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ITALIAN CRIMES

IN YUGOSLAVIA

*This is the first of a series of surveys of War
Crimes in Yugoslavia. Further instalments will
deal with German, Hungarian, Bulgarian and
Quisling crimes.*

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YUGOSLAV INFORMATION OFFICE
LONDON 1945

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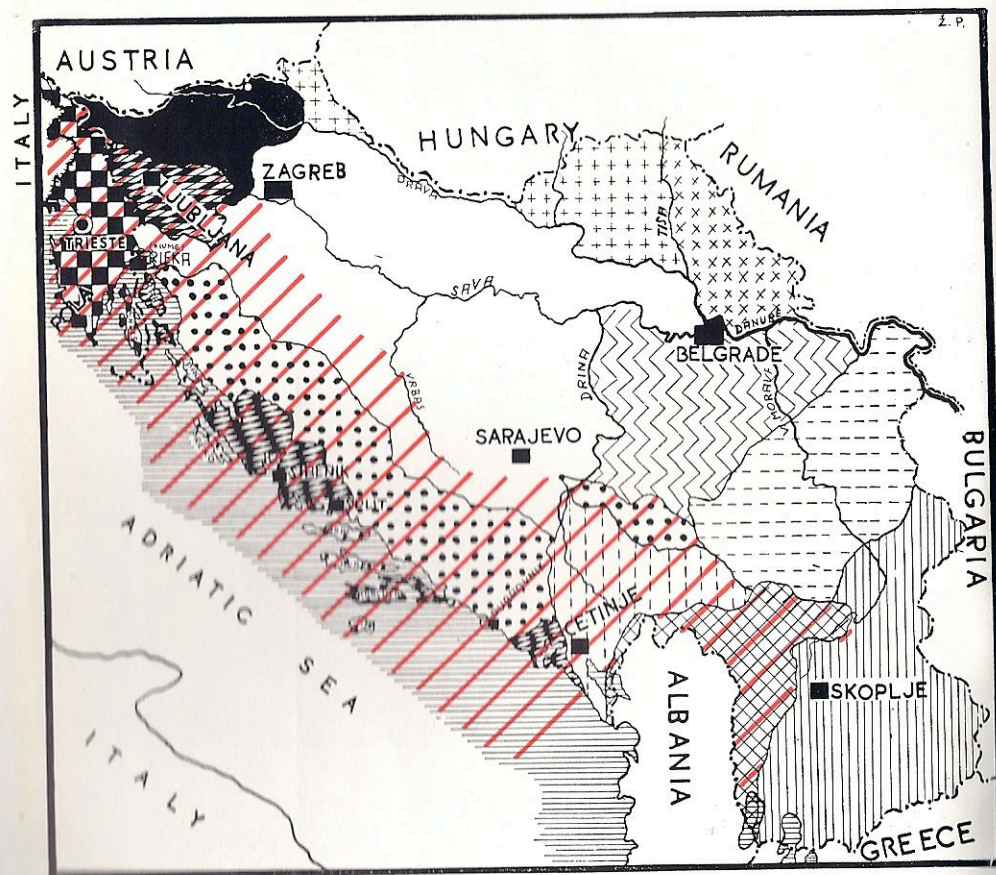
A Map showing the Area affected by Italian crimes is given on page iii with a key on page iv.

Note: Apart from the frontispiece and end-piece, the illustrations to the main text will be found in the centre of the book together with other photographs illustrative of Italian crimes in Yugoslavia and photographs of the documents described in Appendix B.



Figure 1 (page 12)

"Fascism in the Julian Region
from the Origins to the March on Rome."



SKETCH SHOWING ENEMY PARTITION OF YUGOSLAVIA

Scale : one hundred miles = 1 inch.

KEY

1		5		9	
2		6		10	
3		7		11	
4		8		12	

1. Detached from Austria and annexed to Italy after 1914-1918 war
2. Annexed by Italy in 1941
3. Occupied by Italy 1941-1943
4. Annexed by Germany
5. Annexed by Hungary
6. Annexed by Bulgaria
7. Occupied by Bulgaria
8. Italian Protectorate of Montenegro
9. Annexed to Italian Protectorate of Albania
10. German Military Administration
11. Neditch Serbia
12. Ustasha Croatia

The area overprinted in Red is the area of Italian crimes.

