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is equally possible that such expressions may be merely the natural result of the disgust felt by the honest and politically submerged peasant class who are just beginning to realize and resent the fact that they must dance to the tune played by their corrupt leaders. The Legation has no desire to minimize the importance of the reports made by Colonel Godson, but we differ with him merely as to the immediate danger of the White Hand. We do not however deny that during a future crucial situation, this military clique may be called upon to resume its role of political importance, but no such situation appears to be imminent at present.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
John Dyneley Prince⁴⁹⁸
John Dyneley Prince,
American Minister.

File No. 800-Quintuplicate.

Copy to E. I. C., Paris.

87. 1926., srpanj 13., Izvješće poslanika Johna Dyneleyja Princa State Departmentu o pravoslavizaciji stanovništva te politici državne centralizacije.

NARA, M 358, R 4, 860h.00/291

[...]⁴⁹⁹

LEGATION OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Belgrade, July 13, 1926.

Despatch No. 46

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,
Washington.

⁴⁹⁸ Vlastoručno.

⁴⁹⁹ Državni pečat.

Sir:

I have the honor to submit herewith a brief study of the centralization tendencies as existing at the moment in Belgrade governmental circles. I have embodied also some remarks on the present condition of the Yugoslav Ministries and their various departments.

It may be regarded as a political axiom that in any federation of national elements, which, previous to their union, had been accustomed to a reasonable amount of local independence, each part of the new combination will continue to demand the utmost latitude in the regulation of its home affairs. This fact has been so fully demonstrated in the development of the United States, that it requires no amplification for Americans, conversant with their own history. Furthermore, it is clear that such newly combined governmental entities must, therefore, resist, both actively and passively, any too strenuous efforts to effect a thoroughly centralized regime. This has been and is the case in the existing Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, where, as has already been shown in previous despatches, the purely Serb element is constantly seeking to dominate the two other supposedly equal members of the new state. This unfortunate tendency is apparent to any impartial observer stationed at Belgrade, where the expression "Great Serbia" is continually applied to the entire kingdom, and where the new national flag, representing all three peoples, is flown less frequently than the old Serbian banner.

Furthermore, the Serbs are making every effort to induce non-Orthodox people, chiefly Catholics to change their religion to that of the Serbian Church, chiefly by holding out the prospect of political benefit, but often even by intimidation. I have no wish to comment on the respective merits of the two branches of Christianity represented by almost equally powerful factions in this kingdom, otherwise than by expressing the opinion, that the Serbian National Church is not a live spiritual body, but is principally a propagandist organ for the Serbian irredentists. Thus, I attended recently a service in the local Cathedral and heard the preacher enlarge vividly, not on personal religious life as governed by common Christian principles, but on the glory of the Serbian name in ancient and modern wars and the need for the preservation of purely Serbian feeling. The large congregation, whenever a telling point was made in this connection, applauded vigorously and shouted its approbation. I was strikingly reminded of the scenes in the Cathedral at Alexandria during the sermons of the nationalistic Patriarch, Cyril of that city, as graphically described by the late Charles Kingsley in his famous romance "Hypatia".

I have also been told by Belgrade Serbs that "Centralization", for which everyone here seems to be longing, is synonymous with Serbianizing the entire State. This tendency must be borne in mind by anyone studying the organization or attempts at organization, of the governmental system of the Kingdom at large.

There are four distinct systems of law now in vogue in this State, as the Department is aware; viz., the purely Serbian, the Hungarian, the Austrian (German), the Bosnian-Herzegovinan code, which latter law originated from the earlier Turkish code. It is a grave question whether these systems really ought to be unified and centralized. The

