

War and Revolution
in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945



THE CHETNIKS



JOZO TOMASEVICH

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Preface



This is the first of three projected volumes dealing with the war and revolution in Yugoslavia during the period 1941–45. I originally planned a one-volume history of the period, but the manuscript grew too large and its complexity too great, and its splitting into several volumes became imperative. Since a purely chronological splitting would not have alleviated the problem of complexity, I have elected to make separate studies of the three main internal forces of the period: the Serbian Chetniks, the Croatian Ustashes and other open collaborators, and the Yugoslav Partisans. These forces fought against one another because they followed different political principles, and because they differed fundamentally on the problem of the continuation and nature of the state of Yugoslavia as such.

In pursuit of their differing objectives, the Chetniks, the Partisans, and the various collaborationist forces developed their specific military and political strategies and sought the aid of mightier warring powers as best suited their goals. The Great Powers, at the same time, made or tried to make use of these contending groups to promote their own interests. And so the wartime situation in Yugoslavia became an unbelievable imbroglio.

In Part I of this volume I have given the historical background of Yugoslavia up to the time of the Axis invasion in April 1941 and the collapse of the country, showing the forces responsible for the establishment of the state in 1918 as well as the problems that beset it in the interwar period and lay beneath the enmity of the opposing groups that emerged during the occupation. This, in fact, is the introduction for the entire three-volume study. Parts II and III concentrate on the story of the Chetniks and their leader, General Mihailović. I have necessarily had to say a good deal at one time or another about collaborationist

forces and the Partisans, but I have reserved the bulk of my material on these subjects for the future volumes.

In setting forth the complex story of the Chetniks, I have made extensive use of books, collections of documents, and articles in learned journals and newspapers originating in almost a dozen countries. But by far the most important source of information for this study has been the microfilmed German and Italian wartime documents made available through the United States National Archives, together with some German microfilmed documents that I obtained from British, West German, and Yugoslav authorities and individuals. These are all duly noted in the Bibliography. For reasons of convenience and economy, I have translated into English all quotations from published materials, microfilmed documents, and unpublished documents, as well as the titles of all articles in less familiar foreign languages, but all sources have been fully identified so that persons interested in further study of this material can find it without difficulty.

In the course of gathering information, and especially in four trips to Yugoslavia between 1963, when I began my work, and 1972, I have talked with many scores of persons, including Marshal Tito, about their wartime experiences and their opinions on various issues. I have talked at length with many Yugoslav historians specializing in the Yugoslav National Liberation War and Revolution. And I have corresponded with a number of persons in Yugoslavia and other countries regarding various issues connected with my study. To all these persons I express my heartfelt appreciation; some specific acknowledgments are made in the notes.

Although over the years I have assembled a large private library, I was greatly helped by the rich library resources of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, the Library of San Francisco State University, and the Library of the University of California at Berkeley. To the staffs of all these institutions I express my sincere thanks. I am grateful also for books and other published materials lent me by a number of other scholars in the field and by several other persons who collect published materials on Yugoslavia or its component nations. I am also grateful for having had the opportunity to consult unpublished archival materials in the United States, Yugoslavia, and Great Britain. On numerous occasions in the course of writing this study I have used sources—documents, correspondence, interviews—which, for a variety of reasons, I am not free to identify. I have scrutinized information from such sources as carefully as I have information from identified sources, and I have used it only when in my judgment it carries as much weight. A great deal of pertinent material—politically or otherwise sensitive Yugoslav documents, Soviet materials, operational intelligence reports—may

not soon, or ever, become available for scholarly inspection. In the circumstances the scholar's task can only be to get as near as possible to the truth.

There are two close friends whom I want to thank specifically for their unflagging interest in the study and the help they have given me: Professor Wayne S. Vucinich of the Department of History of Stanford University and Colonel Vojmir Kljaković of the Institute of Military History in Belgrade. Both of them, as well as another friend, Professor Bariša Krekić of the Department of History of the University of California at Los Angeles, read the entire manuscript in an earlier draft and made many valuable comments.

I am grateful to the preliminary editors of the first several chapters of my manuscript, Jesse M. Phillips and my daughter Neda Ann, and to Dave Pauly for the preparation of the maps. A feeling of most heartfelt gratitude goes to Shirley Taylor, who took the burden of editing in the early stages and carried it with understanding, extreme care, and great patience to the final copy for the press. From June 1965, when I presented a few chapters of an early draft of the study to Stanford University Press, through the long evolution of the project from a one-volume to a three-volume affair, I have had the friendly support and expert counsel of their Editor, J. G. Bell, on the overall organization and innumerable details of the study, and it gives me great pleasure to thank him here.

