

CROATIAN TOTALITARIAN COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT'S PRESS IN THE PREPARATION OF THE STAGED TRIAL AGAINST THE ARCHBISHOP OF ZAGREB ALOJZIJE STEPINAC (1946)

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“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do”

(Luke 23,34)

I.

Daily newspapers are a secondary source of research and reconstruction of historical events. The press reports and transmits certain messages to the public, and is in the position to shape public opinion. As the media in totalitarian systems are in the hands of the ruling party, which was the case in Socialist Yugoslavia (Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija – SFRJ), they were not free or in the position to independently publish and express public opinion. The task of such media, especially in the period between 1945 and 1952, was to promote the Party's ideas. Media were non-autonomous, controlled and forced to publish information and interpretations as ordered by the Party and state top structures, or the Department for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) of the Central Committee (Centralni komitet - CK) of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička partija Jugoslavije - KPJ) and CK of the Communist Party of Croatia (Komunistička partija Hrvatske - KPH). Agitprop was functioning in a strict hierarchy and in a centralised manner, “taking care” of “the image” of the entire social life in the state. As an institution, it was on the top of the information system and was giving basic ideological and political guidelines, and in a number of cases, it acted as a supreme arbiter. It is generally known that “the party, or its leading core, or its supreme leader, is the only one who has the means of decision-making and coercion, media and propaganda”¹. In the period mentioned, its activities were aimed at the “establishment and control over the

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¹ Claude Lefort, *Prijepor o komunizmu* (orig: *Controversy on Communism*), trans. Radmila Zdjelar (Zagreb: Librokon, 2000), p. 11.

centralised information system”² The link between the higher and lower organisation was strong, hierarchically organised, and the communication between them was being carried out through “directives.” The most important Agitprop’s sector, was the “press sector,”³ which was functioning in all republics of the former Yugoslav state and was a supreme “censor” deciding what was not to be published for reasons of state secrecy or political delicacy.⁴ “The person in charge of the press and agitation /.../ was on the watch so that political and other opinions in the press do not depart from the correct Party line, and that the directives of the central press are applied and correctly interpreted. /.../ decides what kind of articles should be printed and what the articles should be about, what needs to be emphasised. /.../ Apart from the total control of everything that was leaving the printing plants, there was a concrete requirement of what and how to write.”⁵ Namely, the Party, or Agitprop, which was controlling the press and dictating most of the messages, even the headlines published in newspapers, was negatively evaluating the “dry reporting on events” as well as “the so-called objectivity”; such an approach was not considered to be on the Party line. Editorials were usually written by prominent politicians, and their role was mainly to give directives. In fact, the state and leading Party structures created and shaped all the important political decisions, and President Josip Broz Tito himself had the power to make final decisions, i.e., “he was sharp and firm against any opposition actions.”⁶ The strictly centralised Communist Party of Yugoslavia created and controlled the political strategy, as well as everyday life, cultural and social policies, the economy, and especially the judiciary, the police [militia] and the Yugoslav People’s Army. Everything was “in the hands” and under the control of the Party leaders or Politburo of CK KPJ. “The mobilisation of the masses”, carried out for political purposes through newspapers and other media, was the main task of the press in that period. When total control was established over all of the media in the state, public opinion of the citizens, i.e., the masses,⁷ was to be shaped in keepings with the totalitarian ideology of the KPJ.⁸ The citizenary, public opin-

² Katarina Spehnbak, “Uloga novina u oblikovanju javnog mnijenja u Hrvatskoj 1945.-1952.,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* (hereafter: ČSP) 25 (Zagreb: 1993), No. 2-3: 165.

³ In that period, the head of Agitprop’s “Press Sector” in Croatia was Ivo Sarajčić, a candidate for membership in the CK KPH, elected at the Second Congress of the KPH.

⁴ In the first years after the war, “the data on the achievements and the results of harvest” were considered a state secret, and newspapers were not allowed to publish them.

⁵ Zlata Knezović, “Obilježja boljševezikacije hrvatske kulture (1945.-1947.),” ČSP 24 (Zagreb: 1992), No. 1: 106.

⁶ Dušan Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest* (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1999), p. 227

⁷ Gvozden Flego, “Dubinska psihologija masa, politika,” *Treći program hrvatskog radija*, vol. 35 (Zagreb: 1992), p.5.

⁸ “Crkva za dostojanstvo čovjeka protiv totalitarizma XX. Stoljeća,” *Obnovljeni život* (hereafter: OŽ), vol. 1-2 (Zagreb: 1996); Raymond Aron, *Demokracija i totalitarizam* (orig: *Democracy and Totalitarianism*), trans. Gordana V. Popović, (Zagreb: Gandalf, 1996), Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarizam* (orig: *Totalitarianism*), trans. Mirjana Pajić Jurinić, (Zagreb: Gandalf, 1996).

ion, newspapers, etc. - "are a part of the propaganda and agitation 'plant' in which 'the masses' are only 'educated' for the new society".⁹ Therefore, it is not hard to agree with those historians who argue that the communist/totalitarian government was attaching considerable importance to public opinion, never neglecting it, but on the other hand paralysing and neutralising it when it was not in the line of the realisation of their ideas.

It is not unusual that the KPJ/KPH, having learned the lesson from the experience of the All-Federal Communist Party - (Bolsheviks) (Svesavezna komunistička partija - /boljševika/ - SKP /b/) was exterminating anything that "might get out of the Party's control, any association that was a sign of an independent initiative, any relationship, any communication with unpredictable effects. /.../ because nothing is as dangerous as a free flow of public expression."¹⁰ The communist idea in Croatia, unlike other Yugoslav republics, did not strike deep roots in real life,¹¹ partly because of the Catholic religion, which traditionally has had a status of moral authority.

II.

Newspapers, as a printed medium, use photographs and caricatures, apart from the texts. Visualisation of the events from the past is presented best with photographs, or more precisely, documentary photographs. Caricature as a visual expression deforms reality on purpose and is mainly used to show the weaknesses, flaws and deformities of individuals and the society; they are also an inexhaustible source of mockery, exposure to ridicule and abuse. Newspapers had the task in that period to inform the public (citizens) with those individuals and groups, and institutions, which were dissatisfied and resisting the new government. They were publishing names and surnames of individuals, who were sentenced to long-term imprisonment, forced labour, confiscation of property, loss of political and civil rights, etc., all for purpose of compromising those who were opposing the policy of the new, Communist government.

This text will present a small selection of articles from the Zagreb daily paper *Vjesnik*¹², and *Borba*¹³, a KPJ organ. Those newspapers had a consider-

⁹ K. Spehnjak, "Uloga novina" p. 169.

¹⁰ C. Lefort, *Prijepor o komunizmu*, p. 56.

