

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

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KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1934–1941**

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Dragan Bakić

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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



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one institution and its staff deserve special praise. It was in the Archives of Yugoslavia that the bulk of the research was done by the three historians that contributed to this volume (Dušan Fundić, Rastko Lompar and Dragan Bakić). As it happened, our archival investigations had to be carried out in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and, with all the restrictions imposed on accessing material in the reading room, it seemed that this would be virtually impossible to do. Indeed, it would have been impossible if it had not been for the understanding and unstinting support of the Director of the Archives of Yugoslavia, Dr. Milan Terzić, who appreciated the project's time constraints and made special arrangements for the team members to complete their research. Without his help, this volume would have never seen the light of day. Along with their director, we are indebted to the archivists Tamara Ivanović and Ivana Božović, in particular, for their kind assistance during the sweltering summer months of 2021 when most of our research was done.

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PART 4

Between Conservatism and Fascism:

Prominent Public Figures

(Svetlana Šeatović, Dragan Bakić, Vladimir Cvetković)

Miloš Crnjanski, the Serbian Right and European Dictatorships

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Literary-historical and critical texts of contemporary and later interpreters of the complex personality and literary oeuvre of Miloš Crnjanski have always led to conflicting judgments of his political affiliation and role in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Only his novel *Seobe* (*Migrations*), more recently, since the mid-1980s, and *Lirika Itake i komentari* (*The Lyric of Ithaca and Commentary*) have been subjected to unbiased research and critical examination.

In a series of studies, Crnjanski was portrayed as a nationalist, drawing on the view that he was not particularly critical of right-wing and fascist ideas.¹ Material for in-depth and systematic research of Crnjanski's ties to the development of fascist ideas in Germany, Spain, and Italy became available to a broader circle of readers only in the last few years. When the Endowment of Miloš Crnjanski published *Politički članci (1919–1939)* (*Political Articles, 1919–1939*) in 2017 and *Diplomatski izveštaji (1936–1941)* (*Diplomatic Reports, 1936–1941*) in late 2019, the professional and general public finally had access to a valuable body of evidence that allows us to discover the author's ideological views. Miloš

¹ Milan Bogdanović, *Slom modernizma između dva rata* (Beograd: Kolarčev narodni univerzitet, 1949); Marko Ristić, *Književna politika* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1952); Marko Ristić, "Miloš Crnjanski," *Delo* III/1957, knj. IV, sv. 4: 772–780; Predrag Protić, "Književna vrednost memoara Miloša Crnjanskog," in *Književno delo Miloša Crnjanskog: zbornik radova* (Beograd: BIGZ, Institut za književnost i umetnost, 1972).

Crnjanski's texts collected in the book *Srpsko stanovište* (*The Serbian Stance*, 2020) include key articles and political texts published in the daily *Vreme* and the *Ideje* journal, shedding more light on the author's political and national thoughts.

In 1928 and 1929, Crnjanski worked as a press attaché at the embassy in Berlin, a position that gave him direct insight into the ongoing political developments in Germany. He was recommended for the press attaché post at Živojin Balugdžić's mission by Slobodan Jovanović, editor of *Srpski književni glasnik* (*Serbian Literary Gazette*) and an influential figure concerned for the welfare of authors and their social status. At that time, Crnjanski was still a teacher at the Fourth High School for Boys, a modestly paid job.² Also, his arrival in Germany and encounter with a new political and culturological milieu was a "trend" of the time, as attested personally by the author in his memoirs.³ During those two years, as well as before, Crnjanski had absolutely no inclination toward German culture and even less toward the political positions of National Socialism. But he was a man of ambition, as Gorana Raičević shows in his letters and reports, in which Crnjanski complained that Balugdžić kept assigning him to irrelevant duties and saw this as an affront: "I told him I want to get involved in politics," the author declared.⁴ A similar sentiment permeated a letter sent by Crnjanski from Rome, on 18 May 1939, to Milan Kašanin, art critic and another prominent cultural figure: "I think we are a generation that has emerged from chaos and that will again plunge into chaos. I've always wanted to be a man

² Miloš Crnjanski, *Embahade*, ed. Nada Mirkov (Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog, 2010), 48.

³ In *Embahade* (*Embajadas, Legations*), there is a detailed description of the trend of employing Serbian poets and authors in diplomatic service, regardless of their political views: "Around that time, it became fashionable to appoint so-called 'cultural' attachés in legations. If memory serves me right, I was the first. [...] At that time, poets could easily be assigned to diplomatic service because literature was held in high regard, as one of the paths for the unification of our people. Dučić, Rakić, and many other, less distinguished poets – and even a few literary cockroaches – had slid into our legations as favorite faces. My generation was not as well-loved after the war. We were mostly retained in service in smaller towns, and Ivo Andrić was the only one of us to make it to the minister rank." – Crnjanski, *Embahade*, 50.

⁴ *Ibid*, 53.

of action. But as fate would have it, I've now become an observer and reporter."⁵ The ambition with which Crnjanski approached his new job is also suggested by the seven-point plan, from June 1928, in which he explained to Balugdžić how he saw his role as the cultural attaché. The new attaché suggested publishing a German translation of:

A book about our country, illustrated, to depict, in a clear, brief account, the natural beauties of our fatherland, its most important cultural institutions, the people's way of life, monuments of art, monasteries, and cities, to offer the average German complete information about our country, highlighting its past and present cultural values.

Also, Crnjanski proposed a hardcover, luxury edition to be donated to universities, consulates, and commercial, lawyers' and engineers' chambers. The second, paperback edition was to be distributed, free of charge, to schools and libraries. The second point suggested promoting Serbian culture in major German journals, staging exhibitions and plays, writer exchanges through PEN International, cooperation between teachers' and professors' associations, and stressed the propaganda power of motion pictures.⁶

The most commonly cited are Crnjanski's impressions from his visits to Munich and Nuremberg, which impressed on him Germany's national unity and economic growth that led to the cohesion of all available forces. At that time, Crnjanski enrolled in a philosophy and history study program at the University of Berlin, attended music concerts and other cultural events, but still wrote, in a letter to a fellow writer, Ivo Andrić, that Berlin was a city of "rain, fog, a climate of prostitution and homosexuality."⁷

The cause and the result of this impression of Berlin was the travelogue "Iris Berlina" ("The Iris of Berlin"),⁸ the centerpiece of *Knjiga o*

⁵ Stojan Šovljanski and Vladimir Trećakov, eds, *O Crnjanskom – arhivalije* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1993), 83.

⁶ Gorana Raičević, *Agon i melanholija. Život i delo Miloša Crnjanskog* (Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2021), 293.

⁷ Miloš Crnjanski, *Pisma ljubavi i mržnje: pisma Marku Ristiću*, ed. Radovan Popović (Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 2004), 61.

⁸ See the most recent interpretation of *Iris Berlina* and Crnjanski's political writings by the distinguished German scholar and an expert on Serbian-German rela-

Nemačkoj (*Book of Germany*), which he wrote after he came home, in the summer of 1929. Crnjanski had watched in awe as Germany rose from the ashes, aided by American loans, and invested in the arms industry and other areas and was disappointed that the Dawes and Young plans had cut the war reparations to Germany by half. In *Knjiga o Nemačkoj*, Crnjanski saw only work and order, frenzied labor to put the defeated country back on its feet, and gave credit to the Germans for their “brutal vitality” that could well become a threat to Europe.⁹ Crnjanski predicted that Germany would introduce compulsory military service in 1932 but, as he admitted in *Embahade*, he was wrong: this happened in 1933. However, few heeded the predictions of the astute author, observer, and a man who analyzed and carefully monitored developments in economy, culture, and mentality.

