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EDUCATIONAL POLICY AS PROPAGANDA FOR YOUTH IN THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA

INTRODUCTION

This article mainly focuses on the ideological discourse employed in educational policy in the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH), which was constructed as a Nazi puppet state within the larger part of present-day Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, after the Axis invasion of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941. Because of its close relationship with Nazi Germany, the notorious Croatian political group called the Ustasha obtained power over this country. The Ustasha organization was founded and commenced its radical activities around the first half of the 1930s, led by “Poglavnik”

(Commander-in-Chief) Ante Pavelić, with the goal of establishing an independent Croatian state. Core members of the group followed the Fascist movement between the two world wars in Europe and forged ahead with a similar totalitarian policy in the NDH, replacing previously-established systems of government, for the military affairs and education, and among others.¹

The foremost aim of these reforms was the achievement of national unity and a flowering of the “Ustasha spirit” throughout the whole nation.² Therefore, it is certain that the regime placed particular emphasis, among other methods of nationalization, on “education,” with the object of building up a new generation to embody the ideology of the Ustasha.

In addition, taking into account this characteristic of “education” as practiced in the Ustasha regime, it is interesting to note that its leadership established an institution called the Ustasha Youth (*Ustaška mladež*) to mobilize the younger generation of Croats. The Ustasha Youth was a typically fascist institution for the education and cultivation of youth and emulated similar organizations in Italy and Nazi Germany.³ Although they are few in number, excellent studies on educational policy and propaganda in the NDH are available. However, they treat academic teaching and edification within the Ustasha Youth as separate subjects for investigation and interpretation.⁴ In contrast to such an approach, this article demonstrates the relationship between these two forms of “education” that was constructed by the regime. In other words, I analyze both types of propaganda—school-based and Ustasha Youth based—intending to draw a clear picture of the educational policy and its practice inside the NDH.

Undoubtedly the Ustasha modeled its ideology from the very beginning after Fascism in Italy and National Socialism in Germany, showing an inclination towards the leadership principle, political violence, and ultra-nationalism.⁵ In terms of educational policy, the Ustasha also shared with these countries the political value of emphasizing the importance of raising a new generation of

1 Jelić-Butič, Fikreta. *Ustaše i Nezavisna država hrvatska, 1941–1945*. Zagreb: Liber, 1977, pp. 99–123, 203–214.

2 This Ustashe project was called “The Cultural Revolution.” See Labus, Alan. *Politička propaganda i kulturna revolucija u “Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj”*. *Informatologija*, 44, 2011, 3, pp. 214–220.

3 Tomasevich, Jozo. *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 341.

4 Yeomans, Rory. *Visions of Annihilation, The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013; Petrunaro, Stefano. *Pisati povijest iznova, hrvatski udžbenici povijesti 1918–2004 godine (Riscrivere la storia. Il caso della manualistica croata (1918–2004))*, Aosta: Stylos, 2006) Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2009. Besides that, for a brief discussion of the relation between the school system and Ustasha Youth, see Miljan, Goran. *Young, Militarized, and Radical: The Ustasha Youth Organization, Ideology and Practice, 1941–1945* (Ph.D. diss.). Budapest: Central European University, 2016, pp. 154–164.

5 For a succinct definition of Fascism see Payne Stanley G. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945*. London: Routledge, 2001, p. 14.

“elites.” However, it is questionable whether the ideology of the Ustasha regarding education was simply an imitation of Fascism and National Socialism, or whether it demonstrated its own uniqueness.

For example, recent studies indicate that the “Ustasha spirit” was a hybrid combination of nationalisms, originating from currents within Croat ethnic society and the Fascist movements in Europe during the interwar period.⁶ Following this re-examination of the “Ustasha spirit,” I explore how the regime formulated its ideology regarding education by analyzing several school textbooks and official bulletins of the Ustasha Youth. This analysis constitutes the first aim of this article.

