

## DIMITRIJE DJORDJEVIĆ

### THE 1883 PEASANT UPRISING IN SERBIA

Fifty years after the 1883 rebellion in Eastern Serbia which resulted in its liberation from the Ottomans, another uprising broke out in the same region. This time it was directed against domestic authorities. The peasant movement in Serbia in 1883 resulted from economic, political and social factors.

After the overthrow of Ottoman rule, the Balkan peasant witnessed the growth of his own State establishment which introduced a heavy bureaucracy and fiscal burdens unknown in the previous period. The city became the main initiator and beneficiary of the modernization process. The peasant became involved in a free laissez-faire economy in which he had to confront competition beyond his economic capacities. Having offered massive support to movements directed against the Ottoman rule in the previous period, the peasant now became an object in the political game of domestic and foreign dynasties and politicians recruited among the new intelligentsia and the growing urban population. In the struggle for constitutionalism and parliamentarism which was promoted in the Balkans during the last three decades of the nineteenth century and was initiated by the middle-class liberals, the peasantry suddenly assumed an important political role, due mainly to its numerical preponderance in the voting process. The liberals mobilized and organized the peasantry, confronting the conservatives who found support in the dynasty, the army and the bureaucracy. This confrontation enlarged the basis of Balkan politics and introduced a period of dynamic and explosive strife and collisions.

All these factors are present in the 1883 uprising in Eastern Serbia, known as the Timok Rebellion (*Timočka buna*), after the region in which it occurred. The rebellion was an important event in the late nineteenth century Serbian history. All general histories of Serbia deal, to a smaller or larger degree, with the rebellion<sup>1</sup>. Some of the participants wrote memoirs, or gave accounts

1. Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića*, Beograd 1934, II, Chapter *Timočka buna*, 111-145, and Appendix VIII, *Raša Milošević o Timočkoj buni*, 517-535. Živan Živanović, *Politička istorija Srbije u drugoj polovini devetnajestog veka*, Beograd 1924, II, Chapter *Timočka buna i srpsko-bugarski rat*, 239-262. Jaša Prodanović, *Istorija političkih stranaka i struja u Srbiji*, Beograd 1947, 493-513, Dragoslav Janković, *O političkim strankama u Srbiji XIX veka*, Beograd 1951, 246-255. The Timok Rebellion was also treated in Michael Petrovich,

and testimonies<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly enough, there is no complete story of the movement itself, especially all its economic and social aspects. The older Serbian and Yugoslav historiography mostly concentrated on the involvement of the Radical Party leadership in the rebellion. With the exception of two volumes of published sources concerning the Timok Rebellion<sup>3</sup>, the modern Yugoslav historiography neglects the revolutionary spirit of the middle-class Radicals in the 1880's, attributing these endeavors to the young social democracy. To understand the movement in its entirety, it is necessary to approach domestic politics in Serbia on the eve of the rebellion, the outbreak and development of the uprising, the reaction of the State authorities and, finally, the social structure of the rebels and the responsibility for moving the peasants in such a venture.

## I

The 1880's witnessed a strong polarization in Serbian politics. On the one side was Prince (from 1882 King) Milan Obrenović and the Progressive Party, supported by the State establishment. In spite of its name, the Progressive Party was basically conservative. Its proclaimed program of reforms and Westernization of the country was checked by the fear of the peasant masses entering politics. The new Radical Party, on the other side, successfully gathered large segments of the population around the program of political self-government (*samouprava*) which tended to limit the role played by the bureaucracy and to decentralize the State apparatus. The Liberal Party,

*A History of Modern Serbia 1804-1918*, New York 1976, II, 428 and Alex Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and Yugoslavia*, New Jersey 1974, 26-28. The diplomatic background is offered in Charles Jelavich, *Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism*, Berkeley 1962, 193-197.

2. The most important personal accounts are: Raša Milošević, *Timočka buna 1883 godine*, Beograd 1923, 291. Pera Todorović published a series of articles in *Male novine* (1980 *Krvava Godina*, 1901 *Uspomene na kralja Milana*). Nikola Pašić explained his role on three occasions in *Ustavna Srbija*, 11 July 1903, in the Parliament on June 23, 1907 and in *Politika*, April 1927, published after his death. Some of the participants of the rebellion published their statements: Ljuba Božinović in *Politika* 11 april 1927; Dobrosav Petrović in *Politika*, 10 November 1940; Djoka Lazarević discussed the responsibility for the rebellion in *Politika* 21 April 1927; Dragutin Ilijć, the Secretary of the Summary Court published memoirs *Zaječarska buna*, I 1909, II 1910. See also: Dušan Nikolajević, *Kralj Milan i Timočka buna*, Beograd 1927, and Velizar Ninčić, *Pera Todorović*, Beograd 1956, 96-126.

3. Milen Nikolić, *Timočka buna 1883*, ed. by Državna arhiva Srbije, Gradja, knj. IV, Beograd, I 1954, II 1955. This is the most valuable publication of sources concerning the Rebellion. Momčilo Veljković published some documents in *O Timočkoj buni 1883*, Beograd 1936.

supposed to be in the center, was squeezed between the two stronger opponents. The conservatives looked upon the Radicals as extremists, anarchists and demagogues, dangerous for the existing law and order. The Radicals saw in the Progressivists a clique of reactionaries, abusing the State authority and power. The democratic process gave the advantage to the Radicals who became a popular movement, rather than a political party in a proper sense. The King and the Progressivists tried to crush the rising tide of the Radicals by applying coercive and non-parliamentary measures. The Radicals answered by inciting their followers and introducing revolutionary tactics. Both sides were rapidly moving in opposite directions, jeopardizing the nascent parliamentarianism in the country. A serious crisis resulted.

The storm started in January 1882 when the Radicals and Liberals obstructed Parliament. The obstruction was followed by the resignation of the deputies of both parties, as a protest against the Progressivists' government and the Prince. The elections held on May 15, 1882 in order to fill the vacant places, returned the same deputies who left their benches in Parliament. In such a stalemate, and in order to survive, the government neglected the electoral issue and fabricated its majority by introducing into Parliament the Progressivists (*dvoglasci*) who were second in the elections<sup>4</sup>. The Parliament became a farce and a so-called "policy of defiance" (*politika prkosa*) took place. Passions and proselytism turned politics into a crusade in which any means were used by both sides.

