Reviving the *Völkerabfälle*: The South Slavonic Left, Balkan Federalism and the creation of the first Yugoslavia

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Abstract

This article explores how the Southern Slavs, decried as *Völkerabfälle* by Engels in 1849, managed nevertheless to develop a distinctively socialist movement and culture of their own, particularly from 1903 to 1914, capable of both challenging and shaping politics in the Balkans. Although heavily influenced by Marxist theoretical currents and external ideas such as Austro-Marxism, the formation of this South Slavonic Left was rooted in the social and historic contexts of its adherents' respective homelands. Limited industrialisation, coupled with the rise of rival political movements such as nationalism and peasant agrarianism, prompted many on the Left to turn to the region's early socialist heritage, specifically the philosopher Svetozar Marković's concept of Balkan Federalism. As well as providing a means by which the region could begin to modernise through closer economic and political cooperation, the perceived threat of Austro-Hungarian and Italian expansionist ambitions legitimised the left-wing belief that a Balkan Federation was now essential to the future preservation of regional identity and political freedoms. Consequently, the creation of the first Yugoslavian state in December 1918 was welcomed as the first step to fulfilling these goals.

Key Words: South Slavs, social democracy, Balkan Federalism, Yugoslavia, national identity, revolution

In January 1849, a young Friedrich Engels published an article in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, on the precarious domestic state of the multi-ethnic Habsburg Monarchy, still gripped by the Hungarian Revolution. Besides commenting on the Hungarian national movement's faltering progress, Engels took the opportunity to denounce those ethnic groups who had

lent their support to the Imperial Austrian army. Chief among these were the South Slavs: a subgroup of the Slavonic people inhabiting South-East Europe's Balkan Peninsula that includes Croats, Serbs, Bulgarians, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Bosnian Muslims and Macedonian Slavs. With the exception of Bulgaria, these peoples would be unified in 1918 in the first Yugoslavian state. To Engels however, this spectrum of identities, stemming from centuries of imperial dominance by external powers, impeded the South Slavs' historic cultural development, leaving them servile and devoid of any coherent sense of modern nationhood. Indeed, not even the region's native 'Pan-Slavist' movement,[1] calling for political union among the Monarchy's Croats, Serbs and Slovenes, could disguise the fact that they were little more than 'residual fragments of peoples', *Völkerabfälle*:

> There is no country in Europe which does not have in some corner or other one or several ruined fragments of peoples, the remnant of a former population that was suppressed and held in bondage by the nation which later became the main vehicle of historical development. These relics of a nation mercilessly trampled underfoot in the course of history, as Hegel says, these residual fragments of peoples always become fanatical standard-bearers of counter-revolution and remain so until their complete extirpation or loss of their national character, just as their whole existence in general is itself a protest against a great historical revolution […] Such, in Austria, are the pan-Slavist Southern Slavs, who are nothing but the residual fragment of peoples, resulting from an extremely confused thousand years of development.[2]

Engels' disparaging cultural assessment can be seen to have vicariously informed later historical evaluations on the apparent failure of South Slavonic socialism, specifically the collapse of Socialist Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. The original interwar state, proclaimed in late-1918 as the 'Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes', has been the subject of particular scrutiny, frequently presented as doomed at political inception due to its elites' inability to resolve competing nationalist aspirations, the so-called 'nationalities question'.[3] This dovetailed into broader debates as to why the Balkans in general had supposedly deviated from 'an assumed European norm' since the Balkan Wars of 1912 to 1913.[4]

This article challenges the deterministic assumptions of Engels and later portrayals of socialism in the South Slavonic Balkans as simply an imported concept by considering how these so-called *Völkerabfälle* attempted to

adapt Marxist theories to the socio-political context of the region. Central to this were the efforts of the early South Slavonic Left to confront both the nationalities question and perceived threat of foreign imperialism by championing political and economic union among the South Slavonic nations, culminating in their support for the first Yugoslavia's formation.[5] It also locates and historicises the experiences and shifting priorities of the Left against the dramatic context of the modern era, particularly 1903 to 1918, and the extent to which ideas from this period foreshadowed those of Titoism. In this regard, special consideration is given to the activities and shifting opinions of the Serbian Social Democrat Party (SSDP) under the charismatic pre-war leadership of Dimitrije Tucović and Dragiša Lapčević. Alongside its Bulgarian counterparts, this group was arguably the most proactive, radical and dynamic of the South Slav Left with its members and political doctrines playing a leading role in the founding the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.[6]

Svetozar Marković and the Origins of Balkan Federalism

The idea that the South Slavonic peoples represented a single nation was not a concept unique to the modern era. Indeed, the earliest known expression of pan-Slavism in general can be attributed to the writings of the sixteenth century Dalmatian Slav humanist Vinko Pribojević who judged the region's linguistic and cultural traditions as evidence of a 'lost' Slav or 'Illyrian' identity.[7] However, it was only in the nineteenth century that pan-Slavism gained political traction and philosophical cohesion among regional nationalists, including the informal recognition of a common 'Serbo-Croatian' language by Croat, Serb and Slovene linguists in 1850.[8]

The concept of a unified South Slavonic entity as a political construct was itself partially linked to the early development of Balkan socialist thought in the late nineteenth century; a process mainly attributed to the work of the radical Serbian philosopher Svetozar Marković. Having received his education in Russia and Switzerland – where he had become active in revolutionary circles – financial difficulties forced Marković to abandon his studies and return to Serbia in the summer of 1870. Although influenced by various strands of revolutionary thought – specifically the populism championed by the Russians Nikolay Chernyshevsky and Nikolay Dobrolyubov – Marković initially channelled his energies towards promoting economic diversification and attacking Serbia's conservative political culture. Despite the recent adoption of a democratic

constitution, he argued that a lack of distinction between the main political parties and the Orthodox Church's stranglehold over the country's cultural life amounted to *de facto* suppression of public freedoms. Even before his return, these rising frustrations over the state of Serbian national life had prompted him to found the first European-style socialist party, the Serbian Radical-Socialists, formulated around a detailed programme of social and economic domestic reforms.[9]

