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TOWARDS THE SOCIALISM WITH A HUMAN FACE

Abstract: The takeover of power in Yugoslavia was carried out by the Communist Party in full accordance with the textbooks of the Bolshevik Party schools for establishing of the proletarian dictatorship. In this spirit, a state established after the Second World War was formed, whose declared aim was to change the regime and establish a new social order.

The first priority on the list of the leaders of the socialist revolution was the liquidation of the occupying forces and their domestic collaborators. In order to consolidate its power, the revolutionary power included in their number not just those who actively assisted the occupying forces, but also those who were not in favour of the regime and did not actively fight on the side of the partisans. The iron fist of vengeance thus struck thousands and thousands with all its might.

However, the firmer was the Communist Party's grip on power, the greater was the weight of its internal opposition. It became a real danger after the split between Moscow and Belgrade in 1948. This is why the regime dealt with them mercilessly. A new series of mass arrests, convictions and deportations followed.

Initially, Tito's regime responded to criticism from Moscow by radicalising the Stalinist line in eliminating the last vestiges of "capitalism" in Yugoslavia. Eventually, however, Yugoslav ideologues developed a new type of socialist system – Titoism. The showcase item, born out of creative opposition to Stalin and the Soviet system and fit for new ideologisation was workers' self-management. Paradoxically, how this new system works, the regime tested in practice on the Goli Otok island and other "work sites" scattered around the state were so-called Stalinists were deported in order to be re-educated.

Keywords: Cominform, Goli otok, Nazi collaborators, socialist revolution, socialism with a human face, Titoism, Workers' selfmanagement

National Heroes Clean up the State

According to Marx and Engels, as Lenin elaborates in his essay on society and revolution, the bourgeois state may be deposed and replaced by proletarian rule only by way of violent revolution (Lenin 1934: 21–2). Its achievements,

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then, may be preserved only by the dictatorship of the proletariat, which, temporarily at least, inevitably demands a range of limitations on the liberties of oppressors, exploiters, capitalists. “We must suppress them,” claimed Lenin, “to liberate humanity from perpetual slavery; their resistance must be broken by force. Where there is suppression, by necessity there is violence as well, there is no freedom or democracy” (Lenin 1934: 84).

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was established in April 1919, joining the Communist International immediately upon its founding congress. With this, it adopted a programme of forceful demolition of capitalism in Yugoslavia. The revolutionary upheaval of capitalism was conceived as a “blitzkrieg class war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie,” in which the latter’s hold over the state is broken, the expropriators expropriated, and the working people’s governance established (Bilandžić 1985: 28). Yet, fertile grounds for the Yugoslavian revolution were, in reality, opened up only by the Second World War, when the CPY spearheaded the Yugoslav Partisan resistance. It did so only when the Nazis had attacked Soviet Union, which implies that for the Yugoslav communists, loyalty to the flagship nation of socialism called even louder than loyalty to the common Yugoslav state (Bakić 2011: 48). Since its inception, the leadership of the National Liberation Struggle did not conceal its true ends: a Yugoslav socialist revolution. With the establishment of the First Proletarian Brigade on December 22, 1941, this sentiment emerged in full view: the name, and especially the red five-pointed star with hammer-and-sickle symbol, specifically implied its fundamental revolutionary mission (see e.g. Adamic 1952: 450).

The “bolshevizing” of the Yugoslav resistance displeased Stalin, and soon after the start of armed defiance against occupation he warned the leadership of the CPY that their highest goal was defeating the aggressor, without inner ideological exclusions. After the establishment of the Proletarian Brigade, Stalin on March 5, 1942, sent the leadership of the CPY a telegram with expressions of his discontent regarding his conviction that “the essential and direct task of the people is to unite all elements against Hitler, so as to crush the Axis forces and win national liberation” (Dedijer 1979: III, 26; cf. Adamic 1952: 474–75). It is said someone in Moscow then quipped: “The Yugoslavs have stuck a knife in our back!” (Adamic 1952: 450).

A few months later, a serious rift opened up between Stalin and the leadership of the CPY that had continued to persist in its revolutionary tendencies. Stalin demanded that the CPY should reach a power-sharing agreement with the Yugoslav government-in-exile in London and King Peter II, which the CPY leadership found categorically unacceptable (Kardelj 1980: 45). In Jajce, on November 1943, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPY discussed whether they should notify Stalin of their intent of forming a temporary government, depriving the royal government in London the right to represent Yugoslavia internationally while banning King Peter II from the state.

