Taming the Assembly: National Representation in Serbia (1815-1859)
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The element of differentiation of the modern nation-state from its predecessors is the legitimization of power in terms of the people’s will. Although not necessarily democratic, the government of the national state is supposed to be invested to a certain extent with this will. Therefore, the support of the government by a representative body (parliament, assembly or other) becomes a desirable ratification of the legitimacy of the State as a whole. The analysis of the relationship between the executive and the representative body could thus offer an insight into the basic sources of legitimacy on which a determined State rests.

Serbian historiography, whether Marxist or liberal, generally approached the development of the National Assembly in terms of “natural” progress towards parliamentarism or in terms of the struggle of “progressive” groups or parties. The State, or the single ruling groups, were represented almost exclusively as obstacles to further development of the rule of the people. This type of analysis not only risks being anachronistic, but also tends to overlook the benefits for the State and the ruling classes of using the National Assembly as a political instrument. This last point will be the main argument of our research.

In order to examine this relationship, we have chosen to retrace the basic steps of state-building in Serbia in the light of the confrontation between the National Assembly (as a representative body) and other state organizations.

During the Ottoman period, the whole set of local autonomies was based on a pyramid of assemblies. Each local community had an assembly which elected its elders-representatives (knez) to the assembly of a broader administrative unit. At the top of this pyramid sat an assembly of knezes of districts which dealt directly with the Ottoman governor (pasa). The main function of these assemblies was the distribution and gathering of tax rates.

With the First Serbian Insurrection (1804-1813), the assemblies were maintained but their structure, their functions and their composition had changed. Whilst during the Ottoman rule the “representatives” were local elders, elected in virtue of their wealth or their “diplomatic” skills; during the First Insurrection the members of the Assembly became military chieftains that succeeded in imposing themselves upon the local population. The Assembly, once a tax-gathering rally,

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1 See PRODANOVIĆ Jaša, Ustavni razvitak i ustavne borbe u Srbiji, Beograd 1936 and Istorija političkih stranaka i struja u Srbiji, Beograd 1947.
2 For a relatively recent argumentation of this view see NIKOLIC Dragan, Borba za skupštinu (u Srbiji 1858 – 1868. godine), Niš 1992.

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became the theatre for coordination of military operations and, as we would now say, of “logistic planning”. But, it had another important role on which we would return after examining the main centers of power of the first Serbian insurrectional state.³

The insurrectional Serbia was a pre-modern military state whose all resources were employed in bellic operations which lasted almost incessantly for nine years. It’s military organization was based on detachments of several men led by a chieftain who was able to arm and feed them, and that operated mainly on a local level. These chieftains, in turn, exercised unlimited power in zones under their control. The detachments ranged from a couple of men to small armies, and single chieftains could control entire districts. The central power of the Insurrection was represented and exercised by the commander-in-chief of the Serbian forces, Karadjordje Petrovic, whose military command was never contested, but whose political leadership was seriously challenged by the other great chieftains. The battleground for the clash between the two was the Assembly not in virtue of legitimacy as much as in virtue of sheer force: the members of the Assembly were, in fact, commanders of military detachments. During the First Insurrection, the central authority proved unable to bend the power of chieftains, and when it took the most decisive steps in that direction it was too late, for the Ottoman troops were already advancing through Serbian territory.

However, the reestablishment of the Ottoman authority did not last long. A series of repressions and technical errors caused the Christian population of the Pasalik of Belgrade to rise once again, and this time successfully, under the leadership of Miloš Obrenovic (Serbian leader 1815-1830, Prince 1830-1839 and 1858-1860). This time, the military phase lasted for only six months in 1815 while the fifteen years that followed until the establishment of the formal autonomy were characterized by broad diplomatic activity of the Serbian central authority towards the Porte. For Miloš, i.e. the central authority, the pacification with the Ottomans represented a perfect occasion to break down on his own chieftains. To achieve his goal, the first Obrenovic, used “the carrot and the stick”. Chieftains loyal to their leader were offered a share in the tax farming business, or were permitted to engage commerce, while those who presented themselves as rivals were whipped out. One of the Miloš’s favorite means of getting rivals out of the way, apart from bribery and political assassination, was the use of the National Assembly.⁴