With the exception of a research leave for the spring semester of 1969 from San Francisco State University and some typing help by the University's typing service, all costs involved in completing this study have been borne by the Tomasevich household. For this, and for their understanding, patience, and steady support, it is to all the members of my family, and in particular to my wife Neda, that I owe the greatest debt of gratitude.

JOZO TOMASEVICH

Palo Alto, California
October 1974

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PART ONE

The Coming of the War



CHAPTER ONE

Yugoslavia Between the Wars



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the territorial and national components of modern Yugoslavia were parts of the multinational Ottoman and Habsburg empires. Gradually, first the Ottoman and much later the Habsburg empire began to lose strength; at the same time, under the influence of traditional forces and of ideas of nationalism and democracy, the movement for independence grew among the Slavs and other peoples within their borders. Serbia and Montenegro achieved their independence from the Ottoman Empire in the course of the nineteenth century, and during the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 they liberated the South Slav areas that were still ruled by the Turks. After the fall of Austria-Hungary at the end of the First World War, Serbia and Montenegro formed a common South Slav state with the Croats, Slovenes, and Serbs who had formerly been under Habsburg rule. During the century of gradual liberation and unification, the South Slavs were able to make considerable progress in political, cultural, and economic affairs, but they still lagged markedly behind the states of western and central Europe. In 1918, the least advanced areas were those that had remained under Ottoman rule until 1878 (Bosnia and Herzegovina) or until 1913 (Sandjak and Macedonia).

The territorial formation of the new Yugoslav state during the period 1913–19 is indicated on Map 1. The unification of the South Slavs into one state at the end of the First World War brought together five different though closely related peoples (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins), living in eight historically relatively well-defined areas (Serbia proper, Macedonia, Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia-Slavonia, Dalmatia, Slovenia, and Montenegro), belonging to three main religious denominations (Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Moslem), speaking three closely related yet different languages (Serbo-Croatian, Slovene, and Macedonian), and using two scripts (Latin and Cyrillic).

These five nations had never before been united in one state, and their political, cultural, and socioeconomic pasts varied greatly.¹ During the Middle Ages, both the Serbs and the Croats had well-developed states. The Croats lost theirs in 1102, when they concluded an agreement with the Hungarian kingdom. This connection lasted until 1918. From 1526 to 1918 both the Hungarians and the Croats were ruled by the Habsburg dynasty. From 1868 to 1918 Croatia formed an autonomous part of the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy. The Serbian medieval state was conquered by the Turks over a period of about ninety years, beginning with the Battle of the Maritsa River in 1371 and ending with the fall of the despotate of Smederevo in 1459. In medieval times there were in the Montenegrin area several states generally considered Serbian. Montenegro fell to the Turks in 1499, but certain isolated and economically and strategically unimportant areas were never fully subdued and up to the establishment of the modern Montenegrin state in the 1850's the inhabitants of these areas lived on as associations of clans.

The Bosnian medieval state, whose conquest by the Turks was completed in 1463, included both Croats and Serbs. For most of its existence it was controlled by the Bogomils, a heretical Christian church, who strongly opposed the encroachments both of Catholic Croatia and Hungary and of Orthodox Byzantium and Serbia, and most of whom eventually embraced Islam. Most of the Moslems of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1971 about one and a half million, are descendants of the Bogomils.

The Slovenes also had some early medieval principalities, but their lands fell under the control of the Germanic states early and they remained associated with Austria until 1918. In Macedonia, too, there were medieval states, but the area, originally under Byzantium, shifted periodically from Serbian to Bulgarian control and back again; it came earliest under Turkish rule and remained so until 1913.

In the late eighteenth century the South Slav peoples felt the first stirrings of a sense of national identity and a desire for national independence and unification. Among the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes national identity in the modern sense of the word was completely developed during the first half of the nineteenth century under the influence of modern ideas of nationalism and democracy coming from the West. Among the Montenegrins there was a duality of feeling, as there is still, some considering themselves a part of the Serbian people, others considering themselves a separate people though closely related to the Serbs. Among the Macedonians, whose territory was vigorously claimed by the Serbs, the Bulgarians, and the Greeks as an integral part of their

¹ For a review of the history of the South Slavs from the time of their arrival in the Balkans in the early Middle Ages until 1918, see my book *Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia*, pp. 3-232; Corović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*; and Grafenauer et al., *Istorija naroda Jugoslavije*, 2 vols., which cover only the developments until the end of the eighteenth century. For complete authors' names, titles, and publication data on all works and on published and unpublished (microfilmed or not) collections of documents cited in the notes, see the Bibliography, pp. 475-92.



