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PLANNING A SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE RESEARCH OF WWII COLLABORATION IN SERBIA*

ABSTRACT: *During the occupation of Serbia in WWII a group of intellectuals in the Ministry of Education and Religion tried to conceive a new cultural policy and impose it on the Serbian people. While some elements of this policy were implemented during the war and affected mostly cultural production under occupation, several extensive long-term projects for a thorough transformation of Serbian society were also made. This article aims at showing and describing these projects and putting them in adequate historical context, thus providing a contribution to the research of the WWII collaboration in Serbia.*

Key words: *collaboration, Milan Nedić's government, cultural policy, Serbian civil/cultural plan, peasant cooperative state, concept of the „New Serbian Man“, Velibor Jonić, Vladimir Velmar-Janković*

Introduction

The study of a broader range of issues related to the local government in Serbia under Nazi occupation started in Yugoslav

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historiography six decades ago.¹ These issues were studied by historians in Serbia and in exile, as well as by a number of foreign scholars.² During the first three decades of this period, scholarly principles were heavily influenced by political circumstances. Local historiography was controlled by the government established by the victorious communist movement and was forced to adopt an imposed ideological point of view, i.e. to acknowledge the victors of the Yugoslav class revolution.³ The basic idea of political rhetoric was that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia led the liberation war against the occupation, and that any participation in local government during the occupation was treason against the country and the people. On the other hand, Serbian historians in exile who had taken an active role in the events they described, present an entirely different picture of the internal situation in the occupied country, trying to justify their reasons for participating in the government at the time of the occupation. On the wave of anti-communist euphoria during the Cold War in Western Europe and America, Serbian historians in exile accused the communists of being the reason for all Serbian misery during the occupation, which conformed to the ideology of the countries that gave them refuge. Authors in exile justified their collaboration with the Nazis with political pragmatism, the need of having to fight the common enemy – the Communists. At the same time they expressed their patriotism more rationally and had more political tact than both resistance movements in the country, i.e.

¹ WWII history has been one of the topics in Yugoslav and Serbian historiographies that have been best researched. Among numerous studies dedicated to this problem, several important ones dealing with the Serbian collaborationist government stand out: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia*, Collection of Papers, ed. by Anić, Dekker, Udovički & Vujović, Beograd, 1977; Milan Borković, *Kontrarevolucija u Srbiji*, I-II, Beograd, 1979; Milan Ristović, *Nemački novi poredak i jugoistočna Evropa 1940/41–1944/45. Planovi o budućnosti i praksa*, Beograd, 1991; Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939–1945*, Beograd, 1992; Dragan Aleksić, *Privreda Srbije u Drugom svetskom ratu*, Beograd, 2002; Stevan K. Pavlović, *Hitlerov novi anti-poredak – Drugi svetski rat u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd, 2009.

² So called „Serbian historiography in exile” comprising a number of authors, mostly collaborationists and members of the „Zbor” movement, developed extensive publicist production during the past six decades. Majority of its publications represent memoirs and apologetics of their own participation in the war; however, several studies offer valuable information (ideological interpretation aside): Boško N. Kostić, *Za istoriju naših dana – odlomci iz zapisa za vreme okupacije*, Lille, 1949; Đoko Slijepčević, *Jugoslavija uoči i za vreme Drugog svetskog rata*, Munich, 1970; Ratko Parežanin, *Drugi svetski rat i Dimitrije V. Ljotić*, Beograd, 2001; Borivoje M. Karapandžić, *Građanski rat u Srbiji 1941–1945*, Cleveland–Valjevo, 2010.

³ Political instructions for evaluation and writing the history of Yugoslav nations were set from the very top of the state and party nomenclature (Josip Broz Tito, Politički izveštaj CK KPJ, *V. kongres Komunističke partije Jugoslavije 21.–28. jula 1948: stenografske bilješke*, Beograd, 1948, pp. 9–112).

Partisans and Chetniks. The main thesis launched by the historiography in exile was that collaborationists were better able to help the Serbian people who were biologically compromised due to the Nazi reprisals. In the past few years a new generation of historians free of ideological bias and political constraints did significant research based on historical sources. The latest developments are based on new, until recently, unknown sources (the Security Information Agency handed extensive documentation to the Archives of Serbia) and memoirs of the most important participants in these events and various writings. The results of this research broke the old stereotypes about the nature and extent of collaboration and made room for a much broader and more detailed interpretation of this, probably the most complex, phenomenon of the Second World War.

This research is focused on three extensive projects dealing with the transformation of Serbian society in almost all its aspects: the *Serbian Civil/cultural plan*, *Peasant Cooperative State* and the concept of the national education, the so called *New Serbian Man*. These were launched in two different centers of Serbian collaborationist administration, independently of one another, and they represent the utopian alternative: the new social and economic organization of Serbia.⁴ Remarkably, the new concepts of radical transformation were offered in the period while the country was occupied at the time a provisional government was in office, and the main legal state administrative bodies, the parliament and the government, as well as the sovereign himself were *de facto* missing. Particularly intriguing was the fact that they were initiated in late 1942, and that major accomplishments in these projects were achieved in the final stages of the war, when it was already clear that the Third Reich and Nazism were near their end. That is why the initiative for the development of these three extensive projects was particularly unusual and interesting. In order to understand the reasons for launching them, it is necessary to analyze their authors and not only their content. In order to achieve the goal of the research it was necessary to put the central object of the research in its appropriate political context. This issue is insufficiently explored and little known even to the academic community in the country, making

⁴ During the war, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, with its internal organization and institutions, became an unacceptable frame for post-war life and development in the eyes of practically all active political participants in war (both resistance movements, King's government in exile and collaborationists in the country). At some point, all of them began developing their own concepts of state reorganization and society transformation.

this article a modest contribution to the process of WWII collaboration in Serbia.