Despite the Radical-Socialists' growing popularity, Marković's political and journalistic activities resulted in him having to flee into exile in Austria-Hungary in order to evade arrest in 1872.[10] This brief intermission, coupled with the party's subsequent electoral failures, prompted him to reconsider the nascent socialist movement's ideological approach in his magnum opus *Serbia in the East*. Through his social analysis of recent Serbian history, Marković argued that the early-nineteenth century revolutions, which had eventually won the Serbs independence from Ottoman rule, were expressions of an inherent class consciousness among the country's peasantry. Allowing for the development of capitalism and continued growth of modern state structures would, he predicted, lead to the erosion of such qualities.[11] In place of Marx's notion of historical development, Marković proposed a loose federal association of *opštine* (municipalities) modelled on Serbia's patriarchal peasant family *zadruge* (collectives). Much like his idealised image of the *zadruge*, his depictions of the *opštine* as self-sufficient and mostly self-governing, negated the need for a capitalist transition, reducing the role of the state to that of a coordinating intermediary.[12]

For Marković, this revolutionary ideal of '*zadruga* socialism' necessitated the unification of all Serbs into a single polity, a belief he shared with nationalist intellectuals such as the philologist Vuk Karadžić, and, increasingly, Serbia's ruling elites. Indeed, since 1844, successive governments had preoccupied themselves in pursuing a 'Greater Serbia' encompassing territories populated by Orthodox Slavonic-speakers including Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Montenegro.[13] Despite sharing a desire to end Habsburg and Ottoman rule in the Balkans, Marković's thesis was simultaneously opposed to any form of integral nationalist ideology; the Serb population in the wider Balkan 'mosaic of nationalities' was, he argued, too fragmented and often outnumbered by other ethnicities. Any attempt to create a greater ethno-national state entity would invite ethnic unrest and exploitation from external powers. Addressing the subject in 1874, Marković concluded that a pan-national revolution across the entire Balkan Peninsula represented the only workable alternative

to nationalism. Applying his model of '*zadruga* socialism' to this wider context, he envisioned a loose Balkan Federation comprising 'opštinas, districts, states – whichever suits them best'.[14] Within this socio-economic macrocosm, individuals would be granted the right to join one of numerous self-regulating communes, irrespective of their nationality.[15]

Despite warnings from his peers, Marković's radicalism, his refusal to temper his criticism of the central government in Belgrade, and his subsequent arrest for 'press crimes' in 1874, captured the public imagination, elevating him as a symbol of social discontent towards Serbia's state institutions. During elections to the National Assembly held in April that year, a small but vocal group of Radical-Socialists were elected as deputies, transforming his ideas into matters of serious political debate.[16] It also drew the attentions of foreign observers including the anti-Ottoman Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee in Romania. Writing in defence of Marković's ideas, the Committee's equally charismatic chairman and militia-leader Hristo Botev argued that a future Serbo-Bulgarian socialist union, now embodied both their nations' futures as well as that of the wider Balkans:

> We are prepared to state thousands of facts showing that that union is natural, and necessary, and open and inevitable; that that union existed, exists, and will exist, and the honest and intelligent Serbs and Bulgars will never be ready to think otherwise.[17]

South Slavonic society and the Left before 1914

Marković's sudden death from tuberculosis in March 1875, followed by that of Botev during Bulgaria's failed April uprising against Ottoman rule in 1876, deprived the South Slavonic Left of the proactive leadership and revolutionary impetus needed to become a sustainable political force. By the turn of the twentieth century most radicals had moderated their agendas to appeal to wider demographics, while revolutionary activity was likely to merit a swift response from conservative state authorities.[18]

As a result, the emergence of an organised Socialist Left was a relatively late development in South Slavonic Balkan politics. The first modern political parties only appeared in 1894 with the founding of the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (BWSDP) and Social Democratic Party of Croatia and Slavonia (SDPCS). These were followed in 1898 by the Yugoslav Social-Democratic Party (YSDP), based in Austria-Hungary's ethnically Slovene territories such as the Alpine province of Carniola, the

SSDP in 1903, and the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SDPBH) in 1909.[19] Additionally, Slavs from Macedonia were known to have been active in the socialist movements of Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, including the BWSDP's founder Dimitar Blagoev.[20]

Beyond these elite political and intellectual circles however, the principal challenge for the South Slavonic Left was the region's lack of industrial or urban development. The formation of the first Yugoslavia illustrated the extent of this problem in late-1918: from an estimated population of twelve million, less than a quarter of the new South Slavonic kingdom's citizens lived in settlements with more than 5,000 inhabitants. Despite a significant diversification in the agricultural sector, only around a fifth of all economic activity occurred in urban areas before the 1920s.[21] Indeed, by the 1900s many of these gainfully employed town-dwellers were either wealthier peasants whose incomes was derived from their agricultural holdings, or economic migrants from rural districts working as mostly unskilled seasonal labourers.[22]

Urban culture and the nature of capitalism in the South Slavonic Balkans was another critical factor. In contrast to other European regions, urban areas, and particularly those in the former Ottoman domains, had generally existed to administer largely rural populations. While their economic functions had grown in importance during the nineteenth century, most South Slavonic towns never developed into centres for innovation, remaining little more than trading hubs for their specific localities.[23] Moreover, Balkan capitalism itself was commercial rather than industrial in nature, dominated by trade in basic commodities and small-scale light industry. Increased exposure to foreign competition compounded this issue, with many pre-existing industries subverted by cheap imports flooding domestic markets.[24] In conjunction with this, the South Slavs were distinguished by various imbalances in social development. On the eve of Yugoslav unification, the Slovene lands recorded an illiteracy rate of around 10 per cent By contrast, over 80 per cent of Bosnian and Macedonian Slav peasants were deemed unable to read or write in 1918, producing a Yugoslavian national average of 51 per cent.[25]

