

21 ZBIRKA
RAZPOZNAVANJA
RECOGNITIONES

Vlasta Stavbar

**POLITIK VEKOSLAV
KUKOVEC**

**Politično delovanje
do leta 1918**

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POLITIK VEKOSLAV KUKOVEC:
POLITIČNO DELOVANJE DO LETA 1918

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POVZETEK

POLITIK

VEKOSLAV KUKOVEC

**POLITIČNO DELOVANJE
DO LETA 1918**

Politično delovanje Vekoslava Kukovca se je začelo v času njegovega študija v Gradcu. To je bil čas, ko se je habsburška monarhija znašla v hudi krizi. Velik problem je bil ohlapen dualistični ustroj monarhije. Čeprav so obe državni polovici povezovali skupni vladar, skupne finance, skupna vojska in enotna zunanja politika, sta bili med seboj popolnoma ločeni. Odnose med njima je oteževala tudi razvejana birokracija. Cislajtanijska je bila – v primerjavi s čisto madžarsko nacionalno državo – zgolj mozaik narodov.

Po padcu Taaffejeve vlade, ki jo je pokopal neuspešen poskus uvedbe državnozborske volilne reforme, je mesto ministrskega predsednika 11. novembra 1893 zasedel knez Alfred Windischgraetz. Njegovo vlado je podpirala »nenačelna koalicija« tistih strank, ki so zrušile Taaffejevo volilno reformo. Nova vlada si je za svoj cilj zadala prav volilno reformo. Trenja ob njej so bila velika, zlasti so ji nasprotovali v konservativnem Hohenwartovem klubu in tudi v Združeni liberalni levici. Neugodnim razmeram v koaliciji se je pridružilo še »celjsko vprašanje«, ki je sprožilo val nemškega nacionalizma v alpskih deželah in solidarnost sudetskih Nemcev z ogroženimi brati na jugu monarhije. Celjsko gimnazijsko vprašanje je tako postalo glavni problem avstrijske notranje politike. Pravzaprav je pomenilo »mejnik v zgodovini Avstrije« in povzročilo padec Windischgraetzove vlade.

Badenijske jezikovne naredbe, ki so se jim uprli Nemci, so pokazale na zaostrene nacionalne odnose. Ob tem je parlament paralizirala še nemška obstrukcija. Ob ukinitvi jezikovnih naredb v času Claryjeve vlade oktobra 1899 je nemško obstrukcijo nadomestila češka.

Koerberjeva vlada na prelomu stoletja (1900–1904) si je z ambicioznim gospodarskim programom prizadevala izničiti nacionalizem, vendar ni bila uspešna. Nacionalni konflikti so se stopnjevali in že leta 1904 je državni zbor postal prizorišče besnih spopadov in obstrukcijskih manevrov.

Tudi v slovenski politiki, zlasti na Kranjskem, so se v tem času do skrajnosti zaostriili odnosi med katoliškim in liberalnim

taborom. Prvi katoliški shod leta 1892 v Ljubljani je postavil temelje katoliške politične organizacije in katoliški tabor se je hitro krepil. Tako so na Kranjskem med letoma 1893 in 1895 ustanovili vrsto okrajnih katoliških političnih, izobraževalnih in tudi delavskih društev in organizacij. Rezultati širokega družbenega dela na podeželju so prišli do izraza že na deželnozborskih volitvah novembra 1895, ko je Katoliški narodni stranki uspelo osvojiti vse mandate v kmečki kuriji.

V liberalnem (narodno naprednem) taboru dolgo niso našli odgovora na razmah katoliškega tabora. Shod zaupnikov »narodno napredne« stranke novembra 1894 v Ljubljani je potekal v znaku ponujene sprave katoliški stranki. Toda želja kranjskih liberalcev, da bi na narodnem programu obnovili »slogo« s katoliškimi konservativci, je bila iluzorna. Narodna stranka se je kmalu po ustanovitvi začela s katoliško zapletati v vedno ostrejšo polemiko. Ob koncu stoletja se je na Kranjskem razvnel boj, ki je segal v vse sfere družbenega življenja. Liberalni tabor je doživljal poraz za porazom. Tako kot drugod po monarhiji je liberalizem svojo moč ohranil le na kulturnem področju, na političnem pa je njegova moč plahnela.