Crnjanski intended to write another book on Germany as a sequel to the first volume, but this never came to fruition.¹⁰ Due to a scandal among the staff at the legation in Berlin, Crnjanski was recalled to Belgrade in the summer of 1929. In 1931, however, he received the Grand Prix of the Kolarac Foundation for the travelogue *Ljubav u Toskani* (*Love in Tuscany*) and *Knjiga o Nemačkoj* and, having returned from Germany, it seemed to Crnjanski that he made a comeback on the literary scene.

Then Crnjanski got involved in cultural polemics, first, in 1929, with Marko Car, an author, because the publisher Srpska književna zadruka had rejected his *Ljubav u Toskani*, and then, in 1932, with the writers at the publisher Nolit, which led to a public appeal of intellectuals against this author’s national ideas and deepened the polarization on the broadest ideological spectrum. The apex of ideological debates, under the guise of cultural matters and publishing agendas, was Crnjanski’s polemic with the author and communist sympathizer Miroslav Krleža, in 1934, about a text entitled “A Defamed War” (*Vreme*, 16 March

tions in the 20th century, Gabriella Schubert: Gabrijela Šubert, “Slika Crnjanskog o Nemcima u putopisu *Iris Berlina* i u njegovim političkim komentarima,” in *Velike teme srpske književnosti. Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane* (Beograd: Filološki fakultet, knj. 1, 2019), 459–473.

⁹ Raičević, *Agon i melaholija*, 299.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

1934).¹¹ Crnjanski recalled the forgotten sacrifice of the fallen in World War One and warned against the promotion of a new type of “pacifism” that masked the political aspirations of that time:

The pacifist propaganda is absolutely negative as long as it involves an absurd defamation of the war. [...] The war that was, with all its horrors, with all of its heavy casualties and consequences for our people, nonetheless seems like a bright, eternal star in the night above us.¹²

This was the basis to continue the polemic in the text “Miroslav Krleža as a Pacifist” (*Vreme*, 22 May 1934), in which Crnjanski noted that the Croatian author’s views were very questionable: “Mr. Miroslav Krleža, now a staunch pacifist, after finishing high school, enrolled in the Austrian military academy Ludovica in Pest.”¹³ This conflict, from 1934 on, sealed Crnjanski’s reputation in literature, culture and the broadest social context as a right-winger and fascist, diminishing his role in Serbian literature of the first half of the 20th century. It was only Milo Lompar’s study, with the slightly earlier and more sociologically focused books by Zoran Avramović,¹⁴ that delved into these matters, from which the patina of the usual, politically and documentarily baseless markers and labels needed to be removed.

On the purely political level, Crnjanski was concerned about the apathy of nationalism, which he associated with the exhaustion brought on by the war and the illusion that “with the achievement of the first level of nationalist ideology, the shaping of the tribe, the acquisition of state forms, we achieved everything.” He believed that nationalism was still needed, that it was “still the prerequisite of a realistic political view on this territory that we have firmly embraced in our borders and, even

¹¹ Milo Lompar, *Crnjanski – biografija jednog osećanja* (Beograd: Pravoslavna reč, 2018).

¹² Miloš Crnjanski, “Oklevetani rat,” *Vreme*, 16. III 1934, in *Politički članci (1919–1939)*, ed. Časlav Nikolić (Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog, Catena mundi, 2017), 236–237.

¹³ Miloš Crnjanski, *Srpsko stanovište*, ed. Boško Obradović (Beograd: Catena mundi, 2020), 72.

¹⁴ The four books by Zoran Avramović are: *Crnjanski o nacionalsocijalizmu* (Beograd: Beletra, 1990); *Politika i književnost u delu Miloša Crnjanskog* (Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2007); *Politička misao Miloša Crnjanskog* (Beograd: Institut za političke studije, 2010); *Obrana Crnjanskog* (Novi Sad: Orfeus, 2013).

more so, the only path that can breathe life into those forms.” He thought that “new men that would bring new ideas” were needed because he thought that “our people won’t exist unless an elite crystallizes from its warrior base” and stressed that “the role of nationalism does not have to be obsolete at all; on the contrary, for us, it is the only [role] that can be logical, and even social and economic.” Crnjanski thus saw nationalism as a living, creative force, which he contrasted with the internationalist, anti-national position in different shades, which, he was convinced, would end in “defeat, and nothing will be left of them but the smoke and vapor from the minds of our so-called intelligentsia that loves anything foreign and has for so long touted its leftist mottos.”¹⁵ The assassination of King Alexander in Marseille, on 9 October 1934, was a serious challenge for Yugoslavia because the sovereign had, especially during the 6 January Dictatorship, firmly held all internal and foreign policy issues in his hands. Crnjanski wrote a eulogy for King Alexander, noting that he, besides being the sovereign, had also been a genuine political and ideational leader; he extolled the late monarch’s vision of Yugoslavism, to which he had given a remarkable and, in his view, decisive contribution and also defended, albeit more discreetly, his personal regime. He did so by berating the pseudo-politicians and pseudo-scholars that “created, during the period of false liberalism, a distorted notion of voting rights. They claimed that our people were very democratic, although it is clear that you’ll never find the kind of unruliness they extolled in the lives of our workers and peasants.”¹⁶

A particularly important source for Crnjanski’s attitude to the principal political questions in Yugoslavia and Europe, and consequently for an analysis of his ideological views, is his editorial contribution to the journal *Ideje* in 1934–1935. The journal was meant to provide space where “new people” could present their “new ideas.” It should be noted that, apart from Crnjanski’s own opinions, *Ideje* became a platform where some of the “new people”, later prominent figures in the col-

¹⁵ Miloš Crnjanski, “Nacionalistička apatija,” *Vreme*, 1.VI 1934, in *Politički članci*, 254–257.

¹⁶ Miloš Crnjanski, “Badnjak blaženopočivšeg Kralja,” *Vreme*, 6–9. I 1935, in *Politički članci*, 264–268.

laborationist regime during the Second World War, voiced the most extreme and outright fascist “new ideas,” including articles that advocated and debated racist and eugenic teachings.¹⁷ For Crnjanski, this need for presenting alternative views was dictated by the spirit of the times, marked by an economic crisis that could not be rationally explained either to individuals or to the masses. Since rationalism had failed, there was “chaos [not] only in economic relations but even more so in the psyche and people’s minds.” In this great upheaval of the human soul and psyche or, to borrow Crnjanski’s term, “the world of ideas,” only “grand, collective political dogmas” could mobilize the people to overcome these troubles and, above all, give them hope. Naturally, the solution offered by these new political religions was contested, but Crnjanski believed that they could not be discarded and must be accorded due attention, at least because they seemed so well-received by the masses.

Under the outdated lens of rationalism, there can be no doubt, many major political successes of theatrical fascism, mystical Hitlerism and even the Soviets lose many of their results. However, no one can deny that, in the firm hand of leaders, in the enthralling, religious force of political conviction and, of course, in the collective equalization of ideas, salvation can be found in the present circumstances.