¹¹ In late 1945, the KPH had 47,205 members: Croats 30,634 or 65.0%, Serbs 14,509 or 30.7% and other nationalities 2,062 or 4.3%. In late 1946, the number of members of the Party of Croatia was 58,441 members: Croats 39,560 or 67.7%, Serbs 16,438 or 28.1% and others 2,443 or 4.2%. (B. Jandrić, "Komunistička partija Hrvatske 1945. - 1952. Organizacija, uloga, djelovanje," (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Zagreb, 1995), p. 90.)

¹² The first issue of *Vjesnik (Politički vjesnik)* was published on 24 June 1940. *Vjesnik Jedinствene narodnooslobodilačke fronte Hrvatske* was published on 12 May 1945 in Zagreb. Since then, it has been published daily; with another publisher, on 30 November 1945, it changed the name into *Vjesnik Narodnog fronta Hrvatske*. The largest circulation was in 1945, with more than 90,000 copies a day. (B. Jandrić, "Izvori i literatura za proučavanje Komunističke partije Hrvatske - Saveza komunista Hrvatske 1945. - 1978," ČSP (Zagreb: 1982), No. 2: 169.)

¹³ The first issue of *Borba*, a KPJ organ - it never had a legal status of a newspaper - was printed in Zagreb on 19 February 1922. (Look in: Stanislava Koprivica-Oštrić, "Pedeseta godišnjica Borbe", ČSP (Zagreb, 1972), No. 1: 131.)

able circulation in those times. The articles, supplements, analyses, reports, interviews, photographs and caricatures published on the pages of those newspapers were glorifying and promoting the Communist ideas on the “revolutionary metamorphosis” of the society, and the extinction of religion or Roman Catholicism. Namely, some “Bolshevik” forces in the CK KPJ/KPH wanted, at whatever cost, to create a copy of the atheist atavist USSR in the territory of the new state. During the war, the Communists thought that after the war they would organise, in fact impose the social system on the model of the USSR, in which the Party would have unlimited power.¹⁴ The Bolshevisation of the Yugoslav/Croatian army, judiciary¹⁵, culture, art, sport, and society on the whole, was being introduced in a systematic and organised manner. Many Croatian intellectuals and people active in culture, as well as Party leaders/officials were taken by surprise. Instead of the promoted and promised “freedoms, there began strict censorship, firm Party’s pressure and the Party-dictated content and model”.¹⁶ Such pro-Soviet forces, which dominated the CK KPJ/KPH and the society as a whole, were determining the character and the course of the relations between the Communist Party and the Catholic Church, which were full of tensions. Unfortunately, that was a big step backward, as there was a break-up with the national tradition and the past, as well as the national future of Croatia. However, one should not ignore the fact that “during the war, the Communists managed to colour the liberation requests of the people with anti-religious and especially anti-Catholic nuances. /...../ With the arrival of the partisan forces led by the KPJ to Zagreb, it became obvious that the anti-religious, and at least anti-Catholic, elements were dominating”.¹⁷ The Party leaders referred to religion in a very insulting and vulgar manner, especially targeting the Catholic Church and even Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac, who was called “Ustasha, a cut-throat, war criminal, terrorist”, etc. The aim was to prepare and shape public opinion for the announced trial against Archbishop Stepinac. All over the country, newspapers started pub-

¹⁴ Bolshevisation was present in all segments of the society. The structure of the army and the “militia”, ranks, organisation of judiciary, schooling system, influence in culture, sport, five-year plans, “personality cult”, military parades on May 1st, etc, were organised on the model of the USSR. The KPJ Statute was literally a copy of the SKP(b) Statute, article by article. The main inspiration and the prayer-book of Yugoslav/Croatian Communists until 1950 was the History of the All-Union Communist Party - Bolsheviks /SKP(b)/, it was a dogma which had to be believed in, and its teaching was a ceremony studied by the Party’s cadre in 400 lessons. (B. Jandrić, “Obrazovanje kadrova KPH 1945. - 1949. godine”, *Povijesni prilozi* (hereafter: *PP*), (Zagreb, 1990), vol. 9: 240.)

¹⁵ The Justice Department of ZAVNOH requested the purchase of the expert literature on the reorganisation of judiciary in the USSR (“whole judiciary legislation, theoretical review of the basic issues from that area, especially as regards the organisation of courts and the right of representation in the USSR, as well as the text-books in the field of judiciary legislation, political economy, criminology and sociology, published in the USSR”) (ZAVNOH (Zagreb: 1985), p. 83).

¹⁶ Z. Knezović, “Obilježja boljševizacije,” p. 101.

¹⁷ Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva u totalitarizmu 1945. - 1990.* (Zagreb: Globus, 1997), p. 38.

lishing articles and reports, often false, unargued and fictitious, with the tendency of creating discord within the congregation, disunion within the clergy, and stimulating atheism, consciously giving up religion and the beliefs stemming from it. *Vjesnik*¹⁸ from Zagreb had a leading role in that. In the campaign, humorous and satirical magazines *Kerempuh* and *Pomet*, presenting “the most abominable caricatures with insulting expressions and intentionally distorted facts”¹⁹, played an important role. After the trial, *Kerempuh* published a special edition called *Lojzekovih 1000 grijeha* (*Alojzije’s 1000 Sins*) (referring to Alojzije Stepinac). There was no end to the Communist mocking, such as: “Fratre, popove, švercere i lopove, nabit ćemo u topove” (“Friars, priests, black marketers and thieves will be loaded into cannons”), or songs like “Imam kapu sa tri roga, mi idemo protiv Boga, a’ nećemo protiv Hrista, jer je i on komunista”²⁰ (I have a tricorn hat, we go against God, but not against Christ, as he also is a Communist), which were sung by groups of young members of the Young Communist Association of Yugoslavia (Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije – SKOJ) and fanatic Communists, in order to create the atmosphere of fear. The state and Party leading structures never gave to the press under their control the approval for the application of the principle “audiatur et altera pars”. Because of that injustice, Stepinac submitted on, 21 July 1945, a petition to the Prime Minister of the NRH in which he stated, “that the Catholic press was in deed silenced”²¹ “The parish priests of Zagreb were not allowed to publish their paper because there was not enough paper. A bit later, without any court decision, soldiers took from the cellar of ‘Narodna tiskara’ and my home wagons of paper for the Party’s printing plant ‘Naprijed’, as if the Party’s printing plant was a state-owned company”²² According to the Act on the Press, not even the Catholic Church’s corrections of false allegations were being published.

Historians have proven that Stepinac was a victim of the totalitarian regime, and that the “actual prosecutor” was the Communist Party. His sentence was in fact the sentence against the Catholic Church in Croatia, against Roman Catholicism and the Vatican, and was passed much earlier, long before his arrest. It was not passed by the state judges, but by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia/Croatia. With the assistance of the men-

¹⁸ In that period, the editor-in-chief of *Vjesnik* was Josip Kirigin.