Map 1. Territorial formation of Yugoslavia, 1913-1919

states, there gradually developed a sense of being a distinct nationality with no allegiance to any of the claimants. This conviction received great impetus during the Second World War, and today there is a fully developed Macedonian nation, with its own literary language and national feeling, existing as a separate socialist republic within Yugoslavia.

During the first half of the nineteenth century there also developed in Croatia the idea of South Slav cultural and political unity, an idea that was to become the ideology of Yugoslav supranationalism. Unity seemed logical in several ways. All the South Slav peoples had a common racial background. The Croats and the Serbs spoke variants of the same language and lived together in many areas. Individually, the South Slav peoples, especially those living in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, were too weak to oppose with full success the political, cultural, and economic pressures coming from the Austrians and Hungarians. Their best hope seemed to lie in uniting with other South Slavs in one state.

From Croatia the Yugoslav supranationalist ideology spread to a certain extent among the other South Slav peoples. Owing to their varying

conditions and aspirations their interpretations of it differed, but they all agreed that the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were essentially branches of the same Yugoslav nation and could hope to achieve full political liberation and unification in one Yugoslav state in which the feeling of mutual belonging would gradually supplant the feeling of Serb, Croat, and Slovene national separateness. Yugoslavism had two basic sources. One was the desire to preserve national identity and acquire strength through unity in the struggle against the multinational Habsburg Empire in which they were threatened with Germanization and Magyarization and in which they were treated as second-class citizens. The other was the example of other European peoples still living in many states, primarily the Germans and the Italians. This integral Yugoslavism was never widespread among the masses, but it had many adherents among the intellectuals in most South Slav nations and was an important ideological force behind the formation of the Yugoslav state in 1918.²

Like many political ideologies, the Yugoslav ideology was long on idealism and short on specific reasoning, and the new Yugoslav state experienced great internal political difficulties from the moment of its inception. With the Habsburg threat gone and independence achieved, new problems rose to the fore. Faced with the narrower nationalist proclivities of individual South Slav nations, the concept of Yugoslav supranationalism proved totally inadequate. The greatest blow came when the Serbian establishment began using the ideology as a cloak for its own hegemony in the new state; as a result, the whole idea of integral Yugoslavism lost credit during the interwar period.

The South Slav peoples differ greatly in numbers. Since Yugoslavia between the wars was completely under Serbian domination and did not recognize either a Montenegrin or a Macedonian nation, claiming that both of these peoples were Serbs, the best figures for our purposes are from postwar census data (Table 1). As the table shows, the two chief South Slav peoples were the Serbs and the Croats, followed by the Slovenes, the Macedonians, the Moslems who refused to declare themselves either as Serbs or as Croats,³ and finally the Montenegrins. Among "other

² For interwar Yugoslavia and the history of its various component parts see the bibliography (to 1954) in *Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia*, pp. 703-26. Some of the newer studies on Yugoslavia during the interwar period are Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference: A Study in Frontier-making*; Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934-1941*; Valev, Slavin, and Udalcov, eds., *Istorija Jugoslavii*, II, 7-184; Culinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*; Kukoleča, *Analiza privrede Jugoslavije pred Drugi svetski rat*; and Stajić, *Nacionalni dohodak Jugoslavije 1923-1939 u stalnim i tekućim cenama*. Of the literature published by the Yugoslav political exiles, see especially Pavelić, *Dr. Ante Trumbić: Problemi hrvatsko-srpskih odnosa*; Maček, *In the Struggle for Freedom*; Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt: Jugoslavija između dva rata*; Jareb, *Pola stoljeća hrvatske politike*; and Ostović, *The Truth About Yugoslavia*.

³ The Moslems of South Slav origin, i.e. the Moslems of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were at liberty in the 1948 census to declare themselves as Serbs, Croats, or undecided. In round numbers, 89 percent declared themselves as undecided, 8 percent as Serbs, and 3 percent as Croats. In the late 1960's the Moslems of Bosnia and Herzegovina officially acquired a status identical to that of a separate nation.

