THE PRESSURES OF POLITICS

The political heritage of the South Slavs reflected the diversity of their history. On the eve of World War I, Serbia was an independent kingdom under the Karageorgević dynasty. It could boast of a democratic constitution and a national assembly, the Skupština, elected by popular male suffrage based on minimal taxation. Croatia, by contrast, had little tradition of democracy. It possessed a provincial assembly, or Sabor, elected by very limited suffrage on a curial basis, but was administered by a *ban* appointed by Budapest. Bosnia-Hercegovina enjoyed even less political experience because before 1910 it had no legislature whatsoever. Montenegro displayed a brief period of constitutional monarchism and manhood suffrage, but the remaining territories, Slovenia, the Vojvodina, and Macedonia, were merely entitled to elect several representatives to the Austrian or the Hungarian or the Turkish parliaments, respectively.

From these varied models the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes adopted the Serbian form of government with only slight modifications. The Vidovdan Constitution of 1921 defined the new Yugoslav state as a "constitutional, parliamentary, and hereditary monarchy" and at the same time retained the basic Serbian constitution of 1903, the one-chamber Skupština and the Karageorgević dynasty, along with the old Serbian administrative system. Universal manhood suffrage and a type of proportional representation (the D'Hondt system) designed to foster large parties rather than encourage smaller factions were introduced.

Except for the Communist Party, which was outlawed in 1921, the main Yugoslav political parties were regional in nature and depended upon the support of one particular nationality. The largest

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Serbian political group was the Radical Party, whose leaders were in power throughout most of the 1920s. The Democratic Party, which eventually split into two divisions, also had a substantial Serbian following, and there existed, in addition, a small Serbian Agrarian group. The spokesman for the Croats was the Croatian Peasant Party; a smaller, bourgeois Croatian Union initially also attempted to compete for votes but later faded. Among the Slovenes, the predominant party was the Slovenian People's Party, whereas the major representative of the Muslims in Bosnia was the Yugoslav Muslim Organization. These parties, then, were the most important, although by no means the only, political forces in the Yugoslav parliamentary era of the twenties.

The leaders of the different political parties varied considerably in their attitudes toward the Jews. Most sympathetic to Jewish causes were the Radicals, the largest Serbian party. Nikola Pašić, party chief and frequent prime minister until his death in 1926, projected an image of himself as a great friend of the Jews. He adopted as his motto the Serbian proverb, "He is my brother, whatever his faith may be," and thereby gained the loyal support of many Serbian Jews.[1] Much the same could be said for Milan Srškić, the Radical boss in Bosnia. As president of the regional government and later minister of justice and premier of the royal government in the early 1930s, he helped protect the constitutional rights of the Jewish minority. In return he generally received the bulk of the Sarajevo Jewish vote.[2] The leaders of the Democratic Party, such as Ljubomir Davidović, appear to have had a rather neutral record with regard to the Jews, and their party too received a share of the ballots cast by Jews, especially in the Belgrade area.[3]

The leadership of the Croatian Peasant Party, however, in particular Stjepan Radić, one of its founders, occasionally resorted to anti-Semitic demagoguery. As early as 1906 Radić published a polemical article entitled "Jewry as a Negative Cultural Element."[4] He continued to make anti-Semitic remarks part of his campaign rhetoric for opportunistic reasons throughout the 1920s. However, because anti-Semitism was by no means a major plank in his platform, he should not be considered in the same class as other blatantly anti-Semitic politicians elsewhere in Eastern Europe at the time.[5] Nevertheless, Croatian Jews were rarely found among his followers, even though he constantly swept the Croatian electorate for his party. Not unlike Radić was Msgr. Anton Korošec, the moving spirit of the Slovenian People's Party. The party and its leader were devoutly Catholic and had little love for the Jews on religious rather than racial

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grounds. Although Korošec was rarely openly anti-Semitic in his speeches, he was the initiator of the first anti-Jewish legislation passed in late 1940. Mehmed Spaho, the leader of the Yugoslav Muslim Organization was himself not overtly anti-Semitic; but his party received almost no Jewish backing because it sponsored such programs as a boycott of Jewish stores in Bosnia in 1925. The only other political figure of any significance with respect to the Jews was Dimitrije Ljotić, who was minister of justice for a brief period in 1931 and later head of the tiny Fascist group, called Zbor. This group, centered in the Vojvodina, received 1 percent of the total vote in the 1938 election.[6] Ljotić' s anti-Semitism was undisguised and unrestrained; he enjoyed little popularity but nonetheless made his voice heard. The Croatian Fascists, known as the Ustaši, did not participate in the Yugoslav parliamentary system during the interwar period, but operated illegally, primarily in exile in Italy. They apparently were not concerned to any great extent with anti-Semitism before the outbreak of the war.

