

66 | 2 (2026)

PRISPEVKI

ZA NOVEJŠO ZGODOVINO

2



INŠTITUT ZA NOVEJŠO ZGODOVINO

PRISPEVKI
ZA NOVEJŠO
ZGODOVINO

Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino

Contributions to the Contemporary History

Contributions a l'histoire contemporaine

Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte

UDC/UDK 94(497.4) "18/19 "
ISSN 0353-0329 (tiskana izdaja)
2463-7807 (spletna izdaja); <https://ojs.inz.si/pnz>
DOI <https://doi.org/10.51663/pnz.66.2>

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Izdajatelj/Published by: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino/Institute of Contemporary History,
Privoz 11, SI-1000 Ljubljana, tel. (386) 01 200 31 20, fax (386) 01 200 31 60,
e-mail: jure.gasparic@inz.si

Sofinancer/Financially supported by: Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko
dejavnost Republike Slovenije/ Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency

Računalniški prelom/Typesetting: Studio Aleja d.o.o.

Tisk/Printed by: Medium d.o.o.

Cena/Price: 15,00 EUR

Zamenjave/Exchange: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino/Institute of Contemporary History,
Privoz 11, SI-1000 Ljubljana

Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino so indeksirani v/are indexed in: Scopus, ERIH Plus, Historical
Abstract, ABC-CLIO, PubMed, CEEOL, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, EBSCOhost

Številka vpisa v razvid medijev: 720

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Fotografija na naslovnici:

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Neja Blaj Hribar*

Who Counts as Foreign? Foreign Employment between Legislation and Public Discourse – the Case of the Drava Banovina

IZVLEČEK

KDO JE TUJEC? ZAPOSLOVANJE TUJCEV MED ZAKONODAJO IN DISKURZOM – PRIMER DRAVSKE BANOVINE

Članek obravnava zakonodajo in javni diskurz o zaposlovanju tujih delavcev v Dravski banovini v medvojnem obdobju. Predstavi osnovne značilnosti zakonodaje in na tej podlagi pokaže, kako so se oblikovale različne možnosti za različne skupine prosilcev za delovna dovoljenja. Analiziran je tudi diskurz o problematiki zaposlovanja tujcev in o tem, kdo je bil označen kot tujec. Na podlagi te analize ugotavlja, ali je pravna in diskurzivna kategorija »tujca« enotna, in če ne, na kakšen način se znotraj vsake od njiju oblikujejo razlike.

Ključne besede: zaposlovanje tujcev, zakonodaja, prva Jugoslavija, diskurz, tujost

ABSTRACT

The article examines the legislation and public discourse surrounding the employment of foreign workers in the Drava Banovina during the interwar period. It outlines the key characteristics of the relevant legislation and, on this basis, shows how various conditions shaped varying opportunities for different groups of applicants to obtain work permits. The article

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also analyses the discourse on foreign employment and on who was identified as a foreigner. Drawing on this analysis, it asks whether the legal and discursive category of the “foreigner” is uniform and, if not, in what ways differences emerge within each of them.

Keywords: foreign employment, legislation, first Yugoslavia, discourse, foreignness

The concept of economic nationalism is rooted in the nineteenth century and emerged alongside ideas aimed at protecting local labour and domestic economies. Economic nationalism can manifest as a state-backed policy of self-sufficiency, pursued through various measures – most notably protectionism.¹ Yet economic nationalism extended beyond tariffs and banking. The exclusion of immigrants and discrimination against ethnic minorities were also integral to the construction of a national economy.² This pushed states towards greater involvement in managing migration – not only at the borders but also in protecting domestic wages, working conditions, and social security.³

In this economic climate, foreign labour and capital were perceived as a problem. In this paper I examine the legislation and public discourse surrounding foreign workers, focusing on the Drava Banovina within interwar Yugoslavia. While the legislation discussed operates at the state level, the analysis of public discourse draws primarily on the Slovenian-language press. Although I focus on the 1930s, I also present prior legislation for clarity and coherence. It should be noted that the Drava Banovina is not an exceptional case. Its attitudes towards foreign labour were the product of an already developed economic nationalism, rooted in Slovenian national movements and shaped by the region's broader contemporary economic thought. Whether significant differences existed compared to other parts of Yugoslavia remains a question for further research. This paper treats it primarily as a case study within what appears to be a wider, shared discourse.

I also analyse who foreigners were, what defined them, and whether there was a hierarchy among them. I follow the theory of Sylvia Hahn, that

1 Ivan Smiljanić, “National Pride and Economic Prejudice: Some Effects of Economic Nationalism in the Slovene Rural Areas in Austria-Hungary,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 66, No. 1 (2026): 31–32, <https://doi.org/10.51663/pnz.66.1.02>.

