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INFLUENCES OF ITALIAN FASCISM ON THE IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL PRACTICE OF THE ORGANISATION OF YUGOSLAV NATIONALISTS (ORJUNA)

Abstract: The goal of this paper is to show in which segments and to what extent Italian fascism influenced the establishment of the fundamental ideology and political practice of the Organisation of Yugoslav Nationalists (ORJUNA). Responses to these questions would contribute to placing of the emergence of the extremist right-wing ideology into a general context of ideological trends in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s and point to some, until recently little known, sources of ideological influence from Europe.

Keywords: fascism, Organisation of Yugoslav Nationalists, integral Yugoslavianism, working class, corporate state, terror, dictatorship, Yugoslav National Movement Zbor.

The period between the two world wars was characterised by the onset of extremist right-wing movements and in certain countries (Italy, Germany and Spain) their concepts were adopted as the official ideology of the ruling regimes. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS), which experienced all political and economic turmoil as other parts of continental Europe, was not excluded from the presence of extremist movements on the political scene.

The goal of this paper is to show in which segments and to what extent Italian fascism influenced the establishment of the fundamental ideology and political practice of the Organisation of Yugoslav Nationalists (ORJUNA). Responses to these questions would contribute to placing of the emergence of the extremist right-wing ideology into a general context of ideological trends in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s and point to some, until recently little known, sources of ideological influence from Europe.

Vasilije Dragosavljević

The socialist renegade Benito Mussolini went through a complex process of ideological and political metamorphosis in his rise to the position of an undisputed ruler of Italy. Seeking his way to the Italian masses, by skilfully combining different ideas and approaches, he created an ideological system of fascism, a paradoxal synthesis of the extreme left wing and extreme right wing, of anachronous and modern, rational and irrational, individual and collective.

Mussolini's joining the movement of Italian interventionists which advocated Italy's participation in World War I on the side of the Entente would prove to have the greatest influence on the development of Yugoslav-Italian relations. During his engagement with this movement, Mussolini came into contact with ideas of Enrico Corradini, an ideologist of the right-wing movement of the Association of Nationalists. This party promoted nationalism, militarism and creation of an Italian empire by annexing large territories in North Africa and the Balkans.¹ After the war ended, the opinion of the Italian public that territorial gains were not proportional to the invested war efforts led to a drop in popularity of the interventionists. Seeking wider support in the people, Mussolini turned to extreme nationalism fuelled in Italy by Gabriele D'Annunzio's conquering of Rijeka. Using the national frustration caused by the failed realisation of the London agreement and annexing of Dalmatia to the Kingdom of SHS, Mussolini presented his vision of national politics, where Italy was a direct successor of the Roman Empire, the main goal of which in foreign politics was to turn the Mediterranean into an Italian lake. Mussolini capitalised many times on his fickle support to D'Annunzio's short-lived adventure in Rijeka by managing to gather around himself all the political elements which supported D'Annunzio.²

After the march to Rome and taking over power in October 1922, Mussolini gradually stripped the Parliament of power by January 1925 and introduced totalitarian dictatorship with physical support in the form of a military and police apparatus and fascist squads reorganised within the voluntary fascist militia. In the political area the main support of the regime was the Fascist Party which, through its presence in corporations and other state bodies and institutions, controlled completely the economic and political life in Italy.³

Italian politics in the Balkans and its resonations in the Kingdom of SHS

Considering that he gained power with the help of the Nazi rhetoric and support to the foreign policy programme of the Association of Nationalists (which

¹ J. Weiss, *The Fascist Tradition*, New York 1967, 36–37.

² Љубинка Тошева-Карповић, Идејна и програмска оријентација Данунцијевог похода на Ријеку, Ријека 1980, 110–111.