Character of Collaboration in Occupied Serbia 1941–1944

In the spring of 1941 Serbian people lost their state(hood) and in the autumn of the same year they suffered an ideological split that caused resistance and led to a bloody civil war and brutal German reprisals. At the time when the Third Reich was at the height of its power, it seemed that Europe would have a new shape mirrored in the „new world order“ of the future. A number of the most active and ambitious participants in local collaborationist government went public with a strategy to bring most of the Serbian people together and to pacify them, even by offering unrealistic socio-political concepts. The Nazi occupation program planned no ideological actions in Serbia.⁵ The overriding priority of the occupation administration was the security of the German armed forces and the smooth economic exploitation of the occupied territories. The Germans were willing to leave some freedom to the local collaborationist government in creating public awareness and cultural transformation, while retaining the possibility of intervention if an act of local administration was felt to be potentially harmful to the major interests of the occupiers. In practice, this meant that the work of state and public institutions had to be devoted to maintenance of public peace and order, unobstructed movement and actions of the German occupation troops and smooth operation of commercial and industrial facilities of the country. Public word was subject to censorship, property to confiscation and expropriation, and economy to systematic exploitation by the occupiers.

⁵ This was confirmed by numerous statements of high-rank Nazi occupation officers, such as Dr Georg Kiessel and Herman Neubacher. In his statement before the State Commission for Determining Crimes of Occupiers and their Collaborators, Georg Kiessel pointed out: „apart from our standing point that introduction of National-Socialist form to foreign countries was of no use to us, we had the opinion that Serbian people, with its internal divisions, is highly incompatible for conduction of such an experiment“ (Archives of Yugoslavia /AJ/, holding: State Commission for Determining Crimes of Occupiers and their Collaborators /110/ – 2603/I). Some broader studies indicate that Serbian future in Hitler’s „New Europe“ would not be bright (Milan Ristović, *Nemački novi poredak i jugoistočna Evropa 1940/41–1944/45. Planovi o budućnosti i praksa*, Beograd, 1991; Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: Nazi rule in occupied Europe*, Penguin Books, 2009).

Collaboration with the occupiers in Serbia 1941–1944 went through two very distinct phases that were institutionally shaped: the period of the Council of Commissioners and the period of Milan Nedić's government (the so called: „The Government of National Salvation“). The first Serbian administration under occupation, the Council of Commissioners, was formed on April 30th, and publicly announced on May 16th 1941. The Germans allowed a small government with very narrow prerogatives, comprising originally of only ten commissioners. They were deprived of any political decisions-making powers and were, *de facto*, just administrators of the pre-war ministries, in technical and administrative sense.⁶ In order to create the false image of wide public support for collaborationist government, the occupiers included in Council of Commissioners persons from almost all important pre-war political parties. This also had a moral effect and encouraged many to work with and for the Germans. The behaviour of the occupiers toward the Serbian people in Serbia during the first several months of the occupation was, to a certain extent, in accordance with the international law and rules of war.⁷ The change in this attitude came with the beginning of the uprising, that, combined with events on other frontiers, produced numerous and horrific crimes committed by the occupier against local population. Swift and unexpected spread of the uprising and the failure of the Serbian authorities to end it brought on the fall of the Council of Commissioners. Faced with ideological and total war waged on the Eastern front, the Nazi occupiers started to pick personalities who were ideologically closer to them, which was also reflected in the composition of Milan Nedić's government.

⁶ A number of experts were engaged to work in the Council of Commissioners, willing to perform their professional and patriotic duty and to help the suffering people. Well documented is the case of Dr Gojko Grdić, a prominent economist and statistician who became a Commissioner for Prices and Salaries. He believed that, being a proven expert and German doctoral student, he would be granted freedom in his field of work, but he was disappointed due to constant interventions of occupier and resigned (Archives of Serbia/AS/, holding: Commissariat for Prices and Salaries /G-6/ f. 24). After the war he was not prosecuted and continued his work at the University.

Serbian administration was supervised by special elements of the occupation system during the entire occupation (Military archives /VA/ holding: German archives /Na/ – 27-12/1; AJ, 110-f2603). Cf. Lj. Skodrić, „Odnos nemačkog okupatora prema domaćim saradnicima u Srbiji 1941–1944“, *Oslobođenje Beograda 1944* (ed. by: Aleksandar Životić), Beograd, 2010, pp. 82–94.

⁷ Occupying forces helped repair the disastrous consequences of bombardment and their troops in Serbia were disciplined. However, systematic prosecution of Jews, communists and free masons started in Serbia as early as the end of April 1941, while Germans did next to nothing to prevent genocide on Serbian people in Independent State of Croatia.