It is important to note that Crnjanski did not separate the communist from the fascist collectivist ideology – they were alike in the features he deemed fundamental. Besides, he assigned crucial importance to the awareness that the Yugoslavs must factor in the distinctiveness and authenticity determined by their special circumstances:

Not only the patriarchal economic structure of most of our regions, the until recently highlander lifestyle and warrior psychology of the bulk of

¹⁷ For more detail, see Ilija Malović, “Eugenika kao ideološki sastojak fašizma u Srbiji 1930-ih godina XX veka,” *Sociologija*, L, no. 1 (2008): 79–96; Olivera Milosavljević, *Savremenici fašizma: percepcija fašizma u beogradskoj javnosti 1933–1941*, 2 vols (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2010); Nenad Petrović, *Ideologija varvarstva. Fašističke i nacionalsocijalističke ideje kod intelektualaca u Beogradu (1929–1941)* (Beograd: Zadruga Res Publica, Most Art, 2015); Aleksandar Stojanović, *Ideje, politički projekti i praksa vlade Milana Nedića* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2015).

our people in the previously Turkish-controlled areas – and those areas are the heartland of our country – but also the social structure of the oft-mentioned peasantry that make up 80% of the population, all of that makes us a country with a distinctive flavor and distinctive features.

Therefore, Yugoslav nationalism (and there is no doubt that here Crnjanski refers to Yugoslav and not Serbian nationalism) must not “ape foreign movements” or “look at our problems through the German, Italian, or Russian lens.” Crnjanski’s main premise was that nationalism must be authentic. It was, on the one hand, “a logical ending of our efforts to create unity and a state,” and, on the other, unity as a necessary prerequisite was the true answer to the social needs and aspirations of workers and peasants. However, obstacles to achieving this vitally needed unity came from the intelligentsia because “we see ideational confusion in well-educated minds.” In a recognizable right-wing discourse, Crnjanski distinguished between the nationally conscious countryside and the problematic urban centers.

The jumble of morals and ideas is in the cities, which are full of foreign elements. That is where ideas need to be clarified and visible political lines drawn.

For Crnjanski, the national idea is thus identified with the idea of (Yugoslav) unity and emancipation from foreign influence and domination.

We can no longer give up on the vision of a new state and a new nation. Condemning nationalism to oblivion would be deeply immoral. And we would do better to disappear than to erase, distort and dilute what essentially defines the sharp features of our people’s pure image.

These words pithily confirm that, at the heart of Crnjanski’s concept of nationalism, lie cultural authenticity and political independence. Nationalism, understood like this, had no alternative in his eyes, and hence the question of the country’s socio-political orientation and system came down to “the implementation of national ideas.”¹⁸

Crnjanski revisited this problem in some of his later texts, reaffirming his fundamental views. He argued that the nationalists should come

¹⁸ Miloš Crnjanski, “Ideje,” *Ideje*, 6. X 1934, in *Politički članci*, 281–283.

together and called for full coordination between all national associations to meet their duties as best they could. The problem was this:

The majority is not only still sensitive to tribal traditions and regional intimacies but is also fascinated by the ideas of prewar and so-called liberal thought.

He condemned the premise that the state had the purpose of “being comfortable for a person” and served for “the blathering of politicians and voters” and futile squabbles “in which everyone can do as they please.” Crnjanski saw the peasantry as the backbone of healthy nationalism and, therefore, focused on the preservation of their spiritual values to help it retain “its heroic visage [...] and the morals of a seasoned and centuries-old survivor, the national moral that even the poorest and most destitute highlander homestead once had.” According to Crnjanski, the solution for economic and social problems was dependent on the existence of political idealism, which was not possible without new national élan.

Essentially, with economic and political realism – and we have plenty of examples for this – major political matters, which require discipline, giving things up and sacrifice, will be resolved in our time only based on consciousness and insinuating limitations in the collective yet national framework.¹⁹

He indignantly rejected all promises and hollow hopes used by Marxism to lure the working masses on the social level and saw it as, above all, an attack against national identity:

Marxist propaganda has sprouted among us like a mushroom; there’s all sorts of things in it, but most of all, enmity, hatred, and malice toward anything that is ours, racially ours, ours in terms of tradition and spirit. Marxist propaganda here does not represent workers or a realistic program for their interests and neither is it idealistic.²⁰

¹⁹ Miloš Crnjanski, “Nacrt nacionalnog skupljanja snaga,” *Ideje*, 20. X 1934, in *Politički članci*, 287–290.

²⁰ Crnjanski, *Srpsko stanovište*, 38. His staunchest anti-Marxist texts are: “Pobeda nacije nad marksizmom,” *Ideje*, 17. I 1935; “Slabost naše odbrane od marksizma,” *Ideje*, 16. II 1935; “Naš salonski komunizam,” *Ideje*, 6. IV 1935, in *Politički članci*, 306–309, 310–313, 340–343.

After the assassination of King Alexander, Crnjanski analyzed – always from a “nationalist perspective” – the reasons that led to political instability and precariousness in the Yugoslav state. Considering the “seventeen years of political wrangling,” he argued that the problem was that the question of “who is against and who is for Serbia” was never resolved, and this question preceded the matter of who was in favor of the new state of South Slavs. There was “sabotage of the state,” and the trouble was that “the saboteurs were never seen and covered in an ideology of political pogrom.” “The state ideology that was opposed to the saboteurs was obviously long in the tooth and obsolete. With all of its bells and whistles of old liberalism, in practice, it was not only cynical and amoral but also powerless in party matters.” In a more subdued tone, Crnjanski acknowledged that “the dictatorship also failed to draw a necessary ideational line.” For him, the existence of the nation – a single, united Yugoslav nation – was an undeniable fact, and any departures from this credo, as the main political line, were unacceptable. But instead, the wrong path was chosen: “One must not rush; we should wait; time will quieten everything down; and also, what is it that allows them to harass people, to deprive tax payers of the right to think what they like; one should not go overboard and, for the love of God, not threaten. That was all the political wisdom we had in seventeen years. And the results reflected that.”²¹

In the context of reviving the national question in Yugoslavia under Prince Paul’s regency regime, once the repressive fetters of 6 January Dictatorship relaxed and a more liberal path was chosen to deal with particular and separatist tendencies, primarily in Croatia, Crnjanski said his part on the aggressive defamation of Serbia. Responding to the criticisms from sections of the Montenegrin intelligentsia and revisiting such sentiments in the past, especially in his home province of Vojvodina, Crnjanski let his bitterness show: “In my opinion, nothing that is Yugoslav needs to sully and destroy anything that was Serbian, bright, and honest and which is still no worse than anything else and which will once again be bright and honest. And as for political freedoms and political sense, who will teach those who have shown

²¹ Crnjanski, “Nacija i sabotaza,” *Ideje*, 2. III 1935, in *Politički članci*, 318–320.

that they know what a state is? Certainly not those who were voters in Vojvodina or coalitions with a *ban* or without one [in Croatia] or those who raise seven banners as the wind blows?" Crnjanski was certain that such criticisms were a mask for "sabotage, envy, a war waged against war; against whom? Let me say it: despite all loving words and promises, against those who were in favor of [creating] this country; And by whom? By those who were never in its favor."²² Crnjanski did not believe that Yugoslavia had a crisis of parliamentarism and thought that this was a thinly veiled struggle for the nation, whose opponents, external and internal, were grouped together. "Ridiculing so-called national ideas, the past, the myth of the Serbs' corruption and inferior culture, Montenegrin mythology, Zagreb's panic, the Slovenian desire for a Wall of China – is any of it new? It is Austria, the late Austria. Marxism, pseudo-Marxism and separatism, federalism, all of it blends into the same thing."²³

