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# The Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War: What the Biography of the Philosopher I.A. Ilyin Hides

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**ABSTRACT:** The article contains fragments of Russian philosopher I. A. Ilyin's biography and separate articles from his other works. It shows that I. A. Ilyin collaborated with fascist Germany, worked against the USSR, and supported the regimes of Mussolini and Hitler. Nowadays, this information about Ilyin is not published in Russia for some unclear reasons.

**Keywords:** philosophy; philosophy of law; I.A. Ilyin; fascism; nazism.

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# Ко Дню Победы в Великой Отечественной войне, или Что скрывает биография философа И.А. Ильина

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**Аннотация.** В статье приводятся фрагменты биографии русского философа И.А. Ильина и отдельные статьи из его творчества. Показывается, что И.А. Ильин сотрудничал с фашистской Германией, вел работу против СССР, поддерживал режимы Муссолини и Гитлера. Отмечается, что по непонятным причинам в настоящее время указанные сведения об Ильине не афишируются и не публикуются в России.

**Ключевые слова:** философия; философия права; И.А. Ильин; фашизм; нацизм.

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The personality of I. A. Ilyin is well known by modern scientists as a religious philosopher from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a lawyer, and the author of books, including *The general law and the state doctrine* and *"On the essence of legal consciousness"*.

The main milestones of Ilyin's biography are also known. He was an ardent opponent of the Soviet government. In 1922, together with 160 other well-known publicists of that time, he was expelled from Russia on the so-called "Philosophical Steamer". He lived in Germany and then moved to Switzerland, where he died in 1954. Ilyin's work is now being carefully studied and positively evaluated. However, here is the problem: as so often happens in Russia, the studies are one-sided and therefore biased.

For some reason, modern experts do not write and perhaps do not know that Ilyin was a supporter of Hitler's coming to power. Ilyin's articles and letters in support of the Nazi party, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP, for the German abbreviation), are not published. In 2020, a remark about Ilyin's initial support for fascism and approval of the attack on the Soviet Union was removed from Wikipedia. However, in 2019, this information was present on Wikipedia.

In addition, Ilyin was one of the ideologists of the Russian All-Military Union (RAMU). Employees of the RAMU conducted underground work in the USSR. The purpose of this work was to prepare an armed uprising and overthrow the Soviet government. From the point of view of Soviet legislation (and the legislation of some other countries), the RAMU was an international terrorist organization. During the war between the USSR and Finland in 1939–1940, members of the RAMU were on the side of Finland, killing Soviet soldiers. During the Great Patriotic War, members and leaders of the RAMU fought for the fascists against the USSR or at least supported fascist Germany.

To provide further confirmation, it is enough to cite historical fact: in 1945, the USSR demanded that Finland detain and transfer 22 employees of the RAMU who were allegedly guilty of committing war crimes and carrying out espionage and terrorist activities against the Soviet Union on the instructions of Germany (the so-called Leino list). Finland unconditionally fulfilled the USSR's requirements and thereby confirmed that the 22 employees carried out the criminal activities. It is well known that the military crimes on the side of the fascists were connected with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, primarily Russia.

The work against the RAMU as a terrorist organization was a priority for the Soviet state security agencies both in the pre-war period and during the Great Patriotic War. The Soviet government, its leaders, its communist approach, and all that it represents may be perceived in different ways; however, it is difficult for people to support the fascists who fought against their homeland and killed their compatriots.

Ilyin, an Orthodox religious philosopher, supported the ROVS until his death in 1954. He acted as its

ideologist and published his works in the journals of this organization.