2 Marvin Suesse, *The Nationalist Dilemma. A Global History of Economic Nationalism, 1776–Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 9.

3 Christoph Rass, “Temporary Labour Migration and State-Run Recruitment of Foreign Workers in Europe, 1919–1975: A New Migration Regime?,” *International Review of Social History* 57, No. S20 (2012): 195, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859012000466>. For the impact of the rise of the welfare state on the distinction between citizens and foreigners, see Beate Althammer, ed., *Citizenship, Migration and Social Rights Historical Experiences from the 1870s to the 1970s* (London: Routledge, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003261261>.

“foreignness” (Fremdheit) is not a strictly established quality of individuals and groups, but rather a historically variable social and cultural construct which changes according to the political, economic, and social situation. That is, foreignness is produced by discourses of difference that distinguish between native and foreign between us and them.⁴

One factor that shapes perceptions of foreignness is legislation. Legal institutions such as citizenship create legal and societal differences. These inequalities can lead to mutual resentment, antipathy, or even xenophobic outbursts.⁵ As Sigrid Wadauer noted (on the subject of wanderers, but the consideration is nevertheless applicable to the issue at hand), although the state’s views and legislation are insufficient to understand the problem, legal definitions can have important implications.⁶

For this reason, given the connection between legislation and public discourse, I will attempt to answer the questions posed above from both perspectives. Other perspectives on how laws were implemented and how society treated foreigners in everyday life are not the focus of this paper. I will include the existing data and literature, but further research is urgently needed.

Legislation on Foreign Workers

The first joint regulation of foreign workers was included in the Labour Protection Act of 1922. It is revealing which law this provision was embedded in. In addition to the eight-hour workday, the right to a break, childcare for children, maternity leave, insurance, and other labour rights, the act included a paragraph stating that the employer must first obtain permission from the Ministry of Social Policy, which must first consult the local employment offices, to employ a foreigner. Permission from the Ministry was also required to recruit employees on behalf of foreign employers.⁷ Two years later, the Ministry added an ordinance to the law that defined more precisely how to apply for the permit. The local work inspection office issued permits for up to three months, while for longer periods, the Ministry had to issue them. It also acted as the second-instance authority, deciding on appeals.⁸ That same year, the Ministry issued a special ordinance stating that Russian refugees should be treated as local workers.⁹

4 Sylvia Hahn, “Inclusion and Exclusion of Migrants in the Multicultural Realm of the Habsburg ‘State of Many Peoples,’” *Histoire sociale / Social History* 33, No. 66 (2000): 309.

5 Ibidem, 324.

6 Sigrid Wadauer, “Establishing Distinctions: Unemployment versus Vagrancy in Austria from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1938,” *International Review of Social History* 56, No. 1 (2011): 42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859010000702>.

7 “Zakon o zaščiti delavcev,” *Uradni list pokrajinske uprave za Slovenijo*, No. 74, 13 July 1922, 485–92.

8 “Pravilnik o zaposlovanju inozemskih delavcev,” *Uradni list ljubljanske in mariborske oblasti*, No. 71, 2 August 1924, 425–26.

9 “Odločba, da je smatrati ruske begunce glede zaposlovanja na našem ozemlju za enake domačim delavcem,” *Uradni list ljubljanske in mariborske oblasti*, No. 93, 9 October 1924, 563.

Aleksandar R. Miletić's research shows that legislation in the early 1920s was used to expel as many foreign workers as possible. The First Yugoslavia had both formal and informal procedures, all aimed at restricting labour immigration based on labour needs and ethnicity. However, due to consular interventions, many of these decisions were reversed, as Yugoslavia feared retaliatory measures. The only firm stance was taken against Austrian citizens. Even those who had lived and worked in the territory of Yugoslavia for years were denied extended visas and work permits unless they applied for citizenship. In March 1925, the Austrian representative in Belgrade complained in official correspondence about the expulsion of their citizens and the tightening of labour regulations.¹⁰

In addition to other international regulations, this was probably one reason the Ministry issued the new ordinance at the end of that year. It introduced a new category: foreign workers who had begun working in the kingdom before the Labour Protection Act came into force. These workers had to submit a new request and provide firm evidence of their living and working circumstances to obtain a certificate confirming they were not subject to the Labour Protection Act. If granted, they were allowed to stay and work without having to make regular extension requests. However, this applied only if they remained with the same employer and did not leave the country for more than one month, unless the absence was work-related.¹¹ Another important exception was added: for the first time, a bilateral treaty of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the Kingdom of SHS) with another country was mentioned. For foreign workers from countries with such a treaty, including a special agreement on the workforce, the law was obsolete.¹² This coincided with new bilateral trade and economic treaties that Yugoslavia began to sign with other countries. Previously, only those signed by the Kingdom of Serbia before the war were valid.¹³

