

THE JEWS IN YUGOSLAVIA 1918–1941  
**Antisemitism and the Struggle for Equality**  
*Ivo Goldstein*

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was a very complex state: it stretched from the Alps almost to the Aegean Sea, covering an area that had not been under a single administration since the fourth century. It had about 70,000 Jews, of whom about 60 percent were Ashkenazim and 40 percent Sephardim. Most of them lived in towns, and made up approximately 0.5 percent of the population. Antisemitism was never very strong: it was of a 'Central European' type, and there were no pogroms like in Poland and Russia. Nevertheless, the internal situation and the position of Yugoslavia in the international community strongly affected the position of the Jews.

Antisemitism was only one facet of the problem. Even when antisemitism was relatively weak, it was always an issue whether Jews were considered equal in everyday life, whether they were able to achieve the same professional goals with the same education, and so on. The distinguished Croatian scholar Mirjana Gross addressed this issue in a recently published paper on the period when equality before the law had already been achieved but full equality, in the sense that the Jews, their religion and culture were considered equal in Croatian and Serbian society, in the Catholic and Orthodox environments, was still a long way away. Resistance was often not explicit but involved the very complicated and problematic relation between the State and the (Catholic and Orthodox) Church. Jews faced deeply rooted prejudice; they were threatened by envy and business competition. [1] Social equality was never achieved in the interwar Croatian and Yugoslav society, and in 1940 open discrimination started.

In the first years of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes the authorities two sets of criteria in relation to the Jews. The loyalty of the Serbian Jews, many of whom had bravely fought in the Serbian army in the First World War, was never questioned. The Bosnian Sephardim, particularly those in Sarajevo, were regarded as an autochthonous and indigenous element who had, thanks to four centuries of life in the region, gained special rights. [2] None of this was true of the Ashkenazim (in Austria, Hungary, Romania, and so on). The Serbian Jews were 'ours', they spoke Serbian (Ladino had mostly been forgotten), whereas the mother tongue of some 'foreign' Jews, most of whom were Ashkenazim, was German or Hungarian (especially in Voivodina). The situation was paradoxical in many ways: the Sephardim kept their culture and lived in relative isolation from the broader community – there were very few mixed marriages; assimilation and conversion to Christianity were rare. In Sarajevo this was the result of urban multiculturalism. In contrast, the Ashkenazim in Zagreb, in northern Croatia and Slavonia (and Voivodina) adopted the language of their environment relatively quickly and in a short time they underwent a cultural and religious, political and national assimilation. Despite all this, they were seen as more foreign than the Sephardim. The feeling that they were a 'foreign body', that they were different from the majority of a predominantly Croatian or Catholic society, became even stronger after 1918. With the formation of Yugoslavia all the links that the Ashkenazim had with the much larger Jewish communities in Austria, Hungary and Bohemia were suddenly broken. Instead of being a periphery that was to look to its centre, they now had to find their place in a completely new situation.

The problem of deporting Jews already appeared in the first months of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The government considered deportation necessary because the Ashkenazim were seen as foreign since they had come to the area of the new state from other parts of Austria–Hungary. Although some of them had been living in Croatia, Voivodina or Bosnia for several decades, the Yugoslav authorities felt that they had not gained the right to acquire citizenship. Thus, deportation began, although various Yugoslav and international Jewish organisations were engaged in preventing it at the Paris Peace Conference. [3] The deportation was apparently implemented in the most brutal fashion: the first to suffer were the Bosnian Ashkenazim a small number of whom were banished (to Italy, Austria or Hungary) never to return to Yugoslavia. Others were allowed to return home after several months of moving from place to place but they suffered greatly in the material sense. The issue of refugees from Bosnia had not been solved when the same problem arose in Zagreb, where there was a plan to exile 600 families in 24 hours, as well as in Voivodina. Jewish organisations began to intercede and the displacement was discontinued; some people, however, could not return to their homes. [4] Publicly this problem was not treated as if it concerned Jews, people spoke about the ‘expulsion of foreigners’. It referred to those who had ‘fled from the fear of Bolshevism’ (that is, refugees from revolutionary changes in Germany, Russia and Hungary) and ‘in these times of unrest it would be possible to justify certain measures of security against anti-state disorder’. These were the words of the *Obzor*, a Zagreb paper of a liberal outlook, [5] which nevertheless criticised this practice claiming that the

order commanding deportation issued by the minister of the interior was so elastic that in certain cases his subordinates could interpret it as they liked, they could take advantage of it either to leave alone a foreigner who should be deported, or to deport someone we needed.