In this paper, we discuss the work of Ilyin. Specifically, we provide several detailed quotes from his article, characteristically titled "National Socialism. The New Spirit", which was published in 1933 shortly after Hitler came to power<sup>1</sup>. According to Ilyin,

Europe does not understand the National [S]ocialist movement. Europe is afraid of it. And because of fear the misunderstanding is growing. And the more Europe does not understand, the more it believes all the negative rumors, all the stories of "eyewitnesses," all the frightening predictors. Left-wing publicists of almost all European nations scare each other with [N]ational [S]ocialism, creating a real roll call of hatred and anger. Unfortunately, the Russian foreign press is gradually becoming involved in this roll call; European passions are beginning to be transmitted to emigration and to confuse the emigrants. It becomes morally impossible for us, who are in the very cauldron of events, seeing everything with our own eyes, subject to all new orders and laws, but maintaining spiritual sobriety, to remain silent. It is necessary to speak; and to tell the truth. But the way to this truth still needs to be cleared ... First of all, I categorically refuse to assess the events of the last three months in Germany from the point of view of German Jews who have been curtailed in their public legal capacity, who have suffered financially or even left the country in this regard. I understand their state of mind; but I cannot turn it into a criterion of good and evil, especially when evaluating and studying such phenomena of world significance as German National Socialism. And it would be strange if the German Jews expected this from us<sup>2</sup>.

His commentary on the bloody events and riots that accompanied the fascists' coming to power is considerably interesting and indicative:

I refuse to judge the movement of German National Socialism by those excesses of struggle, individual clashes or temporary exaggerations that are put forward and emphasized by its enemies. What is happening in Germany is a huge political and social upheaval; the leaders constantly characterize it with the word "revolution." This is a movement of national passion and political tension, which has been concentrated for 12 years, and for years, yes, for years, it has been shedding the blood of its adherents in battles with the communists. This is a reaction to the years of post-war decline and despondency: a reaction of grief and anger. When and where did such a struggle go without excesses? But for us, who have seen the Russian Soviet revolution, these very excesses look just like angry gestures or individual accidental incorrectness<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ilyin I. A. National Socialism. The New Spirit // Electronic Library of the Odintsovo Deanery. URL: [http://www.odinblago.ru/filosofiya/ilin/ilin\\_i\\_nacional\\_sociali/](http://www.odinblago.ru/filosofiya/ilin/ilin_i_nacional_sociali/) (accessed on: 15.10.2020).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

In other words, it is silencing the Nazis' actions and their careful support. Moreover, Ilyin writes: "What did Hitler do? He stopped the process of Bolshevization in Germany and thereby rendered the greatest service to the whole of Europe. This process in Europe is far from over; the worm will continue to gnaw Europe from the inside. But the situation won't be the same. Not only because many dens of communism in Germany have been destroyed; not only because the wave of detonation is already going through Europe; but mainly because the liberal-democratic hypnosis of non-resistance has been thrown off. While Mussolini is leading Italy, and Hitler is leading Germany, European culture is given a reprieve. Has Europe understood this? It seems to me that it has not ... Will she understand it very soon? I'm afraid it won't... Hitler took this postponement primarily for Germany. He and his friends will do everything to use it for the national, spiritual, and social renewal of the country. But by taking this reprieve, he also gave it to Europe. And the European peoples must understand that Bolshevism is a real and fierce danger; that democracy is a creative dead end; that Marxist socialism is a doomed chimera; that a new war is beyond Europe's strength, neither spiritually nor materially, and that only a national upsurge can save the cause in every country, which will take up the "social" solution of the social question dictatorially and creatively. Until now, European public opinion has only been repeating that extreme racists and anti-Semites have come to power in Germany; that they do not respect rights; that they do not recognize freedom; that they want to introduce some kind of new socialism; that all this is "dangerous" and that, as Georg Bernhard (former editor of the *Fossische Zeitung*) recently put it, this chapter in German history "hopefully will be short." It is unlikely that we will be able to explain to European public the opinion that all these judgments are either superficial or short-sighted and biased"<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, Ilyin's arguments about fascism and racism in the context of the processes that began in Germany in 1933 are interesting.