This ostensibly limited socioeconomic development did not imply complete stagnation or an absence of industrialisation. For example, between 1905 and 1910 government subsidies and foreign investment rapidly expanded Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia-Slavonia and Serbia's non-agricultural workforces, creating potential supporter bases in the form of organised labour. This proved especially beneficial to the SSDP,

which managed to bring Serbia's Central Workers Union under party control in 1911.[26]

Regardless of these efforts, the fact remained that modern South Slavonic socialism had simply developed too early to exert itself as an effective political force. Reflecting on a series of mostly ineffectual mass demonstrations by 12,000 Belgrade factory workers in December 1910, Tucović spoke of 'two Serbias'; the Serbs might have possessed Europe's greatest revolutionary potential, yet they were unable to harness it effectively. Beyond the few isolated industrial enclaves, the 'bourgeois-proletarian division' of Germany and other industrial countries had failed to find 'an appropriate articulation' since social divisions were 'barely visible' in rural districts 'whose own parliamentary deputies dress and behave as peasants'.[27] Echoing Marković's earlier sentiment that Serbian society's fundamental flaw lay in its inability 'to create wealth' rather than distribute it, Tucović considered the Balkans' economic situation to be unique. In place of capitalist exploitation, Serbia's ruling elite perpetuated an imbalanced social conflict between 'patriarchy and modernity', giving priority to popular wellbeing at the expense of modernisation and retarding Marx's notion that an organised industrial working class would form naturally.[28]

Even in the future Yugoslavia's more industrially advanced north-west, socialist hopes of an emergent, literate proletariat proved redundant. As in other South Slavonic territories, industrialisation in the Slovene lands had been modest, limited to small-scale enterprises and reliant on *Gastarbeiter* from other Habsburg domains. Moreover, by 1914 the two industries with the greatest potential to serve as fountainheads for the labour movement, textiles and iron refining, had already fallen into decline as firms relocated their investments to more productive and resource-rich centres in the German and Czech provinces.[29] Consequently, the YSDP faced the similar problem of appealing to a pre-industrial society. This was made all the more difficult by its leadership's initial refusal to exploit rising anti-German resentment among ethnic Slovenes; a political tactic increasingly favoured by their more patriotically-minded conservative and liberal opponents.[30]

Ultimately, the greatest obstacle that confronted the South Slavonic Left before 1914 was whether to extend party membership to those portions of the peasantry receptive to socialist ideas. This proved especially divisive for the BWSDP and SSDP, both of which had ostensibly been formed as parties of the industrial working class, and perceived rural society as socially conservative and inherently reactionary. The contentious question of bolstering the parties' rank and file from the more

demographically sustainable agricultural workforce became all the more urgent with the rise of Agrarianism as a regional political force with genuine mass appeal. The implications of consolidating a support base among rural voters was particularly evident in Bulgaria where Aleksandar Stamboliyski's Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union, founded in 1899, quickly rose to become the main opposition party by 1914. For Bulgaria's Social Democrats, Stamboliyski's distinctively non-Marxist programme of radical left-wing reforms, formulated around land redistribution, was especially problematic.[31]

Fears of the 'peasantisation' of South Slavonic socialism even caused a split in the BWSDP with Blagoev and his followers forming a rival BWSDP known as the 'Narrow Socialists' in 1903. However, in contrast to their 'Broad Socialist' opponents, the Narrow Socialists immediately impeded their own chances of electoral success by proposing the confiscation of all private property, including that of the peasantry.[32] Among the SSDP's members, a softening of attitudes towards increasing socialist activity in the countryside from 1910 to 1911, particularly from Tucović and Lapčević, achieved a similar result. Ironically, in relaxing the rules on accepting peasants, the party more than doubled its membership and saw its first two deputies, one of whom was Lapčević, elected to represent two of Serbia's wealthiest rural districts in 1912. As with its Bulgarian counterpart, however, this sudden surge in the SSDP's political fortunes did not prevent a fissure among its most radical leftist elements, many of whom abandoned the SSDP following the 1912 elections to form their own party. Unlike Bulgaria's Narrow Socialists, the new 'People's Socialist Party' quickly became consigned to complete political irrelevancy.[33] Even in the early 1900s, incompatibility between pure Marxist dogma and domestic realities was an already recognised fact.

Between Austro-Marxism and Balkan Federalism: Navigating the 'Nationalities Question'

Throughout the late nineteenth and the opening years of the twentieth centuries, the South Slavonic Left's constituent movements were primarily focused on domestic questions and matters of political reform within their respective national territories. From 1903 to 1913, however, left-wing politicians and intellectuals became increasingly aware of the myriad external threats to Balkan democracy, specifically local nationalism and Great Power imperialism. While recognition of these challenges was instrumental in reviving earlier socialist beliefs in pan-Slavism, they also engendered

divisions that came to define both the shape and character of the Left and often frustrated efforts to present a unified front. These disputes were indicative of the fact that even the supposedly internationalist Left was itself immersed in the nationalities question that manifested in the ideological divide between Austro-Marxists and Radical Balkan Federalists.

Despite their shared namesakes, the South Slav social democratic parties were divided by a range of differing ideological and national influences, as well as the political systems in which they were obliged to function. Unlike Bulgaria and Serbia, where universal male suffrage had been introduced in 1879 and 1869 respectively, the Dual Monarchy's restrictive system of political enfranchisement, particularly in its Hungarian portion, locked the majority of South Slavs out of the political process entirely.[34] This was even more evident in Ottoman-ruled Macedonia, where organised political groups were virtually non-existent outside of the larger towns. Furthermore, under the Ottomans' system of confessional communities, Macedonian Slavs were legally classified as either Turks or ethnic Bulgarians, submerging any attempt to present the case for an independent Macedonian identity while strengthening the territorial claims of 'Greater Bulgarian' expansionists.[35] By contrast, no coherent socialist movement existed in the nationally-homogenous principality of Montenegro where politics continued to revolve around the patrimonial figure of Crown Prince Nikola I Petrović-Njegoš and an assortment of shifting clan allegiances.[36]