The paper also expressed concern about the international position of the country because ‘our state is in any case surrounded by enemies and if we begin antagonism with other states now that everyone is getting ready for peace and for repairing the horror left by the war . . . then this is not a reasonable policy. . . .’ Finally, the *Obzor* explained: ‘we will not even mention that these activities have an antisemitic meaning, which can in no way agree with the modern principles of our democracy. Things seemed to have cooled down as time passed and deportations from Zagreb and its surroundings decreased and finally stopped, but in the winter of 1919–1920 there was still deportation from Bosnia and ‘people had to leave their homes in the freezing winter . . . although they had been living among us for several decades’, said the representatives of Jews to Svetozar Pribičević, minister of the interior. [6] And this was not the end. In the summer of 1922 there was a crisis in Voivodina when the Jews were treated as second-rate citizens: special police surveillance was organised and they were threatened with deportation from the country. [7]

In March 1931 the *Židov* wrote about deportation; it said that in early 1919

a secret order had been issued to remove foreign elements from Bosnia, Voivodina and Croatia – before the peace talks ended it could not even be said which people were really considered ‘foreign elements’. The term was never even thought to include colonists of a different mother tongue. . . . We informed our head rabbi Isak Alkalaj about this, and he went to see prime minister Stojan Protić who said that he had no knowledge of these decrees, but the head rabbi laid clear evidence before him. ‘Why are you getting so upset about the Hungarians and the Germans, no one’s bothering the Serbian Jews. What do you care about those others! Although the Protestant

German and the Protestant Englishman share their religion, or the Catholic Czech and the Catholic Hungarian, they have nothing in common, they can be the fiercest enemies’,

said Protić. But when Alkalaj explained to him that this was a ‘single Jewish people’, Protić accepted it. ‘That night the telegraph never stopped. The result?! The Jews have not been harassed in their homes until the present, and all the decrees were recalled’, concluded the prominent publicist and Jewish scholar Lavoslav Šik (Schick). [8]

In the 1920s there were antisemitic incidents in every major Yugoslav town, including Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Ljubljana. Often used as a tool in internal political strife, Jews were accused of disloyalty to the new state and of economically exploiting the Croats and Serbs. When the Zionist movement became stronger, Jews were accused of neglecting Yugoslavia and only promoting emigration to Palestine. Sometimes when a circle wanted to launch a campaign against another town or nation, they used the Jews. Nevertheless, none of the parties’ programmes contained antisemitism, nor was this kind of antisemitism a constant element in the activities of such circles. Therefore, Jews regarded antisemitic outbursts as incidents of no major importance and concentrated more on reaching full equality – not only equality in rights but social equality as well. Of course, this was not possible in the semi-democratic Christian and Muslim country of that period. Prejudice was still strong and certain positions in society were still closed to Jews.

Jews developed Zionism in order to confront growing antisemitism: Zionism was not only an ideology whose goal was to create a Jewish state in Palestine, but also a struggle for Jewish revival. The first Zionist organisations on the territory of the future Yugoslavia were founded by Vienna students in Osijek and Zagreb at the very beginning of the twentieth century. [9] After the First World War the Zionists took over the strongest Jewish community in Zagreb, and soon the other Ashkenazi communities as well. By the late 1920s the Zionists also imposed themselves as the leading force in Sephardi communities. At the beginning of the century Zionists believed that equality and freedom would remain empty words as long as the Jews themselves did not become conscious of the spiritual value of Jewish individuality. A Zionist must stress on every occasion: ‘*Ivri onochi* – I am a Jew!’ [10] The Zionists rejected the euphemism *Israelite*, which they said had been introduced into European culture by the ‘antisemitic Napoleon’, i.e. the French Revolution, and demanded to be called *Jews*, and after 1918 it was also possible to use the word *Hebrew*. [11]

Antisemitic outbursts were relatively numerous and varied after the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Some were indirectly encouraged by the authorities, some were the work of journalists, some took place in the street. The attacks were motivated by religious and national intolerance, xenophobia or fear of business competition. The Jews were accused of treason, of insufficiently expressing patriotism and of getting rich in devious ways. In an editorial the Catholic paper *Narodna Politika* condemned Jewish women for their luxurious clothing at a Jewish party. [12] The pattern of attack against Jewish women for their ‘luxury’ kept repeating itself: in September 1919 the first congress of women of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was held in Belgrade. Jewish women’s societies also participated and all kinds of subjects were discussed, but on the third day there was an incident: a certain Mrs Iveković from Zagreb, reading the paper ‘On Luxury’, emphasised several times that the people who lived luxuriously and imported luxury goods were Jews, or to be more precise, Jewish women. [13]