Given their experience of the first session of the AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia), when Moscow forbade the formation of a Partisan resistance government, the Politburo made the decision to send to Moscow only a terse, incomplete notice. When decisions of the second session of the AVNOJ were published, Stalin described them as “a betrayal against the USSR” (Marović 1985: 36). Thus, in his letter addressed to the CPY leadership, he demanded the communist resist Tito’s ambitions of becoming president of AVNOJ or the government, since the West would interpret this as “a communist revolution rather than patriotic struggle” (Marović 1985: 35).

Stalin’s School of Marxism-Leninism

After the Second World War, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia seized power entirely in line with textbook Marxism-Leninism of the Soviet Party school for the establishment of proletarian rule. The CPY leadership, educated at the Communist Academies in Moscow, was according to Edvard Kardelj “pervaded with the spirit of Marxism-Leninism” (Kardelj 1948: 5). It is no coincidence, then, that after the war, folks in Montenegro sang:

Three are the sons of our nation,
Hoxha, Stalin and Tito;
Stalin is our imagination,
Since he was the one to school Tito,
Schooled him till he had top marks
In teachings of Lenin and Marx. (Bakić 2008: 142)

In this spirit rose also their state, established after the Second World War, whose declared goal was the change of regime and enactment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this task, the student in many ways surpassed the teacher. His terror tool of choice was the political police, designated the Department for People’s Protection (OZNA), established in May 1944 and in 1948 renamed to the State Security Administration (*Uprava državne bezbednosti*, UDBA). Its organisers were sent for training to the Soviet Union immediately after the war, Soviet advisers also helped in building it up. The principle of the UDBA was universal suspicion and distrust, through a network that spread over the whole of society and penetrated even into family relations (Zilliacus 1952: 244; Adamic 1952: 463). Its efficiency was bolstered by a broad network of voluntary informants acquired in various ways. Perhaps the most significant was the network of vigilant Party cell members, stretching the entire state and infiltrating the smallest villages. The cell members trash out who was in favour of the regime and so many were enlisted in the Party, and who was hostile to the regime and had been heard to make critical or unfriendly remarks. Negative

points were reported as a matter of course to the UDBA comrades, who then intervened officially, or at least made a first adverse entry in the files—the so-called *Karakteristika*—which, thanks to these close-method system of vigilance, were being kept for almost every inhabitant of the country (Halperin 1958: 29). This meant that Yugoslavia after the Second World War was a police state under the dictatorship of the Communist Party operating behind the thinly veiled fiction of Popular Front embracing remnants of some prewar parties (Hoffman and Neal 1962: 81). According to the observations of Swiss historian and the Belgrade correspondent of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Ernst Halperin, among the people, joy at the victory of the Partisans quickly changed to horror, and later into silent hatred (Halperin 1958: 29).

Dealing with the Occupation and Domestic Collaborators

The top priority on the revolutionary leaders' list was retribution against the occupation and its domestic collaborators. In his first speech in liberated Belgrade, at the end of October 1944, Marshal Tito said that the heroic Partisans and their Allies were now routing the enemy "into his den," so they might "slay the dragon that attempted to subordinate all humanity" (Anon. 1944: 1). Soon after, surrealist poet and essayist Mario Ristić published in the editorial of *Politika* his contemplations on good and evil. According to him, never in history were good and evil, light and darkness, so clearly and perfectly delineated as they were at the war's ending: on the one side was set all that was black and despicable in the nation, and on the other all that was bright and exalted. He claimed it was "our sacred duty" to do everything at the people's disposal, so that "the guilty, the traitors and the executioners of their own people were stricken by—the single just—merciless punishment." Only that way might the survivors secure their liberty, for which many had perished singing (Ristić 1944: 1).

After a horrible war and through suitable propaganda, the public to a great extent embraced the necessity of stark punishment of those "guilty" for the years of suffering and misery. The head of UDBA and minister of internal affairs, Aleksandar Ranković-Marko, indeed wasted no time, immediately ordering liquidations of the members of armed quisling and "counterrevolutionary" units. "Who is against Socialism is an enemy," Ranković is reported to have said, "and must be made harmless" (Archer 1968: 122). Brutal action against "collaborators," at the end of a protracted and bloody war, had wide approval, and the Yalta Conference had placed its imprimatur on such action. The only open question, then, was: who was collaborator? In the proletarian dictatorship, it was not just a person who had actively helped the enemy, but anyone the regime did not like and had not actively fought with the Partisans. This included persons ranging from General Mihailović and the Četniks and the

Roman Catholic hierarchy of Croatia and Slovenia to pro-western politicians and businessmen who had in fact exhibited hostility against the occupying forces (Hoffman and Neal 1962: 91). The iron fist of retribution brutalised thousands upon thousands under its weight.

