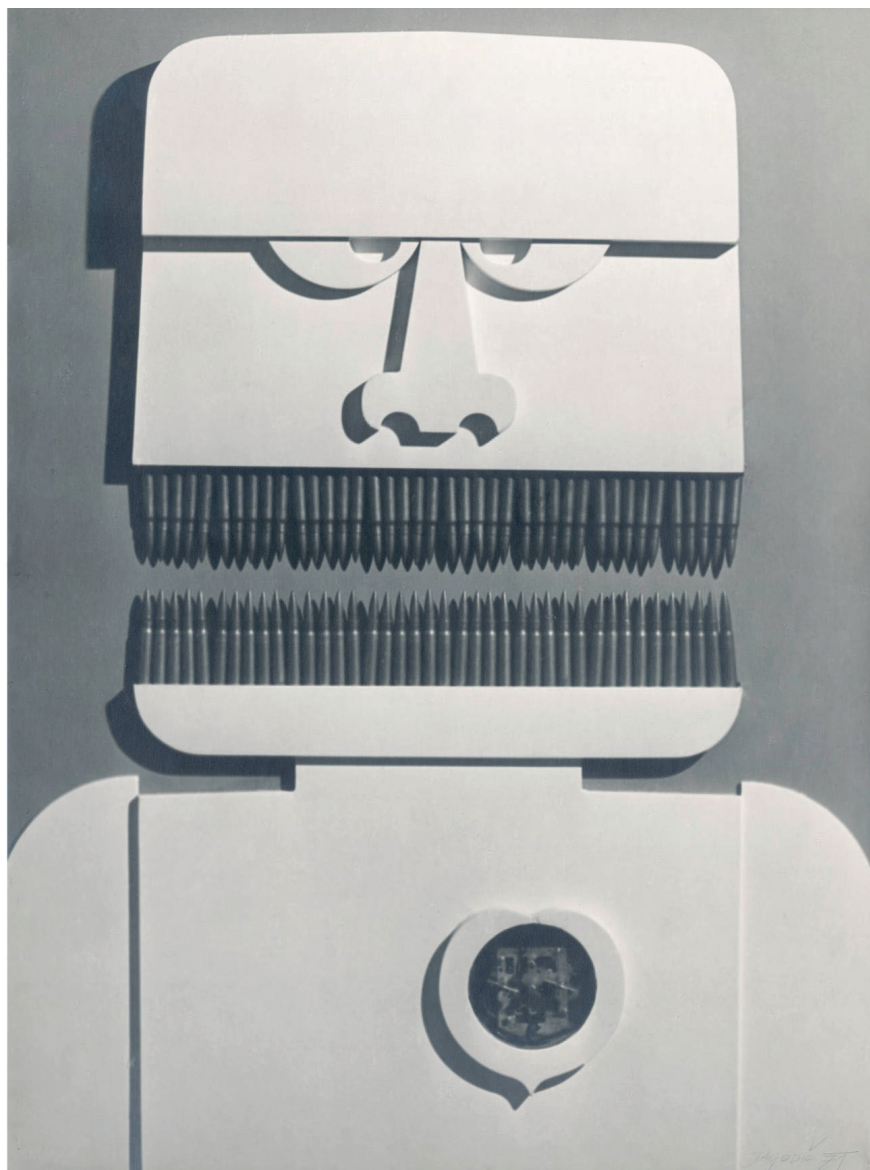


Peace Policies and Practices in Yugoslavia and Beyond



PEACE, UNCONDITIONAL!

Edited by
Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

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UNCONDITIONAL!



Institute for Recent History of Serbia
Založba ZRC, Institute of Culture and Memory Studies ZRC SAZU



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in Yugoslavia and Beyond

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Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

Belgrade, Ljubljana
2025

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Rastko Lompar*

War and Peace within Interwar Yugoslav Radical Right Circles

Abstract The aim of this paper is to analyse the attitudes towards war and peace, as well as militarism and pacifism, present within interwar Yugoslav right-wing political organizations and intellectuals. The analysis covered the most important integral Yugoslav nationalist organizations such as the Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists), Jugoslovenska akcija (Yugoslav Action), Jugoslovenska narodna stranka (Yugoslav Popular Party) and the Jugoslovenski narodni pokret Zbor (Yugoslav National Movement Zbor). It identifies two key concepts within the rightist interpretations of war: as a potent regenerative force on both a personal and a national level, and as a way of securing the living space for the nation. There was a general disdain towards pacifist tendencies. However, as the Second World War loomed on the horizon, this bellicose rhetoric was replaced by propagating neutrality.

Keywords Orjuna, nationalism, fascism, Zbor, war, peace

The War will sweep from power all her foes: diplomats, professors, philosophers, archaeologists, critics, cultural obsession, Greek, Latin, history, senilism, museums, libraries, the tourist industry [...] The War will rejuvenate Italy, will enrich her with men of action, will force her to live no longer off the past, off ruins and the mild climate, but off her own national forces.

Filippo Marinetti, *Manifesto agli studenti*, 29 November 1914¹

* Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4345-4857>

¹ Quoted in: Roger Griffin, ed., *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 26.



Stane Jagodič, *Guardian of Peace*, photomontage, 1985

Trincerocrazia

Today, it seems as though fascism² and war were inextricably linked from the very beginnings of the movement in Italy. Intellectually born in the trenches of the First World War, the fascist wave swept over Europe in the coming years. Despite triumphantly proclaiming the incoming “fascist century”, Benito Mussolini and his fellow travellers witnessed the destruction of their regimes as a consequence of the Second World War they had started.

In many ways, the fascist obsession with war preceded the emergence of Fascism as a political movement.³ Already during his time in Switzerland (1902–1904), Mussolini, once a convinced socialist, started reforming his views by adopting an increasingly revolutionary, voluntarist and nationalist worldview. However, his break with socialism came during the First World War. In this war, Italy had started out as neutral, and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) had championed an anti-war stance, staying true to the principles of the Second International. However, Mussolini was amongst those who saw Italy’s involvement in the war as a chance not only to expand its control over disputed Austrian lands, but also as a way of preventing the triumph of the conservative and clerical forces. Others, however, attributed this change to the French financial contributions allegedly given to Mussolini when he broke with the Socialist Party in November of 1914 and founded *Il Popolo d’Italia*.⁴ Initially, in his new newspaper, he made a case for entering the war from a proletarian and faux socialist perspective.⁵ Some of his associates were blunter. Giovanni Papini decried the pitiful cowardice of the Italian elites who lacked the courage to take the necessary steps. Italy was, therefore, described as “A great power, but the weakest of all; armed, but incapable of waging war; full of social unrest, but with no serious will to change regime; conservative, but spineless whenever there was a hint of threat to stability”. With trademark fascist crassness, he proclaimed that “nothing great can be made with shit” and called onto his compatriots to embark on this great adventure.⁶ Even though their wishes were granted, the Italian entry into the war was a debacle. The Austro-Hungarian army routed the Italians in a series of battles, and the mythical courage of the *Arditi* shock troops, albeit inspirational, did little to stop their advance.