people now using them have been accustomed to them for many generations, so that each section of the country, where a special legal code prevails, understands thoroughly the working of their law and its basis. An attempt at unifying these systems, except for purely federal purposes, would almost certainly mean an effort to accommodate the far superior legal procedure of the Hungarian and Austrian communities to the primitive, cumbersome indefinite and semi-Oriental Serbian fundamental law. In the United States, where each State has ceded to the Central Government to right to legislate only for matters pertaining to the whole body politic, a most admirable *modus vivendi* has resulted, and there seems to be no reason why a similar arrangement could not be made here. I believe that if the Banat and Vojvodina and the Croats and Slovenes as well as the Bosnian and Herzegovinians were permitted to retain their respective legal codes and practice and were also permitted more local autonomy than the Serbs wish to concede them, an almost perfect satisfaction would prevail and the future of the state as a whole would be greatly strengthened, if not actually assured. It is difficult, however, to get a Serbian chauvinist to understand this point of view, so utterly wrapped are many of these people at the Capital in their dreams of a Serbian grandeur which shall restore the so-called golden age of Dušan and Nemanya, who were lords in their day of a "Greater Serbian" empire. These modern extremists are quite unable to see, for example, that the ideal method of unifying the present state would be to allow a complete local autonomy to the Croatians and Slovenes – by granting to each group its own legislative body which should fulfill similar functions to those of one of our State legislatures and by permitting such laws as do not affect the Federation to be made and administered at home. Furthermore, I feel convinced that as far as the smaller groups are concerned representation should be accorded them as minorities. This applies especially to the case of the large Hungarian speaking population across the Danube who are allowed no legislative rights whatever and are thus ignored as a political entity.

As to the federal administration, it is sadly in need of reform and this is admitted by the best minds at the Capital. Omitting from consideration the existence of corruption in very high places (see especially Legation's Despatch No. 10) and the fact that the leading personnel of all Ministries is very weak, it may be of interest to note two points in this connection: (1) the number of ministries is very much too large; (2) the internal administration of all the ministries is too diffused – the work is duplicated and in many instances even triplicated.

The Number of Ministries.

1) as is of course known to the Department, there are at present eighteen Ministries, each one of which has a full department of more or less ill regulated employees. Dr. Lazar Marković, one of the best jurists in the Skupština, recently called attention in a public interview to the absurdity of the number of Yugoslav ministries and their resultant departments, as compared with the administration of other states. It would seem possible, for example, to concentrate the work of several of these unusual ministries into

other departments of a more recognized character. Thus, one is struck at once by the existence of the following somewhat bizarre and seemingly unnecessary departments. The Ministry for the Unification of the Laws, which, by the bye, has as yet accomplished practically nothing in the direction of its titular labors and whose work in any case may be regarded as of doubtful value from our point of view, might readily be made a part of the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Agrarian Reform, whose chief function is to superintend the practical confiscation of the estates of the former great landholders and to apportion these lands on a basis which shall supply in most cases the purely Serb peasantry with enlarged holdings, might easily be combined with the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministries of Social Affairs, Mines and Forests and Public Work could be concentrated into a reorganized Ministry of the Interior. Were such steps to be taken, there would be only thirteen Ministries which could be reduced further to twelve, were the Prime Minister to hold a portfolio distinct from his function as chief of the Government, as is done in most other states. It has been shrewdly hinted to me by Serbian acquaintances that the chief objection to reducing the number of departments, which have grown up like weeds, is not so much one of statesmanship as one of "practical" politics, because under the present arrangement a vastly greater quantity of "jobs" is provided for the henchmen of the various leaders.

Diffusion of Effort.

2) It is, however, refreshing to find Dr. Lazar Marković on the side of the reduction of clerical forces in the administration of the various ministries. He said, in the above mentioned interview, that such a concentration of effort is really the chief key to administrative reform which, he adds, is sadly needed, not only for economy's sake, but because the present horde of employees get in each others way and seriously retard administrative business. From other quarters, I learn that the character of the minor officials is not high and that most of them consider that the offices exist in order to provide them with work. In short, they are similar to the officials (činovniki) of the old Russian régime who were so mercilessly satirized by Czechov in his inimitable little sketch entitled "How to obtain official Information (Spravki)", where the unfortunate searcher for a dead is detained all the forenoon, bribing his way past certain functionaries.

