁶⁴

Similarly, Korošec was also able to secure a deal to abolish personal income tax for the Slovene peasantry in the final months of the Vukićević administration in 1928. As demonstrated in chapter six, Korošec had encountered extensive criticism from the Slovene Liberal and SKS opposition in the mid-1920s for failing to address the tax burden faced by the Slovene peasantry during his brief period in the Davidović government.⁴⁶⁵ By March 1928, however, after a year of cooperation with the Serb Radicals, Korošec had made significant progress in this area. At the start of the year, he had proposed to the Council of Ministers that the personal income tax minimum be raised from 6000 to 12000 dinars. This proposal was signed into law by 22 March, to be effective from 1 January 1929.⁴⁶⁶ Korošec's success in this area was celebrated in the Slovene regions, because the new minimum threshold effectively meant that personal income tax was abolished for the vast majority of the Slovene workers and peasants, whose typical annual incomes fell well below this limit. This success is an example of Korošec making careful, calculated demands on behalf of the Slovene electorate, as well as his sophisticated awareness of the bargaining power he held due to the Serb Radicals' dependency on SLS backing in the Skupština. As part of the Independent Democrats, the

⁴⁶² 'Samofinanciranje,' *Slovenec*, 9 April 1927, p.1

⁴⁶³ 'Novi veliki gospodarski uspehi SLS za Slovenijo,' *Slovenec*, 9 April 1927, p.1

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ 'Untitled Cartoon 2,' *Kmetijski List*, 4 February 1925, p.3 (Appendix 5)

⁴⁶⁶ 'Dohodnina že letos odpravljena,' *Domoljub*, 22 March 1928, p.2

Slovene Liberals had previously sought to abolish personal income tax completely, but to no avail. By proposing that the personal income tax minimum threshold was doubled rather than completely abolished, Korošec had made a request Vukičević was willing to allow in exchange for continued SLS support. The move had indirectly resolved the taxation issue for the Slovene electorate. Through manoeuvres such as this, Korošec demonstrated himself to be an adaptive, skilled politician capable of adjusting his policy proposals in order to maximise his chances of success in negotiating with the main government party, while still ensuring that these proposals fitted the needs of the Slovene electorate.

Korošec was also able to achieve minor concessions within the realms of consolidating Slovene cultural developments during his time in the Vukičević government. The preservation and development of the Slovenes' distinct culture, most notably in relation to the Slovene language, had been the second major element of Slovene national programmes since the 1848 revolutions. As we have seen, significant progress had been made in the initial Yugoslav period. The establishment of the University of Ljubljana in July 1919 fulfilled the SLS's ambitions for the development of Slovene-language academia. They celebrated this development because it the Slovenes onto an equal footing with the Serbs and Croats, who had long had their own universities.⁴⁶⁷ In 1927, however, Korošec made it clear that this work was far from over. He announced that under his guidance, a number of Slovene cultural institutions, such as *Slovenska Matica*, the National Gallery and various faculties at the University of Ljubljana had submitted a bill to the Ministry of Education requesting additional funding to cultivate Slovene cultural and academic development.⁴⁶⁸ This was in response to attempts by the Serb Radicals to abolish the University of Ljubljana as an unnecessary expense. Such a move would have undone almost a decade of progress in terms of the development of Slovene as an academic language, as well as Ljubljana's new status as a city of 'fresh thoughts and aspirations.'⁴⁶⁹ Korošec therefore vowed to do all in his power to preserve the existing funding for these institutions, but he warned that 'all our educational and economic organisations' would have to prepare themselves for the very real possibility of substantial budget cuts.

Six months into his quadruple coalition government with Vukičević, Korošec successfully resolved this issue. At the start of 1928, he proposed to the cabinet that an article within the Finance Act which allowed the Minister of Education to shut down the University of Ljubljana without further

⁴⁶⁷ *Archives of Yugoslavia*, 66-185-453, Univerzitetni Svet. v Ljubljani, 25 October 1919

⁴⁶⁸ 'Za slovensko akademijo znanosti in umetnosti- za Narodno galerijo, Slovenci!' *Slovenec*, 1 January 1927, p.3

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

consultation should be abolished. This was approved on 13 March, securing the university's future funding.⁴⁷⁰ Korošec responded to this welcome news by having the University Commission submit to the Skupština a proposal for a new university law and budget plan. He hoped this would protect it further from attempted Serb Radical cutbacks. In doing so, he appeared to be attempting to keep one step ahead. Having realised that the cultural progress made so far was vulnerable to budget cuts while such financial decisions were controlled from Belgrade, he set out to further protect the University of Ljubljana beyond the reassurance offered by the abolition of the relevant article of the Finance Act. This in itself was yet another argument in favour of the Slovene administrative autonomy Korošec had been advocating since the SHS Kingdom's creation. Financial autonomy would allow the Slovene regions to control their own budget and prioritise the preservation of Slovene cultural ventures.

The Bled Treaty of July 1927 was undeniably the ultimate concession which Korošec secured for the Slovenes through negotiations with the Serb Radicals during his time supporting their governments. This treaty and its implications have been largely neglected by historians, despite representing a significant development for the Slovene population. Indeed, it was also a major achievement for Korošec, given the small size of his party and its lack of political authority outside the Slovene regions. By summer 1927, he had realised that Vukičević's Serb Radicals would more likely than not be dependent upon his party's support in order to hold a majority within the Skupština after the September general elections. He therefore used this situation to his advantage, securing an agreement with the Radicals that in return for SLS backing, they would allow him to push for further concessions towards devolved government in the Slovene regions.

The Bled Treaty was presented in the SLS-controlled press as a great triumph for Korošec from the outset. Vukičević's arrival in Bled to conduct talks with Korošec was, according to *Domoljub*, the 'talk of the country,' when it emerged that the two men had reached an agreement regarding the economic strategy of a future coalition between them.⁴⁷¹ The Bled Treaty outlined that Korošec would not be expected to give up any aspect of the SLS's autonomy programme in return. Indeed, *Domoljub* and *Slovenec* argued, Vukičević was eager to form the Bled Treaty with Korošec partly due to the sophisticated, realistic approach the SLS took over financial policies.⁴⁷² He was impressed with the party's early ideas regarding regional financial autonomy as granted under the previous

⁴⁷⁰ 'Dohodnina že letos odpravljena,' *Domoljub*, 22 March 1928, p.2

⁴⁷¹ 'Volilno gibanje,' *Domoljub*, 14 July 1927, p.1

⁴⁷² 'Vsaka kroglica izgubljena,' *Domoljub*, 21 July 1927, p.1

Uzunović administration and wanted to implement elements of this across the state as a whole, believing the SLS's to be the strongest plan for state finances across all Yugoslav parties.⁴⁷³ Indeed, *Slovenec* proudly reported that Vukićević had observed during the SLS's prior participation that 'our party was the best economic worker,' and therefore accepted the 'rise of Slovenia' in the belief that SLS cooperation would strengthen both the position of the Slovene regions within the SHS Kingdom and the SHS Kingdom as a whole.⁴⁷⁴ This would represent a greater degree of SLS influence than the party had enjoyed during its previous cooperation with Serb Radical governments in this period. *Domoljub* argued that this was due to Vukićević's realisation that he would almost certainly struggle to form a majority government without Korošec's support.⁴⁷⁵ In this way, Korošec had made the SLS's twenty Skupština seats more important than the HRSS's sixty. There was no value in a Skupština presence if Radić was unwilling to cooperate with his colleagues and work within the parliamentary system.

Under the Bled Treaty, Korošec was able to guarantee Vukićević's commitment to addressing government corruption, particularly within his own Serb Radical Party, as well as to economic reform.⁴⁷⁶ This was of particular significance because the issue of government corruption had dominated SLS manifestos since the SHS Kingdom's creation. Pašić's reluctance to tackle the issue within his own party, however, had made this near-impossible prior to his death in 1926. Korošec saw corruption and economic reform as intrinsically linked; any attempts to impose the latter would be sabotaged all the while corrupt ministers remained in power. By making the tackling of corruption a condition of the SLS's future cooperation with the Serb Radicals, Korošec was guaranteeing that both matters would be addressed under a Serb Radical-SLS administration; he knew Vukićević was dependent on his support and could not afford an SLS walkout. In this way, he was able to gradually guide the Yugoslav government parties towards the model of inter-party negotiation and civilised debate practised within the Habsburg political system, as opposed to the disorderly infighting into which the Yugoslav system had descended in the 1920s. By placing such emphasis on eradicating corruption, Korošec also directly challenged claims made by the Slovene Liberal and SKS opposition parties during the mid-1920s that he himself was guilty of corruption, exploiting his position for personal gain.

⁴⁷³ 'Razburljive novice,' *Domoljub*, 14 July 1927, p.1

⁴⁷⁴ 'Vsaka gibanje,' *Domoljub*, 14 July 1927, p.1

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ 'Razburljive novice,' *Domoljub*, 14 July 1927, p.1

More important for the Slovene regions, however, was Vukičević's promise to grant the Slovenes further concessions towards self-government via the Ljubljana and Maribor regional assemblies. Indeed, the Serb Radicals had entered into negotiations at Bled with an apparent commitment to Slovene issues which had simply not been present under Pašić's leadership. This almost certainly reflected the party's resignation to the reality of the situation in which it found itself. Its leadership understood that if it wanted to count on Korošec's support in the aftermath of the imminent September general elections, it would need to allow at least some modest concessions of 'special self-government' in the Slovene regions.⁴⁷⁷ In turn, the Bled Treaty had been made possible by Korošec's realism, and his acceptance that 'some self-government is better than none.'⁴⁷⁸ By using the Serb Radicals' pre-election predicament to his advantage, Korošec was able to guarantee the continuation of the 'independent financial rights' for the Ljubljana and Maribor oblasts which had been conceded by Uzunović, in order to further consolidate this degree of self-government. In addition, the Vukičević administration agreed to prioritise legal reforms to grant additional powers to the municipal courts, not only in the Slovene regions, but across the kingdom as a whole.⁴⁷⁹ Through these gains, Korošec had placed himself in a strong position to next turn his attention to negotiating the merge of these two Slovene oblasts into one administrative unit. He was hereby making 'slow but marked' progress towards the creation of an autonomous Slovene unit.⁴⁸⁰

Korošec's successful negotiation of the Bled Treaty in particular, but also the minor concessions he was able to win for the Slovenes during his period supporting Serb Radical governments, demonstrate his capabilities as a negotiator and an advocate for the Slovene electorate. Additionally, it represents the triumph of his approach to securing Slovene autonomy by working within the political system in contrast to Radić's brutal, uncompromising strategy. The HRSS's representation in the Skupština in this period was three times that of the SLS's, and yet it was Korošec who was able to negotiate Slovene-specific concessions towards a degree of financial autonomy via the regional assemblies; no similar agreement was secured for the Croats. Through realistic planning, time spent carefully fostering a working relationship with the Serb Radicals and establishing himself as a safe pair of hands who could be counted upon to provide Skupština backing, he was able to transform his small parliamentary delegation into a powerful political entity.

⁴⁷⁷ 'Dogovor med SLS in NRS v hrvatski luči,' *Slovenec*, 14 July 1927, p.1

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ *Archives of Yugoslavia*, 72-24, Narodna Skupština Kravljine Jugoslavije 1925-1934, Predlog zakona urebenju redovnih sudova, 1 November 1927, p.23

⁴⁸⁰ 'Vsaka kroglica izgubljena,' *Domoljub*, 21 July 1927, p.1

In this sense, he proved himself to be a far superior advocate for the Slovene electorate than Radić was for the Croat.

Korošec's Relationship with the Slovene Electorate: Balancing Slovene and Yugoslav Interests

More than in any other period of the 1920s, Korošec utilised the Slovene press agencies in order to communicate directly with the Slovene electorate during his time in partnership with Uzunović and Vukićević. This communication can be categorised into two major themes: firstly, bids to further consolidate support in upcoming elections and attempts to highlight the SLS's political priorities and achievements for the Slovene regions, and secondly, prioritising broader Yugoslav interests over the pursuit of Slovene autonomy in the interests of state stability. Korošec was evidently highly aware that a political partnership between the Serb Radical Party and his own SLS could be interpreted by both SLS supporters and the Slovene opposition parties as far from a natural fit, given that the former had championed the very centralist state structure which he and his SLS had spent the last six years campaigning to devolve. There was therefore significant potential for the Slovene opposition press to use his support for the Serb Radicals in government against him, and to present him as opportunistic, power-hungry, and more concerned with his own pursuit of political power than sticking to Slovene-centric policies. We have already seen that this was an angle Slovene Liberal and SKS-affiliated news agencies consistently used to try to discredit him.

Pre-empting this, Korošec set out to counteract such criticism via his communication with the Slovene electorate, using the medium of his own SLS-controlled press. Through articles published in both *Slovenec* and *Domoljub*, he justified his decision to bring the SLS into union with the Serb Radical governments. He argued that supporting the ruling party, despite its centralist, Serb-orientated political philosophy, was in the best interests of state stability. Additionally, he used *Slovenec* and *Domoljub* to actively encourage the Slovene electorate to continue engaging with elections in order to transform their situation within Yugoslavia for the better. He maintained that only through cooperation with larger, more powerful parties and political personalities, and working within the parliamentary system, could the Slovenes hope to secure concessions towards a devolved model of regional administration. In this way, his decision to support the Serb Radicals in government could be justified as essential in order to work bring about the reforms the Slovene electorate had backed during the general elections of 1923 and 1925.

Korošec's justification for supporting the Serb Radicals in the Skupština began in the weeks immediately prior to the start of the SLS's partnering with the Uzunović administration in order to prevent its collapse. In 1927, he welcomed the new year by penning a message to the Slovene electorate for *Slovenec*, the most widely circulated of the SLS-controlled newspapers. Perhaps in anticipation of cooperating closely with the Serb Radicals,⁴⁸¹ he used his New Year message to the Slovene people to address concerns that the Serb Radicals were not up to the task of implementing the economic and social reform which the SLS viewed as essential. Acknowledging that the Serb Radicals were by far the most powerful party in the Skupština entering into 1927, he implied that the only way out of a parliamentary crisis towards which state politics seemed to be heading was either to prop up the existing Uzunović administration, or to replace it with a new, predominantly Serb Radical government.⁴⁸²

Korošec saw new, 'free elections,' as the only long-term solution, but expressed his fear that the Yugoslav electorate would fall victim to election fatigue were a general election to be held in 1927, given plans to hold municipal elections by the end of January. He attempted to combat any election fatigue well in advance by arguing that this would be 'easier to overcome' if the Slovene electorate embraced the municipal elections first with 'enthusiasm and great victory.'⁴⁸³ Any nation wishing to 'decide its own destiny,' he reiterated, 'must gladly take on these electoral burdens.' In the short term, however, he strongly hinted that the SLS would step in to provide numerical reinforcement in the Skupština to prevent if necessary the collapse of Uzunović's government. Simultaneously, he maintained that the SLS would prioritise 'solving the most urgent economic and social challenges' facing the kingdom in 1927. It was therefore not prepared to sit in a government 'that does not have the right will to work' towards these goals. He would not prop up the sitting Serb Radical government, or indeed that of any other party, if 'its main goal is to hold power in its hands only for the benefit of its own party.'

In laying out the SLS's priorities for 1927, Korošec made an extremely enlightened statement regarding the importance he placed upon Yugoslav stability over all other issues. Commenting on domestic politics, he insisted that 'when a country is in danger, all parties should neglect their party

⁴⁸¹ The Uzunović administration would have appeared increasingly unstable by the end of 1926, particularly following Pašić's death in December of that year. Yugoslav politicians of the 1920s were no strangers to government collapse; it seems highly likely that Korošec would have anticipated this.

⁴⁸² A. Korošec, 'Ob novem letu,' *Slovenec*, 1 January 1927, p.1

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

programmes and unite to address the most pressing issues.’⁴⁸⁴ This is a particularly powerful concept within the context of 1920s Yugoslavia, given that the instability of this period has been typically attributed to repeated failings to find a compromise solution between clashing political and administrative ideologies within the Skupština.⁴⁸⁵ In presenting this view to SLS voters, Korošec demonstrated that he was willing to temporarily put aside his own ambitions for the Slovene regions and enter into government with a pro-centralist Serb party if he deemed that Yugoslav political stability depended upon it. Unlike Radić, he understood that there was no point pushing for Slovene administrative autonomy via a federalist-style restructuring if the central Yugoslav government was so dysfunctional that it could never implement such reform. He therefore expressed his willing to prioritise government stability over the pursuit of Slovene autonomy until new elections could be held.

Furthermore, Korošec seemed to understand the importance of justifying this stance in order to keep his voters onside. He followed this statement up by arguing that ‘the recent crisis’ (referring to the Uzunović administration’s loss of the vital support from Radić’s HRSS for a Skupština governmental majority), had proven that it would be ‘impossible’ for the SLS to avoid involving themselves with the government completely.⁴⁸⁶ In doing so, he implied that the SLS were the Serb Radicals’ only hope of regaining a majority in the Skupština, and with it a functioning government. This built on his argument that it was the SLS’s duty to sacrifice its own manifesto for the moment in the name of ensuring Yugoslav state stability; in his eyes, this should be the ultimate priority above all else. In this way, Korošec struck a delicate balance in his 1927 new year address between offering reassurance to the Slovene electorate that he and his party would remain true to their election manifesto as far as possible, while simultaneously preparing them for the very real possibility that at some point soon, the SLS would be entering into government with the Serb Radicals, or at the very least forming a partnership with them.

Korošec would keep this promise he had made to the Slovene electorate to make economic reform and Slovene administrative devolution the condition of supporting the Serb Radicals in government. On 2 February 1927, as entering into an agreement with the SLS in exchange for their support in the Skupština emerged as the only option available to Uzunović, King Aleksandar invited the presidents of each of the parliamentary clubs to an audience. He was particularly impressed by Korošec’s

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Djokić, *Illusive Compromise*, p.1

⁴⁸⁶ A. Korošec, ‘Ob novem letu,’ *Slovenec*, 1 January 1927, p.1

attitude. Rather than using his audience with the king to demand concessions towards Slovene administrative autonomy, Korošec stressed that the SHS Kingdom's 'first and most urgent need' was for a resolution to the 'economic, financial and social crisis,' which he viewed as having stemmed from years of government instability and corruption within the ministries.⁴⁸⁷ He argued that 'strong, stable and hard-working governments' were needed in order to bring about such change. In this way, Korošec proved himself once again to be Yugoslav minded first and foremost. He recognised that the Slovenes' position could not be altered through a federalist-style devolution of central government powers until such problems undermining the state's efficiency and central government's stability were addressed; the Slovene regions would need to be granted financial and administrative responsibility through negotiations with Belgrade.