³ Ignazio Silone, Fascism, Its Origination and Development, Zagreb 1935, 67–150.

merged with the Fascist Party in 1923), Mussolini's foreign policy had an extremely anti-Yugoslav character. The Kingdom of Italy conducted, even before the march to Rome, a series of obstructions in the process of establishment of the Kingdom of SHS. The Italian pre-fascists governments occupied Dalmatia, supported the creation of an Albanian separatist organisation - the Kosovo Committee, provided arms and training for Albanian kachaks and financed their political wing, i.e. the party Jemiet, encouraged the separatist uprising in Montenegro on 6 January 1919 (the so-called Christmas rebellion), assisted financially the organisation of the Montenegrin army in exile, supported the Austrian Heimwehr in an undeclared Yugoslav-Austrian war on Koruška and granted quiet support to D'Annunzio's adventure in Rijeka.⁴ This multinational coalition of anti-Yugoslav forces which Italy created at the end of World War I was further supported by the new fascist regime so that it continued with its endeavours during the entire period between the two wars. The anti-Yugoslav policy of Rome, coupled with a series of internal political difficulties, such as a danger from a Bolshevik revolution (due to great success of the KPJ (Communist Party) at the elections in 1920) and clashes between unitarian and federalist constitutional concepts, led to the creation of a new political entity in the form of ORJUNA. Since it originated as a form of resistance to anti-Yugoslav politics of Italy and its Balkan satellites, ORJUNA itself represented an ideologically and ethnically heterogeneous coalition which gathered intellectuals from Dalmatia and Slovenia, members of paramilitary formations from Southern Serbia, Yugoslav refugees who had to leave Julijska krajina and Dalmatia due to fascist terror, as well as members of numerous veteran and patriotic associations from the entire territory of the Kingdom of SHS. Apart from resistance to Italian expansionism, the cohesive factor of these diverse elements was the ideology of the pre-war Yugoslav youth movement.⁵ The core of that ideology was integral Yugoslavianism, i.e. the belief that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes represented three tribes of the same Yugoslav people. At the moment of its establishment, the movement did not have a clear ideology and leaned on a vague vision of a centralised authoritarian state, with a strong nationalist note reflected in the ideology of integral Yugoslavianism. On these foundations and under the influence of Italian fascism, the ideology of ORJUNA gradually acquired, during the period from 1921 to 1929, more defined forms. By analysing the programme texts in the printed media of ORJUNA, it was possible to detect several common features with the ideology and political practice of Italian fascism, such as absolutisation of the state and people's unity, anti-Communism, authoritarianism, anti-clericalism, expansionism, relation with the workers' issue, theory of nationalist revolution, aggressive propaganda activities and use of terror in the fight against political opponents.

⁴ Енес Милак, Италија и Југославија 1931-1937, Београд 1987, 19-31.

⁵ Ivan Bošković, ORJUNA: Ideologija i književnost, Zagreb 2006, 90.

Relation towards the working class

In his theory of the corporate state, Mussolini started with the premise that liberal capitalism as the economic doctrine experienced a downfall and that it was unable to ensure further regular functioning of the economy and society. The root of the crisis of this economic system was found in uneven distribution of wealth and its inability to resolve the conflict between work and capital, the escalation of which led to the Bolshevik revolution. In order to prevent such a scenario, the Fascist Party began during 1921 with the establishment of party unions which had the goal to separate the working class, as the most productive and the most dynamic part of the nation, from the influence of the Bolshevik nationalist propaganda and harmonise its interests with other classes of the Italian society. As a former socialist, Mussolini skilfully made some demagogical moves with the goal of winning over Italian workers. He supported strikes and social unrest and accused international capitalism of destroying the strength of the Italian nation by exploiting the Italian working class. Mussolini used a part of the Italian working class which joined the fascist unions in his political fight as strike breakers to crush the strikes organised by the Socialist Party and, on the other hand, he also used them as strikers as a means of pressure on the regime and Italian industrialists who financed the opponents of the Fascist Party. Mussolini offered corporatism to the workers who joined fascism as a new economicpolitical system which was supposed to annul the class differences and lead to an agreement between work and capital with the intervention and control of the state. The basis of this system consisted of corporations which represented associations of employers' and employees' unions within one branch of the economy.⁶ In that way, the former Marxist Mussolini transformed the unions from the class struggle tools into the bodies which simultaneously protected the interests of the working class and harmonised cooperation of working masses with other social life actors. The state held the key role in this system as a mediator and arbiter both between the employers and employees within corporations, and also between corporations themselves.⁷ All corporations selected their representatives who joined the National Council of Corporations which managed the state together with the Great Fascist Council. As a system, corporatism had a goal to harmonise the interests of all social groups in order to strengthen the unity of the nation as a whole.

