

The Concept of the Serbian Peasant Cooperative State

An Unrealized Attempt to Introduce a Corporatist System in Serbia during World War II

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Received 21 November 2023 | Accepted 10 December 2023 | Published online 18 December 2023

Abstract. The paper introduces and interprets the corporatist plan of organizing and establishing the ‘Serbian Peasant Cooperative State,’ which was developed by the collaborationist authorities in Serbia during World War II. Born out of deep disillusionment with interwar parliamentarism and under the influence of the German occupation system in Serbia, this unrealized concept of state organization was an ultra-conservative response to the political conditions in occupied Serbia, as well as one of the aspects of its planned integration into Hitler’s new imperial order founded on the premise of Nazi hegemony and known as ‘New Europe.’ The present analysis is based on the limited number of surviving primary historical sources that testify to the genesis and character of the draft proposal. To provide context for interpreting the plan and the thinking behind it, the paper extends the chronological framework to the entire interwar period.

Keywords: Peasant cooperative state, corporatism, government of Milan Nedić, Serbia, World War II

Introduction: Political life in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia and the development of the idea of corporatist social organization

The first common state of South Slavic peoples, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after 1929), was founded in December 1918 in Belgrade. During almost its entire existence, it remained ridden by continuous political crises of different causes and intensities.¹ In the same state, several kin nations lived who, however, had belonged to different cultural zones for centuries and, therefore, possessed very different experiences of politics and state-building.

1 Petranović, *History of Yugoslavia*; Pirjavec, *Yugoslavia (1918–1992)*; Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Jugoslaviens*; Sundhaussen, *Experiment Jugoslaviens*; Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*; Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*; Calic, *A History of Yugoslavia*.

Influential political actors from Serbia and centers of power, including the ruling dynasty, advocated a unitary arrangement for the new realm that corresponded to the Serbian state-building experience. Parties and national leaders from the rest of the Yugoslav territory were mostly supporters of national emancipation and autonomy, which they thought achievable through a federalist arrangement. Between them and the political leaders of the Serbs, disagreements persisted regarding the extent of power that should belong to the monarch, as well as the powers and the method of selecting the executive power and local self-government.

The so-called Vidovdan constitution adopted in June 1921 defined the Kingdom of SHS as a hereditary parliamentary monarchy. The constitution provided for the inviolability of the king's personality and left the monarch with broad executive powers and considerable sway over the legislative process. Political instability in the country frequently resulted in cabinets falling and government changes: no single cabinet of the period fulfilled its full mandate stipulated by the constitution.² Two constitutional drafts submitted during the debate in 1920–1921, proposed by radical political leader Stojan Protić and the Union of Farmers, respectively, stand out for already containing elements of corporatist ideology, but at the time, neither idea received significant support.³

Frequent changes of government led to the creation of numerous opportunistic coalitions, while parliamentary culture suffered and failed to evolve, and the plenary sessions themselves were occasionally the scene of severe verbal conflicts. Political instability also prevented the implementation of numerous essential reforms and negatively impacted the functionality of the state and the efficiency of the bureaucracy and other government bodies. The leading politicians of the era, or at least their considerable majority, were mired in corruption and nepotism.⁴ With the passage of time, it seemed less and less imaginable that the existing political parties and their leaders would be able to solve accumulated political and social problems. With the turbulent times, a notion increasingly gained ground that parliamentary democracy was not the appropriate political framework for resolving the accumulated crises and ushering in a period of stability and development. This corresponded to the experience of other European societies at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, reflecting in part the consequences of the Great Depression, as analyzed incisively and in detail by Philip Longworth and Eric Hobsbawm, *inter alia*.⁵

2 Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*; Gligorijević, *Parlament i političke stranke*; Radojević, *Srpski narod*.

3 Stojanović, *Ideje Milana Nedića*, 309–10.

4 Kulundžić, *Politika i korupcija*.

5 Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 109–41; Longworth, *Making of Eastern Europe*.

The apex of tensions associated with parliamentary politics came about in June 1928. After several verbal challenges by opposition Croatian MPs, Puniša Račić, a Radical Party MP and Serbian chauvinist, pulled out a revolver and killed two Croatian MPs. Stjepan Radić, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party and the most prominent Croatian politician of the day, was also wounded and succumbed to his wounds two months later. King Alexander, who had repeatedly intervened in the functioning of Parliament before, this time brought about the end of parliamentarism in the country by dissolving the National Assembly. He then rapidly introduced a personal dictatorship and effected a series of radical political changes in the country, including a name change (to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), the creation of a new system of territorial administration, and the widespread use of repressive measures.⁶ Among other restrictions, the functioning of all political parties and organizations with a 'tribal' (national) aspect was prohibited.

In the years that followed, King Alexander ruled Yugoslavia as a dictator, relying on governments that he chose and appointed himself. The members of the governments were mostly civil politicians with close ties to the court, conservative in outlook, committed anti-communists, and Yugoslav nationalists,⁷ with several ministers also being members of the *White Hand*, a group of officers who supported the king. Many of them did not hide that they considered the king's personal regime to be an arrangement superior to a democratic constitution, and they blamed the problems of the Yugoslav state and society on divisive 'partisanship' and the political schemes of the former parliamentary parties.

When the dictatorship was established and stabilized through a series of legal acts, the question of a new constitution arose once more. The Minister of Justice at the time, Dimitrije Ljotić, was entrusted with drafting the new constitution. The document itself has not been preserved, but it is known that Ljotić proposed to the king a corporatist parliament based on estates (*stales* in the original, *ordos* or *ordines* in the language of interwar corporatism), which, instead of the representatives of political parties chosen in parliamentary elections based on universal suffrage, would have been made up of deputies representing professional associations and the broader estates.⁸ These estates represented in the conservative and New Right thinking of the time a corrective to the decadence of liberal parliamentarism and a way of organically reconstructing society, based on professional groups, supposedly avoiding the pitfalls of party politics and the danger of ideologies creating fault lines in society. Given the fact that the draft has not been preserved nor showcased in detail in any existing narrative, it is difficult to estimate if Ljotić was under the

6 Dobrivojević, *Državna represija u doba diktature*.

7 Bakić, ed., *The Serbian Right-wing Parties*, 13–80, 277–322, 351–76.

8 Ljotić, *Iz mog života*, 101–2; Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića*, 20–21.

influence of foreign ideologies and constitutional concepts, and if so, just how much. Worth noting is the fact that Mussolini's Italy, the most obvious possible influence for corporative constitutional ideas, was a bitter enemy of Yugoslavia at the time and that fascism was perceived, even among the Yugoslav right-wing, as a hostile imperialistic ideology. A number of authors wrote extensively on Ljotić's early ideological influences, claimed to range from religious philosophers of Christianity, such as Blaise Pascal, via the 'organic political thought' of nineteenth century France and Fyodor Dostoyevsky to Charles Maurras, but none of them identified Italian fascism as an influence.