Miloš Obrenovic was, in fact, a ruler that governed through the Assembly as much as he did govern the Assembly itself. Until the achievement of the formal

³ ĐORĐEVIĆ Miroslav, Pregled razvitka politickih i pravnih ustanova Srbije (od kraja XVIII do pocetka XIX veka), I, Niš 1977 pp.18-24
autonomy in 1830, the assemblies were summoned at least twice a year and have known an extraordinary extension of roles and powers and even a formal diversification. The “small” or “ordinary” assemblies were summoned twice a year, and were constituted of local notables (mainly ex-chieftains who supported Miloš), while the “great” assemblies included “representatives” of the clergy and of the people, although the former were appointed by the notables. The ordinary assemblies were substantially rallies of tax gatherers, but they also served as a channel of communication of the central authority to its subordinate “officials”. But not only officials, notables and “representatives” participated in the work of assemblies: these were held outdoors, their members were armed, they voted by acclamation and virtually anyone could participate in their sessions. In a largely illiterate society, the assemblies were used as an “official gazette”, transmitting orders and regulations to the “state apparatus” and to the population. In this way, the society was firmly controlled from above by the system of assemblies that functioned as a substitute for an inexisten bureaucracy. Manifestations of discontent and requests to the central authority had to be transmitted by other channels, mainly through the use of rebellion.

The state that emerged from the two insurrections against the Turks had no regular or standing army, and the use of force was delegated directly to the people in arms. In such conditions, any “peasant” revolt meant also a revolt in the army, and the success of a rebellion depended directly on how many districts did it manage to spread through. If a revolt would erupt in the majority of districts, not only it would gather a greater military force but it would also prevent the central authority in gathering forces in the rebel districts, thus making vain any tentative of suppression. In their aims, the revolts were political clashes with a low intensity of violence, and even if they failed, the winners would persecute and punish only the leaders.

From 1815 to 1830, there were seven major revolts in Serbia, and the biggest of these was certainly the so-called Djak’s rebellion that broke out in the Prince Miloš’s native district of Rudnik in 1825. Lead by Miloje Popovic – Djak (deacon or clerk), veteran of the First Uprising, it managed to spread through four out of twelve districts, and it is particularly interesting for us because, in the wake of the rebellion, it managed to summon up a National Assembly in which all the districts were represented. The first day of the rally, the rebels sent their grievances to the Prince, lamenting that the state of the peasants is “worse than under the Turks” and begging him to replace his notables by those elected by the people; the second day, when it was clear that Miloš would send his notables against the Assembly, the rebels sent another letter in which they swore their

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allegiance to the Prince and demanded from him to call of his army. The next day, 21 January (O.S.), Prince Miloš’s troops cracked down on the rebels, while their leaders still believed that the Prince would bend to the decisions of the Assembly. Although an indubitable sign of the political naïveté of the leaders of the Djak’s rebellion, the belief that the Prince would bend to the Assembly was also an expression of the general structure of the state and the society of Serbia of the early nineteenth century. As we have seen, the revolts were mainly demonstrations of force of a single political fraction and of it’s ability to gather the majority of the people in arms. Much in the same way, the decisions of an Assembly, in virtue of the direct participation of the people in arms, were binding because they expressed the wishes of the majority of the military forces. What made the Assembly more vulnerable than the revolt was that it didn’t actually exclude the possibility for the opponents to gather troops in the districts represented.

After breaking down on the Djak’s rebellion, Prince Miloš realized he could no longer count on the people in arms, and he proceeded to the creation of a standing army. This step, however, implicated a relative dependence of the Prince on the nascent bureaucracy and on the notables that integrated it. Yet, at least until the gaining of the autonomy, Miloš’s decision to put the armed forces in the hands of the notables and of the bureaucracy, was a winning choice.