Historical sources clearly indicate that the motives for collaboration were almost entirely personal, which is additionally confirmed by the fact that the occupiers had personal connections with all leaders of the collaborationist government (both in the period of the Council of Commissioners and afterwards). The collaborationist government did not have the support of neither organized political parties and movements, with the exception of the „Zbor“ movement, nor of the majority of any class of the Serbian people (although ideologically burdened Yugoslav historiography often maliciously claimed that most of the Serbian bourgeoisie sided with the occupiers). Being appointed by the occupiers, in extraordinary circumstances, Milan Nedić's government had no proper legitimacy, since it was not elected by the people, and was not responsible to its people, but to the Nazi authorities.

The discrepancy between various groups of Serbian collaborationists was obvious even in the period of the Council of Commissioners. The only compact and politically focused group was the „Zbor“ movement, an extreme pro-fascist party with few supporters in the country (approximately 1% of the voters at the parliamentary elections in Yugoslavia). Collaborationists included other smaller groups that were connected through personal and family ties and joint political actions in the past, but their motives for collaboration were different, thus they engaged individually in collaboration with the occupying forces.⁸ From the very beginning of the occupation, local administration engaged a group of intellectuals acting primarily in the Ministry of

⁸ Among the Serbian collaborationists there were many right-wing political activists from inter-war era, prominent members and ideologists of right-wing political organizations, such as the Narodna odbrana (National Defense), Jugoslovenska akcija (Yugoslav Action) and ORJUNA (Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists). The most obvious examples are Velibor Jonić, collaborationist Minister of Education and Religion, former Secretary-General of the Yugoslav action and „Zbor“, and his assistant-minister Vladimir Velmar-Janković, high-ranking official of the National defense and the Yugoslav action before the war. During the post war interrogations, it has been established that Jonić personally offered his services to occupiers, which was the main reason for the positive attitude they had towards him till the end of the war (Military archives /VA/, holding: Chetnik archive /Ča/ – unit: 269-3/17; Historical archives of Belgrade /IaB/ – holding: BdS, unit J-87). Close personal connections also existed in security circles, with several important police officials (Dragomir Dragi Jovanović, Božidar Boško Bećarević, Radan Grujičić) being set to lead the Special Police, with Milan Aćimović as the Head of Ministry of Internal Affairs as their superintendant (Cf. Branislav Božović, *Beograd pod komesarskom upravom* 1941, Beograd, 1998; Branislav Božović, *Specijalna policija u Beogradu 1941–1944*, Beograd, 2004).

Education and Religion.⁹ Between the wars some of them had modest political careers in the Yugoslav right-wing political organizations and state administration, but their ambitions were much larger. Driven by personal frustration, ambition and adventurism, they felt that their historical opportunity has come, and devoted themselves to collaboration with Nazi occupiers, firmly connecting their destiny to the expected Axis' triumph in the war. Relying on the occupiers, this group of Serbian collaborationists tried to launch new cultural and national policy and to impose it on the Serbian people during the occupation.¹⁰ However, new research indicate that above mentioned policy was also created as a long-term national program, with much of its realization left for after the war.

Cultural Policy of Milan Nedić's Government and the Socio-political projects for Transformation of Serbian Society

Starting from the assumption that Yugoslavia as a state was irrevocably destroyed (historical sources show that many collaborationists believed the Axis powers would win the war, although some of them were proven Anglophiles and Francophiles), and that in the period between the wars the Serbian people had made too many compromises on its nationality and identity, a specific national and cultural policy was developed including a return to patriarchal and conservative Serbian national and social values. This meant affirmation of the traditional way of life, agricultural production, national motives in art, patriarchal family relations, Orthodox religion and so on.¹¹

⁹ Some of more active intellectuals in this group were: Dr Svetislav Stefanović, extreme-right ideologist, a medical doctor, translator and a poet; Dr Branimir Maleš, anthropologist and Gestapo informer; Dr Vladimir Vujić, philosopher, translator and Nazi supporter from the first days of the NDSAP; Damnjan Kovačević, writer and extreme-right ideologist and others. Most of them were, at some point, active as high-rank officials in Ministry of Education and Religion.

¹⁰ Cultural policy of Milan Nedić's government has been only partly researched in Serbian historiography. Basic elements of this policy have been described and pointed out in recent studies: Boro Majdanac, *Pozorište u okupiranoj Srbiji*, Beograd, 2011; Bojan Đorđević, *Srpska kultura pod okupacijom*, Beograd, 2008; Ljubinka Škodrić, *Ministarstvo prosvete i vera u Srbiji 1941–1944: sudbina institucije pod okupacijom*, Beograd, 2009; Aleksandar Stojanović, *Srpski civilni/kulturni plan Vlade Milana Nedića*, Beograd, 2012.