At the time when Ljotić's draft was made, the corporatist outlook was gaining in popularity across the continent, but no European country possessed such a constitutional regime, and King Alexander rejected the proposed draft. In its place, in September 1931, the Octroic [Imposed] Constitution was promulgated, which made the Yugoslav Parliament bicameral, and the powers as well as the electoral representativeness of the Parliament were curtailed compared to the Vidovdan Constitution.

Parliamentarism in Yugoslavia was restored in the wake of the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles. Despite the great changes that had taken place during the years of the royal dictatorship, both in the international system and in the internal affairs of the state, Yugoslav parliamentarism retained most of its weaknesses from the 1920s: corruption, nepotism, opportunism, and even dynastic meddling on the part of the Prince-Regent Paul. The rise of fascism and Nazism, as well as the political and economic crises affecting democratic countries, represented global processes impacting an increasing number of Yugoslavs who felt that parliamentarism suffered from major faults and weaknesses. It was during this period that Dimitrije Ljotić rose to lead the right-wing Yugoslav National Movement 'Zbor' (being an abbreviation for *Združena borbena organizacija rada* – United Militant Labour Organization).⁹ Although Zbor participated in the elections and abstained from fomenting revolution or engaging in a coup, it advocated the abolition of democratic institutions and political parties. Instead of parliamentarism, Ljotić and his comrades sought an absolute monarchy and the political organization of the people on an 'organic' basis, i.e., the principle of estates or professions, which reflected features of corporatist thinking. At around the same time, corporatist state reforms were introduced in Austria and Portugal,¹⁰ but overall, the Yugoslav public remained largely unaffected by these changes, and nor was the possibility of adopting such a model of societal organization seriously considered by significant political actors. Corporatist ideas only attracted the attention of certain Roman-Catholic

9 Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića*; Dragosavljević, *Druga Evropa i Kraljevina Jugoslavija*; Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić*.

10 Ščetinec, *Korporativno uređenje države*; Coyne, "Oliveira Salazar," 81–94.

clerical circles and a number of younger rightists who were researching Italian and German state organizations and political systems.¹¹ In the parliamentary elections in Yugoslavia, held in 1935 and 1938, Zbor won only about 1 percent of the votes, which attested to the fact that such radical changes to the political system did not resonate with larger sections of the Yugoslav public at the time.

The occupation of Serbia during World War II and the question of state reform

At the time of Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939, Yugoslavia was going through another political crisis, this time triggered by the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia and the reactions to the change in the administrative division of the country. By this time, Yugoslavia had grown largely dependent on export arrangements to Germany and Italy.¹² Although the sentiment of a significant part of the population, composed mostly of Serbs, was on the side of the anti-fascist coalition, the Yugoslav government had to balance and harmonize its foreign policy with the realities in Southeastern Europe. The progress of the war, especially following the capitulation of France in the summer of 1940 and Italy's attack on Greece, rendered the neutrality of the countries of Southeastern Europe unsustainable. After several months of diplomatic pressure from Berlin, and following the same action by Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, the government and Prince Paul signed, on 25 March 1941, the treaty on Yugoslavia's accession to the Tripartite Pact, originally a treaty of the Axis powers guaranteeing mutual assistance in the case that a non-belligerent power were to attack any of the signatories. On 27 March, in the early hours of the morning, a coup was carried out in Belgrade, significantly assisted by the British intelligence service. Adolf Hitler's response to this act was the German attack on Yugoslavia, which followed on 6 April 1941, bringing about the rapid collapse of the Yugoslav army, which capitulated after eleven days of war. At the same time, King Peter II and the government left the country, settling in London after a long journey via the Middle East.

The territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was divided between Hungary, Italy, Albania, Bulgaria, and Germany, and the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH) was formed in the central part.¹³ On the territory of Serbia,

11 Ščetinec, *Nacionalni socijalizam*; Ščetinec, *Korporativizam i demokracija*; Ščetinec, *Korporativni sistem fašizma*; Gregorić, "Ekonomska i socijalna politika nacionalnoga."

12 Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis*; Mitrović, "Ergänzungswirtschaft," 5–42; Ristović, *Nemački novi poredak*; Hadzi-Jovancic, *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia*.

13 Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije*; Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 47–174; Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 21–90.

approximately within the borders existing in 1912, a German occupation military administration was introduced, while the question of future statehood, borders, and organization was left for the period after the war. Germany's official position was that Yugoslavia no longer existed and would not be restored. The occupation regime was comprehensive, strict, and repressive. The entirety of life on the territory of Serbia was subordinated to the main German priorities: the security of the occupying power and unhindered economic exploitation of the country. Under these conditions, the needs of society hardly impacted considerations. Inflation was high, and shortages of food, medicine, firewood, and other necessary goods were very frequent. The German administration promulgated anti-Semitic and anti-Roma decrees, setting the stage for a full-scale Holocaust that would take place throughout the following year. By May 1942, over 80 percent of Serbian Jews had been murdered in this process.

In the summer of 1941, a popular uprising against the occupiers broke out in Serbia, spurred by Germany's attack on the USSR. Soon, two resistance movements took shape: one royalist (legitimist) and one revolutionary, headed by communists. The Germans had not expected an uprising in Serbia and at first, had great difficulty containing the attacks of the insurgents. Domestic administration, the so-called Council of Commissioners, which did not have an army at its disposal and relied only on a policing force (the gendarmerie), was not able to suppress the uprising. At the end of August, a decision was made to replace this administration with a government with broader powers, modeled after the government in occupied Greece. Former General and Minister of the Army Milan Nedić was appointed as the head of the government, while the government itself took on the propagandistic name of the 'Government of National Salvation.'

