

THE SERBIAN RIGHT-WING
PARTIES AND INTELLECTUALS IN
THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1934–1941

Edited by
Dragan Bakić



INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES
OF THE SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

SPECIAL EDITIONS 155

**THE SERBIAN RIGHT-WING
PARTIES AND INTELLECTUALS IN THE
KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1934–1941**

Edited by
Dragan Bakić

Editor in Chief
Vojislav G. Pavlović,
Director of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA

BELGRADE

2022

Publisher
Institute for Balkan Studies
Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
Belgrade, Knez Mihailova 35/IV
www.balkaninstitut.com
e-mail: balkinst@bi.sanu.ac.rs

Reviewers
Ljubodrag Dimić
Academician (Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts)

Zoran Janjetović
Principal Research Fellow (Institute for Recent History of Serbia)

Aleksandar Stojanović
Senior Research Associate (Institute for Recent History of Serbia)

ISBN 978-86-7179-121-2

Prepress and Print ∴ Interklima-grafika, Vrnjci

This research was supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia,
PROMIS, Grant no. 6062708, SerbRightWing.

Table of Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	7
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	11
<i>Introduction</i>	13

PART 1

Conservative Authoritarianism: the Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ) and the Serbian Radical Party (SRS)

Dragan Bakić

<i>A Makeshift Party: Conservative JRZ under Milan Stojadinović</i>	33
<i>Troubles at Home and Abroad: JRZ under Dragiša Cvetković</i>	81
<i>A Failed “Leader” and the Serbian Conservative Core: Milan Stojadinović and the Short-Lived Serbian Radical Party</i>	159

PART 2

Outright Fascists? The Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR and Svetislav Hodjera’s “Borbaši”

Rastko Lompar

<i>True Believers or Latecomers? Dimitrije Ljotić, ZBOR and the Nature of Fascism</i>	193
<i>The Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR and Nazi Germany 1935–1941</i>	225
<i>The Yugoslav People’s Party “Borbaši”: A Fringe Extreme Right-Wing Party in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia</i>	247

PART 3
The Serbian Right Wing and Yugoslavism

Dušan Fundić

*“Being capable or incapable of governing
a great Yugoslavia”: Yugoslav Nation-Building
in the Ideology of the Serbian Right Wing* 277

*An Uncomfortable Relationship: The Serbian
Right Wing and the “National Minorities” Question* 323

*Extremes on the Margins: Serbian Right-Wing
Nationalism in a Comparative European Perspective* 351

PART 4

Between Conservatism and Fascism: Prominent Public Figures

Svetlana Šeatović, Dragan Bakić

*Miloš Crnjanski, the Serbian Right
and European Dictatorships* 377

Svetlana Šeatović

*Radical Right-Wingers among Men of Letters:
Vladimir Velmar-Janković and Stanislav Krakov* 407

*Dragiša Vasić before the Second World War:
from Leftist to Right-Wing Conservative* 437

Vladimir Cvetković

*Church Dignitaries and their Disciples:
Svetosavlje, Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism:
Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Dimitrije Najdanović
and Djoko Slijepčević* 459

Bibliography 501

List of Contributors 537

Index of names 539

True Believers or Latecomers? Dimitrije Ljotić, ZBOR and the Nature of Fascism

Rastko Lompar

Institute for Balkan Studies

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts

Even seventy-five years after Dimitrije Ljotić died on 23 April 1945, the debate about him continues to intrigue the Serbian public. Although he was the leader of a small political organization, he remains one of the most controversial figures of 20th-century Serbia. Erased from public consciousness during the communist dictatorship, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, he began to elicit growing public interest. At the same time, the circle of his followers and supporters, until then limited to the diaspora, began to widen. The deconstruction of the normative image of Dimitrije Ljotić and his movement led to a series of scandals, and each of them reopened the debate, which, sadly, continues to abound in stereotypes and misinterpretations. The achievements of modern historiography, at least as far as the role of Dimitrije Ljotić and his movement is concerned, have failed to reach the general public. One of the central questions is whether Ljotić was indeed a fascist. This debate tends to lack theoretical underpinnings and give rise to superficial and academically unsound judgments.

After the World War II experience and all the death and suffering it caused, fascism became a term that encapsulates horror and evil. At the same time, it became a well-loved political insult and the ultimate disqualification. That has led to its substantial politicization and devaluation. The danger of its excessive use is clear: if everything gets labeled as fascism, then nothing is fascism. It would be ludicrous to

claim that the misuse of the term fascism was limited to politics or that there are no similar examples in historiography. Political needs often dictated academic “truths.” This practice was particularly widespread in totalitarian regimes. The historiography of socialist Yugoslavia usually took its views on fascism in the interwar period from the documents of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Accordingly, the term fascism became an inflated currency. The regime of King Alexander, its actors, the Yugoslav Radical Peasants’ Democracy/Yugoslav National Party, the Yugoslav Radical Union, and many smaller opposition parties and movements (Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists, Serbian National Youth, Croatian National Youth, Yugoslav Action, Patriotic Youth Front, Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR, Yugoslav People’s Party – *Borbaši*) were all labeled fascist.¹ In view of those *ipse dixit* views, it became unnecessary to prove why that was so or to examine the numerous differences between these movements. They were all indiscriminately portrayed as fascist movements.

There is extensive historiographic literature from the socialist period on right-wing parties and movements in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.² Its achievements are significant, particularly in the heuristic regard. However, due to the above-described ideological preconceptions, the research of the ideology of those movements was neglected. The reason was not just that their ideology was reductively seen as “fascist,” and consequently, self-explanatory and banal, but also that the ideologically motivated condemnation of fascism had reduced this term to a copy of the Italian and German model, eliminating any need for a deeper investigation of the distinctive features of the organizations and individuals who were active on Yugoslav soil and often derived their ideas and political affiliations from their own milieu and national traditions.³

¹ Ivan Prpić, ed., *Komunisti o fašizmu* (Zagreb: Centar za aktualni politički razvoj 1976).

² For an overview of the literature cf. Vasilije Dragosavljević, “Savremena srpska istoriografija o jugoslovenskoj desnici u međuratnom periodu,” *Humanizacija univerziteta* (Niš: Filozofski fakultet, 2013), 514–523; Rastko Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej: Zbor, hrišćanstvo i verske zajednice: 1935–1945* (Beograd: Catena Mundi, 2021), 9–17.

³ The most notable studies on ZBOR published in Yugoslavia were: Mladen Stojanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1984); Branislav Gligorijević,

The democratization of scholarship after the fall of communism, the easing of ideological constraints and the disappearance of the need to name “internal enemies” facilitated significant advances in the research of fascist movements. Also, substantial progress was made in the study of the ideology of right-wing movements in the interwar period. However, although the deflation of the fascism label was certainly much needed and welcome, it seems to have gone too far. With the exception of the *Ustaše*, there is no consensus about defining any other organization as fascist. Most recent works favor terms such as “far right,” “radical right,” “pro-fascist,” “pro-German” or “populist” instead of “fascist.”⁴ This tendency should not be seen as an attempt to

“Napad Ljotićevaca na studente Tehničkog fakulteta u Beogradu, u oktobru 1940. i rasturanje Ljotićevog Zbora,” *Istorijski glasnik*, br. 2 (1963): 52–81; Branislav Gligorijević, “Politički pokreti i grupe s nacionalsocijalističkom ideologijom i njihova fuzija u Ljotićevom Zboru,” *Istorijski glasnik*, br. 4 (1965): 35–83; Branislav Gligorijević, “Organizacioni oblici fašizma u Jugoslaviji između dva rata,” *Socijalizam*, br. 12 (1985): 1659–1673; Todor Kuljić, “Fašizam i istraživanje fašizma u Jugoslaviji,” *Marksistička misao*, br. 3 (1986): 3–18; Branko Petranović, “Fašizam u Jugoslaviji – istoriografski sporovi,” *Marksistička misao*, br. 3 (1986): 19–31; Branislav Gligorijević, “Osobenosti fašizma u Jugoslaviji dvadesetih godina,” *Marksistička misao*, br. 3 (1986): 32–44; Mladen Stefanović, “Delovanje Ljotićevog pokreta Zbor u čačanskom kraju (1935–1945),” *Zbornik radova Narodnog muzeja*, (1987): 287–325; Mladen Stefanović, „Ljotićev pokret Zbor u užičkom kraju,” *Užički zbornik*, br. 16 (1987): 259–293; Branislav Božović, Mladen Stefanović, Milan Aćimović, Dragi Jovanović, Dimitrije Ljotić (Zagreb: Centar za informacije i publicitet 1985), 197.

⁴ Cf. Mirko Bojić, *Jugoslavenski narodni pokret Zbor, 1935–1945: jedan kritički pri-laz* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga 1996); Momcilo Dobrich, *Belgrade’s Best: The Serbian Volunteer Corps 1941–1945* (Bayside: Axis Europa Books 2000); Slaviša Perić, *Srpski dobrovoljački korpus 1941–1945* (Smederevo: privatno izdanje, 2018); Aleksandar Stojanović, “Ekstremna srpska međuratna desnica – ideološka osnova srpskih kolaboracionista 1941–1945,” in *Istorijska tribina: Istraživanja mladih saradnika* (Beograd: INIS, 2013), 111–134; Nenad Ž. Petrović, *Ideologija varvarstva: fašističke i nacionalsocijalističke ideje kod intelektualaca u Beogradu* (Beograd: Zadruga Res Publica/ Mostart, 2015); Jovo Bakić, “Fašizam u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941,” *Nova srpska politička misao*, br. 1–4 (2004): 21–43; Vasilije Dragosavljević, “Ideološki uticaji evropskog fašizma na JNP ZBOR,” in *Istorijska tribina mladih saradnika* (Beograd: INIS, 2013), 93–110; Vasilije Dragosavljević, „JNP Zbor i koncept srpske državnosti,” in *Savremeno društvo i nauka*, eds. Gordana Djingić, Lela Milošević-Radulović (Niš: FFUN, 2019), 272–292; Zoran Janjetović, “Pokret Zbor u poslednjoj fazi Drugog svjetskog rata,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, br. 48 (2016): 673–685; Zoran Janjetović, “Di-

revise history or absolve some right-wing movements that emerged in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The reason is more likely to be an attempt on the part of a given author to distance themselves from the earlier ideologically biased historiography and historical image.