It was, therefore, quite logical, in Crnjanski's view, "that we returned to the sense that the basis of our present was Serbdom and its traditions and that, after the war, we began to glorify Serbia and the Serbian army. Embracing it in one's heart was a step toward a new kind of nationalism." Precisely for this reason, Crnjanski later openly said that he had stood up "against fake pacifism," realizing that the protagonists of the alleged campaign against Serbian militarism – the very same that never had a problem with Austrian militarism – "were not targeting the specter of war but Serbia, as the bedrock of everything, the army's role in the creation of the present day, the importance of Serbdom." The validity of rooting Yugoslav nationalism in the Serbian identity is self-evident in Crnjanski's view because "we have had [the concept of] race for a long time, but it was fully expressed only in the struggle for Serbdom – not only on the battlefield but also in its ideological and social sphere. Is a new nationalism to lean on separatists or have at its heart the past of some nobodies?" The warrior spirit of the (Serbian) people and its racial characteristics and views on life should underpin the political ideology of nationalism, which could not be forged with "watered-down liberalism" or the vague concept of patrio-

²² Crnjanski, "Crnogorska kritika," *Ideje*, 9. III 1935, in *Politički članci*, 321–323.

²³ Crnjanski, "Poslednja prilika," *Ideje*, 23. III 1935, in *Politički članci*, 332–335.

tism. Crnjanski was convinced that what was needed was “tough Jacobite nationalism,” without which “it is impossible to conceive our union or merge our tribes or break the separatists or improve the [the people’s] cultural level.” The social base of nationalism, as envisaged by Crnjanski, was to be the four-fifths of the peasantry that inhabited the territory where “the Austrian military frontier and Turkey were (and that’s almost our entire territory)” and which had the “same needs, the same folklore, the same customs, the same psychology and almost the same economic structure.” This base could not be found in the intelligentsia, which was “unruly” and must be goaded to accept the nationalist ideology. Although he mentioned neither Jovan Cvijić nor Vladimir Dvorniković, Crnjanski obviously took the Dinaric racial type for his social base.²⁴

Commenting on the ideas applied as alternative forms of economic and political organization, Crnjanski had to take a position regarding the corporatist system of popular representation. He approached this question primarily from the vantage point of the advantages and drawbacks of the corporatist system compared to forms of representation based on political parties, taking into account the peculiarities of the Yugoslav state and its need to be consolidated under the auspices of nationalism. Given his view on political parties and the Kingdom’s experience of parliamentarism, which he regarded as “quite negative,” Crnjanski framed the problem like this and offered the following answer: “So, the question is whether the corporatist system would destroy this division of the nation along party lines, this provincial division of the state. Although we are not supporters, at least not yet, of the corporatist system, we nonetheless realize that corporate groups would be more unitarist than parties.” He did not undertake an assessment of the corporatist system as such and instead based his stance solely on his anti-liberal and anti-parliamentarian sentiment, which stemmed from his frustration due to the failure of the Yugoslav state to find inner peace and balance in the principles of parliamentary democracy. It seemed to Crnjanski that as long as there were, “even tacitly, political

²⁴ Miloš Crnjanski, “Socijalna baza našeg nacionalizma,” *Ideje*, 30. III 1935, in *Politički članci*, 336–339.

parties, there will be tribal borders, province barriers, separatist urges. And what's worse and often overlooked, [there will also be] cultural provincialism." The second point in favor of corporatism, according to Crnjanski, was the need for a radical break in Yugoslavia's political history to stir the masses from apathy and give them hope, "the hope that is now, despite all economic factors, one of the principal political forces." To justify his view, Crnjanski then provided a historical overview to show that it was corporate groups that brought most benefits in the Yugoslavs' recent past, too. As examples, he listed the clerical, mercantile, artisanal, military and aristocratic classes in Croatia, teachers in Slovenia, and, especially, Serbian agricultural cooperatives in Croatia, backed by the Zagreb-based Serbian Bank, which were very important for the pre-1914 Serbo-Croat coalition, and even the *Sabor* in Croatia and the May Council in Karlovci in 1848, because members of each class were represented in them.

Apparently aware that these historical parallels were less than compelling, Crnjanski revisited his central argument about the advantages of corporatism compared to parliamentary democracy: "The strongest defense of political parties could go like this: one should be spontaneous, accept one's fate, be capable of waiting, let every region speak through its representative and say what pains it and what it needs. But does this indeed allow us to hear anything clever or useful? – the supporters of the corporatist system reply – it's nothing but politicizing and blathering." Reminding the reader that much of the "old and backward" was abandoned in the name of creating the new state, he rhetorically concluded that "one must pause before the question of whether the political idea of corporate groups, if not ready to be implemented here, does not at least deserve to be discussed and considered?"²⁵

Crnjanski's disenchantment with the Yugoslav national and state-building project, apparent in almost all of his texts published in the *Ideje* journal, in the period after King Alexander's death, when the failure of integral Yugoslavism was diagnosed as an undeniable fact, spilled out openly, with no reservations, no holds barred, with the full

²⁵ Miloš Crnjanski, "Korporacije sa nacionalističkog gledišta," *Ideje*, 20. IV 1935, in *Politički članci*, 347–349.

force of the author's temperament, in the text "It Must Happen" ("Do tog mora doći"). Deeply aggrieved about everything that was happening because of "wrongly positioned Yugoslavism," Crnjanski announced *urbi et orbi* that it was high time for the Serbs to have their say. Embittered by the constant Slovenian and Croatian attacks on Serbia and, even more so, the reality in which the Serbian side "was always losing, making concessions, blushing, being naïve, living on (futile) promises and being criticized in discussions, constantly being asked to give everything and receiving nothing," Crnjanski stressed the need for a "purely Serbian point of view, Serbian egoism and moving away from the emotional and otherwordly discussion of things toward realistic stances and positions, reflecting Serbian interests. Otherwise, this tedious comedy will continue and will, once again, end as a Serbian tragedy." A realistic policy would involve acknowledging the demands of the other side, but with the Serbian side also tabling some demands to establish a fair relationship. As an example, Crnjanski wrote that he would agree to the demand of the Slovenian PEN Club to remove all non-Slovenian texts from Slovenian textbooks under the proviso that all non-Serbian texts be removed from textbooks in Serbian. The break that Crnjanski had made was complete, and he categorically rejected criticisms of his views:

My opponents say that I pander to Serbians [Serbs from Serbia proper]. Let them say what they like. I feel that I've come back, after several centuries and after fifteen years of bitter self-delusion, not to Serbians but to Serbs and Serbdom, and I'm sick to my stomach at the very thought that a long line of Crnjanskis and Putniks, my family and I, had suffered from childhood – for whose benefit? For the benefit of those from Ljubljana and Zagreb?²⁶

The State Persecutor's Office in Belgrade banned this issue of the *Ideje* journal because of this text. In the last days of Bogoljub Jevtić's government – which continued to defy reality and obstinately and unreservedly held on to the ideology of integral Yugoslavism – Crnjanski's text was pure blasphemy.

²⁶ M. Crnjanski, "Do tog mora doći," *Ideje*, 15. VI 1935, in *Politički članci*, 367–369.