Nedić's government was composed of a heterogeneous group of different right-wingers, among whom there were more moderate conservatives and true fascists, Germanophiles, as well as anti-communists.¹⁴ Nedić adopted the German position concerning the dissolution of Yugoslavia and started 'reconstruction,' i.e., building a 'New Serbia,' based on the principles of nationalism and anti-communism. Positioning it as the counterpoint to the crises of the interwar period, collaborationist propaganda blamed pre-war political parties and democracy, economic and social liberalism, Jewish influence, and cosmopolitanism for all the difficulties of the Serbian people.

At the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, the majority of the insurgent forces were driven out of the territory of Serbia. The two resistance movements

14 Stojanović, "Ekstremna srpska međuratna desnica," 111–34; Janjetović, *Collaboration and Fascism*, 109–90.

ceased cooperation in the late autumn of 1941 and began a bloody civil war. The collaborationist government, although secretly cooperating with parts of the royalist resistance movement, sought to destroy both. The further development of the war situation, and above all, the failure of the German offensive in the USSR, catalyzed the evolving political programs of all parties that participated in the chaotic conflict on the territory of the occupied Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The communists tried to carry out a revolution and seize power in order to radically change the state and the prevailing social order. The Royalists (also known as Chetniks and formally called the Yugoslav Army in Homeland – *Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini/JVuO*), who were formally the armed forces of the émigré government, advocated the reconstruction of Yugoslavia, but in a way that would entail the creation of a large Serbian federal unit and the punishment of Croats and Bosnian Muslims for crimes in the NDH. Nedić's government, although constrained by the rigid German attitude, also formulated its political vision for the future, which was based on the creation of a 'New Serbia' over the widest possible area and its integration into Hitler's 'New Europe.' It is indicative that none of the perpetrators of the Yugoslav war drama wanted a 'return to the old ways,' which testifies to the ubiquitous dissatisfaction with the interwar order and parliamentarism.

Development of the 'Serbian Peasant Cooperative State' concept

The concept of corporatist societal organization was seriously considered, both theoretically and practically, during the occupation of Serbia in World War II, appearing in the form of a peasant cooperative state.¹⁵ It is not completely clear which personalities participated in the development of the project and the planning of legal acts related to the proposed constitutional transformation, but the great influence of Prime Minister Milan Nedić himself, as well as a number of right-wing intellectuals close to him, is noticeable. Former diplomat and prominent collaborationist Dr. Miroslav Spalajković was very likely tasked directly by Nedić to draw up the initial draft of the 'Cooperative and Social Organization of the Serbian People.'¹⁶ In addition to the aforementioned draft, Spalajković was, under strict secrecy, tasked with preparing research for the Nedić government on the Serbian national question,

15 The project of the Serbian Peasant Cooperative State has been only partially explored in Yugoslav and Serbian historiography. Of the existing body of research, the following especially merit mention: Borković, *Kontrarevolucija u Srbiji*, Vol. 2, 33–44; Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu*, 455–70; Jovanović, "Srpska seljačka," 118–28; Kerkez, *Obrazovno-kulturne prilike*, 137–45; Stojanović, "Planning a Social Transformation," 135–52; Aleksić, *Privreda Srbije*; Janjetović, *Collaboration and Fascism*, 441–84.

16 Bajin, "Miroslav Spalajković," 526.

the issues of minorities in Serbia, and the territorial expansion of Serbia as part of strengthening the anti-communist front in the Balkans. His political views reflected nationalist and ultraconservative convictions, coupled with committed anti-Semitism and overt hatred for everything communist.

The final elaboration of the concept of the peasant cooperative state and the accompanying legal acts was given over to Dr. Ilija A. Pržić, professor of international law and high-ranking official in the government, as well as Cvetan Ceka Đorđević, state secretary in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. During the occupation, Pržić was a legal advisor to the Ministry of Education and the Presidency of the Government. In addition to drafting legal acts (government decrees and by-laws), he, like Spalajković, was in charge of preparing reports on a number of high-priority issues, as well as providing expert opinions. The draft 'National Cooperative Organization of Serbia,' as well as a series of decrees on the establishment of the State Assembly, with handwritten comments by Ilija Pržić, were found among his papers after his execution following the liberation of Belgrade. Today, they are preserved in the Archives of Yugoslavia and represent the most direct evidence of intensive work on the development and planned introduction of a cooperative-corporatist organization in occupied Serbia. These historical sources, as well as inscriptions published in the Belgrade press during the occupation, demonstrate that the project of the cooperative state was also backed by the president of the collaborationist government and that the creation of detailed studies and plans related to the introduction of this arrangement was the result of systematic, organized engagement with these ideas.

Seen in the context of everyday realities in occupied Serbia, which included a strict occupation regime, repression, shortages of supplies, civil war, and the deep division of Serbian society, the idea of introducing a cooperative state, or in general, any radical change of the social and political system in the country could easily appear to be the reflection of the fantasies of a group of political actors, or part of a propaganda strategy aimed at gaining the support of wider sections of the population. That the idea of a cooperative state was much more than propaganda or a mere theoretical consideration is most convincingly evidenced by the memoranda sent by Milan Nedić to the German Military Commander in Serbia, General Paul Bader, the official¹⁷ who represented the highest authority in the country. In these documents, at the beginning of 1943, Nedić sought approval for the establishment of a corporatist representative body and the strengthening of the authority of the Serbian collaborationist government, emphasizing the anti-communist (and, in

17 VA, NAV, T. 501, roll 256. Milan Nedić's letter to General Bader, 1 January 1943, with two memoranda attached. The memoranda are titled: "Justification of the necessity of organizing the Serbian people on the basis of national community" and "Building Serbia on the basis of national community."

general, anti-internationalist) attitude of the conservative Serbian countryside. The idea of a cooperative state is interpreted in these in a context- and history-specific manner, so for a full understanding of its genesis and essence, it is necessary to trace its pre-war roots, as well as the pragmatic function assigned to it by the nature of occupation and total war. It is important to keep in mind that the entire project had three basic components:

1. propaganda, whose main goal was to mobilize the peasantry in the fight against the communist resistance movement;
2. political, the purpose of which was to strengthen the authority of Milan Nedić, enable more direct contact between the government and the population, and thereby mitigate its standing as an authoritarian and insulated quisling regime, and
3. ideological, which was reflected by the character of the proposed state structure, as well as the insistence of the 'Government of National Salvation' on nourishing the cooperative spirit in society and submission to the 'interests of the national community,' which was carried out both in theory and in practice during the occupation.

