
CONTINUITY OR RENEWAL IN YUGOSLAV GYMNASTICS: 6 JANUARY, 1929 DICTATORSHIP AND GYMNASTIC ORGANISATIONS

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ABSTRACT: *After the establishment of the Yugoslav state, gymnasts organised before WWI in Sokol and Orel societies, renewed and consolidated their activities, organised themselves at the state level, and joined international organisations. However, they were not united under a single organisation dedicated to their particular discipline, such as sports. By the end of the first decade of the Yugoslav state, their activities were characterised by "the 6 January Dictatorship" that King Alexander imposed on 6 January 1929 amid a tense internal political situation in the second half of 1928. The State Protection Act banned and dissolved political parties with a religious or "tribal" character. Various societies, including gymnastic ones, whose activities were indirectly linked to the political camps, also came under scrutiny. Consequently, the King and the Government adopted an act establishing the new and unified gymnastic organisation, the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which was intended to represent a fresh civil-society force that promoted and encouraged the spirit of Yugoslavism. The act fundamentally interfered with the organisational structure of gymnastics, without affecting the sports sector. In the present article, we will, based on available sources, shed light on the formation of the new single all-state gymnastics organisation, which significantly changed the situation in gymnastics, with its programmatic orientation rooted in Yugoslav Sokolism and the Yugoslav Sokol.*

KEYWORDS: gymnastics, Sokol, physical education, the 6 January Dictatorship, the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

Gymnastics and the Sokol (Falcon) movement were widespread among the South Slavs before World War I. The first societies were founded among Slovenes in 1863 in Ljubljana, among Croats in 1874 in Zagreb, among Austro-Hungarian Serbs in 1904 in Sremski Karlovci, and among Serbs in the Kingdom of Serbia in 1882 in Belgrade. With the expansion of new societies, national Sokol unions were

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organised in the decade preceding World War I (the Croatian in 1904, the Slovenian in 1905, and the Pan-Serbian in 1910). The idea of Yugoslav unity was already present among them. The Yugoslav Sokol unification was intended to take place in 1914 at the Sokol festival/rally in Ljubljana; however, the Sarajevo assassination of the Habsburg heir Franz Ferdinand and the outbreak of the First World War prevented this. In addition to the Sokol societies in Slovenia, Catholic gymnastic sections were also established during the decade before the war, in line with the process of recatholisation.¹

After the end of World War I and the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on 1 December 1918, gymnasts restored their activities and organised themselves in accordance with the new state community system. On 26 January 1919, representatives of the Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian Sokol movements met in Zagreb. They agreed that, in light of the new state-political circumstances, a unified and strong organisation of the Yugoslav Sokol movement should be established, while the national unions should cease to function. The new organisation was founded on St Vitus' Day (the end of June) in 1919 in Novi Sad, based on the "one nation, one state, one Sokol movement" principle. The unitarian Sokol principle corresponded to the political "one nation, one state" principle and the national trinity or the ideology of a united Yugoslav nation and the three tribes (Slovenians, Croats, and Serbs), enacted in the "St Vitus' Day Constitution" of 1921. The union was named the Sokol Union of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, while the renaming to the Yugoslav Sokol Union (the YSU) followed at the 1920 assembly in Maribor. The seat of the Union would have to rotate every five years between Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade. However, Ljubljana remained the seat of the Union until 1930, when the Act establishing the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (SKY) was enacted. Slovene Ivan Oražen was chosen as the elder (or, nowadays, president), while the Croat Lazar Car and the Serb Miloš Popović were chosen as vice-elders. In 1924, Engelbert Gangl, who was also a member of the committee, took over the elder and remained in that position for most of the inter-war period (YSU and SKY).²

During the first year of the united Sokol movement, the unification process or "fusion" represented a sensitive point of concern, especially in the Zagreb Sub-union, along with the question of the Sokol movement's centralism or federalism (supported by Croatian Sokols), which coincided with the tense political pre-election agitations before the Constituent Assembly elections (1921) and the decision between a central or federal state-political system. The 1921 assembly in Osijek attempted to resolve the tense situation and rejected the proposal of the Croatian Sokol opposition for the federal reorganisation. In contrast, the assembly adopted the so-called Osijek St Vitus' Day Resolution. The Resolution emphasised the unification adopted in Novi Sad in 1919, the renaming of the movement as Yugoslav adopted in Maribor in 1920, and Tyrš's³ Sokol system, which was to transform the mem-

¹ See more: *Sokolski zbornik*, ed. Ante Brozović (Beograd: Sokol Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 1934); *Naša pot: 150 let ustanovitve Južnega Sokola in sokolskega gibanja*, ed. Tomaž Pavlin (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za šport, 2014).

² "Sokolski Savez SHS", *Sokol*, 1919, 37–38; Tomaž Pavlin, "Zmaga-svoboda: sokolsko jugoslovaniziranje", in: *Jugoslavija v času: devetdeset let od nastanka prve jugoslovanske države*, ed. Bojan Balkovec (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2009), 213–227.

³ Miroslav Tyrš (1832–1884), the founder of the Czech Sokol movement.

bers of the Sokol movement into “Yugoslavs by evolution”. It pointed out uncompromisingly that “any member of the Sokol movement is also a Yugoslav”; therefore, “no other Sokol movements exist or may exist in our nation apart from the ones included in the Yugoslav Sokol movement”. After the assembly, many members of the Croatian Sokol movement left the YSU and re-established the Croatian Sokol Union on 28 May 1922.⁴

On the other hand, the Catholic Orel (Eagle) movement had already been organised in the Slovenian provinces before World War I; however, following the war and the establishment of the Yugoslav state, it expanded into Croatia. The Orel movement completed the post-war reconstruction by celebrating the 1st Slavic Orel movement camp in Maribor at the end of July 1920 with a significant participation of about 5000 Croats. In the years after World War I, this movement developed in Croatia through gymnastics sections within Catholic organisations, especially school and youth organisations. Following the Slovenian model, the sections took the name Orel and formed a union. In 1921, given the realities of the Yugoslav state, the Slovenian and Croatian Orel movements united to form the Yugoslav Orel Union, with its headquarters in Ljubljana. The Union was divided into two national sub-unions, the Slovenian Orel Sub-union and the Croatian Orel Sub-union, and a special female sub-union, Orlice, was also formed within the Union in 1922. The Orel movement was active in the Catholic part of the Yugoslav state, while no religious gymnastics organisations developed in its Orthodox part.⁵

Thus, the gymnastics organisations existed separately during the 1920s, each on its own, without, for example, a central gymnastics union similar to those in sports. In addition to the YSU, the Croatian Sokol Union based in Zagreb and the Belgrade Sokol society Dušan Silni were also active. The YSU, in contrast to the Croatian Sokol and the Catholic Orel movements, was active throughout the Yugoslav territory and, according to its principle of religious individualism, united the non-religious and the religious (Catholics, Orthodox, and Muslims) and represented Yugoslav gymnastics according to the principle of “one state, one union” in the international gymnastics (FIG) and at the Olympic Games, as well as in the Slavic Sokol Union, where it represented the central link between the YSU and the Czechoslovak Sokol Union.