As noted by Eric Pridonoff, economic analyst at the American Embassy in Belgrade in 1944 and 1945, the leaders of the proletarian dictatorship acted like assassins, yet felt righteous as priests; that made human life then “so utterly cheap” (Pridonoff 1955: 141). The authorities did not hide their mass killings, Tito himself in July 1945 in his address of the first Trades Union Congress characterised them as “inevitable.” Among other, he said:

The people might sooner say we're being too soft, rather than too stern. (Indeed!) I know you think we're being humane, as you consider justice in this matter. Then, there are also those who argue with us constantly that we're too stern, too critical, that we should afford everyone the freedom to do as they wish rather than hold meetings and condemn. You see, these people are blaming us for being too severe. They say that too many have been arrested and severely punished. They do not ask why this was necessary, nor why the death sentences were pronounced. They only ask why so many were convicted. (Anon. 1945: 1)

Such a regime was not a mistake, though, an excess committed in the sudden intoxication with power, nor was dealing viciously with the collaborators a goal for its own sake; to the contrary, the regime knew very well how to handle a collaborator with velvet gloves if it thought that he might be useful (see e.g. Kardelj 1945: 21; Adamic 1952: 190). According to Ernst Halperin, the terror corresponded to a profound internal need (Halperin 1958: 30). Halperin argued, that during the last year of the war—and possibly from 1943 onwards—the overwhelming majority of the Yugoslav people sided with the Partisans. Without having a clear picture of the coming order of things, people hoped that it would be finer and better than the old prewar system. The new order of things arrived indeed, not as the golden age of common prosperity and concord, but as a mass terror directed against hundreds of thousands. First before the firing squad were those who had cooperated with the occupation; the definition of a collaborator was wide enough to envelop any industrialist or businessman who had not totally stopped his business activities during the war. If this accusation appeared insufficient, the victim was accused of contacts with the domestic collaborators. The list of punishable offenses, in short, was so extensive that it practically affected everyone who had not spent the war as an active Partisan or member of an underground Communist Party cells (Halperin 1958: 28).

The court trial against General Dragoljub (Draža) Mihailović, the founder of the Chetniks—Yugoslavia's first guerrilla units resisting the occupation—, perceived as Tito's most serious rival (Bilainkin 1949: 13), took place in Belgrade in 1946. General Mihailović epitomised Serbian resistance to communism, and his trial was by no means an attack against one man, but, rather, a campaign

against the Serbian anti-communism. All the ministers of the Yugoslav government-in-exile, all the Serbs who were ministers in all the Yugoslav governments before the war were dragged into the trial either as defendants or as witnesses, all of them being subjected to “an intensive campaign of political defamation” (Pridonoff 1955: 234).

The trial against Mihailović was followed, across the country, by trials against the leaders of the political opposition and the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, the evident reason of which was to reduce the influence of the bourgeois parties and both the religious organisations (Korbel 1951: 161; Hoffman and Neal 1962: 92–3). In Autumn of 1946, the Zagreb Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac was arrested alongside several high-ranking clergymen. The archbishop was accused of supporting the Ustasha regime of Ante Pavelić and the Axis forces, of actively cooperating with the Ustasha and even of presiding a council for the forcible conversion of Orthodox Serbs into Catholicism. He was found guilty and sentenced to sixteen years. Similarly to the Mihailović process, the process against Stepinac was largely a political assault on his person and the Catholic Church rather than a due trial (Adamic 1952: 208; Hoffman and Neal 1962: 94). After these and other trials, everyone was aware that under the “proletarian dictatorship” it was impossible to criticise the regime, and that the slightest remark may involve terrible punishment (Henderson 1953: 5).

The proletarian dictatorship instilled a pervasive fear in the population, an apprehension of being unjustly persecuted, interrogated, tortured, jailed, or even executed. Eric Pridonoff remembers that the citizens of Yugoslavia, be it communists, non-communists or anti-communists, were all connected by a single common thread: a profound sense of insecurity; he named this condition “unity in fear.” Networks woven with social anxiety were, according to Pridonoff, also the most significant source of power for the totalitarian regime (Pridonoff 1955: 148). He did not recall ever witnessing a public enunciation of this politics, but was convinced it was not just the old divide and rule maxim. According to him it read something like “unification through atomization and total fear.” And yet, as he added, fear in the hearts of the victims of the regime did not allay the fear in the hearts of the rulers (Pridonoff 1955: 149).