¹⁹ Aleksa Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac* (Rome: ZIRAL, 1974), p. 525.

²⁰ Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, vol. 2 (Rijeka: Mladost, 1981), p. 575.

²¹ Before the war, in the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia, there had been 152 religious papers, whose monthly circulation had been reaching 700,000 copies. (From: Branko Petranović, “Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera protiv sređivanja prilika u Jugoslaviji /mart 1945. - septembar 1946./” *Istorija XX veka. Zbornik radova* (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, odeljenje za istorijske nauke, 1963), p. 308. (hereafter: B. Petranović, “Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera”)

²² A. Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 485.

tioned daily papers, supported by radio shows, a show was directed for “the broad masses”²³.

III.

The official ideology of the Communist Party had a negative attitude toward religion, and especially toward the Catholic Church in Croatia. The KPJ undoubtedly supported atheism. In practice, it was obvious that it was not “reluctant in imposing atheism as an official ‘religion’ by use of the whole official apparatus”²⁴. On the other hand, in the Catholic Church and among Croatian believers the dominating opinion was that Communism was an “ungodly” movement, which the KPJ had been trying to justify and defend with its entire means, during the Second World War. Atheism did not echo positively among partisan-believers, who were in the first years of the war the majority of the combat potential of the army in Croatia.²⁵ The Communist monopoly on power was disturbed only by the Catholic Church, which the government could not put under its control, as they did with all other segments of society. The persecution against the “people’s enemies” started immediately after the war. The “People’s courts”²⁶, under the Party’s strong influence, used emergency procedures, working quickly and efficiently, without the usual procedures (engagement of attorneys, brevity of procedure, witnesses, etc.), ensuring that the prisons were full. The most important guilt “to be punished was ‘the perpetrator’s threat to the society’ that is, the judgement of the secret police, Department for the Protection of the People (OZN), who determined who was dangerous for the regime and who was to be eliminated”²⁷. The decisions of the “People’s courts” were not based on legal regulations due to a strong pressure and influence of the Party. According to the political leaders themselves, “before going to certain villages and cities, the Communist officials were receiving ‘precise instructions on how to act in each particular case, how to behave toward the populations’”²⁸. Communists were “always acting as people who give judgements on everything /.../ moreover, an eminent characteristic of Communists was that they judged non-Communists”²⁹. After the entry into Zagreb, “the partisan units had to arrest the Archbishop, but were hindered by Andrija Hebrang,”

²³ Vinko Nikolić, *U službi domovine, studije, ogledi, portreti*. (Zagreb: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1996).

²⁴ J. Krišto, *Katolička crkva*, p. 36.

²⁵ Of 121,351 combatants of all corps in Croatia on 30 November 1944, the national composition was: 73,327 or 60,40% Croats, 34,753 or 28,64% Serbs, 3,316 or 2.75 % Muslims, 284 or 0,25% Jews and 9,671 or 7,96 % others. (From: Ivo Jelić, *Komunisti i revolucija*. (Zagreb: Globus, 1977), p. 199).

²⁶ The Act on the Organisation of People’s Courts was passed on 26 August 1945.

²⁷ Lav Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac, O stotoj godišnjici rođenja* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska - Targa, 1998), p. 68.

²⁸ Marko Belinić, *Put kroz život* (Zagreb: August Cesarec, 1985), p. 137

²⁹ C. Lefort, *Prijepor o komunizmu*, p. 19

who was then the head of the KPH.³⁰ At the same time, some of the partisan “leaders”, wanted to “immediately kill” the Archbishop, ‘but Vladimir Bakarić stood against that, saying that that would cause damage to the partisans, because the whole nation was on Stepinac’s side.’³¹ The sufferings continued, and “until the end of May 1945, the Communist partisans killed many innocent Croats in Dubrovnik, Imotski, Šibenik, Gospić, Karlovac, Osijek and elsewhere, whomever they considered to be a potential opposition to the Communist ruling system in the post-war period.”³² As early as on 11 May 1945, on Jelačić Square in Zagreb, “comrade Marko Belinić (at that time, a member of the CK of Croatia) attacked Archbishop Stepinac, saying ‘that Zagreb did not belong to Stepinac.’”³³ There “does not exist Stepinac’s Church.”³⁴ “The treacherous policy of Maček and Stepinac was in vain /.../ today Zagreb responds to Stepinac, and to Maček, it responds to the oppressors and traitors of our peoples...”³⁵ In addition, Vladimir Nazor, the President of the Regional Anti-fascist Council of the People’s Liberation of Croatia (Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske - ZAVNOH), in the same place attacked Stepinac saying “and you, the quiet bells of Kaptol, chime in this moment of joy of the Croatian people.”³⁶ At the first meeting of educational workers held on 25 May 1945, Archbishop Stepinac was again severely condemned. Because he had stood up for Jews and Serbs during the war, “justification” for such acts was explained with the slander saying that he had been doing that because “he had had a Jewish mistress”.³⁷ The conflict between the state and Party, on one side, and the ecclesiastic, on the other, was unavoidable.³⁸ The “democratic rights” guaranteed by the Constitution of the FNRJ and the NRH³⁹, which included the right to the freedom of worship, were only declarative.⁴⁰ The new govern-

³⁰ Vladimir Horvat, “Nadbiskup Alojzije Stepinac i totalitarni režimi”, OŽ, vol. 1-2 (Zagreb: 1996), p. 160.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Ivo Perić, *Povijest Hrvata* (Zagreb: Centar za transfer tehnologije, 1997), p. 244.

³³ L. Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 27.

³⁴ It is not known who was the first to use the sintagm “Stepinac’s Church.” Stepinac himself was firmly rejecting such ideas. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁵ *Vjesnik*, 12 May 1945.

I would like to express my appreciation to Mrs. Deša Kolar for her kind co-operativeness and the others from the Newspaper and Documentation Centre in *Vjesnik*.

³⁶ *Vjesnik*, 17 May 1945.

³⁷ L. Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 27.

³⁸ B. Jandrić, “Komunistički totalitarizam u sukobu s Katoličkom crkvom u Hrvatskoj (1945.-1953.)”, *Dijalog povjesničara-historičara*, vol. 2, (Zagreb: 2000), p. 617.

³⁹ The Constitution of the FNRJ was adopted on 31 January 1946, Article 25 (Comp.: Constitution of NRH, Article 26) freedom of conscience and faith, separation of the Church from the state, freedom of activities of religious communities, etc., Article 39, separation of school from the Church.