This spectrum of identity and tradition was further complicated by diverging philosophical influences and political cultures in those territories where an organised political left had managed to develop. Like their nationalist rivals, Croat and Slovene social democrats often defined themselves through a stated opposition to Austrian and Hungarian chauvinism, a position that brought most of their leaders into the ideological camp of Austro-Marxism.[37] As a reform-oriented movement, leading Austro-Marxist theorists, notably Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, contested that the Monarchy's own burgeoning nationalities question could be resolved by disassociating the concept of nations from specific geographical territories. In place of the homeland, Bauer and Renner echoed Marković in proposing a federalised association of differing cultural groups. In a more practical sense however, leading Austro-Marxists conceived of their theory as an alternative to imperialism, with Austria-Hungary still serving as a force for economic development in the Balkans.[38]

Socialists in Bulgaria and Serbia, by contrast, drew inspiration from more radical movements: both the BWSDP and SSDP for instance, were

modelled on the Social Democratic Party of Germany.[39] Nevertheless, the growing bellicosity of regional nationalism and rising fears regarding Austria-Hungary's territorial aspirations, following the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, prompted the adoption of Balkan Federalism as a solution to regional matters. In defining the concept of *zadruga* socialism, Marković had emphasised the combined potential to serve as a force for direct revolutionary change as one of the Balkan peoples' most shared characteristics. For Tucović, and Marković's other historical heirs, the Balkan revolutionary tradition was reinterpreted as a historical struggle against various regressive forces which sought to stymie the formation of an industrial proletariat. This subsequently redefined the concept of a Balkan Federation as a form of protective carapace to incubate this process, while the nationalities question was perceived as a deliberate ploy by the ruling elites to obfuscate issues of social inequality.[40] In addition, Blagoev, Tucović, Lapčević and other leading pro-Federalists grew increasingly vehement in lobbying for closer inter-regional economic cooperation as a solution to the perceived dominance of Austria-Hungarian capital. Following the cessation of the 'Pig War', in which the Monarchy unsuccessfully attempted to impose a customs blockade on Serbia between 1906 and 1908, Tucović proposed that Serbia turn economically 'inwards' in the pursuit of forming a Balkan Federation. Failure to do so, would, he warned, amount to an effective regression back to the foreign imperial rule that the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians had revolted against during the nineteenth century.[41]

As with its faltering embrace of the peasantry, the Left's efforts to appropriate this revolutionary tradition were contested by the parallel rise of Balkan nationalism. Following Marković's premature death, the Radical-Socialist Party, rebranded as the People's Radical Party in the 1880s had moved away from its socialist roots to embrace a suitably ambiguous mixture of agrarianism, liberalism and Greater Serbian nationalism. Under the direction of Marković's former disciple Nikola Pašić the party came to dominate both Serbian and early-Yugoslavian politics until the 1920s, with Pašić styling himself as the region's Bismarck. Correspondingly, Bulgaria's later shift to full independence in 1908, under its authoritarian Crown Prince Ferdinand I, saw a gradual escalation of nationalist agitation in Macedonia.[42]

In the period immediately preceding 1914, the revolutionary energy of the region increasingly fell under this nationalist sway with Marxist rhetoric employed as an affectation rather than an expression of political intent. Founded in Thessaloniki in 1893, the so-called Internal

Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO) initially espoused the ideological desire for an autonomous Macedonia founded on a belief in ethnic and religious equality and the preservation of the Ottomans' legacy of multi-culturalism. Infiltration by Bulgarian nationalist agitators subverted this idealism however, transforming the IMRO into a vehicle for Greater Bulgarian interests. It was soon joined by rival groups from Greece and Serbia. Assassination, kidnapping and torture, property destruction, and armed robbery were increasingly directed towards civilians as well as the Ottoman authorities. In certain districts, IMRO cells were even reported to be levying taxes in exchange for granting local Christian Slav residents their 'protection', allegedly from Turkish and non-Slavonic Albanian bands.[43]

These activities reached their apex with the Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising in August 1903. A wave of armed insurgencies across Macedonia, supported by the peasantry, elicited a harsh response resulting in the deaths of thousands alongside accusations of mass rape and the punitive burning of homes by Ottoman soldiers, with waves of refugees fleeing to Bulgaria.[44] Lamenting the uprising's consequences, the left-leaning Macedonian Slav linguist Krste Misirkov warned that the cause of revolutionary struggle was now hostage to nationalist 'megalomania':

> … it is not Russia or Austria-Hungary that are the enemies of Macedonia, but Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia. Our country can be saved from ruin only by struggling fiercely against these states … [45]

Regardless of these concerns, for most social democrats in the South Slavonic Balkans regional and international matters, as well as the implications of nationalist violence, were initially only of marginal interest. Despite the overthrow and murder of Serbia's unpopular pro-Habsburg King Aleksander I by a group of nationalist military officers in June 1903 and the outbreak of the Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising less than two months later, neither event was sufficient to sustain the wider interests of the Left. Indeed, beyond overtures to the aspirations for international revolution, even the suggestion of a Balkan Federation initially merited little enthusiasm from the Serb and Bulgarian movements. In 1894 for example, a proclamation by the SDPCS's leader Ivan Ancel that Croats and Serbs were one people was rejected in Serbia. Fearing an attempted Habsburg encroachment, Belgrade's socialist circles insisted that closer relations were unfeasible since their countries' domestic contexts were 'too different'.[46] This was further illustrated during Austria-Hungary's annexation

of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the international crisis it precipitated, in September 1908. Having played an active role in fostering the territory's trade union movement since 1905, with Bosnian Serbs dominating its leadership, the SSDP joined with the government in voicing its opposition to the annexation. Among his comrades, Tucović alone suggested that Bosnia might be representative of a wider Balkan identity rather than an exclusively Serbian one.[47]