The *zadruga* (usually translated into English using the word 'cooperative') references in the Serbian context an extended, multi-generation agrarian household where everyone works together and shares the benefits and products of their labor. It was a byproduct of Serbian history, especially during the centuries-long Ottoman Turk rule. Economy-wise, it was (originally) a large, or, more precisely, a crowded agrarian household, the multi-generational members of which shared land, animals, tools, and profit. Already in the second half of the nineteenth century, the decline of the institution was underway, as it had become economically obsolete and conflicted with the emancipation and social progress of the era. However, both on the political Left and the Right, the *zadruga*/cooperative was also frequently perceived as an autochthonous and somewhat unique feature of Serbian society, a basic cell of social, popular, and political organization.¹⁸ Not once, and not from just one side of the political spectrum, was it declared that the entire Serbian state or nation is (or should become) 'one large cooperative.' Such thinking was based on the following premises: all members of the cooperative were closely related to each other; they had the same goals and faced the same challenges; they shared everything and had only common, rather than individual interests and aims; and finally, the success and wellbeing of the cooperative was dependent on harmony and joint effort. Although the number of cooperatives had decreased steeply by the 1930s, Zbor and several right-wing intellectuals (Zbor renegades and others) persistently advocated cooperatives as an instrument for dealing with the economic, social, and political crisis in Yugoslavia.

18 Stojanović, "Imagining the Zadruga," 333–53.

The key document for understanding the origin and essence of the concept of the Serbian peasant cooperative state is the elaboration ‘National-Cooperative Organization of Serbia,’ although a large number of synoptic articles were also published in the collaborationist press about this form of state organization.¹⁹ The main goal of the cooperative constitution was specified as ‘ensuring and improving the material and spiritual life of the Serbian people,’ and was especially supposed to strengthen and affirm the most numerous stratum, the peasant class, which, it was pointed out, “proved to be the most resistant to the destructive influence of various internationalists.” As in the case of other political projects associated with the government of Milan Nedić,²⁰ it implied breaking with the constitutional, social, and political traditions of interwar Yugoslavia and building a new Serbian society based exclusively on Serbian national tradition and patriarchal spirit. This implied the disappearance of parliamentary representation and all its achievements, which was to be replaced by a new order organized according to the principle of submission and personal responsibility, in many aspects similar to the Nazi *Führerprinzip*. In the explanation of the concept of cooperative organization, the historical experiences and the political circumstances of the day shine through in passages that attest to the direct impact they had on the text:

“Given the complete bankruptcy of all earlier liberal-parliamentary institutions, founded on the postulates of false democracy (such as political parties, elections, general suffrage, etc.), the connection and cooperation between the government and state administration on the one hand and the people on the other in the future cooperative-social organization of Serbia will be based on the principle of personal responsibility and leadership, expressed through patriarchal obedience to the head of the cooperative.”²¹

The abolition of political parties and parliamentarism was, both in the years before and during World War II, part of the program and ideology of the ‘Zbor’

19 “О задружној држави” [On the cooperative state], Српски народ, 23 January 1943; “Ка новој сељачкој задружној држави” [Toward a new, peasant cooperative state]; “Генерал Недић о улози српског задругарства” [General Nedic on the role of Serbian cooperative organization], Српски народ, 8 May 1943; “Ударен је камен-темељац Српске сељачке задружне државе” [A cornerstone of Serbian peasant cooperative state was laid], Српски народ, May 1943; Милан Недић, “У новом уређењу Србије задругарство има да постане темељ нове сељачке задружне државе” [Cooperative organization is to become a cornerstone of the new peasant cooperative state], Ново време, 4 May 1943; “Народно задругарство биће кичма и ослонац будућег поретка у Србији” [Popular cooperative organization is to become a central pillar of the new social order in Serbia], Ново време, 25 May 1943; “Ново доба српског задругарства” [Serbian cooperative organization’s new era], Обнова, 5 September 1944.

20 Stojanović, “Planning a Social Transformation,” 135–52.

21 AJ, 389/1, “People’s cooperative organization of Serbia.”

movement, which actively collaborated with the German occupation authority and was part of Nedić's government as well. Ljotić and his political comrades advocated the unification of all political actors around the concept of the nation and national interest, propounded again and again in their newspaper *Naša borba* [Our Fight], which was published in occupied Serbia from September 1941 to September 1942.²²

The system of individual responsibility, that is, the principle of leadership as known from the ideology of totalitarianism, permeates all spheres of social and political life in such regimes. In practice, it was realized to the greatest extent precisely in the case of Nazi Germany, where even children's associations and school departments had to have their responsible 'leaders.' This principle, which represented an authoritarian alternative to democracy and responsibility towards the electorate, had its sympathizers among the members of the Zbor movement, who praised it with some reservations. The intellectuals around Zbor had insisted, especially prior to 1941, on the uniqueness of each nation's historical experience and political system and sought original solutions for the Yugoslav case rather than replicating foreign models. At the same time, in the case of the *Führerprinzip*, voices around the movement pointed out to the public of occupied Serbia that this exact principle of governance (based on leadership and responsibility) stood in accordance with Serbian tradition and historical development.²³ In the explanation of the national cooperative organization of Serbia, the principle occupied a central place:

“[...] the social hierarchy in the organization of the family, village, municipality, district (*srez*), county (*okrug*) and state will rest on the cooperative organic principle according to which at the head of each community there is an elder who, after agreement and consultation with his collaborators (community members), makes decisions by himself, bearing all the responsibility for his decisions.”²⁴

In the vision of the Serbian collaborators, the basic unit of the Serbian people and its national 'essence' was the (extended) rural family, i.e., the cooperative. In the memorandum that he sent to General Bader, Nedić defined the cooperative as “an extended family in terms of time and space, that is to say, a family community that

22 Др Ст. З. Иванић, “Не партија већ уједињена нација” [Not a political party, but a nation united], *Наша борба*, 25 January 1942, 4; Милосав Васиљевић, “Окупљање Срба” [A gathering of Serbs], *Наша борба*, 15 February 1942, 3.