⁴⁰ The position of religious communities in Yugoslavia (Croatia), [Constitutional and statutory provisions], was defined in the documents of the Anti-Fascist Counsel of the People’s

ment considered its citizen - believers, especially Roman Catholics, to be enemies of the state. The resistance of the leaders of the Catholic Church headed by Archbishop Stepinac against the non-democratic conduct of the new government, as well as their refusal to co-operate with the new system, were the reasons, which “forced” the KPJ General Secretary and the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, to activate the repressive state apparatus against them.⁴¹ Namely, the Communist government was doing everything to diminish the reputation of the Catholic Church and compromise it in the society, and to exclude the broad “masses” from religious services, which were not publicly prohibited, but those attending were immediately excluded from public and social life. However, the clergy “could not and did not want to fight the government of the new system in an open and organised manner.”⁴² The Party and the Church were fighting fiercely for the influence and positions in the society.⁴³ The Party was fighting to win the masses over and deter the population from religion, i.e. to “liberate them from mysticism,”⁴⁴ and the Church was fighting for recognition and respect (demarginalisation) in the society and politics, on which the Party insisted. As the believers did not approve of the process, groups of members of the Young Communist Association of Yugoslavia (SKOJ) and the KPJ were undertaking actions of “forced persuasion” (physical attacks and abuse of priests, disruption (prohibition) of processions, closing down of junior seminaries,⁴⁵ destruction of the church property, etc.),⁴⁶ and the organising of various sport events and rallies during services and church holidays,⁴⁷ which the population, and especially the school children, had to

Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) and the Regional Anti-Fascist Counsel of the People’s Liberation of Croatia (ZAVNOH), amended and made more precise at the Second session of AVNOJ in Jajce, on 29 November 1943.

⁴¹ Zdenko Radelić, “Komunisti, križari i Katolička crkva,” *Dijalog povjesničara-historičara*, vol. 2 (Zagreb: 2000), p. 584.

⁴² D. Bilandžić, “Komunistička partija Hrvatske u socijalističkoj izgradnji,” *Zbornik, Treći program radio Zagreba*, vol. 17 (Zagreb: 1987), p. 5.

⁴³ B. Jandrić, “Položaj katoličke crkve u Hrvatskoj u poslijeratnim godinama (1945.-1953.),” *Croatia Christiana Periodica*, vol. 42 (Zagreb: 1998), p. 49.

⁴⁴ K. Spehnjak, “Prosvjetno - kulturna politika u Hrvatskoj 1945. – 1948,” *ČSP* 25 (Zagreb, 1993), No. 1: 94.

⁴⁵ On the occasion of the seizure and closing down of junior seminaries, Stepinac said: “What do we need the seminaries for if the rules of education will be given by Communist officers.” (L. Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 52.)

⁴⁶ K. Spehnjak, “Uloga novina”, p. 94.

⁴⁷ On 20 December 1945, the Presidency of the People’s Government of Croatia informs the Religion Commission “On the occasion of Christmas holidays and the New Year, the state offices will be open 24 December, on Christmas Eve until 12 o’clock, and on the Christmas Day, 25 December, and the day after, 26 December, the state offices will be closed. – General Secretary, Dr. Miloš Žanko. HDA, Commission for the Relations with Religious Communities, Record Group 310. General documents, 1945, issue pp. 801 – 1176. The State/Party tolerated celebrations of religious holidays (Christmas, Easter, Assumption of the Virgin Mary, etc.) until 1947. Gradually, that was being prohibited by the use of various forms of political and social pressure. The government was trying, whenever possible, to relate the celebration of

attend.⁴⁸ Operations like “taking off crosses from the school walls, abolishing of prayer at the beginning of lessons, seizing of worship objects, abuse of children, youth and adults because of their faith”⁴⁹ were the sign of the relations between the state and ecclesiastic authorities. However the Party organs did not always approve of such forms of “fighting” of their combatant youth against religion, and some individuals were punished for their serious offences, but the Party punishments were not very strict. Regarding religion and the manifestation of religious awareness, the KPJ was especially strict on its own members, who were not “finished” with religion. Of course, there were Party members who were unconsciously expressing their religious world-view.⁵⁰ During the discussions on the draft Constitution, in which the new legislative power introduced provisions on civil marriage, which were of course in contradiction with that of the Catholic Church, Stepinac fiercely criticised those provisions.

The Serb Orthodox Church and the Islamic Religious Community also gave their comments on them.⁵¹ According to the Catholic religious norm, he [who?] requested that priority be given to religious marriage, or that “marriage can be entered before the competent ecclesiastic or state authority, depending on the free will of the persons entering marriage, and that all marriages must be registered at competent state authorities.”⁵² Furthermore, marriage disputes were to be solved before the ecclesiastic and not “people’s courts.” These proposals were rejected, because the state would, by leaving the marriage disputes to the Church, give up some of its sovereignty in judiciary. [Namely, the Canonical law would be valid (church marriage – church jurisdiction), civil marriage (family law – state jurisdiction).] – [incomplete sentence, when would the law be valid?] The constitutional solution was that only register-office marriages were fully valid for the state, while church weddings were just religious ceremonies, a compromise that encountered severe criticism from the Catholic clergy and religious organisations. Because of the “left-wing rigidity,” Party members were not allowed to attend religious ceremonies.⁵³ Many Party members, because of their insufficient ideological “maturity” did not understand, that according to the KPJ Statute, they could be both believers and Communists at the same time. The Church was also

religious holidays with the days important for the creation of the new state or those from the history of the labour movement.

⁴⁸ Under the slogan, “dok traje obnova, nema odmora” (no one rests during reconstruction), the citizens had to participate “voluntarily” with a certain number of hours annually in the public works (building of cultural centres, playgrounds, parks, roads, etc.).

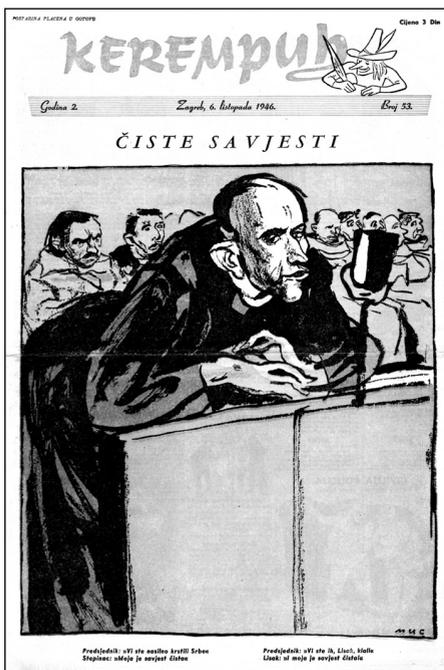
⁴⁹ J. Krišto, *Katolička crkva*, p. 38.

⁵⁰ B. Jandrić, “Pojave i oblici kažnjavanja članstva komunističke partije Hrvatske (1945. - 1952.),” *ČSP* 24 (Zagreb: 1992), No 1: 135.