¹¹ Ideology and propaganda of Milan Nedić's government is still inadequately researched in Serbian historiography. Prof. Milan Ristović published several articles on perception of women and city in collaborationists propaganda: M. Ristović, „Izopačeni grad

Some Serbian national values, like Saint Sava's legacy, Serbian nationalism and history have been abused and perverted by ideologists of the new cultural policy and their propaganda.¹² Recent research on theatre and literary production under occupation indicate that art was subordinated to war goals of occupiers and ideological intervention of collaborationists. Many theatres and theatre companies were very active, playing some of their shows even several times a day; however, they mostly played comic shows of very little artistic value, and were in fact degraded to cheap entertainment for wide audiences.¹³ The quality of literary production hit the absolute bottom (in 20th century Serbian history), due to intensive ideological pressure and censorship. Famous and established authors, like Ivo Andrić, refused to publish or act publicly during the occupation, leaving the spotlight to obscure writers eager to modify their works to the standards of the newly-imposed national culture.¹⁴ With participation of Serbian Literature Cooperative

u ideologiji srpskih kolaboracionista 1941–1945", *Nova srpska politička misao*, Vol. IX, No. 1–4, pp. 67–79 and M. Ristović, „Položaj žena u ideološko-propagandnom rečniku kolaboracionističkog režima u Srbiji u Drugom svetskom ratu", *Tokovi istorije*, 3/2009, pp. 20–32. Contours of ideology and propaganda of Milan Nedić's government were also shown in: Arton Mihailović, *Uspomene iz okupacije 1942–1945*, edited by B. Đorđević, Beograd, 2004; Olivera Milosavljević, *Potisnuta istina: Kolaboracija u Srbiji 1941–1944*, Beograd, 2006; Bojan Đorđević, *Srpska kultura pod okupacijom*, Beograd, 2008, A. Stojanović, „The City and Urban Culture in Serbian Right-Wing Ideology", *Architecture & Ideology*, Edited by: Vladimir Mako, Mirjana Roter Blagojević, Marta Vuković Lazar, CD proceedings/digital edition, Beograd, 2012, pp. 216–223, etc.

¹² Collaborationist propaganda maliciously misused many Serbian national values during the war. Maybe the most notorious one was statement of Mihajlo Olčan, member of „Zbor" and Minister of Industry in the Nedić's government, that „Saint Sava was the first Serbian national-socialist" (IaB, BdS, O-39). Serbian nationalism has been perverted by radical xenophobia, anti-Yugoslavism and promotion of utter servility to Nazi occupiers as an act of national heroism (Cf. perception of servility as a Christian virtue in: Velibor Jonić, „Svetosavski nacionalizam", *Srpski narod*, 22. 1. 1944). Also, there were many misinterpretations of Serbian history coming from collaborationist leaders, especially Nedić, Ljotić and Velmar-Janković.

¹³ More on Serbian theatre under occupation: Vasilije Marković, *Teatri okupirane prestonice 1941–1944*, Beograd, 1998; Boro Majdanac, *Pozorište u okupiranoj Srbiji: pozorišna politika u Srbiji 1941–1944*, Beograd, 2010.

¹⁴ Ivo Andrić strictly banned publication of all his works (in whole or part) during the occupation, refused to sign the „Appeal to the Serbian People" and to participate in Radio broadcasts. Some of the greatest Serbian writers, like Rastko Petrović and Miloš Crnjanski, were not in Serbia, so they did not participate in public life (although their works were enlisted in school program and anthologies published under the occupation). Absence of greatest authors, combined with new cultural model promoted in literature by Velmar-Janković and Svetislav Stefanović (commissar of SKZ), brought obscure and untalented authors like Dragutin Ilić - Jejo to spotlight (Bojan Đorđević, *Srpska kultura pod okupacijom*, Beograd, 2008, pp. 68–140).

(Srpska književna zadruga, SKZ), Ministry of Education and Religion organized several public literary competitions, offering valuable prizes and promoting new motives in literature.¹⁵

Important part of the new cultural policy was transformation of the Serbian society that was mostly discussed and contemplated in the Ministry of Education and Religion. Long-term plans of collaborationist cultural policy were best reflected in three socio-political projects for transformation of the Serbian nation and society, which, in time of occupation, were elaborated in detail: the Serbian civil/cultural plan, the project of Serbian peasant cooperative state and the concept of the „new Serbian man“.

The *Serbian civil/cultural plan* was an ambitious project whose aim was to reorganize Serbian society in almost all its segments.¹⁶ The author and chief promoter of this interesting and in many ways controversial initiative was Vladimir Velmar-Janković, a prominent interwar writer, the Assistant Minister of Education and Religion in the collaborationist government. It was a draft of a national program that should solve major problems of the Serbian people, through decades of professional engagement, and significantly raise their civilization level. Vladimir Velmar-Janković together with professors of the Belgrade University, defined some 200 burdensome problems hindering the development of the Serbian people (in the fields of finance, economy, health, science, culture, education, and partly in the state administration), and then engaged the most prominent experts in

¹⁵ Winner of the first prize for the best short story was Dragutin Ilić - Jejo, with text: „Death of the Serbian Host“ (Dragutin Ilić Jejo, „Smrt srpskog domaćina“, *Srpski narod*, 31st July 1943). All awarded stories celebrated peasantry, traditional way of life and patriarchal moral, but their artistic value was modest. Arton Mihailović, playwright, wrote in his diary that competition was rigged for Jejo to win it (Arton Mihailović, *Uspomene iz okupacije 1942–1945*, edited by B. Đorđević, Beograd, 2004).