Yet alongside this demonstration of readiness to prioritise Yugoslav issues over Slovene as he headed into a political partnership with the Serb Radicals, Korošec also made clear that he would not be abandoning his Slovene autonomy agenda. Indeed, according to *Slovenec*, Ante Trumbić's Croat Federalist newspaper '*Hrvat*' had praised Korošec for entering into government with the Serb Radicals in a far more 'honourable manner' than had Radić in 1926. Radić had been forced to surrender 'all political demands and his entire programme' when he joined the Uzunović administration in April 1926. This ultimately led to him losing patience with the Serb Radicals by January 1927, leaving the Uzunović administration with no option but to seek Korošec's support instead⁴⁸⁸ Korošec's own arrangement with Uzunović meant that the SLS did not itself enter officially or fully into the government, but rather took on a supporting role. This arguably made the arrangement more likely to endure for a sustained period than previous attempts at coalition governments between parties with vastly differing political ideologies. Trumbić's Croat Federalists praised Korošec for this approach, because it displayed an understanding that it would be irresponsible at this point to demand a complete restructuring of the state in order to fulfil his Slovene autonomy ambitions.⁴⁸⁹ Instead, he had carefully negotiated a position of influence from which he could maintain his autonomist agenda. He knew that the two Slovene oblasts were effectively under SLS control due to their dominance in the municipal elections, and he therefore viewed the financial autonomy he had been able to negotiate for the Slovene regional assemblies as a condition of supporting the Uzunović regime in the Skupština as a 'transitional regime from cruel centralism to provincial autonomy.' The fight to have the two oblasts unified as one Slovene

⁴⁸⁷ 'Nova vlada,' *Domoljub*, 3 February 1927, p.1

⁴⁸⁸ As reprinted in *Slovenec*, 'Hrvatski federalist o vstopu SLS v vlado,' 13 February 1927, p.2

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

administrative unit under a single, devolved Slovene regional assembly could come later, when central Yugoslav politics were more stable and the state was free of economic mismanagement and corruption. He was not abandoning his Slovene policies, but merely picking his battles, prioritising state stability as the best route to fulfilling the SLS's pledges in the Slovene regions.

Similarly, when Korošec brought the SLS into Vukićević's quadruple coalition following the September 1927 general election results, he made it clear that in line with the Bled programme, he would be doing so on the understanding that further progress would be made towards devolution of administrative powers.⁴⁹⁰ This was a condition of the SLS's propping up the Serb Radicals to provide the kingdom with a functioning majority government. Recognising that the SLS's support was essential in order for his coalition to succeed, Vukićević therefore entered immediately into talks with Korošec regarding how best to implement the Bled Treaty; this is difficult to reconstruct because Korošec made clear that he did not want any details given to the press regarding these talks.⁴⁹¹ It does, however, show the level of respect that Vukićević held for Korošec in that he was willing to agree uncompromisingly to his terms. Furthermore, it shows the latter's pragmatism, in that he understood the extent of his bargaining powers and acted within them to seek the best deal for the Slovene regions, rather than making unreasonable demands.

In return, Korošec showed a willingness to compromise and prioritise state stability first and foremost in his agreeing that the SLS would not take on their two allocated portfolios in Vukićević's cabinet straight away. It was decided by the new quadruple coalition that in order to prevent immediate and sudden upheaval, the sitting Serb Radical cabinet would be gradually reshuffled, rather than subject to an immediate resignation.⁴⁹² This meant that although the SLS technically entered into government in September 1927, it did not become part of it officially until Korošec was given the Minister of the Interior portfolio in February 1928. Again, Korošec turned to the SLS-controlled press to justify this decision to the Slovene electorate, explaining that this decision would allow a gradual, calm transition into the new government. Equally, it would allow him to initially prioritise implementing the devolution of some degree of administrative powers to the Slovene regional assemblies promised by the Bled Treaty. This further illustrates the careful balancing act he was able to strike in this period between Slovene autonomy and issues of broader Yugoslav governmental stability.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹⁰ 'Pred vstopom SLS v vlado: Dr Korošec v Belgradu,' *Slovenec*, 18 September 1927, p.1

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² 'Kedaj vstopi SLS v vlado?' *Slovenec*, 16 September 1927, p.2

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

That Korošec was able to remain true to his promise to the Slovene electorate in entering into partnerships with the centralist Serb Radicals without sacrificing his Slovene policies demonstrates him to be both a Slovene and a Yugoslav politician in equal measure. He understood the importance of working with the government, were he to fulfil his autonomy ambitions for the Slovene territories but was careful to enter into such working relationships on his own terms, to ensure no conflict would emerge between the two interests. Alongside this, however, he was mindful that Yugoslav state stability was essential in order for the Slovenes to maintain their newly won effective financial autonomy, and for any administrative devolution to come about as a result of the Bled Treaty. He was therefore willing to prioritise Yugoslav state stability over Slovene interests to a certain degree, on the basis that this would benefit the Slovenes in the long run.

Korošec had utilised this theme of state stability above all else in his general election campaign. When the Slovene electorate headed to the polls in September 1927, he confirmed that if re-elected to a similar number of seats in the Slovene constituencies, his SLS would form a coalition with the Serb Radicals and Davidović's Democrats. The primary goals of this coalition, he claimed, would be to eradicate state-wide corruption, as well as to finally 'start working for the good of the people' by developing a 'fair administration,' to strengthen the economy and improve living standards for the working classes. Finally, it would strive to put a stop to the 'waste of national property under the false names of "nationalism" and "Yugoslavism."' ⁴⁹⁴ Notably, these aims are consistent with the SLS's own election manifesto. By highlighting the aspects of the Serb Radicals' goals for government which most closely aligned with the SLS's own, Korošec attempted to reassure potential voters that while he did intend to form a partnership with the traditionally centralist, uncompromising Serb Radicals, this would not be at the expense of SLS priorities. His emphasising of this was also possibly in anticipation of criticism from the opposition press. He insisted that he, Vukičević and Davidović would only form a coalition together when clear about the values their parties shared and the issues they wanted to address while in government. In forming a potential coalition with Vukičević's Serb Radicals, the SLS would not be sacrificing the promises which formed the basis of its election manifesto, but rather putting itself in the best position possible to deliver on these. This built on Korošec's consistent message throughout the 1920s that reform could only be brought about by working within the political system and seeking influence in government.

⁴⁹⁴ 'Ljubljanci,' *Slovenec*, 11 September 1927, p.1

The potential threat of election fatigue, and the resultant need to keep the Slovene electorate politically engaged in anticipation of a sudden general election, was one which Korošec addressed throughout 1927 by penning appeals to the Slovene electorate. He had begun the year by emphasising the importance of the regional assembly elections, particularly within the context of the SLS's political programme. Not only were these the first regional-level elections to be held since the passing of a 1922 law restricting oblast-level government, but he correctly predicted that the existing, albeit neglected, regional assembly framework was the best route to establishing some kind of devolved government in the Slovene regions.⁴⁹⁵ He was right to assume this. In return for supporting the Serb Radicals in the Skupština from February 1927, he was able to negotiate a provision to the 1927-28 budget which granted effective financial autonomy at local level to the Slovene oblasts. Because the January municipal elections resulted in the SLS dominating the Slovene regional assemblies, Korošec's party had full control of local finances in the Slovene regions under this new budget agreement.⁴⁹⁶ Furthermore, the regional assemblies would go on to be used in the Bled Agreement of July/August 1927 to provide a greater degree of financial autonomy to the Slovene regions, and Korošec would begin to enhance the system during his brief premiership a year later.⁴⁹⁷ This was, however, far from an ideal solution, given that the Slovene lands were split into two oblasts under two separate regional assemblies - Ljubljana and Maribor. The outcome of the municipal elections of January 1927 did nonetheless represent a welcome step in the right direction for Korošec, who was willing to accept gradual progress towards Slovene administrative autonomy rather than instant reform. This explains why he entered into 1927 placing such importance on encouraging the Slovene electorate to cast their votes in both the upcoming municipal elections and any future general election. He viewed the reinstatement of the regional assembly system as an ideal opportunity to demonstrate how effectively devolved government could work for the Slovene regions, as well as to consolidate the SLS's position as the reliably dominant party in the Slovene constituencies.⁴⁹⁸ This would put the SLS in a strong position to be considered by larger Skupština parties as a potential coalition partner, therefore giving it bargaining power. Both the financial concessions secured under the Uzunović administration and the Bled Treaty can be seen as examples of this strategy paying off.

Korošec also attempted to counteract election fatigue in the immediate aftermath of the January municipal elections by expressing elation at the SLS's strong performance. At the news that 82

⁴⁹⁵ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.282

⁴⁹⁶ Gašparič, *Izza Parlamenta*, p.37

⁴⁹⁷ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.282

⁴⁹⁸ A. Korošec, 'Ob novem letu,' *Slovenec*, 1 January 1927, p.1

members of the Ljubljana regional assembly would be SLS deputies, he vowed that these men had not been elected on 'empty promises,' but would rather 'perform their duty to the highest standard.'⁴⁹⁹ He praised the Slovene electorate for their 'unbreakable strength' in turning out to cast their votes despite the 'onslaught of our opponents' and adverse weather conditions.⁵⁰⁰ In this way, he seemed to practise positive reinforcement as a means of encouraging SLS supporters to adopt a positive, proactive attitude towards electoral participation, attempting to increase the likelihood of them turning out to vote in a future general election. By focusing his post-municipal election statements he made on the role played by SLS voters, as opposed to the victory of the candidates themselves, he emphasised that the electorate possessed the power to positively impact the Slovene population's circumstances within the SHS Kingdom on an individual level; their votes had made a real difference.

Korošec then utilised this tactic of positive reinforcement again in the immediate build-up to the general elections ultimately held in autumn 1927. As the Slovene electorate headed to the polls on 11 September, a lengthy call to potential SLS voters signed by Korošec was published in *Slovenec*. Entitled 'People of Ljubljana,' this appeal targeted Slovene voters who had traditionally elected Liberal candidates - those in the Slovene region's only major urban area. Korošec spoke directly to this constituency in his appeal. He informed them that Pribičević's Independent Democratic Party as part of which the Slovene Liberal candidates were running, was 'addressing you with hypocritical words' when it promised that if elected, it would 'take care of Ljubljana.'⁵⁰¹ He bluntly pointed out that the Slovene Liberals had failed to do just this when last in government as part of the Independent Democrats. Additionally, he reiterated that he as SLS leader enjoyed the 'trust, respect and love of the entire Slovene nation,' as illustrated by the SLS's dominance in previous general elections.⁵⁰² The message here was clear: Korošec and his SLS represented a reputable, tried and tested alternative to the Slovene Liberal candidates, as confirmed by the vast majority of Slovene constituencies' two-decade-long history of electing SLS candidates again and again.⁵⁰³

In a further attempt to dissuade the Ljubljana-based Slovene electorate from again backing the Slovene Liberal candidates, Korošec highlighted the ways in which he perceived the Independent

⁴⁹⁹ A Korošec, 'Volivcem SLS!' *Slovenec*, 26 January 1927, p.1

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ 'Ljubljančani!' *Slovenec*, 11 September 1927, p.1

⁵⁰² Balkovec, and Šubic Kovačević, 'Die Einzelheiten und Unterschiede Zwischen den Wahlen in Slowenien und Kroatien in den Jahren 1920-1927,' p.81

⁵⁰³ Bobić, p.11

Democrats as having failed the population of Ljubljana during its previous spells in government. In stark contrast to the tactics deployed by the Slovene Liberals themselves to discredit Korošec and his SLS throughout the 1920s, however, this criticism was not a personal attack on Žerjav and his Slovene Liberal deputies. Rather, it took the form of a matter-of-fact summary of the party's record of neglect and poor representation of its Slovene constituents. Korošec pointed out that whilst part of Pašič's 1925-26 coalition, the Independent Democrats had 'dissolved the free municipal council of Ljubljana.'⁵⁰⁴ In addition, it had inflicted severe damage upon the Slovene region's two major banks, *Slovenska Banka* and *Jadranska Banka*, through 'their sequestration and nationalisations... dishonest scandals and corrupt operations.'⁵⁰⁵

The fact that the Slovene Liberal faction within the party had done nothing to prevent this damage gave legitimacy to Korošec's argument that the Slovene population would be better served by a devolved government model granting them financial and administrative autonomy than they were currently being served by centralised government. The existing centralist system had already caused economic damage to the Slovene regions. Korošec promised the Ljubljana electorate that under SLS representation, the city would become 'the seat of united self-government in Slovenia,' and would 'flourish economically' under his own honest, reliable leadership.⁵⁰⁶ He made a direct link between one of the ways he viewed the Independent Democrats to have failed the Ljubljana electorate and his own plans for the Slovene regions, were the SLS to form a government with the Serb Radicals. The implication was that any Ljubljana voters who were unhappy with the way in which Slovene economic affairs had been handled by the Independent Democrats should now vote SLS instead. This can be seen as an additional attempt to confirm to the Slovene electorate that his plans to bring the SLS into government with the Serb Radicals were in their best interests, as they headed to the polls. According to Korošec, the Serb Radicals were the lesser of the evils, in comparison with the Slovene Liberals allied to the Independent Democrats. The latter had failed to prioritise Slovene issues during their last period in government; rather, they had directly caused economic damage. Though a Serb Radical government was far from ideal, the inclusion of Korošec's SLS within it would ensure that Slovene interests were fairly represented and steps were taken towards a better administrative solution in the Slovene regions.

⁵⁰⁴ 'Ljubljančani!' *Slovenec*, 11 September 1927, p.1

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

Korošec again used positive reinforcement to impress upon the Slovene population the crucial role they had played in bringing the SLS into government in the aftermath of the September 1927 elections. He hoped this would allow his party to push for further Slovene administrative autonomy concessions. In a number of press statements, he thanked the Ljubljana electorate in particular, who had 'showed their trust in the SLS' and voted for its candidates in record numbers.⁵⁰⁷ Traditionally, Ljubljana had been a Slovene Liberal stronghold. Korošec equated the growth of SLS support in the city with the coming of a new era of administrative autonomy for the Slovenes, given that as the Slovene capital, it would be the location of any future devolved parliament.⁵⁰⁸ By highlighting the SLS's increased support in Ljubljana, a city in which it had typically struggled, and thanking these voters for their support, he encouraged them to continue supporting pro-autonomy politics via a personal approach. It also created a sense that the SLS were becoming increasingly dominant in the Slovene regions; it would therefore be difficult for any sitting government to deny them further concessions. Korošec appeared to be mindful of the importance of continued future support from the Ljubljana constituencies in this period, planning ahead in an attempt to ensure this by instilling in these voters a sense that they had taken control of their future prospects by voting SLS.

Far from the poor turnout resulting from election fatigue which Korošec had feared, the SLS won 107,240 votes in the September 1927 elections, its highest ever number.⁵⁰⁹ This, he emphasised in his analysis of the election results, was a fight which had been won by the Slovene electorate. He personally thanked the SLS's loyal supporters for their 'tremendous effort and work' in helping his planned coalition with Vukičević become a reality.⁵¹⁰ In turn, he recognised what he saw as a sophisticated degree of 'political awareness' amongst the Slovene electorate for backing his SLS in spite of his plans to form a coalition with the Serb Radicals. The fact that Korošec had these statements published in both *Slovenec* and *Domoljub* is interesting, because his addresses to the Slovene electorate in this period otherwise tended to be confined to *Slovenec*. This made sense because *Slovenec* was geared towards the more politically engaged, educated Slovene workers and had a greater Ljubljana-based following. *Domoljub*, meanwhile, was aimed at lesser-educated Slovene workers and peasants in rural settings, and therefore the type of voters who were more likely to automatically vote for the SLS out of tradition and habit. In publishing statements praising the Slovene electorate, he seemed to be attempting to instil amongst both traditional peasant

⁵⁰⁷ 'Zavednim Ljubljančanom!' *Slovenec*, 14 September 1927, p.1

⁵⁰⁸ 'Ljubljančani!' *Slovenec*, 11 September 1927, p.1

⁵⁰⁹ 'Volivcem SLS!' *Slovenec*, 14 September 1927, p.1

⁵¹⁰ 'Volivcem Slovenske ljudske stranke!' *Domoljub*, 22 September 1927, p.1

voters and urban Ljubljana voters a sense of pride in electoral participation. Through voter empowerment and encouraging the Slovene electorate in both urban and rural settings to view electoral participation as an active means of taking control of their future and bringing about economic and social improvements to their present situation, he could combat election fatigue and ensure continued high turnout in subsequent elections. He had identified SLS electoral success as the best means of convincing the dominant Skupština parties to grant the Slovene regions concessions towards a devolved administration.

As an additional point, the fact that Korošec avoided resorting to slander and direct attempts to discredit Žerjav and Pribičević in his attempts to win the support of Ljubljana voters reveals a great deal as to his political style and character. He understood his audience and had built his political persona as both an advocate for the Slovenes and a Yugoslav statesman on the basis of being measured, calculated and avoiding scandal. By this point, his brand was very much established. He knew offering the Slovene electorate administrative autonomy to be an effective election strategy; this was offered by no other party, and yet it was evidently a popular concept in the majority of the Slovene constituencies. Korošec therefore felt that he did not need to resort to personal attacks on his opponents in Ljubljana. Instead, he trusted in his policies and powers of persuasion as a trustworthy, level-headed politician with a reputation for prioritising Slovene issues and working within the political system to implement reform.