On the other hand, what must also be investigated is how the regime was able to put its educational policy into practice. In truth, most of the Croat people were favorable towards the establishment of the NDH. They saw the birth of their own “independent” country as a realization of the desire to liberate the nation from political suppression based on Yugoslavism. However, in contrast to the projected idealized image of an “independent” state, the NDH was immediately divided into two territories, over which Nazi Germany and Italy had military authority. Moreover, the Axis powers annexed a part of the “ethnic and historical territory” of Croatia.⁷ Ultimately, upon becoming aware that the regime had embarked upon the brutal persecution of Serbs, Jews, Roma, communists, and dissident groups, the Croat populace itself became disillusioned with the Ustasha.⁸

Similarly, the implementation of the educational policy within the NDH begs the question of how Croat teachers felt about the regime. According to a study by Miroslav Hroch, which divides the process of spreading nationalism into three stages, teachers were to be designated, as the role of intellectuals, for the function of promulgating amongst the general public the ideology shaped by political leaders.⁹ To be sure, a certain number of Croat teachers also considered the educational policy in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia a restraint against national education within Croat ethnic society.¹⁰ Accordingly, it is conceivable that they

6 Kallis, Aristotle. *Recontextualizing the Fascist Precedent: The Ustasha Movement and the Transnational Dynamics of Interwar Fascism*. In: Yeomans, Rory (ed.). *The Utopia of Terror, Life and Death in Wartime Croatia*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015, pp. 260–283.

7 Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, pp. 61–64.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 342–356.

9 Hroch, Miroslav. *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nation*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 144–147. However, the author has noticed that the designated role of teachers “depended on the level of the individual’s material wealth,” as well as “a threat of political conflict between national commitment and the attitude of the state authorities or the autonomous local administration.”

10 Troch, Pieter. *Nationalism and Yugoslavia: Education, Yugoslavism and the Balkans before World War II*. London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015, pp. 196–198.

voluntarily carried out the essential educational role designated them within the NDH, especially when adopting new textbooks for use as propaganda.

However, even if they were inclined, along with the Ustasha, to help accomplish the goal of national unity, it is not obvious whether they concurred with the regime in every respect regarding the instruction of youth. Namely, it remains an unsettled question how Croat teachers actually responded to the regime, particularly with regard to the mobilization of pupils through the activities of the Ustasha Youth. For that reason, as a secondary aim of this study, this article also considers the political stance and role of teachers in carrying out the educational policy of the regime.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND TEXTBOOKS IN THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA

The establishment of the new government in the NDH was followed by a series of actions concerning educational policy. The absolute authority of the Ustasha centered on Pavelić, who possessed the position of Premier and took command of the Supreme Ustasha Headquarters, which served as the leading body concerning all activities of governance. Below this highest level, administrative districts were set up throughout the whole territory, and Pavelić held the power of appointing directors and members in each administrative unit.¹¹ Parallel to the founding of this hierarchical system, the Ministry of Education initiated the nationalization of schooling. A number of Serb teachers were purged from educational institutions¹² and, although almost no change was introduced in the school system that the NDH had inherited from the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, new textbooks that had the aim of implanting the “Ustasha spirit” in the youth of Croatia were adopted.¹³

The distinct desire to nationalize educational content is visible in the official guidelines called the “Educational Basis for Elementary Schools,” which included the following goals: 1) Upbringing in a patriotic and social way based

11 Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, p. 340.

12 Dulić, Tomislav. *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941–42*. Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 2005, p. 156.

13 The school system in the NDH prescribed four years of compulsory and free education in elementary school (*pučka škola*) for every child from the age of 6. After completing this elementary education, pupils could attend secondary school or professional-training school. Secondary schools were divided into four years of lower (civic school), four years of higher secondary education and 8 years of gymnasium. See *Naša domovina*, sv. 2, Zagreb: Glavni ustaški stan, 1943, pp. 851–878. The statistical figures on the secondary and elementary schools in the NDH in the school year of 1941/1942 show that there were 39,872 pupils in secondary schools and 489,072 in elementary schools at the time. See *Brojiti ben i izvještaj*, lipanj–srpanj 1942, br. 9–12, pp. 92.

