

The Conflicts of Frank and Supilo and Their Problematic Historiographical Heritage

Franjo Supilo and Josip Frank established a world view that led to the formation of ideological and political “circles” which have impacted upon the whole of Croatian society and caused rifts that still remain today.

At the start of his political career, Supilo already expressed clear and unequivocal beliefs regarding Croatian national rights, particularly the right to the unification of all Croatian regions (Croatia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Istria) in a single state, but also relations with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the position of Serbs in Croatia, Serbian state policy in the Balkans, and the like.

Josip Frank based his political activity on similar precepts, which is why disagreements between the two politicians in the early stages of their careers may be ascribed to differences in significance, education and experience.

However, in 1903, Supilo experienced a profound change in personal and political beliefs, which led to the establishment of a new ideological system, as well as new political practices – both of which contrasted deeply with his earlier principles and practices. He began to adhere to the ideological beliefs of the “Progressive Youth”. These were based on what was seen as the historical role of Croatia and the Slavic people in preventing Germans from spreading eastward. This would require the joint efforts of the Slavic people and thus making peace with Croatian Serbs, Italians and other traditional opponents of Croatian attempts at integration, as well as a greatly diminished “clerical” influence on Croatian society and politics. These were also the principal components of the “New Course” in politics.

Frank, heading the Pure Party of Rights, remained true to traditional principles and attempted to practice a modified Croatian policy, which was essentially characterised by the attempt to attain Croatian integration within the Monarchy. It was this adherence to traditional principles which annoyed Supilo and other liberal circles. It was also the main reason Frank could not see eye to eye with them.

As the politics of Supilo and the Progressives supported South Slavic integration, historiography glorified Supilo’s politics, while at the same time demonising Frank’s. This has not changed with Croatian independence. It appears that certain historiographers are unable to overcome the Yugoslav frame of mind, which makes it impossible for them to re-evaluate the ideological principles and political practices of Frank and Supilo. It also appears that historical events have proved Frank right, while refuting Supilo’s views.

Key words: Franjo Supilo, Josip Frank, historiography, the Progressives, the Rijeka Resolution, the New Course