In Yugoslavia, the Chiefs of Division do very little actual work beyond spending a few hours a day in "superintending" and besides, there are far too many such chiefs. Here in Belgrade, there are Undersecretaries of State, Aides to the Minister, General Directors, Aides to the Director, Overseers and Inspectors - - in brief, a host of colonels and comparatively few privates who do positive and active work. Then again, many of the lower officials are not chosen from a highly intelligent class. Many of them are only young lads who do not, as a rule, show much interest in the work itself. It often happens, in spite of the host of overseers, with which each department is provided that there is little or no supervision of the work of the individual clerk which he is left to finish or not within a given time, as he may please. It should also not be forgotten that all state employees, both

the higher and the lower, are very poorly paid, usually only enough to enable them to add some pocket money to whatever income they may already receive from other sources. Such a system is neither conducive to incentive, nor to a good political morale. Many of the better class Serbs feel that there must be a reduction and concentration of these loosely knit and poorly working elements and that such a reform must come from extra-partisan courses. If the Skupština could only be persuaded to establish something like the American or British Civil Service system, based solely on competency and personal character, there might be some hope for a better administration in the Federal offices. This state of affairs will make it clear to the Department, why it is necessary to wait so long before answers are returned from the local Foreign Office to the Legation. The Foreign Office is the best managed of all the Departments, but it must too frequently await the pleasure of other departments to which matters, often of international importance, must be submitted.

From an economic point of view it will be observed that the expense of administration is naturally enormously increased by the lack of system just described which is a result of unconsidered accretion rather than of development.

Professor Farrand pointed out in his recent lectures held at Belgrade University that the United States and Yugoslavia have certain points of constitutional resemblance, but this is true only so far as both countries are federations. The United States is a federation formed by the common consent of its component elements which were, at the time of the nation's birth, practically homogeneous. Yugoslavia, on the other hand, is a federation of many heterogeneous entities, a large part of which have been superimposed on the Serbian kernel by the fortune of war. Some of these more recent additions to the state, especially the Hungarian and German speaking minorities of the Banat and Vojvodina are inherently hostile, not only to the Serbs, but to all Slavs in general. Of the Slavonic districts, Croatia and Slovenia, it may be admitted that they have ceded federal rights to the Belgrade Government, but this is certainly not true of the inhabitants of the Vojvodina and the Banat, nor is it true altogether of the Moslem and semi-Bulgarian "Macedonian" inhabitants of the south. In this unevenness of political consent to federation lies the great difference between Yugoslavia and our own country and it is clearly a significant difference for Yugoslavia. Even the official name of the Kingdom, which specifies that this is a federation of three distinctly indicated peoples should be a danger signal to those Serbs who wish to impose their own nationality, customs and religion on the entire new nation. They proudly say that they are following the French principle of centralization; that just as the French have successfully centralized all authority in Paris, the Serbian object must be to concentrate everything governmental in Belgrade, which shall be the fountain head of political power. These people forget that France is practically entirely a homogeneous country, all Latin-Celtic, with the exception of a few Flemish speaking villages in the north and a small Basque speaking district in the south, but that Yugoslavia is literally a potpourri of languages, religions and political tendencies. Any impartial observer will admit that the American system of a home-rule federation would be far

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safer for the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes than an arbitrary attempt to force an unwelcome centralization on a variegated population.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
John Dyneley Prince⁵⁰⁰
John Dyneley Prince
American Minister.

File No. 800-Quintuplicate.

88. 1926., kolovoz 2., Izvješće trećega tajnika poslanstva Carla A. Fishera State Departmentu o političkoj situaciji u Kraljevini SHS, nedavnim poplavama, Radićevim protutalijanskim govorima u Dalmaciji i zagovaranju federacije s Bugarskom.

NARA, M 358, R 4, 860H.00/293

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LEGATION OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Belgrade, August 2, 1926.

Despatch No. 58.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

Referring to despatch No. 50 (860h.00/290)⁵⁰² of July 19th 1926 on the internal political situation, the Legation has the honor to report that during the past two weeks the Government has been principally engaged with financial measures looking toward a reduction in State expenditures in order to cover the losses suffered from the recent floods. The principal of these measures provides for a reduction of the authorized budget

⁵⁰⁰ Vlastoručno.

⁵⁰¹ Državni pečat.

⁵⁰² Dopisano rukopisom.