By analysing numerous articles in ORJUNA papers on the social and political position of the working class in the Kingdom of SHS, it may be concluded that leaders of ORJUNA dedicated great attention to this matter, based upon the model of the Italian fascists. Articles like "Workers' Misery"⁸, "Lawlessness Towards Trade

⁶ Бенито Мусолини, *О корпоративној држави: говори, доктрина и законодавство,* Београд 1937.

⁷ Danilo Gregorić, Italijanski korporativizam, Beograd 1940.

⁸ Anonymous, Workers' Misery, Zagreb Orjuna, yr 1, no. 2 (25. 4. 1923).

Assistants"⁹ and "Nationalists to Yugoslav Workers"¹⁰ warned the relevant authorities about the difficult economic conditions that Yugoslav workers lived in. By following the ideological matrix of fascism, ORJUNA tried to profile itself as a protector of the working class and the only political organisation which was able to tear off the working masses from the anti-state communist propaganda. In order to approximate their ideology to the working class and out of the necessity of aligning the interests of all classes of the Yugoslav society for the good of the nation, the ORJUNA ideologists turned, according to Mussolini's recipe, their criticism of capitalism towards foreign capital which was, thanks to the support from great forces and corruption of state officials, ruthlessly exploiting Yugoslav workers. This tendency is most evident in articles such as "A Blow to the Yugoslav Working class in Dalmatia"¹¹ and "State Against the People"¹² and "Let us Free Ourselves."¹³ Already during 1922 and 1923, workers' sections were formed as part of ORJUNA and within them unions and workers' cooperatives. The former socialist Ivan Bornemisa, who worked on the establishment of ORJUNA unions in the territory of Croatia, played a prominent role in gaining workers for the movement.¹⁴ ORJUNA had most success with service workers, seafarers and miners from the territories of Slovenia and Dalmatia. Just like Italian fascists, ORJUNA also used the workers who were members of their unions as a tool of pressure on government bodies and members of national minorities by sparking protest strikes during the arrests of ORJUNA leaders and by organising strikes in factories and companies whose owners were members of Italian, German and Hungarian national minorities.

In spite of many similarities in ideological and organisational sense regarding the workers' issue of Italian fascism and ORJUNA, after analysing the texts from ORJUNA's newspapers one comes to the conclusion that ORJUNA stayed at a rudimentary level compared to Italian fascism with regard to its segment of planning the political and social role of the working class. Namely, ideologists from ORJUNA remained faithful to the democratic parliamentarism and did not follow the matrix of their transformation into the National Council of Corporations. One of the possible reasons is the fact that during the 1920s fascist corporatism itself was in the process of constituting and thus could not be an adequate role model.

Terror as a means of dealing with political opponents

Even though terror, as a means of dealing with those with opposing views, was present in practice since the start of political life among people, fascism managed

⁹ Anonymous, Lawlessness Towards Trade Assistants, Југославија, yr 2, no. 17 (2. 1.1928).

¹⁰ Anonymous, Nationalists to Yugoslav Workers, Будућност, yr 2, no. 4 (27. 1. 1923).

¹¹ Anonymous, A Blow to the Yugoslav Working Class in Dalmatia, Победа, yr 5, no. 48.

¹² Anonymous, State Against the People, Југославија, yr 1, no. 13 (20. 11. 1927).

¹³ Anonymous, Let us Free Ourselves, Југославија, уг 4, no. 37 (24. 9.1925).

¹⁴ Бранислав Глигоријевић, *Организација југословенских националиста ОРЈУНА*, Историја 20. века, Зборник радова V, Београд 1963.