⁵¹ HDA, Commission for the Relations with Religious Communities, Record Group 310. General documents, 1945, issue 16, p. 800

⁵² B. Petranović, “Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera,” p. 305.

⁵³ N. Kisić-Kolanović, “Problem legitimiteta”, p. 190.



Caricatures and jokes in satirical weekly Kerempuh attempted to present Stepinac as war criminal

fighting for its congregation. It remained outside Communist control, and its activities could not be banned or efficiently controlled. Church was still relatively in a materially good situation, and thus independent with an educated clergy. Therefore, it represented a potentially dangerous opponent to the existing totalitarian regime. As its activities could not be officially prohibited, the new Communist system could not “uncompromisingly persecute the church” because it would be unthinkable for international reasons. The Catholic Church therefore remained the only autonomous institution and refuge to all those in conflict with the new government. The repressive measures taken against parts of the clergy because of their “activities against the state” were considered to be appropriate methods of calming down the Church activities against the system, but it was first of all expected that “with the socialist development of the society and the ideological influence on broader social classes the religiosity would gradually disappear.”⁵⁴ In “getting straight” with the religious awareness, intellectuals were treated with the most rigidity. It was considered that religiosity was incompatible with their educational background and social status. KPJ/KPH members from the peasantry were treated with the most tactfulness and patience in their release from the theist world-view and adopting the adequate behaviour patterns.⁵⁵

The conflict of the totalitarian Communist government with the Catholic Church was not typical only for Croatia, or Yugoslavia. The conflict trend

⁵⁴ B. Jandrić, “Pojave i oblici”, p. 148.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

was also present in some other East European countries. Arrests, court proceedings and sentences against high prelates (archbishops and cardinals) to long or short imprisonment occurred in the USSR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Albania. Apart from these states, Roman Catholic believers were being persecuted and harassed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Ukraine.

The Christian religion played an important role in the life of the Croatian population, and the Party needed to prepare the believers for the showdown with the Church. Stepinac did not want to make any concessions, and suggested that the Communist government negotiate on the position of the Catholic Church directly with the Holy See. As the Communist government did not want to do that, the only option left was to put the repressive apparatus in motion and bring him before the "people's court." In the preparations for the trial, the Party requested assistance from the people and wanted "the people to judge for themselves their Archbishop, before the court discussion on his guilt."⁵⁶ The government was threatening and forcing the citizens to attend the public meetings organised for that purpose. At the meetings, they were not only "talking against the Archbishop, the Church, and people of faith, but were also, in a very severe way, requesting the persons present to speak their mind and, purportedly, speak 'freely' on the subject matter during the 'discussion', and of course to approve of the official standpoint and confirm the claims that Stepinac was a criminal."⁵⁷ Before the staged trial, which was launched year and a half after the war ended, the political organisations organised gatherings in front of the Archbishop's manor to support the trial. "It does not matter we do not have professional judges. /.../ What matters is that they have democratic ideas and that they are loyal to the Communist Party,"⁵⁸ was the preparation for the final showdown of the Communist government with the Church.

The launching of the trial,⁵⁹ the judgement and the sentencing of Alojzije Stepinac shocked the world and caused much embarrassment to the Communist government. The prohibited and silenced Catholic faith was louder than the free one.⁶⁰

On 23 September 1946, the Public Prosecutor's Office of the NRH filed at the Supreme Court of the NRH the indictment against Archbishop

⁵⁶ L. Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 32

⁵⁷ L. Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 73

⁵⁸ V. Horvat, "Nadbiskup Alojzije Stepinac," p. 161

⁵⁹ The preparation for the launching of criminal proceedings lasted for almost a year. It was directed by Dr. Josip Hrnčević, Josip Malović, Drago Desput, Dr. Božo Kraus. The process of inquest, investigation, the gathering of material, and other matters was directed by Ivan Krajačić. The investigation was carried out by OZN-a of Croatia, and the chief investigator was Nedo Milutinović, who was questioning the accused Stepinac during the investigation.

⁶⁰ Protests and condemnations were coming to the Holy Father from all over the world. Many of the world's newspapers, such as *Times*, *Humanite*, *L'Osservatore*, *International News Service*, etc., were giving daily reports on the trial and the sentencing of Archbishop Stepinac. Foreign Office in London received 550 petitions signed by 216,000 people, who protested against Stepinac's imprisonment.

Stepinac.⁶¹ The Archbishop of Zagreb was the first and the only one in the 900-year long history of the Bishopric/Archbishopric of Zagreb to be criminally charged. The indictment consisted of the following:

- Collaboration with the Italian and German occupiers during the war and the collaboration with the Ustasha regime in NDH,
- Forcing Orthodox believers to take on Catholicism,
- Military vicarage,
- The assisting of the Ustasha regime until its fall in May 1945,
- Enemy propaganda (after 8 May 1945), qualified as slandering of the people's government.

With the NRH Supreme Court decision⁶², and at the proposal of the Public Prosecutor Jakov Blažević⁶³, on 24 September 1946, "the criminal proceedings against Erih Lisak, Ivan Šalić and others⁶⁴ are merged with the criminal proceedings against Dr. Alojzije Stepinac."⁶⁵ The trial began on 30 September 1946.⁶⁶ The interrogation of Stepinac lasted until 3 October, and the trial finished on 8 October 1946. The court appointed two official defending barristers.⁶⁷ Stepinac said that "he won't say a word in his own defence, before the court that has the task to execute an order of a certain

⁶¹ Makso Baće, Head of the Yugoslav OZN-a Department sent to Hrnčević photographs and documents related to the activities of Stepinac, Ustashas and Germans, as a draft to be used for the filing of the indictment. "As the material was not sufficient for the indictment, /.../ I hardly managed to examine a part of the investigation material and make the draft of the indictment introduction several typed pages long. /.../ When the work was finished, Jakov Blažević, Duško Brkić and myself /Hrnčević/ went to talk to Aleksandar Ranković, who was then on Bled /.../ and afterwards Tito received us and offered us a dinner." (From: Josip Hrnčević, *Svjedočanstva*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1984), p. 174.). "Then, in 1946, we had several days of consultations with Tito, who gave us political and other bases for the criminal proceedings. Tito realised, after several futile attempts, that that was an extremely hostile operation, irreconcilable. /.../ Edvard Kardelj was also there. We also spoke about Stepinac, on his hostile activities against the new Yugoslavia, and Tito said energetically: To hell with him!" (From: Jakov Blažević, *Povijest i falsifikati* (Samobor: Zagreb, 1983), p. 189.).

⁶² The Court consisted of Dr. Žarko Vimplušek, President, Council Members, Dr. Ante Cerineo and Ivan Poldrugač, an additional judge, Ivan Pirker, and a court reporter, Dr. Ante Petrović.

⁶³ Composition of Public Prosecution: Jakov Blažević, assistants Drago Desput and Dr. Božidar Kraus.