After the *Ideje* journal went out of print, a development that seems to have been a result of Crnjanski's hard-line views, he once again went abroad, this time as the correspondent from Germany of the Central Press Bureau (CPB),²⁷ a body that had a special propaganda and informing role within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He was appointed to this post by a decree issued on 9 December 1935 by the new Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović and reported for duty nine days later, assuming office on 28 January 1936.²⁸ Crnjanski got the CPB job after he decided to resign his post as a teacher at the Fourth High School. He later explained his motivation for joining the CPB as follows: "I want to say that the reason for my joining the Press Bureau was financial in nature rather than political, as my literary opponents sometimes claim. It is also untrue that I went to Berlin because I wanted to enter diplomatic service. At that time, the path to diplomatic service went through aunts and uncles. [...] Our diplomatic service, until the Balkan Wars, had been one big Serbian family," adding, characteristically: "I entered those legations – a world full of idiots then – as a journalist, in an observer role."²⁹ Crnjanski claimed that he was not initially supposed to be the correspondent of the Press Bureau in Berlin, and that this assignment was a matter of circumstances: "Thus – and not because of politics – the decree on my new appointment as the attaché in Berlin, six years later, came out. I neither asked for it nor wanted it. And, I repeat, I would have gone to

²⁷ At that time, this institution had the following role: "In early October 1934, CPB began sending 15-day confidential reports to the chiefs of diplomatic missions about the movements of foreign reporters. There were two types of reports. The first group included reports on the correspondents who came to Yugoslavia, their ties with CPB and views on some questions of interest to the Yugoslav state and the promises they had given to the organs of state. Until October 1934, these were intended for internal use [...] but it was decided to send them to chiefs of diplomatic missions abroad to facilitate regular contacts with journalists from major papers. The second group was strictly confidential reports containing analyses of the information provided in the 15-day reports." See Srdjan Mičić, *Od birokratije do diplomatije. Istorija jugoslovenske diplomatske službe 1918–1939* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju, 2018), 395–396.

²⁸ For information on appointments in the Berlin legation, see Raičević, *Agon i melanholija*, 428.

²⁹ Crnjanski, *Embahade*, 136.

Moscow with no less enthusiasm. I've always been curious."³⁰ Nevertheless, his appointment does not seem to have been incidental. As an attested anti-communist, Crnjanski was a member of the Yugoslav Anti-Marxist Committee and its delegate (under the pseudonym Miloš Putnik), together with Drago Zudenigo from the Ministry of the Interior, at the first meeting of the International Anti-Communist Bureau, organized by the Anti-Comintern, a special agency in the German Ministry of Propaganda led by Goebbels, and held from 4 to 10 November 1936 not far from Munich. He was friendly with the president of the Anti-Comintern, Adolf Ehrt, and on this occasion, the latter introduced him to Goebbels.³¹ There is no doubt that all of this made Crnjanski the most suitable candidate for the correspondent job in Berlin.

It is very clear, both from his memoirs and from diplomatic reports, that Crnjanski worked hard in his new job, observing the developments in Germany and traveling often. Besides his duties as the correspondent of the Government's Press Bureau at the legation in Berlin, Crnjanski wrote for *Vreme*, which was especially important because this paper had come under Stojadinović's *de facto* control, and the Prime Minister deeply cared about it. Crnjanski's reports from Germany betray no particular sympathy for the Nazi regime although, according to one interpretation, there is a certain fascination with its grandiose manifestations and the functioning of the new political system.³² On the other hand, Crnjanski clearly sensed in what direction Hitler's policy would move as he "takes advantage of the gullibility and chaos in Europe and, step by step, prepares a counter-blow"; after he had introduced compulsory military service in violation of the Treaty of Versailles and retaken the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland, he "would ask for colonies, then go into Austria at an opportune moment, perhaps into the [Polish] corridor, and then?" He also warned that, although such an expansionist policy seemed fantastical outside Germany, pos-

³⁰ Ibid., 137.

³¹ Miloš Crnjanski, *Diplomatski izveštaji (1936–1941)*, eds Aleksandar Stojanović and Rastko Lompar (Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog, Catena Mundi, 2019), 86–87.

³² Milan Ristović, "Politički izveštaji i pisma Miloša Crnjanskog iz Nemačke, 1936–1937," *Književnost* 7–8 (1987): 1157–1158.

sibly because it seemed “like a devilish plan,” “in Berlin, in Germany, none of it seems inconceivable in the least, and yet we must admit that it seems completely natural and totally different.³³ Watching Hitler during his speeches, Crnjanski noted that the German leader was not “theatrical” but a “fanatic” who “is like a hypnotizer. His face contorts. He is, quite obviously, beside himself.”³⁴ Crnjanski’s request to be redeployed elsewhere after one of his predictions came true shows that he did not feel particularly at ease in Berlin and did not look approvingly upon the developments in Germany.

As far as I’m concerned, I did indeed ask to be redeployed from Berlin after the annexation of Austria, but I was not initially meant to go to Rome. Another correspondent of the Central Press Bureau was to go to Rome: Denić. My appointment came as a surprise. To avoid saying the principal reason that I wanted to get out of Berlin, I asked Stojadinović to be moved to Paris, Pest or Rome and mentioned that I was seeking redeployment due to my rheumatism, and Stojadinović, as he later told me, decided to send me to Rome. He couldn’t give me [a post in] Paris, he thought Pest was irrelevant, and he needed someone in Rome, he said, who could write.³⁵

While still in service in Germany, as a correspondent of *Vreme*, Crnjanski spent some time in Spain to report on the civil war (that was his second visit to the country, the first having taken place in 1933).³⁶ He reported from the Central Command of General Francisco Franco and displayed noticeable sympathies for Franco’s troops in his writings: for him, they were primarily the “national Spain,” as opposed to the “reds,” and he described their leader as an excellent general adored by his fol-

³³ Ibid., 1158.

³⁴ Ibid., 1164–1165.

³⁵ Crnjanski, *Embahade*, 238.

³⁶ Miloš Crnjanski, *Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino (Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog, BIGZ, SKZ, L’Age d’Homme, 1995); Miloš Crnjanski, *Putopisi II*, ed. Nikola Bertolino (Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog, BIGZ, SKZ, L’Age d’Homme, 1996). For a more extensive interpretation of Crnjanski’s travelogues and reportages see: Sladjana Jaćimović, *Putopisna proza Miloša Crnjanskog* (Beograd: Učiteljski fakultet, 2009); Krinka Vidaković Petrov, *Horizont Hispanija* (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2017).

lowers. Regardless, Crnjanski also paid tribute to the brave defenders of Bilbao who fought for the Spanish Republic. His attitude to Franco, however, became more critical after the general clamped down on the opposition in his own ranks, the Spanish Falange, the supporters of revolutionary fascist ideas. For Crnjanski, the Falange, besides being nationalists and front-line warriors against communism, were also the bearers of social reforms that the Spanish society was in dire need of, especially in the rural areas, and he argued that any kind of Spanish nationalism that would choose to disregard the need for social reform was “as useless as a chocolate teapot.”³⁷ The German minister in Belgrade, Victor von Heeren, commented on Crnjanski’s views:

While Crnjanski gave a very positive assessment of the military situation on the national front, his impressions of the overall policy of Franco’s government was less than favorable. In his last article in *Vreme* (on the 5th of this month), he notes that he went there brimming with deep sympathy for the nationalists but, once there, became convinced that he had been overly enthused about General Franco. In his last two articles (*Vreme*, on the 2nd and 5th of this month), Crnjanski explains his disappointment with the internal-policy methods of Franco’s regime, primarily the methods that Franco used to sideline the leadership of the Spanish Falange.³⁸

Crnjanski lived in Rome as a correspondent of CPB from 2 May 1938 to the invasion of Yugoslavia by the Axis Powers on 6 April 1941. He proudly stressed that “many Italian papers” had reported, on 2 June 1938, that he had become the press attaché at the Royal Legation in Rome.³⁹ Once again, Crnjanski paid particular attention to Yugoslavia’s place in the foreign-policy conceptions of Italy in the context of the friendly relations between the two countries after the signing of the Friendship Treaty by Stojadinović and the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, in March 1937. Shortly after his arrival, he trans-

³⁷ Crnjanski, *Putopisi II*, 335–337. See also Olivera Milosavljević, *Savremenici fašizma: percepcija fašizma u beogradskoj javnosti 1933–1941*, 2 vols (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2010), I, 430–436.

