

UDC 930.85(4-12)

ISSN 0350-7653
eISSN 2406-0801

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

BALCANICA

XLVII

ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

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BELGRADE
2016



The 1905 Parliamentary Crisis in Serbia

Abstract: This paper examines the 1905 May crisis in Serbia that emerged from the conflict between the parliament and Cabinet. It places this particular crisis in the context of development of parliamentarianism in Serbia in the period from the 1903 coup to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. This process reflected the application of parliamentary system of government, as it was replicated from the British and French examples, to the circumstances prevailing in Serbia during the challenging period of building a democratic government after the autocracy under the Obrenović dynasty. The case of the May 1905 crisis demonstrated that parliamentary democracy in Serbia was making progress despite the legacy of the “old regime” and the lack of tradition to build on. Hence the crisis remained strictly within parliamentary bounds.

Keywords: Serbia, parliamentary democracy, Old Radicals, Independent Radicals, Nikola Pašić, King Peter I Karadjordjević, cabinet crisis 1905

Re-established in the Kingdom of Serbia after the coup of 29 May 1903, when King Alexander Obrenović was assassinated and King Peter I Karadjordjević was elected as Serbia's new ruler, parliamentarianism survived several disruptions and crises in the following three years.¹ During this time, the question of Serbia's foreign policy orientation in relation to the two blocs of European powers, the Entente and the Triple Alliance, was being decided. Both sides of political life in Serbia, internal affairs and foreign policy, came to be interlocked, affecting one another. Parliamentary life underwent three successive crises. The first emerged from the conflict concerning purchase of artillery in January 1905; the second followed from the dispute about floatation of a foreign loan in May 1905; the third concerned resumption of diplomatic relations with Great Britain in late 1905 and early 1906. At the heart of all these crises was a dispute about the principles and functioning of parliamentary democracy. The first crisis, in January 1905, reflected the relationship between constitutional factors: parliament and King; the second crisis, in May 1905, emerged from disturbed relations between the parliament and Cabinet; the third crisis, in the winter of 1905/6, which involved the so-called “conspirators' question” affected a development of relations between the civilian and military authorities.² All these

¹ Alex N. Dragnich, “King Peter I. Culmination of Serbia's Struggle for Parliamentary Government”, *East European Quarterly* 4: 2 (1970). For more detail see Dragoljub R. Živojinović, *Kralj Petar I Karadjordjević. U otadžbini*, vol. II (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavački grafički zavod, 1990).

² Cf. more in Dimitrije Djordjević, “The Role of the Military in the Balkans in the Nineteenth Century”, in R. Melville and H.-J. Schroeder, eds., *Der Berliner Kongress von 1878* (Wies-

crises unravelled under the influence of internal forces that had risen from the 1903 coup and external factors shaped by the Great Powers rivalry in the Balkan theatre in the early twentieth century. This study aims to outline the course of one of these parliamentary crisis caused by the clash between the parliament and Cabinet in May 1905 and the effect it had on a development of parliamentary democracy in Serbia before the First World War.³

I

The first election in Serbia following 29 May 1903 showed further development of political polarization within the Serbian political classes. It brought about further estrangement between the People's Radical Party of Nikola Pašić (*Narodna radikalna stranka*), the representatives of the older generations, i.e. Old Radicals, and Independent Radicals (*Samostalna radikalna stranka*), led by the younger, mostly French-oriented intellectuals. Emerging from the general election with practically equal strength,⁴ the relations between Old Radicals and Independent Radicals marked the entire development of parliamentary democracy in Serbia: homogeneous Cabinets were difficult to form and thus coalition Cabinets became a necessity. The Pašić Old Radicals offered Sava Grujić, who had replaced Jovan Avakumović's "revolutionary" 1903 Cabinet, to form a new government either with them or with Independent Radicals.⁵ Looking for as wide a support as possible in the National Assembly, Grujić decided to form a coalition Cabinet embracing both wings of Radical Party – the MPs of both factions still had a common caucus. The reconstruction of the Grujić Cabinet in January 1904 signalled that the coalition was entering a crisis. Growing differences regarding certain political issues and struggle for the appointment of their own supporters in the ranks of officialdom was increasingly dividing Radicals and In-

baden: Steiner, 1982), 317–347.

³ External effects of these crises, especially in the light of Austro-Serbian relations, have been covered in the early chapters of Dimitrije Djordjević, *Carinski rat Austro-Ugarske i Srbije 1906–1911* (Belgrade: Istorijiski institut, 1962); see also Ljiljana Aleksić, "Rad srpske vlade na zajmu 1904–1906. godine", *Istorija XX veka* IX (1962), 141–249; D. Djordjević, "Srbija i Balkan na početku XX veka (1903–1906)", in *Jugoslovenski narodi pred Prvi svetski rat*, Posebna izdanja SANU, CDXVI, Odeljenje društvenih nauka. vol. 61 (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1967), 210–212.

⁴ In 1903, Old Radicals had 75 and Independent Radicals 65 out of 160 MPs. The other political parties, Liberals and Progressives in particular were rather marginalized. For example, Prime Minister, Liberal Avakumović, was elected in one constituency alone out of three in which he ran for election. See the Archives of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade (hereafter ASANU), no. 9287, "Memoirs of Jovan Avakumović" (in manuscript), part V.