on the Principles of the Croatian and the Ustasha movement; 2) Religious and refined upbringing; 3) Education and preparation for life in accordance with the conditions and needs of the students' native place of abode, homeland, and state; 4) Development and strengthening of Croatian citizens' awareness.¹⁴ These discourses on educational policy indicate that the chief aim of schooling in the NDH was the cultivation of loyalty to the state among its youth. In fact, as described in previous studies, the importance of an independent state to the Croatian nation was a distinguishing feature in the teaching conducted in secondary schools. Newly-authorized history textbooks underscored the invented tradition of the Croatian national movement, connecting it with the founding of the Ustasha and the NDH. Based on such a perception of national history, these textbooks also emphasized that the Ustasha and Pavelić inherited the political ideas and activities of Croat "nationalists," such as Ante Starčević, Eugen Kvaternik, and Stjepan Radić, in the period of the Habsburg monarchy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.¹⁵

One of the notable characteristics of the "Ustasha spirit" was the introduction of an assimilation policy for Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since before the establishment of the NDH, the Ustasha and a segment of Croat nationalists claimed that their own "ethnic and historical territory" included the critical area of Bosnia-Herzegovina and that the forefathers of most Bosnian Muslims were Croats who were converted to Islam under Turkish rulership. This type of nationalism was justified in a history textbook through Starčević's assertion that Bosnian Muslims were the purest Croats.¹⁶

In contrast, the Ustasha did not conceal its own unyielding stance against the Serbs in one history textbook. In it, centralization as a system of governance with regard to the history of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was a target of criticism because according to the text, the Croats had suffered both political and economic pressure during the period. Furthermore, the struggle of the Croat nation against the Serbs was highlighted as the historical background for the founding of the Ustasha and the birth of the NDH, disregarding the fact that the NDH would not have been formed had Nazi Germany not occupied the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.¹⁷

Another topic taught in school was the Croatian geopolitical position, derived from the country's peculiar experience of existing on the border between "West" and "East." During World War II, the Ustasha repeatedly propagated

14 *Nastavna osnova za obće pučke škole, seoske i gradske produžne pučke škole*, Zagreb: Hrvatska državna tiskara, 1943, p. 5.

15 Petrungaro, *Pisati povijest iznova*, pp. 127–130, 145–147.

16 Srkulj, Stjepan. *Hrvatska poviest za VIII razred srednjih škola*, II svezak. Zagreb: Hrvatska državna tiskara, 1944, p. 250.

17 Jakić, Živko. *Poviest hrvatskog naroda sa svjetskom poviešču za IV razred srednjih škola*, dio II. Zagreb: Hrvatska državna tiskara, 1943, pp. 119–123.

the idea that the political stance of the Croats should be joined with that of the “West,” namely the Axis Powers of Nazi Germany and Italy, and considered the Serbs and Partisan forces inferior figures belonging to the “East.” However, according to an explanation provided in a geography textbook, this structure of binary opposition was not applied to the definition of Croatian uniqueness:

It must be mentioned here that the territory of Croatia (both Pannonian and Balkan), according to its quality, has been closely linked to Western political and cultural development. Therefore the Croats came into being as a Western nation, whereas Croatia may not reject the “East,” according to its characteristics. The boundary which divided these two worlds passed through the eastern part of the Croatian lands along the Drina River. The undeniable effect of the powerful influences on the eastern side had an impact on their spiritual discipline (especially in the case of the Croatian Muslims).¹⁸

In light of the suggestion that, as mentioned earlier, Ustasha ideology demonstrated a combination of generic Fascism and Croatian nationalism, it should come as no surprise that schooling in the NDH displayed an inclination toward finding a Croatian national identity somewhere in the area between the two.

This tendency became even more pronounced in lessons about the relationship between race and nation. While the Ustasha declared that the Croats, as a nation, were included in the Aryan race by laws enacted at the beginning of the NDH,¹⁹ this did not mean that Croatian national identity had been substituted for a single, biologically based racial affiliation. The concept of “Aryan race” was differentiated from other races in Europe and, parallel to this interpretation, Croatian national identity embodied its own uniqueness.

Because the tribal characteristics of all the European nations were fully blended, this mixed feature of the modern European is designated by the name of “Aryan race” which is differentiated from other tribes which do not possess their own roots within the European living space. The “Aryan race” originated from the historical development of the European nations, in which all the best and most complete spiritual features of human beings were gathered in the greatest and most profound way.²⁰

18 Lukas, Filip, Peršić, Nikola. *Zemljopis nezavisne države hrvatske za više razrede srednjih škola*, Zagreb: Hrvatska državna tiskara, 1943, p. 11.