⁶⁴ Other accused persons were: Josip Šimečki, Đuro Marić, Pavao Gulin, Josip Crnković, Modesto Martinčić, Krešo Klemen, Mamerto Margetić, Franjo Pavlek, Mirko Kolednjak, Josip Vidović, Stjepan Švasta, Ivan Ivanković, Josip Majnarić, Blaž Lorković, Ivan Kirin, Božidar Cerovski. (Comp.: *Suđenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini, ustaško-križarskim zličincima i njihovim pomagačima*, (Zagreb: Rožanovski, 1946), (hereafter: *Suđenje*), pp. 1-32.).

⁶⁵ *Suđenje*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Having learnt of Archbishop Stepinac's arrest, the congregation started voluntary and dignified protests in the streets. Out of fear of major incidents, OZNA banned gatherings and long stays of the congregation after mass in groups of more of five persons. (From: A. Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 526.).

⁶⁷ The defending barristers ex officio were Dr. Ivo Politeo and Dr. Natko Katičić.



*"The Shepherd and His Flock".
Comunist caricature published illustrated weekly Ilustrirani Vjesnik, No. 57 of 22 September 1946. pp. 12-13.*

organisation [KPJ/KPH], I shall not defend myself. Shoot me! Put me under the gallows, for I shall not speak,"⁶⁸ that he refuses to have defending barristers at the court, and "that he will not appeal against the court decision," adding that: "as a Catholic bishop according to the canonical law, this falls under the competence of the Holy See court, and not of the civil court."⁶⁹ The Archbishop defined his relationship with the NDH, in his speech before the court (on 3 October 1946): "You are accusing me of being the enemy of the state and of the people's authorities. Please, tell me which authorities were in charge in 1941. Was it Simović in Belgrade or the traitor, as you call it, in London, or the one in Palestine or you in the woods? On the other hand, in 1943 and 1944, was it the government in London or you in the woods? As far as I am concerned, you are the government in charge since 8 May 1945. Could I listen to you in the woods or those who were in Zagreb? Can one serve two masters? That cannot be in accordance with morality, the international or general human laws. We could not ignore the government here, even if it was the Ustasha government, because it was here. You have the right to ask questions and hold me to account since 8 May 1945"⁷⁰ About forcing Orthodox believers to take on Catholicism, Stepinac said: "I would like to make a remark as concerns the re-christening⁷¹ I am blamed for. Everyone,

⁶⁸ A. Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 526.

⁶⁹ *Proces Alojziju Stepinacu – dokumenti* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1997), p. 47.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷¹ According to the church law, the Catholic Church recognises Orthodox christening; once christened, a person cannot and must not be christened again. Therefore, it is wrong to equate

even laymen who know some of the church law, understands clearly that a believer in the territory of another diocese, regardless of my permission for re-christening, would not be admitted into the Catholic Church, because only the relevant bishop can give such permission, so that it is absurd to charge me with re-christening of people from any territory other than the territory of the Archbishopric of Zagreb. Even the committee I was presiding was a mere formality, and was not doing anything. Regarding my territory, I can be charged hundred times, but history will show that the conscience of the Archbishop of Zagreb is totally clean in that respect. Why? Whoever wanted to be admitted into the Catholic Church, had to address us in writing through his parish office. If someone in the field does something without our written permission, it is a wrongdoing for which I, as the head of the Church, cannot be held responsible. Those were not cases of re-christening, but a comedy, with which the church authorities have nothing to do and for which then cannot be held responsible. All my collaborators know that we were put before a dilemma whether to permit re-christening of those who asked for it or reject the request. If we permit that, after long consideration, there was some hope that they would get some help. If we reject the requests, the tears and cries of those people, as my collaborators know, we would all the same now be accused for refusing to help Serbs, when they needed help, when the Catholic Church could have helped them, and we would be considered cruel and accused just like we are now.”⁷²

In the closing words of “his defence” he said: “I was not persona grata for Germans and Ustashas. I was not an Ustasha, neither did I take their oath, as your clerks, who are present here, did. The Croatian people spoke in consensus in favour of the Croatian state, and I would have been worthless if I had not felt the desire of the Croatian nation, which was a slave in the former Yugoslavia.”⁷³

The sentence was pronounced on 11 October of the same year.⁷⁴ Stepinac was found guilty on all counts of the indictment. There were no extenuating circumstances. The ruling was: “The accused Dr. Alojzije Stepinac, pursuant to Art. 4 paras. 1 and 2 of the Act on Criminal Acts against the People and the State is sentenced to the deprivation of liberty with hard labour in the duration of 16 (sixteen) years, loss of political and civil rights in the duration of 5 (five) years. The time spent in the investigation prison between 18 September and 11 October 1946” shall be deducted from the sentence.⁷⁵

“re-christening” (forced act) and “changing one’s religion” (“pure intention, without dishonourable motives, with the belief in the trueness of Catholicism”).

⁷² *Proces A. Stepincu*, p. 222. Document no. 10 dated 8 October 1946. Shorthand record of Archbishop Stepinac’s statement on the last day of the trial. Just for a note, *Suđenje*, p. 447., gives the first sentence only, and that one incorrectly; the whole Archbishop’s statement was left out, which is here presented in its full text.

⁷³ L. Znidarčić, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 43.

⁷⁴ *Suđenje*, p. 46.

⁷⁵ *Proces A. Stepincu*, pp. 229 - 230

IV.

Here will be presented some of the newspaper articles published in the period after the Pastoral Letter (20 September 1945) until the beginning of the Archbishop Stepinac's trial (30 September 1946). The purpose of those articles was to prepare the public for the coming "event" - the trial against Stepinac.⁷⁶

Two weeks after the Pastoral Letter was published, in October 1945, Vladimir Bakarić, the Prime Minister of the People's Government of Croatia, said in an interview: "This letter is the best evidence showing which side lacks good will to reach an appropriate solution to the relations between the Church and the State."⁷⁷ Furthermore, Bakarić stated "that he is surprised by the claims that the Church and the clergy are being persecuted. They are accusing us of sentencing to death the 'innocent' priests, and that we shot without trial 'the opponents of the fascist ideology' and, of course, totally innocent Franciscans from Široki Brijeg. /.../ Everybody could see in the Ustasha newspapers what sort of nest of treason that was, and that those Franciscans were preaching national hatred and organising slaughters. Almost all of them died with rifles in their hands, and among them were some Ustasha officials."⁷⁸ "I reiterate," Bakarić continued, "that there is no persecution of the Church here. /.../ And now, we are addressing (more than once) the priests with the kind requests to work in their parishes, etc., on bringing our peoples closer."⁷⁹