¹⁶ One of the first mentions of Serbian Civil (cultural) Plan was made in: Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939–1945*, Beograd, 1992. The Plan featured in the research of Slobodan Kerkez, Ljubinka Škodrić, Ljubica Kandić and unpublished PhD thesis of Danilo Kilibarda (Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade University). However, most of the above mentioned authors were confused by various names used for the Plan during its making, which misled them to believe that the Serbian Civil Plan and the Serbian Cultural Plan were two separate projects. Because of this, the term the „Serbian Civil/cultural plan“ was introduced in: A. Stojanović, „Projekat industrijalizacije zemlje po Srpskom civilnom/kulturnom planu (1942–1944)“, *Tokovi istorije*, 3/2010, pp. 55–73. For insight in genesis and nature of the Plan see: A. Stojanović, „Srpski civilni/kulturni plan: geneza i prilog proučavanju“, *Istorija 20. veka*, 1/2012, pp. 89–108.

the field to work out their solution.¹⁷ The two-year work on this project resulted in a series of studies and specific solutions for about two-thirds of defined problems. The economic sector of the Plan offered numerous solutions for financial and economic recovery, with a set of measures to be conducted immediately and after the war.¹⁸ Some of them dealt with credit reforms, reform of public sector, etatisation and nationalization of important economic resources in the country. The Biological Sector of the Serbian civil/cultural plan was mostly focused on the improvement of general health care and health culture, in order to help national development and to compensate some of great biological losses that struck the Serbian people in the first half of 20th century.¹⁹ However, this sector contains one project that could be recognized as a part of eugenic praxis.²⁰ The so-called „Technical Sector“ consisted of large number of projects focused on specific problems of national industry, organization of labor and urbanism.²¹ Apart from several very practical solutions, it offered a new concept of organization of national industry and the organization of labor within it. Idea was to transform Serbian economy in order to be more efficient: vast majority of labor force and resources should be assigned to agricultural and raw-material production that have been pin-pointed as comparative advantages of Serbia's geographic position in the project analysis. The whole process of production and distribution of gained goods was supposed to be overseen by the state; economic base formed over time on this premises should be used for introduction of more sophisticated technologies allowing industrial growth above the level of primary production. The author of these ideas was Milosav Vasiljević,

¹⁷ The original schematism of Serbian civil/cultural plan is kept in the Military Archives in Belgrade (VA, holding: Nedić's archive /Nda/, 35-2-2/2); another blueprint of distribution of Plan's individual projects at the University is kept in the Archives of Serbia (AS, holding: Ministry of Education and Religion 1941–1944 /G-3/, separated materials).

¹⁸ Selection of archival records of the Economic Sector has been organized and integrally published in: Aleksandar Stojanović, *Srpski civilni/kulturni plan Vlade Milana Nedića*, Beograd, 2012, pp. 315–338.

¹⁹ Selection of archival records of the Biological Sector has been organized and integrally published in: Aleksandar Stojanović, *Srpski civilni/kulturni plan Vlade Milana Nedića*, Beograd, 2012, pp. 162–238.

²⁰ This individual project called „Protection of Serbian Blood and Healthy Progeny“ represents one view on the use of eugenic praxis in Serbian society (AJ, 110-551-13). Not containing any racial doctrine, it mainly suggests formation of Eugenic Institute and conducting of a series of socio-anthropological researches.

²¹ Selection of archival records of the Technical Sector has been organized and integrally published in: Aleksandar Stojanović, *Srpski civilni/kulturni plan Vlade Milana Nedića*, Beograd, 2012, pp. 339–391.

former member of the Council of Commissioners and prominent „Zbor“ member and ideologist. Fourth part of the Serbian civil/cultural plan, named the Spiritual Sector, was larger and more connected with general cultural policy of Nedić's government than the others.²² It consisted of large number of individual projects, mainly dealing with national history, culture, preservation of identity, education, science and art. As a part of a long-term project, the authors of the Plan established several lists of important editions to be edited and published, among others three versions of Serbian national history, several editions of Serbian dictionary, national theatre repertoire, and a list of 100 books every Serb should read. Some of the proposed measures were focused on building the foundation for development of various sciences, through establishing scientific institutes connected with the Academy of Science and Art or the University. By close analysis of all Spiritual Sector projects broad national policy can be discovered in the background: at its focus were preservation of national identity (especially because of uncertain national future at the time), promotion of cultural heritage and national history and establishment of foundations for further intellectual growth.

The Serbian civil/cultural plan was generally apolitical and professional, and the proposed solutions were applicable within almost any type of state organization. Furthermore, its implementation was initially planned for the period after the war and was not time-restricted. For still unknown reasons, General Nedić refused to raise this plan to the state level, so when the operations for the liberation of Serbia intensified, the plan was put aside.

Closely related to the Serbian civil/cultural plan was the concept of the „New Serbian Man“ as a new concept of national education strategy.²³ It was also developed by the Ministry of Education with significant involvement of Velmar-Janković and the Minister Velibor Jonić himself, but also with major propaganda support from Nedić and several „Zbor“ ideologists. The main agenda was education of the

²² Selection of archival records of the Spiritual Sector has been organized and integrally published in: Aleksandar Stojanović, *Srpski civilni/kulturni plan Vlade Milana Nedića*, Beograd, 2012, pp. 239–314.