19 “Zakonska odredba o državljanstvu,” “Zakonska odredba o rasnoj propadnosti,” “Zakonska odredba o zaštiti arijske krvi i časti hrvatskog naroda,” In: Požar, Petar (ed.). *Ustaše: dokumenti o ustaškom pokretu*. Zagreb: Zagrebačka Stvarnost, 1995, pp. 160–164.

20 Babić, Krunoslav, Fink, Nikola. *Nauka o čovjeku za više razrede srednjih škola*. Zagreb: Hrvatska državna tiskara, 1944, p. 163.

As to this textbook's definition of race, other European races, such as the Nordic, Baltic, Mediterranean, Alpine, and Dinaric, were replaced with the term "tribe," and only the Aryan race was granted the special, spiritual status of a mixture of "tribes." In the same way, Croats, being a group of people associated with a common language, civilization, and customs, were a compound of European "tribes," and maintained their individual complexity, even though part of the "Aryan race."²¹

Undoubtedly, the notion of state and nation took on great importance in schooling in order to encourage the development of an ideal younger generation. However, before investigating how the "education" of the Ustasha Youth was linked to totalitarianism, it is worth mentioning how loyalty to the state and nation were prescribed in a reading textbook. Olga Osterman, a female teacher in a gymnasium, and later a commander of a women's group within the Ustasha Youth,²² described the relationship between the individual and the community thusly:

The human being is the essence of society. Because of this, the individual's life is connected to the life of human communities. In order to make the lives of individuals and communities bearable and useful, the former must be in harmony with the latter. Therefore, the upbringing of the individual must be as follows: When one begins to work in a community, his or her general aspiration may not be in conflict with that of the community. What's more, he or she must work for the benefit of human communities.²³

This statement makes it clear that the regime considered youth to be subjects of the state for the purpose of establishing national unity. However, the more significant point is that, following these sentences, Osterman alludes to a general discontent with schooling:

All the knowledge which is gathered in school, from the lowest to the highest, and all the specialization in every field which can possibly be studied, do not always make the whole individual from people which wholesome and advanced human communities demand. It is because that selection of knowledge, just like a conglomeration of facts, do not guarantee adequate development and ennoblement, or the association and coordination of somebody's social and substantive ability as an individual; nor do they further a human being towards more advanced personal and refined social goals.²⁴

21 Ibid., pp. 156, 162–163.

22 *Tko je tko u NDH. Hrvatska 1941.-1945.* Zagreb: Minerva, 1997, p. 303.

23 Ujević, Mate (ed.). *Plodovi srca i uma: hrvatska čitanka za više razrede srednjih škola, treći dio.* Zagreb: Hrvatska državna tiskara, 1941, p. 614.

24 Ibid.

It may be assumed that Osterman here argues the possibility of the founding of another educational institution being effective for training youth outside the school system. On the other hand, it is questionable whether teachers at that time accepted such an educational policy without objection. For instance, Vlado Petz, who was a professor at the Higher School of Pedagogy of the University of Zagreb, repeatedly maintained that suitably conducted lessons entailed the cooperation of teachers, pupils, and parents.²⁵

In order to examine more carefully the reaction of teachers, the next chapter deals with the strategy adopted by the Ustasha Youth in comparison with the content of regular schooling.

THE USTASHA YOUTH AS AN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The Ustasha Youth was established as a structured organization by legal decree published on behalf of Pavelić in July 1941. The group's plan encompassed all Croatian male and female youth from 7 to 21 years of age, divided into four sections: ages 7 to 11 [Ustasha Mainstay], 11 to 15 [Ustasha Hero], 15 to 18 [Ustasha Starčević Youth], and University Students. At its head was an administrative commander, whose operational responsibility was directly under Pavelić's direct supervision. Each administrative unit in the NDH had its own branch of the Ustasha Youth and a commander. Also, managers served in positions as heads of their own respective sections, which were: a) Military advance training; b) Moral education; c) Propaganda; d) Gymnastics; e) Technical training; f) Health; g) Social-economic care; and h) Housekeeping (only for females).²⁶ It is evident that the leadership assigned a particular value to moral education within these various sections, in line with the Ustasha Youth goal of cultivating the "Ustasha spirit" among the youth of Croatia.