The international crisis precipitated by the Habsburg Monarchy's annexation also exposed the ideological cleavage between the SSDP and its Austro-Marxist counterparts. At the 1907 Socialist International Congress in Stuttgart, SSDP delegates clashed with those from the Monarchy over the former's support for an anti-colonial resolution. Opponents argued back that for those living in underdeveloped parts of the world, the 'civilising mission' was necessary to encourage industrialisation and the formation of class consciousness.[48] In a subsequent meeting with Tucović in June 1908, the SDPCS president Vitomar Korać dismissed claims that Bosnian workers were victims of colonial exploitation by the Habsburg administration that had governed the province on behalf of the Ottoman sultan since 1878. Rejecting a memorandum, proposed by Tucović, calling for condemnation of the Dual Monarchy by the International, Korać insisted that full annexation would, in fact, remedy the current suffering and marginalisation of the urban proletariat.[49]

These disparities in opinion failed to deter Tucović's hardening resolve that the intervention demonstrated by Austria-Hungary's 'barbarian act of annexation' constituted the most salient threat to Balkan socialism, dealing a blow to the region's development by jeopardising international peace.[50] While the SSDP's stance on intervention initially represented a minority viewpoint, developments in the 1910s gradually afforded it greater credence alongside the idea of a federal Balkan entity. Already in 1910, Tucović and Lapčević's warnings over the dangers of Austria-Hungary's 'expansionist capitalism' in the Balkans as a threat to wider international peace gained them numerous anti-war allies in the Second International, including Leon Trotsky. Nevertheless, the disproportionate level of influence wielded by larger organisations, particularly the avowedly Austro-Marxist Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria, generated further disenchantment with the association. 'The delegates of the small nations are lost in the Socialist International, just as the small nations are in world politics', Tucović glibly remarked in his correspondence with the SSDP's Central Committee during the 1910 Socialist International Congress in Copenhagen.[51]

Increasing insistence from more radical elements of the left on the need for a social democratic stance moved towards its climax with the outbreak of the Balkan Wars. Leading socialists, including Tucović, were conscripted into the armies of the so-called 'Balkan League' – which included Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia – and mobilised to drive out the remaining Ottoman imperial presence. Writing on the massacre of Albanian civilians in Kosovo by Serbian and Montenegrin forces, the former SSDP leader accused Serbia's ruling elite of waging 'colonial war' and 'the attempted predetermined murder' of the Albanian nation.[52] Yet, in contrast to Misirkov's earlier denunciations, the atrocities perpetuated by the Serbs were simply an expression of malicious 'foreign influences' and 'degenerate higher culture' of Serbia's elite as they sought to imitate Great Power imperialism:

> Our bourgeoisie bends under the pressure of its northern neighbours, clings tightly to the coat-tails of Russian diplomacy, and borrows the means by which it rules from foreign capitalist companies. It has acquired the ideology of an exploiter and a proprietor that sees itself at the head of a hungry army, and as the master of several million oppressed subjects … The very real and, regretfully, evil consequences of that campaign have exposed to the whole nation the incapacity of the ruling classes to conduct a policy which is in the national interest.[53]

Additionally, the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, coupled with a growing intransigence in the attitudes of Austria-Hungary's rulers towards reforming the Dual Monarchy, prompted more moderate socialist factions to reconsider their stance on the notion that Habsburg expansionism might be a 'civilising force'.[54] Seeking to possibly capitalise on any perceived ideological floundering that Budapest and Vienna's increasingly draconian measures may have engendered in the Austro-Marxist camp, Tucović's correspondence insisted that, despite the war, external intrigue represented the greatest danger to regional peace. Only a social-democratic federation, divorced from the 'malign influences' of the Great Powers, could defeat Austria-Hungary and Italy's plans to 'permanently throttle' the revolutionary spirit of the Balkan peoples.[55]

War and Revolution in the South Slavonic Balkans

While the Balkan Wars failed to undermine a growing inter-ethnic dialogue on the prospects of a future federation, the First World War almost immediately halted all socialist activity in the South Slavonic Balkans.

Widespread opposition from the region's social democratic parties resulted in their being banned as part of a wartime cessation of civilian politics. Indeed, by the end of 1915, all socialist parties were dissolved or outlawed as Serbia fell under the occupation of the Central Powers. Alongside an estimated 20 per cent of the entire Serbian national population, many of the Left's most charismatic figures such as Tucović were killed, imprisoned or driven into exile, their voices largely obscured beneath a tide of patriotic propaganda.[56] This fractious context was further exacerbated in September 1915 when Bulgaria formalised an alliance with the Central Powers, disqualifying it from the prospect of joining a post-war South Slavonic State, much to the anger of committed Balkan Federalists.[57]

Developments in Russia invariably cast a lengthy shadow over Balkan politics. With the steady deterioration of morale and wartime conditions within the Habsburg army after 1915, thousands of Bosnian, Croat and Serb peasant recruits stationed on the Eastern Front began to desert, while retaining their weapons and even their military formations. Upon desertion, many of these former soldiers dispersed across the Monarchy's eastern and southern territories, often hiding in woods as outlaws. They were later joined by former POWs returning from captivity in Russia where they had been radicalised by the October Revolution. Although lacking a coherent ideological focus, many of these armed units had organised themselves, often with the support of local peasants, into self-styled 'Green Cadres'. Espousing an anarchic mixture of revolution and peasant autonomy, the Green Cadres launched numerous raids to plunder towns and destroy symbols associated with state authority.[58]

The Russian Revolution's political reverberations had, unsurprisingly, a profound impact on the politically proactive remnants of the South Slavonic Left. However, it would be incorrect to overstate its importance in relation to the war itself. Like the Green Cadres, whose primary motivations were mostly rooted in localised social unrest, even the more radical leftists concerned themselves with the progression of the conflict in South-East Europe and the region's post-war future.[59] Indeed, the sense of trepidation towards the South Slavs' larger neighbours, precipitated by Tucović's earlier warnings, were heightened by the revelation that Italy had been promised extensive territory in the Slav-populated Eastern Adriatic in exchange for its entry into the war against Germany.[60]