The leading layer is being updated consistently and radically. By no means the whole thing; however, on a large scale. On the basis of a new mindset; and as a result of this, often in the direction of the personnel rejuvenation. Everything involved in Marxism, social-democracy and communism is being removed; all internationalists and Bolshevik elements are being removed; a lot of Jews are being removed, sometimes (as, for example, in the professorship) the overwhelming majority of them, but by no means all of them. Those who are clearly unacceptable to the "new spirit" are removed. This "new spirit" has both negative and positive definitions. He is irreconcilable with regard to Marxism, internationalism and defeatist dishonor, class harassment and reactionary class privilege, public venality, bribery[,] and embezzlement. There is no such

irreconcilability with regard to the Jews: not only because private entrepreneurship and trade remain open to the Jews but also because persons of Jewish blood (take into account two grandfathers and two grandmothers, of whom none should be a Jew) who were lawfully in public service on August 1, 1914; or who have participated in military operations since then; who lost their father or son in battle or as a result of injury; or who are in the service of religious and church organizations are not subject to restriction in the rights of public service (decree of May 8, this year). Psychologically, it is clear that such limited restrictions are perceived by Jews very painfully: they are offended by the very introduction of a presumption not in their favor, "you are unacceptable until you have shown the opposite"; and also "it is not your faith that is important, but your blood." However, the mere existence of this presumption makes it necessary to recognize that a German Jew who has proved his loyalty and devotion to the German homeland in practice is not subject to legal restrictions (neither in education nor in the service). The "new spirit" of national Socialism has, of course, positive definitions: patriotism, faith in the German people identity and the German genius power, a sense of honor, readiness for sacrificial service (the fascist "sacrificio"), discipline, social justice[,] and extra-class, fraternal-national unity. This spirit is, as it were, the substance of the whole movement; it burns in the heart of every sincere National Socialist, strains his muscles, sounds in his words, and sparkles in his eyes. It is enough to see these believers, real believers; it is enough to see this discipline to understand the significance of what is happening and ask yourself: "Is there a people in the world who would not want to create a movement of such an uplift and such a spirit?" In other words, this spirit unites German National Socialism with Italian fascism"<sup>5</sup>.

Providing comments on these words by Ilyin is unnecessary. Human rights, humanity, and the freedom of worldviews were apparently alien to this philosopher. To Ilyin, Bolshevism and communism, after all, just comprised a different worldview and a different ideology. However, unlike communists and Bolsheviks, Ilyin sees no trouble in national fascism. On the contrary, Ilyin openly tries to whitewash fascism [1, p. 124–135].

The phrase about Italian fascism is not accidental. In 1925, Ilyin was sent to Italy by the emigrant newspaper *Vozrozhdenie* to collect materials about the situation in the country, about its new leader Mussolini, and about Italian fascism. Ilyin was positively received by the local fascists and allowed to visit their libraries. Upon his return, within a short time, he prepared a series of articles for the newspaper *Vozrozhdenie* under the general title "Letters about Fascism." The articles were devoted to discussing the essence of fascism, the internal and foreign policy of the fascist authorities, the struggle between the Italian fascists and the Freemasons, the biography of Mussolini, his personality,

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

etc. [2]. Moreover, all the publications were in support of the Italian fascists. The articles are readily available in Germany; however, these articles are not published in Russia.

Although the reason is unclear, Ilyin's biography and views on Russia have now been carefully retouched. From Wikipedia, as already noted, the phrase where he initially supported fascism and the rise to Hitler's power has been removed. The annotation to the book published at the Law Faculty of the Moscow State University states that the biographical essay about Ilyin "not only describes the amazing fate of this wonderful man but also introduces the reader to the world of his creativity, to the ideas of the great Russian thinker, the national Russian genius of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" [3, p. 4]. Alternatively, as V.V. Sorokin wrote, "I.A. Ilyin came closest to the spiritual and moral problems of jurisprudence in the 20th century in his works" [4, p. 4]. His biography was also changed; for example the well-known legal historian V.A. Tomsinov writes that Ilyin was allegedly persecuted by the Gestapo and was forced to move from Germany to Switzerland [2, pp. 626–629]. The younger generation may believe this. However, we have directly communicated with veterans of the Great Patriotic War and with people who saw the fascist regime firsthand, who would provide a different view. Moreover, it would be difficult to prove that Ilyin would have been able to work and live in Germany from 1933 to 1938 if he had not supported Hitler. One cannot honestly conclude that the Gestapo would have allowed Ilyin to leave Germany for Switzerland if he had not been profitable for them. If he had not supported Hitler, the Gestapo would have destroyed him as a speck of dust and would have tortured him in a concentration camp, without giving him the opportunity to pack up and leave. It should be recalled that Ilyin acted as an ideologist of the RAMU and fought against the Soviet Union, which was beneficial to Hitler's regime. Moreover, it should be noted that Ilyin did not fight against Hitler's regime. Historians should have recorded these facts but, for some reason, remain rather restrained.