FOREWORD

The present Statement concerning Italian War Crimes against Yugoslavia, based almost entirely on Italian official documents, does not purport to be a complete account of all that has happened. It is rather a general survey of the purpose, scope, and methods of Italian crimes, planned and executed by and for the Italian State against Yugoslavia and the South Slav peoples, both during the recent war and throughout the foregoing generation during which these war crimes were planned and rehearsed. The State Commission for the Investigation of the Crimes of the Invaders and their Assistants has to date published 16 Reports containing evidence which, thoroughly examined and approved by legal experts, makes it possible to illustrate Italian documents captured by units of the Yugoslav forces, and to present the present story of what has happened in the Slovene lands, in parts of Croatia (the Littoral) and Montenegro, leaving Italian crimes committed in other parts of Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina to be recorded later.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

This is an account of crimes committed over a long range of years by the Italian State against the South Slav people and State. The victim has been the Yugoslav State in two senses. The crimes have been committed against thousands of Yugoslav people, men, women and children, not only as part of the Yugoslav national organism, but also as individuals, because they have persisted in their right, if they so choose, to think and act as Yugoslavs and to reject pressure brought on them to be Italians.

The crimes have been committed by the Italians in one sense only—to increase the physical area of the Italian State, even though this demanded the destruction of another people.

It is a long record of crime, which as the years went by grew steadily more open and ruthless. It is a record of crime which has brought some of the most prominent names of the Italian State, and hundreds of their accomplices, on to the Yugoslav list of War Criminals.

It has become commonly recognised that to suppress the people of occupied territory by acts of general terrorisation of civilians, is criminal in time of war. It is criminal to burn down their public buildings, to attempt to ruin them economically, to subject them to unbearably drastic repressive laws, in themselves infringements of a commonly recognised



human code. It is criminal to sentence them to incarceration in concentration camps and to death in order to conquer their territory. If it is criminal to do this in time of war, it is surely all the more criminal in time of peace.

The present story of crime begins in 1918, when the Julian Region (Istria, Trieste with the Slovene Littoral and the former Austrian County of Gorica) was first occupied by the Italian State, and ends with the liberation of this territory by the Yugoslav and Allied Armies on May 1, 1945.

The area covered by the record thus varies. Part of the country touched by these Italian crimes—Montenegro, Dalmatia and the Croat Littoral, all but Zadar, Fiume, Istria, Slovenia and some of the islands, came under the sovereignty of the Yugoslav State in 1918. This was a natural achievement, if incomplete, which the Italian State tried to reverse completely by annexation to Italy after 1941 of still further Yugoslav national territory. The inhabitants of all this newly annexed area are also South Slavs, quite indistinguishable from the other South Slavs of the interior of the Balkan Peninsula.

These newly annexed districts suffered from criminal acts only from April, 1941, after the enemy had over-run Yugoslavia, to final liberation on May 1, 1945.

In those four years occurred a series of crimes equal in horror and extent to any the Germans have committed anywhere. These crimes of the Italian invaders threw fresh new light on what since 1918 had been going on in other Yugoslav territory under Italian occupation.

As will be seen, what happened in occupied areas of Yugoslavia State territory after April, 1941, was merely the continuation and culmination of what had for a generation been happening in the Yugoslav national territory at the head of the Adriatic. Even had there been any success from Italian terror there prior to April, 1941, the events subsequent to 1941 annulled that success for ever.

Italian war crimes, in other words, have a long pre-war preamble. In order to understand what has taken place during the war, it is *essential* to understand what took place between 1918 and 1941. Therefore, it is the

country at the head of the Adriatic in which these pre-war preparations for the Italian war crimes took place, that must first attract our attention. This area, though outside the Yugoslav State, in this matter of mass terrorisation by aliens and of crimes authorised by the Italian State, forms an uninterrupted whole with the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia, from Susak (Fiume) in the north, to the Gulf of Kotor in the south, together with the deep hinterland of that coast, and was in the course of this war so treated by the Italian State.

It was in the South Slav lands at the head of the Adriatic that the liberation of Yugoslavia from foreign rule in this recent war was concluded. Similarly it is here that the story of Italian crime began.

It may, therefore, be convenient to give a few brief historical notes on this disputed area, the Julian Region. Who inhabits this territory? Since when, and under what conditions?

1. The "Julian Region" consists of Trieste, Istria, and the former Austrian County of Gorica, also known in Austrian administration as the Kustenland. The modern Yugoslav term is "Istria, Trieste and the Slovene Littoral."