⁵ Alex N. Dragnich, *The Development of Parliamentary Government in Serbia* (Boulder & New York: East European Monographs, Columbia University Press 1978), 95–97.

dependent Radicals.⁶ In the negotiations for a new Cabinet, in November 1904, both groups concluded that their coalition could not continue, given their differences in the major issues such as floating a loan, purchase of guns and railway construction. The Radicals seized on the reluctance on the part of Independent Radicals to form their own Cabinet under Nikola Pašić. This led to the definitive rift between the two factions and the secession of Independent Radicals into separate caucus.⁷ This event was of paramount importance for the political and parliamentary history of Serbia in 1903–1914. Homogenous Cabinets could not be formed because of the lack of an absolute majority in the parliament. Coalition Cabinets reflected mutual relations between the two parties.⁸ From 29 May 1903 to 17/30 April 1906 (according to Julian/Gregorian calendar – the former was in official use in Serbia until 1919), there were six Cabinets in Serbia with an average duration of 162 days: that of the “revolutionary government” lasted for 114 days, the first Grujić coalition Cabinet 126 days, the second coalition Cabinet 296 days, the homogenous Pašić Cabinet 176 days, that of Independent Radicals 213 days, and the second Grujić Cabinet 48 days. On the other hand, the weakness of successive Cabinets in the parliament allowed political activity of the “irresponsible factors” outside the parliament, gathered around the Court. “Behind Cabinets that sought how to survive in the parliament irresponsible persons were lurking”, Kosta Stojanović wrote.⁹ In the conditions of parliamentary balance of power, the military and civilian camarilla around King Peter I

⁶ The 1903 May coup brought about a change of personnel in the administrative apparatus. For example, four generals, twelve colonels and four lieutenant-colonels were retired from the army (*Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine II*, Belgrade 1909, 928). In a grab for service in the government, Radicals obtained senior and Independent Radicals junior positions. In October 1903, eight Old Radicals were appointed judges in the Court of Cassation out of fifteen, and not a single Independent Radical; out of ten judges of the Court of Appeal, there were five Old Radicals and one Independent Radical. Out of 24 presidents of the Court of First Instance, there were eight Old Radicals and eight Independent Radicals; the latter outnumbered Radicals only among judges, where the ratio was 27:24 in their favour (*Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine, vanredni saziv 1906*, 186; *Srpske novine* (Belgrade), nos. 242, 247, 23 and 29 October respectively). The younger Independent Radicals, in particular, were vehement in their demand to “cleanse” the administrative apparatus from the people of the old regime. See ASANU, no. 12532/1, Ljubomir Stojanović Papers, Sima Katić to Lj. Stojanović, private, 26 June 1903.

⁷ *Odjek* nos. 107 and 109, Belgrade, 10 and 12 May 1905 respectively; Vladimir Todorović, “Pisma o zajmu”, *Odjek* no. 81, 6 April 1905; *Stenografske beleške I*, 1906, 277, Lj. Stojanović u Skupštini 22 October 1905; *Stenografske beleške II*, 1906, 1156.

⁸ “In Serbia, wills, wits and opinions are so divided that you cannot find a strong majority anywhere and for any purpose”, Jovan Žujović wrote to Ljubomir Stojanović on 17 August 1905, ASANU, no. 12398/5.

⁹ “Slom i vaskrs Srbije”, unpublished memoirs of Kosta Stojanović, ASANU, no. 10133, folio 138.

had an opportunity to tip the balance in relations between political parties. This factor's interference in political life in Serbia endangered the functioning of the political system as a whole, contrary to constitutional principles established after the fall of the last Obrenović in 1903.

II

As soon as it was formed, in early December 1904, the homogenous Old Radical Cabinet found itself in crisis. A paper-thin parliamentary majority made it difficult for the Pašić Cabinet to resolve the major question of procuring a loan for purchasing guns and constructing railway.¹⁰ The negotiations about the loan caused conflicts both inside and outside Serbia. Foreign capital and large European factories interested in orders from Serbia went a long way to secure the orders for themselves. This brought about the involvement of diplomacy and, in particular, the worsening of Austro-Serbian relations. On the other hand, the Old Radicals came into a sharp conflict with opposition in the parliament and the Court in their struggle for a loan and guns. The King's civilian and military advisers among whom were some of the officers who had participated in the 29 May conspiracy openly clashed with the government, drawing King Peter I Karadjordjević in political strife and shifting the ground of political conflicts outside the parliament.¹¹

Cabinet crises stemmed from these aggravating relations, which generated a constitutional crisis in Serbia given the forms of conflict and its participants. All three Cabinet crises, in January, February and April 1905, were not opened in the National Assembly, but rather followed from a clash between the Cabinet and the Court.¹² They were overcome within constitutional bounds, because political parties defended the prerogatives of parliament in relation to the King, thus defending their own interests.¹³ Emerging victorious from the January crisis, the Cabinet was forced to capitulate before King Peter I in early February, only to restore the balance of power in April when it suppressed the resistance on the part of the Court in the matter of purchase of guns. It was then that

¹⁰ The Old Radicals barely acquired majority in the parliament winning over to their side six Independent Radical MPs. Pašić was supported by 81 out of 160 MPs. See Jaša Prodanović, "Radikalna vlada", *Republika* no. 23, Belgrade, 9 April 1946. Independent Radicals attempted to dissuade General Radomir Putnik from supporting Old Radicals but without success.

¹¹ See more in Wayne S. Vucinich, *Serbia between East and West 1903–1908* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1954).

¹² The crisis of the Cabinet formed by Independent Radicals in December 1905 had the same cause. It was a conflict with the Court that brought down the Ljubomir Stojanović Cabinet as well as those of Sava Grujić in April and June 1906. See *Stenografske beleške* II, 1905, 1030.

¹³ The Independent Radicals supported Pašić's Cabinet in its confrontation with the Court in the January 1905 crisis. See *Odjek* no. 16, 20 January 1905.

the influence of the “civilian conspirators” was removed from policy-making.¹⁴ In the new circumstances brought about by the strengthened strict parliamentary system of government after 1903, there was no going back to “personal regimes” from the past that had relied on the army and administrative apparatus.

III

Overcoming dangers that lurked his Cabinet in a clash with the Court, Pašić believed that he had defeated the King’s opposition.¹⁵ Calculating that Independent Radicals were not yet prepared to take office and having won over their leader Ljubomir Živković in the matter of loan,¹⁶ Nikola Pašić decided in early May to proceed with the planned procurements and ordered his Finance Minister Lazar Paču to sign a loan protocol with French banks on 6 May in Paris.¹⁷ Even the Austro-Hungarian Minister in Belgrade, an opponent of Radicals, did not consider the demission of the Radical Cabinet possible.¹⁸ Realising that the loan affair would meet with a strong opposition in the parliament, the Interior Minister Stojan M. Protić started to prepare the ground for a new election as early as April by filling the administrative apparatus with Radicals.