In an article entitled 'Cionistička sabotaža u Jugoslaviji' [Zionist Sabotage in Yugoslavia], the *Narodna politika* [14] gave an extremely negative appraisal of Zionism, saying that the Jews want to be a 'privileged class that amasses capital and then siphons it out of our country, to use it for founding their imperialism'. Yugoslav Jews want to attack the Slavs wherever they can and do not condemn the Germans and the Hungarians, says the author and then asks himself, 'where is their sacrifice in blood for Yugoslavia?' In another editorial the *Narodna Politika* similarly claimed that the Jews who make up one per cent of the population dominate over the rest of the population who make up 99 percent. [15]

There were occasional antisemitic incidents and what is even more interesting, there was also a politically motivated incident. In 1919 students were protesting in the centre of Zagreb against the Italian occupation of Rijeka and its surroundings carried out by legionaries under the leadership of the poet of fascist leanings Gabriele d'Annunzio. When one of the speakers said that d'Annunzio was a Jew (this was not so), cries were heard from the crowd, 'down with the Jews!'. [16] Playing on people's lowest instincts was also manifest on 4 October 1919, when demonstrators on Jelačić Square shouted against Jews who were coming out of the nearby synagogue in Praška Street after the Saturday service (the report does not make it clear whether the demonstrators had prepared this kind of provocation but it cannot be excluded because it was a Saturday). The reason was the strike of the bank clerks which had allegedly not been joined by Jewish bank clerks. The *Židov* claimed that the 'strike-breakers' were both Jews and non-Jews, and asked itself how – since the strike and the demonstrations had been organised by a left-wing trade union – the participants of the antisemitic incident could be part of a trade union movement belonging to the Third International 'which is cosmopolitan and abhors racial hatred'. [17]

The Croatian-oriented *Hrvat* found reasons for writing in a similar vein in a completely different field. Only a day or two earlier the *Riječ SHS*, a paper that upheld centralist state views, [18] was outraged because the Zagreb stock exchange had been closed for Yom Kippur (4 September 1919) and added that 'sadly' most stockbrokers and workers on the exchange were Jews and that 'every Yugoslav must be very disturbed by this indifference or indolence for their state and for themselves'. The Jews were also accused of constantly working against the state in the ideologically completely different Catholic *Hrvatska obrana* from Osijek [19], which reported that Yugoslav Jews had handed over a memorandum to the Yugoslav peace delegation in Paris claiming that they were severely oppressed in Yugoslavia, especially in Croatia. This news 'true, has not yet been confirmed, but neither side has denied it, either'. The editorial board of the Jewish paper *Židov* declared that no body of Yugoslav Jews had handed over a memorandum of that kind, [20] but they had complained at the peace conference about the deportations of Jews.

Bože Lovrić (Split, 1881 – Prague, 1953) wrote about this lack of patriotism, lack of homeland among the Jews in *Savremenik*, [21] a literary journal that was also the 'annual of the society of Croatian writers'. This journal always emphasised the need for a free exchange of thoughts, free creativity, sincerity and so on, and in their proclamation its founders declared that 'without freedom there can be no real progress anywhere. . .'. In the article 'Židovsko pitanje kao kulturno pitanje' [The Jewish Question as a Cultural Question] Lovrić departed from the exalted ideals set forth by *Savremenik's* editors. Although he stated in the usual manner of antisemitic pamphlets that 'we are not against the Jews as a people', but are 'only contesting their outlook . . . they are without roots and

thus without a homeland . . . newcomers who can think only of their own profit . . . they do spread a culture, but it is a semi-culture and cosmopolitan in the worst meaning of the word. . .’ .

There were also books with an obvious antisemitic standpoint. In 1922 the *Zabavna biblioteka* series in Zagreb printed the sequel to a novel *The War* written by a certain Krasnov and the editors advertised it in the following way: ‘he fell under the influence of Orthodox Jewish revolutionaries who taught him that the murder of any *goy* [Christian] brought closer their unlimited empire in the world. . .’. [22] The prominent writer and philologist Nikola Andrić (1867–1942) was editor of the entire series of *Zabavna biblioteka* books, which published approximately 600 titles over almost thirty years (1913–1942). He was a very influential person: among other things, he was the president of the Society of Croatian Writers and their main cultural society the *Matica hrvatska* and for a short time the manager of the Croatian National Theatre.

Jewish commentators said that ‘every day the attitude of the great non-Jewish public to Jews is deteriorating . . . antisemitism has become part of society like a general disease. . .’. [23] Although the author allowed that the newly created Yugoslavia ‘has not yet been consolidated’, he concluded that

there are many parties in our kingdom. Still, we must wait for a new one: the as yet unorganised party of people of good will, a party of the general good. . . . a party of uncontaminated people, patriots for the sake of the country. . . . [24]

For some we are capitalists, for others Bolsheviks; some consider centralism our sin, some call us republicans and separatists, some accuse us of standing to one side, of having no sense or feelings for the interests of the people. For some we are spreading Germanisation, propagating destructive aspirations, others say that we are trying to worm our way into the ranks of the people. . . .