Vasilije Dragosavljević

to turn it into its distinguishing mark. After World War I ended, Mussolini found himself in political isolation, surrounded by merely a hundred of his followers and the reputation of a national fighter which he accomplished by taking part in the war and by journalistic support of the war efforts of Italy and D'Annunzio's adventure in Rijeka. On the other hand, the Italian Socialist Party was on the rise. It controlled the masses and aimed to rule Italy entirely, by joining the government or mounting a revolutionary coup. Faced with the possibility of a Bolshevik revolution, former D'Annunzio's legionnaires joined the Mussolini movement, as well as demobilised officers and ardites, the elements from which the first fascist squads were created in 1919. With the enthusiasm of one renegade, Mussolini directed these elements against his former comrades-in-arms, and one of the first actions of the fascist squads (in April 1919) was to demolish the offices of the paper "Avanti" – the main paper of Italian socialists.¹⁵ In the period from 1919 to 1922, Mussolini's supporters imposed themselves as a counter-movement and the main opponent to Italian socialists. They used systematic brutal violence as the main element of their fight against the "Bolshevik threat", which led Italy to the state of an undeclared civil war. In his speeches and articles Mussolini glorified violence and with his brutal rhetoric he encouraged the squadristi to step up their activities. Fascist violence was primarily directed at socialists and communists, but members of other Italian parties were not spared either. The heaviest blows of fascist violence were suffered by Yugoslav and German national minorities. In the period from 1919 to 1922, the fascists undertook a series of the so-called punishing expeditions in the areas of South Tirol, Gorizia, Istria and Trieste. Large formations of the squadristi would force their way in German and Yugoslav settlements and demolish schools, cultural institutions, newspaper offices, break into private homes and murder local people, often with a silent support of Italian authorities¹⁶. The fascist squadristi from the regions on the border between Italy and the Kingdom of SHS would often break into the Yugoslav territory and cause conflicts there with border guards and the local people.

Just like the Italian fascists, the ideologists of ORJUNA believed that their movement must use *negative actions and destructive methods*, i.e. *physical force of its members* with the goal of *eradicating all enemies of the state and ensuring national unity*.¹⁷ Along these lines, in 1922 ORJUNA established its own armed formations called *Action squads*, whose members wore uniforms and were armed with cold arms and firearms purchased on the black market.¹⁸ Each action by a squad was commanded by its head (*čelnik*). Squads were organised in divisions and battalions and the commander of all action squads held the title of the great head. It is not possible to determine precisely the exact power of a great head (*veliki čelnik*), but at a great ORJUNA gathering in Belgrade in 1925 information was launched that ORJUNA

¹⁵ Ignazio Silone, *Fascism, Its Origination and Development,* Zagreb 1935, 70.

¹⁶ Idem,108–115.

¹⁷ Anonymous, *From the Statute and programme of Orjuna*, Будућност, yr 2, no. 16 (21. 4. 1923). ¹⁸ Historical archive of Slovenia AS 1931, 935-600-12.

had 21 battalions with a total number of ten thousand fighters at its disposal. These squads fought against all elements which the leaders of ORJUNA perceived as enemies of Yugoslavianism. Unlike Italy, where socialists and communists featured as the main opponents, the main enemies of ORJUNA members (who, after the Proclamation was passed in 1921 no longer considered communists a relevant political factor) were the so-called tribal separatists, i.e. supporters of those parties which negated the ideal of integral Yugoslavianism such as the People's Radical Party, Croatian Peasant Party, Slovenian People's Party, Yugoslav Muslim Organisation and Jemiet. The ORJUNA press, just like the fascist media, designated their political opponents with derogative terms such as *deadly bacilli*¹⁹ and *anti-Yugoslav animals*²⁰ and threatened them with new Sicilian vespers.²¹ Action squads attacked political rallies of these parties, burned their headquarters, blew up the offices of party media and used physical terror to prevent their members from voting in the elections. Just like the Italian fascists, the action squads of ORJUNA conducted physical terror over the members of German, Hungarian, Italian and Albanian national minority whom they (with justified reason in most cases) accused of irredentism and active support to anti-Yugoslav revisionist plans of their parent states. By copying the squadristi methods, ORJUNA squads demolished cultural institutions of the minorities and offices of the papers published in minority languages and also broke up party gatherings of the minority parties. In violent acts against their political opponents and minority irredentists, ORJUNA action squads often came into conflict with the Yugoslav police which protected with dedication the public order and personal and material safety of all citizens. In such cases, the ORJUNA media accused the regime and security services of leading the anti-state policy and threatened with a military coup and civil war.22