The conclusion of the loan agreement in Paris caused a stir of protest in Serbia, which threatened to undermine the position of the Cabinet. The attacks of Independent Radicals on Protić in mid-February reflected the increasing intolerance between the two wings of the formerly united Radical Party. At the same time, the Cabinet was taken by surprise by the attacks on the Minister of Construction Petar Velimirović.¹⁹ On that occasion, it barely scraped through the vote of confidence with the majority of eight votes. Debates in the parliament proved that the Cabinet found it difficult to rein in their own MPs. The press went on about how a good deal of Radicals was against the new loan.²⁰ The Austro-Hungarian Minister was informed that the King had dismissed Jaša

¹⁴ Živojin Balugdžić fled to Zemun after the trial; Nenadović was also ousted from the Palace. See Dimitrije Djordjević, *Carinski rat Austro-Ugarske i Srbije*, 73–79.

¹⁵ When Petar Mišić, one of the leaders of the 1903 conspirators, supported Radicals, it led to a split among the latter. The Cabinet also tried to disperse a group of officers-conspirators in early April by transferring them from Belgrade to the interior of the country. See St. A. Wien, Polit. Archiv XIX, Serbien, Bericht N^o 47 A-B Str. vert. Hoyos to Goluchowski, Belgrade, 13 May 1905.

¹⁶ ASANU, no. 7940/30/1905, [A copy of] Dumba to Goluchowski, Belgrade, 3 June 1905.

¹⁷ Archives of Serbia, Belgrade, Političko odeljenje, conf. no. 767, 25 April 1905, Paču’s telegram from Paris, 23 April 1905.

¹⁸ St. A. Wien, Pol. Archiv XIX, Serbien, Bericht N^o 42, Hoyos to Goluchowski, Belgrade, 28 April 1905.

¹⁹ *Stenografske beleške II*, 1904, 1303–1311.

²⁰ “Fuzionaši protiv zajma”, *Politika* no. 472, Belgrade, 6 May 1905.

Nenadović in late April because he did not want to provide Cabinet with an opportunity to open a crisis based on its relations with the Court, anticipating that it would fall on account of the loan.²¹

For all these reasons, an extraordinary session of the parliament scheduled for 8/21 May 1905 was eagerly expected,²² for it had to decide on the loan and on a trade agreement concluded with Germany. It was clear even before that session that it would be a stormy one: when Old Radicals proposed to Independent Radicals to prepare a list of parliamentary officials, as customary, the latter declined, stating that they had not been consulted prior to submitting the loan for ratification.²³ Such a refusal was tantamount to a declaration of war.

An even greater danger for the Cabinet lay in the ranks of its own parliamentary majority. When deliberations in the parliament started on 8/21 May, the benches of Old Radical MPs were often not taken as opposed to those occupied by the opposition MPs. A number of prominent Radicals did not turn up in the parliament at all.²⁴ It was clear that the Cabinet would fall even before the parliament was convened. In order to prevent a Cabinet crisis on a procedural basis and intent on bringing it down on account of the loan, Independent Radicals left the parliament session so that it had to be adjourned due to lack of quorum.²⁵

Faced with obvious languor and indiscipline of its majority, the Cabinet came to the conclusion that it could not rely on its own MPs, that the opposition was prepared for a decisive struggle and that a vote to approve the loan would be impossible in such circumstances. Therefore, Pašić decided to fall on the grounds of a failure to have the Speaker of the parliament elected, which would provide him with a reason to request the dissolution of the parliament. This would allow him to postpone the decision on the loan and to close the ranks of his own party. When the parliament reconvened on 9/22 May, Pašić's supporters were instructed to vote for an Independent Radical candidate to become a Speaker. Seeing through his game and trying to impose a discussion on the loan on the Cabinet, Independent Radicals backed the candidacy of a Radical to cut the ground below the Cabinet's feet and remove the rationale for resignation. After three agonizing votes, Aca Stanojević, an Old Radical, was elected Speaker of the parliament, with the relative majority of 66 out of 138

²¹ St. A. Wien, Polit. Archiv XIX, Serbien, Hoyos to Goluchowski, 28 April 1905.

²² "A session of the National Assembly of Serbia has never been expected with such curiosity, as is the case now", read *Politika* no. 472, 6 May 1905.

²³ "Izbor predsedništva Narodne skupštine", *Odjek* no. 108, 11 May 1906.

²⁴ For example, M. Milovanović, J. Jeličić, P. Savić, S. Kokić, M. Radojković and others. See *Politika* no. 475, 9 May 1905.

²⁵ *Stenografske beleške* VII, 1906, 4445; *Politika* no. 475, 9 May 1905.

present MPs.²⁶ Stanojević, however, refused to accept the position of Speaker in the existing conditions and Pašić had his opportunity to demand the dissolution of parliament, threatening with his own resignation. The crisis was thus opened.

IV

Events in the Assembly snapped Radical MPs out of their lethargy. Gathered in full force in their caucus, they approved the stance of the Cabinet, taking a resolute attitude: the National Assembly was to be dissolved immediately and a new election held under the current Cabinet. An attempt of Sava Grujić to seek an agreement with Independent Radicals was unanimously rejected.²⁷ On the other hand, Independent Radicals decided at the same time not to make any agreement with Old Radicals and to accept a mandate for the formation of a new Cabinet under which an election would be held, if offered one.²⁸ It was then that crisis emerged among Independent Radicals because Ljubomir Živković resigned as president of the Main Committee, since he disagreed with the decision of his party to form a Cabinet, if opportunity presented itself.²⁹

Both sides, Old Radicals and Independent Radicals, agreed on the following: National Assembly should be dissolved and new elections held – in anticipation of potential gains. All fourteen political and party leaders convened at the Court on 11/24 May for consultation were in favour of dissolving the parliament.³⁰ Political public in Belgrade and the country in general, fed up with Cabinet crises, also demanded new election in the hope that one or the other party would finally prevail and ensure a stable government.³¹ However, the King opposed dissolution, partly because he doubted that the new election would result in a strong parliamentary majority, partly because he feared that dissolution would bring about unpleasant comparisons with the practice of

²⁶ An Independent Radical N. Nikolić received 53 votes, Lj. Živković and A. Marković one vote each, while 17 ballot lists (Liberals) were empty. For this election see St. A. Wien, *Polit. Archiv XIX, Serbien, Bericht № 49 Vert., K. Dumba to A. Goluchowski, Belgrade, 22 May 1905*; K. Dumba, *Dreibund und Entente politik in der Alten und Neuen Welt* (Zurich 1931), 228; *Odjek* no. 106, 9 May 1905.