It is clear that Korošec made ample use of the SLS-controlled press in this period as a tool through which to directly communicate with the Slovene electorate. This was a useful strategy because it allowed him to personally address key issues which arose during the period of the SLS's participation within Serb Radical governments, justifying his cooperation despite the latter's centralist stance for which they were notorious. Korošec was particularly mindful of the threat to continued SLS dominance in the Slovene constituencies posed by both election fatigue and by this cooperation with the Serb Radicals being perceived as contrary to Slovene interests. Given the frequency of elections during the 1920s thus far, he would have been all-too aware that new elections might be held before the end of the decade even as the Slovenes went to the polls in September 1927. Instilling in them a sense of personal responsibility to vote and power to transform their economic circumstances through electoral participation, even in the aftermath of SLS victory in the general elections, was therefore a tactical move. It demonstrated a forward-thinking attitude, not getting caught up in the SLS's electoral victory, but already planning ahead.

In addition, Korošec's preparedness to enter into government with the Serb Radicals in the first place proves him to be a skilled, tactical politician with an acute awareness of the value of cooperation with other major political parties. He recognised that this cooperation was essential in order to achieve a degree of influence with which to secure concessions for the Slovene regions. More importantly, he was aware of how his and the SLS's conduct and political unions could be used to condemn him by the Slovene opposition, and indeed how cooperation with the Serb Radicals might be viewed by SLS voters. Mindful of this, he set out to justify his new political partnership, offering reassurance to the Slovene electorate that supporting the Serb centralists did not equate to abandoning Slovene-centric policies. Doing so through the means of writing addresses to the Slovene electorate himself as SLS leader arguably made Korošec more personable. It created an impression that he truly cared about representing the best interests of the Slovene electorate; he was not in politics for the power and prestige. Moreover, the fact that the SLS retained all twenty of their Skupština seats in the general elections suggests that his strategy was successful in preventing election fatigue, preventing the Slovene electorate from being alienated, and encouraging them to continue participating not only in elections, but in supporting the SLS.⁵¹¹

Korošec as a Peacekeeper and Stabilising Force within the Uzunović and Vukićević Governments

Upon the announcement that Uzunović's government would be spared collapse by Korošec's agreement to give it a majority in the Skupština on 1 February 1927, *Slovenec* proudly declared that 'in this crisis, the representation of the Slovene nation was the centre around which the situation was resolved.'⁵¹² Radić and his HRSS were no longer prepared to work with the Serb Radicals. Neither were Pribičević's Independent Democrats prepared to prop up the existing administration, even temporarily, in order to prevent the collapse of yet another government. As a result of Korošec's more pragmatic, Yugoslav-centric approach, the SLS therefore found itself an indispensable force within Yugoslav politics, despite its small size and extremely limited appeal outside the Slovene constituencies. It was prepared to work with other government parties in the interests of establishing a stable government, and this made it far more powerful than merely its twenty Skupština deputies throughout the period 1927-28.

⁵¹¹ Balkovec, and Šubic Kovačević, 'Die Einzelheiten und Unterschiede Zwischen den Wahlen in Slowenien und Kroatien in den Jahren 1920-1927,' p.81

⁵¹² 'Pred novo vlado,' *Slovenec*, 1 February 1927, p.1

Over the next few months, Korošec took this a step further, and built a reputation for himself as something of a peacekeeping figure within Yugoslav political circles. He earned further respect amongst the members of the Uzunović government by gently and calmly intervening in a number of fights which occurred in the Skupština, proposing a solution which was both appropriately proportionate to the incident and acceptable to all parties involved. The most notable of these instances came in March 1927, when he successfully defused a violent brawl between a number of Serb Radical and HRSS deputies which had erupted mid-Skupština session.⁵¹³ He made use of his perceived neutrality as a Slovene to successfully demand that the Belgrade Police Commissioner Sokolović be permanently banned from attending Skupština sessions after he and a number of opposition deputies attacked and humiliated the Serb Radical deputy Jovan Ristić, stripping him naked and parading him around the gallery.⁵¹⁴ This matter required sensitive handling, because although the incident had come about following a fight between two Serbs, it had been preceded by allegations of violence and corruption against both Ristić and his fellow Serb Radical Maksimović by the Radić family. Korošec argued that not only was this a 'heinous act' and completely unacceptable on Sokolović's part, but that such behaviour during parliamentary sessions would destroy the SHS Kingdom's reputation abroad.⁵¹⁵ At his request, a full investigation was launched into the incident. His careful handling of this incident and his quick, calm but suitably appropriate response to such an assault surely saved Uzunović's government from a major scandal. Korošec again came to the Serb Radicals' rescue that summer, defending Vukićević's refusal to contemplate forming a coalition with Radić's HRSS, were they to emerge victorious as predicted in the Croat constituencies following the September general elections. 'Radić is completely impossible for any future government' unless he were to drastically alter his tactics, Korošec argued, for he had demonstrated time and time again that 'no party can hope to cooperate with him... his is so fickle that no state business can be trusted at all.'⁵¹⁶

This was an unusually strong statement for Korošec, who usually took care to avoid direct personal criticisms of the characters of Skupština deputies. It came just as the Serb Radicals were facing criticism in the press for refusing to consider another coalition with the HRSS, given Radić's hold in the Croat constituencies. *Domoljub* arguably pinpointed Korošec's reasoning for speaking out against Radić at this moment, just as the SLS were negotiating the terms of the Bled Treaty: 'everyone knows that' when Korošec spoke out regarding Radić and his lack of professionalism, 'the

⁵¹³ 'Vihar v narodni skupščini,' *Domoljub*, 3 March 1927, p.3

⁵¹⁴ 'Nečuven škandal v narodni skupščini,' *Slovenec*, 25 February 1927, p.1

⁵¹⁵ 'Vihar v narodni skupščini,' *Domoljub*, 3 March 1927, p.3

⁵¹⁶ 'Važna izjava dr Korošca o sporazumu med SLS in radikali,' *Slovenec*, 20 July 1927, p.1

whole country hangs on every word.⁵¹⁷ In the timing of this statement, therefore, Korošec proved himself to be a dependable ally for Vukićević's Serb Radicals. He could be relied upon to calmly and rationally call for appropriate responses to violence and infighting in the Skupština as a neutral figure whose emphasis on order and respectability seemed to be equally accepted by both Serb Radical and HRSS deputies. Furthermore, he was willing to indirectly defend the Serb Radicals publicly when he felt they had responded appropriately to matters for which they were criticised. The issue of a future coalition with Radić is a particularly useful example of this in understanding how far Korošec was willing to prioritise Yugoslav issues in the name of state stability, because the strength of the HRSS in the Croat constituencies before the 1927 general elections called into question whether any government composition excluding them could hope to endure.⁵¹⁸ Korošec strongly disapproved of Radić's tactics and felt that they posed a major threat to Yugoslav stability and unity.⁵¹⁹ In this, he had found common ground with the Serb Radicals, and this made him willing to overlook the centralist aspects of Serb Radical policy in order to give them the backing they needed to prevent Radić again becoming part of a sitting government.

Korošec carried over this calm approach, prioritising stability when he became Minister of the Interior in February 1928. Indeed, he was appointed to the post in the first place due to being seen as a neutral, equally acceptable figure by both Vukićević's Radicals and Davidović's Democrats. Davidović and Vukićević both picked Korošec as their first choice for the role once the Radical deputies were ruled out.⁵²⁰ Davidović's preference was based on his positive experiences working with Korošec during the period of his own coalition government in 1924. Additionally, as a result of his previous periods supporting the Serb Radicals in the Skupština over the last year, Vukićević's deputies welcomed Korošec's appointment wholeheartedly. They viewed him, as *Domoljub* so aptly put it, as 'a man of strict justice and unblemished honesty.'⁵²¹ This further proves that he was right to prioritise establishing solid relationships with key politicians during the 1920s; these relationships combined with his reputation as a neutral, rational statesman would come to benefit him in gaining a ministerial portfolio and further influence within government in 1928.

Korošec was quick to lay out his principle aims as he took up the post of Minister of the Interior in February 1928, focusing in particular on social issues and improving living standards outside the

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ See Prunk, 'Politični profil in delo Dr Antona Korošca v prvi Jugoslaviji,' p.41, and Donia, p.126

⁵¹⁹ Rahten, Korošec and the Croat Question, p.19

⁵²⁰ 'Danes dobimo vlado,' *Slovenec*, 17 February 1928, p.1

⁵²¹ 'Nova vlada ki je stara. Zopet na delo!' *Domoljub*, 1 March 1928, p.1

Slovene regions. Within hours, he had arranged to give a statement to journalists in Belgrade, in which he vowed to 'remove incompetent bureaucrats from the administration' within his new ministry.⁵²² This built on his previous work to tackle administrative-level corruption and mishandling of state finances. He also promised to devote particular attention to Southern Serbia, as both the most impoverished region of the state and also the 'most in need of good administration and order.'⁵²³ Alongside this, however, he also identified Dalmatia and Bosnia as areas in which living standards were considerably lower than the state average, vowing to provide these regions with an additional 150 million dinars as a long-term loan to address poverty. He also unveiled plans to implement pension reform across the whole state to ensure that all pensioners received the payments they were entitled to; this had emerged as a major state-wide issue during the Uzunović administration.

In the brief four months he spent as Minister of the Interior prior to the Skupština assassinations in June 1928, Korošec adopted a hands-on approach to ministerial duties. He also continued to focus not on issues affecting his own Slovene peoples, which might have been expected given the conduct of previous interior ministers, but those within the Yugoslav state as a whole which he deemed the most pressing. When the Interior Ministry was made aware of allegations of inhumane conditions at the Belgrade Municipal Prison, Korošec visited personally to conduct an inspection. Upon finding it was severely overcrowded and prisoners were being denied access to basic medical treatment and provisions, he insisted on an urgent meeting with the Mayor of Belgrade to address these issues through prison expansion, demanding that improving conditions at the prison be made a top priority.

Korošec reported back to the Skupština the next day that he had personally witnessed dire conditions at the prison. As a result, he had taken 'all the necessary steps' to ensure improvements would be made rapidly. Similarly, he responded in May to reports of lawlessness, violence, and poor living standards in Southern Serbia by visiting the region himself. Notably, he was the first Yugoslav Minister of the Interior to conduct a visit to the region.⁵²⁴ Once there, he encountered a population struggling against a stagnant economy, as well as frequent Bulgarian bandit attacks from across the border. The deterioration in living conditions was caused by these two factors. During his month-long tour, he took the time to meet with citizens from various villages during his month-long tour in

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ 'Dr Korošec v Južni Srbiji,' *Domoljub*, 3 May 1928, p.2

addition to state officials to hear their concerns, and upon learning that the major cause of unrest in the region was the constant threat of raids from Bulgarian bandits, vowed to address this in Belgrade. He believed that maintaining peace within all regions of the state was his primary responsibility as Minister of the Interior. He therefore returned to the Skupština to urge Vukićević and the Minister for Foreign Affairs to arrange talks with the Bulgarian prime minister to discuss tighter security on the Bulgarian side of the border.⁵²⁵ Simultaneously, he organised a conference between himself, Vukićević and the Minister for Agrarian Reform, in order to present to them the demands of the regional administration, farmers and workers he had met during his official visit to Southern Serbia.⁵²⁶ True to his federalist-style, devolved government vision for the SHS Kingdom, he argued that the best solution would be to allocate additional funding to the region to support its agriculture-based economy, to be managed within the region itself through the regional assemblies.

It is noteworthy here that Korošec prioritised two Serbian-specific issues during his brief period as Minister of the Interior. In doing this, rather than using his post to focus specifically on the Slovene regions, he demonstrated himself to be truly Yugoslav-minded and invested in improving internal affairs across the state as a whole; he was not interested in a Belgrade ministerial position purely to benefit the Slovenes. By not only prioritising the regions most in need of intervention within the state as a whole, but personally overseeing such matters by visiting the areas himself, he further proved he could be counted upon by the Serb Radicals to work tirelessly for Yugoslav interests as part of their governments. Moreover, the fact that he was warmly received in Southern Serbia as an outsider and the grassroots approach he took to addressing unrest in the region reminiscent of the Krek era of SLS politics shows a willingness to work with the non-Slovene populations of the kingdom, rather than merely impose on them from afar. He was truly a 'man for every parliament' within the Slovenes' Yugoslav context.

Conclusions

The period of Korošec supporting the Serb Radical governments in 1927-28 featured notable gains for both the Slovene regions and for Korošec's own political career. These gains were possible due to the groundwork he had laid in terms of building strong working relationships with key personalities within the major Yugoslav political parties earlier in the decade. Through prioritising such relationships throughout the 1920s, he had demonstrated both capability and commitment to cooperating with other political parties in the interests of providing the kingdom with a stable,

⁵²⁵ 'Konferenci pri Dr Korošču,' *Slovenec*, 9 May 1928, p.1

⁵²⁶ 'Za južno Srbijo,' *Slovenec*, 16 May 1928, p.3

functioning and long-lasting government. He recognised that the best route to achieving his autonomy goals for the Slovene regions was through negotiations with the sitting government. Consequently, he appreciated that it was in the best interests of the Slovene population for his SLS to do whatever necessary within reason to ensure the longevity of the sitting government, be it through Skupština support or active participation. This attitude earned him the respect of the Serb Radicals, who were eager to work with his party, firstly in a support capacity in February 1927, and then in forming a government coalition in September that year, because they recognised the value of his cooperation. In turn, the success of these initial ventures, combined with the reputation Korošec had earned as a respectable, experienced and capable politician and his perceived neutrality as a Slovene strengthened through his strong working relationships in the Skupština, led to Vukičević granting him one of the kingdom's most crucial ministerial posts in March 1928.

Korošec could have used his appointment as Minister of the Interior to prioritise developing further the Slovene regions' infrastructure and industrial development, in addition to investing further in its fledgling cultural scene and new educational institutions which had been neglected under recent Serb Radical governments. Equally, he could have prioritised funding the Slovene regional assemblies following their acquisition of new devolved administrative powers under the Bled Agreement. The fact that he instead prioritised addressing poor living standards and unrest in those areas of the kingdom worst affected, despite them being Serb-inhabited rather than Slovene, demonstrates his Yugoslav-mindedness. Indeed, Korošec regularly prioritised Yugoslav issues over Slovene during the period of his participation in Serb Radical governments. As a tactical, opportunistic, and highly experienced politician, he recognised that a stable, functioning Yugoslav government and basic living standards across the whole state were necessary in order for Slovene issues to be prioritised and addressed. Therefore, he himself prioritised Yugoslav state stability and the development of the most politically and economically fraught regions of the Kingdom when it mattered. This approach in turn caused the Serb Radicals to prioritise concessions towards a degree of financial and administrative independence for the Slovene regions through the Uzunović agreement and the Bled Treaty. They recognised that the support of the SLS deputies was vital in order to retain a majority government; they were therefore willing to grant concessions to the Slovene regions in return for this support.

In this sense, Korošec's political long game had paid off. He entered into his initial agreement to support Uzunović's government in the Skupština mindful of the latter's dependency upon him and his SLS in order to prevent government collapse. He was equally mindful, however, as to the limits

of the concessions he could reasonably request in return, and this realism allowed him to be successful where his Croat counterpart Stjepan Radić had failed. His willingness to work with the major government parties made his 20 SLS deputies indispensable within a political context in which it was almost impossible for any one party to win a strong enough majority alone to endure longer than a few months. This put him in a strong position to negotiate concessions towards a devolved administration in the Slovene regions. While the concessions he was able to win for the Ljubljana and Maribor oblasts through cooperation with the Serb Radicals in this period were limited, they did nonetheless reflect the SLS's vision for the place of the Slovenes within their new Yugoslav context, as had been laid out in election manifestos since 1920. They should therefore be viewed as a success on Korošec's part, and indeed a triumph for a kind of Yugoslav-first, ethnic-group second approach to early Yugoslav politics which only he could truly claim to practise.

Chapter 8- An Impossible Task? Korošec as Prime Minister July-December 1928

Introduction

Korošec's ascension to office as prime minister on 27 July 1928 was a pivotal moment, not only for him on an individual level, but for the SHS Kingdom as a multinational entity. Being the only non-Serb to hold the position during the period of the First Yugoslavia, his premiership challenges the traditional tendency amongst historians to interpret the interwar era as dominated by a vicious power struggle between Serbs and Croats.⁵²⁷ Despite being the leader of a Slovene-specific party with limited support outside of the Slovene constituencies, Korošec undoubtedly possessed suitable experience for the role. As noted previously, he commenced his political career as SLS MP for the then-Habsburg constituency of Celje, Styria, in 1906. At the time, Celje constituted part of the Austrian crownlands of the former empire. It was one of the regions where the Slovenes were particularly adversely affected by German domination as they struggled to assert themselves politically, administratively and linguistically.⁵²⁸ Korošec therefore entered into Yugoslav politics well-practised at representing the Slovenes as a national group within a multicultural entity. He had come to master a careful balancing act between advocating for the Slovene population while pressing issues relating to the wider political entity in order to best serve Slovene interests, bringing this political philosophy into his new Yugoslav context.⁵²⁹ By 1928, he was indisputably the most experienced Slovene politician within the SHS Kingdom, and indeed one of the new state's most experienced politicians. This experience and mindset would have arguably made him an ideal candidate for the premiership, were it not for his party's lack of Yugoslav-wide electoral support and a Skupština majority.

Korošec was, already well-practised at holding positions of authority over a non-Slovene majority population. He had served briefly as deputy prime minister during the period of Protić's first cabinet, during which time he had impressed the Serb Radicals with his willingness to prioritise Yugoslav issues rather than Slovene-specific issues.⁵³⁰ He had also served as president of the Yugoslav Club within both Habsburg and Yugoslav parliamentary circles, as president of the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs within the crumbling Habsburg Empire, and of the interim

⁵²⁷ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.6

⁵²⁸ Bister, *Anton Korošec: državnozbornski poslanec na Dunaju, življenje in delo 1872-1918*, p.73

⁵²⁹ *Ibid*, p.42

⁵³⁰ Engelsfeld, *Prvi Parlament Kraljevstva Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, p.43

State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs immediately preceding the SHS Kingdom's creation.⁵³¹ As demonstrated in previous chapters, he had additionally utilised the interwar period up to summer 1928 to build solid working relationships with the Serb Radicals, Davidović's Democrats, and smaller, national group-specific parties such as Barić's Croat People's Party and Spaho's JMO.

