

Photo of Draza Mihailovic's Serbian Nazi-collaborating
Chetniks with Germans in World War II ↓



The Chetniks and the Jews

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*Last week, the Serbian daily Blic published another [contribution](#) to the long-running efforts of anti-Communist Serb nationalists to rehabilitate the Nazi-collaborationalist Serbian Chetnik movement of World War II. Such efforts represent an affront to the Serbian anti-fascist heritage and to all those who survived the Chetniks' crimes. I am therefore publishing here an extract from my book **Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: The Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941-1943**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006 (pp. 156-162) that illustrates the anti-Semitic and genocidal character of the Chetnik movement.*

As the Chetnik-Partisan breach widened, Chetnik propaganda laid increasing stress on the allegedly 'non-Serb' character of the Partisans. From the start, Chetnik leader Draza Mihailovic portrayed the Communists as an ethnically alien, non-Serb element. In negotiations with the Germans in November 1941, in the course of assuring the latter that 'it is not my intention to fight against the occupiers', Mihailovic claimed that 'I have never made a genuine agreement with the Communists, for they do not care about the people. They are led by foreigners who are not Serbs: the Bulgarian Jankovic, the Jew Lindmajer, the Magyar Borota, two Muslims whose names I do not know and the Ustasha Major Boganic. That is all I know of the Communist leadership.' (1) Rhetoric of this kind was rapidly adopted by the Bosnian Chetniks and became more virulent as their conflict with the Partisans intensified. Chetnik propaganda stressed in particular the presence in Partisan ranks of Muslims and Croats, some of whom were allegedly former Ustashas. A bulletin issued by the staff of Bosko Todorovic, the Chetnik commander of Operational Units for East Bosnia and Hercegovina, probably in January 1942, spoke of 'the leaders of the Partisans from Montenegro, among whom an important role is played by JEWS, TURKS and CROATS' [emphasis in original].(2) A bulletin issued from the same source in February spoke of 'a shock detachment of Montenegrin Partisans, under the command of someone called Vlado Segrt, filled with criminal-Ustasha Turks from Hercegovina, some of whom had until recently been throwing our brother Serbs into pits'.(3)

Propaganda pamphlets issued by Todorovic's staff in this period warned the Serbs in Partisan ranks that the Communists would eventually purge them: 'And who will carry out this cleansing? The Turks and the Croats, who will be in the majority. In the majority because the number of Serbs among the Partisans will continuously fall, while the number of Turks and Croats will continuously rise.'(4) According to Todorovic: 'In the ranks of the Partisans are convicts, outlaws, ne'er-do-wells and Ustashas, who want, on Serb lands, to establish a Communist Croatia in place of the Ustasha Croatia.'(5) So far as the Communist leadership was concerned: 'They are administered and ordered by the Communist headquarters for the Balkans... In these headquarters sit kikes, Magyars, Croats, Turks, Bulgarians, Albanians and Germans, and occasionally a fallen Serb is found among them.'(6) Jezdimir Dangi's Mountain Staff of the Bosnian Chetnik Detachments denounced the Partisan detachments 'which are led by the KIKE Mosa Pijade, the TURK Safet Mujic, the MAGYAR Franjo Vajnert and that so-and-so Petar Ilic whose real name nobody knows...' [emphasis in original].(7) According to the same source: 'the Partisans and Ustashas have the same goal: TO BREAK UP AND DESTROY SERBDOM. That, and that alone!' [emphasis in original].(8)

The Chetniks viewed their struggle against the Muslims and their struggle against the Partisans as two halves of the same coin. This belief found its most detailed formulation in a pamphlet entitled *The guns of Nevesinje*, issued in late 1941 for the purpose of appealing to the Serbs under Communist leadership. The pamphlet carried an endorsement from Todorovic, who claimed it was 'full of truth' and entreated his readers: 'If anyone tries to forbid you from reading it or claims that what is written in this pamphlet is a lie, be assured, brother Serbs, that that person is a Turk or a *Skutor* [Croat] or their "faithful comrade". From such as these, hide it and read it secretly. For there is no longer any point in talking to them. They have sold or given their soul to a foreigner – the German Jew Karl Marx and his followers.' The pamphlet presented the Chetnik struggle with the Partisans in terms of a Serb struggle against the Muslims: 'If the Communist Party continues to kill Serbs and to accept into its society Turks and *Skutors*, if it continues to push Serbs into a pointless and amateurishly led struggle with the occupiers, there where the Serb villages suffer after every attack, then the Turks and others in Yugoslavia will choose a Communist regime in order not only to be equal to the Serbs but to be in a better position to them, but then the Serbs, who want to be free and to avenge their martyrs, will choose the 'regime of the forest' and become outlaws.' To this possibility the Chetniks presented their favoured alternative:

When it achieves freedom, a golden Serb freedom, then the Serb nation will – freely and without bloodshed, by means of the free elections which we are accustomed to in the Serbia of King Peter I – take its destiny into its own hands and freely say, whether it loves more its independent Great Serbia, cleansed of Turks and other non-Serbs, or some other state in which Turks and Jews will once again be ministers, commissars, officers and ‘comrades’.(9)