²⁷ *Politika* no. 476, 10 May 1905.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ The Main Committee was reconstituted on 11/24 May. Ljubomir Stojanović became its president, while Ljubomir Davidović and Milutin Stanojević were elected vice presidents. See *Odjek* nos. 108 and 110, 11 and 13 May 1905 respectively.

³⁰ These were Independent Radicals Lj. Živković, N. Nikolić, Lj. Stojanović, Lj. Davidović and J. Prodanović; Radicals N. Pašić, A. Stanojević, A. Nikolić, St. Protić, priest M. Djurić and Sv. Simić; Liberals Avakumović, Veljković and Ribarac. See *Odjek* no. 108, 11 May 1905; *Politika* no. 477, 11 May 1905.

³¹ *Politika* no. 476, 10 May 1905.

previous regimes.³² Finally, having been pressured by all political factors he had consulted, the King gave in but hesitated for four days before making his final decision. It was not until 12/25 May that Peter I signed the decree to dissolve the parliament.³³

The decision to hold elections raised two questions that further aggravated the crisis: the resignation of the old Cabinet and the mandate to form a new one.

While the resignation of the Cabinet was being announced in the parliament on 10/23 May, Pašić told the King that he requested dissolution of the National Assembly, "placing at his [King's] disposal all portfolios in case this proposal was not accepted". In fact, there were two resignations: one, unconditional, before the parliament, and the other, conditional, before the King.³⁴ According to the latter, dissolution of the parliament would exclude resignation and the Cabinet would carry out general elections, although it was in minority after the vote of 10/23 May. Central to this political game was Pašić's tactics to outmanoeuvre his opponents: he resigned in order to rope the King into dissolving the parliament and, at the same time, tried to keep the mandate for himself. Old Radicals were particularly confused by Independent Radicals' decision of 9/22 May to form the Cabinet should King Peter I offer it to them. Thus, when the King finally accepted the dissolution of parliament, Radicals claimed that their resignation was not valid any more, all the more so because the King was still hesitant to accept it. This hesitation was brought to an end when Independent Radicals stated to the King on 12/25 May that they "could not offer him any advice until after he accepts the Cabinet's resignation".³⁵ The King then, six days into the crisis, on 13/26 May, informed Pašić that the resignation of his Cabinet had been accepted.

The stepping down of Pašić's Cabinet posed a problem of forming a new government that would carry out fresh parliamentary elections. Negotiations that followed were conducted with four possible alternatives in view: a coalition Cabinet consisting of Old Radicals and Independent Radicals; a "neutral" Cabinet for the sole purpose of holding elections; a Cabinet backed by the existing

³² King also resisted the proposals for dissolution of parliament in the crisis of January 1905. See ASANU, no. 7940/17/1905, Dumba to Goluchowski, 21 March 1905.

³³ *Politika* no. 478, 12 May 1905.

³⁴ In its first copies of 9/22 May, the *Samouprava*, an organ of the Old Radical Party, brought news about "Cabinet's resignation". However, later copies of the same issue dropped out the news about resignation and published only Pašić's statement to the King. See "Dve Samouprave", *Politika* no. 476, 10 May 1905; *Samouprava* no. 107, 10 May 1905; "Povodom krize", *Odjek* no. 109, 12 May 1905.

³⁵ *Politika* no. 478, 12 May 1905.

parliamentary majority; a Cabinet emerging from parliamentary minority under the assumption that the impending elections would result in its victory.

V

King Peter I insisted on a coalition between Old Radicals and Independent Radicals. This would no doubt be the most durable parliamentary solution, as it would command the vast majority in the National Assembly. This combination was, however, not possible due to the dispute of the two sides over the concluded loan: one insisting on accepting it, the other on rejecting it. Initially, both parties declined the possibility of a coalition. Radicals replied to the King that he had a choice to make – either resignation or dissolution of parliament, believing that it was only natural for their Cabinet to hold the elections.³⁶ Independent Radicals Ljubomir Stojanović, Ljubomir Živković, Ljubomir Davidović and Jaša Prodanović professed that they were bringing down the Cabinet not because they wanted to take office, but rather to obstruct the loan arranged by Old Radicals.³⁷ At the meeting of the leaders of two parties at the Court on 10/23 May, Pašić and Stojanović decided to try to find a basis for an agreement. The negotiations that took place next day, however, bore no fruit. Talks between Nikola Pašić and Ljubomir Živković who, after his resignation, was not authorized to speak on behalf of his party, were not less fruitless.³⁸

Despite their initial opposition, Independent Radicals agreed to coalition with Radicals on condition that the latter cancelled the loan, that a new loan was arranged solely for the purpose of armament and that Pašić was excluded from a new Cabinet. On the sixth day of the crisis, negotiations took place between the two caucuses on this basis.³⁹ But Old Radicals remained adamant. The *Samouprava*, their official organ, wrote that “there is no compromise” as “there can only be a complete abandonment of its own [Independent Radicals’] standpoint”.⁴⁰ Insulted by such insistence, Independent Radicals reproached Old Radicals that they used to change their leaders at a decree from the Court, and now they refused a coalition with their former comrades.⁴¹ However, being members of a young and inexperienced party, Independent Radicals were weary of assum-

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., no. 477, 11 May 1905.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Old Radicals were represented by Sava Grujić, A. Stanojević, Milan Mostić and Jakov Čorbić; the delegation of Independent Radicals consisted of Ljubomir Stojanović, Ljubomir Davidović, Nikola Nikolić and M. Stanojević. See *Politika* no. 480, 14 May 1905.

⁴⁰ *Samouprava* no. 109, 12 May 1905.

⁴¹ “Koaliciona vlada”, *Odjek* no. 114, 18 May 1905.

ing power with something of an academic and purist reluctance.⁴² Old Radicals sensed this and played on that card. Pašić stalled the crisis, trying to wear down his opponents. He waited for a moment of attrition and apathy to impose himself again.