23 Димитрије Најдановић, “Принцип вођства” [The leadership principle], *Наша борба*, 30 November 1941, 3; Бора Карапанџић, “Задруга као темељ државног уређења” [Cooperative as a state organization cornerstone], *Наша борба*, 22 February 1942, 10; Рад. Св. Павловић, „Ауторитативност је српско начело” [Authoritarianism is a Serbian principle], *Наша борба*, 28 June 1942, 9.

24 AJ, 389/1, “People's cooperative organization of Serbia.”

includes a number of generations and all the fruits of their efforts” enigmatically emphasizing that it “embodies the central real purpose of tradition.”²⁵ The rural family unit was credited with the preservation and development of national traditions, language, customs, and religion, as well as exceptional resistance to harmful cultural and political influences coming from abroad. This perception of the (agricultural) family cooperative represented an idealized and, by extension, distorted image of the past, rendering invisible other, less amenable aspects of this traditional form of societal organization.

In contrast to the ideas of harmony, shared wealth, and the fair distribution of acquired goods, such cooperatives rested on anti-enlightenment and retrograde practices, patriarchy often on the verge of dictatorship by the head of the cooperative, the extremely unequal position of women and children, the absence of individual decision-making and the impossibility of emancipation. And from an economic point of view, most cooperative households would not have appeared prosperous: the family members would often sleep on the bare floor or in improvised beds in a central room where, around the stove or hearth, most activities occurred in a closed space: cooking, eating, sleeping and also communicating with each other would take place here. Life in a cooperative, especially by the middle of the twentieth century, was mostly a consequence of necessity: both economically and socially, the cooperative was already largely falling apart and had been superseded by other structures, and it could no longer be considered an optimal framework for the development of the individual, the family, and or even agricultural production. Nedić’s fascination with the cooperative, however, was part of his family background. Coming from a family that lived in Grocka, a fertile region of Serbia known for fruit growing and relatively wealthy peasants, Nedić mainly had the opportunity to experience the brighter side of cooperative organization. The fact that his father, Đorđe, was the head of a district and, therefore, a representative of the central authorities in his region also impacted the impressions he gained in his youth.

Considering the cooperative’s patriarchal internal arrangement as an ideal organizational unit, Milan Nedić and his advisers wanted to organize the entire Serbian people into one large cooperative. Municipal, district, and country councils were planned, as well as a state assembly, but these institutions were intended to have an exclusively advisory role—all power and responsibility was to belong at every level to the head of the community. The real function of these political bodies was to give greater legitimacy to the collaborationist government and to simplify the management of the country, in which, after the establishment of the cooperative regime, numerous and until then, passive strata of the Serbian population should

25 AJ, 389/1, “Justification of the need for national cooperative organization of the Serbian people”; VA, NAV, T. 501, roll 256, record nos 907–14; 915–23.

have been included. When explaining this state concept to the occupying authorities, Milan Nedić emphasized the shared war goals of the anti-communist struggle and also the pragmatic role that cooperative arrangements could play in that struggle. Pointing out that “there is no organic cooperation between the Government and the people, through which the broad layers of the people would take on their share of responsibility,” he asked for the occupier’s approval and help in the reform that would “restore national tranquility to the Serbian people” and provide the opportunity to occupy “a place that corresponds to its constructive spirit and the abilities that will contribute to the broader community of European nations.”²⁶

The constitutional forms envisaged by the Peasant Cooperative State proposals

The project of the peasant cooperative state implied the establishment of the state assembly as a general representative institution and the formation of municipal, district, and county representative bodies. The principle of elders was to be consistently applied at all levels of organization, from family cooperatives and villages through municipalities, counties, and districts all the way to the national level. The village elder was to be elected once a year at the “household meetings of family and cooperative elders,” “by agreement, not by individual vote,” and in the presence of the district head. If the municipality consisted of one village, the village elder would have automatically become the municipal elder; if the municipality consisted of several villages, its head would be the head of the village where the municipal building was located. In rural municipalities, the council was to be formed from the elders of all villages and “the necessary number of the best village householders” appointed by the elder himself, taking into account the suggestions of the leader of the district. In urban municipalities, with the exception of Belgrade, the municipal head and the council were to be appointed by the county chief, “taking care that people who distinguished themselves with their work on the reconstruction of Serbia, as well as representatives of certain classes, are prioritized with regard to being included in the committees.” The elders of the city municipalities could then appoint their deputies and had the possibility to divide the municipal council into more committees and sections to facilitate more efficient administration. Belgrade was to be made exempt from this rule as the largest city municipality in the country, whose mayor and council were appointed by the Minister of the Interior.

Municipal local authorities would have, according to the national-cooperative organization project of Serbia, all the powers that municipalities had “exercised

26 VA, NAV, T. 501, roll 256, record nos 907–14.

before, according to existing customs and legal provisions,” which mainly related to communal and security issues, as well as an insufficiently defined jurisdiction over issues pertaining to the “economic, cultural and social progress” of the municipal community. The scope of the work of the municipal administration was expanded with several new duties listed in detail, which included essentially the following points of emphasis:

1. construction and maintenance of road and public infrastructure (for which the use of public work for the reconstruction of Serbia was also approved);
2. implementation of agricultural production quotas and coordination with cooperative means to effectuate such production goals;
3. organizing public lectures in order to improve production;
4. selection and recruitment of “the best and most capable village youths” for sending abroad, “especially to Germany for further education in agricultural knowledge and work” and
5. constant supervision of the unity of the cooperative and preventing divisions within it.

The higher level of local self-government was the district administration, which was to consist of the head or chief of the district and the council, which had an advisory role. District councilors were to be appointed by the head of the district, who was supposed to have previously consulted the municipal elders of the same district. By their function, the municipal elders were members of the district council, which also included an undefined number of representatives of the ‘estates’ or professional groups. In regular circumstances, the district council would have been convened twice a year (‘before the beginning and after the end of agricultural summer work’), and the head of the district was to decide on any extraordinary sessions. Just as at the municipal level, the elder presided over the council at the regional level and had exclusive personal responsibility and decision-making rights. Unlike the municipal level, the scope of the district administration was not precisely determined. In addition to the undefined platitudes about the economic, social, cultural, and administrative duties of the district administration, some areas, including improving the nutrition of the population, implementing planned agriculture, maintaining a cooperative spirit and practice, and organizing mutual aid within the community were laid out in greater detail and reflect a particular concern with their management in these structures.