In addition, although a considerable number of important studies on Serbian and Yugoslav interwar right-wing movements was published in the last three decades, significantly expanding and deepening our knowledge and understanding of these phenomena, Serbian historiography has failed to catch up with contemporary theories of fascism. A major contributing factor was the inertia in publishing translations of notable works: the last Serbian translation of a seminal book in this field, Ernst Nolte's *Fascism in Its Epoch* (*Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche*, 1963) was published in 1990. Many influential theoretical studies that, in the last thirty years, determined the understanding of the term "fascism" and helped make it sharper and more usable in heuristic research have yet to appear in Serbian translation. Due to all of the above, in Serbian historiography, the term "fascism" remained unclear and vague, which consequently made it insufficiently usable for research purposes; conversely, for some movements that should be rightly called fascist, other, less controversial and politically charged appellations were used instead.

This paper aims to describe the attitude of Dimitrije Ljotić toward the term fascism and to explore whether his refusal to identify as a fascist constitutes adequate evidence of his non-fascist or even "anti-fascist"⁵ character. I will attempt to challenge this simplified understanding of fascism. At the same time, I will explore the ideology of ZBOR through the prism of Roger Griffin's theory of fascism. Using Griffin's theoretical tool kit, I will try to show that ZBOR does indeed

mitrije Ljotić and World War II," *Istorija 20. veka*, Vol. 1 (2018): 93–118.; John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015); John Paul Newman, "War Veterans, Fascism, and Para-Fascist Departures in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1918–1941," *Fascism*, Vol. 6 (2017): 42–74; Marko Attila Hoare, "Yugoslavia and its Successor state," in *Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, ed. Richard J. B. Bosworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 414–433.

⁵ Dragan Subotić, *Zatomljena misao: o političkim idejama Dimitrija Ljotića* (Beograd: Clio, 1994), 31–32.

meet the “fascist minimum” and can, therefore, be rightly seen as a fascist movement.

ZBOR’s Rejection of the Fascist label

From its very inception, the Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR faced accusations of fascism, a label that would haunt it throughout the existence of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In the eyes of ZBOR’s critics, its collaboration with the German occupiers during World War II confirmed that those allegations were justified. Even before ZBOR was created, the Yugoslav Action,⁶ one of its future founders, had to fend off accusations of fascism. In a text subtitled “What makes the Yugoslav Action fundamentally different from fascism and Hitlerism,” Tihomir Dožudić, explained why the accusations against YA were unfounded. In his view, the Yugoslavs’ nationalism was very different than that of fascists and Hitlerians, who cultivated “backward” and “chauvinistic nationalism.” While fascism and Nazism were “arrogant” and “bloated” with their self-importance, YA members “stand humbled before our people.” Fascism and Hitlerism were described as being nothing but a tool in the hands of large capital, whose economic program was a “hypocritical comedy.”⁷ However, although the movement’s leadership tried to distance itself from fascism and present itself as different, some members did not hide their enthusiasm for the successes of the fascist movements. Protesting against the founding of ZBOR, in which the Yugoslav Action would lose its “national-socialist (*sic*)” ideology, some members warned the YA leadership that the “conquest of streets,

⁶ Yugoslav Action was founded in 1930 by integral Yugoslav intellectuals, mostly members of the outlawed Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (ORJUNA), and drew most of its support from Croatia, whereas the Fighters’ Alliance of Yugoslavia was founded in 1929, and almost exclusively gathered Slovenes. For further reading on the groups that formed ZBOR, see: Croatian State Archives (Hrvatski državni arhiv, hereafter HDA), Group VI – Burgeois Parties and Societies (Buržoaske partije i društva), Collection no. 1353, Inv. br. 3970; Ratko Parežanin, *Drugi svetski rat i Dimitrije V. Ljotić* (Minhen: Iskra, 1971), 16–35; Branislav Gligorijević, “Politički pokreti i grupe sa nacionalsocijalističkom ideologijom i njihova fuzija u Ljotićevom Zboru,” *Istorijski glasnik*, br. 4 (1965): 35–83.

⁷ Tihomir Dožudić, “Naš stav i naš program,” *Jugoslovenska reč*, 13. 8. 1932.

so successfully done by Mussolini and Hitler, [...] is the only right method for us.”⁸

The journal *Javnost*, edited by a former member of the Orjuna,⁹ Niko Bartulović, saw the Yugoslav Action as responsible for the later “fascistization” of ZBOR. Namely, according to *Javnost*, the Yugoslav Action, having suffered the fate of Orjuna and “incidentally” become fascistized, was responsible for the fascist character that ZBOR would later assume, and not the group around Ljotić himself.¹⁰ Responding to these claims, the weekly *Otadžbina* said that they were against dictatorship, which is why they were not fascists.¹¹ Besides the communists¹² and left-wing press,¹³ accusations of fascism against ZBOR also

⁸ Quoted in Branislav Gligorijević, “Politički pokreti i grupe s nacionalsocijalističkom ideologijom i njihova fuzija u Ljotićevom ‘Zboru,’” *Istorijski glasnik*, br. 4 (1965): 55–56.

⁹ The Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (ORJUNA) was founded in 1921 as the Yugoslav National Youth. It attracted intellectuals who believed in integral Yugoslavism, mostly from the former territories of Austria-Hungary. Developing in the shadow of Italian fascism, it bitterly clashed with political opponents, communists, Serbian and Croatian nationalists, and members of minority nationalities. It organized irredentist actions in Italy in the areas inhabited by Croats and Slovenes. At its peak, it had 100,000 members and was banned after the introduction of the king’s dictatorship in 1929. See Ivan Bošković, *ORJUNA: Ideologija i književnost* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 2006); Vasilije Dragosavljević, *Ideje fašizma u Kraljevini SHS: Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista* (Beograd: Odbrana, 2020).

¹⁰ On the other hand, informing Berlin about a ZBOR meeting in late 1934, the German minister in Belgrade, Von Heeren, noted that the Yugoslav Action and the group around ZBOR were sympathetic to nacional socialism, while the Fighters’ Alliance of Yugoslavia members were distrustful. See Historical Archive of Belgrade (Istorijski arhiv Beograda, hereafter IAB), Collection on the activities of Ljotić’s organization ZBOR (Zbirka o radu Ljotićeve organizacije ZBOR), Collection no. 1929, k-2, Izveštaj fon Herena 20 December 1934.

¹¹ Anonim, “*Javnost* i fašistička opasnost,” *Otadžbina*, 9. 2. 1936; Anonim, “Naše stanovište,” *Zbor*, 20. 10. 1935.

¹² Archives of Serbia (Arhiv Srbije, hereafter AS), Security Information Agency (Bezbednosno informativna agencija BIA), II-69, ZBOR Main Secretariat to Miodrag Nestorović, 5 August 1940.

¹³ AJ, 38-353-501, R, “Ko nas naziva fašistima?,” *Vihor*, 8. 3. 1937; Goran Davidović, “Jugoslovenski narodni pokret Zbor u čačanskom kraju 1935–1945. godine,” *Zbornik radova narodnog muzeja*, Vol. 30 (2000): 150–151.

came from the democratic opposition.¹⁴ A particularly vocal critic was Dragomir Ikončić, who had a polemic about whether the ZBOR members were fascists with the head secretary of ZBOR, Velibor Jonić, in which Jonić rejected all allegations.¹⁵ The ruling party, the Yugoslav Radical Union, did not hesitate to condemn the ZBOR members as fascists through its organ *Samouprava*, albeit in a somewhat milder manner.¹⁶ In time, the accusations grew increasingly frequent. For instance, the British envoy who had not labeled ZBOR a fascist movement in 1935 described it as “openly fascist” a few years later.¹⁷ Dimitrije Ljotić noted that they were also accused of being fascists, Nazis and even communists.¹⁸ He concluded that they “have nothing against being called fascists, although we aren’t, so we ask for that to be known.”¹⁹ It is important to note that there were other fascist movements, such as Falange Española, that sometimes not only rejected any similarities with Italian fascism but also bitterly criticized it.²⁰ Aware of the intense pressure and power of that accusation, because in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, being a fascist automatically meant being against the state,²¹ primarily due to the bad relations between Italy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a too close identification with the Italian regime could be understood as betrayal of Yugoslavism. Hence, other integral Yugoslav movements, such as Orjuna, consistently advocated anti-Italian positions, no matter how heavily they were influenced by fascism in the neighborhood. Therefore, Dimitrije Ljotić had to distance himself from fascism. He needed to give a coherent answer to the question of what

¹⁴ Bogomir Bogić, *Narodna demokratija i Hrvatsko pitanje* (Vršac: p. i. 1936), 42.