The idea of a new gymnastic organisation after the 6 January Dictatorship

Gymnastics organisations in the first Yugoslav state and their activities were strongly affected by the 6 January Dictatorship,⁶ introduced by King Alexander in

⁴ Tomaž Pavlin, “Jugoslovanski Sokol”, in: *Naša pot: 150 let ustanovitve Južnega Sokola in sokolskega gibanja*, ed. Tomaž Pavlin (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za šport, 2014), 105–117; Nikola Žutić, “Liberalna, antiklerikalna i antifašistička ideologija srpskih i jugoslavenskih sokola u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1945”, in: *Naša pot*, ed. T. Pavlin (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za šport, 2014), 144–147; Pieter Troch, “Interwar Yugoslav state-building and the changing social position of the Sokol gymnastics movement”, *European Review of History*, 1, 26 (2019), 60–83 (accessed 20 January 2026).

⁵ France Pernišek, *Zgodovina slovenskega Orla* (Buenos Aires: Slovenska kulturna akcija, 1989), 109–130; Tomaž Pavlin, “La société Orel en Slovénie et Yougoslavie”, in: *L’Église, le Sport et l’Europe: La Fédération internationale catholique d’éducation physique 1911–2011*, ed. Laurence Munoz and Jan Tolleneer (Paris: l’Harmattan, 2011), 221–236.

⁶ The topic has been partially investigated and previously disseminated in the Slovenian language in T. Pavlin, “Ustanavljanje Sokola Kraljevine Jugoslavije”, *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, XLII, 1, (2002), 55–72.

1929 to resolve the tense political situation in the country following the shooting in the Belgrade Parliament in June 1928.⁷ The political situation became more tense in the summer of 1928 and in the second half of the same year, as the opposition around the Croatian Peasant Party withdrew from Parliament and obstructed political life. Moreover, demonstrations in Croatia escalated, resulting in casualties.⁸ King Alexander replaced the parliamentary political system with a dictatorship. He introduced personal absolutism because – as he explained in his “manifesto” of 6 January – it was his duty “to safeguard the unity of the nation and the state”. Therefore, the time had come “when no intermediary between the nation and the King can or should exist”.⁹ Alexander immediately proclaimed several new acts, sternly aimed against the existing party democracy, and appointed a new government. The State Protection Act banned and dissolved political parties with a religious or “tribal” character, while the existence of political or politically related societies, and the establishment of new ones, was subject to special authorisation and review of the situation.¹⁰ So the fate of the gymnastic organisations was also on the government’s agenda, which had, by the end of January 1929, already taken the position that the Orel and Croatian Sokol organisations were “tribal” and essentially political, and should therefore be dissolved.¹¹ However, a moratorium was temporarily imposed at the end of January, as it was allegedly difficult to draw a line between political and non-political organisations.¹² The temporary moratorium was probably introduced because of the “intervention” of the representatives of the Orel Catholic gymnastics organisation in Belgrade, where they explained that “Orel is not a tribal-political organisation, as it fully recognises the principles of national unity”¹³ (the “tribal” Croatian Sokol also made a similar reference),¹⁴ as well as due to the participation of the Slovenian leader of the Catholic political camp, Anton Korošec, in the new government. In mid-March 1929, King Alexander received the YSU’s delegation,¹⁵ which presented him with a “memorandum” on physical education and proposals for the act on physical education of school youth and the act on physical education for military schools. In the memorandum – which, according to the YSU’s elder Engelbert Gangl, was drafted “on their own motion” and presented to “the ministries concerned” – the YSU outlined a model for the division of competences regarding

⁷ Jure Gašparič, *Izza parlamenta: zakulisje jugoslovanske skupščine 1919–1941* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2015), 81–90.

⁸ Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvaška zgodovina*, prevod Drago Bajt (Ljubljana: Slovenska Matica, 2008), 197.

⁹ Jurij Perovšek, “Značaj kraljeve diktature”, in: *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1848–1992*, ed. Jasna Fischer et al. (Ljubljana: INZ, MK), 321; Jurij Perovšek, *O demokraciji in jugoslovanstvu: Slovenski liberalizem v Kraljevini SHS/Jugoslaviji* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2013), 134–135; Jure Gašparič, *SLS pod kraljevo diktaturo: diktatura kralja Aleksandra in politika Slovenske ljudske stranke v letih 1929–1935* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2007), 54.

¹⁰ J. Gašparič, *SLS pod kraljevo diktaturo*, 63–65.

¹¹ Tudi “Orel” in: „Hrvatski Sokol” razpuščena“, *Jutro*, 23 January 1929, 1.

¹² Editorial, *Jutro*, 27 January 1929, 1.

¹³ „Intervencija Orlovske zveze v Beogradu“, *Jutro*, 26 January 1929, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Nikola Žutić, *Sokoli: Ideologija u fizičkoj kulturi Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1929–1941* (Beograd: Angrotrade, 1991), 43.

physical education between the state and the Sokol movement. The memorandum noted that the Sokol movement wanted the state to provide for “the physical education of its citizens”, just as it provided for the intellectual education. Thus, physical education should be organised in every school, while after schooling and especially after the age of fifteen, “the state ... should leave it to the Sokol movement”. The reform would also cover the military, where training would be carried out “according to Tyrš’s gymnastic system”.¹⁶