King Aleksandar's decision to offer Korošec the mandate to form a government should therefore be viewed as highly logical on the basis of his political experience and pro-Yugoslav record. It was also rooted at least partly in the fact that the king was out of options in terms of candidates from parties with significantly larger Skupština representation. However, it was also based on Korošec's suitability for the role, as well as the high regard with which the monarch regarded him as a Yugoslav statesman. It is difficult to gain a comprehensive sense of Korošec's relationship with the king, due to the poor condition of the Yugoslav Royal Court Archives; almost nothing of relevance has been preserved.⁵³² However, the fact that the king personally sought Korošec's advice in the aftermath of the Skupština assassinations implies that he greatly respected his opinion as a pragmatic politician, with a proven record of pushing Slovene-specific agendas without compromising his pro-Yugoslav stance.

That Korošec commenced his premiership with a wealth of relevant experience and inter-party connections raises the question of why he was unable to hold together a government long-term. He handed in his resignation to King Aleksandar on 30 December 1928, after just five months in office.⁵³³ This is not only because of what happened next. King Aleksandar responded to the resignation by abandoning parliamentary democracy altogether, proclaiming a royal dictatorship on 6 January 1929. This response would transform interwar Yugoslav politics, and ultimately result in a stark change in national identity policy within the kingdom.⁵³⁴ Yet despite its premature conclusion, Korošec's premiership represents a notable departure from the previous revolving-door of Serb prime ministers from the Radical and Democratic parties. Korošec brought a unique perspective to the premiership. He came to office committed to restoring order to the Skupština in the aftermath of the June assassinations, in addition to reforming the kingdom's administrative structure further in the direction of devolved government. This was a development he believed would appease the Croat and Slovene elements of the kingdom's population, therefore reducing the risk of history repeating itself. He understood the Skupština assassinations not as an isolated incident, but the

⁵³¹ L. Plut-Pregelj and C. Rogel, *The A to Z of Slovenia* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press Inc, 2010) p.241

⁵³² Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.67

⁵³³ C. Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse: Causes, Course and Consequences* (London: Hurst, 1997) p.38

⁵³⁴ Bigelow, 'Centralisation Vs Decentralisation in Interwar Yugoslavia,' p.160

result of years of frustrations and consequent hostilities between rival centralist and anti-centralist factions. Administrative reform was therefore essential in order to ease the tensions between these two camps, now largely polarised along Serb and Croat national lines.

Despite this, Korošec's premiership tends to be either ignored in histories of Interwar Yugoslavia or examined only superficially. Historians focus instead upon the Skupština assassinations and royal dictatorship which immediately preceded and succeeded his government. Fogelquist and Nielsen touch briefly upon Korošec's premiership, though both their works focus primarily upon the circumstances under which he came to office and the Peasant Democrat Coalition's reaction to his leadership. Other historians, such as Djokić, Luthar, Drapac and Wachtel, skim over his time in office entirely.

In light of this omission, this chapter places his premiership back into the historiography. It constructs a more complete understanding not only of Korošec as both a Slovene and a Yugoslav politician and the place of the Slovenes within the SHS Kingdom, but also of the complexities of the 1920s Yugoslav political scene. It outlines the three main challenges he faced during his premiership: first, the legacy of the Skupština assassinations; second, the precarious nature of his quadruple coalition government and its extremely narrow majority in the Skupština; and third, the mass Croat outrage caused by the appointment of a Serb military professor as grand župan of Zagreb province in December 1928. This led to civil unrest in Croatia, and ultimately to cabinet disunity which prompted Korošec's resignation. In this sense, therefore, the grand župan affair was the catalyst for the collapse of his government; without it, his premiership might have limped on for a few more months. Right from the start, however, his cabinet's attempts to implement reform were constantly hindered by the enduring legacy of the circumstances under which he had come to office.

King Aleksandar offered Korošec the government mandate after a series of failures to do so by various Serb and Croat politicians and political figures following the June 1928 Skupština assassinations.⁵³⁵ These included Stjepan Radić, who was offered the mandate in a symbolic gesture while being treated in hospital after the Serb Radical Račić's attack on HRSS deputies. Radić died as a result of his injuries soon after.⁵³⁶ The king even resorted to offering the government mandate to the Serb military general Stevan Hadžić, justifying this on the basis that he was an experienced cabinet minister who lacked party ties, and therefore might be able to form a neutral government of

⁵³⁵ Rahten, 'Anton Korošec and the "Croatian Question" in Yugoslavia,' p24

⁵³⁶ Biondich, *The Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilisation*, p.240

non-party personalities more acceptable to the Croats.⁵³⁷ The Peasant Democrat Coalition deputies refused to join any government until new elections were called. Furthermore, lingering hostilities between these parties and the Serb Radicals meant that the latter would not contemplate any kind of political collaboration with the former.

Korošec, in contrast, was able to bring together a new government within days of being offered the mandate. He achieved this by drawing on his experience participating within previous coalition governments, as well as utilising his working relationships with members of other political parties in Belgrade. Additionally, his striving to portray himself as a committed Yugoslav statesman alongside his Slovene autonomy agenda undoubtedly assisted him in forming a coalition at a moment of such political turbulence and hostility. He had no overwhelming ties to either the Serb Radicals or HRSS, having struck a careful balance between professional cooperation and active criticism of the former's centralist stance. His own government was essentially a continuation of the Serb Radical quadruple coalition of which he had been a part prior to the Skupština assassinations which prompted Vukičević's resignation. It consisted of his own SLS, the Serb Radicals, the Democrats and the JMO.⁵³⁸

Korošec's government faced extensive criticism and undermining in parliament from the Peasant Democrat Bloc. Within this bloc, the Independent Democrat leader Pribičević, together with Radić and his HRSS successor Vladko Maček, all viewed the Vukičević administration as responsible for the Skupština assassinations. Although Maček does mention Korošec in his memoirs, he is disappointingly silent on his premiership, skimming over it in favour of Radić's death and the commencement of the Royal Dictatorship in January 1929.⁵³⁹ He does, however, present Korošec as highly opportunistic in terms of his entering into cooperation with the Serb Radicals in 1927-28, and indeed with the Royal Dictatorship during its initial years.⁵⁴⁰ Along with Pribičević, Maček argued that the Vukičević administration's hostile attitude towards Radić's party and his republican stance had created the assassin Račić. On this basis, the Peasant Democrat Coalition refused to recognise the legitimacy of Korošec's government. Instead, they insisted that an entirely new, neutral

⁵³⁷ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.338

⁵³⁸ S.P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State Building and Legitimation 1918-2005* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006) p.74

⁵³⁹ Maček, In *The Struggle For Freedom*, p.126

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.109

government free of Serb Radical Party influence was needed in order to move on from the Skupština assassinations and restore their trust in the political system.⁵⁴¹

The formation of Korošec's quadruple coalition had resolved the month-long political crisis which dominated after the Skupština assassinations. Yet this meant that he inevitably inherited the HRSS-Serb Radical fallout in the Skupština, which had only intensified as a result of the month of uncertainty and failed attempts to form a government.⁵⁴² Korošec was never able to escape this legacy. Radić's death just days into the premiership, and the subsequent call by Croat political leaders for the 'amputation' of Croat regions, either to become an autonomous or fully independent state, came to dominate in the Yugoslav press over the following months.⁵⁴³ In turn, the Croat Question, and indeed the Peasant Democrat Coalition's refusal to cooperate within the Skupština, came to dominate Yugoslav politics for the remainder of 1928. As a result, Korošec was constantly preoccupied with attempting to restore some level of parliamentary cooperation between the Serbs and Croats. This limited the extent to which he was able to implement his own policies. He was forced to focus instead on damage control, attempting to counteract these calls for territorial amputation with proving how a degree of devolved regional government administration within the kingdom could offer an alternative solution.

Arguably more destabilising, however, was the opposition Korošec faced from within his own precarious coalition. His premiership was not the result of an election victory. This was not unusual for the period of 1920s Yugoslav politics; as has been explored previously, a general lack of cooperation between Serb Radicals and Yugoslav Democrats, the HRSS's hostile position and fundamental disagreements over state structure resulted in frequent government collapse.⁵⁴⁴ Korošec was the SHS Kingdom's tenth prime minister in as many years, and his government the twenty-fourth to come to power in the period December 1918 to January 1929.⁵⁴⁵ But his government was unusual since as prime minister, he did not belong to one of the two main Yugoslav political parties. Despite its dominance in Slovene regions and his reputation as 'one of the ablest and most highly respected' politicians the state possessed,⁵⁴⁶ the SLS was nonetheless a Slovene party representing Slovene constituencies, in a multi-ethnic state in which the Slovenes made up just

⁵⁴¹ Irvine, A, *The Croat Question*, p.43

⁵⁴² Biondich, *The Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilisation*, p.240

⁵⁴³ Ibid, p.242

⁵⁴⁴ Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, p.105

⁵⁴⁵ Bigelow, 'Centralisation Vs Decentralisation in Interwar Yugoslavia,' p.158

⁵⁴⁶ Bevc, *Liberal Forces in Twentieth Century Yugoslavia*, p.4

8.53 percent of the total population.⁵⁴⁷ On 27 July 1928 as Korošec took office, the SLS constituted just 21 of the total 315 Yugoslav Skupština seats.⁵⁴⁸ This in itself made his premiership far more precarious than Vukičević's from the moment of its creation. As leader of the Serb Radical Party, which made up 111 seats of his government's majority of 217 seats, Vukičević had been considerably less reliant upon the backing of the other coalition parties than was Korošec, whose government had the added disadvantage of a slightly narrower majority of just 211 in the Skupština.⁵⁴⁹ In addition, the opposition which Korošec's government faced in the Peasant Democrat Coalition was 87 strong. His own SLS was too numerically small for its deputies to be of much use were he to lose the support of any one of the three other parties making up the coalition. Losing the support of either the Serb Radical or the Democrat element of his coalition, given the substantial sizes of these parties within his government composition, would lead to a government collapse. Appeasing both of these parties simultaneously, despite their differing political perspectives, was therefore a severe challenge. But it was one which Korošec had no choice but to rise to if he wanted his government to endure. For this reason, his premiership can be viewed as the ultimate test of his political character, and indeed of the merit of his political decisions, policies and priorities as both SLS leader and a Yugoslav statesman up until summer 1928.

In his 1928 annual report on the SHS Kingdom, the British minister Howard Kennard wrote on Korošec's brief premiership how 'remarkable' it was that 'a Slovene Catholic priest, the leader of an ultra-Clerical party, should hold the chief office of state in a predominantly Orthodox Kingdom.'⁵⁵⁰ In reality, Korošec's Catholic faith was the least of the problems his premiership faced. Instead, his time in office was dominated by Serb-Croat tensions in the Skupština and the issue of his narrow majority and dependency on a quadruple coalition, within which his own party constituted a minority. These factors hindered, but did not completely prevent, his ability to enforce decentralising policies which aimed to make the state's political structure work more effectively for non-Serbs, including the Croats demanding amputation and the Slovenes he represented as SLS leader. Ultimately, he succeeded to some extent in managing these problems. It was the appointment of the Serb grand župan to Zagreb Province in December 1928 which finally destabilised his position, leading to his resignation at the end of the year.

⁵⁴⁷ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.58

⁵⁴⁸ TNA, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.31

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ TNA, FO 504/11, op.cit., p.35

Korošec as a Neutral, Pro-Yugoslav Prime Minister

As we have seen, Korošec commenced his premiership aware that it would be shaped by the chaotic circumstances under which he had come to office. Most obviously, he inherited a bitterly divided Skupština. Radić's HRSS and the broader Peasant Democrat Bloc of which it was a part insisted that the Skupština was 'no longer a fit forum for the resolution of the pressing issues facing the Yugoslav state and society.'⁵⁵¹ This was a condemnation made largely, but by no means exclusively, on the basis of the heavy Serb Radical element within parliament. This remained unchanged following the Skupština assassinations, in the absence of the new elections the Peasant Democrat Bloc had demanded. Korošec's government contained out of necessity a strong Serb Radical component; 111 of his 211 majority were Serb Radical MPs.⁵⁵² The Peasant Democrat Bloc therefore used his government composition against him. They accused his administration of being nothing more than a restructured version of the Vukičević's under which the Skupština assassinations had occurred, and therefore refused to acknowledge its legitimacy.⁵⁵³ To retain control of parliament, Korošec needed to strike a balance between appeasing the Peasant Democrat Coalition and simultaneously keeping outside the Radicals, whose support his government depended upon.

It seems reasonable to conclude in the absence of surviving royal court records that Korošec was given the government mandate because he was seen as both a neutral figure and a trusted politician. He therefore represented as impartial a candidate for the premiership as was realistically possible within the SHS Kingdom at this point.⁵⁵⁴ His perceived neutrality is clear from both the Slovene press of the period and British Foreign Office reports, and it is reflected in the meagre historiography covering the circumstances of his premiership. Gow and Carmichael outline how he gained prominence and respect on the Belgrade political scene because he prioritised 'the pragmatic and the possible over the emotional and the ideological,' while he nonetheless 'retained principle blended with common sense.'⁵⁵⁵ Rahten too has written about Korošec's premiership within the context of the SLS's interactions in Belgrade.⁵⁵⁶ He has highlighted that Korošec came from a 'generation of politicians' born out of the Habsburg political scene who viewed the SHS Kingdom as

⁵⁵¹ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.312

⁵⁵² TNA, FO 504/11, op.cit., p.30

⁵⁵³ Irvine, A, *The Croat Question*, p.43

⁵⁵⁴ 'Dr Korošec bo kos svoj nalogi,' *Slovenec*, 2 August 1928, št.174, p.1

⁵⁵⁵ Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.38

⁵⁵⁶ Rahten, *Slovenska Ljudska Stranka v Beograjski Skupščini* p.149

the 'best possible solution for the preservation of the Slovene nation.'⁵⁵⁷ Korošec continued to hold this view of the kingdom even as the 1920s brought increased centralism and parliamentary instability. Because he recognised that for a small nation such as the Slovenes, there was no viable alternative, he strove towards Yugoslav political stability and unity at all costs. This was a stark contrast to Radić's Croat-centric, parliamentary boycotting tactics of the period.⁵⁵⁸

With this in mind, it is easy to see how Korošec was able to win the support of the Serb Radical, Yugoslav Democrat and JMO parties and form his quadruple coalition government. Though he was undeniably opposed to the centralist state structure favoured by the Serb Radicals, he had spent a decade earning their trust and demonstrating his loyalty to the kingdom first and foremost. But that he had proven himself capable of balancing both Yugoslav state-building and the pursuit of government devolution arguably made it realistic to hope that he might come to be viewed as an acceptable prime minister in the eyes of the Peasant Democrat Coalition also.

Korošec quickly came to appreciate this reality, that firmly establishing himself as Yugoslav-minded leader was essential for the survival of his administration. He therefore utilised the SLS organ *Slovenec* to portray himself as the suitably neutral, level-headed statesman needed to hold the Skupština together, and to inspire non-SLS deputies to adopt the same mentality. A front-page article on 28 July 1928 celebrated his having brought an end to the month-long political crisis by successfully forming a government.⁵⁵⁹ *Slovenec* acknowledged that this new administration was essentially a reconstructed version of the old quadruple coalition, but argued that there was no realistic alternative. This was a view backed by a later British Foreign Office report which, assessed that inviting the Serb Radicals back into government had been Korošec's only option for restoring any kind of government at all.⁵⁶⁰ For the Peasant Democrat Coalition had refused to participate in any government coalition, making any other parliamentary majority impossible. *Slovenec* reported that the SLS, along with the Serb Radicals, Yugoslav Democrats and JMO recognised this quandary.⁵⁶¹ They were therefore keen to reach an agreement and unite under Korošec's leadership. They acknowledged that the time had come to prioritise the stability of the kingdom above their personal and party-level aspirations; there was simply no other route forward for SHS politics.

⁵⁵⁷ Rahten, 'Anton Korošec and the "Croatian Question" in Yugoslavia,' p.14

⁵⁵⁸ Irvine, A, *The Croat Question*, p.40

⁵⁵⁹ 'Vlada dr Anton Korošca,' *Slovenec*, 28 July 1928, št.170, p.1

⁵⁶⁰ TNA, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.24

⁵⁶¹ 'Vlada dr Anton Korošca,' *Slovenec*, 28 July 1928, št.170, p.1

Over the next few weeks, *Slovenec* built on Korošec's efforts to encourage pro-Yugoslav sentiment amongst his government parties. It argued that his premiership represented a pivotal moment in the kingdom's history, and a long-overdue turn towards Yugoslav-orientated government. Not only was he its first Slovene, and its first non-Serb prime minister, but his unique Yugoslav-Slovene political character and wealth of parliamentary experience in Habsburg Vienna made him especially well-suited to the particular challenges of Yugoslav leadership at this precise moment.⁵⁶² He had a proven record, *Slovenec* reiterated, of campaigning for 'equality, self-governing rights and freedoms' throughout the Yugoslav period.' Moreover, he had done so by engaging with the Belgrade political system, using the Skupština to emphasise the need for 'strong morals and honesty' within both the administration and the public workforce.⁵⁶³ He could therefore be trusted by all Yugoslav citizens to 'prioritise the welfare of the whole country and all of its constituents,' and to work towards 'reconciliation' with objectivity and 'honesty in the administration.'

Previous chapters have already demonstrated that Korošec frequently made use of the SLS-controlled press as a means of conveying his particular political message at any given moment. He did not, however, rely on this tactic during his premiership. Rather, he reinforced it by simultaneously encouraging this pro-Yugoslav sentiment through his own public actions. As his new cabinet ministers were sworn in on 27 July, he urged them to put aside their differences, and to cooperate with one another in order to resolve the urgent issues the kingdom faced as a matter of the highest priority.⁵⁶⁴ Presenting a united front through such cabinet cooperation, he argued, was the only way to calm the hostilities still gripping the Skupština.