The King also worked for the formation of a coalition Cabinet under Mihailo Vujić, Milovan Dj. Milovanović or Sava Grujić.⁴³ Vujić was the Serbian Minister in Vienna, and the Austro-Hungarian Minister in Belgrade learned that the Court, through a confidential person, had sounded out Vujić's interest in forming a Cabinet in early April.⁴⁴ The Serbian Minister in Rome Milovan Dj. Milovanović recorded at this time his bitterness against Old Radicals and Pašić, whom he accused of ruling with the assistance of dispositional expenses. Milovanović equally resented Independent Radicals and labelled them "political dilettantes".⁴⁵ In late December 1904, when the "guns question" reached its acute phase, it was expected in Belgrade that a moderate Old Radical Cabinet under Sava Grujić would be formed, with the support of Independent Radicals.⁴⁶ The Court reverted to this combination during the crisis of January 1905.⁴⁷ Following the failed meeting between Old Radical and Independent Radical delegates in the parliament on 14/27 May, the King summoned Sava Grujić, in agreement with Ljubomir Stojanović, Stojan Ribarac, Vojislav Veljković and Ljubomir Davidović, to form either a coalition or a homogenous Radical Cabinet.⁴⁸ Sava Grujić informed the Old Radicals' caucus of the mandate he had been given, but he was cold-shouldered. Radicals were of the opinion – with only one vote against this decision – that Grujić should not accept it. The caucus even de-

⁴² Jovan Žujović constantly longed for his geology department and he implored his party colleagues to relieve him of ministerial and political duties. (See ASANU, no. 13209, Žujović to Lj. Stojanović, 25 August/7 September 1905; also Žujović's personal archive, note of 10 November 1905). Prodanović exhorted him to attend the meetings in Independent Radicals' caucus rather than going to the meetings of the Geological Society. N. Nikolić relinquished his membership in the abovementioned caucus. See ASANU, no. 12709/1–3, Lj. Stojanović was tired of being Minister in 1909 and looked for a suitable excuse to resign. See Žujović's personal archive, note of 11 August 1909. Prodanović also threatened to resign as Minister of Economy unless he was relieved of his duties. See ASANU, no. 12783, Prodanović to Lj. Stojanović, 2 June 1910.

⁴³ St. A. Wien, Polit. Archiv XIX, Serbien 51, Bericht № 49 Vert. Dumba to Goluchowski, Belgrade, 22 May 1905.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 94–97 Serbien Anleihe, 3. 102, Dumba to Goluchowski, Belgrade, 3 April 1905.

⁴⁵ Archives of Serbia, M. Dj. Milovanović Papers, envelop XXX/176, note from March 1905; also his notes from August 1904.

⁴⁶ St. A. Wien, 94–97 Serbien Anleihe, Dumba to Goluchowski, 9 December 1904.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 94–97 Serbien Anleihe, 3. 73, telegram from Dumba to Goluchowski, № 5, 25 January 1905.

⁴⁸ *Politika* no. 481, 15 May 1905.

cided to expel from the party any individual who would accept a portfolio in the new Cabinet. Grujić was forced to return the mandate to the King, and he resigned from the presidency and even membership of the Main Committee of the Old Radical Party.⁴⁹ Radicals defended their stance by claiming that forming a coalition Cabinet for the purpose of holding elections was a sheer nonsense: how could anyone form a coalition between the opposition that brought down the government and the Cabinet that was brought down by it?⁵⁰ An attempt to establish cooperation between Old Radicals and Independent Radicals thus failed.⁵¹

VI

Since inter-parties conflicts made it impossible to form a coalition Cabinet, the press advanced suggestions for the formation of a “neutral”, business-like Cabinet for the sole purpose of carrying out general elections.⁵² After some initial hesitation, Independent Radicals accepted the possibility of a business-like Cabinet, convinced that they only needed to secure non-interference on the part of the government to achieve an electoral victory. King Peter I thought of a neu-

⁴⁹ *Odjek* no. 112, 16 May 1905; *Politika* no. 484, 18 May 1905.

⁵⁰ Stojan Protić, *Odlomci iz ustavne borbe u Srbiji*, I (Belgrade: Štamparija Dositiej Obradović, 1911), 53–54 (reprint from *Samouprava*, 2–8 April 1908).

⁵¹ All attempts to restore unity in the Radical Party made from 1903 onwards failed. In 1904, a club of Belgrade Radicals was formed for the purpose of smoothing away the existing differences. Cf. K. Stojanović, *Govori i rasprave političko-ekonomske*, I (Belgrade 1910), 103. At the insistence of a large number of members of both Radical factions, Stanko Petrović, an MP, undertook an action for reconciliation and unity in August 1904 (ASANU, no. 12823, Stanko Petrović to Ljubomir Stanojević, 26 July 1904). The MPs from the Belgrade County supported by their electorate tried to do the same (ASANU, no. 12749, Rad. S. Paunović to Blagoje Živanović, president of Kumodraž municipality, 29 November 1904). Radicals from the town of Užice tried to work together with Independent Radicals in March 1905 (ASANU, no. 12456, Mih. Jovičić to Lj. Stojanović, 28 April 1905). Ljuba Živković broke away from Independent Radicals in May 1906 because of his failed efforts to bring together the two parties during the negotiations to form a coalition Cabinet (*Odjek* no. 53, 1 March 1906; no. 100, 28 April 1906). In the summer of 1906, conversations were underway with the view to uniting again in a single party. Radicals demanded a simple merger, but Independent Radicals refused (Jovan Žujović's note, 4 December 1906). The Novi Sad-based newspaper *Zastava* also argued for a concord between the two Radical wings. In October 1906, high-ranking Old Radical politician Jovan Djaja preached reconciliation between two radical factions in the pages of *Narod*. Milovan Dj. Milovanović, Mihailo Vujić and Sava Grujić spared no effort to that end (ASANU, no. 7940/45/1905, Czikan to Goluchowski, Belgrade, 5 October 1905). All these attempts and others that followed failed dismally.