The First World War gave rise to one of the key fascist myths, crucial for the self-understanding of Fascism – the notion of a warrior elite. In December 1917, Mussolini proclaimed the existence of *trincerocrazia* (trench aristocracy), unfazed by danger, unconstrained by societal and class norms, and able and willing to conduct revolutionary violence. “The music of tomorrow will have another tempo,” he gloated, prophesying the death of the old world.⁷ The world war may have ended, but the veterans he gathered embarked on a new violent campaign to transform Italy, street by street. Taking power in 1922, Fascism endorsed political violence as a potent transformative means of national renewal, whilst affirming the need for an imperialist war. War abroad served a twofold purpose: it helped mould the fascist “new man” whilst acquiring the needed *spazio vitale* within which the Italian nation could prosper.⁸ As historian MacGregor Knox observed, internal consolidation was an important precondition for foreign conquest, which was, in turn, the decisive prerequisite for revolution at home.⁹

Despite this bellicose rhetoric, the Italian state, humiliated by the abortive attempt at invading Corfu in 1923, had to bide its time for a new war. More damningly, the Italian army, both in its command structure and the rank and file, remained only superficially fascistized, and far from a warrior elite. The black-shirt radicals from the Fascist militia (*Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*) were never integrated into the armed forces, and their role during the Second World War was minimal. The full “potential” of the Fascist thirst for violence was unleashed only after the German National Socialists came to power in 1933. Adolf Hitler and his followers also owed their radicalization to the trenches of the First World War. Georg Strasser wrote in 1926 that “for a man, military service is the most profound and valuable form of participation in the State.”¹⁰ The Nazi Party also championed the view that war was needed both as a way of transforming the docile and impotent Weimar society and as a way of securing the “much needed land” in the East. For Nazi thinkers, the conquest of *Lebensraum* from racial enemies was a necessary and crucial step for ensuring the well-being of the German Volk.

However, there has been serious debate around the question of how genuinely fascist this imperialist drive that led to the Second World War truly was. Some researchers claim that the radical regimes simply continued to tread the paths outlined by the liberal governments in Italy and the monarchy in Germany. The radicalism of their armies was brought into question, which led many to conclude that obedience and peer pressure played a more prominent role than ideology and racism in the Axis armed forces.¹¹ However, it

² As is standard within fascist studies, in this chapter fascism will be capitalized only when it denotes the Italian Fascist movement and regime.

³ Davide Rodogno, “Fascism and War,” in: *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, ed. Richard J. B. Bosworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 239–258.

⁴ William A. Renzi, “Mussolini’s sources of financial support, 1914–1915,” *History* 56, no. 187 (1971): 189–206; Jasna Tkalec, *Prvi svetski rat, italijanski socijalisti i Musolini* (Novi Sad: Mediteran, 2017), 41–45.

⁵ Griffin, *Fascism*, 24–25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸ Rodogno, “Fascism and War,” 239–258.

⁹ MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorships, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Griffin, *Fascism*, 123.

¹¹ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

seems as though the scale of ideological zeal, especially within the Wehrmacht, has been somewhat downplayed. Bryce Sait had recently remarked, “that the presence of political indoctrination may even have convinced those unmoved by Nazi ideology that committing atrocities was part of their duty.”¹²

Having the understanding of war and peace within fascism as a starting point, I will attempt to dissect the attitudes of the key right-wing integral¹³ Yugoslav movements (Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists – Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista, Yugoslav Action – Jugoslovenska akcija, Yugoslav Popular Party – Jugoslovenska narodna stranka and the Yugoslav National Movement Zbor – Jugoslovenski narodni pokret Zbor) and intellectuals towards these issues. I argue that the twofold nature of war present in the fascist interpretation (war as a regenerative force and war as a way of expanding the living space) was implicitly present within the Yugoslav rightist circles, with the former much more pronounced than the latter.

Si vis pacem, para bellum

When the armistice in the First World War was officially signed in November 1918, the war did not end for many Serbian troops. The newly proclaimed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had border disputes with almost all of its neighbours. An undeclared war was fought with Austria for control over Carinthia, as well as with Hungary during the existence of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.¹⁴ Additionally, the Italian state, especially after the Fascist takeover, was aggressively posturing in the Adriatic.¹⁵ The internal situation was no less volatile. There were armed clashes with Croat and Montenegrin separatists¹⁶, as well as with communist revolutionaries. During the first years of the nascent kingdom, there were several paramilitary organizations that fought against the enemies of the state (Organizovana omladina – Organized Youth, Narodna garda – National Guard and

Narodna odbrana – National Defence), but all of them were ideologically heterogeneous and short-lived.¹⁷ Fearing their radicalism, the Ministry of the Interior disbanded all existing organizations in January 1921.¹⁸

In 1921, an ideologically diverse group of Yugoslav nationalists from Dalmatia started gathering and discussing the creation of a new political organization.¹⁹ Most of them had been politically active during Austro-Hungarian rule and were seasoned agitators, ranging from leftists to fascist sympathizers. In March 1921, they created an organization that would adopt the name Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists, Orjuna) the following year. Since its creation, it championed Yugoslav unitarism and declared war on the separatists and communists, fighting them in the streets all over Dalmatia.²⁰ The majority of its leadership and members were politically affiliated with the ruling Demokratska stranka (Democratic Party),²¹ and the organization was under the partial control of the Minister of the Interior, Svetozar Pribičević.²²

Quickly spreading from Dalmatia, the organization, despite borrowing much from Italian Fascism, was strangely federal. The leadership was shared by the seven-member Directorium based in Split, yet local organizations enjoyed broad autonomy. Furthermore, members were allowed to maintain political affiliations within other parties and organizations, on the condition that they were not “anti-state”.²³ The most important figure within the movement was Ljubo Leontić, a former member of the Savez zemljoradnika (Agrarian party).²⁴ The Democratic Party wholeheartedly supported the new organization, and its shadow loomed over Orjuna. For its enemies, Orjuna was never an autonomous

12 Bryce Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht: Nazi Ideology and the War Crimes of the German Military* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 9.

13 Integral Yugoslavism (integralno jugoslovenstvo) is the notion that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes constitute a single, unified Yugoslav nation and that they should abandon their “tribal” particularities in favour of a common Yugoslav identity. It became the official state ideology in 1929.

14 The Hungarian Soviet Republic was a short-lived communist state proclaimed in late March 1919 and destroyed after the military intervention of the Entente in August 1919.

15 Milan Ristiović, *Mussolini ante portas: Italijanski fašizam i jugoslovensko susedstvo (1919–1925)* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2021).

16 In December 1918, there were armed clashes between pro-Yugoslav and nationalist Croat militias in Zagreb, while the followers of the deposed Petrović dynasty in Montenegro rebelled in January 1919. Both rebellions were met with fierce resistance and quickly quashed. During 1919 and 1920, there were several armed confrontations between members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and state security forces. The most dramatic event took place in the Bosnian mining town of Husino in December 1920, where a group of communist-led miners organized a strike that turned violent and ended after a military intervention.

17 A series of *ad hoc* paramilitary groups sprang up across Yugoslavia in 1918/19. They were mostly used as auxiliary security forces to the government, which lacked sufficient manpower to quell the ascent of various political enemies of the nascent regime. Predrag Bajić, “Delatnost ORJUNA-e i SRNAO-a u Vojvodini kroz prizmu njihove štampe,” *Sveske za istoriju Novog Sada XIX* (2017): 93.

18 Nusret Šehić, “Četničke i slične nacionalističke organizacije u borbi protiv radničkog pokreta i Komunističke partije Jugoslavije u razdoblju između dva rata”, *Prilozi V* (1969): 28–31; Branislav Gligorićević, “Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (Orjuna),” *Istorija XX veka V* (1963): 319.

19 Gligorićević, “Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (Orjuna)”: 317.

20 Ivan Bošković, *ORJUNA – ideologija i književnost* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 2006), 85–86; Gligorićević, “Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (Orjuna),” 323–324.

21 The Democratic Party was founded in 1919 as the second-largest political organization in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Most of its members were ethnic Serbs. Until 1924, it oscillated between federalism, championed by the group around the party's president, Ljuba Davidović, and unitarism, advocated by the influential leader of the Serbs from Croatia, Svetozar Pribičević. The latter left the party after an agreement was reached with the Croat Peasant Party. Pribičević formed his own organization, the Independent Democratic Party (Samostalna demokratska stranka), which participated in a cabinet led by the Radical Party, the archenemies of the Democrats.

22 Branislav Gligorićević, “Profašistička organizacija Orjuna i revolucionarni radnički pokret Jugoslavije,” in *Revolucionarno delavsko gibanje v Sloveniji v letih 1921–1924* (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga/Znanstveni tisk, 1975), 124.