³⁸ Crnjanski, *Diplomatski izveštaji*, 806.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.



Miloš Crnjanski on the far left with the members
of the Yugoslav legation in Rome, 1939
(Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

lated a text from *Corriere Padano* that said that “Yugoslavia was one of the nations that will likely have special importance in the development of European politics, both in its direct relationship with Italy and regarding the axis Rome–Berlin” and that it was necessary to encourage Yugoslavia’s full emancipation and its more decisive entry among powers of the “fascist” type.⁴⁰ In June 1938, Crnjanski reported from the Congress of Foreign Policy Studies in Milan and said that Ciano had stressed that it was in Italy’s interest to return to the Balkans, highlighting Mussolini’s view that Italy should go to the Orient, meaning the Balkans and Yugoslavia.⁴¹ As one would expect, Crnjanski wrote favorably of Italian foreign policy and military power.⁴² From this perspective, he also analyzed the last stage of the Spanish Civil War, the intervention of Italy and its youth as an “idealistic move of the fascists,” but cautiously concluded that the situation would remain complex for Rome and fascism after Franco’s certain victory.⁴³

Crnjanski continued to contribute to *Vreme* from Rome, and those texts are the most intriguing in terms of his views on Italian fascism. First of all, this brings us to the question of the extent to which these articles can be taken to represent his personal views. It is important to note that Crnjanski was instructed to write toned down reports devoid of any personal impressions, as diplomatic channels were not considered entirely safe and it was highly desirable to eschew anything that might create a diplomatic incident.⁴⁴ It is clear then that he had to stay strictly within the limits of the official Yugoslav policy toward Rome and adapt his articles, even when they were merely factual reports, to the taste and sensitivities of Italian diplomacy. There is firm evidence about this. For instance, even though he knew that the Italian troops fighting on General Franco’s side in Spain had suffered a horrible defeat in the Battle of Guadalajara, in the article “General Franco’s Battle No. Six” of 11 June 1937, he wrote that the “disaster of the Italian divisions

⁴⁰ Ibid., 240.

⁴¹ Ibid., 245–246.

⁴² Milosavljević, *Savremenici fašizma*, I, 416–418, 421.

⁴³ Miloš Crnjanski, “Lepi dani u Aranhuezu,” *Vreme*, 9. II 1939. in *Politički članci*, 654–658.

⁴⁴ Crnjanski, *Diplomatski izveštaji*, 800–801.

at Guadalajara is but a romantic fabrication of red newspapers.”⁴⁵ Sometimes he had to adapt his texts to reflect the guidelines that shaped the Yugoslav foreign policy. For instance, he downplayed the trade contacts and economic relations between Italy and the Soviet Union in his article “Italy and Asia” published in *Vreme* on 20 November 1938, although he was well aware that the Soviet delegation had signed a trade deal in Rome, but this news was not welcome in Yugoslavia, which had not yet established diplomatic relations with the Bolshevik regime in Moscow.⁴⁶ Besides, the censorship of information in Rome covered both foreign and local journalists, which Crnjanski noted: “Any reports of critical or confidential news from Rome lead to repercussions that were and are being undertaken against foreign correspondents in Rome.”⁴⁷

It is through this lens of determinants and limitations that shaped Crnjanski’s texts from Italy that we must carefully analyze their content to gauge the author’s own views. The underlying tone of these articles was affirmative for the achievements of Mussolini’s regime, even quite apologetic, but it is noticeable that Crnjanski’s approval mainly concerns the social aspects of the fascist policy. Commenting on the mass scale and discipline of fascist youth organizations, Crnjanski responded to leftist criticisms that these were the children of the bourgeoisie:

But what can they say in response to the fact that, among these masses, there is 80,000 workers’ children and more than 100,000 young peasants? Is it police measures or some kind of magic wand that can move around 120,000 young female workers and more than 150,000 young rural women to cheerfully march and sing? *It is not the police that moves these masses but Mussolini, who has been and will remain a socialist.*⁴⁸

The same thought became even more pronounced and striking in a comparison with democratic countries amidst a campaign in “some papers” against Mussolini, who was constantly expected to fail but continued to go from one success to another. “As for democratic dem-

⁴⁵ Crnjanski, *Diplomatski izveštaji*, 205, f. 149.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁴⁷ Miloš Crnjanski, *Nova Evropa*, ed. Radivoj Cvetičanin (Beograd: Književne novine, 1991), 138.

⁴⁸ Miloš Crnjanski, “Italija u Španiji,” *Vreme*, 2. VI 1938, in *Politički članci*, 592–594; Milosavljević, *Savremenici fašizma*, I, 369.

agogy, looking at things from Rome, it is surprising to see how much these papers associate democracy with empty forms and how strongly they believe that its salvation lies in outdated political formalisms.” According to Crnjanski, Mussolini’s regime “has a sort of plebiscite behind it,” and he was in daily contact with workers and peasants, unlike ministers in western democracies, “always wearing the white gloves of the bourgeoisie.” The author continued with his comparison:

That’s also the case with Mussolini’s corporate groups, police, and all fascist institutions. They are all socialist in essence. Nowadays, even a lay man traveling through Italy can notice a tendency of social leveling. In public, on trains and buses, in trattorias and during evening leisure activities. [...] It’s the same in the countryside, in rural organizations and workers’ cooperatives. Classes are being abolished on internal railroads and in new trains, bathrooms and hospitals, and salaries are also seeing a strong leveling trend. No doubt, what I’m witnessing in Rome is the last breath of an aristocratic society. In the same vein, one can now feel in Milan, every day, Mussolini’s showdown with the private-capital industry. In western democracies, of course, the situation is opposite. There, capitalism and class permeate everything. What horrifying [class] differences can a foreign visitor see there in theaters, housing, diet, salaries, the rail, hospitals, and even schools!⁴⁹

Revisiting the uninformed resentment of the press, “even if it professes to be democratic,” about the situation in Italy, Crnjanski ironically added that it expected “Mussolini to fail [in everything and] even on [such a trivial] matter [as] pasta.” He warned the readers of *Vreme* that “our public opinion often takes its cues” from this kind of press.⁵⁰ Even allowing for Crnjanski’s position as a foreign correspondent in a fascist country, it is difficult to escape the impression that his own views, at least to an extent, informed these assessments. As we have seen from his texts in *Ideje*, Crnjanski was not very fond of liberalism and democracy, especially in the social sphere, and of communism, so he curiously watched the attempts of fascist powers to find a “third path.”