The aforementioned V.A. Tomsinov quoted Ilyin: "For 16 years, I was a guest of Germany, and I never allowed myself to speak publicly about its internal affairs, or interfere in politics, or get involved in the struggle inside the country" [2, p.630]. In other words, he constantly wrote harshly and fought against the USSR, but he never criticized Germany, Hitler, and fascism. Moreover, he called on the RAMU to conduct subversive activities against the USSR, which was beneficial to the Gestapo and the Nazis. Therefore, he managed to survive; he was not arrested and shot. Although we respect V.A. Tomsinov and his works, it seems that Ilyin managed to outwit him on a number of positions. Let us quote V.A. Tomsinov in full:

In February 1938, Ilyin was again summoned to the Gestapo. After Ilyin again refused the Gestapo's offers of cooperation with the German authorities, he was banned from any public speeches in both Russian and German, under threat of imprisonment in a concentration camp. Reporting

this to S.V. Rachmaninoff, Ilyin noticed "Unfortunately, I learned from a reliable source that all this persecution has the goal of forcing me to recognize the German 'racism' point of view, to use my name and my forces in the impending 'Ukraine conquest'. I am telling you this in strict confidence!" It is curious that the letter to Rachmaninoff, in which Ilyin wrote about the Germans' intention to conquer Ukraine, is dated August 14, 1938, that is, Germany's attack on the USSR had been discussed in Germany three years before it actually took place. In a letter to I.S. Shmelev dated October 13, 1938, Ilyin wrote that in April 1938 he was summoned to an interview with the deputy of A. Rosenberg, the Head of the NSRP external department. It follows from Ilyin's words that during this conversation they discussed the German occupation of Ukraine and the involvement of a Russian scientist in the work on the ideological justification of this action. Ilyin replied that he would never agree to the Ukraine occupation and its separation from Russia [2, p. 628].

The Barbarossa plan, which resulted in an attack on the USSR, was signed by Hitler in December 1940. The plan was strictly secret; only the leaders of the country, the leadership of the German armed forces, and the heads of the German special services were aware of it. In 1938, there were no such plans. The German leaders in this period were rather concerned about armed conflicts with Great Britain and Europe. It is all the more doubtful that details such as the use of Ilyin in Ukraine, instead of other potentially occupied territories (Belarus or the western part of Russia), were discussed. It seems that the authenticity of such letters by Ilyin is considerably doubtful. In addition, the possibility that the letters were not written by Ilyin in actuality should not be excluded; alternatively, he could have written them much later to justify his own actions.

It can, however, be assumed that the top leadership of Germany and the Gestapo could already have known about Hitler's secret plans for a potential attack on the USSR in 1938 and discussed these plans in a small group. In this case, we must admit that Ilyin was substantially close to the fascist leaders and well known to them — that is, well known from the right side and, therefore, trusted by the fascists at that time with the most secret plans of Hitler.

In 1945, Ilyin wrote differently. He wrote that if he had foreseen the world war, the attack on Russia, and Germany's defeat in the war from the very beginning of Hitlerism, he would have acted differently [5, p. 281]. However, this also appears to be doubtful. In addition, we doubt the complete truth and authenticity of the published letters by Ilyin, the absence of their editing, and the completeness of their publication. However, if Ilyin truly had this thought, why did he not warn him about the war in time? Why did he not fight against the fascist invaders? Why did he not defend his Motherland for the sake of Russia and the Russian people given that, in his own words, he loved Russian people very much?