As we can see in the Slovenian daily news at the beginning of May 1929, in reports from other parts of the Yugoslav state, the liberal Slobodna Tribuna newspaper launched an initiative in the Croatian public that the Croatian Sokol should return under the auspices of the YSU. As the Croatian Sokol movement had declared its “loyalty” to the King after 6 January 1929, it was to return to the united Yugoslav Sokol ideology because “the danger which is said to have threatened Croatia from Yugoslavia is but a fiction”.¹⁷ However, the gymnastics organisations remained on different shores, and the government continued to discuss the “tribal” Sokol movement’s activities at its sessions. In addition, two “tribal” Sokol organisations were even founded in 1929 – the Croatian Sokol in Zemun and the Serbian Sokol in Belgrade.¹⁸ Such a course of events was not conducive to strengthening the ideology of Yugoslav integralism. It caused concern and prompted the organisation of a project for a uniform national gymnastics organisation based on the Sokol movement, to be unveiled by the government on the festive “Unification Day” (1 December). Simultaneously, a session of the YSU’s administrative board took place at the end of November in Belgrade, where Gangl told the journalists “that ... there is an initiative among the Croatian Sokol movement to join the Yugoslav Sokol movement” and that any member of the Orel movement could join “the Yugoslav Sokol movement if they accept the national ideology of the Yugoslav Sokol movement”.¹⁹

It was more challenging to translate this into practice, as it was unclear whether the YSU could play the role of an integrator of gymnastics organisations. The latter can also be seen in the reply of the Slovenian Catholic newspaper Slovenec on 28 November 1929, which stated that “a single criterion for all gymnastic organisations” should apply during the reorganisation of physical education. Simultaneously, the Slovenec newspaper also answered Gangl’s question why every member of the Orel movement could not join the Sokol movement and underlined that the YSU desired to advertise itself “as the only union which is still viable in the present situation”. However, according to the newspaper’s Belgrade correspondent, who “was informed by a relevant source”, “it has been resolutely emphasised to the representatives of the Sokol movement that equality is provided for all and no exceptions will be allowed in any respect”. Furthermore, it was stated, “that the relevant circles do not see, for example, any difference between the members of the Yugoslav Sokol and the Yugoslav Orel unions regarding civic education and nationality”. The act was supposed to ensure the same conditions for everyone, and whoever wanted to parti-

¹⁶ „Jugoslovensko Sokolstvo je enodušno v službi za kralja“, *Jutro*, 6 December 1929, 1; „Izjava staroste JSS“, *Jutro*, 10 December 1929, 2; JSZ, *Spomenica o telesnom vaspitanju*, 13 March 1929.

¹⁷ „Poziv Hrvatskemu Sokolu“, *Jutro*, 7 May 1929, 2.

¹⁸ N. Žutić, *Sokoli*, 44.

¹⁹ „Velika sokolska seja v Beogradu“, *Jutro*, 27 November 1929, 2.

cipate would have to comply with its provisions.²⁰ On the same day, the administrative board (the presidency) of the YSU also spoke up in a “communiqué”, rejected the references to the “fusion” of the Yugoslav Sokol movement “with certain other organisations”, and stated that “the relevant issue has not even been discussed, as there have been no proposals in this regard”.²¹

Therefore, the state authorities saw the solution to the fragmentation of the gymnastics movement in establishing an all-state Yugoslav gymnastics organisation, as they supported the idea and organisation of the Yugoslav Sokol movement, which would also be in charge of promoting and encouraging the spirit of Yugoslavism. On 30 November, the *Jutro* newspaper’s correspondent reported from Belgrade that “according to an authentically informed source, a great plan is in the making, according to which all physical education in schools and among people would be organised in the same manner, mainly in the spirit and according to the principles of the Sokol gymnastics; while the Sokol movement itself would be brought into the closest possible connection with this national action and would extend itself to the segments of the population that it has not been able to penetrate as a private organisation”. The new Sokol movement would play a vital role as an educator spreading the Yugoslav national and state thought, while the planners intended to “unite it with the state educational policy” because “it will thus be possible to transmit the Sokol and Yugoslav ideology to the broadest segments of the population and educate the entire nation in the spirit of national and state unity”.²²

The Yugoslav Sokol Union in 1929

The YSU, which celebrated its first decade in 1929, can be said to have played a central role in the creation of a unified organisation. At the end of January, on the occasion of its tenth anniversary, the YSU organised a consultation (questionnaire) or “survey” in Ljubljana to critically review the organisational, technical, ideological, and educational situation of the Sokol movement in the first decade, examine the causes that had positively or negatively influenced the development of its activities, and formulate the guidelines for future work based on the survey. The conclusions of the relevant debates and papers revealed that the Sokol movement’s relationship with the education system and the military was unsatisfactory.²³ This was concerning because the education system and the military were crucial social and state institutions for the Sokol movement and its presence in society. Cooperation with the military was also important from a national perspective, in terms of military self-defence and the defence of political independence.

Regarding the issue of increasing their influence, the consultation participants adopted certain conclusions, supporting the idea of an all-Yugoslav festival

²⁰ „Za vse telovadne organizacije eno merilo“, *Slovenec*, 28 November 1929, 1.

²¹ „Predmet sokolskih razprav v Beogradu“, *Jutro*, 28 November 1929, 2.

²² „Pred ustanovitvijo nove vsedrjavne sokolske organizacije“, *Jutro*, 1 December 1929, 1.

²³ „Savezna prosvetna škola“, *Sokolski glasnik*, 15 February 1929, 1–3. The “local inconveniences” were related to the ideological-moral and traditionalist views regarding women and their place in society.

(zlet) in 1930 in Belgrade to arouse "interest in the activities of the Sokol movement and its understanding in the capital city". They also stressed their unreserved determination to keep educating the nation in the Sokol spirit, believing "it will regenerate national and state life".²⁴ At the session of 11 February 1929, the administrative board discussed the conclusions or resolutions of the January survey and used them to draft the aforementioned memorandum on physical education, which also contained a concrete proposal to establish a higher physical education institution. The memorandum was obviously the subject of discussions with the King in March 1929, and with the authorities regarding the further functioning and regulation of general organisational and ideological issues related to gymnastics.