²³ This concept has only been touched upon in the Serbian historiography, in already mentioned works of Slobodan Kerkez, Bojan Đorđević, Ljubinka Škodrić and Aleksandar Stojanović, and it is still almost completely unexplored. Like the Serbian Civil/cultural plan, it was conceived by Velmar-Janković. The crucial document for understanding the nature of this concept and its place in the complex cultural policy of Nedić's government is Velmar-Janković's text: „Polazne tačke za Državni prosvetni plan“, which highlights importance of national duty and favors interest of the community over individual ones (VA, Nda, 35-30/2-2/11).

youth in accordance with national values and traditions, excluding any kind of internationalism. In both collaborationist's classified analysis and public critique of youth education in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia the main points were highlighting of suppression of Serbian national identity and values in education process, giving way to Yugoslav or other international identity that was imposed on the youth. This, in the perception of the ideologists of new cultural policy, has created ideal conditions for spread of communist propaganda, free masonry and other internationalist ideas, confusing young generations in regard of their national identity and patriotic feelings. Collaborationists also criticized too much private initiative in education during the 1920s and 1930s, and too little state control in this field. Because of this, they were proposing strict state control over the education processes on all levels, aiming at long-term creation of new generations of nationally aware and active youth, embodied in the „New Serbian Man“. Special place in this educational plan belonged to a decades-long promotion of the Serbian Civil/cultural plan as a common national program. However, Nedić's government showed great interest in immediate actions aimed at winning trust and support from youth, and directing young generations to follow collaborationist's policy. The young, especially those from agricultural families, have been publicly praised as the foundation of the new Serbia and the greatest treasure of the Serbian people;²⁴ also, much effort has been invested in deterrence of young Serbian men from entering resistance movements. Youth have been massively engaged in public works organized by the National Service for Renewal of Serbia, while several contingents of village youngsters and workers were sent to work in Germany.²⁵

The *peasant cooperative state*, in which cooperatives would become not only an economic but also a political system, was ideologically and politically the most specific concept of social transformation promoted by the collaborationists during the occupation.²⁶ Although

²⁴ Good illustration of such practice is Nedić's Message to Peasant Youth: „Poruka pret-sednika vlade seoskim omladincima“, *Srpski narod*, July 19th 1942.

²⁵ National Service for Renewal of Serbia (NSOS) was established in late 1941. Although it has been formally mandatory for men between 17 and 45 years of age, practically, only youngsters served. Collaborationist propaganda gave explanation that purpose of youth labor was to take young people away from the streets, vices and temptations of leisured everyday life. New researches indicate that NSOS was organized more like a military service, with strict discipline, subordination and organization of life (Zoran Janjetović, *U skladu sa nastalom potrebom: Prinudni rad u okupiranoj Srbiji 1941–1944*, Beograd, 2012, pp. 187–208).

²⁶ The Serbian peasant cooperative state has been much more researched in Yugoslav historiography than the Serbian civil/cultural plan or concept of „New Serbian

it never materialized in political practice, this socio-political project is interesting as the product of political and economic factors that initiated it. The main protagonist of the idea of a peasant cooperative state in Serbia was Milan Nedić, the president of Serbian collaborationist administration, but he was not its author.²⁷ The idea of peasant cooperative state has its roots in a movement and ideology that were present on the political scene of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between two world wars, but without significant impact on the society.²⁸ The concept of cooperative state was founded on the economic base of cooperatives that had a rather fruitful tradition in Serbian history (mainly developed by Milorad Nedeljković and *Agrarian Thought*) and on the ideological concept of a class system, which started from the negation of parliamentary democracy and the progressive ideas of the French Revolution (developed by Dimitrije Ljotić and other „Zbor” movement ideologists). Cooperatives had a long tradition and primarily economic function in Serbia before the war.²⁹ By joining a cooperative, which worked on the principles of profit distribution, many people

Man”. See: Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939–1945*, Beograd, 1992, pp. 455–470; Ž. Jovanović, „Srpska seljačka država u ratnom programu Milana Nedića”, *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, 1–2/1996, pp. 118–128; Ž. Jovanović, *Nova vlast u Srbiji 1941–1945*, Beograd, 1997; Dragan Aleksić, *Privreda Srbije u Drugom svetskom ratu*, PhD thesis in manuscript, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade. However, some important questions, considering ideological roots and historical circumstances that influenced creation of this project for social transformation, are still left unanswered.

²⁷ Highlighting the Serbian peasantry was an important part of both collaborationist ideology and propaganda. Numerous text promoting Serbian peasantry and idea of Cooperative state were published during the occupation: „O zadružnoj državi”, *Srpski narod*, January 23rd 1943; „Ka novoj seljačkoj zadružnoj državi”, „General Nedić o ulozi zadrugarstva”, *Srpski narod*, May 8th 1943; „Udaren je kamen-temeljac Srpske seljačke zadrugne države”, *Srpski narod*, May 29th 1943; Milan Nedić, „U novom uređenju Srbije zadrugarstvo ima da postane temelj nove seljačke zadrugne države”, *Novo vreme*, May 4th 1943; „Narodno zadrugarstvo biće kičma i oslonac budućeg poretka u Srbiji”, *Novo vreme*, May 25th 1943; „Novo doba srpskog zadrugarstva”, *Obnova*, September 5th 1944, etc.