The social equality of Jews was not accepted in Croatia even by those whose outlook should have implied it – the liberally oriented who undoubtedly broadened the horizons of freedom in the country or the ‘progressives’ who espoused socialism. Attacking the Jews, making them a kind of scapegoat had long been present in Croatian and Yugoslav society. In places it grew weaker and even disappeared, but there were moments and situations when it was socially permitted, and in some cases and circles even the socially desirable pattern of behaviour.

Surprisingly, a golden age began for the Jews in 1929 when King Alexander proclaimed a dictatorship. Antisemitic incidents almost disappeared for some years because of strong governmental control over the whole of society. The king visited Jewish institutions several times and liked to be publicly shown as a friend of the Jews. At the peak of the dictatorship, in December 1929, the king proclaimed, on the proposal of the minister of justice, the ‘Law on the Religious Community of Jews’: it confirmed that the leadership and organisation of Jewish religious communities was in the hands of the ordinary non-rabbinical element, it established the financing mechanism of the communities (from membership dues and from the state budget) and allowed a maximum of two communities in one town. The Jews were very pleased by this. [25] The highest forum in Jewish religious matters was a synod consisting of six members, led by a head rabbi appointed by the king.

Externally, it seemed like a ‘Yugoslav–Jewish idyll’: these are the words of the Zadar irredentist paper *Il littorale dalmatico*, which believed that behind its seemingly

pro-Jewish stand was the ambition of the Yugoslav government to get a mandate over Palestine. [26]

Around 1930 Yugoslav Jews could not complain that anything was denied to them. In the words of Lavoslav Šik (Schick), 'in the law about the religious community of Jews we were given complete equality, a seminary and permission for the unlimited work of educational, social and other societies. . .'. [27]

However, the Yugoslav Jews had to secure their position in the state by constant expressions of loyalty. It seems that the authorities expected this and demanded it at least indirectly. For this reason Zionist activities for the development of Palestine were linked with life in Yugoslavia. In 1928 a wood was planted in Palestine dedicated to the memory of Alexander's father, the late King Peter I Karađorđević (Peter the Great the Liberator). The following year a charity bazaar was organised in Zagreb to gather more money for the wood. The editorial board of the *Židov* wrote in February 1930 that planting the wood was a 'historic act' and that during the bazaar 'the participants of the drive for King Peter's Wood also held a congress'. The wood was finally dedicated in April of that year, and the king decorated prominent Yugoslav Jews, among them M. M. Ušiškin, president of the Jewish National Fund (*Keren Kayemet*), the organisation that arranged emigration to Palestine and helped to plant the wood. [28] When King Alexander was assassinated in 1934, a wood was planted in memory of him, too. [29]

It remains open to what degree such drives were the result of conformism or true patriotism and the belief that the Yugoslav kingdom was really a good political framework. In 1931, at a ceremonial session of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, David Albala, a distinguished Belgrade Zionist leader, said that 'Yugoslavia may serve as an example of how a people who live in their own state should behave toward another people'. [30]

When Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, the Nazis started to finance the activities of pro-Nazi and antisemitic circles in Yugoslavia. In Voivodina these circles were formed mostly by members of the very numerous German minority, and in Zagreb by the nationalists who would later join the Ustasha movement. They put out various extreme right and antisemitic publications and magazines.

A new wave of antisemitic incidents started in the 1930s, this time under the influence of growing Nazi propaganda. In 1933 the Jewish publicist Joel Rosenberger explained it as follows:

we do not live on an isolated island . . . already imitations are being reflected in the country of various things concerning Jews that are going on outside the borders of Yugoslavia. This newest resistance is tempting all those who, without a moral backbone, without a constructive stand in their lives, want and desire to push themselves forward politically and materially at the expense of others. [31]

The arguments now differed from those that had been used in the 1920s or earlier. Apart from Voivodina, there were no more allegations about the Jews being allies of the Austrians or Hungarians because the new generations of Jews had in the meantime completely mastered Croatian (or Serbian). Milan Budimirović, member of parliament from Serbia, said that he did not like the 'Voivodina Jews because they speak German and Hungarian better than Serbian', and the paper *Novi Sad* threatened the Jews from the position of Serbian nationalism – 'Your destruction will come from Israel' – and reproached the Jews for speaking Hungarian. [32] The accusation, even on the level of

folk narratives, that the Jews murdered Jesus, which had been an eternal argument of traditional 'Christian' antisemitism had almost completely disappeared. The reason for this was not only that many interwar antisemites were indifferent to Christianity or atheists (there were believers and even priests among them), but that this accusation sounded ridiculous and outdated in the mature civil society of the 1930s. The new antisemites mostly insisted on a racial theory and this, together with some other specific elements, made them almost identical with antisemites of the Nazi type. Although the editorial of the first issue of *Mlada Hrvatska* [33] stated that 'we will not approach the Jews with racial theories', this was only window dressing to make sure that the police would not ban the paper. In fact, every number was full of cartoons showing Jews with large noses and invectives about alleged Jewish racial marks.