On the eve of the Timok Rebellion, at the elections held on September 7, 1883, the Radical Party scored an overwhelming victory, in spite of the pressure of the police on the electorate. The King refused to offer the government to the winners. On September 22, 1883 he postponed the Parliament meetings and appointed a government under Nikola Hristić, a former minister of interior from the times of Prince Michael, who was drawn out of oblivion for the occasion. Consequently, a life or death struggle started between the Radicals and the Monarch, who identified himself with Naprednjak (Progressivist) government. In February 1882 the Radicals refused to greet the promotion of Serbia from a Principality to a Kingdom, and remained seated in the Parliament during the ovations to the new King. The Radical draft of a new Constitution referred to "the sovereignty of the people" from which "all power derives"<sup>5</sup>. The Radicals were not quite innocent in the attempt of Ilka Marković, the widow of a former colonel executed in 1877, to assassinate King Milan in

4. Živan Živanović, *Politička istorija Srbije*, II, 206-209.

5. Raša Milošević, *Timočka buna*, 52.

September 1882<sup>6</sup>. In their defense one must say that Radical fears about the King using all measures to crush them, were justified<sup>7</sup>. In the fall of 1883 the country was facing either a royal coup or a Radical rebellion.

In the summer of 1883 the Radicals were envisaging an armed resistance to confront a royal putsch after the September elections. The Radical Party journal *Samouprava* called the people to resist the authorities in their attempts to forge the results of the coming elections. The journal suggested resisting the police and the army and encouraged the overthrow of village leaders (*kmets*)<sup>8</sup>. On September 22, after the Parliament meetings were postponed, the Radical Party Main Committee met in a secret session to discuss the formation of a Party Headquarters to steer the resistance<sup>9</sup>. Although nothing was decided, the agenda itself reflected the dispositions and tempers of the Party leadership.

The Radical press warned the government that “the people are still quiet, but not appeased...”. The message to the government was clear: “The people might realize that the constitutional struggle is no longer adequate”<sup>10</sup>. In his report to the King after the rebellion, Prime Minister Hristić wrote that omens of the uprising were present before it started, and that the Radicals had the village communes (*opštine*) in their hands in a way that they ceased to be agencies of State authorities<sup>11</sup>.

In the country itself the temperature was rising, stimulated by the press and Parliamentary debates. At the end of 1882 the government ordered the branding of cattle along the frontier of Rumania and Bulgaria, in accordance with a stipulation of the new commercial treaty signed with Austria-Hungary. The peasants in Eastern Serbia, traditionally suspicious of State interference with their belongings, and stimulated by the Radical propaganda blaming Austria, opposed the authorities who attempted to carry out the government orders. Incidents and armed encounters between the peasantry and the mounted

6. In his memoirs, Raša Milošević writes that “her (Ilka’s) intention to assassinate King Milan was not unknown to me”, *Ibid.*, 57.

7. Milen Nikolić, *Timočka buna* (further on TB), I, Doc. 252, p. 305: Circulaire of the Main Committee to local Radical Committees, 8 February 1883. All the dates are based on the Julian Calendar.

8. Raša Milošević, *Kako da se oprostimo nezakonitih izbora*, *Samouprava*, n° 98, 20 August 1883.

9. Raša Milošević, *Timočka buna*, 138-141.

10. “Šta radi narod”, *Samouprava*, n° 124, 6 October 1883.

11. TB, I, Doc. 99, Report of the Prime Minister Nikola Hristić to King Milan, 28 December 1883, p. 95-118.

police took place in the spring of 1883 in the villages in which the coming rebellion was to explode in October<sup>12</sup>.

On January 3, 1883 the Progressivist Parliament, in the absence of the obstructing Radicals and Liberals, enacted a law concerning the establishment of a regular, standing army. The law abolished the old Popular army (*narodna vojska*) formed by Prince Michael in 1861, which proved ineffective in the 1876-1877 wars. The 1883 law introduced a modern military organization, the training in barracks and the re-equipment of military units<sup>13</sup>. It emphasized the collecting of old rifles distributed to the peasants-soldiers of the dismissed Popular Army. On June 25, 1883 the Minister of War ordered the seizure of the arms from the population<sup>14</sup>.

The law concerning the standing army had, besides its military aspect, an implication for domestic politics. It meant the disarmament of the peasant. The peasant was the main supporter of the Radical Party. By dissolving the Popular army the government aimed to weaken the Radicals and to obtain the full support of the army, now under its control. The Radicals immediately understood the political consequences of the change. They vigorously opposed the disarming of the peasant. The Party president, Nikola Pašić published an article in *Samouprava* on July 30, 1883 in which he condemned the government, compared it with the Turks, accused it of selling peasant arms to the Jews (1) and suspected it of acting on behalf of Austria. "Without arms, there is no freedom" wrote Pašić, and "the Serb will be deprived of his rifle with which he fought in wars, which saved his life, protected his fatherland and which he intended to leave to his children as a pledge, a memory, an omen". This emotional appeal ended ambiguously: "And you people, if you are not lucky enough to be spared your rifle, your war souvenir—give it up, but don't leave your home without it"<sup>15</sup>. However, Pašić's message was quite clear: it recommended resistance.

12. Clashes between the mounted police and the peasants occurred in February in Poreč, in March in Grljan, in May in Gamzigrad. In Grljan five peasants were wounded. The peasants marched on Zaječar in order to submit a complaint, but were refused. Twenty four peasants from Gamzigrad went on trial in Zaječar and got sentences from 2 years to 3 months of prison. The future leader of the Timok Rebellion, the priest Marinko Ivković was then sentenced to 8 months of prison, TB, I, Doc. 99, p. 117.

13. *Srpke novine*, n° 24, 1 February 1883, The law concerning the establishment of the regular army was approved in the Skupština on December 27, 1882 and confirmed on January 3, 1883.

14. TB, I, Doc. 1, p. 5, Order of the Minister of War about the seizure of arms from the soldiers of the Popular Army, Beograd 25 June 1883.