23 Bošković, *ORJUNA – ideologija i književnost*, 99–101; Vasilije Dragosavljević, *Ideje fašizma u Kraljevini SHS: Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (1921–1929)* (Beograd: Medijski centar “Odbrana”, 2020), 41–42.

24 Savez, or sometimes Stranka, zemljoradnika was founded in 1919 and gathered agrarian organizations from around the country. Soon, the majority of its Croatian chapters were taken over by the Croat Peasant Party. It remained the strongest in Serbia proper.

force, but merely an armed wing of the Democrats. Despite mostly attracting intellectuals, it brought about the glorification of physical violence like no other movement before. For the ideologues of the Orjuna, street violence went hand-in-hand with propaganda attacks. The leader of its Vojvodina branch, Dobrosav Jevđević, wrote:

Our stance is clear and simple: Communists need to be eradicated. Whether we will achieve this goal with pen and paper or bombs and knives depends solely on what methods would hurt them more.²⁵

Action squads were created, gathering the most radical members and functioning according to military principles. They were subordinated to a single leader with the title of *veliki čelnik* (great leader). Initially, a leader of Serbian guerillas in the fight against the Ottomans, Ilija Trifunović Birčanin, commanded the action squads, but was soon replaced by Marko Kranjec. He was a Slovene refugee from Italy, who had masterminded many terrorist actions in Istria, Trieste and Gorizia.²⁶

Orjuna quickly expanded all over the country. Initially, it was at its strongest in Dalmatia, soon securing a significant support base in Vojvodina, Southern Serbia and Slovenia.²⁷ Unsurprisingly, all of the mentioned areas had a significant presence of national minorities (Germans, Hungarians, Italians and Albanians), which speaks volumes about the Orjuna's appeal in contested multi-ethnic communities. Paradoxically, Orjuna was less popular in purely Yugoslav areas, where it competed with Croat and Serbian nationalists. In 1923, the Zagreb chapter had to officially order its members to stop engaging in physical altercations, admitting defeat in the struggle with the local Croat nationalist youth.²⁸ In many ways, Orjuna bit off more than it could chew, simultaneously attacking Serb and Croat nationalists, the Catholic Church, the communists and national minorities.²⁹

Since its inception, the movement championed the regenerative power of physical violence, paired, of course, with ideological consciousness and fanaticism. Orjuna members saw themselves as the iron fist of the state, ready and able to strike at its numerous enemies both internally and abroad. They were quite eager to commit acts of terrorism. Its members were behind many attacks on national minorities, their rallies, newspapers and cultural institutions, most commonly, Italians in Croatia and Slovenia and Hungarians and Germans in Vojvodina.³⁰ Furthermore, Orjuna under Birčanin and Kranjec organized guerrilla squads in Italian and Austrian territory, and its members often raided the Italian territory, attacking border checkpoints and villages.³¹ A special branch called Orjunavit was formed in Istria in 1925, and it was responsible, according to Italian sources, for 99 terrorist attacks on Italian soil up to 1929.³² Even though they enjoyed some support from the Yugoslav army and diplomacy, Orjuna's actions gradually became a burden on Italian-Yugoslav relations and contributed to its outlawing in 1929.

Orjuna openly rejected the Treaty of Versailles even though Yugoslavia was usually seen as one of the states that had benefited greatly from it. In the eyes of radical nationalists, it was an "unjust" peace, a *vittoria mutilata* of sorts, which had left thousands of Yugoslavs outside the state borders. At its congress in December 1923, Orjuna openly proclaimed that one of its main goals was the "correction" of Yugoslav borders along the "natural" ethnic lines. In the view of its ideologues, all nations have a unique mission. The Yugoslav mission was to complete the unification through war. Orjuna endorsed war as the only way, as "our Liberation arose from blood. The Liberation of our unfortunate brethren [...] has to arise from our blood as well".³³ Drawing on the legacy of their prewar activism, they portrayed their nationalism as progressive and emancipatory, in contrast to the imperialist and conservative nationalisms of the Austrians and Italians. In the struggle between imperialism and "natural" nationalism, Orjuna's ideologues were convinced that they were in the right. Therefore, the mission of Yugoslav nationalism and the liberation of "ethnic territories" were destined for success. Orjuna believed that Yugoslavia would defeat Italy in an armed conflict and, therefore, welcomed the prospect of war. How sincerely they believed in the ability of the Yugoslav state to wage war with its much stronger neighbours is unclear. The bellicose texts could have been mere empty posturing. There were also examples of a completely opposite practice. Despite despising communism and the idea of an "unjust peace", Orjuna newspapers reprinted an appeal of the Italian antifascist leftists entitled "Against the War with Yugoslavia".³⁴

25 Dobrosav Jevđević, *Izabrani članci* (Novi Sad: Štamparija Jovanović i Bogdanov, 1925), 32; All translations from Serbian into English in the present paper are the author's. The translations strove to be as literal as possible and reflect the language of the interwar period.

26 Ivan Bošković, "Splitski orjunaški list Pobjeda i Stjepan Radić," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, vol. XXXIX, No. 1, 2007: 121; Marko Zajc, "ORJUNA in PAČ na poti v Trbovlje. K zgodovini fizičnega nasilja v političnem boju," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* LIV, no. 2 (2014): 106; Bošković, *ORJUNA – ideologija i književnost*, 97.

27 Branko Šuštar, "O razširjenosti Organizacije jugoslovanskih nacionalistov na Slovenskem do sredinom leta 1924," *Kronika: Časopis za Slovensko krajevno zgodovino* XXXVI (1988): 242–244.

28 Anonim, "Naređenje svima članovima Orjune u Zagrebu," *Zagrebačka Orjuna*, 14 July 1923; Željko Karaula, "Hrvatska nacionalna omladina – (HANA O)," *Historijski zbornik* LXI, no. 2 (2008): 309.

29 Šuštar, "O razširjenosti Organizacije jugoslovanskih nacionalistov na Slovenskem do sredinom leta 1924": 242; Bošković, "Splitski orjunaški list Pobjeda i Stjepan Radić," 126–128; Gligoričević, "Organizacija jugoslovanskih nacionalista (Orjuna)," 325–326; Stevo Đurašković, "Ideologija Organizacije jugoslovanskih nacionalista (Orjuna)," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 1 (2011): 238.

30 Bajić, "Delatnost ORJUNA-e i SRNAO-a u Vojvodini kroz prizmu njihove štampe": 96–97, 102–103, 110.

31 Vasilije Dragosavljević, "Irredentist Actions of the Slovenian Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (the ORJUNA) in Italy and Austria (1922–1930)," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* LVIX, no. 3 (2019): 31–52.

32 Dragosavljević, *Ideje fašizma u Kraljevini SHS*, 258–260; Boris Mlakar, "Zaton Organizacije jugoslovanskih nacionalistov – Orjune pod budnim očesom italijanskih fašističkih oblasti," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* LIII, no. 2 (2013): 51.

33 Anonim, "Jugoslovenska misija," *Pobjeda*, 24 December 1921.

34 Dragosavljević, *Ideje fašizma u Kraljevini SHS*, 257–258.

Ultimately, after the critical mission of Yugoslav unification would be accomplished, the state would be renamed “Greater Yugoslavia”, and the Yugoslav king would be proclaimed emperor, the Orjuna ideologues proclaimed. Their vision of “Greater Yugoslavia” called for a drastic overhaul of the existing borders and *de facto* meant that Yugoslavia had to go to war with all of its neighbours. Even though the organization did not shy away from making its territorial claims known, the most illustrative visual representation was printed in the journal *Jugoslavija* in December 1927.



Map of greater Yugoslavia published by Orjuna. Source: *Jugoslavija: nacionalistički organ*, 1 December 1927.