In the 1930s papers appeared whose main feature was anti-Semitism and which used every possible occasion to attack Jews, however ridiculous the accusations were. This was characteristic not only of Croatia; the situation was similar in all parts of Yugoslavia. These newspapers, however, were usually of minor importance. The *Mlada Hrvatska*, which came out in Zagreb from 1936 to 1938, promoted the ideology of exclusive Croatism and spread hatred for other nations, and presented in its entirety 'modern' antisemitism of the kind Europe had developed in the second half of the nineteenth century in this framework. The *Mlada Hrvatska* was allegedly defending Croatian economic and social interests, and accused Jews of responsibility for the economic crisis. 'We will have no mercy on the alien parasites who exploit us wherever they can – we will demand equality with the Jews in our own land in which they are guests and should behave as such', declared the editor of the *Mlada Hrvatska* in the editorial of the first issue. [34] Almost at the same time Stjepan Buć in the *Danica* developed the racist theory of the national socialist movement. [35].

Another Zagreb paper, the *Zagrebačka senzacija*, addressed its only subject, Jews, in a sensational way in keeping with its name. In the first issue printed in August 1936 its only topic was Jews and it poured out torrents of hatred against them. Above the title it said: 'JEWS – GANGSTERS – THIEVES!', and in the subtitle:

Gallows for all Jewish robbers – Wolf, director general, repeatedly slapped an unemployed worker, father of six – Herman Goldman, merchant, stole 731,492 dinars from the state – The [Vicer] brothers are building a mansion, but will not pay a fine of 600,000 dinars for black marketing foreign exchange. . . [36]

Jews were attacked as communists, but also as capitalists: 'international in capital, international in communism, because they are on the one hand the greatest capitalists, on the other, the greatest communists. . .'. [37] The accusations were often absurd. Thus the editorial board of the *Židov* wrote with regret in 1935 that the Zagreb press attacked the Jews for attending the performances of visiting German theatre troupes because they watched performances in German. When the Jews drew their own conclusions from these articles almost collectively and proclaimed a boycott of German performances, the same sources criticised them for not attending performances of a high artistic level for reasons best known to themselves. [38]

As opposed to his statements in 1931, David Albala said at the Congress of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in 1936 that he

was not accustomed to antisemitism in Serbia. . . . it is difficult to be a Jew in Yugoslavia. I would wish many non-Jews to be Jews for only 24 hours, and to feel all the tragedy of their position, to

feel how it is when heads and eyes are turned from the Jew, when conversation cools down when a person finds out he is talking to a Jew. . . . [39]

The highest bodies of the Yugoslav Jews cautioned about the growing danger of anti-Semitism on several occasions. At the Sixth Congress of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Belgrade in 1936 a special resolution on antisemitism was adopted, which stated that

the Congress is conscious of the meaning of increasing anti-Jewish attacks that are being carried out in Yugoslavia without resistance, although they are a fundamental threat to the principle of the equality of religious communities. The Congress emphasises that antisemitism, as an expression of the darkest regression, cannot shake the feelings of Jews in this country that they are upright citizens who owe the country a patriotic obligation. The Congress considers that antisemitism, besides insulting and humiliating the Jews, also does great damage to the honour of the state. The Jews can withstand the numerous antisemitic attacks only with their feelings of honour and human dignity. The Congress declares that such occurrences – unknown in these parts until recently – which, as we are thoroughly convinced, are not rooted in the wider strata of the population who are imbued with traditional tolerance, have rightly caused great concern in the Jewish community. . . . [40]

Several days later the ‘representative of the Union’ visited ‘some of the competent officials in Belgrade who ‘formally promised that the anti-Jewish activities in our state will be stopped and made impossible in the future’. [41] There was no evident result because after the death of King Alexander in 1934 the authorities found themselves in a quandary: some regarded Germany with increasing sympathy; others thought that it would be easiest to resist German pressure by making internal concessions. Nevertheless, the fact that Yugoslav internal and external politics were growing closer to Germany was the result of fear more than sympathy.