During the first reign of Miloš Obrenovic, all means of social elevation were controlled by the Prince, and all of the potential rivals were kept in the state of perpetual insecurity. The “civil servants” were treated like the personal servants of the Prince with irregular payments and frequent exposure to corporal punishment; the merchants had to renew their trading licenses annually, and the permission to exercise trade was granted directly by Miloš. However, it was those who earned the most, i.e. the tax farmers, that were more exposed to precariousness: they had to gain continuous benevolence of the Prince while remaining competitive at the biddings. The great notables, earning for a living in one of these three branches, were thus kept in a state of perpetual dependency, but nonetheless they were eager to secure their power, wealth and prominence. Until the proclamation of the autonomous Principality of Serbia, most notables hoped in gaining the lands of the Ottoman landlords, thus securing a relative economic independence, but when the autonomy finally arrived, in 1830, Miloš distributed these to the peasants. After that date, all hopes to secure one’s position from the arbitrary central authority were frustrated, and the only way to gain security was through constitutionalism.  

The first public requests for reforms were heard at the St. Trifun’s Day Assembly in 1834, and the Prince seemed willing to comply by promising a constituent Assembly latter that year. That Assembly was never convoked and gave rise to a great revolt in February 1835, the so called Mileta’s revolt, which was lead by Miloš’s chief collaborators and that spread through the whole country compelling the Prince to grant a constitution (Presentation Day Constitution) proclaimed in an Assembly (Presentation Day Assembly).8

The party born in the Mileta’s rebellion and during the Presentation Day Assembly is known in historiography as the ulistobranitelji, (the Defenders of the Constitution). It’s primary objective was to guarantee the civil rights to the subjects of the Principality, which meant a relative stability in the civil service as a gain for the notables and the guarantee of the inalienability of the private property as a gain for the peasants. To achieve this aim, the Defenders of the Constitution had to limit the power of the Prince. As we have seen, the Assembly, so efficiently controlled by Miloš for over twenty years, has not proved an efficient margin for the Prince’s authority. Therefore it was necessary to develop another institution, with more internal autonomy and greater powers, and it was found in the State Council, instituted by the first Serbian constitution in 1835. Although the Presentation Day Constitution actually never entered in force for the opposition of the Porte and of Russia (the guarantee power of Serbian autonomy), it has instituted the State Council, which was to become one of the chief actors of Serbian political life. The council was a senatorial organ of seventeen members, whose power derived mainly from the personal force of the great notables that constituted it. During the next three years, it’s members fought with success at the Porte and at the Russian delegations obtaining eventually another constitution for Serbia, the so called Turkish Constitution of 1838. The 1838 Constitution reaffirmed the existence of the Council, gave it the legislative power and, although the executive was still in hands of the Prince, it’s members could not be changed except by decision of the Porte. The next year, a failed coup d’état lead by one of Miloš’s brothers permitted the Council to impose on the Prince a new Statute of the Council which extended the powers of the senatorial organ. After that, the prince was forced to abdicate.9

The institutional system that came in to being with the promulgation of these two fundamental laws (the “Turkish” Constitution of 1838, and the Statute of the State Council of 1839) was the characteristic element of the regime of the Defenders of the Constitution (1839-1859). The 1839 Statute enchroached upon some of the Prince’s prerogatives in matters such as election of the Councilors

8 ed. MARINKOVIC Ratko, 150 godina od donošenja Sretenjskog ustava, Kragujevac 1985.
and of Ministers. According to the Constitution, the Prince had the right to nominate Councilors for life as long as the latter are “perfectly known amongst the folk”. According to the Statute of 1839 new Councilors could be nominated only in accordance with the Council itself, furthermore, after this Statute, the Prince could choose Ministers only among the members of the Council, while in the Constitution we can find no such limitation.  

Considered together, the Statute of the Council and the Constitution were incompatible, if not contradictory acts. For imposing one of these acts over another a situation of political hegemony was required, but the oligarchic structure of the state shaped the political conflicts in the form of equilibrium of powers, in which alliances and hostilities developed along the lines of restraint of the most powerful faction. In other words, while the political system tended towards equilibrium the institutional asset allowed only political hegemony. Within the institutions however, there was no mechanism capable of mediating these conflicts and so the arbitration was bound to be searched outside the institutional framework. It was then necessary to turn to the auxiliary political instruments, i.e. those requested by the State and used by the political class, but controlled by neither. Among these, the most common were the revolt, the Assembly and the intervention of the great powers. Therefore, the research on the Serbian assemblies in the first half of the 19th century should be conducted trough the analysis of the transformation of the auxiliary political instruments as a whole.