The future state was to have access to three seas (Adriatic Sea, Black Sea and Aegean Sea), acquiring the dominant position in the Balkans. Orjuna foresaw the “liberation” of Trieste, Gorizia, Istria, Fiume and Zadar from Italy, Carinthia from Austria, Baranja from Hungary, Aegean Macedonia and the Thracian coast from Greece, the whole of Bulgaria, Dobruja from Romania and parts of northern Albania. Some of these claims, mostly those regarding territories in Austria, Albania and Italy, were also made by various Yugoslav statesmen and regimes and were part of the nationalist mainstream. Others were, however, less widespread. There was much vitriol towards Hungary in the Orjuna journals. The

destruction of the Hungarian “state and race” was openly advocated, as it was seen as a “wedge” among the Slavs.³⁵ In contrast, unification with Bulgaria was to be achieved democratically, as Orjuna claimed that the majority of Bulgarians supported the idea, in contrast to the ruling regime and the “foreign” monarch. In order to secure the support of the Bulgarians, the “Greater Yugoslavia” would wage war to secure the Bulgarian claims in Romania and Greece, going against traditional Yugoslav allies.

Orjuna’s decline began in the mid-1920s. Its patron, Pribičević, was forced into opposition and lost government support.³⁶ Internal strife ensued.³⁷ Also, the political climate was slowly changing. After a streak of anti-Italian violent demonstrations, the Slovene chapter of the Orjuna was outlawed in 1926. A new leadership was elected in 1927, and the headquarters were moved to Belgrade.³⁸ It adopted the slogan “Orjuna is dead, long live the Orjuna”, promising to its crumbling following that the militarist and strict course would not be abandoned and that there would be no compromise with those that endanger the unity of the state.³⁹ However, the organization’s last major action was the violent demonstrations in Belgrade after the ratification of the Treaty of Nettuno in 1928.⁴⁰ Kranjec remained isolated in his wish to continue terrorist activities within Italy, and the organization was largely pacified.⁴¹

King Alexander’s coup d’état in January 1929 signified the end of the first phase of the interwar Yugoslav state, profoundly altering its political landscape. The royal dictatorship legitimized many of the ideas previously relegated to the right-wing fringes of the Kingdom’s political life. However, their endorsement by the newly proclaimed regime meant that the government would not tolerate any ideological radicals. Orjuna, alongside other smaller rightist organizations, was outlawed. In fact, during the last years of King Alexander’s life, there were no relevant right-wing political organizations. The newly created Jugoslovenska akcija (Yugoslav Action, JA) became active in early 1930.⁴² It gathered integral Yugoslav nationalist intellectuals, some of whom had been previously affiliated with Orjuna. Nevertheless, its political style and ideology were very different

35 Ibid., 270.

36 After a brief stint in the Radical-dominated government, Pribičević resigned in 1925 and started revising his previous unitarist convictions. He would soon turn to his former political enemies from the Croat Peasant Party and form the broadest opposition coalition in 1927.

37 Bajić, “Delatnost ORJUNA-e i SRNAO-a u Vojvodini kroz prizmu njihove štampe,” 131–133.

38 Mladen Đorđević, “Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (ORJUNA): istorijat – ideologija – uticaji,” *Nova srpska politička misao* XII, no. 1–4 (2006): 203–208; Bošković, “Splitski orjunaški list Pobjeda i Stjepan Radić” 118.

39 Dobrovoljac, “Nediraj u Orjunu,” *Orjuna* (Beograd), 12 June 1927.

40 Đorđević, “Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (ORJUNA): istorijat – ideologija – uticaji,” 203–208; The Treaty of Nettuno between Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was signed in 1925. Dealing with the Adriatic, it largely benefited the Italians and was highly controversial in Yugoslavia. Due to significant opposition, it was not ratified by the Yugoslav parliament until 1928.

41 Mlakar, “Zaton Organizacije jugoslovenskih nacionalistov – Orjune pod budnim očesom italijanskih fašističkih oblasti,” 54.

42 *Pravila društva Jugoslovenska akcija*, (Beograd: Štamparija Glavnog Saveza Srpskih Zemljoradničkih Zadruga, 1930), 8.

from the Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists. The Yugoslav Action was primarily an intellectual organization, dubbed by some a “debate club”, which had no action squads or mass membership. Several of its leaders served simultaneously as MPs of the ruling Jugoslovenska nacionalna stranka (Yugoslav National Party, JNS).⁴³ Instead of mobilizing its members against perceived enemies (communists, separatists, and national minorities) and fighting them in the streets, the YA focused on the economy, proposing measures for softening the blows of the Great Depression.⁴⁴ Even though it criticized the “harmful” influence of foreigners on the country’s economic situation and the alleged exploitation by foreign capital, it never organized raids against the national minorities.⁴⁵ As time went by, the Yugoslav Action adopted a much more critical stance to the JNS government, which led to its outlawing in September 1934.⁴⁶

Therefore, in the eyes of many staunch nationalists, even though the Yugoslav state was on the right path after the King’s dictatorship was proclaimed in 1929, the society itself was weak, demoralized and ideologically ill-equipped to deal with contemporary problems. The “rearmament” of the revisionist neighbours was a cause for concern because, for many right-wingers, neither the state nor the Yugoslav people were as ready for an armed conflict as they had once been. The editor of the semi-official newspaper *Vreme* and a future ideologue of the Zbor movement, Stanislav Krakov,⁴⁷ took it upon himself to “remind” the Yugoslav people of their past military glory. He started this campaign by publishing a series of front-page editorials during May and July 1932. His first article was envisioned as a call to arms to the veterans who had fought in the First World War. Krakov claimed that the “national ideals which led them to charge at machine guns and cannons, barbed wire and grenades were not dead” and that he was convinced that Yugoslav veterans would safeguard the state once more.⁴⁸

His texts quickly attracted the attention of the Hungarian and Italian press, and he found himself in a propaganda war with them. To disprove the often invoked stance that Yugoslavia was not stable and that there was no genuine Yugoslav nationalism, Krakov attempted to prove that the previous war had served as a catalyst for the emergence of the nation. “Yugoslavia emerged from blood and sacrifice,” he thought, and it is, therefore,

strong. However, it was endangered by the defeatist forces within it and by aggressive foes abroad. Krakov saw the solution to this precarious situation in spiritual rearmament, which would lead the nation towards regeneration.⁴⁹ He proclaimed the emergence of the Yugoslav “Iron Guard” and started publishing patriotic letters from veterans across the country who had answered his call to arms. Despite its name, the “Iron Guard” bore no similarities to its Romanian namesake. It did not exist beyond his texts and was seen as a spiritual army ready to defend the borders. Most of his ire was directed against fascist Italy, whose aggressive stance towards the Adriatic coastline was depicted as the biggest threat to the Yugoslav state. Krakov wrote that Italian invaders would be met with the “strong phalanxes of Yugoslav nationalists, stretching from Sušak to the Dorjan Lake, from the Hungarian to the Albanian border”.⁵⁰ He would again debate with the Italian press in 1934, this time comparing the military traditions of the Serbs and Italians, and their performance in the First World War. He claimed that the “heroes of Caporetto” could never endanger the independence of Yugoslavia.⁵¹

In a similar vein, Miloš Crnjanski, a notable writer and right-wing intellectual, lamented in early 1934 the advance of pacifist and defeatist propaganda. Fearing that this trend would leave the state defenceless, he railed against the state of affairs in the country:

After a war, people always say that an era of lax morals, music, dance, luxury and enjoyment should begin. After bloody epochs, whether wars or revolutions, the exhausted mankind should rest. It should forget. There is nothing more frightening or immoral than this view. If it were true, every idea, every commitment and every sacrifice would be futile and, worse still, pointless and idiotic.⁵²

He claimed that this pacifist propaganda had originated in the countries defeated in the previous war, most notably Germany, as a way of weakening German adversaries and preparing for revenge. This trend was, in his view, also adopted by communists, who weaponized defeatism to pave the way for the communist revolution. Regardless, he defended the Serbian war effort in the First World War, which was the only reason the Yugoslav state was created. Despite having been mobilized into the Austro-Hungarian army, he proclaimed that “those who had fought in a war and had lain amongst the dead know that war is glorious and that there was never a greater moment in a man’s life than consciously taking part in battle.”⁵³

43 Branislav Gligorijević, “Politički pokreti i grupe sa nacionalsocijalističkom ideologijom i njihova fuzija u Ljotićevom ‘Zboru’,” *Istorijski glasnik* IV (1965): 40–41.