15. Nikola Pašić, *Razoružanje narodne vojske*, *Samouprava* n° 89, 30 July 1883, cit.

## II

The commissions appointed by the government to collect arms from the peasants started their task on September 23, 1883. At first the action went smoothly. Suddenly conflicts between the peasants and the authorities started in some villages in Eastern Serbia. On September 27 and 28 in the villages, Čitluk and Sesalac, the villagers refused to return their arms. The same happened at the beginning of October in the village Krivi Vir. The peasants broke into the room where the confiscated arms were stocked and returned them to the crowd gathered in front of the village commune. The district leader ordered the peasants to comply with orders, but got the answer that they were willing to “deliver arms with one hand and to receive new arms with the other”. The district leader issued arrest orders to some of the demonstrators. They refused to submit themselves, shouting: “Who is accusing and castigating us! Give this man to us!”. Frightened, the district leader pardoned the accused and escaped from the village. The same story was repeated on October 7 in the village of Lukovo, where the peasants marched towards the neighboring city of Boljevac, demanding the release of their arrested countrymen. On October 18 they broke into the Boljevac prison, freed the prisoners and celebrated the victory in the local coffee-house in the presence of a powerless authority. The movement spread fast. Peasant horsemen rode from village to village asking for help, standard bearers were waving flags, drummers called for alarm. In a few days the uprising spread to the districts of Zaječar, Timok, Banja, in the countries (*okrug*) of Aleksinac and Knjaževac<sup>16</sup>. State and communal authorities were arrested. In the small spa Banja, in the midst of a crowd of 2000 peasants, the Radical deputy Ljuba Didić, with a gun in his hand, proclaimed that “the authority now passed into the hands of the peoples”. The rebellion embraced the cities in Eastern Serbia. On October 26 in the city of Knjaževac a Provisional Insurgent Committee was organized, which took the executive power. On October 31 in the city of Aleksinac some 3.000-4.000 insurgents attacked the army magazines, seized arms, arrested local authorities and raised a standard with the inscription “For the Constituent Assembly, For the Rights of the People and for Freedom”. The city of Zaječar was attacked. The rebels gathered on mountain peaks surrounding the cities,

at Raša Milošević, *Timočka buna*, p. 142-146. This copy of *Samouprava* was confiscated by the authorities and didn't reach the public. However, the message was transmitted to the Radicals in the country through various channels.

16. TB, I, Doc. 99, Report of Nikola Hristić to King Milan, 28 December 1883.

blocked passes and roads. The Banja-Knjaževac telegraph line was under their control. The uprising was moving towards the Niš and Morava area, but was not able to cross the Morava river<sup>17</sup>. Only sporadic resistance broke out in Western, Southern and Central Serbia<sup>18</sup>.

It is difficult to establish the exact number of the rebels. General Tihomilj Nikolić, King's commissary and commander in chief of the army which crushed the rebellion, estimated their number to be 12.000 to 15.000<sup>19</sup>. This judgment seems to be realistic. The fast ascendance of the rebellion was due to a deep peasant dissatisfaction. The peasantry was embittered by the abuses and brutality of the local authorities. The later testimonies of the arrested local officials refer to peasant accusations and complaints regarding the behavior of the State authorities. "We are going naked while the masters (*gospoda*) are buying clothes with our money and are sleeping on mattresses", the rebels said. They accused the King of being "a bastard, incapable of ruling, who has sold the country to Austria". The government "involved the people in foreign debts, which even their children will not be able to pay off"<sup>20</sup>. In these complaints one could find slogans typical for a peasant *jacquerie*, combined with a political Radical propaganda.

The peasant discontent only partially explains the fast expansion of the movement. Two factors played a major role in mobilizing the rebels: the existing structure of the popular army and the Radical Party network. The first offered military, and the second political leadership.

The popular army in insurgent areas comprised parts of the Timok division, organized in battalions, with a commanding staff and soldiers who went through exercises and wars (in 1876-7). They were armed with old rifles of the "Peabody" type, but lacked ammunition. When the rebellion broke out spontaneously, both the military command and the rebels tried to attract the popular army to their side. Petar Milošević, a commander of the popular army in the 1876 war and a peasant himself, described in his statement to the Summary Court how he received two letters asking him to mobilize his battalion. The one came from the army command in Knjaževac, the other from the insurgent's committee in the same city<sup>21</sup>. In mobilizing his troops, he acted

17. TB, II, Doc. 684, District of Kruševac 12 November 1883; See also Živan Živanović, *op. cit.*, foot-note 2, p. 245-6.

18. TB, I, Doc. 99, p. 102.

19. TB, I, Doc. 94, p. 76-93, Report of General Tihomilj Nikolić to the Minister of War, Zaječar 2 December 1883.

20. See TB, I, Doc. 100, 106, 119, 129.

21. TB, I, Doc. 181, Statement of Petar Milošević to the Summary Court, 3 November

legally, but then he joined the rebels and executed orders issued by their committee. Such was the case with other commanders of the popular army; they joined the peasantry to which they themselves belonged.

The Radical Party immediately imposed a political leadership on the rebels. On October 26 a provisional committee was established in the city of Knjaževac, headed by the prominent Radicals Aca Stanojević, Mihailo Veselinović, and Gavra Aničić. The Committee took over the executive power and issued a proclamation to the population signed by 67 persons. The document was ambiguous. It referred to the necessity to maintain law and order in a situation in which the prerogatives of the government were jeopardized by the unrest. But at the same time the Committee seized power for itself in a revolutionary way, arrested State officials, issued orders to the commanders of the rebels and even started building a new network of local authorities and revolutionary courts. It organized sub-committees in the insurgent districts<sup>22</sup>. The same kind of committee was organized on October 31 in the city of Aleksinac<sup>23</sup>, in Banja, Derven and the Svrljig district<sup>24</sup>.

The peasant military leaders and the members of the Radical Committees differed in the tactics to be applied, although the former were following the instructions of the latter. The peasant leadership urged for an offensive attitude. The Committees tried to find a compromise with the State authorities. Fearing anarchy, the Committees attempted to hold back a revolutionary explosion. They feared reprisals from the army and the government, aware that they possessed more strength than the rebels. One cannot escape the feeling that the Radicals wished primarily to exploit the rebellion to apply political pressure on the government and the King, rather than to push it to extremes. Many of the instructions sent by the Knjaževac Committee to the commander of the rebels at the front of Derven are available. The Committee constantly advised moderation. Ordering the commander to arrest State authorities, he was asked to proceed "with decency". "Don't do anything that could harm anybody" ordered the Committee. The commander was warned to prevent looting and to do everything he could to procure supplies for the people. He

1883; See also TB, I, Doc. 103, Declaration of Rista Petrović to the Court, 30 October 1883.