By 1917, what remained of the SSDP's exiled leadership had increasingly adopted Tucović's rhetoric of revolutionary unification as the only solution to the threat of Great Power colonialism and the perpetuation of victimhood. In a report to the Third Zimmerwald Conference of anti-war

socialists in Stockholm that year, Dušan Popović, the SSDP secretary, asserted that occupying Habsburg and Bulgarian forces were undertaking an 'extermination campaign' comparable to Armenia.[61] Despite having come to lead the party's pro-Leninist faction, Popović specifically emphasised that continued support for the Entente's war effort, rather than a shift to world revolution, was necessary in order to rescue those who had fallen under the occupation of the Central Powers from 'threatened extinction'.[62]

The ideological mantle of unity through language and tradition conveyed by the mostly Liberal-Nationalist wartime Yugoslavist movement was also demonstrated in appeals for the liberation of Yugoslavia's future working class by Bosnian and Croat delegates.[63] From a Marxist perspective, it was argued that the economic potential of the Habsburg Empire's South Slavonic provinces had been squandered by Austrian and Hungarian officials and landlords treating them as 'African colonies'; forty years of 'civilisatory activity' had yielded few positives to counter widespread illiteracy while those attempting to rectify this state of affairs faced persecution. To the Habsburg authorities, it was argued, civilisation merely equated to the safe-guarding of feudal privileges, ensuring that in Bosnia-Herzegovina '650,000 persons … live in a state of veritable medieval slavery and work like beasts of burden for 10,000 Mussleman Aga families'.[64] In Dalmatia 'the Jugoslav peasant languishes under the latin form of serfdom, the state of the *colonati*'.[65] To the north, feudalism also persisted in 'the serfdom of the mortgage' locking the 'rural masses' into generational cycles of debt exacerbated by banks controlled by a surplus of 'feudal squires and priests'.[66]

On 20 July 1917, Pašić, Serbia's then Prime Minister-in-exile, and Ante Trumbić, the Croat leader of the anti-Habsburg secessionist Yugoslav Committee, signed the Corfu Declaration. This loosely-worded statement of joint intention not only pledged both parties to the Habsburg Monarchy's post-war dissolution, but formalised the creation of an independent South Slavonic state as an official war aim. For the scattered and isolated remnants of the South Slavonic Left, such an action was duly, albeit not always enthusiastically, accepted as a matter of absolute necessity.[67]

The First World War thus represented a contradiction. Despite scattering and dividing the South Slavonic Left, the chaos and humanitarian tragedy inflicted upon the region's civilian populace, notably in Serbia, appeared to validate the radical belief that the pre-war status quo no longer guaranteed the promise of socioeconomic transition. Moreover, while

the deeper repercussions of the Russian Revolution would soon be made apparent, the era of the Great War served more as a point of convergence and consolidation for what would become the main preoccupations of the South Slavonic Left after 1918. Following the sudden death of Popović, its most avowedly pro-Bolshevik leader, in November 1918, a statement issued by the revived SSDP did not even mention Russia, focusing instead on the war, nationalities and denouncing the new Yugoslav government.[68]

Conclusion: The *Völkerabfälle* revival, and the origins of Titoism?

The conclusion of the First World War and subsequent declaration of the Yugoslav Kingdom less than a month later, not only brought previously disparate groupings together into a unified body, but served to determine the final form of South Slavonic socialist politics prior to 1945. Notwithstanding Bulgaria's exclusion from the union, at a practical level the creation of Yugoslavia appeared to initially resolve the more pressing concern of foreign interference. Austria-Hungary was politically moribund by October 1918, and essentially disappeared the following month, while Pašić and Trumbić's skilful negotiating tactics at the Paris Peace Conference had mostly preserved the new country's territorial integrity, despite Italy's aggressive posturing.[69] Internally as well, the principal threat to the Left's aspirations of presenting a radical alternative to the socio-political status quo had already been dealt with by the Serbian army's deployment to the former Habsburg territories in late 1918, leading to the disbanding, or assimilation, of the Green Cadres.[70]

By 1921, the majority of the Yugoslavian Left had unified into the (centrist) Socialist and the (revolutionary) Communist parties. Widespread disaffection from returning soldiers, the unemployed and other marginalised sections of the urban and rural proletariats allowed the latter to achieve its biggest electoral successes, briefly becoming the single largest opposition party in the 1920 elections. Despite a ban on its activities in 1921, and a subsequent failure to articulate a coherent revolutionary alternative to its rival ideologies, the new Communist Party's ability to tap into the rising social unrest bolstered its ranks with newly politicised activists, including a certain Josip Broz 'Tito'.[71]

This article has explored the complex and multi-faceted local and international contexts which shaped the agendas and ideologies of the South Slavonic Left.[72] For the majority of the SSDP and its counterparts in Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, the turn of the twentieth century was defined by a gradual acceptance that a commitment to revolutionary

Marxist doctrine amounted to political oblivion. This shift in priorities was exemplification in reactions to the Bosnian Annexation Crisis of 1908. On the one hand, the ability to shield and nurture a nascent urban working class against the influences of local nationalism or its stifling by parochial, anti-urban agrarian movements, became a central tenet of the socialist mission. By the outbreak of the Balkan Wars however, appropriating the anti-imperialist tenets espoused by their political opponents became an essential strategy in order to protect this fragile process of social transition from the predations of external forces. The excesses of the First World War granted this belief further veracity: Yugoslavia became a necessity for banishing lingering perceptions of the South Slavs as mere *Völkerabfälle* whose destiny would continue to be determined by outsiders.

The decade that preceded the outbreak of the First World War, might therefore be viewed as a period in which the South Slavonic Left sought to develop a 'Balkan' identity. Conversely, the Left's continuing propensity to absorb ideas from outside the region, such as the SDCPS's and YSDP's gravitating towards Austro-Marxism, mirrored divisions already present in international socialism. Fractional tensions and political inconsistency continued after the First World War. In keeping with the Comintern's opposition to the Paris peace settlements, Communist leaders who received instruction in the Soviet Union, argued at first for the immediate dissolution of 'Versailles Yugoslavia'. Such a stance placed them at odds with the party rank and file and the broader Left that now conceived Yugoslavia as critical to a future Balkan Federation; by the 1930s, preserving Yugoslavia as a vehicle for revolution was also a Communist priority.[73] While these ideological currents were repurposed towards the goal of turning the peasantry into an industrial proletariat, their cultural and philosophical form remained. The Left's efforts to confront the nationalities question and economic development before and after the Second World War, recurrently involved a federal solution, built upon localised self-management.[74] Furthermore, the mythologizing of the Communist resistance to the Yugoslav Balkans' occupation by the Axis powers from 1941 to 1945, evoked Tucović's belief in the necessity of cumulative struggle for South Slavonic identity's very existence.[75]

The process through which the pre-Communist Left rationalised and looked to harness regional political traditions, including Balkan Federalism, represented the genesis of a distinctive type of South Slavonic socialist thought that would come to exert considerable influence over the later development of the European and wider international Left.