New bilateral and multilateral agreements on migrant labour became increasingly common during the interwar period. States were no longer merely regulating the movement of people across borders – they also began acting as mediators in the international labour market.¹⁴ The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was established in 1919 as part of the League of Nations, and Yugoslavia joined the same year.¹⁵ The ILO also set standards and recommendations for the treatment of migrant workers, covering wages, social welfare, and, ideally, equal treatment with domestic workers, but these recommendations were not binding.¹⁶ Until 1935, Yugoslavia had

10 Aleksandar R. Miletić, "(Regular) immigration controls in the interwar (semi-)periphery? East-central- and southeast European policy patterns," in Kamil Ruzsala, ed., *Refugees and Population Transfer Management in Europe, 1914–1920s* (London, New York: Routledge, 2024): 261, 273, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003472742>.

11 "Pravilnik o zaposlovanju inozemskih delavcev," *Uradni list ljubljanske in mariborske oblasti*, No. 108, 7 December 1925, 777.

12 Ibid.

13 France Kresal, "Avstrijski kapital v industriji stare Jugoslavije," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 27, No. 1–2 (1987): 34.

14 Rass, "Temporary Labour Migration," 192.

15 Ratko Pešić, "International Labour Standards, and Yugoslav Legislation," *International Labour Review* 96, No. 5 (1967): 443.

16 Rass, "Temporary Labour Migration," 200–01.

signed four treaties (with Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania) that included provisions on the workforce.¹⁷

Such agreements were primarily designed with receiving countries in mind, and Yugoslavia was not one of them. Nevertheless, as a country of origin, Yugoslavia had an interest in protecting its workers abroad. Within this framework, reciprocity became a key principle shaping the treatment of foreigners, including in broader legislation. For example, citizens, refugees, and foreigners were all eligible for unemployment support – though for the latter group, an additional condition applied: the benefit was available only if the worker's home country extended the same support to Yugoslav citizens abroad.¹⁸ However, as Marjeta Keršič-Svetel has shown, reciprocity in social insurance and welfare benefits was not consistently enforced in practice, posing a significant problem for foreign workers.¹⁹ Combined with the bureaucratic burden of obtaining and renewing work permits, this led many to pursue citizenship instead.²⁰

During the economic crisis, when many countries adopted more protectionist policies, Yugoslavia did the same. Yet a new law regarding foreign labour was passed after the crisis in 1935. The "Regulation on the Employment of Foreign Citizens" introduced stricter conditions for obtaining work permits and increased bureaucracy.²¹ The employer had to include, among other documents, a report from the local labour exchange on unemployed domestic workers in the relevant branch, as well as a list of foreign workers already employed. One of the conditions was that an employer who had received approval to hire foreign workers must, if possible, employ domestic workers or train them for these jobs. Reciprocity remained an important factor, but it also had a negative side. If the country of origin of the foreign workers limited the number of Yugoslav workers, Yugoslavia did the same for them, and if that country taxed Yugoslav workers there, Yugoslavia did so as well.

The regulation allowed applications only from employers for skilled workers, provided the local labour market permitted it or their skills were important to the country's economic progress, and for temporary workers who came to assemble or repair imported machines. Applications could also be granted to individuals: independent workers (who did not require a business licence under crafts or similar legislation), foreign citizens of Yugoslav nationality, foreigners who had lived in Yugoslavia before 1922, and other groups determined by the Ministry of National Health and Social Policy. The latter were named in the decree adopted a few months later and included Russian war-disabled persons, other Russian refugees, and foreign citizens of other

17 "Nova naredba o zaposlitvi tujcev," *Trgovski list*, 2 April 1935, 2.

18 "Uredba (Pravilnik) o organizaciji posredovanja dela, dajanja neposrednje podpore brezposelnim delavcem in dajanja cenenih posojil za zidanje delavskih stanovanj, in sicer v breme sredstev, nabranih na podstavi pooblastitve v členu 110. finančnega zakona za leto 1922./1923," *Uradni list ljubljanske in mariborske oblasti*, No. 127, 22 December 1927, 854.

19 Marjeta Keršič-Svetel, "Češko-slovenski stiki med svetovnima vojnima (2. del)," *Zgodovinski časopis* 49, No. 3 (1995): 429.

20 Ibid. See also Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, "Statistički pregled stranih radnika i članova njihovih porodica u Jugoslaviji 1933. godine," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 4, No. 3 (1972): 124.