Responding to provocations of Italian fascists in border areas, the ORJUNA action squads raided the Italian territory on several occasions and conducted attacks on the Italian army and fascist militia barracks there. As a response to aggressive positions of the surrounding countries, ORJUNA formed its secret organisations in the territories of Italy, Austria and Hungary. ORJUNA newspapers published texts openly advocating the annexation of the neighbouring countries' territories. A characteristic example is a card of the ORJUNA paper *Vidovdan* intended for the royal family on the occasion of birth of the heir to the throne which ended with: *Long live the future Yugoslav tzar, the only ruler of Istria, Gorizia and the Adriatic.*²³ The most famous among the ORJUNA border organisations was ORJUNAVIT, established in 1925 in Julijska krajina. Its members were recruited from the ranks of the Yugoslav minority and Italian anti-fascists and spread the anti-fascist propaganda, gathered intelligence

¹⁹ Anonymous, *Plague in Yugoslavia*, Победа, yr 1, no. 3 (4. 8. 1921).

²⁰ Anonymous, *Blood shall be Shed*, Будућност, yr 2, no. 6 (10. 2. 1923).

²¹ Anonymous, *The Last Mohicans*, Будућност, yr 2, no. 2 (13. 1. 1923).

²² Anonymous, *People Rebel with Arms*, Видовдан, yr 2, no. 13 (6. 2. 1923); Anonymous,

Destruction of the Royal Serbian Government, Будућност, yr 2, no. 13 (31. 3. 1923).

²³ Видовдан, yr 2, no. 82 (8. 9. 1923).

Vasilije Dragosavljević

data of military and political significance and conducted sabotage acts of military facilities and the transport network. In these tasks ORJUNAVIT cooperated with the organisation of the German national minority Andreas-Hofer-Bund – an illegal organisation of the Austrian fascist movement Heimwehr, which acted in the area of South Tirol.²⁴

Even though, in terms of their organisational form and methods of conducting terror against political opponents, there were great similarities between the armed squads of Italian fascism and ORJUNA, their accomplishments and final fate were diametrically opposed. While the squadristi managed, with their violent actions, to neutralise the resistance of their political opponents and public security services and conduct a successful coup in the form of a march to Rome, ORJUNA action squads suffered a complete failure in these areas. The reason for the lack of success should be sought in large numbers and good organisation of ORJUNA's political opponents (many of whom had party paramilitary formations at their disposal) and in the fact that the security services of the Kingdom of SHS did not allow at any time that the public and constitutional order be jeopardised.

Conclusion

Even though numerous parallels may be drawn from the above mentioned examples between the fascist and ORJUNA ideologies and methods of practical actions in political life, their degree of political success may not be compared. While Italian fascism managed, in three years of its existence, to come into power and completely bring in the next twenty years the Italian state and society to its ideological form, ORJUNA on the other hand was, after relative success in the first five years of its actions, pushed to the political sidelines and disappeared after the introduction of the monarchy dictatorship in 1929. The main reason for such development is the fact that ORJUNA remained in its organisational form at the level of fascism from 1919, i.e. it represented a loose confederation of ideologically diverse patriotic associations without a centralised organisation and a strong leader. While Mussolini managed, by exploiting the national idea, to gather around fascism the majority of Italian political parties, ORJUNA managed, by preaching the uncompromising integral Yugoslavianism, to alienate all the relevant political and economic forces in the Kingdom of SHS.

The disappearance of ORJUNA from the political scene of the Kingdom of SHS in 1929 did not mean the disappearance of ideological influences from the Apennine peninsula. The reception of ideas of Italian fascism in Yugoslavia was first continued through former members of ORJUNA who joined the dictatorship regime and formed an ideological and intellectual core of the regime of the Yugoslav National Party. Once the regime started to feel the need for a wider social base, former

²⁴ Historical archive of Slovenia AS 1931, 935-600-12.

ORJUNA members renewed their work through the movement of the Yugoslav Action, established in 1930. In 1934, after the crash of the monarchy dictatorship, this movement merged with several other right-wing organisations into the Yugoslav National Movement Zbor, and its main ideologists such as Velibor Jonić, Danilo Gregorić and Juraj Korenić were to assume important positions in the organisational structure of YNM Zbor and remained the main advocates of taking over the conceptual solutions of Italian fascism.²⁵ In that way, the ideological concepts of Italian fascism remained present on the Yugoslav political scene as the foundation for further development of right-wing extremism in Yugoslav areas during the 1930s and 1940s.