These antisemitic excesses were the expression of an evil spirit but there was no organised mass movement behind them. The authors and editors of such papers in Croatia were ideologically close to the Ustasha movement, but they had not yet formally joined it in the 1930s. There was no party either in Croatia or in Yugoslavia that had an explicitly antisemitic programme and until the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia there was no physical violence, either in Croatia or in Yugoslavia.

The Ustasha movement was anti-Yugoslav and right-wing from its very foundation in 1932–1933. It and its paper *Ustaša – vijesnik hrvatskih revolucionaraca* [Ustasha – Herald of Croatian Revolutionaries] spread hatred primarily against the Belgrade regime and all its officials, and against Serbs. The Ustasha movement announced from the very beginning that it would use violence to achieve its goal. In the text signed by ‘*Poglavnik*’ [The Leader], the name used later for Pavelić, which appeared in the first issue of the *Ustaša*, he stated: ‘The dagger, revolver, machine gun and bomb, those are the bells that will ring the dawn and the RESURRECTION OF THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA.’ There was not even the slightest indication of antisemitism in the *Ustaša* – apparently for three reasons. First, the Ustashas had to confront a great enemy, the Belgrade regime, and they could and would not engage in other things. Secondly, at the beginning the Ustasha movement did not have the intellectual level to produce a well-rounded and consistent ideology: they knew only the basic tenets of Nazism and fascism. Nazi antisemitic argumentation demands a certain intellectual level that most of the Ustashas did not possess. Thirdly, one of the leading organisers of Ustasha cells was a



Jew, named Vladimir Singer (his fellows, however, imprisoned him in 1941 and killed him). There were other Jews, too, who helped the Ustasha movement. However, in the following years Ustasha ideology grew more exclusive and the Jews came to be seen as second-rate citizens who should be killed en masse. Ante Brkan, a close associate of Pavelić in the 1930s, said at an interrogation in 1951 that in 1934 Pavelić had said in Turin that ‘all enemies, all Serbs, Jews and Gypsies, should be slaughtered’. When Brkan disagreed with him saying that this was ‘impossible when there are 25 percent Serbs in the Croatian lands’, Pavelić upheld his opinion. [42] At that time Pavelić was writing the ‘political novel’ *Liepa plavka* [Lovely blonde], which contained antisemitic invectives. [43] The novel centres around the struggle of Croats for freedom. It is poor literature and the two-dimensional representation of the figures and their characterisation as inferior is not the only weakness of Pavelić’s text. Almost all the Croats are shown as good, resolute, idealistic, honest and mostly poor, while the Serbs are shown as dishonest policemen and oppressors. Although the Jews are not specifically mentioned anywhere in the novel, surnames such as Morgenstern, Blum, Greif, Donner, Rosenfeld, Freitag, say enough. They are shown as either rich or cheats, or both, or as importunate suitors, and also as police informers.

Pavelić’s survey *Hrvatsko pitanje* [The Croatian question] was written for Germany and sent to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in October 1936. It branded the ‘Serbian state authorities, international Freemasonry, Jews and communism’ enemies of the Croatian liberation movement.

Today almost all banking and almost all trade in Croatia is in the hands of the Jews. This became possible only because the state gave them privileges, because the government believed that this would weaken Croatian national strength. The Jews greeted the foundation of the so-called Yugoslav state with great enthusiasm because a national Croatian state would never suit them as well as Yugoslavia did. . . All the press in Croatia is in Jewish hands. This Jewish Freemason press is constantly attacking Germany, the German people and national socialism. . . [44]

As time passed Pavelić became more and more radical.

On the other hand, another Croatia existed, a Croatia clearly opposed to this haranguing. In April 1938 the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka* – HSS) Vladko Maček claimed that antisemitism was ‘an unusual and ridiculous phenomenon. . . there is no Jewish danger anywhere, this is no more than the hallucination of some circles. Antisemitism cannot exist among the Croats. . .’. [45] Because of this statement Maček and the HSS were accused in various newspapers of plotting with the Jews. [46] At the same time the *Podravske novine* of Koprivnica (in North-West Croatia) wrote:

Spreading hatred against the Jews is becoming increasingly open in Podravina (the region around Koprivnica), and the harangues have become truly inhuman. . . ‘Croats’ who have nothing at all in common with the honest Croatian national soul. When they speak loudest against the Jews, they are in fact much worse than the worst Jew. . . [47]

The newspaper *Dom*, which was controlled by the HSS, wrote: ‘The campaign against the Jews, simply because they are Jews, is not in accord with the principle of humanity or justice.’ [48] The *Zelinske novine* (from Sv. Ivan Zelina, 40 km north-east of Zagreb), a paper close to the HSS, wrote: ‘If aversion against the Jews has been, or ever will be, created then it must only be on the basis of the principle: if you are a man, all due respect,

if you are not – may you go far away!’ [49] Various Zagreb newspapers attacked racism and sympathised with the Jewish suffering in the ‘new European order’. [50]