In the autumn, the YSU welcomed the renaming of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (3 October 1929), the only proper name, recognised at home and abroad. Satisfaction was complete, as the official distinction between the sons and daughters of a single nation was dropped from the state's name. The YSU unifying idea, which also informed the organisation's name, became embodied in the highest place. As a logical consequence, the YSU was supposed to gain greater influence in public affairs.²⁵ On 2 November 1929, the administrative board of the YSU convened a meeting in Zagreb. It noted that the agenda's importance required the mandatory attendance of delegates from all the sub-unions. Due to the lack of documentary sources, we have to rely on the scarce publications in the "Sokolski glasnik" gazette, according to which the Zagreb meeting discussed the ongoing Sokol activities and the reports from the meetings of the professional body and the educators. In his address, Gangl welcomed the renaming of the state, which he saw as a triumph of the Sokol ideology. He also reported on the meeting of the Slavic Sokol Union, recalled the resounding tragedy in Pula where the Italian fascist authorities had shot the Istrian (Slavic) patriot Vladimir Gortan.²⁶ At the end of November 1929, the administrative board of the YSU met in Belgrade (only the representatives of two sub-unions were absent). In the above-mentioned "communiqué", the administrative board rejected rumours of mergers among gymnastics organisations. It stressed that it was focusing on the issue of a new physical education act during its "permanent sessions".²⁷ According to the *Jutro* newspaper, the latter was to "regulate uniform physical education in the state and provide for a unified gymnastic organisation".²⁸ The 2nd Yugoslav All-Sokol Festival in Belgrade in 1930 was also a major topic of discussion among the YSU's administrative board. At a ceremonial meeting on 1 December, the national and Sokol holiday, the YSU's elder Gangl announced that the Yugoslav Sokol movement was entering a "festival year", which meant an intensification of preparations for the event.²⁹ The Sokol festivals served as a criterion of the organisation's internal value and had both a ma-

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ „Sokolski pozdrav Jugoslaviji“, *Sokolski glasnik*, 15 October 1929, 1.

²⁶ „Sednica načelnštva i odbora JSS u Zagrebu 2. novembra 1929“, *Sokolski glasnik*, 15 December 1929, 5–6.

²⁷ „Velika sokolska seja v Beogradu“, *Jutro*, 27 November 1929, 2; „Predmet sokolskih razprav v Beogradu“, *Jutro*, 28 November 1929, 2.

²⁸ „Pred ustanovitvijo nove vsedržavne sokolske organizacije“, *Jutro*, 1 December 1929, 1.

²⁹ „Ulazak u sletsku godinu“, *Sokolski glasnik*, 15 December 1929, 1.

nifestational and propaganda character, while the Belgrade festival was intended to consolidate and expand the YSU's movement in the capital city.

The Act of the Knightly Union of Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

Originally, the act on the new national Sokol organisation was supposed to be published on 1 December, a national holiday and YSU holiday. However, the matter was postponed for a few days because “the act is being further refined in certain points”.³⁰ The government discussed it on 4 December 1929, but not in its full composition, as the Minister of Transport and leading Slovenian Catholic politician, Anton Korošec, a patron of the Orel movement, was absent due to an official visit to the German government in Berlin.³¹ At the government session, the President of the Government, Petar Živković, reported on the Act and stressed that the precondition for the new organisation was the abolishment of “tribal Sokol organisations and the establishment of a Yugoslav Sokol organisation”, with the active support of the state, while the existing gymnastics organisations should decide whether they would join the new Sokol organisation.³² Živković also read a letter from King Alexander, who welcomed the establishment of the new Sokol organisation “to unite all the healthy forces of the nation in a unified knightly organisation, the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (SKY), with the aim of physical, moral, and national education”, was pleased to accept the proposal that the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was to be headed by the current Crown Prince, and authorised the government to introduce a provision in the Act to this effect.³³

The Act, confirmed on 5 December 1929, was submitted by the Minister of Education Božidar Maksimović and the Minister of the Army and Navy Stevan S. Hadžić as the representatives of the state ministries and segments where, according to the “survey”, the YSU should and wished to participate actively. Article 12 on the liquidation of the existing gymnastic organisations was essential for the establishment of the new organisation, as it dictated that the existing “societies for physical and moral education: the Yugoslav Sokol, the Croatian Sokol, the Orel and the Serbian Sokol, insofar as they have not unified or joined the SKY within three weeks from the date of entry into force of this Act ... shall be abolished”. The Act introduced “state control” into the previously democratic life of gymnastics organisations. This meant that the Union's administration was appointed and dismissed by the Minister of Education and the Minister of the Army and Navy in agreement with the Prime Minister (after the establishment of the Ministry of Physical Education of the People at the end of 1931, the SKY fell under the latter's jurisdiction), while the Union approved the sub-union leaderships, and the society leaderships were approved by the sub-unions. On the other hand, the Act introduced the “support ensured by the Banates and the state” (Article 8) – or the budgetary funding of the

³⁰ „Pred ustanovitvijo nove vsedržavne sokolske organizacije“, *Jutro*, 1 December 1929, 1.

³¹ „Pred ustanovitvijo Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Slovenec*, 5 December 1929, 1; Bojan Godeša, Ervin Dolenc, *Izgubljeni spomin na Antona Korošca* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1999), 71.

³² N. Žutić, *Sokoli*, 44.

³³ N. Žutić, *Sokoli*, 45; „Pred ustanovitvijo SKJ“, *Slovenec*, 5 December 1929, 1; „Sokol Kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Jutro*, 5 December 1929, 1.

Union (from the budget of the relevant ministry) and the sub-unions (from the budget of the Banates) – among the “funds for the maintenance of the Sokol organisations”, in addition to private funding. The Act dictated or allowed that “students of all primary, lower secondary, secondary, teachers’, and vocational schools may become members” of the new organisation (Article 9). Thereby, the Sokol movement essentially became responsible for physical education and the “Sokolisation” or “Yugoslavisation” of the school population, since student participation in sports societies was banned or restricted. The Minister of the Army and Navy was instructed to “provide for, by special decree, the privileges regarding the compulsory service for the members of the SKY” (Article 10), while the Ministers of the Army and Education were instructed to draw up the statutes of the SKY in agreement with the Prime Minister (Article 11).³⁴

On the day of the Act’s confirmation, the Jutro newspaper summarised an article, published in the Vreme newspaper from Belgrade, “on the motives and goals of the state reorganisation of physical education”. The commentary was primarily based on the Sokol movement’s organisational fragmentation and the stabilisation of this situation. It pointed out that the new organisation would continue to be based on the Sokol idea of developing and strengthening physical education and the single national consciousness, as well as on educating youth in the spirit of the united Yugoslav state. The aim was to expand the organisation to include all classes of citizens, but especially the lower strata – the workers and peasants, who represented “the most capable national elements”. The military importance of physical activity was also stressed, as “the members of the Sokol movement ... have always been the healthiest material for the military”, which is why “compulsory Sokol membership ... will facilitate military education to benefit national defence” and could also shorten military service. The Jutro newspaper concluded that the legal establishment of a national Sokol organisation is a tribute and recognition to the current membership of the YSU and that “it is becoming a unified national organisation for the education of will, body, spirit, and consciousness”.³⁵