We have already examined the basic characteristics of the revolts and the assemblies, and for the latter it is important to note that it was not provided for in the new constitutional asset. As for the intervention of the Great Powers there were three main actors in Serbian internal politics. The Ottoman Empire was still formally sovereign over Serbia whose autonomy was guaranteed by Russia. The Habsburg Empire was confining with the Principality which was virtually its commercial colony. Although formally only the Porte had the right to intervene in Serbian politics, the informal protectorate of Russia over the Ottoman Empire, and the role of Austria as the motor of Serbian economy provided the grounds for the intervention of these two powers as well.

The three years that followed Prince Miloš’s abdication, were accompanied by great political instability. It was a period of assessment of power on all levels, from the village elders to the head of state. Three Princes were incoronated, five revolts broke out, out of which two were major, six assemblies were convoked, three “missions of pacification” were sent from the Porte to the Principality, and at the end, the first dynastic change took place. During this period, the assemblies

10 Jovanovic Slobodan, Ustavobranitelji i njihova vlada (1838 – 1858), Beograd 1912. p.117
11 See T. Sahara, 1999, pp. 6-11
have known a great rise of political power which did not implicate, however, proportional rise in the internal autonomy.

We have seen that, after Miletta’s rebellion, the auxiliary political instruments tended to intertwine and integrate each other: the revolt of 1835 resolved itself into an Assembly that proclaimed the constitution which was abolished because of the intervention of the Great Powers. Three years later, the constitution granted by the Porte was challenged by a rebellion which was put down by the forces that, afterwards, summoned themselves into an Assembly to request the abdication of the Prince.

When Miloš abdicated, he left his throne to his older son Milan, which died of tuberculosis less than six months later. For almost a year, a regency, constituted mostly of Miloš’s archenemies, the Defenders of the Constitution, governed the Principality, spreading discontent among the peasants against the Obrenovic dynasty. At the arrival of Miloš’s younger son, Mihajlo, which initially accompanied his father to the Principality of Walachia, the ustavobranitelji leaders were forced to exile. When they returned, they have unleashed one of the most interesting interrelations between the auxiliary political instruments.

In the beginning of September 1842, Toma Vucic-Perišić, Miloš’s right hand until Miletta’s rebellion, then one of his most ferocious enemies and regent in 1840, crossed the Danube to Serbia and took control of the standing army. What followed was one of the most bloody uprisings since 1815, with almost 80 casualties, in which the garrison troops opened artillery fire at the people in arms that protected the Prince. Mihajlo Obrenovic was eventually compelled to flee to Austria, thus abandoning the throne and creating the grounds for his deposal. As the Prince fled, the rebel troops camped at the outskirts of Belgrade and the Defenders of the Constitution, accompanied by other peasants and village elders, rallied in that camp thus forming an Assembly which deposed Mihajlo Obrenovic and proclaimed Aleksandar Karadordevic, son of Karadorde Petrovic, the leader of the First Serbian Uprising, Prince of Serbia. The Porte recognized the election with a formal investiture but Russia and Austria protested. Then another election took place in Serbia, with the leaders of the Defenders of the Constitutions once more in exile, which reaffirmed the decisions of the previous Assembly. The Great Powers withdrew their claims, and the Porte again invested the new prince.12

What is interesting for the future development of the Assembly is the dynamics of these events: the balance of power obtained with a revolt was confirmed in an Assembly whose decisions were confirmed by the Sultan and contested by the Great Powers, whose intervention, in turn, caused the reconfirmation of the balance of power in the country by another Assembly and it’s final formalization by the Sultan. In this way, the Assembly obtained the right to nominate a Prince

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12 Stranjakovic Dragoslav, Vuciceva buna 1842 g., Beograd 1936.
(“to present a candidate”), the Great Powers obtained a right to file an appeal, while the Sultan reaffirmed his sovereignty with the right to invest the Prince. Serbia became an electoral principality. The great innovation in the assemblies of 1842-43 was that they were indirectly invested by the Porte (the bearer of sovereignty) with the power to elect a Prince. The Great Powers obtained a right to a suspensive veto, not valid in case of a reconfirmation of the assemblies decisions.