22. TB, I, Doc. 258, p. 331-332, Decision of the citizens from Knjaževac to organize a Committee, 26 October 1883. *Ibid.*, Doc. 259, p. 332-3, Proclamation of the Knjaževac Committee, October 26, 1883; Doc. 262, p. 334, Order of the Committee, 27 October 1883.

23. TB, I, Doc. 367, p. 483-484, Report of the Aleksinac Province leader to the Prime Minister Hristić, Aleksinac 1 November 1883. The rebels broke into the prison and freed the Radical deputy Stanko Petrović, shouting: "Slave, we brought you freedom!".

24. See TB, I, Doc. 135, 136, 178.



was instructed to avoid confrontation with the army. If this was not possible, the commander was asked first to negotiate: "Do not shoot unless you are provoked"<sup>25</sup>. Too much law and order transpired through the Committee's instructions. The priest Marinko Ivković, the leader of the rebels, shook hands with the arrested and frightened officials and guaranteed their safety with his own honor<sup>26</sup>. Some of the peasant commanders protested this behavior. "While we are waiting and dozing, we lose the momentum allowing the army to surround and destroy us" complained one of them<sup>27</sup>. The Committees tried to negotiate with the King and the army commanders, asking for amnesty and an armistice. When defeated, some of the Committees tried to reduce their responsibility by restoring the legal authorities<sup>28</sup>.

The Radical middle-class leadership and the commanding officers of the popular army imposed discipline on the peasant movement. This explains why there was no looting of communal or State property, no burning of land registers and killing of arrested officials. When defeated, the Commander Milošević drew up a list of the safe contents and then sealed the safe of the Svrlijig district<sup>29</sup>. On the contrary, some of the local State authorities tried to benefit from the confusion by appropriating money from communal treasuries and imputing responsibility to the insurgents<sup>30</sup>.

### III

King Milan and his government reacted instantly to the rebellion. On October 21 Martial Law was proclaimed, first for the county of Crna Reka, then for the districts of Banja, Krajina, Aleksinac and the Knjaževac Province<sup>31</sup>. A Summary Court Martial was introduced to deal with the rebels<sup>32</sup>.

25. Instructions of the Committee to the Commander Petar Milošević, TB, I, Doc. 138, 139, 156.

26. Mihailo Stuparević, teacher, Srpsko kolo 22 July 1884, cit. at Dragoslav Janković, *Političke stranke u Srbiji*, p. 252.

27. TB, I, Doc. 266, Marinko Ivković to the Committee, at the Vratarnica front, October 30, 1883.

28. TB, I, Doc. 135, Temporary Committee for the Restoration of Law and Order in the Banja District to the Royal Commissary general Tihomilj Nikolić, 29 October 1883, p. 185-186; Doc. 136, Report of the Province leader from Aleksinac 3 November 1883, p. 186-188; Doc. 366, The Committee for the Restoration of Law and Order, Aleksinac 1 november 1883, p. 481-482.

29. TB, I, Doc. 179, Attestation made by Petar Milošević 31 October 1883.

30. TB, I, Doc. 120, Zaječar October 9, 1884.

31. TB, I, Doc. 15, 25, 27, 30. See also Srpske novine n° 230, 237/1883.

32. TB, I, Doc. 16, p. 25.

The army was ordered to crush the rebellion and general Tihomilj Nikolić was appointed King's commissioner and Commander in Chief. The officers and non-commissioned officers were promised a double salary. The expenses were charged to the rebel population of Eastern Serbia<sup>33</sup>. At the same time the law guaranteeing the freedom of the press and the law concerning the freedom of associations and public gatherings were suspended<sup>34</sup>.

Regular troops assigned to quell the rebellion consisted of six infantry battalions, two artillery regiments (with parts of the Čuprija artillery regiment), two squadrons of cavalry and 80 members of the mounted police<sup>35</sup>. The rebels benefited from the rugged terrain, mountain gorges, thick forests and muddy roads flooded by October rains. But the army had an overwhelming advantage in modern long-range rifles, recently purchased in Germany, and the artillery. An abundance of ammunition and a skilled leadership contributed to the superiority of the army. Instead of attacking the insurgents' main position at Čestobrodica directly from Paraćin, where the army troops were concentrated, they moved towards Aleksinac and Banja in order to get at the insurgents from behind. The first confrontation between the rebels and the army took place on October 26 at the gorge at Banja. The rebels tried unsuccessfully to negotiate, but the army charged and easily dispersed some 20.000 insurgents, killing and wounding 34-40 of them, and suffering only one casualty<sup>36</sup>. The troops moved then to Boljevac, entered the city and attacked the main position of 3.000 rebels at Čestobrodica. In half an hour the rebels were crushed, on October 27<sup>37</sup>. Modern rifles and artillery again proved to be decisive. In the meantime another group of rebels attacked the city of Zaječar. On October 28 they entered the city and started negotiating with the local army garrison for an armistice. Refused, some 2.000 rebels withdrew to the neighboring hill of Vratarnica which dominates the access to the city of Knjaževac. The royal troops successfully broke the resistance on October 31 after

33. TB, I, Doc. 17 (also: Službeni vojni list n° 41/1883); Doc. 18 (Also: Srpske novine n° 231, 23 October 1883); Doc. 20, 31, 37.

34. TB, I, Doc. 21 and 22, p. 32-33. The justification for abolishing the freedom of the press was found in "abuses of the free press, which became an instrument to incite the population against law and order, thus becoming dangerous for the security of the country".

35. TB, I, Doc. 94, Report of general Nikolić to the Minister of War, 2 November 1883, p. 76-90.

36. TB, I, Doc. 133, Report of the Commander of the Banja detachment to general Nikolić, 26 October 1883. See also Živanović, *Politička istorija Srbije*, II, p. 253-257, Testimony of colonel Aleksandar Protić, commander of the Morava regiment.

37. TB, I, Doc. 103, Statement of Rista Petrović 30 October 1883, p. 127.

a brief skirmish<sup>38</sup>. On October 31 the troops penetrating from the south and the area of Niš, defeated the insurgents at Gramada and Derven<sup>39</sup>. On the same day the Knjaževac Committee instructed the rebel command to stop further fighting. On November 1 the army entered the two main centers of the rebellion, the cities of Knjaževac and Aleksinac. The rest of the peasants surrendered to the royal troops on the same day. The army demonstrated such a superiority that practically there were no serious clashes with the rebels. It is difficult to score the casualties. In sum it seems that the insurgents lost some 15 dead and 60 wounded. The army had only one dead, and one wounded soldier. The peasant movement was crushed in one week.