Over the next few months, Korošec went to great lengths to present himself as committed to maintaining his neutral, pro-Yugoslav unity stance. He attempted to use this to persuade the Peasant Democrat Coalition to resume participation in parliamentary life. In an interview given to a correspondent from the Belgian daily newspaper publication *L'indépendance Belge*, he insisted that his primary role as prime minister was to restore and maintain peace within the Kingdom.⁵⁶⁵ He highlighted the continued hostilities between the Serb Radicals and HRSS, as well as the Peasant Democrat Coalition's refusal to sit in the Skupština, as the main obstacles to achieving such peace

⁵⁶² 'Vlada slovenskega premijera,' *Slovenec*, 28 July 1928, št.170, p.1

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ 'Dr Korošec o svoji nalogi,' *Slovenec*, 25 September 1928, št.219, p1

and stability as of late September 1928.⁵⁶⁶ He maintained that it would be highly inappropriate for him to give his own personal opinion regarding tensions between the warring Serb and Croat factions, lest he appear to be taking sides. As he saw it, his role as prime minister was to remain as neutral as possible. He recognised that he had been appointed to the post because he was not tarnished by the Skupština assassinations, and therefore could not be blamed by either faction; as a result, he was not willing to compromise his perceived neutrality. He did, however, make clear his intentions to guide the Serb and Croat factions within the Skupština towards some kind of agreement with one another. As prime minister, he took on a mediating rather than an authoritative role. In his statement to *L'indépendance Belge* in late September, he expressed his hopes that such an agreement would be reached 'very soon,' but acknowledged that progress would not be possible unless both parties desired it.

Korošec's Quadruple Coalition Government and its Perception by the Peasant Democrats

It is clear that Korošec went to great lengths during his premiership to present himself as the neutral, pro-Yugoslav statesman he believed the Kingdom needed as its leader after of the Skupština assassinations. Yet this was not enough to win over the Peasant Democrat Coalition parties. Arguably, Korošec himself could be viewed as a neutral figure even by the HRSS, but the same could not be said for his government, due to its dependence on the Serb Radicals. It was entirely predictable that the Peasant Democrat Coalition would object and it proved to be a stumbling block throughout the premiership. As early as 28 July, the day after his appointment as prime minister, the Croatian press began to condemn Korošec's government for being anything but the neutral administration the HRSS had demanded as a response to the assassinations. The Croatian daily publication *Obzor* dismissed the new government as merely a revised version of Vukičević's former quadruple coalition.⁵⁶⁷ It protested that the start of his premiership therefore represented continuity rather than change. On this basis, they demanded new elections, a demand they would repeat uncompromisingly until his resignation in December. In the absence of an alternative government option or Peasant Democrat willingness to compromise, this issue was therefore a problem that Korošec had to work around as best he could.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ 'Zagreb,' *Slovenec*, 28 July 1928, št.170, p.2

While Stjepan Radić was being treated in a Zagreb hospital, Peasant Democrat Coalition deputies protested that Korošec's government would inevitably prove itself to be biased towards the Serb Radicals. They viewed this as a predictable consequence of both its Serb Radical-heavy composition and the SLS's small size. The SLS countered this Peasant-Democrat stance by arguing that Svetozar Pribićević had only himself to blame for the inclusion of the Serb Radical element which he found so unacceptable within Korošec's government. Korošec had been ready and willing to work with Pribićević's Peasant Democrat bloc, but the latter had refused to cooperate with any regime which was not the 'unconstitutional, non-parliamentary, dictatorial government' they had been demanding since the Skupština assassinations.⁵⁶⁸ Such a government, made up of military rather than political personalities, had already proven to be an unviable option for the kingdom. King Aleksandar had given Korošec the government mandate after first offering it to General Hadžić, in the hope that he could form such a politically 'neutral' government from military figures as the Peasant Democrat Coalition had demanded. Hadžić had failed in this endeavour, effectively ruling it out as an option for the kingdom. But the Peasant Democrat Coalition still refused to accept Korošec's last-resort government as an alternative.⁵⁶⁹

The major problem Korošec faced in trying to govern effectively, *Slovenec* argued in September, was that the 'Croats' continued to insist on associating the Skupština assassinations with the 'Serbian nation' as a whole. They therefore refused to even consider cooperating with, or even merely recognising the legitimacy of, any government which contained any kind of Serb element.⁵⁷⁰ They made no allowance for the impossible situation Korošec had inherited, or acknowledgement that a functioning government of some description, however far from their preferred option, was surely preferable than no government at all. The SLS protested that in taking such an uncompromising stance, rather than embracing inter-party cooperation, the Peasant-Democrat Coalition were actively hindering the reconciliation process.⁵⁷¹ Furthermore, they were forcing Korošec to waste value time and energy attempting to encourage them to partake in parliamentary life, which could be better spent drawing up and implementing reforms to allow the kingdom to work for all its citizens.

⁵⁶⁸ 'Srečen izhod,' *Slovenec*, 29 July 1928, št.171, p1

⁵⁶⁹ *TNA*, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.25

⁵⁷⁰ 'Vlada je prijateljica Hrvatov: Mačkov socialni in gospodarski bojkot bo škodoval samo Hrvatom,' *Slovenec*, 18 September 1928, št.213, p1

⁵⁷¹ 'Srečen izhod,' *Slovenec*, 29 July 1928, št.171, p1

The SLS's use of 'Croat' to describe the Peasant Democrat Coalition deputies in the months following the Skupština assassinations is noteworthy here, because it demonstrates that the SLS had come to view the Yugoslav political scene as now polarised along tribal lines. The Skupština hostilities which had resulted in the June assassinations were not between Serb and Croat deputies, but Serb Radicals and HRSS. This is an important distinction, because the Skupština at the time contained ethnic Serb and Croat deputies who did not partake in the parliamentary squabbling and hostilities according to their tribal identities. Davidović's Yugoslav Democratic Party, for example, was not involved. Furthermore, Pribičević had brought his Independent Democrats into the coalition bloc with Radić's HRSS but was himself a Croatian Serb. This distinction has been heavily acknowledged within more recent historiography. Djokić emphasises that interwar Skupština hostilities cannot be understood as a 'simple Serb-Croat dichotomy,'⁵⁷² while Nielsen insists that it was the 'flawed framework of the Vidovdan Constitution,' rather than Serb and Croat tribal allegiances, around which the parliamentary instability of the 1920s revolved.⁵⁷³ Korošec and his SLS would have understood this perhaps better than most based on their own political interactions and collaborations during the 1920s. The Yugoslav Democrat leader Davidović was an ethnic Serb, but experiences within coalition governments alongside both him and the Serb Radicals would have taught the SLS elite that there was no unanimous 'Serb' political outlook. The same can be said of Korošec's close ties with Barić's Croatian People's Party in contrast to his inability to form any kind of working relationship at all with Radić and the HRSS. The fact that the SLS had begun to simplify the resistance Korošec's government faced from the boycotting HRSS deputies as being from uncooperative 'Croats' suggests that the party elite's tolerance for the situation was wearing thin. By the September of Korošec's premiership, his party had come to view the issue of the HRSS parliament boycott as a 'Croat' problem as a result of the party's own actions. As a result not of the Skupština assassinations, but of the HRSS's response to Korošec's attempts to restore parliamentary life in the aftermath, the SLS had also come to view the Yugoslav political scene as hopelessly polarised along tribal lines.

As Korošec's premiership unfolded, the composition of his government faced further criticism from members of the HRSS elite. This rather predictably included Radić's successor Maček. More compelling, however, were Ante Trumbić's protests against the Korošec administration. Korošec had worked closely with Trumbić earlier in the Yugoslav period; as head of the former Yugoslav Committee in, Trumbić had attended the Geneva Conference to reach an agreement on creating a new Yugoslav state along with Korošec and Pašić. He therefore had a considerable degree of

⁵⁷² Djokić, *Illusive Compromise*, p.1

⁵⁷³ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.41

experience and practised a style of politics that would be more familiar and appealing to Korošec than Radić's preferred style. Trumbić had initially opposed both Serb Radical centralism and Radić's uncompromising republicanism, floating between a number of minor Croat political parties during the 1920s. Following the Skupština assassinations, however, he had joined the HRSS.⁵⁷⁴

Almost the moment Korošec was sworn into office, Trumbić protested in the Croatian press that the month-long parliamentary crisis after the assassinations had been nothing more than an elaborate 'game' to restore the same Serb Radical-dominated quadruple coalition to power again.⁵⁷⁵ Korošec as prime minister was merely a cover to disguise the new government's true nature; it represented continuity, not commitment to change. Trumbić did reluctantly acknowledge that Korošec's own cabinet contained fewer Serb Radicals than Vukićević's. This was a deliberate change as Korošec attempted to both appease the Peasant Democrat Coalition and ensure that his administration represented a clear shift towards regional representation in the Yugoslav ministries.

Nonetheless, Trumbić dismissed Korošec's premiership as a 'Serb' attempt to prove to the rest of Europe that there was 'no hegemony on the Serb side of the breakdown in relations between Yugoslav Serbs and Croats.'⁵⁷⁶ He insisted it was an 'unpardonable sin' that the Serbs had not acknowledged a neutral government as the only option to restore Croat trust in the political system: Korošec's coalition simply would not do. Trumbić also reduced the Yugoslav political scene to a polarised conflict along tribal lines - an overly-simplistic interpretation - and wrote off Korošec before giving him the chance to prove himself as prime minister. Trumbić's sentiment was echoed by the Peasant Democrat Coalition a few days later, when it held a meeting in the hall of the old Croat Assembly in Zagreb to mark the start of the new government.⁵⁷⁷ The solemn affair was presided over by Pribićević, who argued that the Belgrade parliament no longer had the right to legislate on behalf of the entire kingdom. The Coalition declared its intention to continue its 'determined struggle' against Korošec's new government.

This anti-Korošec sentiment only seemed to intensify amongst the Peasant Democrat Coalition as his premiership unfolded. In September 1928, *Slovenec* reported that one of its correspondents had been speaking with an 'unnamed member of the government' concerning 'current political issues,'

⁵⁷⁴ 'Kaj napoveduje Zagreb,' *Slovenec*, 29 July 1928, št.171, p1

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ 'Kaj napoveduje Zagreb,' *Slovenec*, 29 July 1928, št.171, p1

⁵⁷⁷ TNA, FO 504/11, op.cit., p.25

specifically Maček's and Pribičević's hostile attitude.⁵⁷⁸ This unnamed deputy was asked for his opinion on Maček declaring a boycott of the Skupština. In response, he explained that there remained a belief in Zagreb political circles that Korošec's coalition was deliberately targeting the Croats: both the Croat deputies within the Škupština and the Croat population of the kingdom as a whole. The anonymous deputy stressed that he did not agree with this view, insisting that no previous government had prioritised Zagreb and the Croats like Korošec's. Additionally, he argued that while Maček's and Pribičević's adamant refusal to engage with the government was admittedly undermining attempts to implement reform across the entire kingdom, it was harming the Croats most of all. Maček had pushed for a Peasant Democrat Coalition boycott of the Skupština believing this would adversely impact the Serbs financially and prevent the passing of any laws which might have brought about social reforms. The unnamed deputy insisted, however, that Maček's boycott 'will not hurt as many Serbs or other nationalities within the country as he thinks.'⁵⁷⁹ Rather, the Croats themselves would be the most adversely affected, given that the overwhelming majority of the Croatian constituencies were represented by HRSS deputies. He despaired that 'a better and more tolerable situation will not emerge in Croatia' until a shift in mentality occurred within the Peasant Democrat Coalition and they elected to work with Korošec's government, something which he felt was unlikely to happen any time soon. The irony, according to the unnamed deputy, was that Korošec had drawn up plans to support the economy in the Croat regions; he prepared to offer up as much as 50,000,000 dinars for this purpose. He therefore held the potential to be the 'greatest friend' to the HRSS, but he was prevented from being so due to their own refusal to engage.⁵⁸⁰

Korošec's Cabinet: The Problem of Reliance Upon a Quadruple Coalition

It is clear that, despite having been appointed to the premiership as a 'neutral figure' unconnected to the Serb Radical-HRSS hostilities, Korošec was viewed as anything but by the Peasant Democrat Coalition. This was because of the strong Serb Radical element within his government. Although Korošec's policies were focused on domestic affairs and restoring Croat trust in the political system, it was not enough to win over the Coalition. This presented him with a significant challenge. Crucially, even with the inclusion of the Serb Radicals, his Skupština majority was extremely narrow. The strength of the opposition posed by the Peasant Democrat Coalition therefore greatly weakened

⁵⁷⁸ 'Vlada je prijateljica Hrvatov: Mačkov socialni in gospodarski bojkot bo škodoval samo Hrvatom,' *Slovenec*, 18 September 1928, št.213, p1

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

his government's authority and ability to implement reform. It also meant that he had to contend with constant undermining and boycotting in the Skupština by the overwhelming majority of the non-government party deputies. Furthermore, his heavy reliance on the Serb Radical and Yugoslav Democrat elements of his own coalition created a simultaneous threat from within his own government, were these parties to grow disillusioned with his leadership.

Korošec therefore needed to strike a careful balance in appeasing the Serb Radicals and Yugoslav Democrats with their differing political outlooks. As noted, his coalition government held an extremely narrow majority of just 211 deputies. Of these, 111 were members of the Serb Radical Party, 61 were Yugoslav Democrats, 21 were SLS and 18 were JMO.⁵⁸¹ Meanwhile, the Peasant Democrat Coalition held 87 of the remaining 107 Skupština seats. This left just 20 deputies who belonged to neither the government parties nor the dominant opposition bloc. The Skupština was effectively polarised along government versus Peasant Democrat Coalition lines. These figures clearly illustrate the vulnerable nature of Korošec's position. The Peasant Democrat Coalition's strength in numbers presented a major challenge to the Skupština's ability to function, and his own party constituted less than a quarter of his government's deputies.⁵⁸² This left him in a far weaker position than his predecessor Vukičević, despite the two prime ministers presiding over what was essentially the same coalition composition. Vukičević's support from his own party had held significantly more value than Korošec's, given the small size of the SLS and its appeal being limited to Slovene regions. Korošec therefore could not afford to lose the support of his coalition parties; he would have entered office acutely aware of this conundrum.

The composition of Korošec's cabinet exemplified how carefully he had to manage the expectations of each of the three additional parties within his quadruple coalition. He also needed to put together a political body whose support he could rely upon. The initial process of assembling his cabinet alone made clear the problems he would face. For example, Davidović's Yugoslav Democratic Party agreed to join the government on the condition that legislation was passed to resolve both the peasant debt problem and the Dalmatian agrarian question. It also demanded that Korošec begin the process of decentralising the state's government, and that he implement further anti-corruption laws.⁵⁸³ These demands complimented Korošec's own political programme throughout the 1920s, so were conditions he was willing to accept. The problem, however, was to

⁵⁸¹ *TNA*, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.31

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*

⁵⁸³ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.339

implement such reforms while keeping the Serb Radicals onside. Korošec struggled with this problem throughout his premiership. Meanwhile, the JMO had their own conditions for entering into the new government. Its leader Mehmed Spaho delayed the cabinet assembly process by demanding an additional ministerial portfolio at the last minute Korošec was unable to accommodate this demand. In the end, only Spaho himself received a ministerial portfolio.⁵⁸⁴ This gave the JMO the same cabinet representation as the SLS. Korošec did not appoint any of his SLS colleagues to his cabinet, but he continued in his role as Minister of the Interior, thereby retaining some continuity in his cabinet.⁵⁸⁵

Thus, Korošec's cabinet was truly one of compromise. Rather than appointing additional members of his own SLS, a move which would have strengthened his own position by providing him with more reliable backing, Korošec seemed to select his ministers in order to reflect the multinational composition of the kingdom. He also kept ministerial portfolio allocations in proportion with party representation within his quadruple coalition.⁵⁸⁶ His cabinet consisted of five Yugoslav Democrats, seven Radicals (the majority of whom had not held a ministerial position previously), himself as an SLS deputy, Spaho as JMO representation, the Croatian People's Party leader Stjepan Barić and the Serb military general Stevan Hadžić as Minister for the Army and Navy.⁵⁸⁷ Barić's inclusion seems particularly noteworthy. This was the first time he had entered a Yugoslav government, having been elected in his Dalmatian constituency for the first time in the 1927 elections.⁵⁸⁸

Barić's appointment was surely a deliberate move on Korošec's part. The latter would have been acutely aware of the criticisms he faced from the Peasant Democrat Coalition for forming a government so dependent upon the Serb Radicals.⁵⁸⁹ In addition, the course of 1920s Yugoslav had taught him that his own political conduct was incompatible with that of the HRSS, even if Radić and then Maček had been willing to consider calling off the party's boycott of parliament. The Croatian People's Party was admittedly a politically inexperienced and relatively minor player within Yugoslav politics. The inclusion of Barić, however, meant that the Croat population had at least some kind of cabinet representation. His appointment also sent a clear message to Maček and the HRSS. Korošec

⁵⁸⁴ 'Vlada dr Anton Korošca,' *Slovenec*, 28 July 1928, št.170, p1

⁵⁸⁵ *Archives of Yugoslavia*, Stenografske Beleške Narodne Skupštine, 1927/28, IX, 1 August 1928, p3

⁵⁸⁶ The JMO constituted a slightly smaller share of the Skupština seats than the SLS at 18 and 21 seats respectively. See *TNA*, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.31

⁵⁸⁷ *Archives of Yugoslavia*, 69-1928, Ministarstvo Vera Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 1919-1929, Br.51. 28 July 1928

⁵⁸⁸ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.339

⁵⁸⁹ 'Zagreb,' *Slovenec*, 28 July 1928, št.170, p.2

was willing to engage with Croat politicians on Croat issues; his lack of cooperation with the HRSS was due to its own refusal to accept another coalition government assembled from the parties represented in the existing Skupština.⁵⁹⁰ Clearly, however, Korošec recognised both the symbolic and practical importance of including Croatian deputies within his administration. The time he had taken in the initial Yugoslav period to build a solid working relationship with Barić and his Croatian People's Party within their new Yugoslav context had paid off well; he was able to draw on this already well-established connection. Barić's appointment also protected Korošec from further Peasant Democrat Coalition criticism. Though they accused Barić himself of betraying Croat interests, Maček and Pribičević could not accuse Korošec of imposing upon the Croat constituencies a government which did not represent them and their interests all the while his cabinet contained a member of the only Croat-specific party of any significance willing to engage with Yugoslav parliamentarism.⁵⁹¹

Korošec's cabinet therefore represented a clear attempt to put together a governing body which would be acceptable to the Peasant Democrat Coalition - or at least, as acceptable as was possible for his cabinet to be - while also appeasing his government parties. He was clearly mindful of the criticism he would face from the Coalition for forming a government with the Serb Radicals. He consequently assigned portfolios to Serb Radical deputies who had not previously held a cabinet position as far as possible.⁵⁹² Another notable feature of his cabinet was that more than half of its ministers were from the kingdom's provinces. The vast majority of previous Yugoslav cabinets had been dominated by Serbs from the Belgrade region.⁵⁹³ The little historiography which exists concerning Korošec's premiership agrees that this was a deliberate move away from over-representation of the Belgrade elite, and another vain attempt to win over the Peasant Democrat Coalition.⁵⁹⁴ He had hoped that by appointing as many non-Belgrade Serbs to his cabinet as possible, he would send out a clear message to Maček and Pribičević that he sympathised with their stance. He intended his government to serve the interests of the SHS Kingdom as a whole, and to be something of a turning point in terms of Yugoslav cabinet mentality. It would not follow established patterns of Belgrade-based Serb decision making for a multinational entity. In this sense, Korošec's cabinet composition seamlessly combined a shift towards consideration of the kingdom's ethnic makeup in ministerial appointments with his own political outlook as both a Slovene and a

⁵⁹⁰ 'Dr Korošec bo kos svoj nalogi,' *Slovenec*, 2 August 1928, št.174, p1

⁵⁹¹ Rahten, *Slovenska ljudska stranka v Beograjski skupštini*, p.150

⁵⁹² *TNA*, FO 504/11, op.cit., 7 January 1929, p.25

⁵⁹³ *Archives of Yugoslavia*, Stenografske Beleške Narodne Skupštine, 1927/28, IX, 1 August 1928, p3

⁵⁹⁴ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.60

committed Yugoslav statesman. Throughout the 1920s, he had insisted that a shared sense of Yugoslav sentiment could only be established through cooperation and respect of tribal identities; his premiership presented him with the opportunity to put these values into practice in his cabinet.