The situation in Serbia in 1842-43 was completely extraordinary and singular. Nevertheless, it was in this exceptional situation of vacuum of power that the Serbian National Assembly has undergone a major transformation by temporarily assuming the role of interlocutor with the Porte and the Great Powers. The next auxiliary political instrument to undergo a radical change, or in this case, to vanish from the political scene, was the revolt.

The use of artillery in the 1842 revolt lead by Toma Vucic-Perišić had substantially broke the tradition of the rebellion as a ritualized battle, and it has considerably raised the level of violence in political clashes. Still, it was not until 1844 that the use of violence became systematic, ad this time it was used against the rebels. In October of that year, a group of young partisans of the Obrenovic dynasty crossed the Danube from Austria dressed in uniforms of the Habsburg Hussars. They entered the city of Šabac and within hours seized control over the homonymous district. The revolt, which is known as the “Hussar rebellion”, was of modest dimensions and lasted only a few days, but the repressions that followed had a devastating effect. Led by the same Toma Vucic that deposed Mihajlo two years earlier, the government troops conducted a large scale persecution in the Šabac district, looting, killing, imprisoning… However it was the modality of repression that was completely new: even before atrocities were perpetuated by the winners after a rebellion, but they were never aimed to persecute all the participants. In 1844, almost four hundred participants were imprisoned, their property sold or burnt down, and dozens of men were executed and put on the wheel. The effect of such a bloody repression was the banishment of the revolt from the Serbian political scene for almost forty years.

Nevertheless, at the higher level of the state apparatus the incoronation of the new Prince brought political stability. At least until 1845, Prince Aleksandar was too weak to move against the notables, and these, in turn, were still pulled together by the ever present but fading threat of the Obrenovic dynasty. As the notable faction obtained hegemony the latent institutional crisis was alleviated, but not for long.

After 1845 the Serbian political class split up and reconstituted itself in two hostile factions along lines of personal loyalty: the partisans of the Prince faced

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13 MILICEVIC Jovan, Istorija Katanske bune (Srbija 1844 g.). In Zbornik filozofskog fakulteta, V/1, Beograd 1956. pp.269-311
those loyal to the great notable Toma Vucic. However, it was not until 1848 that such polarization did get to obstruct the functioning of the institutional system. When it did, the “spring of the nations” added new problems for the young Principality: the uprising of the Serbs of Hungary, the renewed Obrenovic threat, the nascent liberal agitation in the country… all of these movements stimulated the population to press for an Assembly while the political class was compelled to appeal to a auxiliary political instrument in order to resolve the new institutional stale-mate. For once, the latter accepted the people’s will.

At the St. Peter’s Day Assembly of 1848, for the first time in Serbian history, liberal demands were presented. Some of the young liberals, at the time still high school students, presented completely new requests such as those for the liberty of press and of scientific research. Other demands, presented in previous assemblies were transformed by the new ideology. The most important of these was the demand, presented by all the assemblies since 1830, for a more frequent convocation. In it’s liberal interpretation, it was transformed into the demand for the institutionalization of the Assembly through law.

However, for the immediate future of the Assembly as such, liberal requests were less significative than the contingent political situation. The Assembly’s main purpose, in the eyes of the political class, was to resolve the conflict between Toma Vucic and Prince Aleksandar, which it did, in favor of the former. By virtually invading the Assembly with the loyal peasants of his own district (and thus not with the vote of the representatives), Toma Vucic forced the Councilors hostile to him to resign. But it was a Pyrrhic victory for the great notable and for the Assembly as such: following the line of curbing the most powerful faction, the entire political class allied against Vucic and against the use of his favorite political instrument, the Assembly.