¹⁵ Archives of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Jugoslavije, hereafter AJ), Central Press Bureau (Centralni presburo), Collection no. 38, 38-353-501, Velibor Jonić, “Uredništvu Politike,” *Politika*, 16. 6. 1936.

¹⁶ AJ, 38-353-501, Anonim, “Pojave za osudu,” *Samouprava*, 1. 3. 1937; Anonim, “Nezdrava pojava kopiranja tuđih pokreta,” *Jugoslovenski list*, 21. 8. 1936.

¹⁷ Cf. Živko Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 2 (Beograd/Zagreb: Arhiv Jugoslavije/Globus 1986), 400, 469.

¹⁸ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Naši putevi,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 83; Dimitrije Ljotić, “Iz trijumfa u trijumf,” *Sabrana dela* 4, 87.

¹⁹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Onima koji se quite,” *Sabrana dela* 3, 163.

²⁰ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 262–263.

²¹ Milan Banić, *Raspeti na raskršću: Jedan Hrvat o Jugoslaviji*, 111–112.

made him and ZBOR different from fascism and Hitlerism. Like many other things, Dimitrije Ljotić explained that distinction with Christianity. Ljotić addressed the accusation of fascism several times, explaining why it was untrue, but his most famous text on the subject is “Neither Fascism Nor Hitlerism” (1936). Following publication, the text became ZBOR’s credo of sorts, presented as definitive proof that neither ZBOR nor Dimitrije Ljotić had anything to do with fascism. Dimitrije Ljotić himself used it as an argument,²² and it was often cited among ZBOR émigrés.²³ At a ZBOR council in 1964, Vladimir Ljotić quoted his father’s 1936 text as conclusive evidence that ZBOR had nothing to do with fascism.²⁴ The text is still very popular among Ljotić’s apologists.

Dimitrije Ljotić began his text by listing the aspects in which ZBOR was similar to fascism and Hitlerism.²⁵ He accepted that there were “economic similarities” between them, primarily their shared awareness of the backwardness and obsolescence of liberal democracy. Dimitrije Ljotić acknowledged this, but noted that this characteristic was also shared by bolshevism, Rooseveltism, and many other modern movements and that it was not a distinctive feature that ZBOR and fascism had in common. In addition, he agreed with fascism and Hitlerism that private interests must be subordinated to the common good.²⁶ After these similarities, he lists numerous differences. First of all, ZBOR is a Yugoslav movement conceived not in the mind of one man but many. It is an authentic and collective project, while fascism and Hitlerism are alien (foreign) movements born in the mind of a single person (Mussolini and Hitler). Both fascism and Hitlerism emerged, Ljotić believed, from the “purely pagan concepts” of ancient Rome and Ger-

²² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Pre svega – verni sebi,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 134–135.

²³ T. Tomić, “Ogled: Dimitrije Ljotić,” *Iskra*, 1. 2. 1954; Anonim, “Ljotić i burna zastrašena današnjica,” *Iskra*, 1. 10. 1955; K. Milanov, “Stav i borba Dimitrija Ljotića,” *Iskra*, 1. 12. 1972; *Srpski dobrovoljci – povodom 25-godišnjice njihovog osnivanja*, 57; Parežanin, *Drugi svetski rat i Dimitrije V. Ljotić*, 128–142.

²⁴ AS, BIA, I-32, Vladimir Ljotić, Draft plan for the movement, Osnabrück, 18–19. June 1964.

²⁵ Traveling through Yugoslavia in 1936, a German agent concluded that ZBOR’s program was very similar to that of National Socialism. (IAB, 1929, κ-2, Situation in Yugoslavia 1–20 April 1936, p 8).

²⁶ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ni fašizam ni hitlerizam,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 89.

manic tribes. He argues: "Fascism is the deification – divinization – of the state. Hitlerism is the deification – divinization – of race." That view was unacceptable to the members of ZBOR, Slavs and Christians, because they believed that there were incomparably higher values than both race and the state. Also, the holiest premise of fascism is "selfishness" and of Hitlerism "Teutonic rage," but to ZBOR, there is nothing holier than Christianity. Ljotić saw those movements as totalitarian, dubbing them "absolute" and arguing that they eliminated any possibility of opposition and saw themselves as ever-lasting.²⁷ However, ZBOR sees itself neither as infallible nor intransigent. Once the ideal state is achieved, the need for ZBOR will disappear. ZBOR is but an instrument of its transformation, not its master. Hence, Dimitrije Ljotić argued that they were against parliamentarism and not parliament per se, unlike fascism and Hitlerism, which were against any institutions of power outside their respective parties.²⁸ He also emphasized that ZBOR saw itself as subordinate to the king, while the king of Italy was a "puppet," and Germany did not even have one.

With this text, Dimitrije Ljotić laid down the basics of his attitude to fascism and Hitlerism, and other ZBOR members followed his instructions. On the whole, the similarities were portrayed as relatively insignificant. Economic similarity was acknowledged, but he also underlined that the "class state," as ZBOR's economic program (although not particularly well-developed), was original and not adopted from corporatism.²⁹ They noted that fascism was also a "social reaction" to rampant capital, but that fascism and Nazism were neither "pioneering nor real social movements," unlike ZBOR.³⁰ Another parallel they admitted was the view that national unity was the prerequisite of economic welfare and personal freedom. "The Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR agrees with the fundamental position of fascism and National Socialism and, like them, holds that, without achieving brotherhood, we cannot even contemplate achieving the other two principles

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁹ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Staleži i zbor," *Sabrana dela* 3, 114; Dimitrije Ljotić, "Odgovor Narodnom listu Grge Andjelkovića," *Sabrana dela* 9, 151.

³⁰ Anonim, "Zbor–Fašizam–Hitlerizam–Boljševizam," *Otađzbina*, 15. 12. 1935.

– freedom and equality.”³¹ Anti-communism was also included among their commonalities.³²

On the other hand, the differences were touted as being major and insurmountable. The Christian nature of ZBOR was highlighted in contrast to fascism’s alleged paganism. This should certainly be seen as a reflection of Dimitrije Ljotić’s influence. Four years before the publication of “Neither Fascism nor Hitlerism,” YA had also tried to fend off allegations of fascism, but it did not highlight its Christianity nor see reflections of pagan cults in fascism.³³ However, ZBOR members such as Velibor Jonić often evoked that distinction later on.³⁴ Indicatively, it was also noted by the Germans. During the occupation, they held that “Ljotić’s strongest and weakest point was his deep piety,” which made him inept at day-to-day politics.³⁵ A postwar conversation between a Yugoslav informant and the former SS officer Carl Meissner reveals the distancing of neo-Nazi circles from both ZBOR and the Ustaše. According to Meissner, they “had no interest in them because their fascism is closely tied to black clericalism, which is an ideological adversary of ours. While the latter are associated with the Vatican, the former are bearers of mystical Orthodoxy, today an exponent of Soviet imperialism. The philosophy of National Socialism does not recognize the starting positions of Christianity and its erudition is fantastical.”³⁶

Dimitrije Ljotić often tried to dissociate himself from fascist etatism, while also showing apprehension about the state.³⁷ He repeatedly argued that “nowadays states assume the roles that didn’t belong to them previously,” and that those “roles” had been taken in “a revo-

³¹ Velibor Jonić, “Sloboda-Jednakost-Bratstvo,” *Otadžbina*, 6. 1. 1937; Dimitrije Ljotić, “Naš nacionalizam,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 106.

³² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Da li smo fašisti?,” *Sabrana dela* 4, 51.

³³ Cf. Tihomir Dožudić, “Naš stav i naš program,” *Jugoslovenska reč*, 13. 8. 1932.

³⁴ Velibor Jonić, “Sloboda-Jednakost-Bratstvo,” *Otadžbina*, 6. 1. 1937.

³⁵ IAB, BDS, O-39.

³⁶ Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (Diplomatski arhiv Ministarstva spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije, hereafter DA MSP RS), 1951, f. 59, dos. 3, dok. 4441, Political report of the Yugoslav General consulate in Munich, 25 January 1951.

³⁷ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ideali savremene omladine,” *Sabrana dela* 6, 208. This can perhaps be seen as a reflection of earlier “Tolstoyan anarchism.”

lutionary act.”³⁸ However, he also believed that the “state was not something beyond our citizens. It is its citizens. And fascism doesn’t see it like that, and hence the State of Zbor is different than the fascist state. Zbor was the first to understand that the state is merely a framework, a form, but that the essence and content are the people.”³⁹ The “State of Zbor” is different from fascism, Nazism, communism, and democracy, and the only “Slavic, peasant-cooperative, and Christian” among them.⁴⁰ For Ljotić, “the state is [...] merely a tool of the nation, a tool that the nation fought for and made to govern its fate as best it can.”⁴¹ ZBOR declared: “Zbor does not see the state as a coercive force that the people must adore even when it is unjust. The State of ZBOR is a broad community and protector of all classes of people, all strata...”⁴²

Fascism and Hitlerism, they often repeated, emerged in alien territories among alien peoples, and while they might be suitable and beneficial for those peoples,⁴³ they cannot be “transplanted” to Yugoslavia. In the eyes of Dimitrije Ljotić and his followers, to say that ZBOR had borrowed anything from anyone would be tantamount to capitulation and admitting defeat. Borrowing from others would mean being no better than the abhorred communists, who receive orders and the ideas they try to impose on their people from their “motherland.” “We have no need of either fascism or racism,” they declared.⁴⁴ Hence, they took great care to portray ZBOR as a genuinely and exclusively Yugoslav movement, whose ideology stemmed from the Yugoslav people and Christian traditions.⁴⁵ “If we borrow something, we have to give it back

³⁸ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Narod i režim,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 57–58.