The highest level of local self-government was to be the county level. The county administration would also consist of an elder/district head and a council, whose members were to be appointed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the proposal of the district head. County councilors would be elected from the ranks of district councilors and those citizens who distinguished themselves in the reconstruction of Serbia and would also include representatives of class organizations.

Due to its importance in the new arrangement, a provision was introduced for the county council concerning the need for it to have a “proportionate representation of all social classes.” In regular circumstances, the county council (presided over by the county head) would meet once a year for no longer than fifteen days. The project on the corporatist ‘national cooperative’ reorganization of Serbian society did not specify the competences of the county administration more specifically. It can be assumed, however, that this level of government was intended to be the main link between the government and the state leadership on the one hand and the population on the other because this was most often the case in the state-legal development of Serbia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The National Assembly was supposed to take the place of the national representative body in the cooperative system:

“By its composition, the National Assembly represents the people as a whole in a politically, economically, and socially organized form. In the assembly, both the will of the state and the will of all actors who, through their cooperation, enter into the organic structure of the state are expressed.”²⁷

It would consist of a maximum of two hundred representatives (‘state councilors’) whose mandate would last three years. They would be delegated according to the following pattern: one representative from each district, five from Belgrade, one up to ten from the corporations, i.e., the ‘estates’ and professional organizations, depending on the respective size and importance of these organizations, as well as an additional forty persons from the category of meritorious citizens selected by the prime minister, and all government ministers according to their function. The electoral principle was thus very complex and, more importantly, completely subordinated to the will of the executive power, which can be seen both from the elaboration on the cooperative organization of Serbia and from the Regulation on the election and appointment of people’s representatives for the Serbian State Assembly, which Milan Nedić signed on 15 January 1944. In the new system, elections would be held on the same day in all constituencies: districts, county seats, Belgrade, and class organizations. The right to vote was intended for an extremely narrow circle of people: at the district level, municipal heads and ‘people’s champions’ (prominent householders appointed by the county head, in the same number as the presidents of municipalities in a given county), and at the county head of the city administration, his deputies and county councilors (and the same number of ‘people’s champions’ elected by the executive). Corporative entities including the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Crafts, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy and Engineers,

27 AJ, 398/1, “People’s cooperative organization of Serbia.”

as well as the Union of Agricultural Chambers, the Unions of Trade Associations, of Artisans, the Serbian Labor Union, the Supreme Cooperative Union and Supreme Union of Agricultural Cooperatives, would elect one representative for the State Assembly, and up to eighty of them were to be appointed by the prime minister of his own choosing from among deserving citizens. The right to be elected was given to every Serb (exclusively men) older than thirty who was literate and had not been convicted of 'dishonorable acts.' The ballot was set up to be open, effectuated by a roll call, and the representative mandate would have lasted for three years.

Like all other representative bodies in the cooperative system of Serbia, the state parliament was to acquire only an advisory role, and various stipulations would have ensured that the parliament could be completely bypassed even when adopting regulations or laws. In essence, the function of the Parliament was to consult with the government regarding regulations and legal proposals, which could be referred to the plenary session or the individual committees of the Parliament for consideration. The prime minister was to decide on the referral of the proposal and the time that the people's representatives had at their disposal until submitting their council at his own discretion. Parliament could not prevent the adoption of laws, and government decrees "as needed, especially in emergency cases," could be declared to have the full force of laws without any consideration given to them in the state assembly.

The complete dependence of the highest representative body on the executive power in the project of the national cooperative organization of Serbia was also confirmed in the provisions related to the election of the leaders of the Parliament. The president of the parliament would be appointed by the government, while four vice presidents and five secretaries would be elected by the parliament on the proposal of the president. Four committees were planned to operate within the parliament: general public affairs, economy and finance, national culture, and social issues. Convening the parliament, which was supposed to meet at least once a year, was the responsibility of the government.

At the top of the cooperative order of Serbia in the plans of the government of Milan Nedić was supposed to be the 'Supreme State Administration.' This state body would "represent [...] the political leadership of the people and the state," and at its head would stand the "state elder," "who is at the same time the leader of the people and the Prime Minister." According to the proposal on the national-cooperative organization of Serbia, the head of state was to have practically unlimited power in the country: he was the prime minister, commander-in-chief of all armed forces, and he could not be recalled or obstructed by the state assembly: "The head of state gives guidelines for general state policy as to the government as well as to the Parliament, and through this to the entire Serbian people."

Reforms envisaged in the mentioned draft were rooted in (extreme) right-wing utopian perceptions of Serbian mentality, society, and political order. If anything, modern Serbian history was clear proof that the Serbian peasant was not a passive and obedient one and that even the monarchs could lose their heads or thrones (or both) for imposing brutal and authoritarian governance on the people. It was true that the peasantry identified more directly with the national community and was ready to make sacrifices for the sake of the collectivity—at least compared to cosmopolitan and conformist urban populations, but to expect that it would willingly bend the knee to Nedić, especially with the young King Peter II being alive and part of the anti-fascist coalition was of unrealistic design at best. Comparing Serbian/Yugoslav constitutions to the draft constitution of the Peasant Cooperative State, it also becomes evident that no Serbian or Yugoslav ruler from the 1830s and the last constitution until World War II had the type of unlimited and unchecked power comparable to the unbridled authority foreseen for the ‘Supreme State Administration’ in Nedić’s political project. Such reform would have represented the construction of a radically new regime and a dramatic break with Yugoslav experience, but also a political development running against the grain of modern Serbian history.

Between planning and practice: The historical context and character of the Serbian peasant cooperative state

The plans for the reorganization of Serbian society and government, summarized above, were, to a large extent, a consequence of the historical circumstances that preceded its creation, but also the results of the specific situation in which it was conceived and laid out, ready to be translated into practice. The absolute absence of all forms of electoral democracy in the draft of the cooperative state can be partly explained by the experience of a failed parliamentarism in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia but also by pragmatic considerations: the implementation of the project depended on the occupation authorities, who had made it clear to Nedić and his collaborators that they did not intend to allow political life in the country. The project of the Serbian Peasant Cooperative State can be better understood through the analysis of the historical moment in which it was formulated, the military and political conditions in the world and occupied Yugoslavia, and above all, shed light on the real balance of power between political and social actors in the territory under the authority of the German military commander of Serbia.