The decision to marginalize the Assembly, along with the decision to eliminate the revolt from the political scene, left open only the last of the traditional auxiliary political instruments, i.e. the intervention of the Great Powers. However, the political class tried to resolve within the state the latent institutional crisis, before turning to the Powers. Between 1848 and 1855, the political factions tempted to achieve political supremacy through complete control of the state apparatus. The tentative was a complete failure since the very race of different parties for the control of the bureaucracy actually prevented a single faction from hegemonising the state apparatus. Furthermore, the corpus of laws on bureaucracy, promulgated after Prince Miloš’s downfall, made dismissals extremely difficult and purges virtually impossible. The desperate tentatives of the factions to obtain control over the state apparatus then resulted in an absolute permissivism towards the low-rank officials whose consensus was

tried to obtain. Together with the new police code of 1850, which gave the law enforcement officials the right to deliver corporeal punishment at will, such attitude towards the low-rank civil servants increased the discontent among the population and, in a longer period, became paralyzing for the state machinery itself.\textsuperscript{15} It was then that the appeal to the intervention of the Great Powers became necessary but, with the Russo-Turkish confrontation of 1853 and the consequent Crimean war (1854-56), even this political instrument became impracticable.

At the eve of the conflict, one of the main Russian war plans contemplated outflanking the Ottoman army by passing through Serbia. Coming to know of the Russian intentions, the Austrians massed troops on the Serbian border, threatening to invade the Principality in case of the passage of the Russians. In turn, the Porte mobilized along Serbia’s southern border in order to prevent a potential Austrian invasion.\textsuperscript{16} Luckily for the young Principality, the entrance of the Great Britain and France in war with Russia shifted the theater of the operations to the Black Sea, but the consciousness of the fragility of Serbia’s existence determinately influenced the decision-making process of the local political class: while all the Great Powers represented a threat to the very existence of the State, it was impossible to seek arbitration from any one of them. In addition, the Paris peace treaty of 1856 put Serbia under the common guarantee of the four Powers (GB, France, Russia and Austria). This meant that for every further intervention in the Principality the four Powers had to achieve an agreement before acting. The divergency of interests between the Powers prevented them from pursuing any common goal different from the preservation of the status quo, while, in the country, the situation was mature for an institutional change.

With the preclusion of all the auxiliary political instruments, the political conflict in Serbia changed character: from a struggle for political hegemony it became a struggle for the political elimination of the opponents. The first to act in that sense was Prince Aleksandar who tried to modify the institutional asset with a series of fait accompli against the Council.\textsuperscript{17} This tentative was a failure because even though he did bend the institutional system, he didn’t manage to alter efficiently the political equilibrium.

The answer of the Council was more incisive but as unfortunate. Some of the most prominent Councilors conspired against the Prince’s life in 1857, (Tenka’s plot) but they failed, giving the Prince a new opportunity to strike. What followed was a coup d’état carried on against the Council. Four out of it’s seventeen members were arrested and seven others resigned, while only the most

\textsuperscript{15} See S. Jovanovic, 1912, pp. 28-47
\textsuperscript{16} Petrovich Michael Boro, History of Modern Serbia, HBJ, New York – London 1976, pp. 246-251
\textsuperscript{17} S. Jovanovic, 1912, p.159-161
loyal Councilors remained. For the first time the status quo was successfully disrupted but the new situation caused the Great Powers to intervene. At the same time, in Serbia, a strong extra-institutional opposition was forming from the fusion of the remnants of the Councilors’ party with the young liberals, with the marginalized but still popular Toma Vucic’s faction and with the relatives and the clients, some of which extremely wealthy and influent, of the imprisoned Councilors. If the State was no longer able to appeal to the intervention of the Great Powers, the new opposition was free to act in that sense. Personal ties that the old Councilors established at the European courts and at the Porte were then used with maximum profit. The result of the common pressure of the Serbian opposition and of the Great Powers at the Porte was the Ottoman commission of inquiry in march of 1858.

The Ottoman commission of ’58 represented a great but not a total victory for the opposition. The seven Councilors that were compelled to resign the previous year returned to the Council while new amendments were added to the 1839 Statute of the State Council resolving all the contradictory points in favor of the senatorial organ itself. Yet, the latent institutional stalemate between the Prince and the Council became an acute political deadlock within the later. The new amendments prevented the Prince from choosing Ministers outside of the Council, while the members of the latter nominated after the 1857 coup stood in the Council side by side with the rehabilitated opposition leaders in a ratio that didn’t permit either group to form a government and maintain a majority in the Council. It was then necessary to resort to an auxiliary political instrument in order to overcome the crisis.