⁵² *Politika* no. 479, 13 May 1905; no. 477, 11 May 1905, “Ko bi vršio nove izbore”.

tral" Cabinet as early as January 1905 and he spoke to the Austro-Hungarian Minister in that sense.⁵³

Business-like Cabinets were extremely unpopular in Serbia, reminiscent of the abrogation of the Constitution under the previous regimes. Politicians who found themselves pushed into the background after the 1903 change of regime bided their time to re-enter the political arena at the moment when confrontation between Radicals and Independent Radicals reached a deadlock. Jovan Avakumović also cautiously advised the King to have a business-like Cabinet, recalling the practice of Liberal Regents and reminding the King that he was a guardian of the Constitution even against a Cabinet.⁵⁴ The former Finance Minister Vukašin Petrović rejoiced in Vienna upon hearing the news that a mandate to form a Cabinet would be offered to Djordje Pavlović, a Progressive and minister under Milan and Alexander Obrenović.⁵⁵

Radicals were adamant in their opposition to the formation of a "neutral" Cabinet both in principle and for practical reasons. A Cabinet must follow from parliamentary majority, *Samouprava* wrote, any other solution would not be a parliamentary one. The questionable "neutral" nature of any Cabinet put aside, such construction was but an augury of a reactionary and personal regime. This was a dangerous game in which business-like Cabinets were intended to sanction reactionary government and turn it gradually into a permanent system. Such governments had no support in the country and no authority abroad.⁵⁶ In Old Radicals' view, even Cabinets formed for the sole purpose of holding elections were a negation of parliamentarianism: a Cabinet is to be formed on the basis of a programme and elections serve only to pass judgment on that programme. Therefore, a Cabinet could not exist solely for the purpose of holding elections, since it surpassed in itself the purpose and aim of elections.⁵⁷

Radicals also opposed the possibility of a business-like Cabinet on political grounds. It posed a serious danger for their retaining a mandate, since Old Radicals were convinced that Independent Radicals would decline to come into office at the last moment.

⁵³ ASANU, no. 7940/7/1905, Dumba to Goluchowski, Belgrade, 29 January 1905.

⁵⁴ ASANU, no. 9287/V, "Memoirs of Jovan Avakumović", sheet 53.

⁵⁵ ASANU, no. 10139/6, Andra Djordjević Papers, a letter from Vukašin Petrović, Vienna, 13 May 1905. In March 1905, Petrović tried from Vienna to revive the activities of the old Progressives (Vladan and Andra Djordjević and others) by establishing the Main Committee of a peasant party, a faction of Kurtović's Peasant Concord. See no. 10139/4, V. Petrović to A. Djordjević, Vienna, 14 March 1905. The activities of this group came to the fore a year later, in the crises in early 1906. See ASANU, no. 7940/37/1906, Lowenthal to Merey, 11 August 1906.

⁵⁶ "Neutralni kabineti", *Samouprava* no. 108, 11 May 1905; also, no. 109, 12 May 1905.

⁵⁷ Stojan Protić, *Odlomci iz ustavne borbe u Srbiji*, I, 53–54.

VII

The standpoint of Old Radicals' caucus during the May crisis of 1905 was that a new Cabinet could only emerge from the existing parliamentary majority. In other words, they requested a mandate to form another homogenous Radical Cabinet, insisting that it was the only truly parliamentary solution. Independent Radicals were not against a new Radical Cabinet in principle, but they demanded that it drop the loan.⁵⁸ They also demanded that both Nikola Pašić and Stojan M. Protić be excluded from such a Cabinet.⁵⁹ Old Radicals refused such and similar conditions out of hand as not being parliamentary, unwilling to consider any infringement on their mandate. Independent Radicals then made a concession, accepting Pašić but not Protić, whom they accused of preparing the ground for new elections with inappropriate methods even before the crisis.⁶⁰ The opposition press clamped down on Protić in particular, accusing him of abusing power. Pašić was, however, inflexible and he did not sacrifice Protić. Nikola Pašić left the King with a choice: either all Old Radicals relinquish office or they all remain.

The intransigent attitude of Old Radicals with regard to the composition of a new Cabinet and the dogged opposition of Independent Radicals to the loan prolonged the crisis and created a rather uncertain situation.⁶¹ King Peter I found himself in a deadlock, having exhausted the possibilities of a coalition Cabinet and parliamentary majority Cabinet. Pašić's weight was coming to the fore. After having outflanked the Court in the crises of January and April, he was now defeating Independent Radicals. If successful, he was going to become the master of Serbia's political life. Such prospects turned the conspirators against him and they threw all their influence with the King onto the scales on the side of Independent Radicals.⁶² Their attitude finally swayed the King to offer the mandate to form a Cabinet to Independent Radicals, who constituted parliamentary minority.⁶³ This decision surprised everyone. Old Radicals, in particular, were disappointed and bitter. The Main Committee of Independent Radicals undertook to form a Cabinet with the limited mandate to hold general elections.

⁵⁸ Lj. Stojanović's statement in the caucus of Independent Radicals, 11 May 1905, *Politika* no. 478, 12 May 1905.

⁵⁹ *Politika* nos. 480 and 481, 13 and 14 May 1905 respectively.

⁶⁰ "Minula kriza", *Odjek* no. 113, 17 May 1905. According to Independent Radicals, Protić, in his capacity as Interior Minister, used an official cipher to request from county officials to name those Old Radicals who might be suitable candidates for MPs. See *Odjek* no. 118, 23 May 1905.

⁶¹ "No one knows how this crisis will end, neither the King nor MPs nor their caucuses", *Politika* no. 479 wrote on 13/26 May 1905.

⁶² ASANU, no. 7940/31/1905, Dumba to Goluchowski, Belgrade, 13 June 1905.

⁶³ "Nov obrt", *Politika* no. 481, 15 May 1905.

A list of the first Cabinet composed of Independent Radicals prepared at dawn on 15/28 May was thus incomplete.⁶⁴ The new Cabinet formed on the seventh day of the crisis immediately convened the National Assembly to read out the King's decree on dissolution. The new elections were scheduled for 10/23 July; the convocation of the newly-elected National Assembly was scheduled for 25 July/7 August 1905.⁶⁵ With this, the Cabinet crisis was resolved.