³⁹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ravnodušnost čestitih,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 137.

⁴⁰ Anonim, “Država demokratije i država Zbora,” *Otađzbina*, 6. 2. 1937.

⁴¹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Iz moga života,” *Sabrana dela* 11, 85.

⁴² Anonim, “Da li smo desničari?,” *Otađzbina*, 29. 5. 1937.

⁴³ Dimitrije Ljotić held that both fascism and Nazism had done a lot for their respective countries. “[Hitler’s] work for his people is enormous and, whatever it may seem like to us, it does deserve deep respect” (Dimitrije Ljotić, “Povodom događaja u Austriji,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 33). “But we have eyes to see that, for the Italian people, fascism was the leaven that raised their dough to a higher level of value” (Dimitrije Ljotić, “Našim ‘levičarima,’” *Sabrana dela* 5, 40).

⁴⁴ AJ, 38-431-583, M. Bego, “Staleška država,” *Vihor*, 23. 1. 1937.

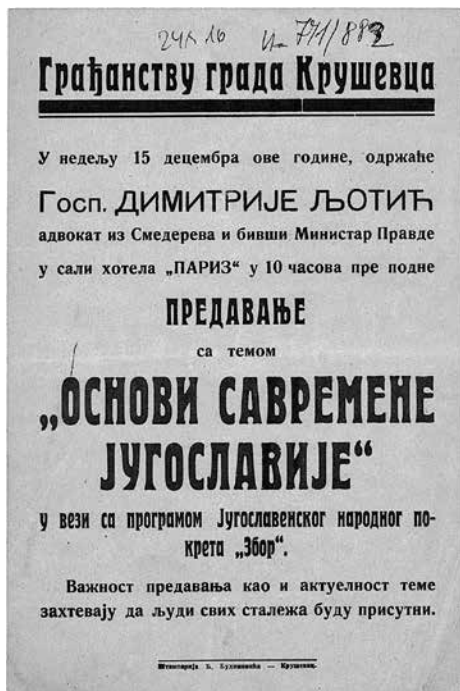
⁴⁵ AJ, 38-353-501, R, “Ko nas naziva fašistima?,” *Vihor*, 8. 3. 1937.



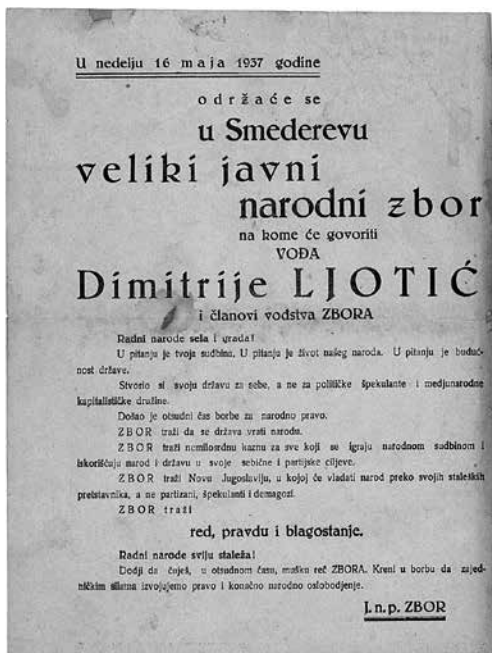
People attending a ZBOR rally in Smederevo, 1938
(Courtesy of the Historical Archive of Smederevo, SUBNOR collection, uncatalogued)



The ZBOR youth from Šalinac, Smederevo county, undated.
(Courtesy of the Historical Archive of Smederevo, SUBNOR collection, uncatalogued)



Poster announcing Ljotić's lecture in Kruševac, circa 1937 (Courtesy of the Smederevo Museum, uncatalogued)



Poster announcing Ljotić's lecture in Smederevo, May 1937 (Courtesy of the Smederevo Museum, uncatalogued)

because it's not ours. If we borrow someone else's thought, it has no root here and often fails to branch out, dries out and dies. Especially if that is done incidentally, without deep conviction, which is like raked soil for a transplanted plant."⁴⁶ In fact, "Zbor is a self-born, autochthonous movement – Zbor is the inexorable result of Yugoslav national history."⁴⁷ The antipode to ZBOR was found in the Yugoslav Radical Union and its president Milan Stojadinović. Unlike Ljotić, whose idea was genuine and had sprung from the people, Stojadinović, impressed by Hitler's and Mussolini's successes, went to Rome and Berlin on an "apprenticeship" to learn from the masters of fascism.⁴⁸ Also, in contrast to Hitler, who had first been a "hero and martyr" in the war, Milan Stojadinović was a slacker during the war, who had, driven by pragmatic reasons, embraced fascism, albeit not genuine fascism but its bastardized form.

Although fascists and ZBOR members were both nationalists, their nationalism was portrayed as different. Dimitrije Ljotić saw fascism and Hitlerism as "transitional conditions" after the fall of liberal democracy, whose nationalism was actually an extension of Germany's and Italy's earlier imperialist nationalism.⁴⁹ In contrast, ZBOR's nationalism was modern but seeped in the Christian spirit and hence panhuman.⁵⁰ Dimitrije Ljotić believed that it "must serve the lofty ethical ideals of our society and, if we are also members of the international community, the general ethical objectives of the international community and humanity."⁵¹ He claimed that Hitler's *Mein Kampf* had dismantled many "Jewish-internationalist misconceptions," but it "introduced among its people this new misconception, the denial of objec-

⁴⁶ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Dve mere," *Sabrana dela* 2, 109.

⁴⁷ Anonim, "Zbor–Fašizam–Hitlerizam–Boljševizam," *Otađzbina*, 15. 12. 1935; See also: Djoko Slijepčević, "Naš kulturni problem," *Nova smena*, maj 1938.

⁴⁸ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Poruka fašističkom šegrtu," *Sabrana dela* 6, 136.

⁴⁹ Anonim, "Zbor–Fašizam–Hitlerizam–Boljševizam," *Otađzbina*, 15. 12. 1935; Dimitrije Ljotić, "Dogadjaji u Evropi," *Sabrana dela* 1, 123; Dimitrije Ljotić, "Bespuće," *Sabrana dela* 2, 121; Dimitrije Ljotić, "Staro i novo," *Sabrana dela* 1, 64; Miloslav Vasiljević, *Kriza demokratije i budući oblik vladavine*, 41.

⁵⁰ N. P., "Nacionalizam i boljševizam," *Otađzbina*, 12. 11. 1936; Velibor Jonić, "Praotački greh," *Otađzbina*, 19. 6. 1937; Dimitrije Ljotić, *Naš put*, 6; Velibor Jonić, *Ministar prosvete govori*, 5; Velibor Jonić, *Problem naše duhovne orijentacije*, 15.

⁵¹ Anonim, "Efikasan lek," *Otađzbina*, 27. 5. 1936.

tive, panhuman truth, popularized it and made it the faith of the state and nation.” Thus, it distanced itself from the Christian view and came closer to the Jewish belief in one superior people.⁵² He held that co-existence between nations was possible, and that nationalism does not necessarily lead to war. “Lastly, there are nationalists in the struggle against the Bolshevik international who have yet to understand that a lack of understanding for a neighbor’s nationalism is in fact abetting one’s deadly foes.⁵³

Palingenetic Myth within ZBOR’s ideology

Published in 1991, Roger Griffin’s *The Nature of Fascism* became one of the most influential books in the study of fascism. Although its conclusions were often contested⁵⁴ and Griffin somewhat revised them in his later works, the definition it provided became dogma in comparative fascist studies. Griffin says: “Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism”.⁵⁵ Therefore, fascism is understood as an ideology based on the myth of rebirth (palingenesis) and whose nationalism is fundamentally opposed to the legacy of the French Revolution. It is also a deeply revolutionary phenomenon, which attacks existing modernity in the name of a new vision of life or alternative modernity.⁵⁶ Briefly touching on the topic of ZBOR, Griffin argued that it was a proto-fascist movement because the palingenetic impulse was not pronounced enough to make it a true fascist movement.⁵⁷ In the following lines, I will attempt to counter this argument.

⁵² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Naš nacionalizam,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 106.

⁵³ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Degeneracija rata,” *Sabrana dela* 10, 218.

⁵⁴ Cf. Roger Griffin, Werner Loh, Andreas Umland, eds, *Fascism Past and Present, West and East* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2014).

⁵⁵ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991), 26.

⁵⁶ Roger Griffin, „Fascism’s Modernist Revolution: A New Paradigm for the Study of Right-wing Dictatorships”, *Fascism*, Vol. 5, (2016): 119.

⁵⁷ Griffin’s argument was based on the scarce literature on ZBOR available in English. See Jacob Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934–1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); Dimitrije Djordjević, “Fascism in Yugoslavia: 1918–1941,” in *Native Fascism in Successor States*, ed. Peter Sugar (Santa Barbara: ABC/Clío Press

In my opinion, the paling genetic impulse was the very bedrock of ZBOR's ideology.