The next day, the Catholic Slovenec newspaper commented on the Act and restrainedly pointed out that “the government has responded to the purpose of the state and to the prevailing atmosphere in the gymnastic ranks”, while the aspiration “to unite the gymnastic societies under one leadership” was not feasible “due to the lack of strong authority”.³⁶ On the contrary, the Jutro newspaper pointed out that the attempts to unite all the gymnastic organisations into a single one “have been prevented mainly by the party-political tendencies that have emerged in some of the organisations”.³⁷ Both newspapers emphasised, however, that the state had taken on this task, thus keeping up with the situation abroad,³⁸ where similar organisati-

³⁴ „Sokol Kraljevine Jugoslavije ustanovljen“, *Jutro*, 6 December 1929, 1; „Zakon o ustanovitvi Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Slovenec*, 6 December 1929, 1; The Act was later reprinted in *Zbornik Saveza SKJ*, 1939, 9–12 (the publication contained acts, decrees, rules, rules of procedure and instructions on the structure and operation of the SKY).

³⁵ „Nova doba v zgodovini Sokolstva“, *Jutro*, 5 December 1929, 2.

³⁶ „Zakon o ustanovitvi Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Slovenec*, 6 December 1929, 1.

³⁷ „Sokol Kraljevine Jugoslavije ustanovljen“, *Jutro*, 6 December 1929, 1.

³⁸ One such model could be found in the immediate neighbourhood, in the fascist Italy and the local youth organisations Opera Nazionale Balilla, Gruppi Universitari Fascisti, and Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro.

ons were under the control of the national leadership. This Act would open the way for all those “willing” to join the new organisation, which would be based in Belgrade and headed by Crown Prince Peter.³⁹

Reactions among gymnasts at home and in Czechoslovakia

Among the gymnasts, the Act was immediately welcomed by the YSU's elder Gangl, who recalled the March “memorandum of the YSU” on the regulation of physical education in the state and pointed out that the Yugoslav Sokol movement was also “ready to contribute, to the best of its ability, to the full achievement of the great and noble goal of physical and moral education of our entire nation, as set out by the Prime Minister General Petar Živković with the conception of the SKY”.⁴⁰

This was followed by two letters from the YSU to the Prime Minister and the King, in which Gangl first welcomed His Majesty's decision to name the Crown Prince as the SKY's elder, as he “sees it as a guarantee of success”; while secondly, he declared, on behalf of the YSU, that the Yugoslav Sokol movement was “ready and willing to render its services for the implementation of the Act on the SKY”. Therefore, he convened the YSU assembly on 15 December in Belgrade and concluded that the YSU “will continue to provide assistance to the state and support the state and national unity, as it has done so far”.⁴¹ The King thanked the YSU for its greetings and was pleased to receive expressions of loyalty and fealty to himself and the Royal household.⁴² The *Jutro* newspaper also reported on a statement by the well-known Zagreb Sokol worker Ivan Ribar, who also welcomed the establishment of the SKY and stressed that this organisation would proudly carry “the banner of the state and national Yugoslav idea, Slavic solidarity, and community. The Yugoslav and Slavic spirit of the Sokol movement will continue to permeate the SKY. The new Sokol will maintain the Slavic Sokol union with the Czech and Polish Sokol movements”.⁴³ However, regardless of the statements of YSU's leadership and influential members, there must also have been a certain degree of unease about what was going to happen among its members, as in some places they even started “hiding equipment, banners, archives and other things”.⁴⁴

After the Act's adoption, the representatives of the gymnastics organisations were invited to a meeting with the Minister of Education to discuss the future of the new gymnastics organisation and the conditions for participating in it. The Catholic Slovenec newspaper briefly commented on the meeting, stating that the representatives of the Croatian Sokol and the Yugoslav Orel had not expressed any positive or negative opinions, as this was a matter for the leadership to decide after the representatives had returned home and been consulted.⁴⁵ The *Jutro* newspaper reported

³⁹ „Sokol Kraljevine Jugoslavije ustanovljen“, *Jutro*, 6 December 1929, 1; „Zakon o ustanovitvi Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Slovenec*, 6 December 1929, 1.

⁴⁰ „Jugoslovensko Sokolstvo je enodušno v službi za kralja in narod“, *Jutro*, 6 December 1929, 1.

⁴¹ „Za Sokola Kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Jutro*, 7 December 1929, 1.

⁴² „Zakon o osnivanju Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Sokolski glasnik*, 15 December 1929, 4.

⁴³ „Za Sokola Kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Jutro*, 7 December 1929, 1.

⁴⁴ Drago Stepišnik, *Telovadba na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana: DZS, 1974), 171.

⁴⁵ „Zastopniki telovadnih organizacij v Beogradu“, *Slovenec*, 8 December 1929, 1.

more comprehensively and published summaries of the interviews given by some representatives to the Belgrade newspapers. The representative of the Orel movement, Stanislav Žitko, explained that while his organisation's ideology was based on Christian principles, this did not imply that it was a religious organisation "influenced by the party or the Church". While the Orel movement supported the intention to establish a new organisation, they were mainly bothered by the name, "which has never been theirs". Žitko pragmatically conditioned a potential joining on a guarantee of equal respect for the Sokol and Orel ideologies, while the entire organisation would take the final decision. Gjuro Kuničić, a member of the Croatian Sokol, said that the news about the new organisation had come to them unexpectedly, and they had not yet had time to gauge the membership's mood. They wanted as much information as possible so that the membership would be well informed, as the Croatian Sokol leadership would react to "the Act according to the decision of the Sokol organisations as democratic institutions". Kuničić added that he could only speak in a personal capacity for the time being and explained that "the Croatian Sokol is a national organisation", which "adopted, in Osijek, a resolution on the creation of a Yugoslav union, which would include the Croatian Sokol Union, the Serbian Sokol, and the Slovenian Orel Union, based on equality, justice, and freedom". Another representative, Milan Praunsperger, added that "a suitable modus must be found" for joining the new organisation.⁴⁶ On the contrary, the YSU's elder Gangl pointed out that the state had accepted their proposal, "presented in March, and showed all its concern for the moral and physical education of our people, and the Yugoslav Sokol will participate to the best of its ability in this great goal of promoting the health of our people, in the broadest sense of the word". He added that the final decision on joining would be reached democratically at an assembly in mid-December.⁴⁷