Yugoslav political life in the interwar period, especially in its first decade, presented a very complex picture of shifting coalitions and bitter feuds. At issue was the nature of the state organization. Despite the efforts of most Croats and Slovenes and some Serbs to find a federal solution, the Vidovdan Constitution, supported by most Serbs and Montenegrins, established a centralized state with all power emanating from Belgrade. This continuing dispute led to parliamentary stagnation and constant governmental crises. Frustration in parliament brought on by the obstructionist tactics of the opposition culminated in the shooting of Stjepan Radić, the Croatian Peasant Party leader, in the Skupština in 1928. Six months later, lacking a viable alternative for restoring order in his chaotic state, King Alexander declared a personal dictatorship. The country was renamed Yugoslavia and redistricted along geographic rather than historic lines in order to blur traditional regional-ethnic loyalties. In 1931 the king promulgated a new constitution and restored limited parliamentary government. No parties were allowed to exist—just the government and opposition blocs. Yugoslavia was somewhat less authoritarian than many countries in Eastern Europe in the thirties, but it could no longer be considered a parliamentary democracy.

The role of the Jews in the political activities of the South Slav lands was a very minor one. Before World War I there was generally one Jewish member in each of the various national assemblies. In the

Serbian Skupština, Avram Ozerović, a fairly assimilated, wealthy Belgrade merchant, served as a Progressive (conservative) deputy in the 1880s and 1890s; later Bencion Buli (1867–1933), a prominent Belgrade banker, held a seat as Radical representative. Both men were very active members of the Belgrade Sephardic community and served as its president for a number of years.[7] In Croatia, Emmanuel Prister and Dr. Ljudevit Schwarz, both leading members of the Zagreb Jewish community, were elected deputies to the Sabor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[8] It was only in Bosnia that Jews were appointed and elected to office specifically as Jews and by Jews. In 1877, shortly before the end of Ottoman rule, Javer effendi Baruh and Salamon effendi Salom became representatives of Bosnian Jewry to the Turkish parliament.[9]

For the first elections to the Bosnian Sabor in 1910 after the Austro-Hungarian annexation, the authorities established a separate Jewish electoral curia. Officially the Jews received two seats in the assembly, one for a virilist (or ex officio member) to which the head rabbi of the Sarajevo Sephardic community was appointed and the other for an elected deputy. In the subsequent election, the president of the Sarajevo Sephardic community, Ješua D. Salom, an affluent banker, soundly defeated Dr. Moritz Rothkopf, a well-respected lawyer and president of the rival Ashkenazic community. Unofficially there was a third Jewish member of the Sabor: the president of the local bar association, first Dr. Josip Fischer, the integrationist vice-president of the Ashkenazic community, and later Dr. Rothkopf, also held a virilist seat.[10] Thus Bosnian Jews were much better represented in parliament on the eve of World War I than their Serbian or Croatian counterparts, and, unlike the others, they ran, for the most part, overtly as Jews.

In the interwar period, Jews proved less successful in being elected to national office. No Jewish party came into existence, although Jewish activists suggested the idea several times, especially in the Vojvodina where Jews lived in greatest concentration.[11] Considering the nature of the Yugoslav voting system with its proportional representation and the diverse character of the Jewish population, both geographically and ideologically, the concept of a separate Jewish list was highly impractical, except on the municipal level. As in western European countries, the only hope for a Jewish presence in the legislature was through the established political parties. Since the Jewish vote was nowhere crucial, except perhaps in the city of Sarajevo, it was difficult to make deals with the major parties. As a result, a Jewish candidate had to be nominated on the

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basis of his merits as a party loyalist, not primarily as a Jew.[12]

No Jewish representative sat in the Constituent Assembly or the first two postwar parliaments, although several Jewish candidates, mainly Radicals and Democrats, but also Socialists, were on electoral lists. In 1927 a Jew was elected to the Skupština as a Radical deputy. He was Šemaja Demajo, a lawyer, who was prominent in Belgrade Radical circles, an active member of the Sephardic community, and a non-Zionist.[13] In the 1930s, the era of dictatorship and limited parliamentary government, few Jews, if any, were interested in running for national office and none was elected during that decade. In 1932 King Alexander appointed the chief rabbi of Yugoslavia, Dr. Isaac Alcalay of Belgrade, as an ex officio member of the newly created Senate;[14] in this capacity he served as permanent representative of all the Jews in the country.

The leading Jewish figures in the Radical Party in Belgrade during the twenties were Šemaja Demajo, Dr. Jakov Čelebonović, a lawyer, Dr. David Albala, a medical doctor, Solomon Azriel (1852– 1928), a merchant, and Šalom Ruso, a teacher. These men shared a number of characteristics: except for Ruso, they were all at one time or another during the interwar period president of the Belgrade Sephardic community (Ruso, however, was an active member of the communal executive); all but Albala had been elected members of the Belgrade municipal council (Albala had run for office but been defeated); and, with the exception of Albala again, none of them was a fervent Zionist. Other communal presidents during this interwar period were also politically involved: Rafailo Finci, a merchant, Dr. Solomon Alkalaj and Dr. Bukić Pijade, both physicians, were all active Democrats, as was Dr. Friedrich Pops, a lawyer, president of the Belgrade Ashkenazic community throughout the period and president of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities after 1933. Pijade and Pops were elected members of the Belgrade municipal council; they were both Zionists, whereas Finci and Alkalaj were prominent in the Belgrade Sephardic Organization. It is clear that those who played an active role in politics stood in the forefront of Jewish affairs as well.