Under the headline "Most of the Ustasha cut-throats in Croatia were raised within clerical organisations"⁸⁰ - *Vjesnik* published an article, which presented the analysis of the situation since 1941 onwards, asking itself where the keepers of the faith and morals were in the last four years. "How did 'the shepherds of their herds' rule? Which of the Bishops of the Catholic Church in Croatia or Yugoslavia raised his voice against that merciless and brutal slaughter committed by Ustashes in Herzegovina, Bosnia, Lika, Dalmatia and elsewhere against the innocent Serbs, Croats, Jews and Gypsies? What did they do to prevent the torture and cruel killing of men, women and really innocent children in the notorious camps of Jasenovac, Stara Gradiška and others?"⁸¹

The Prime Minister of Croatia gave a statement about the Ustasha activities within the ecclesiastic institutions, underlying: "It is not true that priests are being arrested and persecuted. There are, as far as I know, only sever-

⁷⁶ B. Jandrić, "Državno - partijska priprema javnosti za suđenje nadbiskupu Stepincu, Proglašen krivim i prije započetog kaznenog procesa, (Example of the Zagreb paper "Vjesnik")", *Croatica Christiana Periodica*, vol. 42 (Zagreb: 1998), p. 49.

⁷⁷ *Vjesnik*, 6 October 1945.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Vjesnik*, 27 October 1945

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

al priests imprisoned (Šalić, Crnković and Šimecki). They were put in prison in relation with the investigation against Lisak, an Ustasha colonel, who has recently arrived to Zagreb in order to organise terrorist groups in the country.”⁸² “I think”, continued Bakarić “that the very behaviour of the highest clergy, at the end of the Ustasha rule and in the beginning of the liberation, has shown that there is a strong link between the occupier and Ustashes and that part of the high clergy.”⁸³

A part of that high clergy was, in Bakarić’s words, “helping the Ustasha criminals. It has been noticed for a long time now that in various church institutions there are footholds, or points, various channels, leading from the Ustashes abroad into the country. /.../ The fact (is) that Kaptol was sheltering the well-known Ustasha criminal Lisak. /.../ Our peoples will never again allow the church to become an institution which would be against the people, and which would serve to foreign criminal and imperialistic aims. Only the church led by the people’s truly patriotic priests shall play and fulfil the mission assigned to it in the people’s life.”⁸⁴

The headlines in the media represented the opinion of the Party, and were created in the “workshop” of CK KPH Agitprop, and that of “common workers,” toward Stepinac and the Catholic Church, all with the purpose to prepare the trial. They were supposed to “stir the flames” and instigate revolt and anger of the masses and create an anti-Catholic mood in the country. Here are some examples of those headlines:

- “A part of the Catholic clergy, under the pretext of ‘re-christening’ of Serbs, was luring our people into Ustasha slaughters.”⁸⁵
- “A part of the Catholic clergy was assisting all Ustasha crimes, even the killings of children. Archbishop Stepinac delivered partisan children to the provident institution ‘Karitas’, to Ustasha sisters.”⁸⁶
- “Archbishop Dr. A. Stepinac was ordering his subordinate priests to pray for the butcher Pavelić.”⁸⁷
- “Archbishop Stepinac did not do anything to save seven Catholic priests from the Ustasha camp Jasenovac.”⁸⁸

⁸² *Vjesnik*, 16 December 1945

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Vjesnik*, 28 December 1945

⁸⁶ *Vjesnik*, 9 January 1946

⁸⁷ *Vjesnik*, 17 January 1946

⁸⁸ *Vjesnik*, 26 January 1946; on 24 February 1943, Stepinac addressed Pavelić with a letter saying: “I have been trying for months to find out the destiny of my seven clergymen, who were taken to Jasenovac. Everything in vain /.../ From all that I can conclude that they were all killed. Someone will say that they were hostile to the state. Why didn’t they take them to the court? If a regular court was not enough, why didn’t they take them before the court-martial, or at least before the mobile court-martial? This is a disgraceful stain and a crime, which cries to heaven for revenge, just as the whole Jasenovac is a disgraceful stain for the whole Independent State of Croatia.” (The Archiepiscopal Archive in Kaptol (hereafter NKA), *Službeni vjesnik zagrebačke nadbiskupije* issue. 6 – 3 December 1945, p. 35.).

- “The threads of the dirty business of the Archbishop of Zagreb against the people are cut off.”⁸⁹
- “During the occupation, we knew who Stepinac was. The people of Zagreb welcomed with joy the decision on bringing Stepinac before the court.”⁹⁰
- “Stepinac’s responsibility for forced re-christening of Serbs during the occupation.”⁹¹
- “Numerous telegrams are coming from all over Croatia saluting Archbishop Stepinac’s arrest.”⁹²
- “We were waiting for long to see the inspirer of the Ustasha – Crusader crimes, Dr. Stepinac, stopped” – wrote the workers of the *Obnova* Company from Belgrade.⁹³
- “The leading people of the Catholic Church did not want to agree with the people’s authorities because they became agents of the occupiers during the war and want to remain foreign agents”⁹⁴ Bakarić said during his lecture at the Student’s Home in Zagreb.

Unlike *Vjesnik*, which was informing the public almost daily, in texts not only about the coming trial, but also those mocking, insulting and slandering the Catholic Church, clergy and the Archbishop, *Borba* was writing much less, in that period, about the Pastoral Letter and the Stepinac trial. It was mostly informing the public about the reactions to the Letter coming from all over Yugoslavia and Croatia, as well as about the radio programmes and newspaper articles from abroad. The purpose was the same, to prepare the public and to create negative public feeling for Stepinac and the Catholic Church.

V.

Several days before the trial, *Vjesnik* published an “indictment” under the title “Letters to Stepinac.” That was an indictment before the official one, the one of the Public Prosecutor. The text informed the public that “soon, Archbishop Dr. Alojzije Stepinac will be brought before the NRH Supreme Court Chamber, where he will be charged of being the ‘inspirer and the main organiser of the Ustasha-Crusader terrorism.’”⁹⁵ The indictment, which was filed in the name of the people against Stepinac by Public Prosecutor Blažević, also covered the period of the “traitorous” work during the occupation. “From the fall of the former Yugoslavia until the lib-

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Vjesnik*, 22 September 1946.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Vjesnik*, 25 September 1946.

⁹³ *Vjesnik*, 28 September 1946.