The reactions among the closest Slavic Sokol brethren and the Little Entente allies in Czechoslovakia were initially critical. The *Jutro* newspaper dismissed them as resulting from insufficient information, while it was surprising "that they had been published before the Act itself was even known abroad". The Czechoslovak Sokol Union therefore asked the Yugoslav Ambassador in Prague for more comprehensive information to ascertain "that there is nothing fascist in the new Yugoslav Sokol organisation, nor anything unacceptable for the Sokol movement according to its democratic and freethinking principles".⁴⁸ The Ambassador sent a letter to the Secretary of the Slavic Sokol Union and the vice-elder of the Czechoslovak Sokol Union, Vincenc Stepanek, explaining the new national organisation and expressing his conviction "that both the Czechoslovak and the Slavic Sokol Union will be able to assess the intentions of the new Sokol organisation in Yugoslavia". He also pointed out that it was necessary "that the details of the gymnastics organisations in each Slavic nation and each Slavic state are adapted to the local circumstances". After the initial explanations, the Czechoslovak Sokol movement assured the "Yugoslav brothers" of its cooperation,⁴⁹ followed by the "Czech approval of

⁴⁶ „Vodstva telovadnih organizacij v Beogradu“, *Jutro*, 8 December 1929, 2.

⁴⁷ „Voditelji dosedanjih telovadnih zvez o novem Sokolu“, (*Jutrov*) *Ponedeljek*, 9 December 1929, 1.

⁴⁸ „Češka javnost in naš novi Sokol“, *Jutro*, 8 December 1929, 2.

⁴⁹ „Češkoslovaško Sokolstvo ob boku Sokolu Kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Jutro*, 11 December 1929, 1.

... the new Sokol organisation” that replaced the previous scepticism. On 13 December, the Jutro newspaper pointed out that “the entire Czech public is following the events after the founding of the SKY with considerable interest”. It highlighted an article by the influential older politician and first Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Karel Kramář, in the Národní listy newspaper on the importance of the new Sokol, as well as the endorsement expressed by the politician Václav Klobáček in the České slovo newspaper. Similar points were reported in the Lidové noviny newspaper and the social-democratic press. The Members of the Parliament were also interested in the developments, as the Prague correspondent of the Jutro newspaper stated that, at the Parliament’s opening session of 12 December 1929, “many Members of the Parliament asked for information”. “Generally, it is possible to say”, concluded the Jutro newspaper, “that the Czechoslovak political circles, interested in the development of Yugoslavia, regard the King’s initiative and the implementation of the idea of a large unified organisation as an important means of consolidating Yugoslavia and welcome it wholeheartedly”.⁵⁰

Joining the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

As announced by the YSU’s elder Gangl, an extraordinary general assembly of the YSU was held in Belgrade on 15 and 16 December. All the sub-unions attended the extraordinary general assembly, except the one from Cetinje, which sent a telegram expressing its “solidarity” with the assembly’s decisions. The assembly began with the traditional greeting to King Alexander. Gangl then outlined the purpose of the session, stating that they were at a crossroads and had to make a decision. At the working meeting before the assembly, everyone declared themselves in favour of the continuation of the Sokol work, the improvement or advancement of the Sokol idea, and the welfare of the nation, all of which were interconnected. Therefore, the Sokol movement was ready to make sacrifices but could not “sacrifice the great and beautiful Sokol idea”. This meant they renounced the organisation but not its content. As required by the Act, the content was in line with the Sokol idea. Also, it represented a common point between the old private and the new state organisation. After the speech, Gangl read a telegram from the Czechoslovak Sokol movement, saluting and wishing them a favourable decision to ensure the success of the Sokol idea and the progress of the Yugoslav nation. The YSU thanked the Czechs for their wishes, stressing that in the future, reorganised in the new Sokol movement of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, they would remain faithful to the old traditions and continue to work according to the same Sokol principles.⁵¹

The resolutions of the Yugoslav Sokol Union and Zagreb Sub-union delegates were read out at the assembly. The first three points of the resolution of the YSU’s delegates referred to its past work and role, while the remaining points emphasised that the state interests expressed in the Act on the SKY required the YSU to renounce its independence. The YSU was convinced that the new organisation of the SKY would be governed in the spirit of the YSU. It was expected that the current propo-

⁵⁰ „Češke simpatije za našega novega Sokola“, *Jutro*, 13 December 1929, 1.

⁵¹ „Zakon o osnivanju Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Sokolski glasnik*, 15 December 1929, 4.

nents of the Sokol principles would also have the most prominent role in the new organisation, as it saw this as the only guarantee of successful future work for the good of the King, the homeland, and the victory of the Sokol Slavic idea. With this hope, the YSU concluded its activities and proclaimed that the entire organisation was joining the SKY and welcoming its brother and elder, His Majesty Crown Prince Peter. Until the final formation of the SKY, all the sub-unions and societies of the YSU were to continue their work without interruption and prepare for the grand Sokol celebration: the All-Sokol Festival next year in Belgrade. They also expressed their hope that the SKY would become a member of the Slavic Sokol organisation.⁵²

The Zagreb Sub-union's resolution focused on the decision of individuals and societies to join, i.e. on individual choices rather than any collective decision taken by the Union (the concern for the societies' property was also behind this). The delegates of the Zagreb Sub-union proposed that, in accordance with the Act on the organisation of the SKY of 5 December 1929, the YSU and all its sub-unions and societies were to be liquidated. By 25 December at the latest, each Sokol society was to organise an extraordinary general assembly, where each member had to be allowed to decide whether to join the SKY. Moreover, a decision should be adopted on the society's property, thus also expressing the will of the Sokol community.⁵³

Gangl put the two resolutions to the vote, and the delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of YSU's resolution (87 in favour, 11 against). A telegram addressed to Crown Prince Peter was also issued, stating that the YSU had decided to join the SKY, welcoming the Crown Prince as their elder and brother, and expressing faith in the dedicated work of all Sokol members for the future of the nation.⁵⁴ During the final part of the assembly, two more "committees" were elected. The first one (composed of Djuro Paunković, Ivan Ribar, Olip and Branko Čipčić) was to cooperate with the competent authorities during the implementation of the Act on the transfer of the total assets and liabilities of the YSU, sub-unions, and societies to the SKY. The second committee (Gangl, Paunković, and Živković) was tasked with presenting the adopted resolution to the President of the Government and the King's Office ("the Court Marshal's Office") the following day.⁵⁵ In conclusion, Gangl made a short speech thanking the delegates for attending the extraordinary general assembly, while the delegates also thanked Gangl and Paunković for their work, after which the extraordinary general assembly was closed.⁵⁶ This also marked the end of the Yugoslav Sokol movement in the autonomous organisation of the YSU.