There were two main methods of education in the Ustasha Youth: lectures and practical lessons in physical training. History and Geography were the main subjects taught through lectures. Commanders introduced various sports activities such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, and other sports for physical training. Although a course of physical education was also adopted in schools, the Ustasha Youth leadership considered this only an adequate foundation for more advanced education through sports activities in the Ustasha Youth.²⁷ In practice,

25 Petz, Vlado. *Smisao i zadatak škole*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko sveučilišno društvo, 1941; Petz, Vlado. *Analiza obrazovnog oblikovanja — u svezi s nastavom*. *Napredak*, 1–2, 1944, pp. 11–21.

26 *Ustaša — vijesnik hrvatskog ustaškog oslobodilačkog pokreta*, 19 srpnja 1941, br. 4, p. 11.

27 Miljan, Goran. Fašizam, sport i mladež — ideja i uloga tjelesnoga odgoja i sporta u odgoju i organizaciji Ustaške mladeži, 1941.–1945. *Radovi – zavod za hrvatsku povijest*, 46, 2014, 1, p. 364.

these two paths of edification were not separate but were combined to foster the appropriate ideological national consciousness among members.

An ideal image of youth was depicted in “Basis of moral education for Ustasha Youth,” published in February 1942 under the name of Julije Makanec, who was the chief commander of the section for moral education in Zagreb.²⁸ This document refers to the indispensable obligation of political elites being subject to the state:

Whereas it is characteristic of spiritual plebeians that they do not to recognize any values above their pursuit of comfort and enjoyment, the following is an essential characteristic of elites: that they feel a kind of calling deep within them, as though from a higher sphere, which places them under the obligation to dedicate their life to the realization of certain supra-personal values, for which they are willing to sacrifice their own personal happiness and comfort.²⁹

The state is an indispensable means for a nation to live its national life freely and to develop all its abilities to their full potential. To be concrete: In fact, without the Croatian state, the Croatian nation could not fully develop its personality; some of their essential characteristics would become stunted, and their future would not be secured.³⁰

This guiding principle was reflected in history and geography courses within the Ustasha Youth. Its official organ of command, the *Dužnostnik*, reported on its members’ progress according to a directive on the moral education of Hero level Ustasha, whereby the curriculum encompassed: 1) The behavior of a Ustasha Hero at school and at home, 2) Croatia during the age of the Kings, 3) Croatian Bosnia, and 4) Croats as fighters, heroes, and warriors. Concerning the behavior of an Ustasha Hero, it was emphasized that pupils must be polite to their superiors in the Ustasha Youth as well as at home. Next came the lesson plans for the history of Croatia during the time of the medieval Kingdom – which comprised parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina – was presented. The third series of lectures accentuated the importance of Bosnia to the state of Croatia and its emotional value as the heart of Croatia’s “ethnic and national territory.” Based on this historical foundation, the last section of these courses illustrated the age-old struggle of the Croats, their courage, and their military prowess.³¹

Although a more comprehensive study of the various activities in the Ustasha Youth is outside the scope of this article, as far as the content of these lectures is

28 *Tko je tko u NDH*, pp. 252–253.

29 Makanec, Julije. *Temelji duhovnog odgoja ustaške mladeži*. Zagreb: Tipografija, 1942, p. 2.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

31 *Dužnostnik*, ožujak 1942, br. 1, p. 13.

concerned, there is no appreciable discrepancy between lectures delivered in the Ustasha Youth and in the schools. It is understandable that the Ustasha Youth, in their pursuit of the ideology of nation-building, would rely on a curriculum similar to that of the school system to seamlessly mobilize youth in cooperation with teachers. In fact, the Ustasha leadership, in preparing a defense against the opposition to the Ustasha Youth in December 1941, formulated a Circular for secondary schools titled “Harmonization (coordination) between school work and the Ustasha Youth.” It included a request from the Ministry of Education that commanders belonging to the Ustasha Youth practice moderation when participating directly in schooling. As stipulated in a provision of this Circular, the commander deployed to each secondary school was required to obey the school’s disciplinary regulations. Furthermore, it was prohibited for the commander to wear an official uniform or carry arms when participating in school teaching.³²

However, as previously mentioned, it is unclear how teachers responded to this seemingly reasonable behavior on the part of commanders of the Ustasha Youth. Considering that the leadership could change its stance toward schooling at any time, it is necessary to examine the teachers’ view of educational policy in the process of mobilization.