21 "Uredba o zaposlovanju tujih državljanov," *Službeni list kraljevske banske uprave Dravske banovine*, No. 36, 4 May 1934, 276–80.

nationalities with asylum and a valid work permit. The first group was exempt from all regulations. Other Russian refugees (if they had arrived in the country before the regulation) had the same advantages as foreign citizens of Yugoslav nationality (as detailed in this decree). This meant that they could obtain a permanent work permit and were not tied to one employer; in employee personnel lists, they were counted as nationals (but had to indicate their citizenship), yet they had to register every year with the local police office.²²

The Minister of National Health and Social Policy, Drago Marušič, explained that the purpose of the new regulation was to reduce the number of foreign workers, but exemptions remained that could not be overlooked. First, there were international contracts; Yugoslavia had to proceed with caution regarding foreign workers from countries where more Yugoslavians worked (with the option of retaliatory measures), and from friendly states such as the Little Entente. Even some companies had special permission to employ foreigners. Yet there were still some improvements: only skilled workers could apply for a work permit, there were sanctions for violations, and the decree foresaw equal treatment of domestic and foreign workers. Finally, the regulation itself allowed for the re-examination of all already issued work permits.²³

Who is considered a foreigner in legislation?

As outlined above, the legislation treats foreign citizens as foreigners. Before proceeding, it is worth briefly outlining how citizenship was acquired. The first Yugoslavia inherited six legal systems.²⁴ Before the peace treaties, it began excluding members of groups that did not fit the idea of a triune nation, thereby strengthening the link between ethnicity and citizenship.²⁵ The St Vitus' Day Constitution stipulated that public office was open to all native-born citizens, as well as naturalised Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, while other naturalised citizens were required to have ten years of continuous residency.²⁶

The citizenship decrees, adopted under the peace treaties of Saint-Germain and Trianon, granted citizenship rights to four groups. Citizenship was automatically granted to those who held pertinency (*domovinska pravica, Heimatrecht*) on 1 January 1910 in areas of the former dual monarchy that became part of the Kingdom of SHS. Citizenship could be sought by application by those who acquired pertinency in these areas after 1 January 1910; those who held pertinency in other parts of the former monarchy but had previously held it in areas that became part of the Kingdom; and

22 "Pravilnik za uporabo uredbe o zaposlovanju tujih državljanov," *Službeni list kraljevske banske uprave Dravske banovine*, No. 83, 16 October 1935, 783–98.

23 "Nova naredba o zaposlitvi tujcev," *Trgovski list*, 2 April 1935, 2.

24 Dmitar Tasić, "Serbia and Changes in the Concept of Citizenship in the Era of the First World War," *Studia Historica Slovenica* 21, No. 3 (2021): 706–07.

25 Ivan Kosnica, "Odnos državljanstva i nacionalne pripadnosti u Kraljevini SHS/Jugoslaviji," *Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta u Zagrebu* 68, No. 1 (2018): 68–69.

26 Tasić, "Serbia and Changes," 709.

those with pertinency elsewhere in Austria-Hungary who were of Serbian, Croatian, or Slovenian ethnolinguistic background.²⁷ Because the authorities wanted to process option applications first, the granting of naturalisations was suspended until 1924. After that, applications from South Slavs and other Slavs were processed first, followed by those from other groups.²⁸ The government did not adopt the new “Citizenship Law” until 1928. It stipulated that citizenship was hereditary and could be acquired through marriage, birth within the state’s territory (for children of unknown parents), or naturalisation. Although naturalisation was available to everyone, more lenient conditions were set for ethnolinguistically SHS populations; less stringent requirements also applied to Slavs and Russian refugees of Slavic origin who had already applied for citizenship before the law was passed but whose applications had not yet been decided.²⁹

Even from a legal perspective, under such laws, foreigners were not a uniform category. They created a hierarchy that enabled some to gain citizenship more quickly or to find employment more easily, with fewer bureaucratic obstacles. Depending on ethnicity or specific citizenship, one could be considered more or less “foreign”.

Discourse on Foreigners

On 9 August 1929, the *Slovenski narod* newspaper published a query for its readers: “How to Eliminate the Housing Misery, Unemployment, and the Industrial Crisis?” The newspaper reported that unemployment among both unqualified and qualified workers was rising, and that many factories and industrial enterprises were limiting their operations or were forced to cease them altogether. After a sombre view of the issue, there was a call for readers’ ideas on how to fix it. The only instruction was to consider the extreme population growth that affects all of the above subjects.³⁰ *Slovenski narod* published 21 answers by the end of the year, when they started a new query about the celibacy of the women clerks. The majority of respondents suggested accelerating housing construction, which would also help to reduce unemployment and alleviate the economic crisis. Among other suggestions, some raised the question of whether unemployment insurance should be enacted or whether the number of children among poor people should be limited. Others simply elaborated on their views regarding the causes of the problems. Some blamed unemployment on either too many or too few skilled (educated) workers, arguing that everyone wants to be a clerk or is simply lazy, while others saw the problem in underdeveloped industry and

27 “Uredba o pridobitvi in izgubi državljanstva kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev z opcijo in prošnjo,” *Uradni list Deželne vlade za Slovenijo*, No. 174, 21 December 1920, 705–07. “Uredba o pridobitvi in izgubi državljanstva kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev z opcijo in prošnjo,” *Uradni list deželne vlade za Slovenijo*, December 1921. For more details on citizenship after the war, see Kosnica, “Odnos državljanstva,” 72–73.