Similar to the YSU, the other gymnastics organisations referred to in the Act had to make a decision whether to join the SKY by mid-December 1929. The Serbian Sokol (the Dušan Silni Serbian Sokol organisation) decided to join the new Sokol organisation in the second half of December. At its session, the leadership adopted the decision to jo-

⁵² *Ibid*; „Vse jugoslovensko Sokolstvo vstopa v Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Jutro*, 17 December 1929, 2.

⁵³ „Zakon o osnivanju Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Sokolski glasnik*, 15 December 1929, 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*; „Vse jugoslovensko Sokolstvo vstopa v Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Jutro*, 17 December 1929, 2.

⁵⁵ „Zakon o osnivanju Sokola kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Sokolski glasnik*, 15 December 1929, 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

in, believing they “will be fairly represented in the membership and the administration”.⁵⁷ The Croatian Sokol Union leadership stated that the general assembly in mid-December would decide on the Union’s dissolution, while the decision to join the new Sokol organisation would be left to the individual societies.⁵⁸ Consequently, the Slovenian newspapers cited examples of societies joining the new organisation.⁵⁹ The Act on the SKY represented a heavy blow to the Catholic Orel organisation, which was the most widespread in Slovenia⁶⁰ but less so in Croatia (where a similar organisation, called Domagoj,⁶¹ was also active). The Orel organisation expressed its opposition to the new organisation in a special memorandum addressed to the King, stating that it “cannot join the new gymnastics organisation in such a form”. It was bothered by both the name and the Sokol ideology, based on Tyrš’s freethinking spirit. It also sought to preserve the organisation’s democratic character. As the Orel movement received no reply to the memorandum, its general assembly decided not to join the new gymnastics organisation.⁶² The decision was a difficult one for the Catholic camp. Anton Bonaventura Jeglič, the influential Bishop of Ljubljana, called upon the Orel movement in this dramatic moment, asking them to stand courageously and remain faithful to the Christian principles and the exemplary Christian life in all circumstances in which they find themselves, remain good friends with one another, follow their pastors, and broaden their Christian education by reading “good newspapers and books written in the proper spirit”.⁶³

With regard to the Catholic rejection of the new organisation, in the second half of December 1929, the *Jutro* newspaper published the reaction of the “clerical Pražský večerník newspaper” or “the Czechoslovak clerical party’s newspaper”. In an article titled “The determined struggle of the Yugoslav Episcopate against the disbanding of the Yugoslav Orel movement”, Pražský večerník pointed out that “the Yugoslav state Sokol organisation is an attack against Catholicism”. The article, which the *Jutro* newspaper’s correspondent described as “a harsh article on the position of the Yugoslav bishops towards the SKY”, supposedly represented a continuation of the Prague newspaper’s

⁵⁷ „Tudi Srpski Soko vstopil v enotnega Sokola“, *Jutro*, 21 December 1929, 1.

⁵⁸ „Seja starejšinstva Hrvatskega Sokola“, *Slovenec*, 10 December 1929, 1; „Priprave za likvidacijo Hrvatskega Sokola“, *Jutro*, 10 December 1929, 1. The Croatian Sokol Union had 212 societies and 27 halls, while the Yugoslav Sokol Union had 443 societies and 74 halls.

⁵⁹ „Pristop hrvatskega sokolskega društva“, *Jutro*, 20 December 1929, 1. The entry of the Croatian Sokol Union’s society from Bribir, “one of the oldest Croatian Sokol societies of the northern Adriatic”; *Jutro*, 8 January 1930, 2, states generally that “many Croatian Sokol societies ... have applied to join the SKY”. „Hrvatski Sokoli vstopajo v SKJ“, *Jutro*, 14 February 1930, 2. Reports on the entry of the Croatian Sokol Union’s society of Križevci and the Bjelovar Sub-union (a sub-union of the same name was also part of the Yugoslav Sokol Union); Splitska sokolska župa reports on the registration of members of the former Croatian Sokol Union’s society of Kaštel-Sućurac.

⁶⁰ According to the collective volume *Slovenci v desetletju 1918–1928*, ed. Josip Mal (Ljubljana: Leonova družba, 1928), 750–751, in 1928, the Slovenian Orel Union had 319 organisations (208 Orel societies with men membership and 111 Orlice clubs with female membership) with 11,755 members (7,022 male members and 4,733 female members); the Yugoslav Sokol Union had in Slovenia in 1928 123 societies with 13,402 members (9611 male members and 4203 female members) – the statistics of the two organisations do not include the junior membership.

⁶¹ F. Pernišek, *Zgodovina slovenskega Orla*, 234.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 241.

⁶³ Dragi Orli!, *Slovenec*, 10 December 1929, 1.

campaign against the Yugoslav act on physical education. It presented the founding of the SKY as “the beginning of a cultural struggle”. It expressed the idea that it was “a struggle against Catholicism” and “it is therefore not only a simple matter of the Yugoslav national unification, but rather, as the Yugoslav Episcopate points out, currently a question of survival of the Orel movement and, in the future, perhaps of the dismantling of social life and the struggle against the Catholic Church”. The Pražský večerník newspaper predicted a way out of the situation: “Catholic youth organisations will therefore become Church organisations, like in Italy. Thus, the effort to destroy the Orel movement is futile”. The Jutro newspaper’s correspondent pointed out that this was not the position of the Czechoslovak People’s Party, as “the attacks are inspired from outside”, while the Jutro newspaper briefly denied the idea of a cultural struggle as well as the idea of the SKY possibly endangering the interests of the Yugoslav Churches, and described the Prague clerical writing as “unnecessary public agitation”.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, preparatory work was underway to establish SKY. In early January 1930, the government appointed the SKY administration, and a statute was being drafted. While the elder of SKY – Crown Prince Peter – was appointed by law, the government pragmatically selected deputy elders: two from the YSU (Slovene Engelbert Gangl and Serb Djuro Paunković) and two from the Croatian Sokol (Lacko Križ and Pavao Mergenthaler). Between 25 and 27 January, a constitutive session was held in Belgrade, during which the statute and organisational structure were confirmed. Among other decisions, the session approved the All-Sokol Festival in Belgrade in 1930 and SKY’s membership in the Slavic Sokol Union and the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG), thereby continuing the legacy of the YSU.⁶⁵ Following its establishment, SKY issued a proclamation to its members and the nation. With a strong emphasis on ethical and moral education, it declared that the “old Sokol spirit” must prevail in the new organisation. This spirit taught that morality is the sole foundation upon which social order, culture, and civilisation rest – a foundation deemed essential for the survival of any nation, including the Yugoslav one. In addition to Yugoslavism, the proclamation highlighted Slavic brotherhood, asserting that the Sokol idea is uniquely suited to foster rapprochement and fraternal cooperation among Slavic nations. It embodies the spirit of Slavic Sokol thought, “a spirit that eliminates all ancient disputes and their causes, while spreading mutual love, patience, and brotherhood...”⁶⁶