44 *Jugoslovenska akcija. Stenografske beleške sa prvog šireg sastanka delegata Jugoslovenske akcije u Zagrebu* (Beograd: Jugoslovenska zemlja, 1932), 10; *Šta hoće Jugoslovenska akcija* (Osijek: Narodna štamparija, 1934), 3–7.

45 *Jugoslovenska akcija. Stenografske beleške sa prvog šireg sastanka delegata Jugoslovenske akcije u Zagrebu*, 29; N. M., “Pitanje stranaca u našoj privredi,” *Jugoslovenska reč*, 13 August 1932.

46 Gligorijević, “Politički pokreti i grupe sa nacionalsocijalističkom ideologijom i njihova fuzija u Ljotićevom ‘Zboru’”, 43–51.

47 Krakov was a man of many talents: a skilled propagandist, modernist writer, aviation pioneer and a film enthusiast. He started his political career in the Radical Party, later supporting the King’s personal regime and Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović. He eventually broke with Stojadinović and decided to join the opposition radical Zbor movement in 1936.

48 Stanislav Krakov, “Jugoslavijo, probudi se,” *Vreme*, 29 May 1932.

49 Stanislav Krakov, “Šta čekaš još, Jugoslavijo,” *Vreme*, 5 June 1932; Stanislav Krakov, “Ko smo mi, Gvozdena garda narodna,” *Vreme*, 26 June 1932; *Naši savremenici o Krakovu* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik/Univerzitetska biblioteka, 2020), 75–83.

50 Stanislav Krakov, “Borba će trajati sve dotle dok Dalmacija ne bude italijanska...,” *Vreme*, 17 July 1932.

51 Nebojša Berec, “Stopama Stanislava Krakova,” *Bratstvo* 21 (2017): 186–187.

52 Miloš Crnjanski, *Politički članci 1919–1939* (Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog/Catena mundi, 2017), 245–248.

53 Ibid, 233–237.

Bella! Horrida bella!

After the assassination of King Alexander in October 1934, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia entered a new era. Prince Paul, a cousin of the late monarch, became the royal regent, and Milan Stojadinović, an economist and a former Finance Minister, was soon appointed Prime Minister. The ruling regime adopted much of the style and substance of earlier right-wing activism, and the remaining Yugoslav nationalists were relegated to the fringes. However, as the power of the revisionist forces in Europe, most notably Italy and Germany, grew, the Yugoslav international position became even more precarious. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 worried the Government, which had feared an Italian strike on the Adriatic coast since the end of the First World War. Furthermore, German pressure was mounting. Austria and Czechoslovakia were annexed in 1938/39, and a major European conflict was on the horizon. The international situation led those on the right, who generally endorsed war as a way to transform society, to rethink their convictions. Given how volatile the internal situation in Yugoslavia was, the radical right-wingers concluded that peace was needed to preserve the spoils of the last war.

The first political party to adopt a radical right-wing program since the proclamation of the dictatorship was the Jugoslovenska narodna stranka (Yugoslav Popular Party). This often-overlooked party, whose members were better known by their nickname *Borbaši* (i.e. fighters/combatants), was formed by the most radical dissidents of the ruling Yugoslav National Party. It was founded in 1933 by Svetislav Hođera, former chief-of-staff to the former Yugoslav Prime Minister Petar Živković, and gathered integral Yugoslav nationalists. Even though they had initially supported the king's coup and dictatorship, they were quickly disillusioned with the allegedly conservative and compromise-ready nature of the new government. Therefore, they defected from the JNS to form a new political organization, which became the strongest oppositional right-wing force in the country (1933–1939), even though it tended to be overlooked in later historical scholarship.

In parallel with “defending” the manifesto of the dictatorship, the party implemented its organization in the field, introducing a system of ten-strong and fifty-strong units. Borrowing from local military terminology, members were organized into squads with ten people headed by a squad leader (Sr. desetar, with *deset* meaning ten), and five squads made up a *pedesetina* headed by a five-squad leader, i.e. *pedesetar*. Internal-use documents reveal that the party saw this task as the “most important matter” and that, on the other hand, this method made organizing its membership a much slower process than the leadership had hoped.⁵⁴ Doubling down on this militarist impulse, from 1935, members wearing blue shirts began to attend the party's meetings. From the inception

of the party, blue was the colour of its leaflets, posters and banners, which, besides the country's tricolour flag, also bore a blue ribbon with the party motto “Borba za slobodu, pravdu i jednakost” (“Struggle for freedom, justice and equality”). They began to be known as the “Plave košulje” (“Blue Shirts”). The party program did not officially proscribe wearing uniforms, and the blue shirts seem to have spontaneously become customary for some of the most “battle-ready” members tasked with maintaining order at their meetings. Although the *borbaši* claimed that “fascism was not reflected in shirts but in programs” and that their program was not fascist in nature, the party uniforms brought more damage than benefit. Under a barrage of criticism, the practice of wearing blue shirts was quietly abandoned in 1936/1937.

Borbaši wrote with disdain of their opponents caught up in intellectual debates and phrases, claiming they did not have “the courage to stand on the frontlines for the defence of the people's rights and freedom”. They insisted that the struggle must be fought and not negotiated and that a nation cannot be forged “sitting at a green-cloth table, in talks, negotiations or agreements”.⁵⁵ Another similarity with fascism, many observers thought, was their tendency to resort to physical violence. Any attempts to disrupt their meetings were met with violence, and the party organs proudly reported that the provocateurs “left with bloody heads and bruises on their backs”.⁵⁶ Sometimes the *borbaši* made organized attacks against their political opponents. Nevertheless, their violent behaviour never became systemic and was nowhere near the terror of the Italian fascists.⁵⁷

When Italy invaded Ethiopia, they condemned this act of aggression. They made efforts to further distance themselves from fascism, by announcing that their ideal was “democratic parliamentarism”, with adherence to “order and discipline”. At their rally in March 1936, they openly denounced fascism.⁵⁸ Although they could hardly be seen as democrats, the rejection of fascist imperialist aims was stressed by claiming that their end goal was peace rather than war.⁵⁹ This change of heart primarily stemmed from the threat that fascist Italy posed to the Yugoslav state.

Interestingly, the most important episode in Yugoslav right-wing peace activism was the involvement of the journalist Rosanda Gavrilović in the international anti-communist peace movement. In January 1936, an organization called the World Committee of Women against War and Communism, headed by Adelheid Petmecky, was created in Germany as an offshoot of the *Antikomintern*. It was envisioned as a counterweight to the communist-dominated World Committee of Women against War and Fascism. To make

54 Rastko Lompar, “The Yugoslav people's party “Borbaši”: a fringe extreme right-wing party in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia,” in *The Serbian right-wing parties and intellectuals in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: 1934–1941*, ed. Dragan Bakić (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2022), 253–254.

55 Lompar, “The Yugoslav people's party “Borbaši”: a fringe extreme right-wing party in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia,” 260.

56 Anonim, “Veliki zbor borbaša u Jagodini,” *Napred Borbaši*, 26 April 1936.

57 Lompar, “The Yugoslav people's party “Borbaši”: a fringe extreme right-wing party in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia,” 258–260.