28 Kosnica, “Odnos državljanstva,” 72–73.

29 “Zakon o državljanstvu Kraljevine SHS,” *Uradni list ljubljanske in mariborske oblasti*, No. 109, 19 November 1928, 741–44.

30 “Kako odpravimo stanovanjsko bedo, brezposelnost in industrijsko krizo?,” *Slovenski narod*, 9 August 1929, 2.

low wages.³¹ One-third (seven) of all respondents mentioned the problem of foreign workers or foreign capital. Most listed this among several issues, but two devoted their entire letters to this topic. One complained that foreigners are taking better-paid jobs and are seen and presented as experts, yet they were sent abroad because they were not considered good enough in their own countries. They are employed simply because of their connections and, as foreigners, are placed above the domestic population.³² The second focused more on foreign capital. It presents foreign investors as the problem because they work for themselves and their own country, using Yugoslavia's resources for their own profit.³³ Between the lines, there are many comparisons with colonialism.

Yet not everyone agreed with this narrative. One of the respondents to the query believed that the foreign workforce is a minor problem, as their numbers are negligible. Moreover, without foreign capital, the situation would be even worse. They argued that the problem began after nationalisation: banks sold companies back to foreigners because local capital was deposited in banks rather than invested in industry.³⁴ One reader, nicknamed Lajik (layman), on the other hand, saw migration as a solution. They proposed that the whole of Europe, along with Russia, should devise a plan to relocate people across the continent from overpopulated to less-populated areas that still have sufficient natural resources to utilise. Yet they did not believe it was possible, since capitalism preferred a sedentary population.³⁵

The first two mentioned letters represented the general discourse, in its different forms and manifestations, on foreign workers and capital in Slovenian-language newspapers since the late 1920s, and this discourse persisted until the war. As in most other countries, xenophobia increased during the economic crisis.³⁶

Although legislation allowed work permits to be granted in cases of shortages of domestic workers, and during the 1930s only skilled workers could obtain permits, most newspapers argued that too many foreigners were employed and that there were enough local experts to replace them. They did not believe foreign workers were better trained, and if they were, that domestic workers should be trained rather than have the foreigners' work permits extended.³⁷

The other problem was the foreign capital invested in the companies and the people they brought with them. The press portrayed them as hostile to Yugoslavia, accused them of exploiting domestic workers and the country's resources, and of generally

31 "Kako odpravimo stanovanjsko bedo, brezposelnost in industrijsko krizo?" *Slovenski narod*, 17, 21, and 27 August; 2 and 7 September; 4 and 12 October 1929.

32 "Kako odpravimo stanovanjsko bedo, brezposelnost in industrijsko krizo?" *Slovenski narod*, 18 November 1929, 3.

33 "Kako odpravimo stanovanjsko bedo, brezposelnost in industrijsko krizo?" *Slovenski narod*, 3 September 1929, 2.

34 "Kako odpravimo stanovanjsko bedo, brezposelnost in industrijsko krizo?" *Slovenski narod*, 7 September 1929, 2.

35 "Kako odpravimo stanovanjsko bedo, brezposelnost in industrijsko krizo?" *Slovenski narod*, 4 October 1929, 2.

36 Marjan Drnovšek, "Velika gospodarska kriza in slovenski izseljenci," in Neven Borak and Žarko Lazarevič, eds., *Gospodarske krize in Slovenci* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino and Zveza ekonomistov Slovenije, 1999), 123–24.