2. This region, mainly unfertile limestone upland, was settled by Slav peasants from the 6th Century A.D. Constituting a narrow link between the Italian Peninsula and the Balkan Peninsula, and at the same time a gate into Central Europe from the Mediterranean, it had become depopulated by the passage of barbarian and other armies of the ancient world.

3. This peasantry lived in comparative peace for many centuries, before nationality became a decisive factor in international life. Much as the Romans in their invasion of Britain stopped short at the line of Hadrian's Wall, and preferred not to penetrate into the highlands, Latin civilisation had left these Slavs at the head of the Adriatic alone.

4. They received a vernacular bible from the Salonica Monks, Cyril and Methodius, who invented the first (Glagolitic) Slavonic alphabet, and made the first Slavonic bible expressly for the ancestors of these Slavs. This was done with the full approval of the Papacy. It is, therefore,

within this area that, till interruption during the past twenty years, the Slavonic bible had its most ancient use.

5. Though Venetian traders established small townships down the South Slav Adriatic coast (as also round the Albanian and Greek coasts) they never succeeded in obtaining control of the most important port of this region, Trieste. Naturally serving its hinterland, Trieste sought the protection of the Hapsburgs as the then effective rulers of that hinterland, and in 1382 became an "Austrian" port.

6. With the 19th Century two important changes in the position of this region took place: (a) the Slav peasantry "awoke" and began to develop their own modern national culture; (b) Austria came more and more under the domination of the German Reich, and Bismarck pronounced Trieste "the point of the German sword."

7. In the political action of the South Slavs which played a great part in breaking up Austria-Hungary in 1917-18, against the new German Imperialism, to the advantage of the Allied Powers, the Slav inhabitants of this region played a prominent part. On August 16, 1918, a South Slav "National Council" of 50 members was set up in Ljubljana, consisting of 12 representatives of Dalmatia, 18 of the Slovene Populist Party, 10 of the Yugoslav Democrat Party, 3 of the Social Democrat Party, and also—2 for Trieste and 5 for Istria.

These same representatives were later, through their plenipotentiaries, jointly signatories to the Act of Union of the South Slav territories of Austria-Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbia with Montenegro, on December 18, 1918. The people of this region were thus numbered among the *founders* of the Yugoslav State.

8. At Versailles the weight of Italy, as one of the major allies, in the councils of the Peace Conference taking advantage of the secret "Pact of London" of 1915, prevailed over the principle of self-determination of peoples, and by this and subsequent treaties, the 538,331 South Slavs of this region, though in the full sense of the word, founders of Yugoslavia, were placed under Italian rule.

9. In the intervening years from 1918 to the attack made

by the Germans and Italians on Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, Istria, Trieste and the Slovene Littoral were in fact in a concealed state of war. The Italian State was endeavouring to force the Yugoslavs to become Italians, the Yugoslavs were resisting.

The crimes committed by the Italian invader in the territories of the pre-1941 Yugoslav State, which after April, 1941, were annexed by Italy or occupied by Italy, were thus a continuation and culmination of the series of crimes committed in other parts of the Yugoslav littoral by organs of the Italian State. These were throughout crimes committed with the definite aim of de-nationalising territory which for many centuries had been compactly South Slav. They were crimes committed either by independent Italian nationalist and imperialist bodies, tolerated by the State, or generally by organs of the State. Later, as the final preparations were being made for the present war, the crimes committed were part of the general plan for the extermination of the South Slav population which stood in the way of Italian aspirations.

Thus the crimes to be examined in the present account fall into three main groups and will be treated under three separate headings:

1. Acts of sporadic and organised violence, from 1918 to 1941 (Chapter II).
2. The history of the pre-war work for the planned destruction of the South Slav population of the Julian Region, and the work of Mussolini's Personal Adviser on this subject, Italo Sauro (Chapter III).
3. The Organisation of Sauro's Special Office for the "Co-ordination of the Extermination" of the Yugoslav-conscious population of all areas previously annexed, and the continuation of this work of extermination in the officially organised wholesale crimes committed against the civilian population in all Yugoslav areas annexed, whether at a later or an earlier date (Chapter IV).

CHAPTER II

ACTS OF SPORADIC AND ORGANISED VIOLENCE 1918-1941

Under this heading in its charges against Italian war criminals, the Yugoslav State Commission for the Investigation of Crimes of the Invaders and Their Assistants, considers all acts of violence whether of mob violence or of State repression directed against persons of Yugoslav nationality but citizens of Italy from 1918 to 1941, for the purpose of compelling them to renounce their claim to Yugoslav nationality and turn them into Italians. They are mainly the subject of published Report No. 49 of the State Commission.