In Sarajevo there was generally more political activity among the Jews around election time than in Belgrade or Zagreb. The Radical Party held large campaign meetings with speeches and propaganda in Ladino.[15] Undoubtedly this was due to the strategic significance of the Jewish vote to the Radicals in the multiethnic city. The Democrats campaigned less among the Sarajevo Jews, and the Croat and Muslim parties hardly at all.[16] The leading Sarajevo Radicals were Dr.

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Vita Kajon, a banker, intellectual, and vocal Sephardic champion, Avram Majer Altarac, a wealthy merchant and long-time president of the Sephardic community, Dr. Pepi Baruch, a maverick judge, and Silvio Alkalaj, a Zionist. The spokesman for the Democrats was Dr. Jakov Kajon, a respected lawyer and vice-president of the Sephardic community. In addition, a few Jews were active in the rather small Socialist camp, the most important being Dr. Mojsije Zon (1891–), a physician, originally from Poland.[17] It would appear, however, that the Radicals had fairly solid control over the Sarajevo Jewish vote in the 1920s, especially after a boycott of Jewish stores sponsored by the Yugoslav Muslim Organization in 1925 and the subsequent alliance of the Democrats with the Muslims.[18] By the late thirties the Sarajevo Jews were somewhat less prone to vote for the government; of the 2,234 eligible Jewish voters in the 1938 elections, 403 voted for the Stojadinović dictatorship government, 1,124 for the opposition, none for Ljotić's Fascists, and 808 did not cast ballots at all.[19] Thus, three-quarters of Sarajevo Jews joined the antigovernment forces openly, despite a strong government appeal for their support.

As for municipal politics, Sarajevo differed from Belgrade in that there continued to be a separate Jewish list in local elections. In 1928 in the first elections for city council held since the war, two Jewish lists competed for votes: the Sephardic and Ashkenazic establishment, known as the Political Committee of Jews, headed by Avram Majer Altarac, and a worker-youth coalition, predominantly Sephardic, led by Dr. Pepi Baruch. The former received 945 votes and 3 seats; the latter gained 698 votes and 2 seats. Hence, on the thirty-five member council, there were 5 Jews, all elected on Jewish platforms. The Altarac group aligned itself with the Radical Party and the 2 dissidents with the Muslims, Croats, and splinter groups.[20] More class conflict was in evidence among the Jews in Sarajevo than elsewhere; their election behavior is but one means of demonstrating this fact. Jewish solidarity did not always remain intact when economic and social interests, as well as personality factors, dictated otherwise.

In Zagreb the Jewish political situation looked very different. Jews did not play an active part in Croatian politics on the national level. In local elections, instead of conflict between political parties as in Belgrade or class antagonisms as in Sarajevo, there was a struggle between Zionists and integrationists for control over Jewish representation. The real debate centered around whether to run for office as a Jew on a Jewish ticket or as a Croat of the Israelite faith on a broader platform. Unfortunately for the proponents of the latter view, there was not much choice for Jews within the Croatian poli-

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tical spectrum. The major force was the Croatian Peasant Party, peasantist in orientation and somewhat anti-Semitic. The only possible alternative was the Croatian Union, a more middle-class party, which, however, lacked popular appeal, even among the bourgeois Jews.

The 1920 municipal election was the first in Zagreb with a separate Jewish list, led by two active Zionists, Lav Stern, a bank director, who was to become vice-president of the Jewish community, and Dr. Marko Horn, a lawyer and future communal president in the 1930s. Out of 833 Jewish voters, 496 chose the Jewish list. This marked a decisive defeat for the predominantly integrationist Jewish communal executive, although its president, Dr. Robert Siebenschein, was elected on the Croatian Union ticket. In the next election, at the end of 1921, despite vigorous propaganda on the part of Narodni Rad, the small but vocal integrationist group, the Jewish list won 75 percent of the Jewish vote, putting into office Dr. Hugo Kon, the recently elected president of the community, a lawyer and a Zionist, and Dr. Marko Horn. In 1925 the same two deputies were reelected by 88 percent of the Jewish vote. Two years later Jewish voters elected a third Zionist candidate, Makso Bauer, a lawyer, when 806 out of 983 cast their ballots for the Jewish list.[21] Jewish voter participation in Zagreb municipal elections was fairly low–48 percent and 45 percent in the 1925 and 1927 elections, respectively—but it is apparent that those who did vote clearly preferred the Jewish list under Zionist control to any of the Croatian parties, no matter what Jews happened to be running on the various platforms. Throughout the 1930s, the Jewish list managed to maintain its two mandates, Dr. Hugo Kon and Dr. Marko Bauer, another communal activist, while several other Jews, among them Dr. Robert Siebenschein, elected on other tickets, regularly served on the city council as well.[22] Despite considerable voter apathy, Zagreb remained a Zionist stronghold throughout the interwar period.