37 "Pri nas gospodarijo tujci," *Delavska pravica*, 26 September 1934, 3. "Tuji nameščenci," *Pohod*, 16 April 1935, 3. "Poglavje o 'strokovnjakih' in tujcih," *Večernik*, 24 April 1940, 4. Franjo Bulc, "Karteli," *Pohod*, 20 May 1933, 1. "O tujih strokovnjakih," *Prelom*, 19 April 1934, 2. "Brezposelni tehniki in naša industrijska podjetja," *Jutro*, 16 July 1932, 2.

treating foreigners better.³⁸ It also raised security concerns. Foreign companies could sabotage the economy and the country. During the second half of the 1930s, calls for caution grew as the international situation worsened, since foreigners and their capital could be the internal enemy in the event of war.³⁹ The *Ženski svet* newspaper also published an opinion that Holland's immediate capitulation was caused by the betrayal by the foreigners (Germans) already living there.⁴⁰ Foreigners were presented as enemies, "as leeches and parasites", feeding on the body of the nation. They were not seen as people who came to work in Yugoslavia, but rather as exploiters of Yugoslavia and its people, even during peacetime.

Several parts of the relevant legislation were criticised, but the most prominent complaint concerned its implementation. There were many calls to revise issued permits and to strengthen inspection controls, as many individuals were allegedly operating without permits.⁴¹ Allegations also came from the Chamber of Commerce.⁴² Less frequently, articles expressed concern about groups receiving special treatment. Foreigners who had come to the country before 1922 but had not accepted Yugoslav citizenship were seen as the most problematic.⁴³ Granting citizenship based on a work permit was also unacceptable.⁴⁴

The discourse of many newspapers suggests that insufficient legislation and "manipulative colonising foreigners" were not the only problems identified. The press often also blamed the public. Through (auto)stereotypes of Slovenian "serfdom", it was often highlighted that Slovenians bowed to foreigners. In 1940, the *Slovenski delavec* newspaper wrote that Slovenians endured this "shameful yoke" because they were "too soft and lenient".⁴⁵ Another writer commented that even the Chinese or Japanese could settle "here" without learning the language, because Slovenians were so "soft at heart and so lukewarm" that even workers would learn their language in just a few days, as they believed this demonstrated the highest level of culture.⁴⁶ The *Ženski svet* magazine even published an article on how to interact with foreigners. One piece of advice was always to try to speak Slovenian first, and only if that did not work, try something else. The idea was that Slovenians must first respect themselves so that foreigners will respect them too.⁴⁷ In economic terms, it was not just about pledging to buy only

38 "Tujci imajo prednost pred domačinom," *Trgovski list*, 25 October 1934, 2. "Nepotrebni tujci," *Slovenski delavec*, 24 May 1940, 1. "Tuji nameščenci," *Pohod*, 16 April 1935, 3. "Še vedno pereč problem," *Mariborski večernik* "Jutra", 7 May 1936, 2.

39 "Pri nas gospodarijo tujci," *Delavska pravica*, 26 September 1934, 3. "O tujih strokovnjakih," *Prelom*, 19 April 1934, 2. "Zdramite se ob dvanajsti uri," *Delavec*, 15 September 1938, 1. "Nepotrebni tujci," *Slovenski delavec*, 24 May 1940, 1.

40 "Najgrozovitejša vojna, kar jih je doživelo človeštvo," *Ženski svet* 18, No. 6 (1940): 139.

41 "Pri nas gospodarijo tujci," *Delavska pravica*, 26 September 1934, 3. "Proti zaposlovanju tujcev," *Mariborski večernik* "Jutra", 3 May 1933, 2. "Poglavje o 'strokovnjakih' in tujcih," *Večernik*, 24 April 1940, 4.

42 "Zaposlitev tujcev v našem gospodarstvu," *Obrtni vestnik*, 6 September 1940, 1.

43 "Pri nas gospodarijo tujci," *Delavska pravica*, 26 September 1934, 3. "Poglavje o parazitih na našem narodnem telesu," *Mariborski večernik* "Jutra", 6 May 1933, 1.

44 "Poglavje o 'strokovnjakih' in tujcih," *Večernik*, 24 April 1940, 4.

45 "Nepotrebni tujci," *Slovenski delavec*, 24 May 1940, 1.

46 "Narodna zavednost in naše delavstvo," *Pohod*, 10 September 1932

47 Pavla Hočevar, "Pokažimo se svetu," *Ženski svet* 17, No. 7/8 (1939): 158.

domestic goods, but also about criticising the mentality that the foreign is always better. The foremost example was *the Trgovski list* journal, which stated in 1934 that the public was also guilty of the legislation on foreign labour not being fully enforced because people continued to respect foreigners. The public “still cannot shake off its deference towards foreigners, especially those who work among us and are paid better here than any of our own people. And it is this deference that is to blame for the fact that every regulation regarding the employment of foreign workers is enforced extremely loosely – so loosely that, in practice, it carries no weight at all.”⁴⁸

Who is a foreigner?