With its constitutive session, the Sokol movement entered the turbulent 1930s, a period marked by state protection and alignment with the National Party following the restoration of constitutional government, while in the western parts of the state the strengthening of anti-Sokol politics became increasingly evident after the 1935 elections. These were years of aspirations and demands for the democratisation of the Sokol movement and its internal purification, as well as of ideological searching during the tense period that followed the economic crisis and the political

⁶⁴ „Češki glasovi o našem Sokolu“, *Jutro*, 24 December 1929, 1.

⁶⁵ T. Pavlin, „In bratje, mi smo hvala Bogu, opravili delo v dobrobit naroda, domovine in srečo prevzišene dinastije“: konstituiranje Sokola Kraljevine Jugoslavije“, *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, no. 1, (2010), 76, 81–83.

⁶⁶ „Sokol članstvu in narodu“, *Jutro*, 18 February 1930, 1; „Sokoli, budite i odsad celom našem narodu primer jedinstva!“, *Sokolski glasnik*, 18 February 1930, 1.

changes taking place around the world. These were also years marked by the expansion of German nationalism, the old enemy of the Sokol movement, which reached its borders with the Anschluss, and a period in which Sokol ideals, morality, and organisation were repeatedly put to the test.⁶⁷ It ended with the Nazi-fascist attack against Yugoslavia on 6 April, which put the “old Sokol spirit” to the test.

Conclusion

As we have seen throughout the discussion, the 6 January Dictatorship did not bypass the field of physical education, particularly the ideologically and doctrinally distinct gymnastic organisations which, unlike sports organisations, were not united under a single national gymnastics union. As emphasised in the introduction, in the state-territorial sense, the YSU, headquartered in Ljubljana, was predominant and also internationally integrated into the FIG and the Olympic movement. In national-ideological terms, it embodied integral Yugoslavism, in contrast to the Croatian Sokol movement or the Catholic Orli movement. With the dictatorship and the revision of civil associations, the fate of gymnastic organisations also came to the government’s agenda. By late January 1929, the government had already taken the position that Orel and the Croatian Sokol were “tribal” and essentially political organisations that ought to be dissolved, although a moratorium was introduced. The solution would be to concentrate all gymnastic organisations into a single federation, but this proved impossible due to ideological and national differences. So, the other option was state intervention through the drafting and adoption of the law establishing the SKY, which was passed on 5 December 1929. The plan was developed within a relatively narrow circle and presented to the public at the end of November 1929, causing unease in gymnastic circles and, even more so, in Catholic circles, since the new organisation was based on Sokol ideology and the Sokol gymnastics profession. The law subtly required the civil gymnastic society to declare whether it would join the new organisation. The only one to do so was the YSU. At the same time, it initially provoked scepticism among the Czechoslovak “brotherly” Sokol movement. It introduced state subsidies but also state control over the union’s leadership and, indirectly, influence over the leadership of local units and societies. In this way, it represented a unique form of state intervention in the field of physical education, as it did not directly ban organisations but instead prescribed either their continued operation within the new framework or their dissolution. In terms of gymnastic professional content, the SKY was a continuation of the Sokolism characteristic of both the YSU and Croatian Sokol, so the Croatian Sokols also joined. Paradoxically, this development brought the Sokol gymnastic story back to its “Yugoslav” beginning: one state, one nation, one Sokol – although now burdened by the curtailment of gymnastic and Sokol democracy and the organisation’s headquarters transferred to Belgrade, while in the case of the Catholic Orli, by state-imposed forced dissolution, as they declined to join the new state Sokol.

⁶⁷ On the functioning of Sokol movement in the 1930s see more N. Žutić, *Sokoli: Ideologija u fizičkoj kulturi Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1929–1941* and T. Pavlin, *Razvoj sokolstva v Sloveniji med leti 1929–1941* (doctoral thesis, Univerza v Ljubljani, Filozofska fakulteta, Oddelek za zgodovino, 2000).

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CONTINUITY OR RENEWAL IN YUGOSLAV GYMNASTICS: THE 6 JANUARY DICTATORSHIP 1929 AND GYMNASTIC ORGANISATIONS

Tomaž Pavlin, PhD*

Summary

The tense domestic political situation in the first Yugoslav state following the shooting in parliament in mid-1928 was addressed by King Alexander through the introduction of the so-called 6 January Dictatorship in 1929. Under the Law on the Protection of the State, political parties with a “tribal” or religious character were banned and dissolved. Civil society associations were also affected, including gymnastics organisations, but not sports ones. Gymnastic organisations before the First World War were organised on a national and Slavic basis (Sokols) or on a national and religious basis (the Catholic Orl). After the establishment of the first Yugoslav state, they renewed their activities and, in accordance with the new political and state framework, organised themselves at the state level. In the first decade of the state, the main gymnastic representatives were the Yugoslav Sokol (Falcon) Union, the Croatian Sokol Union, and the Catholic Yugoslav Orel (Eagle) Union. Their emphasis was on educating citizens through physical education, which was politically relevant and maintained indirect links to political camps; this did not apply to sports organisations. With the 6 January dictatorship, the King and the government intervened in gymnastics and in the work of the government. They drafted a plan for a new, unified, all-state association that would be the bearer and educator of Yugoslavism. That idea was already central to the YSU. Consequently, the main point of the gymnastics revival and the preparation of the law on the state gymnastics organisation was Sokolism under the YSU. The law on the new Sokol organisation was adopted in early December 1929, and the gymnastics organisations then had to decide on their further (Sokol) path, which the Catholic Orel rejected. In the article, based on sources from the main Slovenian daily newspapers and the YSU bulletin “Sokolski glasnik”, we shed light on the formation of the new all-state organisation, present the law and responses to it at home and abroad, primarily among the Czechoslovak Sokols. As shown, there was a strong tendency to design the new organisation on the foundations of the YSU.

KEYWORDS: gymnastics, Sokol, physical education, the 6 January Dictatorship, the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

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