When comparing the political scene in the three cities, the differences prove striking, but the similarities are perhaps more significant. Belgrade Jews were much better integrated into Yugoslav political life than the majority of their contemporaries in Zagreb. Serbian and Bosnian Jewry could at least find national parties for which they could, in all conscience, vote and which they felt represented their interests; Croatian Jewry generally lacked this opportunity, being too Croatian in sympathy to vote for any of the ultra-Serbian parties, yet finding the Croatian parties unreceptive to their outlooks and aspirations. In Zagreb and Sarajevo, Jewish lists were

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put forth in municipal elections and received most of the Jewish vote, whereas, in Belgrade, this was never considered necessary. Such distinctions were produced by the diversity of environments in which the Jews found themselves.

Other parallels can be drawn from within the Jewish context itself. Jews who participated most actively in the general political sphere played a very prominent role in Jewish communal affairs as well. Even the integrationist-oriented politicians generally took an important part, particularly in Jewish philanthropic endeavors, such as the Hevra Kaddisha. The Sephardic activists were the backbone of their respective communities, and the Zionists provided much of the new Ashkenazic leadership, especially in Zagreb. Only in Zagreb did candidates run on an openly Zionist platform; in Sephardic circles, it was neither advantageous nor desirable. In fact, unless elected on a specifically Zionist ticket, Jewish deputies tended to be non-Zionist in sympathy. Another common characteristic was that of wealth. All successful Jewish candidates seem to have belonged to the affluent strata and most of them were professionals. Indeed, very few Jews engaged in Yugoslav politics in the interwar period, and with few exceptions, the primary function of this elite was to defend the interests of their fellow Jews, mainly on the local level. It is hence no coincidence that this narrow circle corresponds almost exactly to the roster of presidents of the various Jewish communities during the same two decades.

In contrast to the rather small number of older Jews who participated in the official political parties, there was a sizable group of younger Jews who played an active role in the illegal Communist Party, which functioned as an underground movement after 1921. The exact number of Jewish Communists in Yugoslavia in the interwar period is difficult to establish, since membership was secret and Jews were not counted separately in their midst. Some indication of left-wing Jewish activity may be taken from the fact that among a list of 89 Communists in jail in Sarajevo in 1929, there were 8 unmistakably Jewish names to be found.[23] As the thirties progressed, more and more Jewish students, especially those studying abroad in such places as Prague but also a growing number at the universities in Zagreb and Belgrade, joined the ranks of Communist sympathizers.[24] Many of these young radicals had formerly been active members of Jewish youth organizations, in particular Hashomer Hatzair. Seventeen Yugoslav Jews, including 5 from Zagreb and 3 each from Belgrade and Sarajevo, fought in the Spanish Civil War.[25] This is surely a remarkable figure, considering that the total number of Jews within the

Yugoslav Communist Party could not have been very large at the time.

The most important and best known Jewish representative in the history of Yugoslav Communism was Moše Pijade, who was born in Belgrade's Dorćol. An artist and a journalist, he became the chief ideologist of the movement, translating Marx into Serbo-Croatian while spending most of the interwar years in prison. During and after the war, Pijade was Tito's right-hand man. Designated a National Hero, the highest possible honor granted by the socialist state, he served as vice-president of Yugoslavia until his death in 1955.

Jewish Communists in the interwar period in general no longer took part in Jewish communal life, religious or national. Not denying their Jewish origins, they considered themselves primarily Yugoslavs rather than Jews. Although their contribution to the development of Communism in their country was perhaps not as great as that of Jewish Communists elsewhere in Eastern Europe, nevertheless their role in helping to lay the foundations for the future Yugoslavia was of some significance.

In general, the official attitude of the Yugoslav government toward the Jewish minority until the very end of the interwar period was sympathetic. This, to a large extent, was due to the tradition of tolerance of the Serbian Orthodox church and to the friendly relations maintained between the Serbian people and the native Sephardic Jews. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the government was essentially controlled by Serbs, and policy reflected their viewpoint.

The Serbs considered the local Jews patriotic citizens because they had served bravely in both the Balkan Wars and World War I. Approximately six hundred Jews fought alongside the Serbs as both soldiers and officers; of these, about one-quarter were killed or died from typhus. Sixty-two Belgrade Jews were included among these victims. Several Jews received high military decorations, and in 1927 the Belgrade Jewish community erected a monument to the Jewish war dead.[26] Bosnian and Croatian Jews had also served in World War I in the Austro-Hungarian army. The newly created Yugoslav state did not regard such behavior with equal favor, however, and tended to question the loyalty of Jews outside Serbia. As a result, Belgrade Jews were regularly chosen as representatives of all Yugoslav Jewry before the king, and de facto, if not de jure, they enjoyed a rather special position.