In the same letter from 1945, there is an interesting phrase about the National Socialists. Ilyin writes the

following: "They are the enemies of Russia, who despised the Russian people with the last contempt; they used communism as their propaganda card. Communism in Russia was only a pretext for them to justify their thirst for conquest before other peoples and before history" [5, p. 317]. In other words, if the war against communism and the USSR was not a pretext for the National Socialists but precisely the goal of overthrowing the Soviet government, it might have been justified by Ilyin. From here, we can return to the arguments from the press and on the Internet that Ilyin wanted a change of power in the USSR at any cost: even at the cost of war and the seizure of Russia by Hitler.

In 1948, Ilyin wrote the article "On fascism"<sup>6</sup>. Because this article is rarely published, we will provide detailed quotes from it, which, again, speak for themselves.

Fascism is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon and, historically speaking, far from being obsolete. Fascism emerged as a reaction to Bolshevism, as a concentration of state-protective forces to the right. During the onset of left-wing chaos and left-wing totalitarianism, it was a healthy, necessary and inevitable phenomenon... Speaking out against left-wing totalitarianism, fascism was further right since it was looking for fair socio-political reforms. These searches could be successful and unsuccessful: it is difficult to solve such problems and the first attempts could fail. But it was necessary to meet the wave of socialist psychosis with social and, consequently, anti-socialist measures. These measures have been brewing for a long time, and we should not have waited any longer. Finally, fascism was right, because it proceeded from a healthy national-patriotic feeling, without which no nation can either assert its existence or create its own culture. However, along with this, fascism committed a number of deep and serious mistakes that defined its political and historical physiognomy and connected its name with odious associations that are constantly being emphasized by anti-fascists. Therefore, for future social and political movements of this kind, it is necessary to choose a different name. And if someone calls his movement by its former name ("fascism" or "national socialism"), it will be interpreted as an intention to revive all the gaps and fatal mistakes of the past.

These gaps and errors were as follows:

1. Irreligion. Hostile attitude to Christianity, to religion, to confessions[,] and churches in general.
2. The creation of right-wing totalitarianism as a permanent and supposedly "ideal" system.
3. The establishment of a party monopoly and the corruption and demoralization that grows out of it.
4. Going to the extremes of nationalism and militant chauvinism (national "grandiosity mania").
5. Mixing social reforms with socialism and slipping through totalitarianism into the economy nationalization.

<sup>6</sup> Ilyin I.A. Our tasks: About fascism // Electronic Library of the Odintsovo Deanery. URL: [http://www.odinblago.ru/nashi\\_zadachi\\_1/37](http://www.odinblago.ru/nashi_zadachi_1/37) (accessed on: 15.10.2020).

6. Falling into idolatrous Caesarism with its demagoguery, servility and despotism.

These mistakes compromised fascism, restored entire confessions, parties, peoples and states against it, led it to an unbearable war and destroyed it. Its cultural and political mission failed, and the opposition spread with even greater force..."<sup>7</sup>

Note that the "patriot" Ilyin, who lived in Switzerland, does not condemn fascism. There is not a single word about the more than 20 million of his compatriots who died during the war with Germany. Not a single word is included regarding the millions of people who lost their relatives, who were left without shelter and food, and who were left with various health complications. Ilyin did not write about the siege of Leningrad and the hundreds of thousands of Leningrad defenders who died, about the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk, about concentration camps, about the extermination of Russian people and people of other nationalities, about the bombing of peaceful cities, about the destruction of entire villages and towns, etc. On the contrary, he simultaneously regretted that "the opposition spread with even greater force..."

He cynically wrote that Russians should be protected from slavery and that the Russian soul must not be crippled [6, p. 6]. In another characteristic quote, Ilyin stated that the struggle for the right is an element of normal legal consciousness. The expression, "struggle for the right" does not seem appropriate [3, pp. 363–374], especially if we remember that the struggle (as with any competition) is honest and dishonest, moral and immoral, fair and unfair ... [and] the law is considerably contradictory as merely remembering our comprehensive theory of law evinces [1, 7–10].