²⁸ The so-called „Agrarian Movement” lead by Milorad Nedeljković, owner and editor of the journal *Agrarna misao* (Agrarian Thought) promoted ideas of expanding cooperative economy during the difficult years that followed Great Depression. At the same time, Dimitrije Ljotić, Milosav Vasiljević, Stevan Ivanić and other prominent ideologists of „Zbor” offered their own version of corporative state, with significant role planned for cooperatives too. Cf. Đorđe Davidović, *Ideološke osnove našeg zadrugarstva*, Beograd, 1940; Đorđe Davidović, *Jugoslovensko zadrugarstvo*, Beograd, 1940; Milosav Vasiljević, *Pravci sutrašnjice u etici, političkoj ekonomiji i politici*, Beograd, 1934.

²⁹ For history of cooperatives in Serbia see: Mihailo Vučković, *Zadrugarstvo juče i danas*, Beograd, 1945, and Mihailo Vučković, *Istorija zadrugnog pokreta u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*, Beograd, 1966.

improved their economic status and secured their existence. Apart from the agrarian movement, Dimitrije Ljotić and his „Zbor“ also had a clear idea of the peasantry and cooperatives. By the middle of 1930s, Ljotić produced a clear concept of a new economic and political system similar to the corporate system which was advocated by totalitarian states such were Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.³⁰

The political strategy of collaborationist government in Serbia had pragmatic importance for politically and ideologically divided Serbian society, trying thus to gather the majority of the Serbian people around this idea. The Nedić government invested much effort in gaining as wide public support as possible, trying at the same time to improve its position with the leadership of the occupation system and Nazi Germany. Especially after the uprising was crushed, and both resistance movements practically forced out of occupied Serbia, the collaborationists turned to internal development of their institutions.³¹ Nedić became eager to enlarge his prerogatives, asking Nazi officials for territorial enlargement of Serbia, requesting permission to set up some kind of national assembly, strengthening of military forces and reactivating institutions of national importance, such as the University.³² Highlighting the peasantry as the „foundation of Serbian

³⁰ Ljotić built his ideology starting from ultra-conservative foundation, and under strong influence of French „Organic political thought“, Russian Slavophile movement and philosophy of Berdyaev and very specific perception of Christianity (for early influences on Ljotić see: Christian Kurzydowski, „The early ideological influences on Dimitrije Ljotić: the makings of fascist and traitor?“, *Srbi i rat u Jugoslaviji 1941* (ed. by Dragan Aleksić), Beograd, 2013, pp. 31–57). Critique of the Enlightenment and progressive values of the French revolution were roots of his ideology that has been later upgraded with corporative political and economical thought. As a result of these influences came the idea of corporate/class state, with peasantry as a dominant class, and the Serbian version of the so-called „divine triad“: God-King-Landlord. Other ideologists of „Zbor“, like Milosav Vasiljević, Stevan Ivanić and Momir Nikolić, followed Ljotić's ideas and shared his vision of class/corporate state without political parties, democracy, with state organized economy and strong public influence of the clergy.

³¹ It is worth noticing that almost all long term projects of the Nedić government were launched during 1942, especially those conceived by the Ministry of Education and Religion. Also, some complex institutions, such as Institution/Reformatory for Compulsory Education of Youth (Zavod za prinudno vaspitanje omladine) in Smederevska Palanka and Nedić's „Children City“ in Obilićevo (near Kruševac) have been established during 1942 and 1943.

³² Nedić tried to establish all elements of traditional Serbian statehood, by trying to organize or get support from main national state symbols: the Assembly, the University, the Army and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC). While he, after some time, managed to regain control over the armed forces in the country and re-open the University, he failed to establish a representative body and to gain support from SPC. Church leaders deprived him of public support, in spite of his numerous pleas

society" Serbian collaborationists intended to win the vast majority of Serbian population, pacify it, and keep it away from joining resistance movements. Milan Nedić got involved in developing and implementing the project of Serbian peasant cooperative state by emotionally speaking in favor of introducing this type of organization. In the words of a historian „It became his preoccupation". He commissioned Ilija Pržić and Ceka Đorđević to produce a draft of the new state organization on cooperative basis, and they delivered an extensive document: „The main goal of national-cooperative state regulation".³³ The new Serbian state should have been formed on the idea of family, house community and state, as the three main elements and levels of national spirit. Built on patriarchal values, each administrative level would have one leader, solely responsible for making decisions, while all other members of the community would have only consultative role. The existence of political parties was not part of the plan: the only party would be the Fatherland, individual interests should be realized through numerous cooperatives. Representative bodies were supposed to be organized on local, county and national levels, but without any real political power, with merely consultative role. On the top of the state organization stood the „National Leadership", the executive government with legislative power, with its president acting as the leader of whole nation. Nedić marked this complex system as a „People's Serbian Socialism", truly believing in the possibility of class harmony, seeing it as the only way to building the new Serbian society and state. After all preparations had been completed, Nedić engaged himself in seeking support from General Paul Bader, the chief of the German occupation apparatus, but was met with cold reception.³⁴ German rejection of the Serbian

and pressure that followed (Archive of the Holy Synod of Bishops, Record of the Holy Synod held in 1947, documents in possession of Radmila Radić, PhD).