It has for long been an admitted principle of International Law and of the common laws of humanity, that a man should be at liberty to use, at least in private life, the language which he chooses, and through that language to develop the culture which he chooses. By the close of the 1914-1918 war the question of the right of people to live within their own national frontiers had become one of the major war aims of the Allied Powers.

It was nevertheless evident that no frontiers drawn without large scale migration of population could hope to form completely satisfactory demarcation lines between people of one and another nationality. There were bound to remain large groups of nationals of one country within the frontiers of another country. In some cases special opportunities were

given to members of these minorities to "opt" for their own State, and to migrate to it with some measure of economic compensation for any loss involved. At the same time, special clauses were inserted into Peace Treaties to protect the rights of minorities which did not opt or if such a possibility of opting was not considered. Thus it came about that the Yugoslav State retained within its frontiers a sporadic Italian population, scattered down the coastlands, of up to some 10,000 persons (9,362), who were accorded special minority rights. The Yugoslav State agreed contractually to these special rights of the Italian minority.

Whereas only about 10,000 Italians remained within the Yugoslav State, over 500,000 Yugoslavs (538,331) remained in Italy. The Italian Government adopted the standpoint that, being one of the major Allied Powers, it was not required to undertake any special obligations towards this minority. Liberal Italian statesmen declared, despite official Italian publications which gave reasons for doubt, that the rights of these South Slavs within the Italian frontiers would be respected.

Nevertheless, only a few weeks had gone by after the Italian occupation of these western portions of Yugoslav populated territory when the first assault was made on the rights of the Slovenes of Trieste. The premises of the Slovene paper "Edinost," which was founded as far back as 1878, and however vigorously the Austrian State may have oppressed the Slovenes, was never suppressed under Austrian rule, were attacked and destroyed. This act of destruction, aimed at the leading public organ of Slovene opinion in Trieste, took place on December 29, 1918, only 11 days after the formation of the Yugoslav State. Although such an act of violence, if tolerated by the Italian authorities—thereby was in contradiction to the principles expressed by liberal Italian statesmen of the then Italian Government, no action was taken against the perpetrators of the outrage.

Eight months later this repressive work was renewed, when the Slovene "National House" in Trieste, the Slovene School on the Aqueduct, and the Commercial Co-operative

House in the via Battista were destroyed by organised Italian bands.

Following these serious acts of arson and pillage, committed with the benevolence, if not the connivance of the Italian authorities, in September, 1919 acts of terrorism by the Italian gendarmerie (Carabinieri) began to take place. On September 19, 1919, Tomasini, Chairman of the Parish Council in Kojski, arrested and beat up a widow named Karolina Simcicev, because she had come to him as the public authority and, having lost her husband in the war, requested support, but using her native Slovene tongue. In the same village, on September 24, 1919, the gendarmerie arrested all the adult peasants for what was termed "resistance to public authority." These were not isolated incidents, but links in a chain of increasing terrorism.

To close the lesser events of 1919, the South Slav "People's House" in Pazin was attacked by an organised mob and destroyed, and on October 30, the premises of the Slovene "Catholic Printing Press" at the intellectual centre of Pazin in Istria were destroyed.

On September 12 occurred a major assault on Yugoslav national interests, by which at the same time Italian imperial interests flaunted legality and challenged the principle of an international agreement. This was the seizure by d'Annunzio, at the head of an armed band, of Fiume. Fiume had not even been claimed by Italy, let alone "promised" Italy by the 1915 Pact of London, yet now, with the backing of the Italian State, it was possible for this attack on Yugoslav national interests in the Adriatic to be made and acquiesced in.

In this way, from December, 1918, throughout 1919, the free exercise of their minority rights was menaced both by the action of unofficial but permitted mobs, and by organs of Italian State law and order.

Persons responsible were not brought to book, and it goes without saying that the mass of the South Slav inhabitants of Istria, Trieste and Gorica felt themselves to be seriously menaced.

Were these only sporadic acts of violence, they might be

written off as the inevitable consequences of the four trying years of war which had just ended, and of the delicate frontier adjustment. But they were not merely sporadic acts. Viewed as they can now be viewed from a distance, and in the light of the events of this war, they constituted a growing menace.