Yet the problem with this approach to assigning ministerial portfolios was that it failed to produce the efficient, reliable cabinet necessary for Korošec to maintain his grip on power. The extent to which his cabinet strengthened his already precarious position upon taking office was questionable. Indeed, the British minister Howard Kennard went so far as to remark that very few members of Korošec's cabinet provided him with genuine reinforcement.⁵⁹⁵ This was due to their overall lack of experience, as well as their questionable conduct. Five of his ministers, or a third of the cabinet, had never held a ministerial post before. Korošec had made his ministerial appointments in an attempt to construct the most neutral cabinet possible, and to create something of a clean break with prior Yugoslav styles of governance. In the process, however, he had given himself the task of leading a somewhat inexperienced cabinet on top of the challenges he already faced.

Indeed, Korošec quickly experienced a notable degree of disruption within his cabinet. The surviving ministerial records for this period are disorganised and sparse in terms of details about cabinet meetings. They do reveal, however, that Korošec was plagued with resignations almost from the moment of his cabinet's creation, most notably concerning two of his most experienced ministers. His government had barely been sworn in when it became apparent that his newly appointed Foreign Minister, Vojislav Marinković of the Yugoslav Democratic Party, would need to take leave for medical treatment.⁵⁹⁶ His post was assumed temporarily by a relatively unknown Yugoslav Democrat, Ilija Šumanković. This represented a particular blow for Korošec because Marinković had been one of the few cabinet members continuing with the post he had held under the preceding Vukičević government. His departure therefore represented a loss of both much-needed experience and continuity. Further disruption occurred in late October when Dragiša Cvetković left the cabinet abruptly to 'spend time abroad.'⁵⁹⁷ This was arguably no great loss; Cvetković had been a controversial cabinet appointment. Korošec had selected him as he was a Serb Radical from Niš in Southern Serbia; his appointment therefore represented a departure from Belgrade-focused government. But as mayor of Niš, Cvetković had been involved in a number of corruption scandals,

⁵⁹⁵ *TNA*, FO 504/11, op.cit., p.29

⁵⁹⁶ *Archives of Yugoslavia*, 138-3, Materijali o obrazovanju ministarskog saveta Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1928-1941. Br. 1793. Korošec, Belgrade, 28 July 1928

⁵⁹⁷ *Archives of Yugoslavia*, 138-3, Materijali o obrazovanju ministarskog saveta Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1928-1941. Br.2495. Korošec, Belgrade, 28 October 1928.

most notably concerning misallocation of government funding intended for a local orphanage.⁵⁹⁸ Whatever the real reason for Cvetković's departure from the cabinet, it might in fact have benefited Korošec had his government endured for longer. He replaced Cvetković as Minister for Religion with Barić, with whom he shared a federalist Yugoslav mindset more suitable for overseeing the religious administrative affairs of a multifaith entity.⁵⁹⁹ Barić did not, however, have prior ministerial experience. His cabinet appointment just two months prior to its ultimate collapse meant more unnecessary low-level cabinet disruption, rather than an opportunity for reform of the ministry and a beneficial cabinet partnership.

In this way, Korošec somewhat undermined his own position with his choice of cabinet. Yet it is important to emphasise that this was largely a result of the less-than-ideal circumstances under which he came to office, rather than a failure of judgement on his part. He had attempted to put together a cabinet which represented a departure from corruption, bickering and Serb domination, and instead represented the Kingdom's regional variations. The problem he faced was that the party elites he inherited simply were not prepared for such a shift. Many of his chosen non-central Serb ministers simply lacked cabinet experience, and the Serb Radicals he did appoint in the name of government continuity only brought further disruption to the cabinet through their resignations. Korošec had constructed a cabinet which reflected his own political outlook and the kind of state he hoped the kingdom could evolve into. But it was not a cabinet which could provide him with the experienced advice, backing and ministerial policymaking.

The "Amputation" Issue as a Thorn in Korošec's Side

The weakness of Korošec's cabinet combined with the precariousness of his coalition government left him particularly vulnerable to the Peasant Democrat Coalition. Once it became clear that no amount of protest would lead to the replacement of Korošec's administration with the 'neutral' non-government they desired, the HRSS element of the Coalition intensified their demands for amputation of the Croat-inhabited regions. The amputation issue featured heavily in the Yugoslav press throughout Korošec's premiership. Nielsen highlights it as a question which was 'tossed back and forth like a hot potato between the opposition and the government' during the latter half of 1928.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁸ *TNA*, FO 504/11, op.cit., p.29

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.61

Amputation was originally proposed in 1920 by the Kingdom's first prime minister, the Serb Radical Stojan Protić.⁶⁰¹ The concept involved partitioning the state along ethnic Serb and Croat lines, on the basis that these two national groups could not continue together in one state without constant hostilities.⁶⁰² It was no coincidence that Protić had coined the term during the debates over the state constitutional framework. Under his proposal, amputation would involve giving the ethnically mixed regions of the kingdom a choice as to whether they became part of an autonomous 'Serbia' or 'Croatia.' It was not full independence, but the separation of the Croats into a fully autonomous administrative unit within the existing state.⁶⁰³ The concept was brought up at various points during the politically turbulent 1920s, but never discussed with great seriousness; it was viewed as something of a last resort. As a result, it was not clear what would happen to Yugoslav national groups which were neither Serb nor Croat, such as the Slovenes, in the event of amputation being put into practice.

King Aleksander had offered a more extreme version of amputation to the Peasant Democrat Coalition immediately prior to the start of Korošec's premiership.⁶⁰⁴ With the Serb Radical party elites' approval, he informed Radić and Pribičević that if the Croats attempted to implement amputation or even to leave the Kingdom, he would not launch any kind of military intervention.⁶⁰⁵ Historians agree, however, that this was not a solution to the political crisis that the King ever seriously considered. Rahten claims he was pushed into contemplating amputation by the 'court camarilla' who had completely lost patience with the HRSS.⁶⁰⁶ Fogelquist has suggested in turn that offering up amputation was a move intended to frighten both the Peasant Democrat Coalition and the Serb Radicals into working together to reach a compromise solution, given the logistical nightmare of redefining internal and external state borders.⁶⁰⁷ Meanwhile, Nielsen has argued that the King presented the Peasant Democrat Coalition with the option of amputation so that they 'might be given a chance of disavowing it.'⁶⁰⁸ He had correctly predicted that fears of Hungarian and Italian irredentism amongst the HRSS elite would be enough to ensure their denouncement of the

⁶⁰¹ J.R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*, p.138

⁶⁰² Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.61

⁶⁰³ J.R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*, p.138

⁶⁰⁴ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.61

⁶⁰⁵ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.338

⁶⁰⁶ Rahten, *Korošec and the Croat Question*, p.24

⁶⁰⁷ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.338

⁶⁰⁸ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.61

amputation option.⁶⁰⁹ Wachtel too presents the King's consideration of amputation as an absolute last resort; he was saved from having to seriously consider the possibility by Korošec's success in forming a coalition government.⁶¹⁰ Rahten takes this a step further, emphasising that it was Korošec himself who ultimately persuaded King Aleksandar to dismiss amputation of the Croat regions as an unviable option, convincing him instead to try again to resolve the crisis through parliamentary means.⁶¹¹

For King Aleksandar and Korošec, the latter's coming to office on 27 July rendered the amputation question redundant. For the Peasant Democrat Coalition, however, it was anything but. Radić himself proposed his own 'amputation' of sorts prior to his death, calling for a restructuring of the kingdom into a 'dual union of Serbia and Croatia' under King Aleksandar. The Croatian element of his proposed, restructured state would have its own military, administrative systems and parliament, as well as financial autonomy.⁶¹² This was essentially an extreme version of the model of regional autonomy Korošec had advocated for the Slovene lands throughout the 1920s. Crucially, however, it applied only to the Croat regions, unlike Korošec's preferred option of a federalist restructuring, granting devolved administrative powers to each of the non-Serb regions.⁶¹³ Radić's proposal by no means died with him in August 1928; it continued to feature heavily in the Yugoslav press throughout Korošec's premiership.

By early September, calls for amputation had become so prevalent in the Croatian press that Korošec's government was forced to directly address the issue. The Yugoslav Democrat leader Davidović made a public statement on behalf of the government in which he insisted that its ministers would not be considering calls for amputation from Zagreb, despite rumours to the contrary.⁶¹⁴ He released a further government statement two days later, this time along with his fellow cabinet minister, Mehmed Spaho.⁶¹⁵ Both ministers announced that the cabinet was fully aware of Pribičević's new campaign to push for amputation of the Croat regions. They maintained, however, that the issue had been removed from the Skupština agenda on the basis that the Peasant

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*, p.78

⁶¹¹ Rahten, *Korošec and the Croat Question*, p.24

⁶¹² Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.61

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ 'Borba za vodstvo NRS,' *Slovenec*, 6 September 1928, p.1

⁶¹⁵ 'V vladi o amputaciji niti besede,' *Slovenec*, 8 September 1928, p.1

Democrat Coalition had already been offered amputation by the king; they had already rejected this option; it would not be offered to them again.⁶¹⁶

Davidović and Spaho reiterated that Korošec's government was by no means in favour of amputation; it sought to work with the Peasant Democrat Coalition rather than cut ties with it. However, this was not enough to put a stop to rumours of amputation in Zagreb. On 25 September, the radical Croatian newspaper *Hrvat* published an article in which it claimed to have seen a map in Belgrade implying that the government was seriously considering amputation as a solution to Serb-Croat hostilities.⁶¹⁷ *Hrvat* was extremely vague about where and how it had come across this document, and failed to provide a copy for its readership. But its article nonetheless insisted that this was proof that Korošec, in his capacity as Minister of the Interior, had drawn up provisional plans to amputate the Croat-inhabited regions. *Slovenec* picked up on the *Hrvat* article the following day, and adamantly denied that such a document existed.⁶¹⁸ It suggested that it was a forgery designed to once again raise the amputation issue and undermine the authority of Korošec's government. 'It is known,' *Slovenec* claimed, that 'certain people enjoy every inconvenience which this country suffers,' and would stop at nothing to undermine Yugoslav political stability.⁶¹⁹

Historians have found no evidence to suggest that Korošec ever attempted to implement amputation during his premiership. Rahten emphasises that he actively dissuaded the King from exploring this option any further.⁶²⁰ Indeed, 'amputation' as it was defined by summer 1928 was a far more extreme model of government devolution than anything Korošec is known to have promoted in his advocacy of regional autonomy. He responded to *Hrvat's* claims with a statement insisting that the King would not be making any intervention in terms of the state's structure, nor would his government be implementing any such legislation.⁶²¹ He emphasised that his own priorities did not extend beyond those of any other Yugoslav prime minister in any other political climate. He was concerned only with governing the country in its existing administrative form, and with restoring peace between the national groups included within it. Additionally, he claimed that tensions had eased considerably between Serb and Croat deputies during his premiership; there were now only a small number of Peasant Democrat Coalition members still pushing the amputation

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ 'Propaganda s potvorbami,' *Slovenec*, 26 September 1928, p.1

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Rahten, Korošec and the Croat Question, p.24

⁶²¹ 'Dr Korošec o položaju,' *Domoljub*, 26 September 1928, p.1

issue (this surely referred to Maček and Pribičević). Since the king's duty should be to all Yugoslav peoples, not just to the Serbs or the Croats, Korošec insisted that any major decision affecting the whole state, such as amputation, had to take the best interests of all its various national groups into consideration.⁶²² He therefore continued to take the same position he had adopted since July: that he was a neutral, Yugoslav-minded statesman who could be counted on to balance the demands and interests of all parties within the Skupština.

However, such statements from Korošec and his cabinet ministers could only achieve so much. The amputation issue continued to be a thorn in his side for the duration of his premiership. It did disappear from the Yugoslav press briefly in late October, when Maček and Pribičević were tipped off by a member of the Italian opposition that Mussolini was strongly in favour of Croatian amputation. Allegedly, he believed such a development would enable him to exert Italian influence in an autonomous Croatia as he had begun to in Albania.⁶²³ To the Peasant Democrat Coalition elite, even the SHS Kingdom in its existing, centralist administrative form was a lesser evil than Italian ambitions. Towards the end of Korošec's premiership, however, the issue resurfaced. As we will see, renewed calls for the amputation of the Croat regions were made in the Croatian press as a result of his handling of the December riots in Zagreb.⁶²⁴

To the Peasant Democrat Coalition, repeatedly raising the amputation issue became an effective means of expressing discontent with Korošec's government and causing low-level disruption. Each time the issue resurfaced, his government felt compelled to address it and once again rule it out as an option, reiterating that it was committed to reform within the existing state framework. It wanted to work with the HRSS within parliament, rather than ridding itself of the problem of hostile, uncooperative Croatian deputies through amputation of the Croat regions. Yet speculation in the Croatian press, encouraged by the Peasant Democrat Coalition elite, meant that Korošec's government could never completely lay the issue to rest. Though this did not cause major issues, it still constituted a constant, low-level disruption. It also sent a clear message. The Peasant Democrat Coalition were simply not prepared to engage with the government unless sudden, radical concessions towards Croatian autonomy were granted, something which the government had made perfectly clear it was not prepared to consider. Yet the real irony was that Korošec's policies as prime minister included taking modest but significant steps towards devolving government

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ 'Mussolini hoče amputacijo?' *Slovenec*, 26 October 1928, p.1

⁶²⁴ 'Za slovensko stvar gre,' *Slovenec*, 14 December 1928, p.1

administration in the non-Serb regions; he did indeed plan on implementing many of the Peasant Democrat Coalition's demands for the Croat regions. Cooperation with him and his government during this process, as opposed to the Coalition's continued government boycott, would have allowed these devolution policies to be implemented far more effectively.

Korošec's Policies as Prime Minister

Two agendas dominated Korošec's five-month premiership in terms of his political priorities: winning the trust and of the Peasant Democrat Coalition, and modest decentralisation of the SHS Kingdom's administrative structure. Both of these can be seen as a response to the precarious political circumstances he had inherited from Vukičević. Furthermore, there is a great deal of overlap between them. Croatian autonomy had been a key element of HRSS manifestos throughout the 1920s.⁶²⁵ Indeed, the uncompromising, heavy-handed manner in which Radić had pursued this policy had indirectly caused the Skupština assassinations. Taking steps towards implementing a degree of government devolution along regional lines would therefore represent significant progress towards HRSS aspirations. It would also demonstrate willingness on the part of Korošec's government to work with them in the interests of the Croat population.

A shift towards devolved government also constituted positive development in terms of Korošec's own SLS manifestos throughout the 1920s. On taking office, therefore, he effortlessly combined his own ambitions for reforming the Kingdom's government administrative structure with HRSS demands. This strategy allowed him to take steps towards appeasing the Peasant Democrat Coalition through pursuing his own Slovene national ambitions as Yugoslav prime minister. As an approach to implementing a degree of administrative devolution, this was also more likely to be acceptable to the Serb Radical element of his government. Korošec's devolution policies would not address Croat autonomy ambitions directly, but rather implement a modest degree of self-government in all of the non-Serb regions of the kingdom equally. Despite this, Korošec's administrative devolution policies were not well-received by the Peasant Democrat Coalition. This is rather surprising, given the HRSS's demands for such reform since the passing of the Vidovdan Constitution. As will be demonstrated, this negative reaction should be viewed as a reflection of the Peasant Democrat Coalition's continued refusal to accept and cooperate with Korošec's coalition government rather than of his decentralising policies themselves.

⁶²⁵ Irvine, *The Croat Question*, p.41

Korošec's first Skupština address upon taking office demonstrated a clear understanding of the need to pacify the Peasant Democrat Coalition. The majority of his speech referred to the aftermath of the Skupština assassinations. He also placed emphasis upon healing relations between the HRSS and the Serb Radicals, and indeed the Peasant Democrat Coalition and the Yugoslav political system more broadly. Addressing a packed Skupština on 2 August, barely a week into his premiership, Korošec condemned the crime committed by the Serb Radical assassin Punisa Račić.⁶²⁶ He offered assurances to the HRSS deputies that the murders of their colleagues, Giuro Basarička and Radić's nephew Pavle Radić, were strongly condemned by every member of his new government. Stjepan Radić himself would not die from his injuries until 8 August.⁶²⁷ Korošec took care to emphasise that Račić's actions had been personal, rather than political. On this basis, he argued that the Skupština assassinations should be viewed as a terrible, but isolated incident.⁶²⁸ This is an important distinction, because to encourage the Skupština parties to view the incident as such removed any connotations of political idealism. It would be far easier for the Serb Radical and HRSS deputies to work within the same parliament if the assassinations were understood by both parties as a lone wolf attack as opposed to a politically or ethnically motivated incident rooted in Serb Radical Party sentiment. In pushing this narrative, Korošec was fighting to separate political disagreements from petty, primitive infighting. Throughout the 1920s, he had placed great emphasis on fostering close relations with other parties and prioritising Yugoslav statesmanship and political stability above ideological differences. It seems reasonable to conclude that the hostilities leading to the assassinations were not a style of politics he would have been prepared to tolerate under his own leadership.