Although the law recognized the Jews as a religious rather than

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a national minority, the Serbian, and later the Yugoslav, government at all times displayed sympathy for the Zionist cause. The Serbian government became one of the first to express its official support for the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917. A letter dated Washington, December 27, 1917, from Milenko Vesnić, the head of the Serbian War Mission to the United States, to Dr. David Albala, medical captain in the Serbian Army, then on a propaganda campaign for Serbia among American Jewry, contained the following message, in the original English:

> I wish to express to your jewish [*sic*] brothers . . . the sympathy of our Government and of our people for the just endeavour of resuscitating their beloved country in Palestine, which will enable them to take their place in the future Society of Nations, according to their numerous capacities and to their unquestioned right. We are sure this will not only be to their own interest, but at the same time, to that of the whole of humanity.
>
> You know, dear Captain Albala, that there is no other nation in the world sympathizing with this plan more than Serbia. Do we not shed bitter tears on the rivers of Babylon in sight of our beloved land lost only a short time ago? How should we not participate in your clamours and sorrows, lasting ages and generations, especially when our countrymen of your origin and religion have fought for their Serbian fatherland as well as the best of our soldiers.
>
> It will be a sad thing for us to see any of our Jewish fellowcitizens leaving us to return to their promised land, but we shall console ourselves in the hope that they will stand [*sic*] as brothers and leave with us a good part of their hearts, and that they will be the strongest tie between free Israel and Serbia.[27]

Undoubtedly the primary purpose of this so-called Vesnić letter was to gain more aid for the Serbian war effort in America, but at the same time it laid the foundation for future policy. Vesnić later represented the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes at the San Remo Conference in 1920, where he continued to back Jewish nationalist aspirations.[28]

The Karageorgević royal household always maintained a cordial relationship with the Jewish community and its representatives. The Yugoslav chief rabbi, Dr. Isaac Alcalay, was an intimate friend of the family and a confidant of the king.[29] Jewish leaders frequently received civilian decorations from the Crown; the most common were the different degrees of the Order of Sveti Sava (Saint Sava) and the Order of the White Eagle. King Alexander granted audiences to Jewish delegations on such occasions as the visits to Yugoslavia of prominent Zionists, like Nahum Sokolow in 1928 and Menahem Ussishkin two years later. At such times he expressed interest in the Palestine

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situation, especially with regard to the position of the Orthodox churches, over which he considered himself protector, as successor to the Russian tsar.[30] In 1928 a forest in Palestine was dedicated in the name of the late King Peter, whom the Jews regarded as a strong ally; in 1934, after the assassination of King Alexander, a similar forest was planted in his memory.[31] Later, under the regent, Prince Paul, interviews with Jewish representatives tended to be on the subject of Jewish security and anti-Semitism, rather than discussions of Zionism. The royal family continued to maintain close ties with individual Jews and to express concern for Jewish problems even after the young King Peter went into exile.[32]

Indeed, the general consensus among virtually all government spokesmen until the very end of the interwar period was that no anti-Semitic movement and no "Jewish question" existed in Yugoslavia. This attitude was clearly articulated in 1929 by Dr. Vojislav Marinkovic, Minister of External Affairs, in an interview with Jakob Landau, director of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

> Our country does not suffer from the poison of anti-Semitism. On the contrary, we value and love the Jews. And that is no coincidence. The historical development of our nation was in many respects similar to the development of the Jewish nation. We had to undergo so much suffering and misfortune and so many bloody battles in which we bore so many sacrifices for freedom that we have and have always had full understanding for the Jews whose history knows so much hardship and suffering, just because the Jews too faithfully preserved their faith and community. In this regard, the same endurance, stamina and perseverence ties us together, so that it is natural that Serbs and Jews should understand one another.
>
> We value the loyalty which the Jew has for his faith and it is very remote from any thought that we scorn or slight a Jew on this account. . . .[33]

These same themes of common history, patriotism, respect, and toleration constantly repeated themselves, even after the skies had begun to darken over European Jewry. Before the outbreak of World War II, each successive government regularly reassured Jewish deputations that nothing could happen to the Jews in Yugoslavia and that their government would always protect them.[34]

In 1938 and 1939 two books, evidently government sponsored, appeared on the market in defense of the Jews, stressing their patriotism and other positive characteristics.[35] In 1940 a collection of short essays by forty prominent Yugoslavs, mainly Serbs, but including several Jews as well, were published under the title *Our Jews.* In general, the purpose of this volume was to demonstrate how much

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the local populace loved the native Jews. Foreign Jews, however, did not receive quite such favorable treatment.[36] Until the outbreak of the war, the official policy was that stated by Dr. Anton Korošec, then Minister of the Interior, in a speech in September of 1938:

> Among us in Yugoslavia, as everyone can testify, the Jewish question does not exist. Yugoslavia is among the few states which are not bothered by this question. That is the best proof that the Jews among us are treated as citizens with equal rights. All the benefits of the law are extended to Jews just as to other citizens; the same holds true for all obligations of the law as well. As far as the emigration of Jews from other states is concerned, which is today on the agenda, we maintain this principle: No state in the world in present circumstances wishes to increase the number of its minorities, be that minority linguistic, religious or other. . .,[37]

Thus, the country's political leaders continued to deny the existence of anti-Semitism or of a "Jewish problem" in Yugoslavia.

An organized anti-Semitic movement never existed in Yugoslavia before World War II. Nevertheless, with increasing frequency over the years, sporadic incidents occurred in scattered parts of the country, reflecting the influence of foreign currents and events. Here as elsewhere in Europe, anti-Semitism was scarcely a new phenomenon in the twentieth century; it had revived as a force in the 1880s and then seemed to go into eclipse until the interwar period.[38] Such minor anti-Semitic outbreaks as did take place from time to time did not have any official support from the king, the government, or the Serbian Orthodox church.