⁴⁹ Miloš Crnjanski, “Musolinijev predgovor,” *Vreme*, 16. VII 1938, in *Politički članci*, 595–597.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Another important point is Crnjanski's stance on the promulgation of racist legislation shortly after his arrival in Rome. First of all, he pointed out that Italian racism surfaced in the country's African colonies because Mussolini "doesn't want to create an empire of mixed-breeds" and that such a practice was based on "the scientific position that mixed-breeds are a physically, spiritually, and morally dangerous phenomenon and degeneration." Crnjanski portrayed this kind of racism as immanent to historical tradition, arguing that it could be "traced through the centuries, in all Italian historians, writers, politicians." That is how he also understood Mussolini's self-identification as a Mediterranean during the Great War and the claim that, in this war, "the fate of culture around the Mediterranean Basin [was] being resolved and that it [was] a war between civilization and barbarians." According to Crnjanski, although this was an old phenomenon, international outrage broke out "only now, due to the racist declaration of fascism, obviously because of anti-Semitism." However, he saw no "indications of a pogrom" or "animosity toward Jews, at least not local ones" in Italy. He had sympathy for the predicament of the Jewish community: "Those poor people weep, have no idea where to go and are angry in their desperation. [...] They have been dragged into international conflicts because they are an international race and because of their connections, but their interests are local." In contrast, he uncritically endorsed the premise of the fascist regime that there was no similarity between their and German anti-Semitism and even claims that this was a defensive response to the increased activity of anti-fascist centers in "Paris, New York, Amsterdam, and London, which fascism claims are Jewish [centers]." He also believed that "the Jews are certainly exaggerating in their visions of the horrors that await them. But as the saying goes, once bitten, twice shy." The true political background, however, was the "bitter quarrel between the Vatican and fascism." Pope Pius XI condemned racism as "pathetic when contrasted with the universal humanism of Catholicism." He argued that "race was a feature of horses and dogs, but what is great [...] is humanity, as a superior, joint species, and what is great isn't race but the human soul, humanity as the community of all races."

Essentially, whereas one group of cardinals that had a say in the Vatican's foreign policy held "that the time had come for an offensive against fascism," fascism wanted to "eliminate from the inside the last vestiges of Catholic opposition." This course of events made Crnjanski uneasy because it seemed to him that "this most recent conflict between the racists and the universalists truly suggests that Europe won't escape a showdown between these two worlds."⁵¹

It seemed that such a showdown was averted by the signing of the Munich Agreement in September 1938, with Czechoslovakia paying the price by losing a part of its territory, but all of Europe nonetheless breathed a sigh of relief that war had been avoided. In Munich, Mussolini posed as a mediator and peace-maker and so amassed some political capital in both domestic and international politics. Crnjanski responded with some contempt to the criticism of the British and French parliaments for Duce's role in these fateful events. "Even the humblest reader of the daily press must know now that the Axis works with precision and that democracy is not only weaker but infirm," he concluded and added that "such attacks are nothing but human pettiness." Crnjanski argued:

Nowadays, no sane man, if he knows anything about Italy, can refuse to acknowledge Mr. Mussolini's great success in reviving Italy, not only in the military and political but also the economic and, most of all, moral sense. Mr. Mussolini's pedestal is sky-high among the Italian masses, especially among the young. One has to be crazy to say that this pedestal has ever been rocked. Upon his return from Munich, Duce was greeted by a crowd that no man today can expect anywhere. And these crowds, to be clear, did not aggressively yell and shout; they are humane. The Italian people are grateful to Mr. Mussolini for peace. The masses extended their hands to him, called to him, caressed him. [...] Mr. Mussolini is having a great moment, like the one he had during the sanctions and the Abyssinia Crisis.⁵²

⁵¹ Miloš Crnjanski, "Italijanski rasizam," *Vreme*, 9. VIII 1938, in *Politički članci*, 602–605; see also Milosavljević, *Savremenici fašizma*, I, 217–218, 265–266.

⁵² Miloš Crnjanski, "Musolinijev momenat," *Vreme*, 9. X 1938, in *Politički članci*, 609–611.

This ode to Mussolini reflected the *realpolitik* assessment of the international situation that guided Stojadinović's foreign policy, but Crnjanski imbued his text with a self-congratulatory tone, believing that the course of events had vindicated his well-known anti-liberal views. "For years, the author of these lines, with some irony, fought against left-wingers in our country. Not because they are leftists, but because nowadays democracy is but a caricature and, even worse, a jumbled mess," he boasted.⁵³ The text ended with a personal observation:

Therefore, your correspondent from Rome holds that, these days, in a few articles, it should be said that Italy's power is on the rise and how strong Mr. Mussolini's intellectual conception had been during the crisis that shook Europe in recent days. It will not be without benefit for this to be known in our situation.⁵⁴

After the fall of his backer Stojadinović, four months later, Crnjanski's reports grew more impersonal and drier. His main duties concerned the visit of the new Foreign Minister, Aleksandar Cincar-Marković, to Venice (April) and Prince Paul to Rome and Florence in May 1939. Crnjanski tried to portray his country in the Italian press in the most flattering light and to stress the importance of Vidovdan (St. Vitus' Day) in the paper *Il Giornale d'Italia*.⁵⁵ Conspicuously, after Stojadinović's fall in early February 1939, his articles stopped being published in *Vreme*, after an entire series was published in the aftermath of the Munich crisis.

It should be noted that Crnjanski's texts in *Vreme* did not go unnoticed in the Italian press. As he was glad to point out to the Publication Section of CPB, the Italian press "on several occasions printed short excerpts from [articles published in] Belgrade, stressing the sympathetic writing and understanding of the Belgrade press for the circumstances and troubles of present-day Italy." In particular, he sent a newspaper clipping from the Milan-based *Popolo d'Italia* of 14 November 1938, which quoted his article on the motives of Rome's alienation from Paris and the flurry of British ambassador's activity in the Italian

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Crnjanski, *Nova Evropa*, 153.

capital.⁵⁶ Crnjanski was in Belgrade during the visit of Count Ciano in mid-January 1939 and delivered a speech at a dinner party for Italian journalists, which was broadcast by the Roman radio station and reprinted in all Italian newspapers, as was his article in *Vreme* about the Italian Foreign Minister.⁵⁷

It is intriguing to take a look at the reception Crnjanski was given by his hosts in Rome as it could be an indicator of the fascist regime's perception of the author's personal affinity for the ideas and practices of Mussolini's government. Curiously, Virginio Gayda, the editor of *Il Giornale d'Italia* and a fascist ideologue, assigned no importance whatsoever to Crnjanski. Such an inference is suggested by a file containing Gayda's entire correspondence,⁵⁸ which includes no reference to Crnjanski, although the two, by the nature of their jobs, were in constant contact, and, of course, Crnjanski was a correspondent from the country that was of the highest importance for Italy after the Great Powers. In his memoirs, the author reports that Gayda was one of the first journalists with whom he established contacts and that they had lunch together once or twice a month to exchange information.⁵⁹

From 1937 to 1943, Italy had a special ministry in charge of propaganda called *Ministero della cultura popolare*. A book containing information about the basics of Italy's propaganda work in the country and abroad (*Nuclei di propaganda Italia e all'estero*) includes a long list of contributors – politicians, distinguished authors, and university professors. The only person from Yugoslavia on that list was Svetislav Stefanović. A very extensive body of correspondence with the Legation in Belgrade has survived, with documents on many forms of cooperation,⁶⁰ and Stefanović⁶¹ is said to have been an associate from 15 January

⁵⁶ The article in question was published in *Vreme* on 13 October 1938 under the title "Francuska i Italija" – see Crnjanski, *Diplomatski izveštaji*, 329–330. This article was published in *Politički članci*, 615–618.