For Dimitrije Ljotić and his followers, the victory in World War I was the happiest moment in history because the Yugoslavs finally found themselves united in a single state. Those who personally fought in the war felt they had taken part in a great heroic feat and realized the command of their ancestors. After demobilization, Dimitrije Ljotić planned to live peacefully in Smederevo, convinced that his job was done. But the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes did not develop as they would have liked. The unity of the people they had dreamt of was increasingly proving impossible, and the king they had put their hopes in proved incapable of providing stability. The Yugoslav peoples were growing apart, and corruption was rampant. Awareness that they were living in decadent times was slowly emerging, as the poem "Our Days" by Vladislav Petković Dis describes. "The rotten stench of decay" wafted through Yugoslavia.⁵⁸

Dimitrije Ljotić concluded that morality had never been as endangered as then, that they were living in a "time of social anomalies, debauchery, immorality and tainted conscience."⁵⁹ People could not find their feet, he argued. "And so we wallow in rot, decay and stench, suffocating in mud. And so we lost our [sense of] shame and we take pride in the very things that our ancestors were ashamed of";⁶⁰ "we mock virtue and hold evil in high regard, we are merciful and considerate to it."⁶¹ Resolved to take a stand against that state of affairs, together with like-minded associates, he launched the weekly *Otadžbina*, which in 1934 wrote: "And after the war, we stumbled into a swamp of moral decadence, affairs, bartering and fighting with each other about petty personal interests. Gone are enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, and eagerness,

1971), 125–134; Ivan Avakumović, "Yugoslavia's Fascist Movements", in *Native Fascism in Successor States*, 135–143.

⁵⁸ Federal Archive Berlin-Lichterfelde (Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, hereafter BArch), Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt), Collection no. R. 58, R 58/9196, YNM ZBOR pamphlet *Naši dani*.

⁵⁹ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Da ne bude dockan," *Sabrana dela* 1, 92; Dimitrije Ljotić, "Dvanaesti je čas," *Sabrana dela* 5, 126.

⁶⁰ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Ljubljana," *Sabrana dela* 5, 38.

⁶¹ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Jedan težak slučaj," *Sabrana dela* 1, 78.

and selfish calculations rule in their place.”⁶² Many Yugoslav nationalists shared his disappointment. The year when *Otadžbina* was launched, Miloš Crnjanski lamented the spiritual state of affairs in the country: “It was then said that wars are always followed by times of questionable morals, music, dancing, luxury and pursuit of pleasure. In that way, after bloody eras, either in wars or revolutions, humanity, exhausted, rests. It needs to forget. There is no more horrible and immoral motto than that. If there was any truth in that, then every idea, every thrill, every sacrifice would be meaningless, and worse – futile and mad.”⁶³ Also in 1934, the *Četnik* commander and leader of the National Defense, Ilija Trifunović Birčanin, regretfully declared that “before 1912, there was no greater honor than to call oneself a worker for the nation,” but that they were now seen as “empty-headed dreamers,” whereas the true heroes were “football players, boxers, and actors.”⁶⁴

At the fringes of this broader nationalistic wave were ardent Christians. Velibor Jonić complained that, after World War I, there was a rise of the man-animal. “For him, idealism and being principled lost all meaning and were replaced by doubt and cynicism.”⁶⁵ Djoko Slijepčević believed that they were living in bad times but that “ideologues of a new world” were emerging. “And their ideology is contained in the words of the Apostle: that Lord Jesus Christ becomes all in all.”⁶⁶ More specifically, ZBOR was, in a way, a synthesis of two complementary yet distinct impulses, the first of which was integral-national, secular, an intellectual displeasure with the state and the nation’s condition, whereas the second was spiritual, essential dissatisfaction with the condition of society, morality, and individuals. To quote Dimitrije Najdanović, “Zbor [was] a powerful bridge between the eternal principles of the racially biological and spiritual structure of the people and the most

⁶² Anonim, “Univerzitetska omladina,” *Otadžbina*, 7. 4. 1934.

⁶³ Miloš Crnjanski, “U slavu branilaca Beograda,” *Vreme*, 29. 4. 1934.

⁶⁴ Ilija Trifunović Birčanin, “Predgovor,” in Vojin Puljević, *Nacionalno vaspitanje* (Beograd: Narodna odbrana, 1934).

⁶⁵ Velibor Jonić, *Najvažniji problem*, 3.

⁶⁶ Djoko Slijepčević, “U znaku vremena,” *Hrišćanska misao*, June 1937, 95–96; also Djoko Slijepčević, “Inteligencija i narod,” *Hrišćanska misao*, January 1936, 1–2; Djoko Slijepčević, “Protivnici hrišćanske misli,” *Nova smena*, June 1938; Djoko Slijepčević, “Veliki praznik nacije,” *Nova smena*, November 1938.

up-to-date imperative of present-day, conditional reality, the bridge between experience and science.”⁶⁷ The fact that Stanislav Krakov and Aleksa Todorović equally belonged to the movement best illustrates those two factions. On one hand, there was the modernist writer, a film and radio enthusiast, who kept the company of actresses and aviators; on the other hand was the commoner priest from the provincial town of Kraljevo, Bishop Nikolaj’s right-hand man, the leader of a Christian evangelical movement known as *Bogomoljci*. In other circumstances, those two men would have probably never met. What brought them together? Both believed that society was on the wrong track, that it was decadent, soft and rotten and that it needed to be regenerated and re-forged with new splendor. The common ground of their desires was personified precisely by Dimitrije Ljotić, a man who united both of those impulses. He wrote: “Humanity has made the utmost effort to govern its fate. However, it’s never been clearer how powerless it has proved in that. Despite daily agreements, there are endless misunderstandings. It’s as if we’ve become toys in the hands of our own material and moral creations.”⁶⁸

It was precisely the combination of those two impulses that made ZBOR different from other movements that advocated integral Yugoslavism. None of the other movements or intellectuals had such a pronounced paligenetic impulse.⁶⁹ Unlike the others, ZBOR pushed re-birth of the nation – its “resurrection” – to the forefront of its ideology.⁷⁰ The nation had to be re-forged, purged from all “parasites” and put on the pedestal it deserved. ZBOR members proudly claimed that they were

⁶⁷ D(imitrije) N(ajdanović), “Naše znamenje,” *Otadžbina*, 6. 1. 1937.

⁶⁸ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Narod i režim,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 57.

⁶⁹ The Yugoslav Action also harbored the idea of the rebirth of the nation, but in a much lesser form. See Stojan Jeremić, “Vaskrs jugoslovenstva,” *Jugoslovenska reč*, 15. 4. 1933; Even during the occupation, ZBOR’s members and former members did not give up on the idea of a “reborn” new country, although that was more aimed at accepting the German new order than on the autochthonous idea of revolution developed in the interwar period. See Velibor Jonić, *Ministar prosvete govori*, IX–X; Nebojša Jovanović, *Smederevo je bilo dobro obnovljeno*, 141.

⁷⁰ Cf: Dimitrije Ljotić, “Samouništenje Španije,” *Sabrana dela* 4, 39; Dimitrije Ljotić, “Obnova i njene kočnice,” *Sabrana dela* 10, 112.

the “only revivalist movement of the people.”⁷¹ Dimitrije Ljotić believed that he and his supporters had been tasked with achieving this exacting mission and devotedly worked on it. Reflecting the above mentioned orientation of the movement, the authority of the task of reviving Yugoslavia came from two sources: God and their awareness of the *Zeitgeist*, i.e., historical moment, in which they lived.⁷²

Although Dimitrije Ljotić and his followers were convinced that they were living in a time of decadence and immorality,⁷³ they believed that it must and could be ended.⁷⁴ They thought that a new age was on the horizon and saw themselves as its “apostles” and “trailblazers.”⁷⁵ However, their opponents branded them “reactionaries,” people whose time had passed and who advocated returning to the past. Dimitrije Ljotić replied: “Epochs don’t die like humans, and new ones don’t emerge like humans are born: a man was alive until yesterday, and now he’s already dead; he didn’t exist yesterday and was born last night. An epoch disappears slowly, and a new one dawns. Thus, for a long time, even for a very long time, they co-exist in life: the departing with the coming age.”⁷⁶ Consequently, defenders of the old age and protagonists of the “change” existed at the same time, too. However, while the former are waning, the latter are on the rise: like an organism, one of them is old and dying, and the other is young and brimming with strength.⁷⁷ Ljotić was convinced that a new age was dawning and that it would prove him and his movement right. ZBOR’s ideologue Miloslav Vasiljević claimed: “Every age has its own problems and way of seeing truth in them and finding the right solution.”⁷⁸ ZBOR’s ideology was portrayed as the greatest expression of the new age, compared to which all

⁷¹ AJ, 38-353-501, Anonim, “ZBOR će pobediti,” *Vihor*, 13. 11. 1937; Anonim, “Na raskršću,” *Vihor*, 20. 3. 1937.

⁷² Velibor Jonić, *Problem naše duhovne orijentacije*, 13.

⁷³ Mitrofan Matić, “Pobuna protiv današnjice,” *Novi put*, 18. 9. 1938.

⁷⁴ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Naš izborni proglas,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 105.

⁷⁵ Anonim, “Smena generacija,” *Zbor*, 20. 10. 1935; Djoko Slijepčević, “Između dve epohe,” *Nova smena*, September 1938.

⁷⁶ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Na prelomu,” *Sabrana dela* 3, 77; Mitrofan Matić, “U susret novom dobu,” *Novi put*, 4. 9. 1940.

⁷⁷ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Dve revolucije,” *Sabrana dela* 4, 54.