## V

Immediately after the defeat of the rebellion, the Summary Court-Martial met in session. It had a president, two members and a secretary. The investigator was at the same time the State prosecutor. The Court dealt with crimes committed against "Fatherland, the Constitution and the Monarch" as well as "acts directed against laws, authority and public order". There was no appeal to verdicts which were to be executed in twenty-four hours<sup>40</sup>.

The Court was in session from November 4 until December 6. It held 86 trials and rendered 809 verdicts. Ninety-four defendants were sentenced to death. Sixty-three were pardoned by the King, ten were sentenced in absentia. Twenty leaders of the rebellion were executed by firing squads, one committed suicide in prison. Five hundred and sixty-seven rebels (11 of them in absentia) were sentenced to forced labor (*robija*), with a total amount of 3979 years. Five defendants got imprisonment (*zatočenje*), 68 were sentenced to jail (*zatvor*) and 75 were released as innocent<sup>41</sup>. The expediency of the procedure was staggering: the Court met four times a day and sentenced 29 people daily

38. TB, I, Doc. 272, Statement of Ljuba Božinović, Zaječar 3 November 1883, p. 362.

39. TB, I, Doc. 181, Statement of Petar Milošević, 3 November 1883; Doc. 176, Report of Petar Milošević to the insurgent's Committee, October 30, 1883; Doc. 94, Report of general Nikolić 2 November 1883; also Doc. 136, 178, 267, 269.

40. TB, I, Doc. 16, p. 25-28, The law concerning the establishment of the Summary Court 21 October 1883; Doc. 23, Nomination of members of the Court, Beograd 23 October 1883.

41. TB, II, Doc. 745, p. 588-9, Report of the President of the Summary Court about Court's sessions and activity, Zaječar 7 December 1883. There is a slight difference between the President's report and the Court's documents. According to the first, there were 84 sessions, according to the second 86 sessions. The total number of accused was 809 and not 819.

on the average. There was no time for a thorough investigation, “Our judgment is based on conscience, not on proof”, said the Court president to one of the Radical leaders<sup>42</sup>. The priest Marinko Ivković, a Radical Party member of the Parliament and leader of rebels, was interrogated by the prosecutor on November 7, brought to trial the same day, sentenced to death, defrocked and executed the next morning<sup>43</sup>. Another Radical leader, Ljuba Didić was caught trying to escape to Bulgaria. He offered a bribe to the peasant who caught him, but was refused, brought to trial on November 6 and executed<sup>44</sup>. The only ones who escaped this destiny were the Radicals who crossed the frontier on time. Some 23 members of their leadership gathered in the neighboring Bulgarian city of Vidin. Among them were the Party President Nikola Pašić and three members of the Parliament. They launched furious attacks against the King and the Government<sup>45</sup>.

The King and the government were ready to exploit the opportunity to finally settle the accounts with the Radical Party in general. The target was the Party leadership in Beograd<sup>46</sup>. Except for a letter sent on October 10 by Aca Stanojević from Aleksinac announcing the beginning of peasant unrest, the Radical leaders in Beograd were completely in the dark concerning the development of events in Eastern Serbia<sup>47</sup>. The October 21 proclamation of Martial Law and the establishment of a Martial Summary Court took the leadership by surprise. Two days later, after a secret meeting, the members of the Executive Committee in Belgrade decided to join the rebels<sup>48</sup>. The Party president Nikola Pašić sent the Executive Committee’s member Raša Milošević to Persiani, the Russian minister in Beograd, for news and suggestions. But the Russian diplomat, already at odds with the King, could not promise anything and was grim in predicting the future<sup>49</sup>. Pašić understood the message and secretly left the country the same day (October 25) for Zemun, in Austria,

42. Raša Milošević, *Timočka buna*, p. 179.

43. Velizar Ninčić, *Pera Todorović*, p. 115-116.

44. TB, I, Doc. 183, 184, 187, 188.

45. TB, II, Doc. 626, List of the Radical emigrants; Doc. 631, Report of the Minister for Justice.

46. The members of the Radical Main Committee were: Nikola Pašić (president), Pera Todorović, journalist, Kosta Taušanović, tobacco-dealer, Paja Mihailović, secretary of the Ministry of Finances, Raša Milošević, technologist, Jovan Djaja and Andra Nikolić and Giga Geršić professors, Jovan Simić, printer and Stavan Stevanović, merchant. TB, II, Doc. 472, October 4, 1883.

47. Raša Milošević, *Timočka buna*, p. 149.

48. Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića*, III, p. 120-123.

49. Raša Milošević, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

in order to join the rebels by way of Austria and Rumania, or to escape arrest, or to achieve both—a question which probably will never be answered<sup>50</sup>. The other party leaders were still discussing what to do when the police caught them at their homes during the night of October 25-26<sup>51</sup>. They were not aware of the danger they were running. “I took it easy at first”, wrote Pera Todorović, one of the main Party leaders, “knowing that the Executive Committee did not organize the rebellion. But when they put us in irons, I realized the seriousness of the situation”<sup>52</sup>. Nervous and frightened, King Milan was ready for the worst. According to witnesses, he was waiting in the royal palace for news of the arrest of the leading Radicals, dressed in a uniform at 3 a.m., with a sabre on his side, amidst the sleepy members of the government. During the first days of the rebellion he was prepared to leave the country with the Queen and his heir, if the movement was to spread further<sup>53</sup>. He ordered the Commander of the Beograd fortress, where the Radicals were jailed, to send him directly the reports about the prisoners<sup>54</sup>. The members of the Radical leadership were treated severely: they were put in irons so they could only crawl, and were placed in the dark cells of the old Turkish fortress, with a heavy surveillance and isolation<sup>55</sup>. Pera Todorović, who had just returned from Vienna after a medical check-up, and who used morphine to alleviate liver pains, described the ordeal in a letter sent later to a friend:

It all seemed a nightmare, a horrible nightmare. Taken at midnight from bed, led to the fortress, clapped into prison, the next day put in irons, thrown into a Turkish tomb, plunged in the darkest obscurity for twelve days, then loaded on a gloomy night on the ship Deligrad to reach Smederevo at midnight, then packed in a wagon for Paraćin and transported under rainy weather in a cart over the neck-breaking Čestobrodica and escorted by 50 gendarmes, in

50. TB, II, Doc. 628, 615.

51. Raša Milošević, *op. cit.*, p. 151-153. Advised by a friend to join the rebels, Milošević answered that he would “rather join the Beograd lunatic asylum which is shorter than to take a boat to Austria, travel through Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria to reach the jail in Pirot”.