Korošec urged both the HRSS and the Serb Radicals to draw a line under the assassinations for the greater good of Yugoslav politics and the kingdom as a whole.⁶²⁹ He called for the Peasant Democrat Coalition deputies, who at this time were boycotting the Skupština in response to the assassinations, to return to their seats. He insisted that he understood their frustrations. He therefore asked them to resume participation in parliamentary life and help his government to reform the Yugoslav political system from within. This appeal was not enough to appease the Peasant Democrat Coalition (its deputies continued their Skupština boycott throughout Korošec's premiership), but it constituted far more patience and willingness to work with the HRSS than had been demonstrated

⁶²⁶ 'Žalna seja narodne skupščina,' *Slovenec*, 2 August 1928, št.174, p1

⁶²⁷ Biondich, *The Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilisation*, p.240

⁶²⁸ 'Žalna seja narodne skupščina,' *Slovenec*, 2 August 1928, št.174, p1

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*

by any previous Yugoslav prime minister since Pašić's and Uzunović's disastrous attempts to form a coalition with Radić in 1926. Indeed, Korošec arguably demonstrated greater willingness to grant the HRSS concessions towards some kind of Croatian autonomy whilst the party was refusing to participate in his Skupština than the Serb Radicals had whilst part of an HRSS coalition government.⁶³⁰ He was committed to Yugoslav state stability above all else. He recognised that the parliamentary system could not function efficiently while deputies representing the overwhelming majority of the Croat constituencies were refusing to participate; he was willing to compromise on the party's manifesto demands, despite their hostile conduct thus far during his premiership.

To this end, Korošec also used his Skupština address to lay out his policy intentions as prime minister. He focused heavily upon internal affairs, making only minor references to foreign policy. This was perhaps due in part to his own political experience; he held the post of Minister of the Interior and lacked prior experience with foreign affairs. However, his comprehension of the chaotic political situation he had inherited and the kingdom's resultant need for a heavy focus on domestic policy were surely greater factors in this decision. He understood that the implementation of some modest form of devolved government would fulfil the Peasant Democrat Coalition's demands, at least in theory. He therefore announced his government's intention to decentralise the administration.⁶³¹ In line with his established pro-federalist stance, he planned to grant the localities powers to deal with duties he considered more appropriate for provincial-level decision making than a one size fits all approach imposed from Belgrade.⁶³²

As noted in previous chapters, *oblastne skupštine*, or provincial assemblies, already existed across the kingdom as Korošec commenced his premiership. They had been created as a result of the Vidovdan Constitution, which had divided the kingdom into 33 *oblasti*, or administrative provinces.⁶³³ However, the constitution's highly centralised format meant that the role of the provincial governments had been extremely limited since its adoption.⁶³⁴ The first provincial assembly elections since Vidovdan had only been held in January 1927. As we have seen, the Slovene provincial assemblies of Ljubljana and Maribor had been granted effective financial autonomy and control over local administrative affairs in 1927 through successions secured by Korošec in exchange for propping up Serb Radical governments. Inspired by the early success of this

⁶³⁰ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.282

⁶³¹ TNA, FO 504/11, op.cit., p.25

⁶³² 'Žalna seja narodne skupščina,' *Slovenec*, 2 August 1928, št.174, p1

⁶³³ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.127

⁶³⁴ Ibid, p.282

development in the Slovene regions, Korošec came to office with plans to develop the existing provincial assembly system across the kingdom as a whole. These bodies would be granted modest control over local administrative affairs and budgets. Making use of the existing provincial assemblies would allow central government in Belgrade to more quickly and effectively transfer modest powers to handle such affairs at local level over to the provinces. The kingdom could then gradually move away from centralised management of locality-specific issues.

It is important to clarify that Korošec's plan to introduce a modest degree of devolved government was not a direct shift towards regional autonomy along ethnic lines. The provinces into which the SHS Kingdom was divided in 1928 represented smaller administrative areas within the lands inhabited by each of the main Yugoslav national groups. It can be better described as on a local level; it was less radical a proposed redistribution of government powers than the HRSS were demanding. This was effectively the same devolved administrative structure which had begun to be introduced to the Slovene provinces of Ljubljana and Maribor as a result of Korošec's negotiations with Uzunović and Vukičević throughout 1927.

The brevity of Korošec's premiership renders the task of assessing the success of his provincial-level devolved government policy rather difficult. The system was abandoned under the Royal Dictatorship, when the parliamentary era provincial borders were redrawn and the provincial assemblies abandoned. Within the five months in which the policy was being implemented, however, it continued to be a resounding success in the Slovene regions, attesting to Korošec's belief that provincial-level government devolution could work well for a multinational entity such as the SHS Kingdom. By November, the Ljubljana and Maribor provincial assemblies were ten meetings into their second sessions.⁶³⁵ The Slovene press's assessment of both assemblies was overwhelmingly positive. These bodies were able to focus their discussions on matters specific to their localities, and to make decisions and deal with localised problems far more quickly and efficiently than had been possible under strict Belgrade-imposed centralism. Over five months, both Slovene provincial assemblies sought to address a key social issue particularly relevant in their specific provinces. In the Ljubljana province, this was the development of railway infrastructure, and within this, improving the living conditions of railway workers in isolated, rural settings.⁶³⁶ In contrast, the Maribor provincial assembly identified agricultural reform as the major issue needing attention in its own province- with specific concerns including peasant rent increases and a lack of

⁶³⁵ 'Ljubljanska oblastna skupščina,' *Slovenec*, 27 October 1928, št.247, p3

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*

market opportunities for farmers in rural areas.⁶³⁷ Both these assemblies were able to discuss their respective, province-specific issues more promptly and thoroughly than would have been possible in the Belgrade Skupština. They were also able to focus on how these issues presented in their own localities and how best to address them within these contexts, as opposed to a centralised, state-wide approach. Moreover, the financial autonomy these provincial assemblies had been granted as a result of Korošec's careful negotiations under the previous Serb Radical administrations was already in place.⁶³⁸ This meant they could allocate funding themselves to address their respective issues, investing in railway infrastructure and local market opportunities for farmers and craftsmen.

Combining this degree of devolved provincial government with the already-established financial autonomy in the Slovene localities was therefore proving to be highly effective by November 1928. Inspired by this and recent successful provincial assembly elections in the Bosnian provinces, Korošec announced plans to gradually implement a greater degree of budget control to the non-Slovene provincial assemblies.⁶³⁹ This, he claimed, would better serve the interests of all the national groups in the state, as well as enabling more efficient economic development in the localities. He stressed, however, that devolved government at provincial level could only work if the assemblies were committed to operating in 'mutual agreement' with central government in Belgrade.⁶⁴⁰ He acknowledged that problems would continue to present themselves as the assemblies were taking on a greater role than they had under previous governments, but he committed himself to addressing these problems in his capacity as both Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior. He declared that there would be consequences for lawbreakers, particularly those partaking in corruption.⁶⁴¹ These would apply were they government members or part of the opposition, and regardless of nationality. The message here is clear: Korošec was again presenting himself as a neutral, Yugoslav-minded prime minister, whose zero-tolerance approach to corruption would not discriminate based on tribal or political allegiances. Corruption, particularly relating to budget mismanagement, had plagued successive Belgrade governments since the kingdom's creation, and concerns therefore grew that granting the provincial assemblies a degree of financial

⁶³⁷ 'Mariborska oblastna skupština,' *Domoljub*, 7 November 1928, p.2

⁶³⁸ *TNA*, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.31

⁶³⁹ 'Jasna linija dr Korošca,' *Slovenec*, 4 November 1928, p.1

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*

autonomy would lead to the same problems at local government level.⁶⁴² With this in mind, he was committed to successful implementation of his devolved provincial government policy above all else.

Crucially, Korošec's devolution policy was less effective in the Croatian provinces. This was due to two main factors. The funds initially allocated to the Croatian provincial assemblies were inadequate to deliver the HRSS's elaborate modernisation plans at the rapid speed they desired. This caused the party elite to dismiss the whole policy as a failure. Additionally, the Croatian provincial assemblies were riddled with corruption and inefficiency. This hindered their ability to implement the locality-specific policies to benefit their respective populations like their Slovene counterparts. Howard Kennard noted that the Croatian provincial assemblies had imposed heavy taxes on industrialists under their jurisdiction in order to raise additional funds for the public services they had assumed responsibility for under Korošec's devolution policy.⁶⁴³ The tax increase quickly led to disillusionment with the entire provincial assembly system amongst the Croat industrialists. In addition, the presence of Serb officials within almost all of the Croatian provincial governments led to a belief amongst the HRSS that Croatian funds were being redirected to Serb regions. This resulted in a breakdown in their relationship with the provincial assemblies. Kennard assessed that the Croatian regional assemblies had been given proportionate funding to their Slovene counterparts; the crucial difference was that the Slovene provincial assembly ministers were of a 'more practical mentality' than their Croat counterparts.⁶⁴⁴ They therefore focused on making the best use of the budget they had, rather than demanding additional funding they knew could not be afforded.

The success of Korošec's introduction of devolution through the provincial assembly system in the Slovene provinces proved that this policy had the potential to work well for the non-Serb regions which desired greater autonomy. It also proved, however, that competent, experienced provincial government officials and a willingness to work with the central government in Belgrade were essential in order for such devolved government to benefit the provinces. That Korošec's policy worked well in the Slovene provinces in contrast to their Croatian counterparts can be explained partly by the fact that the former had been granted effective financial autonomy the previous year. They therefore already had some experience managing a budget in order to make the most of the

⁶⁴² *TNA*, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.31

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁴ *TNA*, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.32

limited funds they had been allocated by Belgrade. Crucially, the Ljubljana and Maribor provinces also had not historically struggled with state administrative corruption on the same scale as other regions; Korošec seemed to recognise this. He therefore emphasised his zero-tolerance approach to corruption and financial mismanagement as the provincial assemblies were granted control of local administration and public services in the Croatian and Bosnian provinces. He also planned to introduce gradual financial autonomy in these areas. This would have allowed them time to adjust to their new government responsibilities before granting them further powers which could easily and disastrously be exploited. However, the HRSS's dominance in the Croatian provinces meant he could do little about their anti-government sentiment. Maček's party was dissatisfied with the modest extent of devolved provincial government, as opposed to the amputation option they demanded. This dissatisfaction with the budget the Croatian provinces were allocated, as well as the presence of Serb officials within them, meant that the devolved system of government was less well-implemented in these localities. This created further discontent with Korošec's government amongst the HRSS elite.

The Parliamentary Crisis over the Appointment of Maksimović as Grand Župan of Zagreb Province

Korošec's authority as prime minister was undeniably undermined as a result of his narrow Skupština majority compared to the strength of the Peasant Democrat opposition, their refusal to engage, and his cabinet composition. His move towards devolved government along provincial lines had worked extremely well in the Slovene regions, which were better prepared for the implementation of such a policy. This suggested that devolved government could in time prove a viable solution in the Croat regions also. HRSS dissatisfaction with the policy in its early stages meant that it failed to win over the opposition as Korošec had hoped. Despite these destabilising factors, it was his decision to appoint the Serb military commander Vojin Maksimović as grand župan, or provincial governor, in Zagreb province which served as the catalyst for the collapse of his government. Indeed, Kennard went so far as to describe the incident as a second 'parliamentary crisis' of 1928.⁶⁴⁵ Korošec's decision to appoint the Serb to a Croatian governmental post of such importance, and his subsequent refusal to back down, caused him to lose the support of the Yugoslav Democrat and JMO elements of his cabinet. As we have seen, his government was

⁶⁴⁵ TNA, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.27

dependent on the cooperation of these parties in order to survive, so their departure therefore backed Korošec into a corner, ultimately resulting in his own resignation.

The context of Maksimović's appointment as grand župan of Zagreb province is essential in order to understand why Korošec took a decision so unpopular with his coalition cabinet. On 1 December, protests broke out in Zagreb during celebrations marking the tenth anniversary of the creation of the state.⁶⁴⁶ Maček and Pribičević had called for the celebrations to be cancelled in light of the Skupština assassinations earlier in the year and when their calls were ignored, protestors took to the streets demanding 'amputation.' Korošec had anticipated such unrest, and his government ordered the Zagreb police in advance that they should immediately shut down any protests that might break out.⁶⁴⁷ A group of pro-Croat amputation, anti-Serb student protestors waved black flags to symbolise their grief that the SHS Kingdom had ever been created, which quickly caused them to clash with the police. Two police officers were wounded and three students were killed.⁶⁴⁸ Three days later, students from the University of Zagreb began a strike in protest over police brutality. This forced a temporary shutdown of the university and led to further violent police clashes.⁶⁴⁹

Korošec took an uncharacteristically ruthless approach to handling this incident. Mindful of the further unrest that could be caused if the protests were to escalate further, he removed the existing grand župan of Zagreb province, a Croat who had failed to take immediate action to defuse tensions.⁶⁵⁰ Acting in his capacity as Minister of the Interior, he then controversially appointed the Serb military professor and former general Vojin Maksimović as the new grand župan, doing so without first consulting his cabinet. The appointment was met with instant outrage by the Peasant Democrat Coalition, which the SLS held little sympathy for. An article published in *Domoljub* insisted that Yugoslav internal affairs could only improve with the 'harmonious cooperation' of all the state's politicians and citizens.⁶⁵¹ The Croats had proven time and time again that they could not be trusted to partake in such cooperation; the HRSS was determined to destroy all sense of national community within the SHS Kingdom. The Zagreb provincial leadership was just as responsible for the 1 and 4 December riots as the protestors, because they had failed to take preventative action.⁶⁵²

⁶⁴⁶ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.65

⁶⁴⁷ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.348

⁶⁴⁸ Biondich, *The Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilisation*, p.243

⁶⁴⁹ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.67

⁶⁵⁰ Fogelquist, *Politics and Economic Policy in Yugoslavia 1918-1928*, p.348

⁶⁵¹ 'Streljanje v Zagrebu,' *Domoljub*, 5 December 1928, p.1

⁶⁵² Ibid.

It was on this basis that Korošec justified his decision to appoint Maksimović as the province's new grand župan. The HRSS leadership in Zagreb province had made clear that it valued anti-Yugoslav sentiment over maintaining peace within the already precarious political context. Korošec therefore concluded that an alternative approach was needed. The SLS echoed this rhetoric through its *Slovenec* articles in the aftermath of the Zagreb demonstrations against Maksimović's appointment, insisting that the situation the HRSS found so unacceptable was entirely of its own creation.⁶⁵³ This was because the appointment of a Serb such as Maksimović would have not been necessary if the Peasant Democrat Coalition had been willing to engage with the government. Korošec now found himself caught between two warring groups to an even greater extent. The Serb Radicals insisted that he had not been firm enough in his dealings with Maček and Pribičević during his premiership thus far. They argued, that had he set out to 'imitate Pašić' and his notorious ruthlessness in dealing with the HRSS from the moment he came to office, rather than attempting to win them over, then the party's elite would never have rebelled in encouraging the protests. Additionally, the nature of the incident rendered it a case of Zagreb versus Belgrade. This was exactly the kind of tribal divide he had fought so hard to avoid over the course of his Yugoslav political career.

Korošec's decision to handle the Zagreb protests so aggressively in appointing Maksimović was almost certainly influenced by his dependence upon the Serb Radicals. He knew that without their support, his government would collapse, and he was therefore forced to react in a manner which would keep the party onside. The problem with this appeasement, however, was that the party constituted only one element of the quadruple coalition he needed to maintain the support of in order to remain in office. His failure to consult with his cabinet prior to appointing Maksimović angered the Yugoslav Democrats within his government, who worried that the Peasant Democrat Coalition would interpret such a move as 'an intervention to establish military rule' in Zagreb province.⁶⁵⁴ The situation continued to spiral out of control, for the Peasant Democrat Coalition refused to recognise Maksimović's legitimacy. On the basis of this chaos, Davidović led his Yugoslav Democratic Party in refusing to participate within the government until the Serb was removed from his new post. He formalised this stance on 22 December, when his Yugoslav Democrats adopted a motion refusing to work with Korošec until a key list of demands were met.⁶⁵⁵ These included an immediate end to the appointments of military figures like Maksimović to the post of grand župan.

⁶⁵³ 'Združeni napadi na dr Korošca,' *Slovenec*, 6 December 1928, p.1

⁶⁵⁴ *TNA*, FO 504/11, Sir H. Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, 'Yugoslavia Annual Report 1928,' Belgrade, 7 January 1929, p.27

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.28

Davidović's ultimatum placed Korošec in an impossible situation, as the composition of his government meant that it could not function within the full cooperation of the non-SLS parties.⁶⁵⁶ The SLS blamed old rivalry between the Serb Radicals and Davidović's Democrats for the position in which Korošec found himself by the end of December, arguing that these two parties' insistence upon opposing one another over the Zagreb crisis had achieved nothing besides rendering the government unworkable. *Domoljub* summarised the Zagreb crisis as yet further proof that Korošec had been right all along in advocating a federal restructuring of the SHS Kingdom.⁶⁵⁷ Had the Croats, Slovenes and other non-Serb groups been given administrative and financial autonomy from the start, then the hostilities between Serb and Croat politicians which had caused so much political instability and chaos over the last six months might have been avoided entirely. This argument is largely speculative. Nonetheless, it emphasises the impossible situation in which Korošec found himself. Without the backing of the Yugoslav Democrats, his government collapsed, and he was forced to resign as prime minister on 30 December.