REACTION FROM THE TEACHERS’ ASSOCIATION TOWARD THE EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Dating from the period of the Habsburg monarchy, two main Croatian teachers’ associations were active: the Association of the Croatian Teachers’ Societies (*Savez hrvatskih učiteljskih društva*, SHUD), organized in 1885 and composed of elementary school teachers, and the Croatian Secondary School Teachers’ Society (*Društvo hrvatskih srednjoškolskih profesora*, DHSP), established in 1904.³³ In the academic year of 1941–1942, the number of elementary school teachers was 8,852, while secondary school teachers numbered 1,700.³⁴ However, it should be noted that the education system in the NDH faced a management crisis because of the conflict with the Partisan and the Chetnik forces. Moreover, the political views of these Croatian teachers’ associations were not homogeneous. In fact, it is fair to say that a distrust of the regime on the part of teachers gradually developed.

32 “Uskladjivanje (koordinacija) rada škole i ustaške mladeži.” *Službeni glasnik ministarstva nastave*, br. 1, 1942, pp. 19–20.

33 *Naša domovina*, sv. 2, pp. 926–929.

34 *Brojtbene izvještaj*, br. 9–12, p. 92.

According to the minutes of a meeting held by the SHUD in April 1942, there was of yet no discontent with the educational policy. On this occasion, after Ivan Tomašić, the president of the SHUD, insisted that teachers needed to lend their efforts to the realization of the goal of national education, the establishment of the autonomy of Croatian education was confirmed as a program of the SHUD.³⁵

Taking into account that Croat teachers frequently resisted the school system which was based on Yugoslavism during the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, one may say that the “autonomy” of Croatian national education was partly accomplished as a result of the birth of the NDH. Despite this, though, coinciding with the worsening of the war situation, the regime increased its political pressure on teachers. In January 1943, the Ministry of National Education proclaimed its requirements for educators in a publication entitled “Instructions for Teachers on School Work,” which requested more obedience to the regime from secondary level teachers:

All educators must comply with the official duties and obligations of the Clerks’ Oath. Furthermore, they must be spontaneous and genuine guardians of the spiritual and material good of our nation and homeland. Every teacher should also clearly express their own loyalty and devotion to the *Poglavnik*, the state, and the nation on all occasions such as conducting training sessions and lessons for students, as well as when they are in mutual contact while conducting other official and special duties.³⁶

Although it is not clear whether Croat teachers considered the order an intervention in the course of school education, this educational policy still confronted numerous difficulties in the attempt to convert it into practice. An inspection report about the conditions of secondary schools in Zagreb issued for the Ministry of National Education in November 1943 informed on the lack of healthcare for students, the deterioration of school buildings, and an absence of pupils because of their obligation to attend civil service. Moreover, despite the order issued in January, some teachers did not adhere to the prescribed Ustasha manner of greeting with the phrase “ready for the homeland (*za dom spremni*).”³⁷ Also, because teachers were increasingly drafted into military service, the educational environment in the NDH became too disjointed to manage regular schooling.

35 Hrvatski školski muzej (HŠM), A 267 Savez hrvatskih učiteljskih društva (SHUD), Zapisnici skupština, 216–221.

36 Hrvatski državni arhiv (HDA), F 216 Ministarstvo narodno prosvjete nezavisne države hrvatske (MNP NDH), kut. 7, tajni spisi 1943, br. T 181–1943.