Despite the general policy of fair treatment toward the Jews and the frequent denials of the existence of anti-Semitism, some instances of bureaucratic discrimination against Jews per se can be cited, especially in the immediate post-World War I era. Antagonism tended to focus on the recent Ashkenazic immigrants, former citizens of the Habsburg Monarchy, whom the native inhabitants often regarded as an alien element and accused of being war profiteers or Communist sympathizers.[39] In May 1919 local authorities began a series of expulsions of such "foreigners," chiefly from Bosnia but also from Croatia. A number of protests ensued, from Serbian sources as well as Jewish organizations, such as the newly created Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, the national Zionist Federation and the Committee of Jewish Delegations at the Paris Peace Conference. Eventually, through their combined efforts, these forces succeeded

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in rectifying the matter, but not before a considerable amount of suffering on the part of innocent individuals had resulted.[40]

A similar situation arose regarding the right of Jews to vote for the Constituent Assembly in 1920. The problem originated out of a dubious interpretation of the "option clause" for former Austro-Hungarian citizens which had been included in the various peace treaties.[41] Since the Jews in nearly all parts of the country except Serbia were theoretically eligible to choose Austrian or Hungarian rather than Yugoslav citizenship, it was arbitrarily decided that all Jews in territories formerly belonging to the Habsburg Empire should not have the right to vote in the first postwar election. This conclusion was scarcely consistent with the official policy that Jews were a religious minority but part of the Serb-Croat nationality. The Jews, especially the Sephardim, raised a clamor in opposition to this administrative decree. In Sarajevo two thousand people attended a protest meeting which resulted in a spirited resolution being sent to the Ministry of Interior.[42] At the last second, these efforts met with success; Bosnian Jewry, both Sephardic and Ashkenazic, received the right to vote for the Constituent Assembly.[43] It is unclear from the material available whether or not Croatian Jewry was able to vote at this time. The Jews of the Vojvodina, however, had to wait several more years before their citizenship and voting rights became clarified.[44]

Such examples do not necessarily imply a deliberate policy of official discrimination against Jews as such. On the contrary, they seem to reflect anti-Habsburg xenophobia on the part of local administrative officials rather than concerted anti-Semitism. There was never any dispute over the citizenship or electoral rights of the native Jews, the Serbian Sephardim. Questions only arose pertaining to the legal status of "foreign," or Austro-Hungarian, Jews, especially the Hungarian or German-speaking Ashkenazim.

In the 1920s there was no clear pattern to the various instances of anti-Semitic activity. In 1920 a petition was signed by 340 Zagreb medical students demanding a numerus clausus for all "native Jews" and the expulsion of all "foreign" Jews from the medical faculty of Zagreb University.[45] This appeal, obviously an imitation of the contemporaneous situation in Hungary, came to nought. In 1925 the Yugoslav Muslim Organization called for a boycott against Jewish stores in Bosnia. The motive was primarily political revenge, because the Jews had voted for the Radical Party in the recent election, but overtones of religious anti-Semitism developed when the action was proclaimed in mosques as well as

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newspapers. The boycott itself was a failure and was suppressed by local police.[46] Three years later, a peculiar incident erupted into a minor scandal. An air force general had issued a decree cautioning his officers against marrying Jewish women, lest they be considered subversive. This type of action was so entirely out of keeping with standard policy that it could scarcely be believed—and was, of course, officially denied.[47] Potentially of greater consequence was a blood libel accusation which took place in 1928 in Petrovo Selo, a predominantly Hungarian town in the Vojvodina. This rumor was promptly squelched by the courts, and the furor soon died down.[48] These four isolated events, unfortunate as they were in their occurrence, created but a mild stir at the time and had little lasting effect on Yugoslav or Jewish life.

In the 1930s, however, there was a dramatic change. Instead of unrelated happenings at infrequent intervals, anti-Semitic phenomena appeared more regularly, especially in the press, and could most often be linked with Nazi propaganda sources. In 1933 the National Socialist organ *Völkischer Beobachter* in Munich published in German and Croatian an appeal signed by "Croatian nationalists" for a boycott of Jewish shops in Zagreb in response to the Jewish boycott of German goods.[49] Thereafter, articles of an anti-Semitic nature became a common sight in certain newspapers, such as *Balkan* and *Vreme* in Belgrade and similar publications in Croatia and Slovenia. The most flagrant proponent of Nazi racist ideology was *Die Erwache,* the paper of the pro-Fascist Ljotić group in the Vojvodina. At the same time, small local groups began to circulate anti-Semitic pamphlets. By 1936 *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* had been translated into Serbo-Croatian and distributed, and tracts on such topics as "Jews and Masons," the "Talmud Jew," "The Jewish Problem" rolled off the anti-Semitic underground press. There was nothing at all original about this literature; it was all merely copied from abroad. As World War II approached, anti-Semitic manifestations grew more and more common.

The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities served as the Yugoslav Jewish defense agency or antidefamation league. Indeed, one of the most important functions of this supracommunal body involved the protection of Jewish rights, both inside and outside Yugoslavia. Even before the federation received formal government recognition, it became active in the struggle to prevent mass expulsions of Jews with foreign citizenship from Bosnia and Croatia.

