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Šušteršič, Ivan

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Šušteršič, *Ivan*

Lawyer, politician

Born 29 May 1863 in Ribnica, Austrian Empire (today Slovenia)

Died 07 October 1925 in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia (today Slovenia)

Ivan Šušteršič was a leading figure in the Slovenian and Habsburg political milieu prior to and during World War One. A prominent member of the Catholic People's Party, he was at the forefront of the pro-Habsburg political currents in Carniola, which ultimately brought him into strong opposition to the radical Yugoslav-oriented followers of Janez E. Krek and eventually led to his political downfall.

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1. Early Years and Path to Politics

Ivan Šušteršič (1863-1925) was born on 29 May 1863 in Ribnica, Lower Carniola as the fourth of the six children of [Valentin Šušteršič \(1805-1885\)](#) and [Marija Šušteršič \(née Jalen, 1834-1874\)](#) from Kranj. After primary education in Ribnica, Šušteršič went on to Grammar School in Kranj (1873-75)

and from there to the First State Grammar School in Ljubljana (1875-81). He studied law at Vienna University (1881-85). From 1886 he worked as a law clerk at the office of Dr. [Franc Papež \(1838-1929\)](#); he was promoted in Graz in 1889.

In 1890, Šušteršič co-founded the Catholic Political Society (*Katoliško politično društvo*) and from 1894 onwards worked as an independent lawyer. In 1896 he became a representative in the Viennese *Reichsrat*. He was re-elected in 1897 but renounced the mandate in 1898. A year later, Šušteršič was elected as president of the Catholic Political Society; between 1900 and 1918 he served again as representative in the Viennese *Reichsrat* and from 1901 in the Carniolan Diet as well. In January 1912, [Francis Joseph I, Emperor of Austria \(1830-1916\)](#) appointed Šušteršič as *Landeshauptmann* (head of the self-governing province of Carniola), which he remained until 25 October 1918.

2. The Catholic Political Society

Upon his election to the Carniolan Diet, Šušteršič became president of the newly founded Club of the Catholic Slovenian representatives. In October 1902, Šušteršič became a formal head of the Catholic Political Society. Together with two of his key aides, [Janez E. Krek \(1865-1917\)](#) and [Evgen Lampe \(1874-1918\)](#), Šušteršič substantially strengthened the land's autonomy.

In 1905 the Catholic Political Society changed its name to the Slovenian People's Party (*Slovenska ljudska stranka*). In 1909, the party's convention voted in favour of the unification of each of the regional political organizations into the All-Slovenian People's Party; Šušteršič kept his leading position. In 1912 he became president of the party for the second time.

After the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, Šušteršič viewed a trialist reformation of the monarchy, which envisaged the creation of a Yugoslav entity equal in status to Austria and Hungary, as acutely necessary. He believed that the acquisition of land in the Balkans would be a further step toward Southern Slavic reformatory aspirations. Šušteršič put all his political hopes into [Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Este's \(1863-1914\)](#) ambitions for the constitutional restructuring of the empire.

3. World War I and the May Declaration

The outbreak of the First World War prevented the Carniolan Diet from reconvening. The war, however, exacerbated the disparate political outlooks between the key politicians in the Slovenian People's Party. The rift became insurmountable in autumn 1917. The restructuring of the Habsburg Monarchy had by then become central in the reflections of all Slovenian parties; it exposed the divergent ambitions of the Yugoslav-oriented Janez E. Krek and [Anton Korošec \(1872-1940\)](#), and those of the pro-Habsburg Šušteršič.

Following the death of Emperor Franz Joseph I in November 1916, the *Reichsrat* reconvened on 30

May 1917. On behalf of the Yugoslav Club, Anton Korošec read out the May Declaration, demanding the unification of all Slovenians, Croats and Serbs into an autonomous, democratic state under the Habsburgs, free of foreign rule, founded on Croatian historic law and the right of national self-determination. In order to demonstrate his endorsement of the Declaration, on 15 September 1917 Prince-Bishop [Anton Jeglič \(1850-1937\)](#) encouraged the presidents of all the major parties to sign the sympathetic “Ljubljana Statement”. This gave a strong impetus to the Declaration movement, although Vienna refused to see Slovenians as part of the “South Slavic question”.

4. The Idea of Yugoslavia

While Šušteršič aimed to resolve the Slovenian national question in a manner that would not require the monarchy to dissolve dualism, and viewed the Declaration's programme – at least during the war – as an unobtainable maximum, Krek insisted that the only viable solution to the nationality problem was the elimination of the dualist system and the unification of Slovenians with the Southern Slavs in an independent Yugoslavia. Prince-Bishop Jeglič decided in favour of Krek's course; in response, Šušteršič stated on 17 November 1917 that he was no longer a member of the Yugoslav Club in the *Reichsrat*.

Shortly afterwards Šušteršič dissolved the Slovenian People's Party and in place of it set up the Slovenian Peasant Party (*Slovenska kmečka stranka*) and Slovenian People's Party for cities, boroughs and industrial towns (*Narodna ljudska stranka za mesta, trge in industrijske kraje*) He also established a new journal, entitled *Resnica (The Truth)*. Yet his move failed to gain the patronage of the leading Catholic figures: on 1 December 1917, Canon [Andrej Kalan \(1858-1933\)](#) stepped in as head of the reformers of the Slovenian People's Party, who associated themselves with the politicians supporting the May Declaration.

When [Charles I, Emperor of Austria \(1887-1922\)](#) renounced his participation in state affairs on 16 October 1918, Šušteršič insisted on the idea of the May Declaration and called on an imminent constitution of the Yugoslav state under the democratically elected national government to which he would yield his office. On 22 October 1918, Šušteršič still thought [Yugoslavia](#) could be created under the Habsburg sceptre and promulgated “dynastic loyalty” until “absolved from it by the Crown or some legal international act”.^[1] On 25 October 1918, on the verge of the empire's collapse, Šušteršič transferred the authority to Dr. [Karel Triller \(1862-1926\)](#).

5. Defeat

The tumultuous times that followed forced Šušteršič to leave Ljubljana; he returned in 1922 and established the National People's Party and newspapers *Ljudski dnevnik (People's Journal)* and *Ljudski tednik (People's Weekly)*. His political career never recovered after the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy. Although “Slovenian representatives had never before had so much importance in Vienna as when they were led in iron discipline by the master of parliamentary

tactics”,^[2] Šušteršič died on 7 October 1925 in Ljubljana, removed from public life and erased from Slovenian political memory.

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Notes

1. ↑ Slovenski biografski leksikon I [Slovenian Biographical Lexicon I] (Ljubljana, 1925-1991), electronic edition: ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana 2009.
2. ↑ Šuklje, Fran: *Sodobniki, mali in veliki* [Contemporaries, Small and Great], Ljubljana 2010, pp. 253f.

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