Many of the articles are vague about which foreigners they refer to; they use terms such as “foreign blood” and “foreign origin”, though some elaborate further. Most are concerned with foreign citizens and nationality.⁴⁹ Others even specify exactly whom they have in mind: “With a few honourable exceptions, all the so-called ‘indispensable’ foreigners are Germans – whether they are Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Austrian, or German citizens. Among them, there are also a few Jews, who, of course, likewise do not understand our language.”⁵⁰ Germans, mostly German Austrians, were mentioned most frequently in the papers. They were portrayed as former rulers (in the Habsburg Empire) and as oppressors of the Slovenian nation. This perception of them as the “greatest national enemy” persisted in the discourse. Germans were ascribed the ambition to colonise Yugoslavia again, now through economic means.⁵¹

It was not only public discourse that supported restrictions on foreigners and their capital. In the early 1920s, the state also pursued an administrative effort to obstruct entry into the country and to facilitate the expulsion, mainly of ethnic groups such as Austrian Germans, Jews, Hungarians, and Germans.⁵² This coincided with the sequestration and nationalisation of companies, which did not bring the desired results. Austrian capital played an important role in the industry of the first Yugoslavia, especially in the Drava Banovina.⁵³ New nation-states were developing national economies, but they remained highly integrated into the economic systems of the former empires.

As mentioned earlier, the discourse about foreign workers, which sought to tighten regulations, was subordinated to the interests of the better-situated workforce and their capital. Their foreignness was linked to citizenship and/or ethnicity. The press largely reflected the voice of the elite, which judged much of public life – including immigrants and perceptions of foreignness – through the lens of national

48 “Tujci imajo prednost pred domačinom,” *Trgovski list*, 25 October 1934, 2.

49 “Nepotrebni tujci,” *Slovenski delavec*, 24 May 1940, 1. “Poglavje o parazitih na našem narodnem telesu,” *Mariborski večernik* “Jutra”, 6 May 1933, 1.

50 “Poglavje o parazitih na našem narodnem telesu,” *Mariborski večernik* “Jutra”, 6 May 1933, 1.

51 Ibid. “Zdramite se ob dvanajsti uri,” *Delavec*, 15 September 1938, 1.

52 Miletič, “(Regular) immigration controls,” 127.

53 For more details, see Kresal, “Avstrijski kapital,” 35–36. Žarko Lazarević, “Srednjeevropski gospodarski prostor do druge svetovne vojne,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 43, No. 2 (2003): 33–42.

ideology. This applies primarily at a declarative level and mostly to the “main national enemies”: Germans/Austrians and sometimes Jews. Yet we cannot overlook other newcomers who came to the Drava Banovina and were employed mostly in lower positions. Workers who came from other parts of the country, even from rural parts of the Banovina to its cities, as well as refugees and others, also represented a kind of foreignness. Hahn saw a close connection between migration and foreignness, yet the distance that produces foreignness cannot be measured geographically.⁵⁴ They were portrayed as newcomers taking jobs from locals, though only the lower-paid ones. More often than not, they too were exploited, which in turn affected the quality of employment for local workers.⁵⁵ In many ways, this discourse echoes calls to restrict women’s employment during the economic crisis, with women similarly framed as unfair competitors.⁵⁶ People from rural areas were advised to stay at home and work on agricultural development, which would benefit both rural and urban areas.⁵⁷ Refugees, regardless of their origins, were also often disliked, supposedly “stealing” jobs.⁵⁸

When we speak of “foreigner” as a term in public discourse, a wide spectrum of interpretations, understandings, and uses emerges. The perception of foreignness is shaped by multiple factors: legal status, the act of immigration itself, and exclusions based on ethnic, religious or other categorisations, including social position.

Conclusion

The state remained caught between its aspirations and the realities of economic needs and international obligations. Legislation tightened the conditions for work permits, while exceptions proliferated. Regarding the issuance of trade licences, Pejić wrote that the authorities remained largely legalistic, thereby satisfying neither the public nor the legislator.⁵⁹

54 Sylvia Hahn, “Migranten als Fremde – fremd als Migranten. Zuwanderung in Wien und Niederösterreich im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert,” in Ingrid Bauer, Josef Ehmer, and Sylvia Hahn, eds., *Walz – Migrationen – Besatzung. Historische Szenarien des Eignen und des Fremden* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2002), 103.

55 “Pismo brezposelnega delavca,” *Jutro, ponedeljska izdaja*, 22 May 1939, 4. “Množice delavcev prihajajo v Ljubljano,” *Slovenski narod*, 19 April 1933, 2. “Vseučiliška Knjižnica,” *Velikonočna priloga ‘Glasa naroda’*, 11 April 1936, 4.

56 See Ana Cergol Paradiž, Matteo Perissinotto, and Irena Selišnik, “Women Clerks in Transition after World War I,” in Marta Verginella and Urška Strle, eds., *Women and Work in the North-Eastern Adriatic. Postwar Transitions* (Budapest, Vienna, New York: Central European University Press, 2025), 101–02.