Our analysis must be placed within the Yugoslav political context, not only because Croatia was not independent but part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and so interdependence was considerable, but also because the social status of the Jewish minority was quite similar everywhere in the kingdom. There were antisemitic outbursts in other parts of Yugoslavia, and just like in Croatia, they became more frequent after 1933. At that time Majstorović, a Serbian representative, expressed aversion to the Jews in the Senate in Belgrade, and Milutin Stanojević declared himself an ‘enthusiastic supporter of Hitler’s policy’, and had ‘no enthusiasm for refugees from the Third Reich. . .’. [51] In Petrovgrad (today Zrenjanin in Voivodina) the German paper *Erwache* began to appear in 1936 as a ‘national socialist militant paper and organ of the Yugoslav national movement *Zbor*, headed by Dimitrije Ljotić’. Its slogans were: ‘the Jews are our tragedy’, and ‘ruthless and uncompromising fight against the Jews and all international organisations, whose creators and promoters are our own and international Jews – a fight to the death’. In May 1937 Patriarch Varnava of Serbia was interviewed by a German paper and expressed his admiration for Hitler and Hitler’s ‘policy of defence against Bolshevism’. The patriarch parted from the German journalist with the words ‘Take good care of Adolf Hitler!’. [52] At the beginning of 1939 there were antisemitic incidents in Slovenia. Among other things, some circles tried to organise a boycott of Jewish shops. [53]

At the end of the 1930s the Yugoslav government tried to persuade representatives of the Jews on several occasions that nothing would be done to jeopardise their civil rights and equality in any way. The more such reassurance there was, the more wary the Jews seemed to have grown, doubting the intentions of the government. In September 1938 the Slovene politician Anton Korošec, minister of the interior, stated that ‘there is no Jewish question in Yugoslavia; the Jews enjoy complete legal protection in our country’. [54] In an interview given to the paper *Petit Parisien* the prime minister, the Serbian politician Milan Stojadinović, denied that ‘anti-Jewish measures are being planned in Yugoslavia’. He added that ‘as long as the Jews furnish proof of their loyalty . . . the question does not arise. The future will thus, in fact, depend on the Jews. . .’. [55] This statement was the best confirmation of the actual inequality of Jews. In February 1939 Dragiša Cvetković, the new prime minister, received representatives of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities and said that ‘there is no reason for any kind of anxiety’. [56] However, in September–October 1940 the Yugoslav government passed two laws, that is, ‘two decrees restricting the rights of the Jews’. The first was called the ‘Decree on Measures Concerning Jews and the Performance of Activities with Items of Human Nutrition’, which in fact banned all wholesale enterprises dealing in foodstuffs whose owners or co-owners were Jews. The second was called the ‘Decree on the Enrolment of Persons of Jewish Descent at the University, Secondary School, Teacher Training College and Other Vocational Schools’, which introduced a *numerus clausus* for Jews. This meant that the number of Jewish students and pupils had to be reduced to the percentage of the Jews in the total population. This measure was to be applied for the first grade of schools and for the first year of university already in the academic year 1940–1941 which had begun a month before the law was passed. The decree was legally incomplete because it did not define who was to be considered of ‘Jewish descent’. The decree could be circumvented, especially if there were reasons for preferential treatment: ‘if persons of “Jewish descent” had parents who were meritorious for the homeland, they

could enrol through the permission of the competent supreme school authorities . . . regardless of the limitations. . .'. [57]

As almost all Jews lived in towns and traditionally schooled their children, this meant that many could no longer go to school. The Jews represented 0.46 percent of the population, while 4 percent of the students in trade schools, 2.57 percent in grammar schools, and 1.51 percent in secondary technical schools were Jewish. At the university almost 16 percent of the students of the faculties of medicine and law were Jewish. [58]

In his *Memoirs* Vladko Maček said that these laws had been passed on the proposal of Anton Korošec, and that he, Maček, had not opposed them, stating very unconvincingly, in fact hypocritically, that 'he himself considered it necessary under such difficult conditions to "socialise" trade with foodstuffs especially wheat'. However, Maček continued,

as soon as the proposal according to which Jews were to be forbidden to own printing houses was placed on the agenda of the ministerial council I opposed it decisively, stating that I would rather start a governmental crisis than allow this, or any similar act with Hitlerist–Nazi tendencies, to be adopted. . . . [59]

Strict policies toward Jewish refugees from the Reich and other European countries were introduced in 1939. Both the government in Belgrade and the government of the newly formed Croatian 'Banovina' co-operated willingly in this activity. The path towards the Holocaust was already open.