⁷⁸ Miloslav Vasiljević, *Čovek i zajednica*, 37.

alternatives were backward and outdated.⁷⁹ Communism and democracy, they believed, were obsolete and non-revolutionary. “In comparison with our movement, communism is the embodiment of reaction, nonsense, and lack of culture,” the Split-based journal *Vihor* wrote.⁸⁰ They denied allegations that ZBOR’s ideology was a dark ideology of the past. Velibor Jonić declared: “Our program is the expression of a new, different understanding of the world and life,” adding that there was nothing non-modern in it.⁸¹ Dimitrije Ljotić argued that the accusation that he proposed a return to the Middle Ages was ludicrous because it was “impossible to go back.”⁸² Ljotić believed that, after all, “drawing on the past to prove that an institution is needed in the present is very feeble proof.” Therefore, he spoke on behalf of the future. The central motif of ZBOR’s ideology was the “new age,” often capitalized.⁸³ “In a sunburst begins the Birth of the New Age and New Freedom,” ZBOR emphasized.⁸⁴ However, this “new age” would not come on its own, regardless of how close on the horizon it might seem. It was represented as the rising sun, which can be seen in the distance, but bringing it closer to Yugoslavia would require the joint effort of its devotees. A revolutionary leap was needed: “Born in the darkness of the great night and deadly darkness, your Revolutionary Quest has broken the clouds of twenty-year-long gloom... You, Defiant, Young, irresistibly Insurgent, Revolutionary, you who suffer and endure, fight and build, you, the chosen Battalion of New Change, who brings the New Age, New Man, and New State.”⁸⁵

“We are the participants in the greatest revolution that ever was,” claimed Dimitrije Ljotić. ZBOR’s vocabulary was full of revolutionary

⁷⁹ Miloslav Vasiljević, *Zboraški sociološki trebnik*, 31, 198; Miloslav Vasiljević, *Križa demokratije i budući oblik vladavine*, 41–43; Miloslav Vasiljević, *Čovek i zajednica*, 375.

⁸⁰ AJ, 38-353-501, R, “Ko nas naziva fašistima?,” *Vihor*, 8. 3. 1937.

⁸¹ Velibor Jonić, “Na jedan prigovor – Ko nije savremen?,” *Otađzbina*, 22. 3. 1936.

⁸² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Na drugi prigovor,” *Sabrana dela* 3, 104; Dimitrije Ljotić, “Staleži i Zbor,” *Sabrana dela* 3, 114.

⁸³ Velibor Jonić, *Šta hoće Zbor?*, 23; Mitrofan Matić, “U susret novom dobu,” *Novi put*, 4. 9. 1940.

⁸⁴ Mitrofan Matić, “Ide novo doba,” *Naš put*, 28. 1. 1940.

⁸⁵ Mitrofan Matić, “Zboraškoj vojsci smene za Novu godinu,” *Naš put*, 7. 1. 1940.

symbolism. Mitrofan Matić announced: “We are the New Yugoslav Generation. Our steps can be heard. Our time is coming. We are approaching. We, the scorned, rejected, tortured. We, the young and new.”⁸⁶ Dimitrije Najdanović said that theirs was “the revolutionism of St. Sava,”⁸⁷ and *Vihor* wrote of “national revolutionism.”⁸⁸ ZBOR’s flyers and articles preached revolution.⁸⁹ Essentially, ZBOR members had a deeply ingrained awareness, constantly bolstered by the movement’s leadership, of being the avant-garde of the revivalist revolution.⁹⁰ “The masses are inert, conservative,” Dimitrije Ljotić believed, and they only tread “well trodden” paths. Only the initiated can spur the masses into action.⁹¹ But, as revolution had always had a negative and anti-state (communist) connotation in Yugoslavia, ZBOR underlined that their revolution was distinctly different. There were two revolutions, Ljotić wrote: “One has split people into herds, packs. In them, humans lost all signs of dignity and humanity and became beasts.⁹² That revolution wreaks destruction because destruction is much easier than creation.⁹³ “The revolution of the beast-man does not destroy only cultural heritage... It also destroys men: it mars the soul, pollutes the heart, spoils the mind. And then medicine is needed to make a new man capable of true life in order, work, freedom, all kinds of justice and goodness.”⁹⁴ On the other hand, the revolution he wanted to achieve was portrayed as creative and progressive. “The second revolution brings people together into a harmonious whole, into friendship and brotherhood.”⁹⁵ Faced with choosing between “constructive enthusiasm and creative

⁸⁶ Mitrofan Matić, “U borbu hrle legije plamene mladosti,” *Otadžbina*, 6. 1. 1937.

⁸⁷ Dimitrije Najdanović, “Raskol ili saborsko jedinstvo,” *Hrišćanska misao*, November-December 1939, pp. 2–6.

⁸⁸ AJ, 38-353-501, Anonim, “Omladina – udarna snaga Zbora,” *Vihor*, 20. 3. 1937.

⁸⁹ IAB, 1929, κ-7, Leaflet: Great protest rally in Smederevo; Anonim, „Zbor–Fašizam–Hitlerizam–Boljševizam,” *Otadžbina*, 15. 12. 1935.

⁹⁰ “We are the movement of the best, most honourable, most courageous and most dedicated!” Dimitrije Ljotić, “U Zbor!,” *Sabrana dela* 3, 85.

⁹¹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ka ekonomskoj demokratiji,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 152.

⁹² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Dve revolucije,” *Sabrana dela* 4, 55.

⁹³ Velibor Jonić, *Ministar prosvete govori*, 2.

⁹⁴ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Dve revolucije,” *Sabrana dela* 4, 55–56.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

joy” and “destructive rage and detrimental drunkenness,” one must not remain undecided. “Those who fail to choose the first, by default choose the second path. Abstinence is of no use here.⁹⁶ “The time has come when we must uncompromisingly separate the healthy from the lepers and when all those who reject the principle of honor and freedom do the same wrong to their people as those against whom they rise and against whom their conscience protested before.”⁹⁷

The ZBOR revolution was portrayed as the only way to end the time of corruption, immorality, and darkness.⁹⁸ It was the only way for the Yugoslav people to survive – if that failed to happen, it would waste away and drown in the sea of its own decadence. Only ZBOR’s path could lead the people to salvation: “Every other path will lead it into utmost ruin. Every other path is the path that leads to its well-earned death. Only one path is the path of life, and that is ZBOR’s path. Hence, if your people are to endure, ZBOR must triumph.”⁹⁹ Voters were promised: “Zbor knows where salvation lies. Zbor has shown you the road to salvation. Even now Zbor is showing you that road. All the quacks are dead. The illness is not only uncured but also incorrectly treated because it has gotten worse. You’ve tried everything – everything except what Zbor proposed. Now nothing can help you except heeding Zbor. Zbor will save you. No doubt about it. With God’s help, which has so far directed, sustained, defended, and encouraged it. Come to Zbor now!”¹⁰⁰ However, the fact that ZBOR was right did not necessarily mean that it would win because not even God’s support, which was, as they repeatedly emphasized, on ZBOR’s side, could ensure its triumph and the advent of rebirth. Dimitrije Ljotić underlined that a Christian believer must not become a fatalist¹⁰¹ and must not believe that it was enough to believe in God; instead, action was crucial. Human action, with God’s help, is the means of rebirth. “It is not set in stone that ZBOR

⁹⁶ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Sudbonosna raskrsnica,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 88; see also Anonim, “Još o Zlatnoj sredini,” *Otadžbina*, 7. 8. 1936.

⁹⁷ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Za krst časni i slobodu zlatnu,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 102.

⁹⁸ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Naš izborni proglas,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 105.

⁹⁹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Dva pitanja,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 91.

¹⁰⁰ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Mesto zaključka,” *Sabrana dela* 9, 190.

¹⁰¹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Iz moga života,” *Sabrana dela* 11, 32.

will win. But ZBOR is a possibility for the salvation of our people. If we toil and refuse to rest. If we scatter and not run around like hamsters. If we burn and not rot.”¹⁰² That is the duty of every true nationalist and Christian. “If our less than beautiful present cannot exhilarate us, we will work with exhilaration to repair it. But let’s not turn our heads away from it! Let’s not run away from our duty!”¹⁰³

So, how was this revolution to be achieved? How would the new age come? Dimitrije Ljotić held that rebirth could be achieved only when a new man was re-forged, when the new avant-garde takes the nation into its own hands and “purges” it of its enemies. Thus, the role of the revolution was twofold: on one hand, creating the “new man” and, on the other, removing the “unwanted” from the national organism. Consequently, it was both “creative” and “purifying.”¹⁰⁴

Just like the Gospel teaches that new wine should not be poured into old wineskins, so “old” people cannot bring about the new age, Dimitrije Ljotić believed.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, a new man needed to be forged. As per his custom, Dimitrije Ljotić used a biblical parable to explain what the new man was supposed to be like. He believed that God had created three types of humans: cold, hot and lukewarm. The archetype of a lukewarm person was embodied by Pontius Pilate. The lukewarm do not know the truth and have no ideals or aims.¹⁰⁶ They are the most repulsive to God: “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Rev 3:16-17). On the other hand, hot people are full of love and life and fight for justice and truth. Cold people are their opposite and consciously fight for evil.¹⁰⁷ The hot or “sunny” man is the reflection of the best in

¹⁰² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Dva pitanja,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 92.

¹⁰³ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ne klasa nego nacija!,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 100.

¹⁰⁴ AJ, 38-432-584, Anonim, “Neće dugo proći kad će Herceg Bosna, sa Sarajevom na čelu, biti veliki primer i putokaz svim Jugoslovenima od Varne do Jadrana,” *Jugoslovenska pošta*, 10. 3. 1938.