VIII

Infuriated for having been driven out of office, Radicals breathed fire on the new Cabinet, threatening that they would resign collectively from the civil service and leave Independent Radicals to make do.⁶⁶

Starting the election campaign, Old Radicals accused Independent Radicals of being pro-Austrian on account of their opposition to the loan and of coming into office through non-parliamentary means, as a parliamentary minority.⁶⁷ Both accusations were designed to discredit the new Cabinet's foreign and domestic policy. Both parties embarked on a fierce press campaign that would, to a large extent, mark Serbia's political life until the First World War.

Old Radicals explained the formation of the first Independent Radical Cabinet in May 1905 by fatal influence of the past. "Le mort saisit de vif", Sto-

⁶⁴ Independent Radicals had a number of capable politicians in 1905. Ljuba Stojanović and Jovan Žujović dealt with foreign policy; education was the domain of Ljuba Davidović and Jaša Prodanović; M. Drašković, Dr. M. Marković and David Simić specialised in economy; Nik. Nikolić, Drag. Pečić, Iv. Pavićević, K. Timotijević, Dj. Nestorović and Drag. Joksimović examined legal matters; Savčić and Vulović dealt with construction. Despite numerous ministerial candidates in the party, Independent Radical Cabinet was rather rump: Prime Minister and Interior Minister Ljubomir Stojanović, Education Minister and Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs Jovan Žujović, Army Minister Colonel Vasa Antonić, Construction Minister Vladimir Todorović, Finance Minister Dr. Milan Marković, Minister of Justice Nikola Nikolić, Minister of Economy Ivan Pavićević. See R. M., *Kraljevske vlade od 1903–1935* (Belgrade: Štamparija Drag. Popovića, 1935). General Živković declined the portfolio of Army Minister and, because of that, V. Antonić, commander of 16th Regiment in Niš, was urgently summoned to Belgrade (*Odjek* no. 113, 17 May 1905; *Politika* no. 482, 16 May 1905). Nikola Nikolić resigned as soon as 23 May/5 June because he had physically assaulted Pašić for being insulted in the pages of *Samouprava* ("Nemio događaj", *Odjek* no. 120, 22 May 1905; *Samouprava* nos. 114 and 120, 18 and 25 May 1905 respectively).

⁶⁵ *Odjek* no. 113, 17 May 1905.

⁶⁶ Personal Papers, Jovan Žujović's note, no date.

⁶⁷ "Značaj promene", *Samouprava* no. 114, 18 May 1905; "Zar baš tako vajna braćo?", *Odjek* no. 115, 19 May 1905; *Stenografske beleške* II (1905), 1053, Stojan Protić u Skupštini, 12 December 1905.

jan Protić wrote.⁶⁸ According to Old Radicals, the crisis was resolved contrary to parliamentary principles. Pašić's Cabinet formed by parliamentary majority realised that it had no sufficient strength to solve major issues that were on the agenda and requested the dissolution of parliament and general elections in order for the people to be consulted. In keeping with parliamentary practice, there were two alternatives in such a case: the current Cabinet could hold the elections, or a new minority Cabinet, if the King came into conflict with the majority and acted on the presumption that the minority would win the elections. The latter solution was, however, dangerous for a monarch in case of an unfavourable election result and could thus be resorted to only in extreme cases. It was out of question if there was no conflict between the King and the parliamentary majority. Such a conflict could have resulted from the dissolution of parliament demanded by the Cabinet. However, the King had accepted the proposal of the Cabinet. Therefore, Peter I accepted the will of the majority and then offered a mandate to the minority. For that reason, the formation of an Independent Radical Cabinet was not parliamentary.⁶⁹ To prove their point, Old Radicals advocated the principle of solidary accountability of Cabinet and parliament, invoking British parliamentary practice. "Either we stick to parliamentarianism or we do not", Protić wrote, "if we do, we must work as other parliamentary states."⁷⁰

Independent Radicals defended the formation of their Cabinet, denying that Radicals had the majority. A parliamentary vote on 9/22 May showed that Pašić's Cabinet was in the minority. This was a clear sign that the parliament would not work with it. From the moment it lost the majority, Pašić's Cabinet became non-parliamentary.⁷¹ The King was faced with a choice: "larger" or "smaller" minority. He opted for the latter, believing it would provide a greater guarantee for free elections. However, although he was defeated in the Assembly, Pašić did not surrender and demanded dissolution. Forcing the King to consent to it, he made him an accomplice in the Cabinet's actions. The Cabinet is, in fact, just a committee of parliamentary majority that mediates between the parliament and the King, the latter two being unaccountable factors. The National Assembly is senior to the Cabinet, because the latter emerges from the former,

⁶⁸ St. Protić, *Odlomci iz ustavne borbe u Srbiji I, Pritisak prošlosti* (reprint from *Samouprava*, 14 May 1906).

⁶⁹ St. Protić, *Odlomci I, Borba protiv većine* (reprint from *Samouprava*, 2–8 April 1908) and *Pritisak prošlosti* (reprint from *Samouprava*, 14 May 1905).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, *Pritisak prošlosti*.

⁷¹ Radicals denied this, describing a vote of 9/22 May as "parliamentary coincidence", and not acknowledging they had lost the majority. The Cabinet was in the minority, but there was no majority on the side of opposition. See "Izbori časništva Narodne Skupštine", *Samouprava* no. 110, 13 May 1905.

and not the other way around. Radicals wanted, however, to impose a Cabinet on the Assembly, requesting dissolution of the National Assembly as soon as it opposed their Cabinet. Had Old Radicals accepted the terms of Independent Radicals, the Assembly could have continued its work with a new Cabinet, just as the French parliament had voted Combes out of office and then supported Rouvier's Cabinet.

Although they opposed the dissolution of parliament in principle, Independent Radicals justified their acceptance of general elections by a change of public mood. To prove their point, they adduced a number of examples from French, English and Italian parliamentary practice when a minority was given the mandate to carry out elections.⁷² Therefore, Independent Radicals were adamant that the formation of the Cabinet was strictly parliamentary: if the rule was to give the parliamentary majority a mandate to form a new Cabinet, then the constitutional mechanism could be disturbed in case the King gave a mandate to the minority. Such disturbance occurred when the Radical Cabinet lost its majority. The victory of Independent Radicals in the parliamentary elections in July 1905 – narrow as it was⁷³ – served as confirmation of their thesis.