Ideološko-strankarski spopad na Kranjskem na začetku devetdesetih let 19. stoletja je krepil Katoliško narodno stranko (KNS), ki je z zadrugami in posojilnicami ter oprta na cerkveno organizacijo večala vpliv, zlasti med kmečkim prebivalstvom. S širjenjem volilne pravice se je njen vpliv še povečeval.

Nastanek katoliške in liberalne politične organizacije na Kranjskem je spodbudil ideološko in politično diferenciacijo na celotnem slovenskem ozemlju, vendar je bil v »obmejnih« deželah ta proces veliko počasnejši. Vztrajanje na skupni »narodni« politiki v »obmejnih deželah« (Goriška, Štajerska, Trst) je bilo posledica stopnjujočega se občutka nacionalne ogroženosti. Medtem ko je Kranjska pod Taaffejevo vlado dobila status večinsko slovenske dežele in so Slovenci pridobili vrsto jezikovnih koncesij, so se obmejni Slovenci soočali z naraščajočim nemškimi in italijanskimi nacionalizmom. Kljub temu so obmejne de-

žele sledile kranjskemu scenariju. Na Goriškem je prišlo do razcepa leta 1899/1900, na Štajerskem pa se je sloga ohranila do leta 1906, čeprav so se trenja med obema deloma Narodne stranke, katoliškim in liberalnim, stopnjevala od srede devetdesetih let 19. stoletja. Trenja med obema strujama so prišla do izraza zlasti ob volitvah, ko so se pojavile dvojne kandidature. Korošec je na Štajerskem uveljavljal Krekova načela, liberalno usmerjeni študentje – mladi narodni radikalci – so bili nezadovoljni z razmerami. Eden takih je bil tudi mladi Vekoslav Kukovec.

Ko je Kukovec leta 1902 prišel v Celje, se je slogaška politika že izpela. Kljub temu da z razmerami v mestu ni bil zadovoljen, se je aktivno vključil v politično delo. Postal je član Narodne čitalnice in nekaterih drugih društev. Še posebej dejaven je bil v društvu Naprej, ki je usmerjalo celjsko politiko. Sodeloval je na številnih shodih in v ospredju njegovih govorov sta bili gospodarska in šolska tematika. V slovenski politiki v Celju je postajal vedno pomembnejši. Na njegovo pobudo je leta 1905 uredništvo *Domovine* prevzel njegov prijatelj Vekoslav Spindler in celjska *Domovina* se je začela jasno nagibati na liberalno stran. Kukovec in Spindler sta zaradi bolezni in odsotnosti do tedaj enega najvplivnejših celjskih politikov dr. Ivana Dečka prevzemala narodno politiko v Celju v svoje roke. Na krepitev njunega položaja so vplivale tudi splošne politične razmere v monarhiji, ki se jim je bilo treba nemudoma prilagoditi. V prvi vrsti je bilo to vprašanje o uvedbi splošne (moške) volilne pravice. Zahteve za njeno uvedbo, ki sta jim jeseni 1905 morala prisluhniti cesar in ministrski predsednik Gautsch, so v politično življenje na Štajerskem vnesle novo dinamiko. Katoliški del narodne stranke na Štajerskem se je na preimenovanje KNS na Kranjskem v Slovensko ljudsko stranko (SLS) 27. novembra 1905 nemudoma odzval in začel delovati v tej smeri. Krmilo štajerske katoliške politike je prevzel dr. Anton Korošec. Po drugi strani pa so se mladi narodni radikalci v celjskem liberalnem taboru zavedali, da je politika sloge preživeta.

Mladi štajerski narodnjaki so septembra 1906 prekinili sodelovanje s »štajerskimi klerikalci« in predstavili svoj pro-

gram v knjižici *Štajerski Slovenci, kaj hočemo?*, ki jo je v sodelovanju z Vekoslavom Kukovcem napisal Vekoslav Spindler, urednik *Domovine*. Program je zahteval narodno politiko. Štajerski narodnjaki so začeli z aktivnostmi za ustanovitev narodne stranke. Vodilna osebnost novonastajajoče stranke je bil dr. Vekoslav Kukovec. Dne 8. decembra 1906 je bila v Celju ustanovljena štajerska Narodna stranka in politika sloge je bila dokončno končana.