Yugoslav historiography established some time ago that the idea of establishing a peasant cooperative state arose in 1942 and that the first more specific plans for changing the state system were created at the end of that year. That the socio-political project for the national-cooperative organization of Serbia was launched at that

specific point in time is a significant historical indicator in itself: A constitutional reorganization of the state could only be seriously considered after responding to direct threats. It was necessary to suppress the uprising in the country, to expel armed groups of insurgents from the territory under the control of Milan Nedić's government and also gain at least partial trust from the occupiers.

Once the uprising was extinguished and the activity of the resistance movement in Serbia was reduced to its lowest point, this necessary trust on the part of the occupying power was to be gained by deploying intensive anti-communist propaganda, sending workers and even peasants to Nazi Germany, expressing public gratitude and openly pandering to the occupation leadership and the Nazi leaders at large. Accepting the war triumph of the Axis powers as inevitable, specific Serbian collaborators, in fact, advocated active cooperation with the occupying forces and the internal transformation of the Serbian state and society in order to create the most favorable position possible for Serbs and Serbia in Hitler's 'New Europe.'²⁸ This process took place under complex geopolitical circumstances: the Axis powers suffered their first major reversals at the end of 1941, but their hold on the region was still unassailable both in the territory of occupied Yugoslavia and in the rest of the Balkans. Nevertheless, the prospect of an unexpectedly long war, which could exhaust the economy and the armed forces of the Third Reich, did create space, at least in the Nazi propaganda of the day, for 'small' nations to 'earn' the right to their existence and place in the new world order, as conclusively demonstrated by Mark Mazower.²⁹ Faced with frustration about the war defeat in April 1941, aware of the acute threat to Serbian people in neighboring countries, and driven by extreme anti-communism and nationalism, members of the 'Government of National Salvation' led by Milan Nedić decided to embark on an ambitious venture of governmental and societal transformation, whose ultimate goal was to make Serbia acceptable to the new masters of Europe. The series of major initiatives—surprisingly ambitious considering the moment in which they were advanced—involved several departments of the Nedić government, spanning disparate topics from the expansion of the territory of Serbia to changes in the state structure and the partial reactivation of the political life, and culminated in the introduction of the Serbian Civic and Cultural Plan as a comprehensive blueprint for life in the country. This reform drive was lent further impetus by the propaganda and the false promises extended by the occupation authorities toward the Serbian government. Although occupied Serbia suffered what may have been the harshest oppressive measures in any territory that had fallen under German occupation (this was certainly the case in the Balkans), representatives of the occupation authorities nevertheless made occasional appearances in front of the public. They engaged in

28 Stojanović, *Ideje, politički projekti i praksa vlade Milana Nedića*.

29 Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*; Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 141–84.

informal conversations with various Serbian officials, enticing them with the possibility of effectuating change. The situation favored the interests of the Third Reich: the collaborationist government insisted on its right to prove that it 'deserved' and could 'choose' its place in the 'New Europe,' while the German leadership persistently refused to make any substantial concessions to Nedić and his associates.

The enormous powers that the plans for the establishment of the Serbian Peasant Cooperative State would have provided for the head of the national community are, to a considerable extent, also a reflection of the political turmoil among the Serbian collaborators. In Nedić's government, there existed several groups and individuals who, using connections with representatives of the occupation administration, often acted independently and outside the control of the prime minister. During a significant part of the occupation, a kind of struggle for supremacy took place among the rival collaborationist factions, and the issue of Nedić's successor as the head of government was also raised frequently. Both Zbor and a group of Milan Stojadinović's (Yugoslav prime minister, 1935–1938) followers, including notorious war criminals and collaborators such as Dragi Jovanović, constantly competed to win favor with the German administration and amass as much power as possible. This explains why, in the draft of the cooperative arrangement, extraordinarily broad competences were foreseen for the person who would be at the head of the Serbian government, granting him nigh-absolute power in the country.

The formation of the state assembly and the system of local self-government organized on the basis of cooperatives was conceived with the aim of strengthening the political position of Milan Nedić and his government: the entire national-corporatist organization of the country was based on the premise that Nedić would be at its head. The representative institutions led by the state parliament were supposed to strengthen the legitimacy of the collaborationist administration in the eyes of the people and show how it supposedly had broad support. Convening the parliament was mentioned as one of Nedić's conditions for taking over the government during the negotiations with the German occupation authorities in August 1941.³⁰ The new cabinet, accordingly, sought to form a state assembly as early as September 1941, which is why the necessary decrees were drafted at that early date. The process of working towards this goal came to an end in 1943, when the German occupation administration stopped all work towards the setting up of a representative body.³¹

The closest point to any real autonomy that Nedić's government got was during Hermann Neubacher's initiative in 1943. This 'flying diplomat' was sent to the Balkans to conduct a special mission: to sponsor a broader political action against the

30 Borković, *Kontrarevolucija u Srbiji*, Vol. 1, 102.

31 VA, Nedić Archives, 24/1-1, k. 1a "Draft Decree on the State Assembly"; Borković, *Kontrarevolucija u Srbiji*, Vol. 1, 131–2.

communists and entice the collaborators to fight the communist resistance together and stop fighting among themselves.³² He was given extensive political power and initiative from his superiors in Berlin. As noted in his memoirs, Neubacher felt a lot of empathy for Nedić and his position, and the position of the Serbian nation in general, and showed himself eager to provide assistance.³³ He even managed to arrange Nedić's personal audience with Ribbentrop and Hitler in September 1943. Although the Serbian delegation was feeling quite enthusiastic and hopeful, the meetings were a fiasco, as they were met with a cold, reserved welcome and aggressive outbursts in response to any mention of Serbia's territorial enlargement or changes to existing policies. If Nedić had kept alive any illusions regarding the place of his government and Serbia in the 'New Europe' until then, he certainly had to realize the futility of such designs following the meetings.