Political opinion in Serbia was divided in the aftermath of the crisis. The conspirators' daily *Mali Žurnal*, Independent Radical *Dnevni list*, pro-Austrian *Štampa* and independent *Politika* took a favourable view of the new Cabinet and approved the manner in which the crisis was brought to an end. On the contrary, *Progressive Pravda* condemned the outcome of the crisis as not being parliamentary. Novi Sad-based *Zastava* was in favour of reconciliation between the two Radical wings and wrote to that effect. Legal theoreticians such as Slobodan Jovanović expounded the opinion that King Peter I was within his rights to dissolve a parliament that he found was no longer representative of popular opinion. Thus the emphasis was not on the crisis itself, but rather on its consequences, because the King was obliged to accept the result of an election, regardless of its outcome, since doubts regarding popular opinion had been dispersed.⁷⁴

⁷² Independent Radicals reminded of the following examples: Pitts' Cabinet in 1783, Peel's Cabinet in 1834, Derby's Cabinet in 1858/1859, and Campbell-Bannerman's Cabinet in 1905 in Britain; d'Azeglio's Cabinet in 1895 in Italy etc. All these were Cabinets entrusted with carrying out elections that emerged from parliamentary minority. See "Promena vlade", *Odjek* no. 112, 16 May 1905; "Stara pesma", no. 136, 14 June 1905; "Samoupravine zablude", no. 145, 25 July 1905; "U velikoj nevolji", no. 153, 2 August 1905; "Je li parlamentarno?", *Politika* nos. 531–534, 6–9 July 1905.

⁷³ In July 1905, Independent Radicals had 81 out of 160 MPs.

⁷⁴ Slobodan Jovanović, *Ustavno pravo Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (Belgrade: Službeni list, 1995), 139.

Contrary to the two large political parties, the tiny Serbian Social Democratic Party played no role in the crisis. "So far the workers party has been prosecuted by Fusionists and from now on this would be done by Independent Radicals", the *Radničke novine* wrote. However, indifferent to a change of Cabinet, the Social Democratic Party was not indifferent to the hints that the old regime might be restored. Therefore, the Social Democrats condemned interference of the "Court camarilla" in politics and attacked Independent Radicals, who professed to be democrats, for taking office from its hands. In the view of Social Democrats, the new Cabinet's coming to power was not parliamentary.⁷⁵

IX

The crisis in May 1905 can be assessed from a general, societal and practical political point of view. The crisis served the purpose of clarifying general notions of parliamentarianism that had been making headway in Serbia after the 1903 coup. Debate in the press and public concerned the questions of constitutional prerogatives of the King, the system of government by parliamentary majority and its relationship with parliamentary minority. Central to this crisis was the question whether the fall of a Cabinet brought in its tail dissolution of parliament. Essentially, it was a problem of relations between Cabinet and parliament, their trial of strength. Parliamentarism in Serbia without sufficient democratic traditions was torn between two systems adopted in Western Europe: the British and the French. According to the former, the parliament shares the fate of the Cabinet; according to the latter, the existing parliament elects a new Cabinet. The former system was viable in Britain due to the two-party composition of its parliament; by contrast, the multitude of parties in France informed the formation of coalition governments emerging from parliamentary majority. With her own structure of political parties, Serbia was somewhere between British and French parliamentary practice: in 1905, she had five political parties, but two of them stood out as the largest. However, the balance of strength between Radicals and Independent Radicals made the formation of a homogenous Cabinet difficult. For that reason, although parliamentarism in Serbia came close to British parliamentary practice, the need for coalition-making facilitated the application of the French system.

Conflict regarding relations between executive power and parliament reflected different viewpoints and interests. Relying on the numerous and strong administrative apparatus, the Cabinet tended to impose itself on the parliament. Arguing for supremacy of Cabinet over parliament, Old Radicals represented the interests of traditional entrepreneurial groups in Serbia that called for a

⁷⁵"Tiranija tevabije", *Radničke novine* no. 49, 4 June 1905; "Posle smene", no. 45, 21 May 1905; "Situacija", no. 43, 14 May 1905.

“strong” Cabinet. On the other side, arguing for predominance of the National Assembly, Independent Radicals expressed the views of the growing number of younger democratic groups within Serbian society that wanted to ensure a democratic system through the strict application of parliamentary democracy.

Conflict concerning these questions was amplified because Serbian society and its political classes were in the permanent process of stratification, with modern business-oriented elite taking shape since the late nineteenth century in step with Serbia’s economic development.⁷⁶ Therefore, parliamentary democracy was in many ways still very fragile. That crisis was not as pronounced at this time as it had been in the last decades of the nineteenth century, for democracy had scored victory in 1903 over the Court and the autocratic, “personal regimes” of the last Obrenović kings that had relied on the Army and bureaucracy. For that reason, the 1905 May crisis remained within boundaries of parliamentary democracy.

The struggle for a mandate to form Cabinet that would carry out general elections showed how important it was in Serbia to acquire control over the election process, despite all the constitutional and legal provisions established after the 1903 coup, which guaranteed free elections for the National Assembly. This stemmed from the role that the administrative apparatus played in Serbia’s political life. The formation of an Independent Radical Cabinet in 1905 signalled the beginning of a fierce and relentless struggle between the two Radical groups, since Independent Radicals demonstrated to their opponents through their acceptance to form their own Cabinet that they were not just capable of being opposition, but were also able to take office. Therefrom their mutual rivalries further increased and coloured political life in the Kingdom of Serbia, exerting a considerable influence on the development of parliamentary democracy until the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914.

UDC 94(497.11):328.16”1905”

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⁷⁶ Dimitrije Djordjević, “Serbian Society 1903–1914”, in Dimitrije Djordjevic & Bela A. Kiraly, eds., *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars* (Boulder & New York: Columbia University Press 1987), 227–239.

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