¹⁰⁵ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Živa crkva,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 106.

¹⁰⁶ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ideali savremene omladine,” *Sabrana dela* 6, 196.

¹⁰⁷ Dimitrije Ljotić held that Jews were an excellent example of a cold nation. Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ideali savremene omladine,” *Sabrana dela* 6, 197-198.

people and brings “light” to the state.¹⁰⁸ Those who align with ZBOR must not be lukewarm: “We need heroes. They might be few, but they can pepper the whole world.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, the key characteristics of the new man were unconditional and fanatical belief in the idea, discipline, obedience to the leader, and readiness to suffer and sacrifice oneself.¹¹⁰

“Today, we don’t just need heads full of knowledge, if indeed there are any, but also apostles and trailblazers of a new age, new faith and new ideals. We are not in such dire need of subtle analysts of ideas and manifestations of life in general or creators of grand philosophical and sociological systems, although it wouldn’t hurt to have them, but [we desperately need] people with a genuine, honest and spontaneous urge to selflessly serve truth, common interests, goals, and ideals.”¹¹¹ Unconditional belief in the idea and unshakeable fanaticism characterize the real man, the man with an “eagle” vision, whereas pragmatists are essentially like “hedgehogs and hamsters.” Hamsters are motivated by selfishness and hedgehogs by self-centeredness.¹¹² “The policy of the earthly kingdom is implemented by people of a petty and feeble stature; that is a short-term policy and the policy of hamsters and hedgehogs.”¹¹³ The quest to find people worthy of the idea is not easy, but it is the only way, and his supporters should not lose heart because they are few: “Our strength lies not in numbers or in votes or in the numbers of seats in the parliament but in the immeasurable value of our aspirations, our firm will to achieve them, our unshakeable faith that we are on the right path, our uncompromising, firm, and pure position on that path.”¹¹⁴

Other ZBOR members also emphasized the strength of their convictions.¹¹⁵ In fact, ZBOR harbored an almost irrational faith that the strength of their conviction would be enough to achieve a turnaround.

¹⁰⁸ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Stražilovo,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 70-71; Anonim, “Dajte svetlosti,” *Otadžbina*, 2. 2. 1936.

¹⁰⁹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Šta čini veličinu našeg naroda,” *Sabrana dela* 6, 116.

¹¹⁰ IAB, 1929, κ-7, Leaflett: Dear comrade.

¹¹¹ Anonim, “Efikasan lek,” *Otadžbina*, 27. 5. 1936.

¹¹² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Na orlovski uzlet!,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 68.

¹¹³ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Politika carstva zemaljskoga,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 111-112.

¹¹⁴ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Zašto smo listu istakli?,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 101; Dimitrije Ljotić, “Smernice,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 10.

¹¹⁵ Mitrofan Matić, “U borbu hrle legije plamene mladosti,” *Otadžbina*, 6. 1. 1937.

Besides public appearances, that feeling also permeates their internal documents. A letter to one member declared: "We will come to power, God willing. But, as our comrade and president says, not by the will of the people or the will of the powers that be but by the force of truth and the loyalty and diligence with which we serve it and which we have followed and have at our disposal because we have only ever been guided by it."¹¹⁶ Dimitrije Ljotić admitted that ZBOR had not fully planned out how the "change" would play out, but he underlined that it must be believed in: "We cannot go into details; with all our conviction, we just indicate the paths and means that can only lead us out of the present-day position and can bring us to the true transformation of our state and real rebirth of our people."¹¹⁷ ZBOR's members must not question the certainty of their victory; they must not "sink" into political games and pragmatism. This led him to ask the members of ZBOR: "Have you fearlessly fought against the misconceptions around you that fill our public life, dueling against them with Zbor's truth as your weapon? Or have you spinelessly and meekly kept silent, hiding your eyes like Peter the Apostle before the servant girl and servants of Caiaphas?"¹¹⁸ If you have not done so, you are a stranger to Zbor. You're just a man whose lips speak of Zbor. The idea of Zbor is not [truly] yours."¹¹⁹

Using the widely known biblical episode of the Denial of Peter (Lk. 22:54-60; Mk. 14:69-70; Mt. 14:69-70; Jn. 18:13-27), Ljotić highlighted the difference between ZBOR's and Christ's mission. Whereas Christ's mission was eternal and inexorable, ZBOR's intention must be realized in human time, and any denial or disowning of ZBOR's "truth" inevitably leads to "excommunication." Whereas St. Peter was forgiven after the Resurrection (Jn. 21:15-17), ZBOR would show no mercy for recreants. He compared those who did not believe in the resurrection of Yugoslavia with those who doubted the Resurrection of Christ.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ AS, BIA, II-69, Main ZBOR Secretariat to Miodrag Nestorović, 5 August 1940.

¹¹⁷ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Ovim putem," *Sabrana dela* 1, 139.

¹¹⁸ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Dva pitanja," *Sabrana dela* 5, 92.

¹¹⁹ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Dva pitanja," *Sabrana dela* 5, 92.

¹²⁰ Dimitrije Ljotić, "Uskršnja poruka," *Sabrana dela* 5, 123.

Belief in an idea, of course, entails willingness to sacrifice oneself for that belief. “A thorny road leads to the gates of Resurrection,” ZBOR reminded its members.¹²¹ It underlined: “We ask the best sons of our people to sacrifice themselves and burn in the restoration – moral and material, spiritual and organizational – like the best sons of our people of all three tribes and all three faiths sacrificed themselves in the creation of our nation-state.”¹²² One must not run away from adversity; on the contrary, adversity is beneficial. It makes people better. “Hardship has been for us what his mother earth was to Antaeus,”¹²³ Dimitrije Ljotić told his followers, emphasizing the quality that gave them strength in the past and explaining what would continue to make them strong. In Greek mythology, Antaeus, son of Poseidon and Gaia, was invincible in wrestling matches as long as he remained in contact with the earth. For years he killed his wrestling rivals because his mother earth gave him strength. He was ultimately defeated by Heracles, who held him up in the air, severing his contact with the ground, and crushed him in his arms. The Antaeus metaphor was popular among right-wing intellectuals, who believed that every man was similar to Antaeus – strong as long as he was firmly rooted in the earth from which he came and that he was weak and easily defeated when separated from it. Ljotić, too, thought that men can be hardened only in the face of adversity and that only those who, defying danger, rush into the fight could be “true” sons of ZBOR. As long as he is fighting and depriving himself, a ZBOR member is invincible.¹²⁴ “Only this can redeem our previous sins, [all our] wandering, wavering. Only then will our suffering mean purification and preparation for a true, more beautiful and better life.”¹²⁵ Fighters must be exhilarated by the idea because “exhilaration is a prerequisite of life.”¹²⁶ They have to firmly believe in the idea, but they also need to be fully committed to its realization. “It takes loyalty, which, in turn,

¹²¹ Anonim, “Putem trnja do kapije Vaskrsenja,” *Otadžbina*, 19. 5. 1935.

¹²² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ko smo i šta hoćemo,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 102; Mitrofan Matić, “Misao vaskrsenja,” *Novi put*, 24. 4. 1938.

¹²³ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Iz trijumfa u trijumf,” *Sabrana dela* 4, 86.

¹²⁴ Anonim, “Idemo dalje,” *Otadžbina*, 12. 5. 1935.

¹²⁵ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Kakvu politiku hoćemo,” *Sabrana dela* 3, 74.

¹²⁶ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Gore srca!,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 113.

comes from the depth and strength of conviction.”¹²⁷ That makes them genuine fighters, willing to work on the rebirth of the nation. “These fighters must first be reborn themselves. Only then will they be able to serve as an example to others and make others become fanatics, those willing to give the utmost sacrifice in their struggle for Yugoslavia’s safe and better future.”¹²⁸

Ljotić saw war as the ultimate test: “For us, war was never about profit or amusement; it is the most serious, fateful, and heroic task.”¹²⁹ In his view, World War I had purged the army – the bad ones either ran from the war or were killed in it. After the war, a “fatal change” ensued.¹³⁰ For Ljotić, this “fatal change” was the replacement of heroes with cowards and profiteers. During the war, heroes stood at the head of the army, whereas weaklings and cowards were at its rear. However, they swapped places after the war, and “people on the frontlines were replaced by those in the background”, which was a “veritable change of two worldviews and two moralities.”¹³¹ Genuinely good people, people from the trenches, were abandoned in the new state and were not given priority in it.¹³² Those war heroes were to have their place in ZBOR and to go to war once again. Stanislav Krakov, who had fought alongside Ljotić both in the trenches and the political arena, urged other ZBOR members: “Today we must initiate the battle for our survival, and in order to survive, we must begin our battle for the rebirth whose realization we have brought in our hearts as our faith from the battlefields eighteen years ago. Our time has come. Our faith is not a misconception, even if it has been desecrated by others.”¹³³ Velibor Jonić explained what kind of “fatal change” had happened in Yugoslavia: “The warriors returned to their homes and jobs, leaving old generations to organize the newly formed state. And our ancestral sin of rot. Those

¹²⁷ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Dve mere,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 109.

¹²⁸ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Kakvu politiku hoćemo,” *Sabrana dela* 3, 74.

¹²⁹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Stvarni mir ili potajni rat,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 54; Anonim, *Dimitrije Ljotić u Splitu*, 9.

¹³⁰ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Iz moga života,” *Sabrana dela* 11, 45; see Anonim, “Hermafroditki ponos,” *Novi put*, 10. 4. 1938.

¹³¹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Kobna smena,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 79.