⁹⁴ *Vjesnik*, 30 September 1946.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

eration of the homeland, Stepinac's activities were just complementing Pavelić's bloody orgies. Between 1941 and 1945, clerio-fascists were not only the main foothold of the Ustasha policy, but also the spiritual core of the Ustasha movement. /.../ With the 're-christening' of Serbs, Stepinac and a part of the Catholic Church hierarchy helped Ustashes to slaughter hundreds of thousands of the fraternal population. While the bandit's Ustasha hordes were slaying, robbing, ruling the roost, Stepinac was shaking Pavelić's hand, visiting the barracks and blessing the butchers of the Croatian people. /.../ The trial against Stepinac will establish what we all already know; it will establish that the most eminent Archbishop, in the so-called Ustasha state, was a factor with a special role. Together with Pavelić, he drew the sword against all glorious fighters for freedom and a better future of our people. /.../ Until now, in the process against Lisak, Šalić⁹⁶ and others, facts have been revealed which accuse Stepinac as the head of all anti-people political activities, which were supposed to be the preparation and an integral part of foreign intervention. The statements of the accused have shown the purpose of the 'Pastoral Letter,' the relations between Kaptol and Stepinac's leadership with the Ustasha and Crusader terrorist organisations. /.../ Stepinac wanted to destroy the People's Republic of Croatia and the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and to bring the criminals to power. /.../ The complete criminal group led by Stepinac is in fact small, but ready to commit all sorts of crime. /.../ And thus Stepinac wanted bloodshed again; he wanted a war, a new invasion on Yugoslavia, although he knew that such invasion would bring about new destruction, thousands killed, more tears, /.../. That was just another crushing defeat of the bandit Stepinac's policy /.../. With a strict but just judgement and punishment of all responsible for the tears and blood of the people, the Supreme Court Chamber of the People's Republic of Croatia will firmly put an end to the bloody and mean betrayal, whose main base was in Kaptol, and the main leader – Stepinac."⁹⁷

VI.

The real purpose of the staged trial against Archbishop Stepinac was the separation of the Catholic Church from the Vatican. The top Party leaders were lamenting on the "people's courts" and the "process" against Stepinac. On the objections to the work of the "people's courts" and the questions of the Catholic Church about the process against Stepinac, Bakarić underlined two reasons: "The first reason for such situation was the former Yugoslavia, which was the dungeon of nations and which created the possibility of developing and stirring up of fratricidal hatred among our nations. Had it not been the case, no one would have been able to mislead so many Catholic priests. Another reason is the colossal Ustasha and Nazi propaganda present

⁹⁶ Joža Horvat and Zdenko Štambuk, ed. and published, *Documents about the subversive activities and crimes of a part of the Catholic clergy* (Zagreb: 1946).

⁹⁷ *Vjesnik*, 23 September 1946.

in all church organisations and the Catholic press, by the responsible ecclesiastic factors. That specially designed propaganda was in fact the preparation for the occupation of our country and the preparation for all sufferings of our peoples during the occupation. The process, which was recently held in Zagreb, put light and pointed to many issues, which are important for the judgement of our population toward certain ecclesiastic factors, and in that sense necessary decisions have been made. They often ask us: what do you want with that Church, to destroy it? Our answer is: no, we think that such decision would be stupid, that it would not be based on well-understood interests of the development of our people and the people's state, and that it would hurt the religious feelings of our peoples. They say: do you want to separate the Church from the Pope; do you want to draw the Catholic Church in Croatia away from Rome and the Pope? Do you even consider that relation of the Church with the Pope to be a crime, etc.? We answer that question the way we already formulated our attitude. Our answer is: no, we do not intend to create a new schism or heretic Church. We would like the church to satisfy the religious needs of our peoples and to reflect the lives of the people. We only request and want the clergy to serve the religious needs of their nations. We do not interfere and do not want to interfere with the issues of dogmas and catechism, as well as the issues of the competence of the Holy See in these issues. I repeat that we only want our priests to serve the religious needs of our peoples and to listen to the people, its political and national aspirations, to be sons of their people and to be driven, in those political and national issues, by the people's thoughts and wishes, and only by those thoughts and wishes. (Long applause and acclamation). This is not and cannot be contrary to any religious dogma".⁹⁸ This was very different from the situation in 1945, when Stepinac was arrested. The Yugoslav authorities expressed their views on the process in numerous pamphlets, published especially for that purpose.⁹⁹ Before the sentence was pronounced, they offered Archbishop Stepinac a settlement, freedom, which he did not accept. In addition to the condemnation of the Catholic Church and Stepinac, the process had another significant dimension, which was not publicly revealed at the trial, and which had long-reaching consequences in the years to come and was reflected in the overall Croatian nation. It was also a "process against the Croatian homeland, which unfortunately was always being identified with the fallen regime and its politi-

⁹⁸ Speech of the Secretary of the National Front, Dr. Vladimir Bakarić – The Catholic Church Issue. HDA, Commission for the relations with religious communities, Record Group 310. General documents, no. 200 - 374 dated 15 October 1946

⁹⁹ In this context, it is very interesting that the Yugoslav Ambassador in Washington stated in front of the members of the American Committee for Assistance to Yugoslavia that "Stepinac had been supporting the plot, hatched during the war, whose aim had been to found a new state in the Catholic central Europe, consisting of Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and maybe Bavaria, headed by Otto von Habsburg." (From: Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 117.).

cal aspirations.”¹⁰⁰ It is not surprising that “Stepinac became a symbol of the gravely and wrongly accused nation.”¹⁰¹

Translated by Ida Jurković

**Die Presse der totalitären kommunistischen Behörden in Kroatien
im Vorfeld des Schauprozesses gegen Zagreber Erzbischof
Alojzije Stepinac (1946)**

Zusammenfassung

«Vater vergib ihnen, denn sie wissen nicht, was sie tun!»

(Lk 23, 34)

Die kommunistische (totalitäre) Regierung im ehemaligen sozialistischen Jugoslawien hielt es für notwendig im Konflikt mit der katholischen Kirche, unmittelbar vor dem Prozessauftritt gegen den Zagreber Erzbischof Alojzije Stepinac, auf die öffentliche Meinung einzuwirken und diese für sich zu gewinnen. Die Manipulation mit der öffentlichen Meinung war der erste Schritt in diesem Prozeß. Die Grundaufgabe der Presse war, die öffentliche Meinung gegen die katholische Kirche und den Erzbischof aufzuhetzen. Ein Großteil der Zeitungsartikel im meistgelesenen und auflagenstärksten Zagreber Tagesblatt *Vjesnik* und dem Organ der Kommunistischen Partei Jugoslawiens, *Borba*, sollte den Beistand der Volksmassen im bevorstehenden Prozess gegen das Oberhaupt der katholischen Kirche in Kroatien sichern, das zum Tod oder langjähriger Gefängnisstrafe zu verurteilen war. Bereits vor dem Gerichtsprozess hatte die Presse Erzbischof Stepinac für schuldig erklärt. Der Autor dieses Beitrags stellte das ausführlich durch eine eingehende Analyse von Zeitungsberichten dar.

¹⁰⁰ A. Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 587.

¹⁰¹ Stjepan Kožul, *Spomenica žrtvama ljubavi zagrebačke nadbiskupije* (Zagreb: Nadbiskupski stol, 1992), p. 14.