58 Anonim, “Borbaši su u Kruševcu održali zbor,” *Politika*, 23 March 1936.

59 Arhiv Jugoslavije – Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ), Jugoslovenska narodna stranka – Yugoslav Popular Party (307)/1, *Bilten*, vol. 8, 5 June 1937; AJ, 307/2, “Politička situacija”; “Pitanje br. 1.”

it appear independent from Nazi Germany, an agreement was reached with the Geneva-based Entente Internationale Anticommuniste (International Anticommunist Entente; EIA) to move the Committee to Switzerland. It was officially launched in September 1936 and headed by Edith Hentsch-Humbert. Behind the scenes, German “partners” financed and managed the Committee. At its peak in 1938, the organization had representatives from eighteen countries.⁶⁰ Gavrilović, a journalist by trade, became the Yugoslav representative in mid-1936. The exact circumstances of her appointment as the Yugoslav representative remain unclear. She had no institutional support behind her, but she seems to have impressed the Geneva leadership enough to give her the role of the organizer in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The most important anti-communist organization in the country, Jugoslovenski antimarksistički komitet (Yugoslav Anti-Marxist Committee; JAK)⁶¹ had expressed a desire to establish a women’s branch as early as April 1936. Therefore, when Gavrilović contacted them with the credentials from Geneva, the JAK leadership was quite impressed. She was accepted into the Committee in September 1936 and given a generous stipend of 6,000 dinars for travel expenses. She soon contacted the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Varnava, and sent him the statute of the World Committee of Women against War and Communism, seeking the support of the Church.

A gifted public speaker, Gavrilović soon gathered a group of like-minded women and founded the women’s branch of the JAK in February 1938. She organized several anti-communist events focusing on the threat of communism to peace and prosperity, managing to attract guest speakers from abroad. Gavrilović was quite ambitious and asked the JAK leadership whether they would be open to hosting the annual congress of the World Committee of Women against War and Communism. Despite the undeniable prestige this event would bring the organization, this idea was rejected because JAK lacked the needed financial and logistical means. Such initiatives would soon land her in hot water, and she, alongside the women’s chapter, was expelled from the Yugoslav Anti-Marxist Committee in November 1938.⁶² Soon after her expulsion, Germany pivoted away from openly criticizing the Soviet Union in anticipation of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact. Therefore, the World Committee of Women against War and Communism was quietly disbanded. Following its dissolution, no other attempts were made, in Yugoslavia or elsewhere, to launch a new right-wing organization for peace.

60 Michel Caillat, *L'Entente internationale anticommuniste de Theodore Aubert: Organisation interne, réseaux et action d'une internationale antimarkiste 1924–1950* (Lausanne: SHSR, 2016), 275–277.

61 Jugoslovenski antimarksistički komitet was founded in 1935 as a private anticommunist organization. It established close contacts both with the EIA and the Antikomintern, collaborating with both organizations to create anticommunist propaganda (lectures, press, booklets, films and radio broadcasts). Despite being privately run, it enjoyed support from the government and was in part financed from the “black fund” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

62 See: Rastko Lompar, “Between Patriarchal Stereotypes and Avant-Garde Interpretations: The Yugoslav Right Wing and the Woman Question,” in *Right Wing Politics in Southeastern Europe: Between Conservatism and Fascism*, Dragan Bakić, Dušan Fundić, and Rastko Lompar eds. (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2023), 120–123.

No political organization in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia embodied the dilemma of the late 1930s regarding war quite like the Jugoslovenski narodni pokret Zbor (Yugoslav National Movement Zbor), founded in 1935 through a merger of several integral Yugoslav right-wing movements that joined forces. The assassination of King Alexander in October 1934 served as a call to arms for many integral Yugoslav nationalists, who feared that the king’s legacy of centralist authoritarian Yugoslavia was jeopardized. Two meetings were held in Belgrade and Zagreb in October and December 1934, bringing together the representatives of the Yugoslav Action and Združenje borcev Jugoslavije (Fighters Alliance of Yugoslavia; BOJ) and the editors of the right-wing journals *Zbor*, *Otadžbina* and *Buđenje*. As a result, the Yugoslav National Movement Zbor was officially proclaimed on 6 January 1935, on the anniversary of the king’s coup d’état of 1929. The lawyer and former minister Dimitrije Ljotić was elected president.⁶³

Formed only months prior to the elections in May 1935, Zbor failed to attract a large voting base, failing to win a single representative in the national assembly.⁶⁴ Three years later, despite intense propaganda, Zbor won only 5000 additional votes. Throughout his political career, Ljotić was highly critical of the Yugoslav ruling regimes, as well as oppositional democratic parties and the communists. His opposition led to a short-lived outlawing of the movement in 1938, and ultimately, after a particularly violent clash with the communists, to its permanent political ban in 1940. Between 1935 and 1940, the movement was plagued by political rifts and failures. Many prominent members abandoned Ljotić to join the Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica (Yugoslav Radical Union; JRZ), as its leader, Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović, was eager to accept them into his ranks. Zbor remained a largely unpopular intellectual movement with a reasonable footing only within the Yugoslav Army and the Serbian Orthodox Church. It remained in opposition to the regime during the two gravest political crises of the late 1930s, sharply criticizing both the Concordat with the Vatican in 1937 and the Cvetković–Maček Agreement, which led to the proclamation of the Banovina of Croatia in 1939, fearing that federalization it envisioned would lead to the dissolution of the state. On the other hand, it looked approvingly on the pro-Axis foreign political turn during the Stojadinović and Cvetković governments, even though the movement officially advocated strict neutrality.

From the movement’s inception, violence was seen as a necessary component of national revolution, playing a fundamental role in the writings of Dimitrije Ljotić and his followers. Violence, they opined, served two purposes: it was a vessel for social “purification” and could help shape “the new man”. Dimitrije Ljotić was convinced that “evil had already engulfed our society” and that only “through ruthless amputation and

63 Ratko Parežanin, *Drugi svetski rat i Dimitrije V. Ljotić* (Minhen: Iskra, 1971), 16–35; Gligorijević, “Politički pokreti i grupe sa nacionalsocijalističkom ideologijom i njihova fuzija u Ljotićevom Zboru,” 69.

64 Todor Stojkov, *Opozicija u vreme šestojanuarske diktature* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1969), 311.

operation of diseased parts could the rest of the body be saved.”⁶⁵ The metaphor about the amputation of a diseased and gangrenous limb was employed to better illustrate the nature of the impending “purifying” revolution. Zbor was given the role of a sword or, rather, a surgical knife to carry out this procedure. “The whole organism is gangrenous, and liberal democracy does not possess the surgical knife to stop the spreading of the gangrene. A radical operation is necessary to deliver us from this severe disease.”⁶⁶ Ljotić quoted the Gospel of Matthew (10: 34–35) to prove the Christian nature of the “purifying” revolution. Just as the “sorry state of decay” was ended by the coming of Christ, the Yugoslav crisis could only be ended through the arrival of Zbor.⁶⁷ Therefore, Zbor brings internal war to Yugoslavia, carrying a sword as its crest. This sword is a “social surgical knife” which will be ruthless to the enemy, because the amputation needs to be carried out completely. If the operation is not thorough and even a shred of disease remains within the national organism, the whole endeavour would be in vain. Even worse, if inadequately treated, “the final condition of that person is worse than the first” (Luke 11:26).⁶⁸

In essence, Ljotić called for the elimination of all “national enemies” (communists, capitalists, Jews, etc.) from the national organism. Those who could not be brought back to the right path had to be beaten into submission or eliminated.⁶⁹ To dehumanize the enemy, they were labelled animals and pests, such as cockroaches, stink bugs, snakes or spiders. Yugoslavia needed to be “deratized” or, in the words of Dimitrije Ljotić, “we will shoot in the flesh until we shatter the venomous snake’s head and until we destroy the venomous spider which sucks this nation and country dry”.⁷⁰

Furthermore, violence played a key role in the creation of “the new man”. This “new man” had to be ready not only to use but also to suffer violence. Members were reminded that “the path to the gates of resurrection was made of thorns”.⁷¹ Not only should they not run away from peril and suffering, but they should embrace it, as it is beneficial. “Suffering is to us what Mother Earth was to Antaios”, proclaimed Ljotić to his followers. Just like Antaios, a member of Zbor is unbeatable for as long as he keeps fighting and suffering for the benefit of the nation.⁷² In addition, a true combatant had to be fanatically devoted to the idea. “Only through this will we be able to redeem our previous sins, wanderings and failings. Only then will our previous sufferings serve as purification and preparation for

a real and better life”.⁷³ Through a combination of ideological fanaticism and readiness for self-sacrifice, an individual member of Zbor would become a true reborn “combatant”. Once there were thousands of them, Ljotić was convinced that he and his “army” would be able to spread their message throughout Yugoslavia.⁷⁴