The pamphlet explicitly condemned the Communist policy toward Muslims as an unfavourable alternative to the extermination of the latter, as favoured by the Chetniks: ‘If they [the Communists] were fighting for their people then they would take account of the desire of the Serb people, that the Turks and Muslims be exterminated in or at least expelled from Bosnia-Herzegovina. But they are fighting for themselves and their Party, and in order to win, they are ready to help the Turks not only in preventing the revenge of the Serbs, but in exterminating dissatisfied Serbs.’ The pamphlet further declared one of its post-war goals to be: ‘The extermination or expulsion of all non-Serbs, particularly the Turks, with whom the Serbs never again wish to live intermingled.’(10)

The chauvinism of the Chetniks, and particularly their anti-Semitism, closely mirrored that of the Nedic regime, which in turn was part of the general ideological climate created by the Nazi hegemony. Nedic peppered his speeches in this period with references to a ‘Communist-Jewish rabble’ and a ‘Communist-Masonic-Jewish-English mafia’.(11) Such rhetoric was linked to Nazi policy toward the Jews, in which quisling Serbia was deeply implicated, for the German military decree of 31 May 1941 had charged the Serbian authorities with responsibility for enforcing anti-Jewish and anti-Gypsy regulations.(12) The mass imprisonment of the Jews in Serbia began in August and, as Israel Gutman’s *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* notes, a key role in this was played by ‘the Serbian quisling puppet government, under Milan Nedic, whose police and gendarmerie assisted the Germans in rounding up the Jews.’(13) The Serbian Jews were then exterminated by the Nazis between the autumn of 1941 and the spring of 1942. Nedic himself appears to have been eager to impress the Nazis with his anti-Semitic zeal, and on 22 June 1942 he wrote to General Bader, complaining of the fact that Serbian prisoners-of-war in German camps were being confined alongside Jews and Communists, and requesting that ‘it would be very desirable if Jews and leftists-Communists be removed from the common camps and kept apart from the nationally healthy officers.’ Consequently: ‘The Serbian government, concerned by this action, would be extremely grateful if the German Reich would take effective measures for a maximally rapid separation, etc.’(14)

The frequent reference in Chetnik propaganda to the ‘Jews’ in Partisan ranks may have been influenced in part by this desire of Serb quislings to please their Nazi overlords. The Nazi Holocaust of the Jews in Serbia was well under way by the time the Chetniks were making the anti-Semitic statements cited above, a fact of which, given their close ties to the Nedic regime, they cannot have been unaware. This anti-Semitism was by no means purely cynical, but reflected the sentiments of many individual Chetniks. Marijan Stilinovic, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, recalls meeting a group of Chetniks outside Ivancici in January 1942 who had defected from the Partisans on the grounds that the Partisan leaders were ‘Jews’ and Vajner-Cica was a ‘Kraut’.(15) Nor did Chetnik anti-Semitism stop at words. As the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* notes: ‘As the Chetniks increased their cooperation with the Germans, their attitude toward the Jews in the areas under their control deteriorated, and they identified the Jews with the hated Communists. There were many instances of Chetniks murdering Jews or handing them over to the Germans.’(16)

Chauvinist and antisemitic themes in Chetnik propaganda were not confined to the winter and spring of 1941-42, but remained a constant in the months and years that followed – an integral element in a movement whose goal was an ethnically pure Great Serbia inhabited solely by Orthodox Serbs. At a rally in Trebinje in Hercegovina in July 1942, the Chetniks denounced the Partisans as being ‘for the Serb nation more dangerous than any others’, whose ‘leaders were for the most part Bosnian Muslims, Catholics and Jews’. They declared: ‘The Serb lands must be cleansed of Catholics and Muslims. In them must live only Serbs.’(17) Dobroslav Jevdjevic, Mihailovic’s delegate in eastern Bosnia and Hercegovina, issued a proclamation to the ‘Serbs of eastern Bosnia and Hercegovina’ in July 1942, in which he claimed: ‘Tito, the supreme military chief of the Partisans, is a Croat from Zagreb. Pijade, the supreme political chief of the Partisans, is a Jew. Four fifths of all armed Partisans were supplied to them by Pavelic’s Croatian Army. Two thirds of their officers are former Croatian officers. The financing of their movement is carried out by the powerful Croatian capitalists of Zagreb, Split, Sarajevo and Dubrovnik. Fifty percent of the Ustasas responsible for the massacres of Serbs are now in their ranks.’ Jevdjevic levelled a still more bizarre charge against the Partisans: ‘They have destroyed Serb churches and established mosques, synagogues and Catholic temples.’(18) That Jevdjevic himself shared the prejudices to which he appealed is suggested by his claim, in an internal report of June 1942, that the Proletarian brigades contained many ‘Jews, Gypsies and Muslims.’(19)