Notes

1. Pan-Slavism was a political and cultural ideology which advocated unity among Slav-speaking ethnicities. During the nineteenth century different variations appeared in Poland, Russia, Slovakia and the Czech lands as well as the South Slavonic Balkans.
2. F. Engels, 'The Magyar Struggle, 1849', in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 8: Marx and Engels 1848-9*, London 2010, pp232-235.
3. I. Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, Ithaca NY 1984, pp11-12. This deterministic approach has been increasingly challenged by more recent scholarship. See for example D. Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*, New York 2007; P. Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia: Education, Yugoslavism and the Balkans before World War II*, London 2015.
4. E. Michael, *The British and Balkans: Forming Images of Foreign Lands, 1900-1950*, London 2011, p158. Prominent, and frequently cited, examples of this western propensity to essentialise the Balkans as backwards and violent during the Yugoslav Wars include R.D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History*, New York 1993. For a more relativistic variation on this hypothesis see P. Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans*, New York 1995; P. Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century*, Lanham MD 2015.
5. The article also seeks to build upon James Robertson's recent exploration of Serbian socialism's efforts to promote Balkan Federalism, by embracing local traditions and political customs. J. Robertson, 'Imagining the Balkans as a Space of Revolution', *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, Vol. 31, No.2 (May 2017): 403.
6. R. Milentijević, 'Serbian Social Democracy confronts the Nationality Question (1903-1919)', *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, No.1 (1978): 82-83.
7. V. Pribojević and K.Miroslav, eds, *O podrijetlu i slavi Slavena*, Zagreb 1997 [1532], pp136-142.
8. R.D. Greenburg, 'Language, Nationalism and the Yugoslav Successor States' in Camille C. O'Reilly (ed.), *Language, Ethnicity and the State, Volume 2: Minority Languages in Eastern Europe*, Basingstoke 2001, pp18-24.
9. W.D. McClellan, *Svetozar Marković and the Origins of Balkan Socialism*, Princeton NJ 1964, p126.
10. Ibid., pp177-178.

11. Svetozar Marković, *Srbija na istoku*, Niš, 1972 [1872], pp33-41.
12. Ibid., pp172-173.
13. Banac, *The National Question*, pp107-108.
14. S.Marković, 'Socijalism ili društoveno pitanje (1874)', *Sabrani spisi, Vol.4*, Belgrade 1965, p418.
15. Ibid., pp402-406; p423.
16. McClellan, pp271-272.
17. Quoted in ibid., p232.
18. In 1883 for example, the Radical Party's support for a peasant uprising in Serbia's eastern province of Timok, resulted in mass arrests, and even executions, prompting much of its leadership to flee into exile. Augusta Dimou, *Entangled Paths Towards Modernity: Contextualizing Socialism and Nationalism in the Balkans*, Budapest 2009, pp132-133.
19. S. Dimitrijević, 'Srpski socijalisti i stvaranje SKJ', in *Srpska socijaldemokratska partija*, Belgrade 1965, p28. No single ethnic Slovenian polity had ever existed before 1918. During the nineteenth century however, nationalists identified the provinces of Carinthia, Carniola, Prekmurje, Styria and the 'Slovenian Littoral' as the constituent ethnic territories of the Slovene nation. Oto Luther, *The Land Between: A History of Slovenia*, Bern 2008, p120.
20. Dimou, *Entangled Paths*, pp53-54.
21. *Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1919-1929*, Belgrade 1930, p3; P.F. Sugar, *The Industrialization of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1878-1918*, Seattle WA 1963, pp71-73, 233; J.R. Lampe and M.R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550-1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations*, Bloomington IN 1982, pp168-176, 280-288; M. Palairet, *The Balkan Economies c.1800-1914: Evolution without Development*, Cambridge 1997, pp143, 237.
22. J. Tomasevich, *Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia*, Stanford CA 1955, pp6-7.
23. Lampe and Jackson, *Balkan Economic History*, p162.
24. N. Vučo, *Privredna Istorija Sribje do prvog svetskog rata*, Belgrade 1955, pp249-250; Lampe and Jackson, *Balkan Economic History*, pp29-31; R.J. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria, Second Edition*, Cambridge 2005, pp123-124.
25. Tomasevich, *Peasant, Politics, and Economic Change*, pp581-582.
26. Milentijević, *History of the Serbian Socialist Party*, pp288-290.
27. D.Tucović, 'Socijalni uslovi u Srbiji', *Sabrana dela, Vol.4*, Belgrade 1980, pp46-47.
28. Ibid., p.48.
29. R.A. Kann and Z.V. David, *Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands, 1526-1918*, Seattle WA 1984, pp339-341.