V katoliškem taboru so vse pogosteje kazali interes za ustanovitev lastne stranke s katoliško-socialnim predznakom. Dne 21. januarja 1907 so v Mariboru ustanovili katoliško Slovensko kmečko zvezo pod vodstvom Frana Roškarja. Toda neformalni vodja nove stranke je bil dr. Anton Korošec.

V času pred prvo svetovno vojno se je nacionalno vprašanje v monarhiji še zaostriло. Čas balkanskih vojn je še posebej aktualiziral jugoslovansko vprašanje.

Kljub poskusom skupnega delovanja obeh političnih taborov na Štajerskem, zlasti ob pobudi za ustanovitev Spodnještajerskega narodnega sveta, sta se obe stranki pred volitvami v štajerski deželni zbor spustili v brezkompromisni boj za volivce. V dokaj umazanem volilnem boju se Narodna stranka ni najbolje znašla. Katoliški kandidati so osvojili 12 od skupaj 13 slovenskih mandatov. Edini liberalni mandat je v »slovenski trški skupini« pripadel Vekoslavu Kukovcu.

Delovanje Vekoslava Kukovca v štajerskem deželnem zboru je zaznamovalo nenehno nasprotovanje in šikaniranje slovenskih klerikalnih poslancev, zato je Kukovec, tudi za »narodne stvari«, iskal podporo pri socialdemokratih. Nasprotovanja in obtožbe med večino slovenskih poslancev in na drugi strani osamljenim liberalcem Kukovcem so se prenašala v strankarska glasila, ki so bila polna obtožb in norčevanja, zlasti klerikalnih poslancev. Kukovec je vlagal predloge in interpelacije predvsem s področja šolstva in gospodarskih zadev.

Višek spora med Kukovcem in poslanci Kmečke zveze pa je pomenila obstrukcija slednjih leta 1912, ki je Kukovec ni odo-

braval. Oba tabora sta razloge za in proti predstavljala svojim volivcem na številnih zborih in v časopisnih člankih.

Pred prvo svetovno vojno je bilo Kukovčevo politično delovanje opazno tudi v strankarskem življenju. Narodna stranka je kljub napovedim v klerikalnih časnikih, da se ji bliža konec, nadaljevala svoje delo. Organizirala je številne politične in gospodarske shode, Zveza narodnih društev, ki je bila ustanovljena pod okriljem Narodne stranke, pa je organizirala tečaje. Dr. Kukovec se je udeleževal tudi shodov slovenskih učiteljev in jih podpiral v njihovih zahtevah. Tako je sodeloval na velikem učiteljskem shodu v Mariboru, ko so se sredi avgusta 1909 zbrali učitelji iz vseh slovenskih pokrajin.

Politična diferenciacija se je v letih pred prvo svetovno vojno še stopnjevala. Posledica pregretega ozračja se je zrcalila tudi na osebni ravni, saj se je Kukovec srečeval s številnimi tožbami, ki so bili vložene zoper njega.

Narodna stranka se je spopadala s številni težavami, tudi gospodarske in finančne razmere niso bile ugodne. V primerjavi s klerikalci, ki so imeli za seboj močne denarne zavode in cerkveno organizacijo, se je Narodna stranka ukvarjala z oslabelim vplivom. Še tiste redke denarne organizacije, ki so bile pod vplivom ali vodstvom Narodne stranke, so pestile težave, na primer šoštanjsko posojilnico. A stranka je svojo moč videla le v nadaljevanju dela, in sicer s prirejanjem različnih shodov.

Prva svetovna vojna je močno posegla v politično življenje Slovencev. Dvajset let kasneje je Kukovec v svojem referatu *Slovinci 1914* razpravljal o tej prelomnici za Slovence. Med vojno je bil Kukovec rezervni poročnik v Thalerhofu in Lebringu, od koder je vzdrževal politične stike z ožjo domovino. O tem priča bogata korespondenca.

Vojna pa je pomenila tudi poskus skupnega nastopa obeh štajerskih strank glede narodnih vprašanj. Leta 1917 je Narodna stranka na zaupnih shodih proučevala možnosti za skupno delo in povezovanje s klerikalci, še zlasti ob dejstvu, da so vsi

jugoslovanski poslanci državnega zbora podali izjavo o združitvi avstroogrskih jugoslovanskih dežel v samostojno enoto.