The true test of a man’s character was war, thought Ljotić.⁷⁵ In his view, the First World War had not only purified the army but the society as a whole, because the weak and the evil had either died or fled, and only the good and strong remained. However, after the war, “a deadly replacement” occurred, as the heroes who had led the army during the war were pushed out by weaklings and cowards from the back lines. The men from the trenches had no leading roles in the post-war state, but they had to take their place within Zbor to march into war once again, he wrote. His brother-in-arms, both in the trenches and the political arena, Stanislav Krakov, concurred: “Today we must start fighting for our survival. In order to survive, we must fight for that rebirth whose realization we brought from the battlefields as faith in our hearts eighteen years ago. Our time has come. Our faith was not a delusion if it was desecrated by others”.⁷⁶ Not unlike Mussolini, Ljotić believed in a Yugoslav *trincerocrazia*, which should and must take its rightful place in a new state. Therefore, military terms were introduced into the realm of politics. Members became combatants; political struggle was war, and universities and streets were battlefields.⁷⁷ True fighters must also be disciplined. Dimitrije Ljotić wrote how he only grasped the true meaning of authority in the army. During his time in uniform, he realized the “organic” nature of discipline. Fighters of Zbor had to “defeat themselves first”,⁷⁸ abandon egoism and embrace a collective spirit of brotherhood and authority. By doing so, they would become “the army of change”, which would usher in a new era and a new state.⁷⁹

However, far from the theoretical realm, as the actual war drew near, Ljotić and his followers became increasingly aware of the danger it could pose to the young and frail Yugoslav state. A new European war could undo the results of the last one, and the Yugoslav state, for which so much had been sacrificed, could perish. Therefore, the movement adopted a strictly neutral and anti-war stance. Commenting on the invasion of Ethiopia in January 1936, Ljotić wrote:

65 Dimitrije Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 1 (Beograd: Zadruga, 2001), 145.

66 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 3, 239.

67 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 5, 283–286.

68 Ibid., 283–286; Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 2, 185.

69 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 5, 84.

70 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 3, 214.

71 Anonim, “Putem trnja do kapije Vaskrsenja,” *Otadžbina*, 19 May 1935.

72 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 4, 163; Anonim, “Idemo dalje,” *Otadžbina*, 12 May 1935.

73 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 3, 135.

74 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 1, 215–218; Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 2, 202–204; Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 3, 133–135.

75 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 2, 93–98; Anonim, *Dimitrije Ljotić u Splitu* (Split: JNP Zbor n.d.), 9.

76 Stanislav Krakov, “Naš čas je došao,” *Otadžbina*, 6 January 1937.

77 Istorijски arhiv Beograda – Historical Archive of Belgrade (IAB), Zbirka o radu Ljotićeve organizacije Zbor – Collection of Sources about Ljotić’s Organization Zbor (1929), box 7, “Veliki zbor u Smederevu”; D. N, “Naše znamenje,” *Otadžbina*, 6 January 1937; Mitrofan Matić, “Nad iskidanim pitanjima,” *Naš put*, 14 January 1940.

78 Velibor Jonić, *Šta hoće Zbor?* (Petrovgrad: JNP Zbor, n.d.), 22.

79 Mitrofan Matić, “Nad iskidanim pitanjima,” *Naš put*, 14 January 1940; Anonim, “Putem trnja do kapije Vaskrsenja,” *Otadžbina*, 19 May 1935; Anonim, *Dimitrije Ljotić u Splitu*, 24.

It would have been better if Italy's natural need for expansion had been satisfied without resorting to war, by a fairer distribution of colonies and mandates [...] To Abyssinia, we extend our deepest condolences. Her [Abyssinia's] enlightenment cannot be judged by the standards of the truly unenlightened. She is also close to us, being one of the first Christian states in the world. Our sentiments cannot go against her in this time of desperate struggle for their centuries-long independence.⁸⁰

This passage is important as it shows that colonialism was seen as "natural" without embracing the discourse of racial superiority. This is evident in many of Ljotić's writings on the topic of race.⁸¹ In his analysis, Ljotić went on to condemn the League of Nations and the double standards it had shown towards Italy by rightly identifying it as an aggressor, yet failing to do so in the case of the Japanese invasion of China and the conflicts in South America. He voiced the same concerns in November 1934, fearing that the League of Nations was losing its legitimacy.⁸² This hypocrisy, in his view, undermined the frail foundations of the organization, potentially endangering peace in Europe. "The current problems are so grave that a new world war could bring many unforeseen troubles", wrote Ljotić, advocating against joining in the sanctions against Italy, until they are rightfully levied against all aggressor states. Only then could the true mission of the League of Nations be fulfilled.⁸³

However, when the Spanish Civil War started in 1936, Zbor supported the Nationalists.⁸⁴ Unlike other wars, this was seen as an ideological struggle within the same nation. Choosing to show selective blindness to the involvement of German and Italian troops, Ljotić adopted the nationalist framing of the war as a conflict between the international "scum" and the brave Spaniards.⁸⁵ The Republicans were seen as communists whose mission was to destroy religion and family.⁸⁶ Nationalist victories, like the defence of Alcázar de Toledo, were celebrated in the Zbor press.⁸⁷ Despite undoubtedly supporting the Nationalists, Ljotić chose to focus on the dangers of communism in Spain, lamenting the destruction of the country rather than glorifying the Nationalists' war effort. He

claimed: "If the rebels fail, Spain will become communist. The Civil War will not stop. The Spaniards will continue to kill and exterminate each other until they perish as a nation and a state".⁸⁸

Zbor was largely indifferent towards the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, with some of its members even describing the country as "a victim of the Western democracies and Bolshevik Russia" instead of Germany.⁸⁹ However, Ljotić, owing in part to his deep-seated anti-Semitism, was convinced that another world war would bring about the demise of the European civilization and usher in an era of destruction and slavery to Jewish masters.⁹⁰ He was convinced that Yugoslavia had to remain out of the war because such a mass conflict would spell its doom, staunchly advocating Yugoslavia's neutrality. He wrote, "The new war will bring new hardships, and perhaps even the definitive downfall of the whole Christian culture and civilization".⁹¹ When the war, nevertheless, commenced, he became convinced of German responsibility. In 1939, he toured the country to give a series of lectures on the nature of the ongoing war. These lectures were printed as *Drama of Contemporary Mankind*, a work describing his deeply apocalyptic vision of the Second World War.⁹²

Ljotić criticized Adolf Hitler's messianism, which had blinded and led him to start the war, whose end would bring about the victory of Bolshevism and the Jews.⁹³ He disregarded German pretences and openly claimed that Hitler and Germany were responsible for the outbreak of the war.⁹⁴ Hitler and Mussolini were unwittingly acting, according to Ljotić, as "unconscious Jewish agents", who, blinded by anti-Semitism, helped the "Jewish agenda".⁹⁵ He stressed that they were short-sighted and did not recognize the true nature of the war, failing to see who would ultimately benefit from it. Germany, therefore, became "a danger to small and middle-sized states in Europe", like Yugoslavia.⁹⁶ In protest, Zbor members Mihailo Olčan and Milorad Mojić left the German-Yugoslav society.⁹⁷ His criticism of German imperialism during this period did not include the

80 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 3, 222–223.

81 Rastko Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – Učitelj ili farisej* (Beograd: Catena mundi, 2021), 185–187.

82 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 2, 93–98.

83 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 3, 222–225.

84 Boris Stojkovski, "List Otadžbina o Španskom građanskom ratu," *Kultura polisa* II, no. 2–3 (2005): 89–100.

85 Anonim, "Evropa na putu sutrašnjice," *Otadžbina*, 11 December 1936; Anonim, "Migel de Unamuno o današnjoj Španiji," *Otadžbina*, 15 October 1936.