30. Banac, *The National Question*, p181.
31. On Stamboliyski and the history of the Agrarian Union see J.D. Bell, *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899-1923*, Princeton NJ 1977.
32. Crampton, *A Concise History*, pp122-125.
33. Milentijević, *History of the Serbian Socialist Party*, pp330-331.
34. F. Veliz, *The Politics of Croatia-Slavonia 1903-1918: Nationalism, State Allegiance and the Changing International Order*, Wiesbaden 2012, pp98-100.
35. I.K. Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908*, Ithaca NY 2013, p29.
36. Two political parties, the People's Party and the True People's Party, were founded in 1907. However, this had only come about because of a growing split in Montenegrin politics over the issue of a future unification with Serbia. S. Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss: The Annexation of Montenegro and the Creation of the Common South Slavic State*, West Lafayette 2008, p12.
37. G. Haupt, *Aspects of International Socialism, 1871-1914*, Cambridge 2011, pp74-76.
38. L.S. Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation: A History of the Movement Toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times*, Hamden 1964, pp132-134; Milentijević, 'Serbian Social Democracy confronts the Nationality Question', p71; Robertson, 'Imagining the Balkans as a Space of Revolution', pp410-415.
39. R. Milentijević, *A History of the Serbian Social-Democratic Party (1903-1919), Origins and Development*, Columbia University PhD 1970, p2.
40. Robertson, 'Imagining the Balkans as a Space of Revolution', p411.
41. D. Tucović, 'Politički momenat u borbi oko trgovinskoga ugovora između Srbije i Austro-Ugarske', *Sabrana dela, Vol. 7*, Belgrade 1980, pp421-426.
42. Dimou, *Entangled Paths Towards Modernity*, p352; Yosmaoglu, *Blood Ties*, p144.
43. M. Biondich, *The Balkans: Revolution, War and Political Violence since 1878*, Oxford 2011, pp67-69.
44. *Makedonija i Odrinsko, 1893-1903: Memoar na vătrĕšnata organizacija*, Sofia 1904, pp10-15; 211-213.
45. Misirkov's anti-Bulgarian rhetoric subsequently resulted in him having to flee Bulgaria to Russia, where he was unable to publish his work internationally. K. Misirkov, *Za makedonckite raboti*, Sofia 1903, pp4-5.
46. Milentijević, *History of the Serbian Social-Democatic Party*, p341.
47. D. Lapčević, *Rat i srpska socijaina demokratija*, Belgrade 1925, pp17-24.
48. S.Dimitrijević, 'Učešće balkanskih socijalista u drugom internacionalu od osnivanja do Kongresa u Kopenhagenu, 1889-1910', *Prilozi za istoriju socijalizma*, No.3 (1966): 24-26.

49. Austria-Hungary had been granted administrative rights in the province under the 1878 Treaty of Berlin. S. Djurović, 'Dimitrije Tucović i Srpske socijaldemokratske partije prema aneksiji Bosne i Hercegovine', in S. Djurović, ed., *Srpska socijaldemokratska partija,* Belgrade 1965, pp105-107.
50. Lapčević, *Rat i srpska socijaina demokratija*, p11.
51. Quoted in Milentijević, *History of the Serbian Social-Democratic Party*, p374.
52. D. Tucović, *Srbija i Arbanija*, Belgrade 1946 [1912], p10.
53. Ibid., p.81.
54. Veliz, *The Politics of Croatia-Slavonia*, pp139-141.
55. Tucović, *Srbija i Arbanija*, pp81-82.
56. Milentijević, *History of the Serbian Social-Democratic Party*, p382. Although Serbia's war losses are believed to have been proportionally among the highest of the war's participants, the exact numbers remain contested due to a lack of records. Estimates range from approximately 450,000 to over 1 million. Danilo Šarenac, 'War Dead as a Yugoslav Burden: Serbian War Casualties and the Interwar Years', presented at ASEEES-MAG Summer Convention 'Images of the Other', Lviv (Ukraine), 27 June 2016.
57. Lapčević*, Rat i srpska*, pp58-61; Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, pp198-201; Veliz, *The Politics of Croatia-Slavonia*, p152.
58. On the role of the Green Cadres as a revolutionary force in early Yugoslavian history see F. Čulinović, *Odjeci oktobra u jugoslavenskim krajevima*, Zagreb 1957; B. Hrabak, *Dezerterstvo, Zeleni kadar i prevratna anarhija u jugoslavenskim zemljama, 1914-1918*, Novi Sad 1990; J. S. Beneš, 'The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918', *Past & Present*, Vol. 236, No.1 (August 2017): 207-241.
59. B.Krizman, *Raspad Austro-Ugarske i stvaranje jugoslavenske države*, Zagreb 1977, pp118-122.
60. The secret treaty of London, signed in April 1915, had promised Italy extensive territorial acquisitions including the city of Trieste and nearly all of the upper Adriatic.
61. *Memorandum by the Serbian Socialist Party upon the Conditions in Occupied Serbia*. Washington DC 1918, pp2, 34-36.
62. Ibid., p.39.
63. M. Radešević and F. Markić, *Memorandum: Addressed by the Jugoslav Socialists to the International Socialist Peace Conference in Stockholm,* London 1917, pp2-3.
64. Ibid., pp.7-8.
65. A tradition of sharecropping originating in the late Roman Empire, ibid., p.9.

66. Ibid., pp.9-11.
67. D. Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija 1917, godine*, Belgrade 1967, pp157-159.
68. Milentijević, *History of the Serbian Social-Democratic Party*, pp427-428.
69. This by no means secured all Slav-inhabited territory in Dalmatia and the Upper Adriatic. Indeed the crisis precipitated by the Italian nationalist Gabrielle D'Annunzio's military occupation of Rijeka (Fiume) from 1919-1920 ensured that the territorial issues surrounding Yugoslavia's western border were not resolved until 1928. D. Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija 1917 Godine*, Belgrade 1967, ppx-xii; J. Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World War*s, Seattle WA 1974, pp232-233; D. Djokić, *Nikola Pašić and Ante Trumbić: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes*, London 2010, pp119-127.
70. Čulinović, *Odjeci oktobra*, p120.
71. J.R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country*, Second Edition, Cambridge 2000, pp122-124.
72. Veliz, *The Politics of Croatia-Slavonia*, p195.
73. See Geoffrey Swain, 'Tito and the Twilight of the Comintern' in Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds), *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919-43*, Manchester 1998.
74. Vladimir Unkovski-Korica's analysis of economic policy in Socialist Yugoslavia provides further consideration of this trend in the context of the early Cold War era. See Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia: From World War II to Non-Alignment*, London 2016.
75. Tucović, *Srbija i Arbanija*, p84.