## Notes

1. M. Gross, 'Ravnopravnost bez jednakovrijednosti (Prilog pitanju mentaliteta i ideologije hrvatskih cionista na početku 20. stoljeća)' [Equality without being equal (a contribution to issues of the mentality and ideology of Croatian Zionists at the beginning of the twentieth century)], in *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj* [Two centuries of Jewish history and culture in Zagreb and Croatia] (Zagreb, 1998), pp. 106–26.
2. C. Loker, 'Sarajevski spor i sefardski pokret u Jugoslaviji' [The Sarajevo Dispute and the Sephardi Movement in Yugoslavia], *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* 7 (Belgrade, 1997), pp. 72–79.
3. H. P. Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia. A Quest for Community* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 182–83.
4. *Spomenica Saveza jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije 1919–1969* [Memorial book of the Union of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia 1919–1969] (Belgrade, 1969), p. 37.
5. *Obzor* (29 May 1919).
6. *Židov* 1 (1920).
7. *Židov* 32 (1922).
8. *Židov* 13 (1931).
9. Ž.-J. Lador-Lederer, 'Tri fragmenta o cionizmu' [Three fragments on Zionism], in *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture*, pp. 179–92.
10. Article by A. Licht in *Židovska smotra*, Zagreb, 20 (1910); also, Gross, 'Ravnopravnost bez jednakovrijednosti', p. 109.
11. *Židov* 33 (1920).
12. *Narodna politika* (15 January 1920); *Židov* 4–5 (1920).
13. *Židov* 31 (1919).
14. *Narodna politika* (28 June 1919).
15. *Narodna politika* (15 January 1920); *Židov* 4–5 (1920).
16. *Židov* 31 (1919).
17. *Židov* 31 (1919).
18. *Riječ SHS*, Zagreb, No. 321 (9 September 1919).
19. *Hrvatska obrana* 49 (29 February 1920).
20. *Židov* 4–5 (1919).
21. *Savremenik* 4 (1920). See also *Židov* 4–5 (1920).
22. *Židov* 38–39 (1922).
23. *Židov* 16 (1919).
24. *Židov* 2–3 (1920).
25. *Židov* 51, 52 (1929).
26. As brought by the *Novosti*, Zagreb (20 January 1931).
27. *Židov* 13 (1931).
28. *Židov* 3, 8 (1928); 5, 6, 7, 9 (1929); 9, 21, 22, 33 (1930).
29. *Židov* 50 (1934).
30. *Židov* 18 (1931).
31. *Židov* 37 (1933).
32. *Židov* 37 (1933); 8 (1939).
33. *Mlada Hrvatska* 1, Zagreb (1936).
34. *Mlada Hrvatska* 1, Zagreb (1936).
35. *Danica* 130, Zagreb (1934).
36. *Zagrebačka senzacija*, Year 1, No. 1–5, Zagreb (August 1936).
37. *Mlada Hrvatska* 3 (1937).
38. *Židov* 42 (1935).
39. *Spomenica Saveza jevrejskih opština*, pp. 58–9; *Židov* 14 (1936).
40. *Spomenica Saveza jevrejskih opština*, pp. 58–9; *Židov* 14 (1936).
41. *Židov* 15 (1936).
42. Croatian State Archives, holdings of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Croatia, 013.0.3 (V. Židovec, *Ustaštvo i NDH* [Jewry and the NDH], 53).
43. A. Pavelić, *Liepa plavka* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Chicago, 1968; 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Madrid, 1969).
44. A. Pavelić, *Hrvatsko pitanje* (Zagreb, 1942).
45. *Narodne novine*, Zagreb (2 April 1938).
46. *Vreme*, Belgrade (7 May 1938); *Židov* 19, 20 (1938).

47. *Židov* 20 (1938).
48. *Dom*, Zagreb (7 February 1939).
49. *Zelinske novine* (4 February 1939).
50. See, I. Goldstein, 'Antisemitism in Croatia', in *Antisemitism, Holocaust, Antifascism* (Zagreb, 1997), pp. 12–52.
51. *Jevrejski list*, Sarajevo, 6 (1934).
52. *Spomenica Saveza jevrejskih opština*, pp. 35–38.
53. *Židov* 3, 5 (1939).
54. *Prekomurje*, Murska Sobota (11 September 1938).
55. *Židov* 4 (1939).
56. *Židov* 16 (1939).
57. *Službene novine* (5 October 1940); *Narodne novine*, Zagreb (9 October 1940).
58. Statistics in *Židov* 41 (1940).
59. V. Maček, *Memoari* (Zagreb, 1992), pp. 140–41.