TABLE 1
The National Composition of Yugoslavia as of March 15, 1948

Slavic peoples	Population	Percent of total	Non-Slav minorities	Population	Percent of total
Serbs	6,547,117	41.51%	Albanians	750,431	4.76%
Croats	3,784,353	23.99	Hungarians	496,492	3.15
Slovenes	1,415,432	8.98	Vlaxhs	102,953	0.65
Macedonians	810,126	5.13	Turks	97,954	0.62
Montenegrins	425,703	2.70	Italians	79,575	0.50
Moslems, undecided	808,921	5.13	Gypsies	72,736	0.46
Other Slavs	240,990	1.53	Romanians	64,095	0.41
			Germans	55,337	0.35
			Others	19,883	0.13
TOTAL	14,032,642	88.97%		1,739,456	11.03%

SOURCE: Yugoslavia, *Statistički godišnjak FNRJ 1954* (Statistical Yearbook of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, 1954), Belgrade, 1954, p. 60.

Slavs" the largest group were the Slovaks and the Bulgarians. In addition, as a consequence of the peace treaties following the First World War, between 500,000 and 600,000 Croats and Slovenes living in Istria, the Julian March, Rijeka (Fiume), Zadar (Zara), and various Adriatic islands were allotted to Italy.⁴ About 65,000 Carinthian Slovenes remained under Austria after 1918.

Non-Slavs make up a greater minority population in Yugoslavia than in any other European country except the Soviet Union. The most numerous are the Albanians, concentrated in the Kosovo region (about 30 percent of all Albanians live in Yugoslavia), and the Hungarians, living almost exclusively in Vojvodina. During the interwar period, to these two large minorities was added a third, the Germans living mostly in Vojvodina, Srijem, Slavonia, and Slovenia. In the 1930's they numbered around 550,000, but in 1948, after voluntary withdrawal with the retreating German armies in the closing stages of the war and then expulsion by the new government, they had dwindled to a tenth that number.

Added to the multinational character of Yugoslavia, the fact that most of the large minority population lived in border areas made the country extremely fragile from a political point of view during the interwar period. Large minorities are a potential source of trouble if they are subjected to political, cultural, and economic restrictions not imposed on the majority, or if their homelands are ready and able to exploit them for revisionist or expansionist purposes. Both conditions obtained in Yugoslavia.

Turning to the religious sphere, the census figures of 1931 show that roughly 48 percent were of the Serbian Orthodox faith (Serbs, Mace-

⁴ These regions, except for a small part of the Julian March, were incorporated into the new Yugoslavia in 1945 and 1953.

donians, Montenegrins, and various minorities in areas populated mostly by Serbs), 37 percent were Roman Catholics (mainly Croats and Slovenes), 11 percent were Moslems (the Slavic Moslems of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Albanian and Turkish minorities), and fewer than 4 percent were Protestants or Jews. In the 1953 census the proportions were essentially the same: 48 percent Orthodox, 36 percent Catholic, 14 percent Moslem, and 2 percent all others.⁵ Since religious ties greatly influenced the sense of national belonging of the various South Slav peoples, and since relations between the different churches were characterized by suspicion and intolerance (both for general historical reasons and for specific recent ones), the religious diversity of the country was yet another of its many problems.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS, 1918–1939

Having suffered in captivity for many centuries and, in the case of Serbs and Montenegrins, having experienced only a relatively short period of modern statehood, the South Slav peoples when united in 1918 were above all eager to preserve their national independence, their national character and heritage, and their national aspirations. Logically, the new state should have been organized on a federal principle so as to allow each of the peoples its free development so far as may have been compatible with the ultimate goal of strengthening the bonds between them. Instead, the new Yugoslav state of 1918 was organized on rigidly centralistic lines. Given Serbia's forty-odd years of virtual independence and another forty years of fully independent existence, its distinguished record in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 and the First World War in which it was on the Allied side, and the fact that the Serbs were by far the largest of the nationalities, Serbian predominance in the new state was a foregone conclusion. The majority of non-Serb South Slavs probably soon came to feel that they had merely exchanged one form of foreign rule—by the Austrians, the Hungarians, or the Turks—for another, though milder, one. Thus from the very start the unsolved national question, particularly as it related to the Croats and Macedonians, poisoned the life of the new state and undermined its foundations.

In both domestic and foreign policies, the new multinational and multireligious Yugoslav state, now with more than 12 million people, was run by the Serbian ruling elite little differently from the pre-1918 Balkan Serbian kingdom—a small country, nationally and religiously homogeneous, without marked regional differences in the level of economic and cultural development, and with only 3.5 million people.⁶ For

⁵ Yugoslavia, Information Service, *The Church in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia*, p. 3.

⁶ For a concise presentation of the political developments and problems of Yugoslavia between the wars see Vucinich, "Interwar Yugoslavia," and for a discussion of the complex nationality problems between 1918 and the early 1960's see his "Nationalism and Communism."