37 HDA, F 216 MNP NDH, kut. 7, tajni spisi 1943, br. 3349.

As the war situation evolved, an uncooperative attitude on the part of teachers toward the Ustasha Youth began to be noted by the authorities. In March 1944, representatives of the DHSP from throughout the country gathered in Zagreb to discuss problems with the school system. Ivan Oršanić,³⁸ the administrative commander of the Ustasha Youth, was present at the meeting and demanded that teachers improve their relations with the Ustasha Youth. Concerned about the report of the confrontation between the two groups, Oršanić encouraged teachers to become members of the Ustasha and directors in the Ustasha Youth.³⁹ When compared to the content of the Circular issued in December 1941, it is certain that the leader of the Ustasha Youth took this initiative in order to mobilize teachers.

However, this attempt did not achieve its desired outcome. From August to September 1944, the DHSP carried out a survey of secondary school teachers regarding school conditions. The results revealed the pitiful condition of education all over the country: all school buildings were occupied by military forces, 3,000 teachers were thrown out onto the streets, and most of the pupils had joined the Partisan forces.⁴⁰ Although, inasmuch as my examination of archival sources indicates, Croat teachers did not voice any ideological problems with the educational policy, it may be fair to say that they finally realized the insufficiency of “autonomy” in the school system.

It appears that the Croat teachers who engaged in the “purification” of schools at the inception of the NDH shared the Ustasha political viewpoint on the establishment of national education. Nor were the effects of fascistization surrounding education limited to the revision of textbooks. The regime initiated the forced recruiting of students into the Ustasha Youth and, by the end of the war, the target of this mobilization had changed to teachers. Consequently, Croat teachers’ disaffection toward the deficiencies in the school system was revealed with their refusal to assist with the activities of the Ustasha Youth. This breakdown of the educational system was caused by the fragility of the regime in the NDH as a puppet state in wartime.

38 *Tko je tko u NDH*, pp. 302–303.

39 HŠM, A 672 Društvo hrvatskih srednjoškolskih profesora (DHSP), kut. 2, b.b.

40 HDA, F 216 MNP NDH, kut. 1472, “Zaključci prihvaćeni na zajedničkom sastanku svih nastavnika srednjih škola dne 11. rujna 1944. kao rezultat anketa.”

CONCLUSION

In summary, this article analyzed the problem concerning the educational policy in the NDH, focusing on the ideological discourse found in textbooks, the function of the Ustasha Youth, and the reaction of Croat teachers to the fascistization of the school system. It is evident that the Ustasha failed to create a totalitarian state because of the chaotic situation not only inside the country, which was occupied by Italian and Nazi troops as well as Partisan forces which were increasing in strength, but also because of the internal structure of the regime. This weakness was clearly visible in the characteristics of their educational policy.

The plan of national education which was desired by both the leadership and the Croat teachers took definitive shape in the content of the newly-adopted textbooks. As I have examined in this article, this educational content highlighted Croatian uniqueness with regard to the “betweenness” of its geopolitical existence and the “complexity” of the European race. Compared to the general school system, the Ustasha Youth, as a fascistic organization, were meant to serve the function of inculcating nationalism into the youth of Croatia. However, the Croat teachers, who bore the responsibility for implementing the educational policy in the NDH, were not *tabulae rasae*, open to silent subordination to the regime. Although I did not investigate their idea of pedagogy and its dissimilarity with the “Ustasha spirit,” there is no doubt that they did not align themselves with the Ustasha’s totalitarian policy on education. This tendency within the teachers’ associations began to surface when the school system was thrown into disorder during wartime. After all, fascistization through education in the NDH had resulted in failure. Subsequently, it can be concluded that the tension between the teachers and the Ustasha is one of the reasons for this outcome.

When I extend this argument to the relationship between education and politics in the 20th-century history of Croatia, it can be seen that “Yugoslav” and “Serbian” ideas were recognized as the subjects of the oppression of Croats when national education was politicized. Such an antagonism against the “other” was also present in the history textbooks adopted in the period of the NDH. Although some Croat teachers refused to cooperate with the Ustasha, this did not mean that they changed their political stance to ally with the Communist groups, which were identified with “Yugoslav” or “Serbian” manner. Further research is required to discover how Croat teachers in the period of socialism interpreted their experience of the educational practice in the NDH and how its legacy influenced the subsequent rise of nationalism.