V zadnjem letu habsburške monarhije, v obdobju deklaracijskega gibanja, so se v obeh najmočnejših političnih taborih zgodile pomembne spremembe. V kranjski Slovenski ljudski stranki je spor med mladini in starini decembra 1917 dosegel vrhunec, kar se je posledično kazalo tudi v Vseslovenski ljudski stranki. Iz vodstva so izključili dr. Ivana Šušteršiča, ki v primerjavi s Krekom in Koroščem ni podprl Majniške deklaracije. V tem času se je začel povezovati tudi slovenski liberalni tabor z željo, da se ustanovi vseslovenska napredna stranka. Do srede 1918 je potekala obširna korespondenca med liberalci, zlasti štajerskimi. Junija 1918 je slovenska liberalna politika storila korak, ki ji je omogočil, da je tudi slovenski liberalni tabor postal vseslovenski politični subjekt. Z združitvijo obeh pokrajinskih narodnih strank in vseslovenske politične skupine Štajerske, Koroške in Primorske je bila ustanovljena Jugoslovanska demokratska stranka (JDS). Slovenski liberalni tabor se je politično in organizacijsko združil in se v naslednjih letih čvrsto oklenil jugoslovanskega nacionalnega unitarizma. Najaktivneje se je zanj zavzemal prav Kukovec, ki je bil tudi eden izmed pobudnikov za združitev liberalnega tabora ter pripadnik mladoliberalnega krila. Začel je tesneje sodelovati s Hrvati.

Ustanovitev Narodnega sveta za slovenske dežele in Istro jeseni 1918 je bila prvi korak. Vojaški položaj Avstro-Ogrske se je slabil in politični voditelji habsburških Jugoslovanov so začeli z aktivnostmi za uresničitev samoodločbe narodov, zajetih v državne meje monarhije. Razprava o prihodnji ureditvi jugoslovanske države je bila sporno vprašanje v programskih načelih klerikalcev in liberalcev ves čas njegovega pojavljanja. Polemika med obema poloma je pokazala, da tudi pri uresničevanju enega najpomembnejših narodovih vprašanj sodelovanje med političnima taboroma ni možno.

S Pozivom, objavljenim 23. oktobra 1918, naj po mestih in vaseh ustanovijo odbore za zaščito ljudi in premoženja, so habs-

burški Jugoslovani začeli živeti svoje, od monarhije ločeno življenje. Nastala je Država SHS in Narodni svet je postal vrhovna oblast v novi državi. Kukovec je v njej prevzel nove naloge, postal je poverjenik za finance. Dejavno je deloval tudi kot podpredsednik Jugoslovanske demokratske stranke. V novi državi Kraljevini Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev je opravljal pomembne naloge in naredil odlično kariero.

Vekoslav Kukovec se je od mladega narodnega radikalca, ki se je začel politično oblikovati v študentskih letih v Gradcu, osebno in politično dokončno oblikoval v Celju. Tam je po odhodu starejših politikov (Dečko, Sernec) in zaradi nezadovoljivih političnih in gospodarskih razmer skupaj z liberalnimi somišljeniki ustanovil štajersko Narodno stranko. S strankarskim delovanjem in zagovarjanjem ter predstavljanjem liberalnih idej, s poudarkom na izobraževanju in nujnosti lastnega gospodarskega razvoja, je širil svojo prepoznavnost, ki se je obrestovala na volitvah leta 1909, ko je bil izvoljen v štajerski deželni zbor. Med slovenskimi poslanci je bil edini liberalec. Podpore pri svojih predlogih in interpelacijah med slovenskimi klerikalnimi poslanci ni imel, zato jo je večkrat poiskal med socialdemokratskimi poslanci v deželnem zboru. Ob tem je treba omeniti, da Slovenci v deželnem zboru niso mogli veliko doseči, saj so imeli premalo poslancev in pogosto so morali sodelovati s katoliškimi konservativci.

V zadnjih letih monarhije je Kukovec odigral pomembno vlogo v povezovanju liberalnega gibanja in strank ter pomembno prispeval k ustanovitvi JDS. Nova država in drugačna delitev političnih sil ter zmožnost Kukovčevega političnega povezovanja so mu v novi državi prinesli zavidljivo politično kariero.