³³ Draft of the Serbian cooperative state project is kept in the Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ, holdings: Zbirka Ilije Pržića, f. 2). On the idea of the Serbian cooperative state and the preparations for its introduction during the occupation Cf. Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939–1945*, Beograd, 1992, pp. 464–470; Slobodan Kerkez, *Društvo Srbije u Drugom svetskom ratu 1941–1945*, Niš, 2004.

³⁴ On January 1st 1943 Milan Nedić, acting as the president of the collaborationist government, sent two memoranda to General Paul Bader: „Explanation of the necessity to organize the Serbian people on basis of national community" and „Development of Serbia on basis of national community", practically asking for permission and support to introduce the Peasant Cooperative State. After internal discussion, Nazi administration in occupied Serbia rejected Nedić's requests (VA, holding: Mikroteka, NAV-N-T-501, r. 256, mf. 955/962: letter of P. Bader to M. Nedić, January 29th 1943). High ranking military officials such as generals Alexander Löhr and August Mayszner offered strong opposition to these requests, stressing that strengthening

cooperative state did not stop further efforts to develop and promote this idea. It was in public focus especially during May of 1943 and at the beginning of 1944. However, it is still unclear whether this was only propaganda, or collaborationists held hopes to reverse the German decision due to the altered war situation.

Instead of a Conclusion

Military defeat of the Axis powers and the revolution that followed in Yugoslavia put an end to the concepts of social transformation developed by Serbian collaborationists. The Peasant cooperative state, a utopian and anachronistic project, never came to life: new authorities in Serbia favored working class over peasantry. Some of the solutions contained within the Serbian civil/cultural plan were later implemented by the new authorities, but it remained unclear whether they were the result of the studies made during the occupation, or of the general wave of post-war development. The concept of the „New Serbian Man“ has been marked as a fascist indoctrination of the Serbian youth, although communist authorities also insisted on strict state control over education and ideological indoctrination of young generations. Almost all individuals involved in the development of these socio-political projects were prosecuted by the new authorities for war crimes, treason, collaboration with occupiers and fascist indoctrination of Serbian youth. Among the accused were some proven collaborationists, pro-fascists and pro-Nazis and persons who have committed various war crimes; but among the prosecuted there were also many Serbian intellectuals engaged in development of the Serbian civil/cultural plan and other scientific activities during the occupation, their only fault being their patriotic, professional or anti-communist stand. Destiny was cruel in many such cases: some of the most notorious collaborators managed to escape from the country and lived in peace and prosperity for several decades, while some of the prominent intellectuals who were in contact with occupiers by way of professional duty were imprisoned, deprived of national honour and forced to retire from public life after

of Nedić's authority and improvement of the Serbian position in the „New Europe“ could be potentially harmful for interests of Germany and her allies in the Balkans (VA, Mikroteka, NAV-N-T-501, r. 256, mf. 924/26, Letter of A. Mayszner to Commanding military officer in Serbia; VA, Mikroteka, NAV-N-T-501, r. 256, mf. 927/937, Letter of A. Löhr to P. Bader, January 22nd 1943).

the liberation of Serbia. Deep divisions of national being, rooted in the Second World War, still heavily burden the Serbian nation.

Резиме

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Планирање друштвеног преображаја: прилог проучавању колаборације у Србији у Другом светском рату

Кључне речи: колаборација, влада Милана Недића, културна политика, Српски цивилни/културни план, Сељачка задружна држава, Нови Србин, Јонић, Велмар-Јанковић

Темама из Другог светског рата посвећена је, у југословенској и српској историографији, велика пажња. Међу проблемима који су само фрагментарно истраживачки дотакнути налази се и културна политика владе Милана Недића, а посебно друштвено-политички пројекти за друштвени прображај који су били њен интегрални део. На основу најновијих истраживања српске историографије и нових историјских извора може се закључити да је током окупације група колаборациониста, окупљених углавном у Министарству просвете и вера, покушала да створи нову културну политику и наметне је народу у Србији. Путем снажне државне интервенције у култури, просвети и уметности, требало је створити систем вредности који почива на екстремном национализму, негацији свих тековина југоловенства, митским интерпретацијама историје, фаворизовању сељаштва и традиционалног живота и саборности. Захваљујући таквој политици још током окупације је драстично оборен квалитет уметничке продукције (што се најбоље уочава на примерима позоришта и књижевности), а за послератни период развијани су обимни концепти за преображај друштва: Српски цивилни/културни план, пројекат Сељачке задружне државе и концепт новог васпитања: „Нови Србин“. Идеја задружне државе – сталешки уређеног друштва са доминацијом сељаштва, коју је заговарао

и сам Недић, није реализована јер није добила подршку окупатора. Српски цивилни/културни план такође није остварен, али због одбијања Недића да га издигне на ниво националног приоритета, док се са васпитавањем омладине у циљу стварања „Новог Србина“ није стигло далеко, услед ослобођења Србије и ратног пораза Осовине. Сама чињеница да се изради три овако сложена и екстензивна пројекта приступило у условима окупације и светског рата изазива велико истраживачко интересовање, те ће поменути друштвено-политички пројекти сигурно бити тема и будућих истраживања.