Following his article in 1933, one might have excused his actions based on a lack of understanding of certain issues. In 1948, however, Ilyin wrote, with cynicism, about the same thing. Moreover, at the end, he added the following: "Franco and Salazar have understood this and are trying to avoid these mistakes. They do not call their regime 'fascist'. Let's hope that the Russian patriots will analyze the mistakes of fascism and National Socialism profoundly and will not repeat them".<sup>8</sup> This is, again, hidden support for Nazism and fascism. This is the essence of Ilyin's ideology, his true thoughts, and desires at the final stage of his life.

There are many cases in history when real Russian patriots, even while in exile, opposed Nazism, fascism, and Hitlerism, joined the Soviet army, or supported the Soviet army. Such a case does not apply to Ilyin. Unfortunately, works by Ilyin were not published in Russia during the Soviet period. The works were not published primarily because everyone understood whose side he was on and who he sympathized with. When the pain of the war was still great and affected almost every family, it was difficult to support and publish

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

pro-fascist works or their authors. In addition, publication was difficult because all nationalities, including Hebrews (Ilyin called them Jews), existed amicably in the USSR.

May 9 is still celebrated as Victory Day to date; however we sometimes attempt to whitewash and create excuses for people who killed and maimed our compatriots as well as those who supported the fascists. Currently, for some reason, biographies are misrepresenting the facts. Individuals have the right to know that many Russian emigrants (including some philosophers, historians, and lawyers) supported Hitler and even fought against Russia. However, there is scarce information regarding the same, and the available information is being distorted and destroyed. Moreover, attempts are being made to present the frank service of Hitler's fascists not as a betrayal of Russia but as a struggle against totalitarian Bolshevism and communism. This is a lamentable trend of our time: it means that history does not teach us.

In conclusion, we once again draw attention to the fact that the work and biography of Ilyin began as one-sided and biased. Simultaneously, his life and work are considerably contradictory. He appears to be a monarchist but supported the February Revolution of 1917 and the overthrow of the monarchy. He considered himself a faithful Orthodox man; however, he approved of the brutal war against the Soviet government, which gainsays the Orthodox faith. Ilyin called himself the Russian patriot but supported fascism and was ready to exterminate Russian Communists and Bolsheviks, who comprised a significant part of the Russian population at the time. He spoke about Russia as an enslaved country and the people who were mortally tortured in Soviet times.

However, serfdom (in fact, the slave-owning system) was legally abolished in Russia only in 1861 and lasted until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The absolute majority of Soviet people were not nobles at all but serfs. Thus, contemplating the monarchy, it appears that Ilyin did not wish for freedom for most people but rather alluded to another form of slavery. He held Soviet views, yet he justified fascism, Nazism, and war. Ilyin had a right to oppose the Soviet government, but he did not have a right to support fascism and Hitler.

Surprisingly, the biography and views of Ilyin have only been retouched in Russia. In Germany and other countries, his support for the regimes of Mussolini and Hitler is evident; one can easily find his pro-fascist articles.

In our philosophical works, we have repeatedly emphasized that the roots of a person's behavior and beliefs should be sought when telling the history of their life. It might be difficult to absolutize the biographical factor, but one must agree that biography has a strong influence on a person's creativity and even more so on their philosophy. Once his biography is learned, Ilyin's philosophy can be understood more clearly. However, his biography must be conveyed honestly, objectively, and in full. Therefore, when publishing books by or about Ilyin, it is important to note his support of fascism, Hitler, and Mussolini. Special attention must be paid to these facts; only then can one proceed to appreciate the works of this philosopher, many of which are genuinely interesting and informative. Ilyin undoubtedly left a legacy in philosophy and jurisprudence. However, we must not forget his history — we must always remember the feat of our ancestors and the actions of their opponents.

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