²⁵ Ратко Парежанин, Други светски рат и Димитрије В. Љотић, Београд 2001, 142–153.

Vasilije DRAGOSAVLJEVIĆ

INFLUENZE DEL FASCISMO ITALIANO SULLA IDEOLOGIA POLITICA E LA PRATICA DI ORGANIZZAZIONE NAZIONALISTA JUGOSLAVA (ORJUNA)

Sommario

Organizzazione dei nazionalisti jugoslavi (ORJUNA) è stata creata come risposta di una parte dell' intelligence jugoslava alle alcune sfide della politica estera ed interna le quali affrontava il Regno di Serbi, Croati e Sloveni negli anni Venti del Novecento. Analizzando i testi di programmazione nella stampa dell'ORJUNA è possibile individuare diversi punti in comune con l'ideologia e la pratica politica del fascismo italiano, di cui i più tipici sarebbero l'utilizzo di terrore fisico come un mezzo legittimo di lotta politica, nonchè la sollecitazione della classe operaia promuovendo le idee del corporativismo. Basandosi sul concetto di jugoslavismo integrale e sotto l'influenza del fascismo italiano, l'ideologia dell'ORJUNA si stava lentamente formando nel periodo 1921-1929. La scomparsa dell'ORJUNA dalla scena politica del Regno dei Serbi, Croati e Sloveni, provocata dall'introduzione del monarco-dittatura nel 1929, non significò la fine dell'influenza ideologica della penisola appenninica. Ricezione delle idee del fascismo italiano in Jugoslavia è continuata attraverso gli ex-membri dell'ORJUNA i quali si sono avvicinati al nuovo regime dittatoriale creando la sua base intellettuale. In questo modo, la concezione ideologica del fascismo italiano è rimasta presente sulla scena politica jugoslava come base per l'ulteriore sviluppo di estremismo di destra nel territorio jugoslavo negli anni Trenta e Quaranta del Novecento.

Parole chiave: fascismo, organizzazione di nazionalisti jugoslavi, jugoslavismo integrale, classe operaia, stato corporativo, terrore, dittatura, Movimento nazionale Zbor.

Василије ДРАГОСАВЉЕВИЋ

УТИЦАЈИ ИТАЛИЈАНСКОГ ФАШИЗМА НА ИДЕОЛОГИЈУ И ПОЛИТИЧКУ ПРАКСУ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЈЕ ЈУГОСЛОВЕНСКИХ НАЦИОНАЛИСТА (ОРЈУНА)

Резиме

Организација југословенских националиста (ОРЈУНА) настала је као одговор једног дела југословенске интелигенције на изазове у домену спољне и унутрашње политике са којима се суочавала Краљевина Срба Хрвата и Словенаца током двадесетих година двадесетог века. Анализом програмских текстова у штампаним гласилима ОРЈУНЕ могуће је детектовати неколико

додирних тачака са идеологијом и политичком праксом италијанског фашизма од којих су најкарактеристичније употреба физичког терора као легитимног средства у политичкој борби и покушај придобијања радничке класе пропагирањем идеја из домена корпоративизма. Ослањајући се на идеју интегралног југословенства и под утицајем италијанског фашизма идеологија ОРЈУНЕ је током периода од 1921. до 1929. године полако стицала све издефинисаније облике. Нестанак ОРЈУНЕ са политичке сцене Краљевине СХС увођењем монарходиктатуре 1929 године није значио и престанак идеолошких утицаја са Апенинског полуострва. Рецепција идеја италијанског фашизма у Југославији настављена преко бивших чланова ОРЈУНЕ који су пришли режиму диктатуре чинећи његову интелектуалну базу. На тај начин идеолошке концепције италијанског фашизма остале су присутне на југословенској политичкој сцени као основа за даљи развој десног екстремизма на југословенском простору тридесетих и четрдесетих година 20. века.

Кључне речи: фашизам, Организација југословенских националиста, интегрално југословенство, радничка класа, корпоративна држава, терор, диктатура, Југословенски национални покрет Збор.