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Through a series of appeals and interventions, it played an instrumental role in sparing hundreds of Jews from illegal eviction.[50] Similarly, throughout the interwar years, the central Jewish authorities fought to gain Yugoslav citizenship for foreign-born Jews, especially those in the Vojvodina. This issue was particularly crucial to the Jewish community as it pertained to foreign religious functionaries and teachers, who were desperately needed to fill the ranks of these professions due to the serious lack of qualified native Yugoslavs. When actual citizenship was not forthcoming from the government, the communal federation pressed for regular renewal of temporary residence permits.[51] As the mediator between the government and individual Jews or communities, the federation generally met with considerable success. Although the relations between synagogue and state were not always perfect, for the most part, such arrangements worked out satisfactorily.

During the first decade of the interwar period, the federation concentrated on defending the rights of foreign Jews in Yugoslavia and opposing discrimination outside the country's borders, such as in neighboring Hungary and Rumania. By the mid-1930s, however, there was a growing concern within the Jewish community, particularly among its leadership, about the deteriorating situation not only beyond their own frontiers but inside their own territory as well. Yugoslav Jewry was at all times well informed of current events in Germany and elsewhere. Although they expressed confidence that such developments could never happen in their homeland, they were nonetheless determined to take whatever steps they could to curb anti-Semitism and secure their own safety.

In October 1933 the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities issued a memorandum to all its members to be on the alert for any signs of anti-Semitism and to report them immediately.[52] At the federation's Sixth Congress held in Belgrade in March 1936, the central committee passed a unanimous resolution condemning antiSemitism in Yugoslavia, which stated:

> The Congress of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia is conscious of the significance of the more frequent anti-Jewish attacks which are being conducted in our land without hinderance, although they violate the principle of equality of religious communities. The Congress states that antiSemitism, as an expression of the most hateful reaction, cannot cause the feeling of civil equality and patriotic duty to waver among the Jews of this land. The Congress considers that anti-Semitism, in addition to being degrading and humiliating for Jews, also brings great moral harm to the reputation of the state. The Jews can pit

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against anti-Semitic attacks only their own feeling of honor and human dignity.

The Congress states that these occurrences, which until recently were almost unknown among us and which in its deep conviction do not have roots in the broad strata of the people, imbued with traditional kind-heartedness, have created a justifiable and great discomfort in our Jewish community and it seeks and expects from all official factions the respect of full and actual equality.[53]

In addition to making general condemnations, the federation also attempted to take positive action in opposing anti-Semitism, through interventions with various authorities, court cases, and press coverage.

In 1936 there was an unsuccessful attempt to have the *Protocols* banned from Yugoslavia.[54] Later that same year, the communal federation brought a libel charge against the editor of *Die Erwache.* The court acquitted the accused on the somewhat dubious grounds that according to the constitution, the Jews were a religious, rather than a national minority, whereas the newspapers' attacks had been against the Jewish race and not the Jewish religion![55] Hence the Jews were denied protection by the constitution in this instance. Further efforts at prosecution of the anti-Semitic press also ended in failure. Frequent interviews of Jewish representatives with government officiais throughout the decade and various appeals to the authorities for help in combating anti-Semitism resulted in empty verbal assurances but little concrete support.

Also arising out of the anti-Semitic fervor spreading throughout Europe, another issue which greatly concerned the communal federation during the thirties was the question of Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied countries. The first refugees began to arrive from Germany in 1933, soon after Hitler came to power, and immediately Yugoslav Jewry started to organize its resources to help them. In agreement with the federation, the Zagreb Jewish community established a Local Committee for Aid to Jews from Germany, headed by Dr. Makso Pscherhof, vice-president of the Zagreb executive. From the beginning, virtually all Jewish institutions contributed generously to this cause. The Yugoslav volunteers, led by Alexander Klein, the secretary of the Zagreb community, worked in conjunction with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the JOINT) and the European branch of HICEM, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, based in Paris. In 1933 about 4,400 German refugees reached Zagreb, and the following year 4,200 more. The Zagreb committee managed to collect donations of 1,180,000 dinars ($21,000) the first year and

2,660,000 ($47,500) the second from within the community, plus substantial funds from outside sources.[56] From 1934 to 1937 the number of arrivals fell, but considerable amounts of money were still required to help persons find new homes. Generally, it proved difficult for refugees to establish permanent residence in Yugoslavia. Therefore, most recent emigres needed to locate opportunities for settling elsewhere, mainly in Palestine. The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities and the Zionist Federation, as well as various other affiliated organizations, were constantly searching for places where these people could go and the means to get them there. In 1936 a Central Committee for Aid to Jews from Germany was organized in Belgrade.[57]

The general situation deteriorated rapidly in 1938 with mass emigration and expulsions of Jews from Austria after the Anschluss. The most publicized incident was the case of eighty Jews from Burgenland, who were evicted from their towns and became stranded on the Yugoslav border, lacking visas. After several months of difficult negotiations, the federation obtained permission from the government for these unfortunates to enter Yugoslavia on a temporary basis with guaranteed support from the Jewish community. As the dismal parade of refugees grew ever longer, it became imperative to erect special facilities to house these unfortunate people. Between 1938 and 1940 the communal federation established fifteen collection centers for 3,210 persons in various parts of the country.[58]