Čas Kukovčevega političnega delovanja do konca habsburške monarhije bi lahko označili kot obdobje, ko se je mladi Kukovec iz mladeniča, ki je z zanimanjem spremljal dogajanja v graškem liberalnem študentskem krogu, zlasti med narodnimi radikali, in izražal svoje nezadovoljstvo s političnimi razmerami doma, oblikoval v vodilno politično osebnost liberalnega tabora

na slovenskem Štajerskem. Med organizacijskimi sposobnosti mu glede na rezultate lahko pripišemo zmožnost povezovanja in javnega nastopanja. Dr. Vekoslav Kukovec je ob pripravah na novo državno tvorbo in vstopu vanjo deželno politiko hitro in spretno zamenjal za pomembna mesta v državnih organih.

SUMMARY

POLITICIAN

VEKOSLAV KUKOVEC

AND HIS POLITICAL

ACTIVITIES UNTIL 1918

The political activities of Vekoslav Kukovec began in his study years in Graz. These were very critical times for the Habsburg Monarchy. A big problem was the Monarchy's lax dualistic structure. Although both state parts were connected by the joint sovereign, joint finances, joint army and the unified foreign politics, they were totally divided. The branched bureaucracy also made the relations between the state parts difficult. Cisleithania was in comparison with a pure Hungarian national state just a mosaic of nations.

After the fall of the Taaffe's government, which was ruined by the unsuccessful attempt of introducing a parliamentary election reform, Prince Alfred Windischgraetz became the Prime Minister on 11th November 1893. His government was supported by the "unprincipled coalition" of the parties that blew up Taaffe's election reform. The new government set an election reform as its goal. The reform contradictions were big; the heaviest opponents were the conservative Hohenwart club and the Joined Liberal Left. The "Celje question", which activated a wave of German nationalism in the Alp states, as well as the solidarity of the Sudetes Germans with the endangered brothers in the South of the Monarchy, also played a big part in the unpleasant situation within the coalition. The Celje gymnasium question became therefore the major problem of the Austrian inner politics. It actually meant the "milestone in the Austrian history" and it caused the fall of the Windischgraetz's government.

Badeni's language decrees, which were opposed by the Germans, reflected the tense national relations. Besides all of these the parliament was paralysed by the German obstruction. When in October 1899, in the times of Clary's government, the language decrees were annulled, the German obstruction was substituted by the Czech one.

Koerber's government at the turn of the century (1900–1904) strived to negate the nationalism with an ambitious economic programme. The programme did not succeed. The

national conflicts were increasing and already in 1904 the parliament turned into a scene of angry conflicts and obstructive manoeuvres.

The relations in the Slovene politics, especially in Carniola, also became very strained between the catholic and liberal party. The first catholic meeting in 1892 in Ljubljana set foundations for the catholic political organisation and the catholic party became stronger very fast. Between 1893 and 1895 a line of district catholic political, educational as well as worker's associations and institutions was established. The results of a broader social work in the country were already shown on the state elections in November 1895, when the Catholic National Party succeeded in winning all mandates in the country Curia.

In the liberal (nationally progressive) party they were for a long time unable to find the answer to the growth of the catholic party. The meeting of the "nationally progressive" party confidants in November 1894 in Ljubljana was all in the sign of offered reconciliation for the catholic party. The wish of the Carniola "liberals" to achieve "unity" with the catholic conservatives in the national programme was illusory. The National Party got, soon after its establishment, more and more entangled with the catholic party. At the end of the century a fight broke out in Carniola, which was infiltrated in all spheres of social life. The liberal party faced one defeat after another. As in other part of the Monarchy the liberalism kept its powers only in the fields of culture, whereas in the political its powers were diminishing. The ideological party fight in Carniola in the beginning of the 90is of the 19th century strengthened the Catholic National Party, which by establishing cooperatives, loan banks and relying on the Church increased its influence among the country population. With spreading the right to vote its influence also grew.

The establishment of catholic and the liberal political organisations in Carniola stimulated the political differentiation on the whole Slovene territory although the process was much

slower in the “border” states. The insistence on a common “national” politics in the “border” states (Goriška, Styria, Trieste) was the effect of the growing feeling of national jeopardy. While Carniola got a status of mostly Slovene state and the Slovenes got a series of language concessions under Taaffe’s government, the Slovenes in the border regions on the other hand were faced with a growing German and Italian nationalism. Nevertheless the border states followed the Carniola scenario. In Goriško there was a split in 1899/1909, in Styria the unity was kept until 1906, although the conflicts between both – the catholic and the liberal – part of the National Party were intensified until the middle of the 90ies of the 19th century. The frictions between both currents were very distinct during the elections, as double candidatures occurred. Korošec enforced Krek’s principles in Styria and the liberally oriented students – young national radicals – were unsatisfied with the situation. One of them was also the young Vekoslav Kukovec.