A Chetnik proclamation of September 1942 defined the difference between the Partisan and Chetnik movements as being that ‘the Chetnik movement is a Serb national organisation whose goal is to establish a Serb state that will unite all Serbs’, while ‘the Partisan movement is a multinational organisation whose goal is to establish a non-national Soviet revolutionary state in the Serb lands’; the difference between the Chetniks and Partisans was that ‘only a true Serb can become a Chetnik’ whereas ‘an Ustasha, German, Jew or Gypsy may become a Partisan; in other words anyone willing on behalf of the foreigner to participate in the slaughter and killing of the best Serb sons.’(20) It was the belief of Stevan Botic, Dangic’s successor at the head of the Mountain Staff of the Bosnian Chetnik Detachments, that the Muslims were supporting the Partisans on an anti-Serb basis: ‘The Turks, when they saw the work of the Partisans, i.e. when they saw how the Partisans mercilessly killed Serbs, immediately saw that collaboration with the Partisans would be very profitable.’ (21)

Petar Bacovic, Todorovic’s successor as commander of the Chetnik Operational Units in eastern Bosnia and Hercegovina, issued an appeal to the Serbs in Partisan ranks in October 1942, which attributed the appearance of the Partisan movement to the fact that ‘the Jews, associated with much of the scum of the earth, fled to our country and began to propagate such better and happier state of affairs in a Communist state.’ The Partisans were guilty of destroying traditional Serb society and morals:

Dividing and ruining Serb villages and Serb peasants; banning Serbs from practising their Orthodox religion; corrupting many Serb youth; teaching children not to listen to their parents; propagating free love among the youth; saying that brother and sister, son and mother, father and daughter can live together as husband and wife; bringing with them many fallen women from the towns – teachers, students, workers etc. – to serve the Communist bosses for the purpose of physical pleasure; and in the wake of their terror pushing many of our honourable peasants to kill each other and to kill all those honourable and national Serbs, who did not wish to join them and accept their bloody and corrupt ideology: godlessness, irreligion, familial corruption and immorality of every kind. (22)

The proclamation lamented to the Serb Partisans: ‘You are still being led by Tito, Mosa Pijade, Rocko Colakovic, Vlado Segrt, Rade Hamovic, Savo Mizera and many other Jews, Muslims, Croats, Magyars,

Bulgarians and other scum of the earth.’ (23)

A pamphlet distributed by the Chetniks around Sarajevo in the autumn of 1942 spoke of ‘the Communists whose leaders are Jews and who wish to impose Jewish rule on the world; [though] their and the Ustashas’ collapse is inevitable.’(24) A Chetnik pamphlet distributed in eastern Hercegovina in December 1942 claimed: ‘The Yugoslav Communists who are today so bloodily and heartlessly fighting against the Serb nation’ were a nationally alien, criminal riff-raff; and that ‘the Supreme Commander of all Communist forces in the country is some Comrade Tito, whose real name nobody knows, but we know only that he is a Zagreb Jew. His leading collaborators are Mosa Pijade, a Belgrade Jew; Frano Vajner, a Hungarian Jew; Azija Kokuder, a Bosnian Turk; Safet Mujije, a Turk from Mostar; Vlado Segrt, a former convict; and many others similar to them. Their names best testify as to whom they are and to how much they fight from their heart for our people.’(25) Mihailovic himself informed his subordinates in December 1942: ‘The units of the Partisans are filled with thugs of the most varied kinds, such as Ustashas – the worst butchers of the Serb people – Jews, Croats, Dalmatians, Bulgarians, Turks, Magyars and all the other nations of the world.’(26)

An issue of the Bosnian Chetnik newspaper *Vidovdan* appearing at the start of February 1943 claimed that Tito’s officers were ‘the Belgrade Jew Mosa Pijade, who was not even born on the territory of Yugoslavia’ and that ‘The other members of the Communist-Partisan staff are mostly Jews, who have very little sympathy for the pain and suffering of our people.’ It complained also that ‘the Communists have promised the Croats a “Croatian Soviet Republic” in which [Croat Peasant Party leader] Macek would be president.’(27) On 10 February the Chetnik commanders for East Bosnia, Hercegovina, Dalmatia and Lika issued a joint proclamation to the ‘people of Bosnia, Lika and Dalmatia’, claiming that ‘since we have cleansed Serbia, Montenegro and Hercegovina, we have come to help you to crush the pitiful remnants of the Communist international, criminal band of Tito, Mosa Pijade, Levi Vajnert and other paid Jews’. The Partisan rank-and-file was called upon to ‘kill the political commissars and join our ranks right away’, like the ‘hundreds and hundreds who are surrendering every day, conscious that they have been betrayed and swindled by the Communist Jews’.(28) The proclamation was signed by Ilija Mihic, Momcilo Djujic, Petar Bacovic and Radovan Ivanisevic. The 9 March issue of *Vidovdan* described the Partisans as ‘bandits led by the Zagreb Jew “Tito” and the Belgrade Jew Mosa Pijade’.(29) A Chetnik leaflet distributed in the Sarajevo region in April described the Partisans as ‘the scourge of God’.(30)

References:

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