The existence and functioning of representative bodies, despite the numerous restrictions on their authority and autonomy as foreseen in the plans of the future cooperative state, would have partially absolved the collaborators from moral and potentially criminal responsibility for cooperating with the occupier, in addition to reducing the responsibility of the leadership of the state during a complex and difficult time. This was a smokescreen, however: the function of 'head of state,' with practically unlimited powers, was more than clearly tailored to Nedić's requirements. Under the cooperative system, there would have been no possibility for any of the ministers or other officials to obstruct the will and decisions of the prime minister, which otherwise happened very often in practice. Despite the loyalty that the Serbian collaborationists formally expressed to King Peter II Karađorđević, in the documents concerning the national-cooperative reforms, the *de iure* ruling sovereign is neither mentioned and nor is the existence of a monarch foreseen at all. The new arrangement would have also strengthened the position of the national bureaucracy *vis-à-vis* the occupation. As compensation, the constitution would have placed Serbia on the side of the Axis, and in itself would have demonstrated willingness to participate in Hitler's 'New Europe' (clearly visible from the memorandum that the Prime Minister's Office sent to General Paul Bader, military commander in Serbia).

Ultimately, due to the prevailing division of power, the fate of the Serbian Peasant Cooperative State project was solely in German hands. After receiving Nedić's memorandum, Bader forwarded it to Generals August Meissner and Alexander Löhr for their opinion.³⁴ Proverbially anti-Serbian, Meissner contributed to stop-

32 Neubacher, *Specijalni zadatak Balkan*; Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost*.

33 Nojbaheer, *Srbi u memoarima Hermana Nojbaheera*.

34 A portion of Bader's correspondence with Meissner and Southeast Command regarding Nedić's 1 January 1943 memorandum is also on microfilm at the National Archives in Washington (VA, NAV, T501, roll 256). Instead of General Löhr, Bader was answered by Counselor Bönner.

ping the initiative of the Serbian collaborationist government in this case, as well. He 'reminded' General Bader that although "Serbia has received certain borders due to political considerations and exigencies and thus represents an administrative area, its territorial existence is still so unclear that one cannot speak of it as a single state." Meissner, an officer of the k.u.k. army in World War I, shared Hitler's resentment of the Serbs and feared any strengthening of the authority of the Serbian government or the emergence of a stronger popular organization in general. Although he considered Nedić's plan to be more like a sketch about re-organizing the economy than a serious plan for state organization, he still saw any strengthening of the Serbian government to be extremely harmful to Germany's military and political interests. Meissner's letter to Bader was mostly written in a sarcastic tone, but the SS general saw quite well Nedić's intention to try and legalize his own dictatorship under the guise of introducing representative bodies and expanding the political base of the collaborationist parties. Considering Meissner's significant role in Serbia since Harald Turner's departure from the country in 1942, it is realistic to assume that it was his opinion that was decisive in terms of the Germans saying 'no' to the project on the cooperative organization of the Serbian state.³⁵

Bönner, who was an advisor to the Nazi Southeastern Command, sent a reply on behalf of General Löhr, showing a little more understanding than Meissner had done, but he was not prepared to endorse Nedić's demands either. In a letter to General Bader dated 22 January 1943, he pointed out that in the current situation, further political aspirations of the collaborationist government should not be supported. Explaining his position, Bönner pointed to the fact that the population of occupied Serbia could only be kept pacified due to the threat of coercion looming over them. He opined that the people should be treated as subjects of administrative management without their own political will and, especially, a 'state idea'. The Southeast Command was, therefore, inclined to support any ideological movement in Serbia that would contribute to the internal restoration of peace and a real political turn towards cooperation with Germany but did not share the belief that Nedić could be relied on in this sense since the memorandum was understood as a request to sanction his dictatorship.³⁶ Taking Meissner and Bönner's suggestions into account, the military commander in Serbia, General Paul Bader, wrote to Nedić on 29 January 1943, informing him that the creation of a Serbian peasant cooperative state (or anything similar) was completely unacceptable under conditions of war and the occupation. The position of the military commander in Serbia was decisive and commanded authority, leaving no room for a different interpretation. Nedić was told that he must follow the instructions of the German authorities and support

35 For an identical conclusion, cp. Kerkez, *Obrazovno-kulturne prilike*, 142.

36 VA, NAV, T. 501, roll 256, record nos 927–37.

their occupation policy as a whole. Formally, at least, the question of the future of the Serbian state, its arrangement, and its potential place in the 'New Europe' was left to be decided after the war.³⁷

Conclusion

The project of the Serbian Peasant Cooperative State, created and developed within the narrow circle of associates of Milan Nedić between 1942 and 1943, represents an unprecedented phenomenon in Serbian history. In its form and essence, it amounted to an attempt to radically break with the state-legal traditions of Serbia and Yugoslavia and to establish a system that did not exist anywhere in Europe at that time. This project was a reflection of a deep disappointment with parliamentarism and political pluralism in general, on the one hand, as well as an effort to concentrate all power in the state in the hands of one man, on the other. At the same time, it is a faithful reflection of the distance of the leading collaborators from reality, which could be interpreted as a consequence of war psychosis, propaganda, or even self-deception. It defeats reason that Nedić and his collaborators proposed to the German occupation authorities a change in the state system at a time when the Serbian people and society were under enormous pressure and were victims of numerous internal divisions and frictions, on top of the foreign occupation. The leadership of the collaborationist administration in Serbia failed to properly assess its relationship with the Germans and Germany's broader plans for Serbia and the Balkans. The cold shower of rejection that Turner, Meissner, and Bönner gave Nedić had to be expected if we take into account that the occupation administration had also refused to make even much more modest and less important concessions to Nedić. In the end, the Serbian Peasants' Cooperative State remained, in the literal sense, dead letter on paper: a series of detailed elaborations and drafts, written and signed decrees by Nedić and his ministers, which were never published or entered into force. Serbian corporatist reform, let alone the transformation of the state as a whole, was abandoned for good after these events.

37 VA, NAV, T. 501, roll 256, record nos 955–62. Letter of General Bader to Milan Nedić, 29 January 1943. The letter excludes the possibility of introducing any patriarchal-corporatist system during the occupation, but once more emphasizes the possibility that after the war Serbia will be governed according to the values that best correspond to the concept of 'New Europe' with Nazi Germany at the helm.

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