When Kukovec arrived to Celje in 1902, the times of the unity politics were already over. Although he was not satisfied with the situation in Celje, he soon got very much involved into political work. He became a member of the National “Reading Room Movement” and some other societies. He was especially active in the “Naprej” society, which directed the Celje politics. He participated in many meetings and in the centre of his speeches were economic and educational themes. He became a very important member of the Slovene politics in Celje. Vekoslav Spindler, a friend of Kukovec, took over the editorship of “*Domovina*” in 1905 on his initiative and the “*Domovina*” started leaning towards the liberal side. Kukovec and Spindler, because of disease and absence of one of the most important Celje politicians, Ivan Dečko, Ph.D., took the national politics in Celje in their own hands. Their positions were strengthened by the general politic situation in the Monarchy, which had to be adapted immediately. First, there was the question of general (men) right to vote. The demands of its initiation that were introduced to

the Emperor and his Prime Minister Gautsch in Autumn 1905 brought fresh dynamics into the Styria political life. The catholic part of the National Party in Styria reacted to the name change from Carniola KNS (Catholic National Party) to SLS (Slovene People's Party) on 27th November 1905 and started with activities right away. Anton Korošec, Ph.D. became the leader of the Styria catholic politics. On the other side the young national radicals in the Celje liberal party new that the unity politics is obsolete.

The young Styria patriots broke off with the "Styria clericalists" in September 1906 and introduced their programme in a booklet *Štajerski Slovenci, kaj hočemo?* ("Styria Slovenes, What Do We Want?"), that was written by the editor of "*Domovina*" Vekoslav Spindler in cooperation with Vekoslav Kukovec. The programme demanded national politics. The Styria patriots began with activities to establish a new National Party. The main figure in the new party was Vekoslav Kukovec, Ph.D. On 8th December 1906 the Styria National Party was founded in Celje and the unity politics was definitely history. In the catholic party there were strong interests in establishing an own party with catholic-social connotation. On 21st January 1907 a catholic Slovene Farmers' Union under the lead of Fran Roškar was founded in Maribor. However, the informal leader of this party was Anton Korošec, Ph.D.

Before World War I. the national question in the Monarchy became very strained. The times of Balkan wars actualised the Yugoslav question.

Despite the tries for common activities of both political parts in Styria, mostly while initiating the foundation of Lower Styria National Board, both parties fought uncompromisingly for their votes for the Styria Provincial Government. Yet, the National Party did not play well in the dirty election campaign. The catholic candidates won 12 out of 13 Slovene mandates. The only liberal mandate in the "Slovene market-town group" went to Vekoslav Kukovec.

The activities of Vekoslav Kukovec in the Styria Provincial Government were signed with constant contradictions and chicaning from the side of the Slovene clerical members of parliament. Therefore Kukovec sought support, also when it came to the “national matters”, from the social democrats. The contradictions and accuses between the majority of Slovene members of parliament on one side and the lonely liberalist Kukovec on the other side were also reflected in the party bulletins, which were full of accusations and mocking, mostly from the clerical side. Kukovec filed suggestions and interpellations on educational and economic issues.

The peak of the dispute between Kukovec and the members of Farmers Union was the obstruction in 1912, of which Kukovec did not approve. Both sides presented reasons for pro and contra on numerous meetings and newspaper articles to their voters. In the times before World War I. Kukovec’s political activities are noticeable also in the party life.

The National Party continued with its activities, although the clerical newspapers predicted its early end. It organised many political and economic meetings and the Zveza narodnih društev (Union of National Societies), which was founded by the National Party, organised different classes. Kukovec, Ph. D. took part in the meetings of the Slovene professorship and supported their demands. He took part in the professorship meeting in Maribor in August 1909, where teachers of all the Slovene regions gathered.

The political differentiation intensified in the years before World War I. The effects of the overheated political atmosphere were also seen in his private life, for Kukovec had to face numerous lawsuits against him.