The reasons for the elimination of the revolt from the political life were structural: in order to maintain at least a relative internal stability, the State was compelled to stem revolts with all means. We have already seen that after 1856 the appeal to the intervention of the Great Powers was an impracticable solution for altering political equilibriums. On the contrary, the reasons for marginalizing the Assembly were contingent and political and they were based on the threat that Toma Vucic represented for the political class immediately after 1848. Ten years later, the great notable in his early seventies found himself united with the rest of the Serbian elite in the struggle against the Prince. However, in the new political context, the 1858 Assembly was not to be only an instrument of arbitration between the great notables but also the final resort for the elimination of one of the main political factions. It was these circumstances that gave the St. Andrew’s Day Assembly of 1858 the possibility and the power to express liberal ideas with such vehemence. Other changes occurred in the organization of the new Assembly even before it’s convocation. It was the first modern Assembly in Serbia, whose protocol, statute, functionaries and procedures were regulated

18 Ibid, p.161-192
trough law. In addition, the representatives sat indoors, thus excluding popular participation, and they were not permitted to carry arms.\textsuperscript{19}

In the meantime, in the late fifties, the peasant masses grew steadily hostile towards the establishment. The great notables went to power in 1842 also thanks to the promises given to the peasants in matter of lower tax rates and more local autonomy. These were fulfilled for the most part, but the structural crisis of the extensive agriculture, which became evident in the mid-nineteenth century, made the peasants fall into indebtedness and misery.\textsuperscript{20} The entire political class, which presented itself also as the defender of the peasant, was blamed for this state of the economy. In addition, the permissivism towards the low-rank bureaucracy gave way to systematic abuse of power after the 1850 police code. Other political scandals contributed to the dynastic disaffection of the masses while the “propaganda” of the 1857 extra-institutional opposition promoted public hostility towards the Prince.

At the St. Andrew’s Day Assembly, the largest single group of representatives was formed by the alliance of the liberals with the partisans of the Obrenovic dynasty. While the former were young intellectuals, educated at the greatest European universities, the latter were mainly peasants and village traders; while the liberals believed in panslavism and parliamentarism, the Obrenovic partisans were simply nostalgic for the days of a heavy-handed monarch who was benevolent towards the peasants. Whatever the differences, both shared the conviction of the necessity of a dynastic change and the desire for a stronger role of the Assembly in the future Serbian political life. What distinguished them was the grade of priority attributed to these aims. The liberals wanted to achieve greater participation in the government through dynastic change while the Obrenovic dynasty partisans, which were a majority in the Assembly and in the country, were not even against the principle of people’s sovereignty as long as it didn’t threaten their dynastic interests. Thus, during the first sessions of the Assembly, the Obrenovic partisans left their allies considerable leeway.\textsuperscript{21}

It was in fact in those first sessions that the liberals advanced a draft law on the Assembly that would transform the state in a parliamentary system. According to the liberal proposal, the Assembly would have the supreme legislative power and the right of control over the other political institutions. However, as time passed, the liberals were forced to compromise with the resistance of the old Councilors against the project and the anxiety of the dynastic partisans to return the throne to Prince Miloš. The law that was effectively promulgated from that compromise

\textsuperscript{19} ed. RADENIC Andrija, \textit{Svetoandrejska skupština- zbirka dokumenata}, Beograd 1964. p.60-63
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, p.44-45
\textsuperscript{21} S. Jovanovic, 1912, pp.228-253
finally made an ordinary political institution of the Assembly although it’s powers were merely consultative.²²

During Miloš Obrenovic’s second reign (1858-1860) this institutionalized Assembly would once again become the Prince’s tool for depriving the other state organs from all power. During the second reign of his son, Prince Mihajlo (1860-1868) the Assembly would fall under complete governmental control with the 1861 law that deprived the deputies of the freedom of speech and made the functionaries of the Assembly directly dependent on the Prince. It became the essential instrument for the mobilization of consensus in the process of militarization and statalization that transformed the country, from “the Poor Man’s Paradise”²³ of the first reign of Prince Miloš to the “Prussia of the Balkans”²⁴ under the second reign of his son Mihajlo.

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²² Ibid., p. 242-250
²³ HERBERT Vivian, Servia, the Poor Man’s Paradise, London, 1897