Towards The Royal Dictatorship

The collapse of the government brought the first Yugoslav parliamentary period to an abrupt end. Having run out of options to form a government from within parliament, King Aleksandar responded to Korošec's resignation by declaring a royal dictatorship on 6 January 1929. He justified this on the basis that parliamentary democracy had failed to bring about political stability, and the time had therefore come to try a new approach. He embarked on a mission to construct an all-encompassing Yugoslav identity 'from above,' believing that it was the kingdom's lack of a shared sense of national identity which had caused the rapid turnover of failed governments in its first decade. Historians agree almost unanimously that this experiment in Yugoslav identity building and state restructuring was not a success. Hugh Seton-Watson dismissed the King's so-called Yugoslav nation as 'simply the Serbian nation writ large.'⁶⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Nielsen has argued that such attempts to impose a 'Yugoslav' identity merely escalated ethnic tensions within the state.⁶⁵⁹ In this way, the King's experiment was no more effective in resolving ethnic tensions than Korošec's attempts at appeasement and modest governmental restructuring had been.

⁶⁵⁶ 'Političen položai,' *Domoljub*, 22 December 1928, p.1

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁸ H. Seton-Watson, *The Sick Heart of Europe: The Problem of the Danubian Lands* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1975) p.35

⁶⁵⁹ Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, p.3

Korošec's time in office had undeniably been plagued with problems from start to finish. The majority of these problems were ones he had inherited, while Maksimović's appointment to the post of grand župan, which ultimately proved fatal, is an exception to this. The composition of the Skupština he had inherited necessitated the creation of a multi-party coalition. The process of forming and then holding together such a government was further complicated by the legacy of the Skupština assassinations, as well as the multi-party nature of his government and the SLS's constituting a minor element within it. This meant that Korošec could not rely on his own party to provide him with the backing he needed to hold his government together. As a result, he was considerably more dependent on the other government parties than Vukičević had been during the period of his own quadruple coalition, and had to balance appeasing these and their differing political perspectives. Simultaneously, he struggled to restore the Peasant Democrat Coalition's trust in the Yugoslav political system.

Throughout his premiership, Korošec attempted to present himself as a neutral figure first and foremost. He was aided in this struggle by being a Slovene leader of a Slovene-specific party. The Peasant Democrat Coalition refused to engage with his government throughout, boycotting parliament and undermining him constantly with calls for Croat amputation. Maček and Pribičević did undoubtedly find him more acceptable than a Serb alternative, though they still continued to view the issue of restructuring the kingdom's political framework as a matter of extremes. Korošec's devolution policy in theory granted the HRSS considerable concessions towards the Croat autonomy they continued to demand, but the fact that the funding allocated to the Croatian provincial assemblies fell short of what the party desired in order to implement major reform to public services immediately caused them to dismiss the entire policy as a failure. In this way, it failed to win over the Peasant Democrat Coalition and persuade them to participate in Belgrade parliamentary life.

Ultimately, Korošec's brief premiership proved that Yugoslav politicians of any ethnic background could prioritise the interests of the kingdom as a whole: it was not about ethnic allegiances, but about a pro-Yugoslav mentality. In turn, he also demonstrated that it was possible for a leader of a small, national group specific party to preside over the SHS Kingdom were they to possess these qualities. Crucially, however, this was only possible with the backing of larger Skupština parties. In the context of late 1920s politics, this meant some combination of the Serb Radicals, the Yugoslav Democrats, or the HRSS. As a result, it was not enough for Korošec himself to be the experienced, capable, Yugoslav-minded leader the kingdom needed. Regardless of his own abilities, he was

dependent upon willingness amongst other, larger Yugoslav political parties to cooperate not only with him, but also with each other, despite their often drastically opposing political viewpoints. Without this, he was powerless, as proven by the grand župan incident which brought his premiership to an abrupt end.

As a final point, it seems important to acknowledge the fact that the majority of this chapter deals not with Korošec's policies as prime minister, but how he attempted to manage the problems he inherited upon taking office. This balance reflects the fact that these problems took up much of his attention; his premiership was cut so short that he was given little time to implement his own policies. To a certain extent, these circumstances rendered it inevitable that he would be remembered as the prime minister who took office in the aftermath of the Skupština assassinations and was succeeded by the Royal Dictatorship. There is, however, far more value to be found through examining Korošec's premiership than just the events immediately preceding and succeeding it. How Korošec handled the problems he inherited, in addition to his policies as prime minister, reveals a great deal as to the kind of Yugoslav politician he was, and what he perceived an 'ideal' SHS Kingdom to look like. He was suitably Yugoslav-minded, and, once in office, remained true to the devolved government concept he had advocated since the kingdom's creation. Additionally, he remained true to his zero-tolerance policy regarding corruption, and continued to promote inter-party relations, recognising that these priorities were essential in order to hold such a multinational entity together. That he was able to hold a government together at all in such circumstances is a testament to his political capabilities and adaptability.

Chapter 9- Conclusions

When reflecting on Korošec's 1920s Yugoslav political career, it is important to acknowledge that this was a period of experimental state-building very much of his creation, at least for the populations who had joined the state from the Habsburg Empire. He was therefore personally invested in the kingdom's success. This was not just for the Slovene population he represented as SLS leader, but also for Habsburg South Slavs of non-Slovene backgrounds, due to his having acted in their interests in proclaiming the SHS state which he brought into union with Serbia in December 1918.

In this way, the dual Slovene and Yugoslav political personalities Korošec exhibited throughout the 1920s were evident right from the moment of the kingdom's creation. He had been slow to embrace the concept of a new Yugoslav state as a solution to Slovene national ambitions, continuing to hope for a post-war restructuring of Austria that would fulfil this agenda instead. Once Habsburg collapse became inevitable, however, he transferred his traditional Slovene loyalty to the Monarchy to the SHS Kingdom. He embarked on his Yugoslav political career fully committed to the Yugoslav state-building process alongside his Slovene political personality, in a direct continuation of his approach to broader state politics versus Slovene issues in Vienna. This was undoubtedly due at least in part to his appreciation of the fact that the Slovene population's small numbers necessitated their being part of a larger state entity in order to protect them from Italian, Austrian and Hungarian territorial ambitions. Despite this vested interest, he proved himself to be truly invested in the kingdom's success, fully embracing Yugoslav statehood as the Slovenes' post-war reality.

Rather than focusing his political activities exclusively on Slovene regional affairs, Korošec actively engaged with Yugoslav state-building and policymaking throughout the first decade of the kingdom's existence. He did this in a number of ways. Through the ministerial posts he held in this period, he demonstrated not only his commitment to improving living, working and economic conditions across the Kingdom as a whole, but also a preparedness to prioritise non-Slovene regions, should he deem these in greater need of development. This trend was most prominent during his periods as Minister for Food and Nutrition in Protić's 1919 Serb Radical government and as Minister of the Interior within Vukićević's Serb Radical coalition cabinet in 1928. Korošec willingly prioritised the resolution of supply issues, corruption, unrest and poor living conditions in various regions of Bosnia, Dalmatia and Serbia, having identified these as the most pressing problems faced by these ministries during his time in office.

As has been explored, one of the many criticisms Korošec faced from the Slovene Liberal and SKS opposition during the 1920s was that he pursued ministerial positions purely for personal gain. These parties argued that he had no interest in implementing reform in the Slovene regions, let alone outside them. However, his conduct during his ministerial posts directly contradicts this view. Moreover, his Yugoslav-centric approach to these roles demonstrated an understanding that improving living standards and administrative efficiency across the kingdom as a whole was key to state stability and endurance. The Slovenes had entered into the kingdom as its most economically prosperous region, having benefited from the more intensive economic development in the Austrian crownlands during the Habsburg period.⁶⁶⁰ They also possessed by far the highest literacy levels and living standards in the kingdom upon its creation.⁶⁶¹ Korošec's prioritisation of policymaking to improve conditions in the non-Slovene, less developed regions during his ministerial posts undeniably illustrates his dedication to Yugoslav reform. Indeed, as a leader elected solely from Slovene constituencies, there is scope to criticise him for placing Yugoslav-wide social, economic and local administrative reform above Slovene. The extent to which he was failing the Slovene electorate in this prioritisation, however, depends on how he perceived the relationship between his dual Slovene and Yugoslav political loyalties in this period. As a politician truly invested in the broader Yugoslav entity the Slovene population were a part of, Korošec's advocacy of both Slovene-specific and non-Slovene Yugoslav issues in this period implies an equally commitment to both of these political loyalties. Much like the SLS's traditional loyalty to the Habsburg Monarchy, he saw no contradiction between the two.

Alongside his dedication to broader Yugoslav issues as evident through his ministerial posts, Korošec maintained a strong Slovene-specific political agenda. This centred around the pursuit of administrative autonomy for the Slovene-inhabited lands of the kingdom, in an almost complete continuation of the 1848 *United Slovenia* political programme. The creation of the SHS Kingdom had fulfilled the language element of this programme, but the adoption of Vidovdan in 1921 left its demands for Slovene administrative autonomy within the new Yugoslav political context unresolved. Korošec promoted a federalist state structure as the best option for state stability during the constitution drafting process. After the triumph of centralism became increasingly likely from late 1920, as well as in the years immediately following the adoption of Vidovdan, he stated this view

⁶⁶⁰ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia and the Post-Yugoslav States: One Hundred Years of Citizenship* p.31

⁶⁶¹ Cox and Fink Hofner, *Into Europe? Perspectives from Britain and Slovenia*, p.13

more explicitly. He argued that despite of attempts from pro-centralism parties to insist that the kingdom's citizens were now one unified Yugoslav people, separate regional identities continued to exist. Moreover, failure to acknowledge this fact would inevitably lead to future unrest and divisions between these identities. The implementation of a modest degree of administrative autonomy on a regional level, he argued, was the best means of preventing such unrest.

Korošec continued his attempts to reverse some of the damage Vidovdan had done to his Slovene secure a modest degree of Slovene administrative autonomy via the existing Ljubljana and Maribor oblasts. This illustrates that the dawn of Slovene independence as part of a broader South Slav entity in the creation of the SHS Kingdom, although a pivotal moment for the Slovene population in terms of national self-determination, was never in fact his goal, and in itself did not fulfil his and his SLS's Slovene nationalist ambitions. Independence from the Habsburg Monarchy was never Korošec's goal. Rather, he envisioned administrative autonomy for the Slovene population within the security of some kind of broader state entity which recognised their right to this arrangement as a national group. This arguably made him more tolerant of post-Vidovdan state centralism. He was willing to focus on Yugoslav state-building and wider Yugoslav politics, while simultaneously pushing his Slovene autonomy agenda. He saw both as equally important, realising that without a Yugoslavia of some description, Italian and Austrian territorial ambitions meant that there might well be no question of Slovene autonomy at all. On this basis, he rejected the boycotting tactics practiced by Radić's HRSS in this period. Instead, he focused on building strong relationships with his colleagues from the larger, more influential Serb Radical and Yugoslav Democratic parties. Through participation within their governments, he proved himself to be a reliable, pragmatic coalition partner. Indeed, he was willing to cooperate with parties and politicians whose outlook and values directly opposed his own in the interests of facilitating a stable government, putting his Slovene autonomy agenda to one side within this context. In this sense, he was truly a Yugoslav statesman.

In building the trust of the Serb Radicals and Yugoslav Democrats through participation in their respective cabinets and parliamentary blocs in this period, Korošec played a political long game which ultimately paid off. The Serb Radical leaders Uzunović and Vukičević turned to him and his SLS to provide their governments with the Skupština backing they badly needed in order to hold office in January and August 1927 respectively. This was because they recognised that he could be counted upon to put differences in political ideology aside and work alongside them in the interests of government continuity and stability within the politically turbulent 1920s. Korošec successfully used this Serb Radical dependency upon his SLS's support to his advantage. In return for his agreeing to

support Uzunović's Serb Radical government in the Skupština and save it from collapse, he negotiated a limited degree of financial autonomy over local administrative affairs for the Slovene regions of Ljubljana and Maribor. Later that year, the Bled Agreement saw Uzunović's successor Vukičević commit to a gradual progression towards the administrative autonomy Korošec desired for the Slovene regions in return for his participation in a post-election Serb Radical coalition government, though through the Ljubljana and Maribor oblasts rather than a single, federalist-style Slovene unit. The commencement of the Royal Dictatorship in January 1929 prevented this process from being finalised. However, the control of local-level administrative affairs concerning issues such as education and culture, rural development, supply distribution and budgets for these worked well in the Ljubljana and Maribor provinces during both the final months of Vukičević's administration and Korošec's own premiership. It allowed local-level, Slovene-specific issues to be dealt with more efficiently than the previous centralised, Belgrade-based process. This demonstrated the effectiveness of Korošec's long-term political tactics. Moreover, it also proved that he was right to advocate regional administrative autonomy as a more effective form of government for Slovene interests.

Korošec's premiership represented an amalgamation of these three major political strategies he utilised throughout the 1920s. He undoubtedly succeeded in forming a coalition government in the hostile aftermath of the Skupština assassinations as a result of having spent the last decade building working relationships with the Serb Radicals and Yugoslav Democrats, as well as establishing himself as a Yugoslav-minded politician. He was persistent in pushing ahead with his pro-federalist state restructuring agenda as far as realistically possible given the chaotic political context he had inherited. Indeed, his focus upon introducing a limited degree of devolved government to the localities through the previously neglected regional assembly system demonstrates this. In this way, his premiership too can be viewed as largely a continuation of the SLS's Habsburg policies, simply transferred into the Slovenes' new Yugoslav context. His vision for their place within the larger state entity of which they were a part remained unchanged.

The key problem Korošec's SLS faced in the Habsburg period was a complete lack of willingness on the part of the monarchy to compromise and grant the Slovenes concessions towards their nationalism agenda. This became a major issue too within the Yugoslav context with the adoption of Vidovdan. However, it gradually posed less of a problem as the 1920s unfolded, and the Serb Radicals realised the value of allowing him modest concessions in order to secure his support. By the end of the kingdom's first decade, the major problem Korošec faced within its political

environment was that the vast majority of his colleagues in the Belgrade Skupština simply did not share his commitment to developing a functioning state political system and administrative framework. Nor were they willing to compromise unless forced. The HRSS, and later the Peasant Democrat Coalition of which it became a part, spent much of the decade refusing to participate within Yugoslav political life at all in a hard-line approach to achieving its Croat autonomy goals which ultimately proved in vain. Meanwhile, the Serb Radicals took an uncompromising approach to state centralism and a complacent attitude to corruption within the government ministries. Both of these factors undermined government stability, as well as causing the vast majority of their fellow parties to lose faith in the kingdom's political system before it had even been fully established. The concessions towards Slovene administrative autonomy which Korošec secured from the Serb Radicals in 1927 were a lone exception to this uncompromising centralist stance. This in itself reiterates the effectiveness of his 1920s political long game- in particular, the sophisticated, state-first approach to politics he brought to his Yugoslav career from the SLS's record in Vienna. In making his SLS an invaluable source of Skupština backing during the late 1920s and being willing to compromise in terms of his Slovene national ambitions, he was able to secure concessions from the Serb Radicals which the HRSS could not.

In this way, including Korošec's 1920s political activities within the narrative allows for a more complete understanding of this crucial era of Yugoslav state-building. The absence of a detailed exploration of his dual Slovene and Yugoslav political characters within existing histories of interwar Yugoslavia has resulted in an interpretation of the period as dominated by opposing visions for the new state amongst Serbs and Croats, and a bitter unwillingness to find a compromise solution by the Yugoslav political elite.⁶⁶² Korošec's experience of 1920s Yugoslav politics, however, demonstrates that compromise was in fact possible, and that the Serb Radicals at least were willing to practise it as a political strategy if it meant their governments could remain in power. Furthermore, it highlights that this period of Yugoslav politics was more complex than the Serb and Croat dominated picture typically presented by histories of the SHS Kingdom. Within this, Korošec, his SLS and his willingness to cooperate with the major Yugoslav parties, despite their political outlooks differing drastically with his own, ensured an invaluable degree of government stability.

Korošec's political conduct throughout the period 1918-1928 laid the foundations for his four-year-long participation within the Serb Radical Milan Stojadinović's government 1935-39. This Serb Radical-SLS-JMO coalition was undoubtedly the most successful of the interwar period. It was by far

⁶⁶² Djokić, *Illusive Compromise*, p.1

the first Yugoslavia's longest enduring government, with the exception of King Aleksandar's royal dictatorship. Within it, Korošec returned to the Minister of the Interior post he had previously held during both the Vukičević administration as well as his own premiership. This in itself is a testament to the trust he had built with the Serb Radicals by this point in Yugoslavia's political history, in addition to his own reputation as a politician committed to Yugoslav state stability first and foremost.

Korošec entered into the SHS Kingdom in 1918 urging the Serb government representatives and Yugoslav Committee in Geneva to 'first form a state, then discuss everything else.'⁶⁶³ His haste did not merely reflect his alarm at the advance of Italian troops into Slovene-inhabited lands. It also represented a genuine belief that such discussions following the proclamation of a Yugoslav kingdom could result in a future state which fulfilled his modest nationalism ambitions for the Slovene population. When he was released from prison in 1934 in order to attend King Aleksandar's funeral, Korošec gave a brief speech in which he urged his fellow politicians that 'we ought to work and live for Yugoslavia now... everything else is forgotten.'⁶⁶⁴ This statement conveys the same unwavering commitment to the Yugoslav experiment he had openly declared in November 1918, as well as demonstrating consistently through his Belgrade political conduct throughout the 1920s. He was all-too-aware of the state's flaws- most notably its ongoing struggle to establish a stable, efficient parliamentary system which worked in the interests of all of its national groups. Despite this, however, he remained committed to working within the political system to implement reform rather than seeking an alternative future for the Slovene population. In this sense, he was truly both a Slovene and a Yugoslav-minded statesman.

⁶⁶³ Gow and Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes*, p.30

⁶⁶⁴ H.M. Sachar, *The Assassination of Europe 1918-1942, a Political. History*, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014) p.268

Glossary

HRSS	Croat Peasant Republican Party
Oblast	Serbian/Croatian word for an administrative region
SHS Kingdom	Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes
SHS State	State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes
SKS	Independent Agrarian Party in Slovenia
Skupština	Serbian/Croatian word for Parliament
SLS	Slovene People's Party

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