52. Velizar Ninčić, *Pera Todorović*, p. 112.

53. According to *Tasin Dnevnik*, cit. at Momčilo Veljković, *Timočka buna*, p. 41.

54. See reports of the Commander of the Beograd fortress to the King, TB, II, Doc. 476, 477, 478, 479, 487, 491.

55. TB, II, Doc. 494, 505.

order to reach Zaječar (where the Summary Court-Martial sat-DDJ) being alone for eighteen days and finally sentenced to death...<sup>56</sup>.

From the Beograd prison both Todorović and Geršić tried to reach the King, wrote him letters suggesting a compromise, even a split of the Party among its moderate and radical members<sup>57</sup>. All in vain. The investigation in Zaječar was brief; for some of those accused it took only ten minutes<sup>58</sup>. The trial was held on November 28 and was through in three hours. The State prosecutor accused the nine Party leaders of inciting the rebellion in order to abolish the Monarchy and depose the Obrenović dynasty. The accusation was based on articles published in the Party journal before the rebellion, on a letter which could not be found in the Court archives<sup>59</sup>, and on some statements of already caught and executed rebels. The police tried in vain to find the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings in Beograd. In the meantime they were securely locked, as private papers of a Beograd attorney, in the safes of the State treasury.

While the evidence used against the defendants was shaky, their defense was quite convincing. If the leadership had planned an uprising it would have started in the entire country. If the Executive Committee had organized the movement, its members would not have been caught "sleeping peacefully in beds" but would have joined the rebels. Had the rebellion been premeditated, there would have been no need to emphasize the popular plebiscite, planned for November 1, to call for a revision of the Constitution. It is dangerous to assume, said Todorović to the Court, that the Radical Party is anti-dynastic, while the Party enjoys the support of the vast majority of the voters<sup>60</sup>.

The verdict was determined in advance. Pera Todorović and Raša Milošević were sentenced to death, Kosta Taušanović to 8 years in prison, Paja Mihalović to 5 years in prison. The rest of the 5 defendants were found inno-

56. TB, II, Doc. 518, Letter of Pera Todorović to the priest Živojin Jovičić, professor of Theology, 6 December 1883.

57. TB, II, Doc. 501, Letter of Giga Geršić to King Milan i November, 1883; See also Doc. 506, Beograd 3-8 November 1883.

58. Raša Milošević, *Timočka buna*, p. 172.

59. The letter really existed but was caught by the police before Milošević could get it. See: TB, II, Doc. 512, Knjaževac 22 October 1883; see also: R. Milošević, *op. cit.*, p. 179, Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića*, III, p. 135. Milošević destroyed all his correspondence before being arrested (*op. cit.*, p. 153).

60. Raša Milošević, *op. cit.*, 172-179.

cent<sup>61</sup>. The Party president Nikola Pašić was tried in absentia and separately, and was sentenced to death<sup>62</sup>.

What followed the sentence looked like a theater with tragic and comic accents. All Beograd society, in which everybody knew each other, stood in favor of a pardon for the members of the Executive Committee. Among them was Queen Natalia, the German minister, the progressivist leaders Stojan Novaković and Milutin Garašanin<sup>63</sup>. The wife of the condemned Milošević was expecting a baby, which moved all the women in Beograd. The King himself, alternately being lenient and severe, was ready to commute the death sentences. He began to worry that the sentenced might refuse to petition for pardon and sent orders to the Court in Zaječar to delay the execution, due in 24 hours, until their petitions were presented. The King overestimated the courage of the sentenced: immediately after the verdict, the two sentenced leaders, Todorović and Milošević, sent an appeal to the Monarch: "Mercy, our sublime Ruler!". The rest was easy and the King transformed the two death penalties into ten years of imprisonment. There was an irony in the King's order to General Nikolić "to present the pardon to Todorović with special precautions, to avoid possible consequences which such a shock could provoke to his health"<sup>64</sup>. The theatre went on and the actor Todorović answered to the actor Milan, "From this moment on the life of Pera Todorović belongs to his Monarch"<sup>65</sup>. Still, the sentenced leaders had to stay in prison until January 1886 and Pašić was able to return from emigration only six years later, in 1889.

The rebellion was over. On December 8, 1883 a royal decree called the army back from Eastern Serbia to the barracks. The next day the Summary Court-Martial was dissolved and its authority transferred to regular courts<sup>66</sup>. A shower of medals and awards followed for the army commanders and members of the Summary Court-Martial<sup>67</sup>. The frightened public answered by congratulating King Milan and his government. Among them could be found many Radicals trying to ingratiate themselves with the victors. A docile

61. TB, II, Doc. 514, p. 186-199, The verdict of the Summary Court concerning members of the Main Committee of the Radical Party, Zaječar 28 November 1883.

62. TB, II, Doc. 638, p. 403-405, The verdict concerning Nikola Pašić and others, Zaječar 4 December 1883.

63. Raša Milošević, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

64. Velizar Ninčić, *Pera Todorović*, p. 121.

65. TB, II, Doc. 515, 516, 517. Also Ninčić, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

66. TB, I, Doc. 36, p. 42, The Royal Decree 8 December 1883; Doc. 37, p. 42-3, The Royal Decree, 9 December 1883.

67. Momčilo Veljković, *Timočka buna*, p. 55.

*Skupština* made up of Progressivists, approved on June 15, 1884 all the measures applied to check the rebellion<sup>68</sup>. It was much later and after the downfall of King Milan that a monument was raised on the hill of Kraljevica, near Zaječar, where the rebels were executed.

## V

The documents of the Summary Court-Martial offer an interesting insight in the social structure of the Timok Rebellion<sup>69</sup>. The Court sentenced to death six priests (three of them executed), 19 merchants (5 executed), 7 teachers (1 executed), 11 members of the Parliament (5 executed), 26 rebels of various professions—village mayors, coffee-shop keepers, craftsmen and 36 peasants (6 executed). Forced labor and jail was applied to 5 priests, 6 professors and teachers, 25 merchants, 461 peasants and 134 of various professions. Among these were 35 village leaders (*kmet*) 4 village mayors, 7 secretaries of village communes, 9 members of village courts, 5 village-commune councilors and one member of the Parliament. Many of them, especially the village authorities, were peasants themselves. Released as innocent were 6 teachers, 6 merchants, 39 peasants and 19 others. There is no available data for 21 persons.