57 “Kako odpravimo stanovanjsko bedo, brezposelnost in industrijsko krizo?,” *Slovenski narod*, 7 November 1929, 2.

58 Teja Krašovec, “Primorski priseljenci v Ljubljani med obema svetovnima vojnama,” Doctoral dissertation (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, self-published, 2016), 37–39. Gregor Antoličič and Petra Svolišak, “The others. Refugees seen from the Slovenian perspective of the First World War,” in Kamil Ruszala, ed., *Refugees and Population Transfer Management in Europe, 1914–1920s* (London, New York: Routledge, 2025), 102–27, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003472742>. Petra Kim Krasnič, “Ruska emigracija v Jugoslaviji med letoma 1918 in 1941,” Doctoral dissertation (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, self-published, 2024).

59 Oliver Pejić, “Dometi i ograničenja pripadnosti državnom narodu u Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca: iskustva iz ‘prečanskih krajeva,’” in Natalija Dimić Lompar, Ognjen Tomić, and Nikola Koneski, eds., *Nova istraživanja jugoslovenske prošlosti: perspektive sa postjugoslovenskog prostora* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije 2025), 173, <https://doi.org/10.31212/2025.nova.istrazivanja.pej.159-180>.

It was precisely these exceptions, based on citizenship, national or international treaties, or fear of retaliatory measures, that created differences in employment opportunities among various categories of foreigners. A second axis of differentiation was nationality: members of the SHS national enjoyed certain employment advantages over others. They also had an easier path to citizenship, even within the relatively technical first-decree process, which determined citizenship based on pertinency. Under the new law, certain advantages were extended to Slavs and Russian refugees of Slavic origin as well, thereby influencing employment opportunities.

In public discourse, foreignness is a far more fluid and elusive concept. The influence of legal definitions and assigned nationality is evident, yet foreignness was also tied to the very act of migration – a rural dweller seeking work in the city, a migrant from another Banovina, or a refugee could all be perceived as foreign, regardless of their nationality. Notably, the latter groups were more frequently associated with lower social strata, whereas foreigners, defined by citizenship and/or nationality, were more commonly linked in the discourse to better-qualified, higher-skilled positions.

Acknowledgements

The research was conducted as part of the infrastructure program *Research Infrastructure of Slovenian Historiography* (I0-0013), funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) from the state budget.

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Neja Blaj Hribar

KDO JE TUJEC? ZAPOSLOVANJE TUJCEV MED ZAKONODAJO IN DISKURZOM – PRIMER DRAVSKE BANOVINE

POVZETEK

Prispevek obravnava vprašanje, kako je bila kategorija »tujca« pravno in diskurzivno oblikovana v kontekstu zaposlovanja v Dravski banovini v Kraljevini Jugoslaviji, s poudarkom na tridesetih letih. Z analizo državnih predpisov in slovenskega časopisja raziskuje, v kolikšni meri sta bili ti dve kategoriji notranje enotni ter kje in zakaj so se znotraj njiju pojavljale razlike. V medvojnem obdobju je zaposlovanje tujih delavcev postalo eno pomembnejših vprašanj, predvsem skozi prizmo ideje ekonomskega nacionalizma. Dravska banovina pri tem ni bila izjema, temveč predstavlja zgovoren primer državne zakonodaje, v kateri so se prepletali protekcionistične ideje gospodarske politike in pričakovanja javnosti ter na drugi strani realno gospodarsko stanje, mednarodne obveznosti in strah pred povračilnimi ukrepi drugih držav.

V zakonodaji so se po eni strani zaostrovale razmere za pridobitev delovnih dovoljenj, hkrati pa so se množile izjeme. Prav te so ustvarjale razlike v možnostih zaposlovanja različnih skupin tujih državljanov. Razlike so se pojavljale tudi med različnimi skupinami glede na možnosti pridobitve državljanstva. Pravna kategorija »tujca« torej ni bila enotna, oblikovala se je kot hierarhija, v kateri so državljanstvo, etnojezikovna pripadnost in mednarodna situacija določali, kako »tuj« je bil posameznik.

V javnem diskurzu je bila tujost še bolj fluidna in težko določljiva. Vpliv pravnih definicij in pripisane narodnosti je bil sicer razviden, a na tujost so vplivali tudi osebne percepcije, socialni status in sam akt migracije. Za tujca je lahko veljal podeželan, ki je v mestu iskal zaposlitev, priseljenec iz druge banovine ali begunec, ne glede na narodnost. Tudi diskurzivna kategorija »tujca« torej ni bila enotna, temveč notranje razslojena in odvisna od konteksta.