July 13, 1920, has for the past generation been specially remembered in Trieste as "Black Tuesday." On this day, the Italian mob burned down the "People's House." The material damage amounted to 15,000,000 lire, or at the then rate of exchange, or about £227,240.

This Tuesday was a day of serious and widespread disorder in Trieste. The offices and homes of prominent Slovenes were fired with cans of petrol. Dr Kimovec and Dr Vilfan, prominent leaders of thought of the Slovenes of Trieste, were personal sufferers. Lencek's Inn was also attacked, and in addition to suffering damage, the proprietor was compelled under threat of serious violence, to sign an obligation not to serve Slovene patrons. Other Slav buildings attacked were the Credit Bank, the Adriatic Bank, the Trieste Savings Bank, the Orthodox School, the offices of Dr Pretnar Okretic, Josip Abram and Josip Agneletto, the transport firm of "Balkan Ltd" and the Offices of the Yugoslav Consulate.

The total damage done to Yugoslav property in Trieste on this Black Tuesday was over 100,000,000 lire, or about £1,515,150. At the same time, the "People's House" in Pulj (Pola) was destroyed, the damage done estimated at about 5,000,000 lire, and the offices of the solicitor, Dr Zukon. At Pazin, yet another Yugoslav-language printing press was destroyed.

Later in the year, on November 17, there were new outbursts. During a concert of Yugoslav music in the Central Hall in Gorica, bombs were thrown which caused numerous casualties. Two days later the "People's Press" in Gorica was also attacked with grenades, and serious damage caused. It was common knowledge that one of the ring-leaders of this attack was the son of the local Questore, Giganti.

On January 27, 1921, an Italian mob broke into a Yugoslav

Reading Room in Trieste and destroyed everything they could lay their hands on.

Later in the year, on September 8, they once again wrecked the presses of the paper "Edinost" in Trieste, and burned down the Slav House of Labour, the Spartacus Society, and the "People's House" in St Ivan.

During local elections in Skofje in Istria, on May 15, 1921, a number of houses were destroyed. On May 16, soldiers of the Italian Royal Army committed a similar crime in Mackovlje.

In Crni Kal on the same day, the property of a land-owner named Andrijasic was destroyed, and in Blari in Istria, the houses of peasants named Ludovic, Herak Lukovic and a widow named Radovic.

These are but examples, for as 1921 passed by and 1922 and 1923 followed, acts of this kind became more frequent. It became impossible for the simple peasantry of these Yugoslav lands to be sure when or where the next blow would fall. Report No. 49 of the State Commission gives a further long list of similar incidents, chosen from among many more, which it would be tedious for the English reader to give in detail. In village after village, town after town, Slovene "People's Houses" or other offices connected with the public life of the South Slavs were destroyed.

These "People's Houses" were not in any sense centres of irredentist propaganda. They were cultural centres in the best modern sense, premises in which activities closely identical with the Clubs and Institutes developed by the British Council in Great Britain and abroad, were organised and pursued by the people in their own towns. They were centres for recreation and serious study, for public meetings, concerts and debates. They were institutions without which the natural intelligent life of the Yugoslavs of Istria, Trieste and the Slovene Littoral could not possibly be developed. To destroy them was not merely an act of terrorisation in itself, but an act intended to inhibit further activities. It was also in every case a deliberately intended act of destruction of property, an act intended to weaken and impoverish the Yugoslavs, for in no case was insurance compensation forthcoming. These

"People's Houses" had been built by subscriptions from most classes, but mainly by the accumulated pennies of hard-working peasants and town-workers. After so many centuries under repressive Austrian rule, the Yugoslavs of these lands found themselves on their own soil against their will living in a state of masked Civil War forced upon them by their new, Italian, alien rulers.

Here it is necessary to underline that all these acts of repression, and the imperialist seizure of Fiume, took place *before* the establishment of Fascism in Italy.

From the Italian end, the toleration of such a constant stream of public crimes, could only have one interpretation. This was the beginning of a deliberate policy of de-nationalisation and extermination. It has been characterised by the Yugoslav State Commission as official Italian practice for the mass terrorist executions which were later, after open war against Yugoslavia had been begun, to follow from Gorica in the north, down the whole length of the Adriatic coast to the Gulf of Kotor and Montenegro in the south.

What these *rastrellamenti* or mass "purgings" meant, we shall see in the fourth chapter of this account. Let us first finish the story of Italian misrule and terrorisation in the first period.