86 Anonim, "Španska klanica," *Otadžbina*, 8 November 1936; Anonim, "Pozadina španskih događaja," *Otadžbina*, 12 November 1936; Anonim, "Boljševička Španija zabranjuje svetkovanje Božića," *Otadžbina*, 25 December 1936.

87 Anonim, "Junaci Alkazara," *Otadžbina*, 10 October 1936.

88 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 4, 68; Also cf. Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 4, 117–123; 211–214.

89 IAB, 1929, box 3, "Građanil".

90 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 2, 112–117.

91 Ibid., 114.

92 On the contacts between Zbor and Nazi Germany during the interwar period, see: Rastko Lompar, "Afera 'Tehnička unija' i veze JNP Zbora sa nacističkom Nemačkom 1935–1941," *Istorija 20. Veka* 38, no. 2 (2020): 85–102; Rastko Lompar, "The Yugoslav national movement ZBOR and Nazi Germany: 1934–1941" in *The Serbian right-wing parties and intellectuals in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: 1934–1941*, 225–246.

93 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 7, 6; Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 9, 41.

94 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 8, 195;

95 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 7, 83; Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 7, 212; Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 7, 252; Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 8, 23; Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 12, 57–125.

96 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 8, 244.

97 IAB, Befehlshaber des Sicherheitspolizei und des SD (BDS), Mihailo Olčan Dossier (0–39), Vermerk, 24 September 1942.

ideology of National Socialism. Nonetheless, Zbor was in favour of a strong response towards the threat of war. Their objection to war was not limited to rhetoric. One of the movement's propagandists, Janko Vujić, wrote to the Minister of Defence and suggested compiling lists of Yugoslav Germans to be taken as hostages in case of war.⁹⁸ Ljotić called on the members to answer the mobilization call on the eve of the conflict.⁹⁹ This criticism of Nazi Germany and the "Greater Yugoslav stance" led to Zbor being included in the Index Card database of the enemies of the state of the Reich Security Main Office.¹⁰⁰

In contrast to Orjuna, Zbor barely mentioned the need to expand Yugoslav borders. Focused on the need for internal consolidation and renewal, the movement was painfully aware of the country's weakness. In a letter to Prince Paul in February 1940, Ljotić did not mince words. He assessed that "Yugoslavia was falling apart" and that the relations between the Serbs and Croats had paralyzed the whole system. Therefore, the war would bring about its speedy demise.¹⁰¹ In August 1940, he proclaimed, "If we enter into the war with our current armed forces, we will not just be defeated but shattered".¹⁰² With

this in mind, Zbor not openly advocated an expansionist foreign policy: discreetly, the movement considered the "Greater Yugoslavia" one of their ideals. In a Croat nationalist journal, it was described as stretching from "Soča/Isnozo to the Black Sea and from the Adriatic Sea to Lake Balaton".¹⁰³ A rare visual representation of this ideal future state can be found on the cover of the Slovene issue of the *Drama of Contemporary Mankind* (1940).



Map of greater Yugoslavia published by YNM Zbor. Source: Dimitrije Ljotić, *Drama sodobnega človeštva* (Celje: Knjižnica omladine Zbora, 1940).

It featured a map showing Yugoslavia and Bulgaria as one country with four marked cities (Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade and Sofia), with the addition of the coastal areas controlled by Italy (Zadar, Rijeka and Istria). Even though the brochure itself makes no reference to the map, it serves as a clear testament to the existing ideal of a "Greater Yugoslavia". Realistically, the only way the coastal areas could be annexed was through a conflict with Italy. However, regarding Bulgaria, there was a largely utopian idea of the peaceful unification of all South Slavs. Some Zbor ideologues had shared this sentiment even prior to the creation of the movement.¹⁰⁴ Ljotić himself optimistically downplayed the Yugoslav-Bulgarian rivalry as merely a struggle for supremacy within the future common state.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it is clear that Zbor, despite advocating neutrality, did not abandon the old territorial claims.

In conclusion, it seems that the Yugoslav right wing shared the common faith in the regenerative properties of war, glorifying the Serbian war effort in the previous war. In the trenches, they believed, the combatants had been "reborn" and filled with ideological fanaticism, which later fuelled the Yugoslav national interwar project. Throughout the interwar period, there was no significant peace initiative coming from the right, even though some political organizations flirted with anti-war slogans. In the early days of the Yugoslav kingdom, the Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists openly called for war with the country's neighbours, full of optimism and (blind) faith in the capabilities of Yugoslav armed forces and volunteers. As time went by, the Yugoslav right did not alter this perception of war, but it did lose its fervour. Internal strife and instability made it clear that the fragile state was in no shape to wage a war, much less an offensive one. Furthermore, as the aggressive appetites of Italy and Germany grew, the danger for the Yugoslav state increased. As a result, both the Yugoslav Popular Party and the Yugoslav National Movement Zbor adopted a stance that favoured strict neutrality. Once the war broke out, members of both movements took up arms as soldiers of the Yugoslav army. Hodera was captured as a POW and spent the entirety of the war in German captivity. Ljotić, however, despite fighting against the German army during the two-week war in April 1941, was quick to come to an understanding with the occupiers, and his movement later collaborated with the Germans.

98 AJ, Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića – Dimitrije Ljotić's Zbor (115), Janko Vujić ministru odbrane Milanu Nediću, 11 May 1940.

99 IAB, 1929, box 7, "Dragi druže."

100 See: Lompar, "The Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR and Nazi Germany: 1934–1941," 245; Lompar, "Afera 'Tehnička unija' i veze JNP Zbora sa nacističkom Nemačkom 1935–1941," 100.

101 Ljotić, *Sabrana dela* 6, 383–385.

102 Ibid., 394.

103 AJ, Centralni Presburo – Central Pressbureau (38), 38–353–501, Anonim, "Dalekozor političkog duha jednog Ljotićevca," *Hrvatski Dnevnik*, 4 April 1940.

104 See, Velibor Jonić, "Jedini put," *Put*, May–June 1933.

105 Vasilije Dragosavljević, *Druga Evropa i Kraljevina Jugoslavija: JNP Zbor (1934–1941)* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2021), 55–56.

Summary

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia underwent significant changes during its twenty-three-year-long existence. It seemed that, in many aspects, the young state lacked stability and continuity. The most extreme radicals, both on the right and the left, were marginalized, but they still managed to influence mainstream politics to a certain degree. Those on the right-wing fringes were often co-opted into the ruling regimes after the dictatorship of King Alexander was proclaimed in 1929. However, they were only accepted as dissidents, and their political organizations (Orjuna, Jugoslovenska akcija, Jugoslovenska narodna stranka and Jugoslovenski narodni pokret Zbor) remained in opposition. Therefore, their views on war and peace were constantly kept out of the political mainstream. The first one to gain importance, the Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists, championed war like no other movement before or after it, proclaiming the need for an offensive war, which would “correct” the borders of Yugoslavia to reflect the perceived ethnic lines. Even though they sometimes served the needs of the state, especially during the tenure of Svetozar Pribićević as the Minister of the Interior, their radicalism was one of the main reasons for their outlawing after the dictatorship was instituted. During the first years of King Alexander’s dictatorship, there were no organizations on the right that championed the regenerative properties of war, as the political “space” was quite narrow. To an extent, the two main political parties of the radical right during the 1930s, the Yugoslav Popular Party and the Zbor movement, “rehabilitated” the war in the face of increased “defeatist propaganda”. However, even though they accepted and glorified physical violence, the imminent world war brought a turn towards neutrality, with non-involvement deemed necessary. This decision was also a result of the aggressive foreign policy of the Axis powers, primarily Italy. As a result, a somewhat contradictory stance was adopted: the regenerative and revolutionary properties of war were endorsed whilst dreading the outbreak of an armed conflict, thereby glamorizing a hypothetical instead of an actual war.

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