The National Party had to face many difficulties, for the economic and financial circumstances were not favourable. In comparison with the clericals, who had the support of heavy financial institutions and the Church, the National Party had to deal with a weakened political influence. Even the rare mone-

tary organisations that were under the influence or leadership of the National Party had problems, like for instance the loan bank in Šoštanj. Nevertheless the Party saw its powers only in carrying on with its work, i.e. with organising different meetings.

World War I. interfered with the Slovene political life. This was the theme of Kukovec's proceeding *Slovensci 1914* ("*Slovenes 1914*") twenty years later. In the wartimes Kukovec was a back-up lieutenant in Thalerhof and Lebring, from where he kept political contacts with his homeland. There is a rich correspondence to prove it.

The war was a chance for a common standpoint of both Styria parties regarding the national questions. In 1917 the National Party studied the possibilities of connecting with the clericals. Mostly was this because all of the Yugoslav members of parliament gave their votes for unification of Austria-Hungarian Yugoslav states into an independent unit.

In the last year of the Habsburg Monarchy, in the period of declarative movement, many important changes occurred in both strongest political sides. In the Carniola Slovene People's Party the dispute between the young and the old reached its peak in December 1917 and it also influenced the All-Slovene People's Party. Ivan Šušteršič, Ph. D. was excluded from the party's leadership because he did not support the May declaration like Krek and Korošec did. In this time the Slovene liberal side also started to connect and they wished to establish an All-Slovene progressive party. Until the middle of 1918 there was a vivid correspondence between the liberals, mostly between the Styria ones. In June 1918 the Slovene liberal politics took a step that enabled it to become an All-Slovene political subject. The Jugoslovanska demokratska stranka (JDS – Yugoslav Democratic Party) was founded with the coalition of provincial National, as well as the All-Slovene Styria, Carinthia and Primorska, political groups. The Slovene liberal side was joined politically and organisationally and clang to the Yugoslav national unitarism. The most active in this process was Kukovec, who was also one

of the initiators of a joint liberal party and a member of young liberal wing. He started with a close cooperation with the Croats.

The establishment of the National Board for Slovene states and Istria in autumn 1918 was a big step. The military situation of Austrian-Hungary was getting weaker and the leaders of the Habsburg Yugoslavs started with activities for self-determination of nations on the Monarchy's borders. The discussions of future organisation of the Yugoslav state were a contentious question in programmes of principled clericals and liberals. The polemics between both sides showed that even with one of the most important national questions the cooperation of the political parties will not be possible.

With the Appeal on 23rd October 1918, that in the cities and towns the boards for protection of men and property should be organised, the Habsburg Yugoslavs started with their own, Monarchy independent life. The new State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established and the National board became the supreme power in the new state. Kukovec took over new duties in the new state and became financial trustee. He was also active as the vice-president of the Yugoslav Democratic Party. In the new state, in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Kukovec had a lot of important duties and he made a great career.

Vekoslav Kukovec turned from a young national radical, who started his political life in the study years in Graz and developed personally and politically in Celje, where, after older politicians (Dečko, Sernec) left and unsatisfactory political and economic situation, he turned into one of the liberals, who founded the Styria National Party. Through his activities in the party and the introduction of liberal ideas, with the emphasis on education and necessity of own economic development, he spread his recognisability, which paid off in the elections in 1909, when he was elected into the Styria Provincial Government. Among the Slovene members of parliament he was the only liberal. He did not have any support for his proposals and interpellations among the Slovene clericals. Therefore he sought support wi-

thin the social democrats. It has to be mentioned that Slovenes could not achieve much in the provincial government, for they had too little members of parliament and they often had to cooperate with catholic conservatives.

In the last years of the Monarchy Kukovec played an important role as connector of the liberal movement and parties and he contributed a lot to the establishment of JDS. The new state and a different division of political powers as well as Kukovec's ability of political connecting brought him a great political career.

Kukovec's political activities until the end of the Habsburg Monarchy can be marked as a period, when the young Kukovec turned from a young men interested in happenings in the Graz liberal students' group and who expressed dissatisfaction over political situation at home, to a leading political personality of the liberal party in Slovene Styria. According to his career one can say that he had extraordinary organizational competences, like connecting and public appearance. Vekoslav Kukovec, Ph. D. changed in the preparation times for a new state from local politics to important positions in state authorities.