It was at this point that Fascism came to power in Italy. The Fascist "March on Rome" took place on October 28, 1922. But though terrorisation of the South Slavs left under Italian rule preceded the advent of Fascism to full power, it is far from being unconnected with it. Italian Fascism grew out of this Italian imperialism directed against the South Slavs. The Italian Fascists have been conscious and proud of this. A history of the rise of Fascism could even appear with a cover design based on the burning of South Slav institutions in Trieste. (Frontispiece*). It was by this work, first of sporadic terrorist acts, later of more organised repression,

*Il Fascismo nella Venezia Giulia dalle origini alla Marcia su Roma; M. Risolo; Trieste, Casa Editrice "La Vedetta Italiano", 1932; 8°; pp.xviii 200; L.10.

This book was printed in an edition of 650 copies "numerate su carta a mano con legatura di lusso e di gran lusso".

that Italian fascism trained for the domination of Italy and for the further development of wholesale crime reviewed in this record.

The next stage of the terror came in 1924, when elections were carried out in Italy. During these elections throughout the area, men were waylaid and beaten up, and made the targets of assassins. In the mountain district of Brda, a certain doctor of medicine, named Ottone, stands out as the leader of the terror. In the lowland Kanal district, it was a man named Tapoli who was the leader. At Ajdovscina, the first Slovene martyr, Anton Stancar, was killed. Age was no protection. For example, for his obstinacy in voting according to his own impulses, 76-year-old Piculin, of Golo Brdo, near Kozbana, was beaten to the point of loss of consciousness. Many electors fled across the Yugoslav frontier, leaving everything behind them. At Smilj in Istria, gendarmerie fired on an election meeting, causing 105 casualties.

The culmination was yet to come. On November 12, 1924, the first arrest for the use of the Slovene language took place. Thirteen men were singing Slovene songs in their mother tongue, among them three who were over 60 years of age. They disappeared from the world into an Italian prison.

Less than three weeks later, at the beginning of December, 1924, followed a special order prohibiting any public meeting, concert or other arrangement in which the Slovene language was used. Catholic printing presses which used the Slovene language were broken up, and the Slovene writer, Franc Bevk, was arrested for a humorous sketch in a popular paper. The terror was increasing in intensity.

The elections, false elections carried out under terror, passed, but still the Yugoslavs of these districts, Slovene or Croat, remained conscious of being Yugoslavs and not Italians. No doubt the Italian Fascists had expected their display of mailed fist to have direct results. Yet the Yugoslav population continued stubbornly to think and dream as Yugoslavs.

On July 14, 1927, the Fascist leaders of Gorica, Trieste, Istria, and also of Fiume and the Port of Zadar further down the coast, left by the Peace Treaty in Italian hands (ad-

ministratively part of Istria) held a conference and decided on the following steps:

1. Slovene teachers were to be removed from their native districts and sent away into the interior of Italy.
2. Religion was to be taught in the schools in Italian and not a Yugoslav language.
3. All Slovene societies were to be dissolved.
4. All school children were to join the Balilla.
5. Sermons and Church Services were to be conducted in Slovene Churches in the Italian language.
6. All Slovene papers were to be suppressed.
7. All Slovene co-operative organisations were to be dissolved.

Outrageous as were all of these proposals, especially directed by a State which purported to be civilised against a compact, non-national population of well over 500,000 persons, two of the proposals stand out among all others in their monstrosity. These are the second and the fifth. For, it must be repeated, it was for the Slavs of this area, once contiguous with the Pannonian Slavs, that the Slav Apostles Cyril and Methodius, with the approval and support of the Pope, created the first Slav alphabet, the so-called Glagolithic, and gave the Slavonic world its first liturgy and translation of the Bible.

It was in the confines of the Istrian portion of the north-western corner of Yugoslav-peopled territory, that this ancient Glagolithic alphabet was still to be found in use in the monasteries within living memory. The Catholics of this part of the world, in common with the Croat Catholics, had through the centuries stood out in the Catholic world, and particularly after the Reformation period in maintaining or striving for use of their own national language in their Church services. Now, at the bidding of Italian Fascists, this fundamental right was to be suppressed.

Indeed, not only were children to be christened henceforth with Italian names, but even inscriptions on tombstones were to be desecrated, and ancient Slav family names transformed into bastard and hybrid "Italian" equivalents. (See Appendix, pp. 77-81).