In the late thirties, thousands of Jews succeeded in escaping from Europe by boats along the Danube to the Black Sea with aid from the Belgrade Jewish leaders. The last transport reached the YugoslavRumanian border in October 1939 with 1,100 passengers on board. But the Rumanian authorities refused to allow the ship passage through Rumanian waters, and these refugees were forced to remain in Yugoslavia where they found accommodations in Kladova and later Šabac.[59]

The cost involved in caring for the refugees and finding ways for them to leave the country was enormous. In 1938 the federation proposed a 20–30 percent communal tax increase to cover these expenses, and the various Jewish communities complied with 10–50 percent raises, but by 1940 this allotment had to be raised to 60 percent or higher.[60] Communities which were otherwise often unwilling to contribute their share to the communal federation usually managed to afford this donation to the central aid fund. From 1933 to 1941 Yugoslav Jewry raised 41,575,000 dinars ($742,410) in support of the refugees, while JOINT contributed 21,650,000 dinars

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($386,607) and HICEM, 15,520,000 dinars ($277,142). The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities and the Zagreb Jewish community helped some 55,000 Jewish refugees during their stay in Yugoslavia, and the Zionist Federation and many other Jewish organizations gave generously of their time, money, and efforts.[61]

Despite all the aid given to these refugees by the Jewish community, their situation remained extremely precarious, especially after the outbreak of the war.

Throughout the 1930s, Yugoslavia was gradually slipping under the economic and political domination of Germany. The government found itself increasingly under pressure to conform to Nazi policy. Yugoslavia apparently had little difficulty resisting the introduction of anti-Jewish laws before the invasion of Poland. Soon after, however, following the precedents set by virtually every other country in Eastern Europe, the Yugoslav government also succumbed to outside influence.

Yugoslavia proved to be no different from other countries in its unwillingness to accept Jewish refugees in the 1930s. The first discriminatory legislation proposed against the Jews was, predictably enough, directed against foreign Jews, all Jews who lacked Yugoslav citizenship. The real targets, however, were the thousands of refugees who had come from Germany and German-occupied territories since 1933. In October 1939 the Ministry of the Interior formulated a law whereby all Jews who had entered the country, legally or illegally, since 1935 were compelled to leave within three months. All other Jewish noncitizens were required to depart within six months to a year.[62] Apparently, this regulation never actually went into effect, however. No reference to such a law appeared in *Židov* or *Jevrejski glas*, which published all other laws relating to Jews, or in correspondence between the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities and the Ministry of Justice, although the subject of restrictions against refugees was raised repeatedly in the ministry. Hence, it seems fair to conclude that this law was probably never formally promulgated. Unfortunately, there was virtually no place left in the world where these stranded Jews could go.

On October 5, 1940, the Cvetković-Maček government promulgated two laws which signaled the revocation of Jewish emancipation. The first piece of legislation essentially prohibited Jews from engaging in the wholesale food business or related occupations.[63] This was the beginning of an attempt to exclude Jews from the coun-

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try's economic life. The second act was a numerus clausus, limiting Jewish enrollment at all high schools and universities to their percentage of the total population.[64] Since the number of Jews receiving advanced education greatly exceeded. 46 percent, such legislation clearly intended to reduce Jewish cultural and professional participation in Yugoslav society. These laws came as a bitter blow to Yugoslav Jewry. Despite repeated promises by government leaders, they were denied their civil equality and legal protection against discrimination. These decrees, only partially implemented, were the last of the series before the German invasion and occupation of Yugoslavia in April 1941.

The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities reacted to the passage of the anti-Jewish legislation in the fall of 1940 with a declaration of faith in the Jewish people and in Yugoslavia. The Jewish leaders were both shocked and dismayed by this ominous development, but they refused to despair.[65] As the officiai spokesman of Yugoslav Jewry, the federation tried, as it had in the past, to fight against ill treatment of Jews wherever it occurred. At the same time it expressed loyalty to its host country and confidence in the future of the Jewish community in Yugoslavia.

In general, the political situation in interwar Yugoslavia, as viewed from the perspective of the Jews, was for the most part healthy because the Jews constituted only a very small percentage of the population, and the government's policy was favorable. Anti-Semitism, especially of the racial variety, was an imported phenomenon, stamped Made in Germany; it never struck deep local roots. Such anti-Semitism as did exist was more apparent in the ex-Habsburg territories than in the Serbian or former Ottoman areas. Hence, it was more often directed against Ashkenazim than Sephardim, the former being considered foreign and the latter native.

But Yugoslavia, too, became a victim of the Nazi war machine. The Jews could not defend themselves, and Yugoslavia, in the end, was no longer capable of protecting them, even had the government wished to do so. Yugoslav Jewry was to suffer the fate of the rest of European Jewry. But interwar Yugoslavia is one of the few countries in Eastern Europe that may be remembered for fair treatment of its Jewish minority.

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