⁵⁷ Crnjanski, *Diplomatski izveštaji*, 555–563; the article "Grof Čano," published in *Vreme* on 22 January 1939, was reprinted in *Politički članci*, 649–650.

⁵⁸ Central Archives of the State (Archivio centrale dello Stato, hereafter ACS), Rome, Ministry of Popular Culture (Ministero della cultura popolare), ID 952, busta 26.

⁵⁹ Crnjanski, *Embahade*, 259.

⁶⁰ ACS, Ministry of Popular Culture, ID 952.

⁶¹ ACS, Ministry of Popular Culture, ID 952, busta 36.

1935 to 29 March 1939. There are documents concerning talks about Stefanović being hired to translate Mussolini's book *The Corporate State (Stato Corporativo)*, published in Belgrade in 1937, and many receipts, contracts and fees he received (on 1 February 1936, the Ministry informed Corrado Sofia, the Belgrade correspondent of Agenzia Stefani, that Stefanović would be paid 10,000 lire for the translation of the first volume). In a letter dated 30 May 1936, Sofia introduced Stefanović to Dino Alfieri, Mussolini's press and propaganda minister, as the president of the Yugoslav PEN Club and a true friend of Italy, adding that he was an esteemed writer in his country and was working, in his spare time, on promoting the Lega italo-jugoslava, together with the former Justice Minister Dimitrije Ljotić, who was preoccupied with extensive propaganda against the Marxists and Masons in Yugoslavia. The same letter recommended Stefanović as a translator for a series of books on fascism, including Mussolini's *Doctrine of Fascism (La dottrina del fascismo, 1932)*. The purpose of their cooperation with Stefanović was not only the translation of Italian works but also systematic propaganda against Marxism in Belgrade, focusing on the publishers Nolit and Kosmos as centers of communist propaganda. In this context, it is interesting that Crnjanski seems not to have attracted the attention of Italian propagandists, either in Rome or at the Belgrade mission,⁶² as a suitable candidate for such a job; alternatively, he could have been offered the job and turned it down. This seems even more significant because he would have been ideally suited for such an endeavor – he

⁶² From 1935 on, the Italian mission in Belgrade had a special task: to monitor the dissemination of communist ideas. They published books distributed to the broadest worker and peasant masses to discourage them from endorsing Bolshevik ideas. The Ministero della cultura popolare Direzione generale Propaganda, besides their cooperation with Stefanović and attempt to publish an entire series of fascist writings and translations of Mussolini's writings, was also tasked with monitoring the influence of Russian Bolshevism, which Italy was apprehensive about, through the Belgrade legation. It seems that the Ministry was more focused on the struggle against communist organizations and the rise of leftist ideas in Yugoslavia than on promoting fascist ideas and corporatism. The Ministry of Propaganda believed that the Belgrade mission should act through the Italian consulates in Ljubljana, Bitola, and Split, monitoring the movements of the communists and preventing their organizations from gaining momentum (ACS, Ministry of Popular Culture, ID 952, busta 17 bis Jugoslavo; ID 952, busta 26; ID 942, busta 34).

was at war with these Belgrade-based publishers due to their publishing policies. Also, in 1933, he published a translation of the interview that the journalist and biographer Emil Ludwig had conducted with Mussolini four years earlier (1929), as part of the novel *The New Machiavelli* by H. G. Wells, published by *Narodno delo* in Belgrade, in the *Savremena biblioteka* series. The translation of this interview was seen in the literary and social milieu of Yugoslavia as a sign of Crnjanski's sympathy for Mussolini. However, all of the above makes it clear that Crnjanski was far from Stefanović's position of unreservedly espousing the fascist ideology (Stefanović was eventually executed for having translated Mussolini's work).⁶³

In the last stage of his stay in Rome, Crnjanski was heavily involved in Yugoslav-Italian relations, at a time when they were quite fraught and when it seemed that Italy might even launch a military offensive against Yugoslavia. We learn of this from a letter sent by Gayda, the director of *Il Giornale d'Italia*, to the Minister of National Culture, Alessandro Pavolini, on 20 June 1940, asking him to make an assessment and, if needed, inform the Duce of the following:

The well-known delegate of the Yugoslav mission in Rome, Mr. Crnjanski, has called a new meeting and a new conversation about Yugoslavia and Italo-Yugoslav relations. I will recapitulate the key points that Crnjanski conveyed to me:

- 1) Despite the statements of the Duce and Italian politicians, there is still a lack of understanding for the positions of Germany and Italy in Yugoslavia after the end of the great standoff with France and Great Britain. It is constantly feared that Italy and Germany, now their hands are no longer tied, will approach the Balkan question with new views, especially regarding Yugoslav interests.
- 2) He admits that removing Stojadinović was a mistake. But his removal and the unsympathetic views on Italy were imposed by Maček [Croatian leader and Deputy Prime Minister]. Unless it can reach an agreement with Maček, the government in Belgrade might turn to Pavelić (!).

⁶³ Stefanović's political views are apparent from his texts published in: Svetislav Stefanović, *Starim ili novim putevima: odabrani politički spisi 1899–1943*, ed. Predrag Pužić (Novi Sad: Artprint, 2006).

3) Yugoslavia had a Francophile faction comprising soldiers and generals educated in France. There is still the Anglophile faction, most prominently personified by the Prince Regent, who is trying to balance between the requirements of political realism and his deep-seated sympathies.

4) Yugoslavia would like to have assurances for the future. "It would be willing to negotiate with Italy about some concessions if that would safeguard it from any surprises" (Crnjanski almost hinted that the Belgrade government would be ready to discuss even some limited territorial concessions to Italy).⁶⁴

If we accept Gayda's report as authentic, which could be questionable because the reference to potential cooperation between the Belgrade government and the leader of the Croatian fascist *Ustaša* movement, Ante Pavelić, who was in Italy and was responsible for the death of King Alexander, seems quite fanciful, Crnjanski was indeed trying to get involved in politics, as he had once told Balugdžić in Berlin. If he was trying to do so by playing a lone hand, then it must be said that it was a clumsy effort indeed.

In the end, in light of the above, many judgments and clichés that purport that Crnjanski was fascinated with Franco and admired Mussolini, enthusiastically following his appearances on the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, the seat of the fascist party at Piazza della Venezia, and that he uncritically reported on National Socialism in Germany, must be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism. It is perhaps closer to the truth, as Gorana Raičević has concluded, that Crnjanski, especially during his time in Rome, had no choice but to live as a *homo duplex*:

Sensing an all-encompassing tragedy and knowing that he was powerless to change anything in the world, Crnjanski had no choice but to double up, living two lives at the same time: one in which he was reduced to a mask, the mechanical dance of a marionette with someone else pulling the strings, and his other, authentic life, which, however, took place in thoughts and feelings.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Crnjanski, *Diplomatski izveštaji*, 807–808. The quoted document lists its source at the end: *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, Nona Serie: 1939–1943, 11 giugno – 28 ottobre 1940, Volume VI (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1965), 55–56.

⁶⁵ Raičević, *Agon i melanholija*, 484.

Unfortunately, before he left Rome, Crnjanski burned almost all of his writings and archives, depriving us of invaluable sources that could have shed more light on his understanding of the political, ideological, and literary movements he followed while working in the capitals of fascism.