¹³² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Iz moga života,” *Sabrana dela* 11, 26.

¹³³ Stanislav Krakov, “Naš čas je došao,” *Otađzbina*, 6. 1. 1937.

older generations, raised amidst tribal ideologies and views, looked upon the new state from their narrow-minded, outdated positions... They gave the state a threefold character in its very name,¹³⁴ failing to understand that it was created as a result of a national revolution rarely seen in world history.”¹³⁵ The idea that warriors are best qualified to lead a country, that they are the avant-garde of a nation, is inherent to fascism. Already during World War I, Mussolini had developed the concept of *trincerocrazia* – rule by those who had fought in the trenches – as a new warrior caste that must come to lead the state.

The new people who will bring a turnaround, Dimitrije Ljotić believed, must be warriors. However, that did not mean that only “trenchocrats” could be protagonists of the change. He believed that being a warrior was a personality trait, which can and must be cultivated. Even those who were not old enough to fight in the war could help their people. Therefore, ZBOR paid a lot of attention to young people. It managed to exert strong influence on high-school students. “The youth is always the same, always young, always eager, always ready to do good deeds and sacrifice itself.”¹³⁶ The young were told that they must “fight” and become “reborn” fighters.”¹³⁷ They were called upon to join “the final, decisive battle for achieving the real Yugoslavia.”¹³⁸ Military terminology was borrowed and brought into the sphere of politics. Streets and universities were to be the trenches of ZBOR’s youth. Mitrofan Matic declared: “Many of our comrades... have left behind personal comforts, honors, and pleasures and, led by the Worthiest, declared a war on rot, stench, treason, cowardice, injustice, and dishonesty, and fearlessly lead the inexorable Army of the irresistible Change into a new Victory.”¹³⁹

To be true “warriors” of ZBOR, they must be disciplined. Dimitrije Ljotić claimed that he had gotten to know the real nature of authority in army service. He realized that discipline was not silly but “organic”

¹³⁴ The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes instead of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

¹³⁵ Velibor Jonić, “Praotadžki greh,” *Otadžbina*, 19. 6. 1937.

¹³⁶ Anonim, “Univerzitetaska omladina,” *Otadžbina*, 7. 4. 1934.

¹³⁷ D. N., “Naše znamenje,” *Otadžbina*, 6. 1. 1937.

¹³⁸ IAB, 1929, κ-7, Leaflet: Great protest rally in Smederevo.

¹³⁹ Mitrofan Matic, “Nad iskidanim pitanjima,” *Naš put*, 14. 1. 1940.

and necessary and did away with his Tolstoyan “misconceptions.”¹⁴⁰ ZBOR argued: “But this kind of organization also requires something else – a great deal of self-discipline. Anyone who wants to be a member of ZBOR must know this: in movements like this, every personal will must be subordinated to the general, common will.”¹⁴¹ Velibor Jonić underlined that they must “defeat themselves,” give up egotism and selfishness and join the [movement’s] apparatus with their comrades.¹⁴² They must become the chosen army, the “army of change.”¹⁴³ That is precisely why the ZBOR anthem, penned by Mitrofan Matić, was called the “army of change.”

Dimitrije Ljotić claimed that “evil had already spread to our society” and that “only ruthless amputation, an operation of the infected parts, could save the rest of the body.”¹⁴⁴ The parable of the “amputation” of an infected, septic limb to allow the rest of the body to survive was used to familiarize the audience with the imminent “cleansing” revolution. ZBOR would play the role of the sword or surgical knife that would perform the amputation: “The entire organism is septic, and the surgical knife that can cut off the spread of sepsis is not in the hands of liberal democracy. A radical operation is needed to save ourselves from this severe illness.”¹⁴⁵ Drawing on the Gospel of Matthew,¹⁴⁶ Dimitrije Ljotić explained how the “cleansing revolution” would essentially be Christian: “The sword of Christ is the lethal blow between His and non-Christian principles, as one interpreter says.” Before Christ came, the world was in a “wretched state of disintegration,” which ended with his coming.¹⁴⁷ However, “Lord Jesus Christ is not opposed to all peace, but only to peace in evil.”¹⁴⁸ Hence, ZBOR would bring war to Yugo-

¹⁴⁰ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Iz moga života,” *Sabrana dela* 11, 17.

¹⁴¹ Anonim, “Putem trnja do kapije Vaskrsenja,” *Otadžbina*, 19. 5. 1935.

¹⁴² Velibor Jonić, *Šta hoće Zbor?*, 22.

¹⁴³ Anonim, *Dimitrije Ljotić u Splitu*, 24.

¹⁴⁴ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Jedan težak slučaj,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 77.

¹⁴⁵ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Lutanja,” *Sabrana dela* 3, 126.

¹⁴⁶ “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Mt. 10:34–35).

¹⁴⁷ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Mač Zbora,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 142–143.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

slavia and for that reason had a sword on its emblem. The sword is “the surgical knife of society, which we cannot do without,” it is dangerous and will take vengeance on enemies.¹⁴⁹ The amputation must be complete because “if there are any seeds left, the illness will be impossible to cure,”¹⁵⁰ and the resulting state will be worse than the first.¹⁵¹ “We are the pioneers who are building a new future. We are the saviors from this difficult position that our people find themselves in. We are the judges to wrongdoers. We are the bearers of new justice and lawfulness. We are the conscience that will rumble and speak. We are the thunder that will scorch the corrupt, the cliques, the profiteers, the moneygrubbers. We are fighters for a new Yugoslavia.”¹⁵² ZBOR would judge their enemies for their sins, announced Dimitrije Ljotić. One of ZBOR’s papers was, therefore, called *Judgment (Sudjenje)*, but it was soon banned.¹⁵³ Whereas some people can be brought to the “right path”, others are hopeless, and they must be eliminated: “And only those who are afraid of God are not afraid of drubbing, and that’s how we know that there are people that can be brought to their senses only by fear of being beaten, since they already choose to live in darkness and even refuse to know God.”¹⁵⁴ Enemies were often called animals or pests, such as “cockroaches,” “snakes,” and “spiders,” and it was claimed that Yugoslavia needed “pest extermination.”

Although ZBOR took care not to overdo calls for physical violence while the Kingdom of Yugoslavia existed, it is clear that, in ZBOR’s ideology, violence was seen as a means of social regeneration. Enemies were threatened: “Victory is in the creation of a new conscience. But you don’t understand that. It’s for the best. Because you will once feel that conscience on your back. And then you’ll shut your filthy mouth.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Mač Zbora,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 143–144.

¹⁵⁰ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Zašto smo listu istakli?,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 100.

¹⁵¹ “Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.” (Lk. 11:26).

¹⁵² Dimitrije Ljotić, “Samo napred,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 136.

¹⁵³ Branislav Žorž, *Tragom učitelja*, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Dimitrije Ljotić, “Bosanska krajina,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 44.

¹⁵⁵ Anonim, “Jednoj smrdibubi,” *Otdžbina*, 2. 6. 1935; see also AJ, 37-21-152, Leaflet: Dear comrade, 11 November 1940.

Members were advised to use violence against communists and were told that they were not that fearsome and could be tamed “like all filth can be tamed, of which there is a lot amongst our people.”¹⁵⁶ The White Eagles, ZBOR’s youth organization, as the cell leader at the University of Zagreb, Zoran Vuković, wrote home, were “armed to the teeth.”¹⁵⁷ In Croatia, besides communists, they also had to contend with the Croatian nationalists. But the violence of ZBOR members was still far from that of the fascists in Italy and Germany. In addition, they were often targets rather than initiators of attacks. The communists disrupted and attacked ZBOR conferences throughout Yugoslavia.¹⁵⁸

Conclusion

Dimitrije Ljotić strove to distance himself from fascism in his texts, arguing that he and his movement had little in common with the ideology of the Italian regime. An overly close identification with fascism could be construed as betrayal of Yugoslavism. At the same time, his criticism of political opponents usually revolved around the claim that they were not genuine national movements but imitations of foreign trends. Therefore, for ZBOR, admitting that the movement borrowed ideas from elsewhere meant political suicide. A closer reading of the texts authored by ZBOR members reveals many expressions of solidarity with fascist movements and regimes throughout Europe. Despite denying the generic features of fascism, ZBOR harbored awareness – even if diffuse – of belonging to the broader ideational wave of fascism.

Applying Roger Griffin’s theoretical model to ZBOR, it becomes evident that ZBOR must be classed among fascist movements. The paligenetic myth was an obvious lynchpin around which the entire ideology of the movement revolved. The belief in the advent of a “reborn”

¹⁵⁶ “You ask us what to do and what steps to take against the communists who have raised their voices too much in your town. We think that you need to fight them in line with Zbor’s demands, but your temperament will determine if you will use the methods that have proved the most effective.” (AS, BIA, I-32, Main ZBOR Secretariat to Čedomir Beljić, 3 July 1940).

¹⁵⁷ AS, BIA, IV-50, Zoran Vuković to Danica Vuković, 31. March 1939.

¹⁵⁸ Mladen Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića*, 72–83.

or “resurrected” state, in which all “evils” tormenting the modern society would be banished, was the fundamental premise of ZBOR’s *credo*. ZBOR’s alternative modernity had a clear revolutionary aspect. Advocating a revolutionary change of regime, which would be enacted by the “army of change,” ZBOR spoke of a need to “cleanse” or “purge” the national organism. “Parasites” and “septic tissue” had to be surgically removed from the national organism. It was precisely this reasoning that led to their acceptance of physical violence as a regenerative power.