The professional affiliation of the sentenced for the rebellion shows that the peasantry made up the overwhelming part of the rebels. The area was non-developed economically and one can assume that the poor peasant made the bulk of the insurgents' army. But the number of village mayors and communal authorities involved in the rebellion shows that the upper layers of the peasant society also took an active part. The leadership consisted of priests, teachers, Parliament members, merchants and craftsmen. It originated from urban, as well as from peasant societies. The number of priests and teachers can be explained by the fact that the Radical Party found among them its main followers. Peasants by origin, they represented the village intelligentsia and the backbone of the Party's influence among the people. Thus, the movement was basically a peasant one, with a middle-class flavor, expressed through its leadership, which joined the peasant uprising.

## VI

Three theories emerged after 1883 concerning the responsibility for the

68. TB, I, Doc. 39 and 41, June 13 and 15, 1884, p. 44-48.

69. All the verdicts registered personal information about the defendants. See also the registers of the sentenced rebels, TB, II, p. 593-613.



Timok Rebellion: King Milan and the Progressivists intentionally provoked the uprising in order to settle the accounts with the Radicals; the Radical Party instigated and directed the rebellion, aiming to depose the King and his government; the rebellion broke up spontaneously and caused a general confusion in which the central authorities reacted faster and crushed the peasants and the Radicals. Another assumption which is still impossible to verify, concerns the involvement of Russian intelligence, in efforts to create trouble for the Austrophile King Milan<sup>70</sup>.

The first thesis accusing King Milan for troubles was supported by the Radicals. The Party, said the Radicals, won an overwhelming victory at the September elections and it was not the winner but the loser who would seek revenge<sup>71</sup>. To disarm the population at that moment was equal to instigating the rebellion. The rebels did not execute anyone, while the Summary Court-Martial massacred the Radicals<sup>72</sup>. These arguments are valid to a certain point. But the disarming of the population, which started the movement, could be also emphasized as a preventive measure against an eventual Radical revolutionary move<sup>73</sup>.

The second thesis was supported by the conservatives and the King. The Radical Party and its propaganda were constantly inciting armed resistance. It was a fact that the Radical local committees joined the rebels almost en bloc<sup>74</sup>. Obviously, Radical leaders had an immense influence on the peasantry. "Whatever the priest Marinko or the deputy Žika would do, the people would follow", said one of the rebels in his defense to the Court<sup>75</sup>. The movement was too well organized and directed. But, on the other hand, the defense of the Executive Committee members at the Court seems quite persuasive: would they have waited to be caught in their beds had they known about the uprising in advance? Pera Todorović wrote from prison to the King: "If there is but one sound piece of evidence of our involvement in the rebellion, I agree volun-

70. Velizar Ninčić (*op. cit.*, p. 102) refers to Russian involvement in the Timok rebellion, but doesn't quote sources. Charles Jelavich (*Tsarist Russia and Balkan Nationalism*, p. 194-5) mentions only Russian sympathies for the Radicals and animosities towards King Milan.

71. Samouprava, n° 166, 18 September 1883.

72. Jaša Prodanović, *Istorija političkih stranaka i struja u Srbiji*, p. 504-508, The Declaration of Radical Emigrants in Vidin 1 December 1883. See also the similar opinion in Momčilo Veljković, *Timočka buna*, p. 37. Also Raša Milošević, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

73. Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića*, III, p. 120; Živan Živanović, *Politička istorija Srbije*, II, p. 247.

74. TB, I, Doc. 185, p. 218, Derven 7 November 1883.

75. TB, II, Doc. 577, Testimony of Dobrosav Petrović, Zaječar 4 November 1883.

tarily to be the first placed against a beech tree at Čestobrodica and shot"<sup>76</sup>.

In fact and when talking about the Radical Party, one has to differentiate between various Party segments. In our opinion, the question is: was the Executive Committee unanimous and was there a difference between the Beograd leadership and the local Radicals in the country, concerning the issues and measures to be taken?

It seems that the Executive Committee as a body was not tangled in the outbreak of the rebellion, although the testimonies about this vary<sup>77</sup>. However, the attitude of the Party president Nikola Pašić is more ambiguous. The rebellion took place in his electoral district; he visited the area on the eve of the uprising and had confidential talks with the leaders of the future rebellion. Finally, Pašić was the only member of the Beograd leadership who escaped arrest in time. He was different from his Party colleagues. Todorović, the second Party man, was a politician of a French-Jacobin type, talkative, ambitious and impulsive; Pašić was taciturn, cautious and distrustful. Todorović was an open book; Pašić was mysterious and unpredictable. Pašić's method in his dealing was to offer options, but to abstain from clear-cut decisions. At the July 1883 meeting at which the rebellion was discussed, he did not utter a word. Pašić let the audience define his thinking as it pleased<sup>78</sup>. At the September 22 meeting of the Executive Committee, he created an atmosphere of resistance, but refused to adhere to the proposal to create a Party Headquarters<sup>79</sup>. Still, there are indications that he worked on the rebellion secretly with two of his confidants, the deputy Aca Stanojević and the priest Marinko Ivković<sup>80</sup>. Pera Todorović later accused Pašić of conspiring behind the back of the Executive Committee<sup>81</sup>. Pašić himself made public statements on three occasions concerning his involvement in the affair<sup>82</sup>. In all of them he rejected

76. Živan Živanović, *Politička istorija Srbije*, II, p. 252.

77. Ljubomir Bozinović, merchant and member of the Knjaževac insurrectional Committee testified later that "the movement, by no means started under orders of the Main Committee". The merchant Dobrosav Petrović referred to the Main Committee's decision to oppose disarmament as the factor which triggered the uprising. But the teacher Mihailo Stuparević is explicit in denying any relationship between the Main Committee and the Rebellion, *Politika* 11 April 1927, 12 April 1927, 10 November 1940. See also Jaša Prodanović, *op. cit.*, p. 510-511.

78. Testimony of the teacher Mihailo Jović, *Politika* 11 April 1927, cit. at Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića*, III, Appendix, p. 528-529.

79. Raša Milošević, *Timočka buna*, 137-141.

80. Velizar Ninčić, *Pera Todorović*, p. 103-4, 122.

81. Pera Todorović in *Male Novine*, n° 79, 80/1901. One must have in mind that Todorović split with the Radicals and opposed Pašić' politics later.

82. Ustavna Srbija (11 July 1903), Narodna Skupština (23 June 1907), *Politika* (April

the existence of a plot before the rebellion and concerned himself with its conduct only after the rebellion had erupted. One is left with the impression that Pašić, with a strange instinct for foreseeing disasters, was on the alert, and with an eye on all the irons in the fire. He might have toyed with the rebellion, as one of the possible issues of the political crises, but only the policy of "wait and see" can explain why he remained in Beograd till October 25, risking arrest, and escaping it at the last moment.

One has also to distinguish between the Beograd Radicals and the local leaders in the countryside. The central leadership was made up of journalists, university professors and merchants who were not revolutionaries. They might talk about a revolution, but were far from entering into it. When arrested, Pera Todorović entered prison with gloves and a walking stick, Jovan Djaja wore a top hat, and professor Geršić was found by the police in his favorite coffee-house, drinking his traditional coffee<sup>83</sup>. It is another story with the local Radicals. Searching the homes of prominent rebels and Radical leaders in Eastern Serbia, the police found, among other literature, *The Communist Manifesto 1848* (translation published in Pančevo in 1871), *The Program of the German Social-Democracy* (from 1869), the works of Baboeuf (1789), various revolutionary pamphlets written by early Serbian socialists, especially Vasa Pelagić<sup>84</sup>. These people were more ready to carry out a revolution than their Beograd leaders.

Among historians dealing with the uprising, estimates about the responsibility vary. Slobodan Jovanović, although condemning the policy of the Progressivists and the King, charges the Radicals with the uprising<sup>85</sup>. Michael Petrovich and Alex Dragnich more or less accept Jovanović's conclusions; Petrovich refers to the economic origins of the peasant discontent as one of the basic factors<sup>86</sup>; Dragnich is more sympathetic towards the Radicals, accusing King Milan of provoking the crisis<sup>87</sup>. Živan Živanović, a Liberal, hints at the responsibility of Pašić and the Radicals, but avoids a final statement<sup>88</sup>. Modern Yugoslav writers, following Marxist lines, condemn the cowardice, treachery and weakness of the Beograd radical leadership and give all the credit to the

1927), cit. at Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića*, III, Appendix, p. 524-527.

83. Raša Milošević, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

84. TB, II, Doc. 616, 622, 629. Police reports concerning the search in rebels' homes.

85. Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića*, III, p. 140. *Ibid.*, Pera Todorović (Političke i pravne rasprave, I) Beograd, 1932, p. 357.

86. Michael Petrovich, *A History of Modern Serbia*, II, p. 428.

87. Alex Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and Yugoslavia*, p. 27-28.

88. Živan Živanović, *Politička istorija Srbije*, p. 257.

pauperized peasantry. A spontaneous revolt was subverted by the petit bourgeois interests of the local Radicals in Eastern Serbia<sup>89</sup>. Close to this estimate is Jaša Prodanović, with the opinion that the people began the rebellion with the Radicals trotting behind<sup>90</sup>.

In the confusion created before and during the Timok Rebellion a couple of facts seem clear. The peasantry in Eastern Serbia was embittered by the abuses of the authorities, and this created a revolutionary atmosphere. The King and the Progressivists refused to accept the rule of the Radical majority, confirmed through the democratic electoral process. The Radicals answered by preparing a revolution, but more as a threat to the government than a reality. They engaged more in talk than action. However, this propaganda went too far and the Party was caught in its own trap. "How can I appease the people whom I incited for twenty years?" asked one of the Radical leaders<sup>91</sup>. The Knjaževac Committee leader Aca Stanojević wrote to Raša Milošević on October 22 that "neither we, nor anyone else, can direct the events now. God only knows what will happen"<sup>92</sup>. The same ideas of appeasement were contained in a letter which Todorović addressed to Pašić in October before leaving for Vienna<sup>93</sup>. Both rivals—the King and the Radicals—were waiting for the first move. The disarming of the peasants was a protective measure against the expected Radical uprising, but lit the accumulated powder. Psychologically prepared by the Radicals and inflamed by the government, the rebellion broke out spontaneously. Both sides were taken by surprise. The local Radical echelons could not but join the rebelling peasantry to give some direction to its movement. The central authorities reacted efficiently and the army crushed the Rebellion in a brutal way.

## VII

The Timok Rebellion was in fact the last peasant uprising in Serbia. As Slobodan Javanović has already stated, it was basically a clash between a peasant and a bureaucratic concept of the State. It took place in Eastern Serbia which suffered during the Serbo-Ottoman war in 1876, which was invaded,

89. Dragoslav Janković, *Političke stranke u Srbiji*, p. 246, 248, 251.

90. Jaša Prodanović, *Istorija političkih stranaka i struja u Srbiji*, p. 511-12.

91. TB, I, Doc. 104, Testimony of the priest Milija Petrović; see the same arguments in Doc. 100 and 118.

92. TB, II, Doc. 512, Letter of Aca Stanojević to Raša Milošević, Knjaževac 22 October 1883.

93. Velizar Ninčić, *Pera Todorović*, p. 97.

plundered and devastated by Ottoman troops. The establishment of Bulgaria in 1878 cut it from the Vidin area with which it comprised an economic entity. This region was poor, economically passive, due to a rugged and mountainous terrain. The peripheral position and the proximity of Romania and Bulgaria also played some role in the rebels' expectations of help. The Radical Party suffered a terrible setback by the collapse of the movement. From that moment on the Party would gradually move from the left to the center, eventually (after 1918) to the right, trying to find a compromise with the establishment. The new standing army proved its value, not only for foreign, but for domestic politics, a message which the Serbian dynasts would never forget. King Milan was the victor, but for a short time. Two years later the peasants would refuse to fight in the Bulgarian war, causing a defeat and the King's abdication.

In historical perspective, the Timok Rebellion had no chance at all. Its purpose was to depose King Milan and the conservatives. If successful, the rebellion would have forced King Milan's abdication. This would have automatically involved Austrian intervention, according to the stipulations of the 1881 Secret Convention, which King Milan had signed with the Habsburg Monarchy to protect his throne. The peasants and the Radicals had to face either the domestic army or Austrian troops. Neither prospect was encouraging. Still, the Rebellion remains a token of the struggle for parliamentarianism and democracy in the nineteenth century Serbia.

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