“Stalin–Tito!”

Between 21 and 28 July 1948, the Fifth Congress of the CPY took place in Yugoslavia, the first after two decades.¹ The congress was called since Stalin had criticised Josip Broz Tito’s perceived rule through the Politburo and the Central Committee, in which the majority was not elected members, but

1 The first congress of the CPY was held in Belgrade in 1919, the second in Vukovar in 1920, the third in Vienna in 1926, and the fourth in Dresden in 1928.

rather those co-opted by Broz according to his own liking; accusations that the CPY had no internal democracy, no critique or introspection; that the party cadre secretary was the minister of national security, that is, that the cadre was under his control. According to Marxist-Leninist theory, the Party was obliged to control all governing bodies of the state, including the Ministry of National Security, whereas in Yugoslavia it was the opposite—said ministry was controlling the Party (Kardelj 1980: 216). Tito moved to seize the initiative: the Fifth Congress began session on 21 July 1948, not a full month after the publication of the Cominform Resolution (Marović 1985: 75). At the congress, Tito still professed “resolute loyalty to the teachings of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin” and made assurances that the CPY will prove allegiance through its work (Anon. 1948a: 5; Dedič 1979: I, 376). On the stage behind the congress chairmanship, Stalin’s statue stood for the duration of its sitting; Tito himself wrapped up his introductory speech with the cheer: “Long live Comrade Stalin!” (Marović 1985: 76). As noted by foreign observers, Tito’s address at the Fifth CPY Congress was accompanied by the enthusiastic acclaim by the delegates chanting: “Stalin-Tito!” (Armstrong 1951: 103; Maclean 1957: 392).

Before the Second Congress of the Communist Party of Serbia in early 1949, observed Louis Adamic, every fourth or fifth window in Belgrade sported Tito’s photograph, occasionally beside one of Lenin or Stalin. A few months later, Stalin’s image was nowhere to be seen in Yugoslavia (Adamic 1952: 37).

Tito’s faction represents but a minority of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and rests not upon the party’s confidence, but upon the administrative police machinery of Yugoslavia

The purge of pro-Cominform Party members was under way for about ten days before anything leaked out (Yindrich 1950: 113). Even afterwards, Tito continued to publically claim his loyalty to the Soviet Union, while mentions of the USSR in Yugoslav press were still decidedly amicable. This veil of peace persisted up until 8 September 1948, when the Moscow gazette *Pravda* attacked “Tito’s clique” in its editorial, accusing it that it represented but a minority of the CPY, and rested not upon the Party’s confidence, but upon the administrative police machinery of the state (Bilainkin 1949: 216–17; Yindrich 1950: 116; Girensko 1991: 142). The Yugoslav response came only in late September 1948, when the joint session of the government and the National Assembly adopted, to a thunderous applause, its Resolution on the Cominform. At the joint session, the proposing member of the resolution Petar Stambolić among other things said this body “cannot stay indifferent” in the face of “false and libellous attacks on our country, our state and its lawful government.” Though that campaign was being waged under the guise of criticising a particular group of people, it was, argued Stambolić, “objectively an affront to our entire country and its path, as it is impossible to separate our political and state leadership from the people since the Government of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia which this House Assembly had chosen and legitimised, conducts such exterior

and interior politics as suits the interests and needs of our proletariat and our nation, as well as the interests of the global democratic order” (Anon. 1948b: 1).

The revolutionary extermination of (potential) military and political opposition was complete, yet the dictatorship of the proletariat had not yet fully neutralised all opposition. Namely, the more the CPY leadership strengthened its monopoly on authority, the greater became the weight of its internal opposition. This danger was especially acute after the Cominform Resolution and thus, the regime decided to deal with it ruthlessly. This time, too, lightning struck at the highest levels first. The earliest victims were the federal ministers of industry and finance, Andrija Hebrang and Sretan Žujović; the latter Tito’s deputy as commander-in-chief during the war (Bilainkin 1949: 210–11; Maclean 1957: 393; Hoffman and Neal 1962: 119; Kardelj 1980: 129). The decision to arrest Hebrang and Žujović was taken by Tito single-handedly; the Central Committee had not discussed the matter (Djilas 1981: 73; Marović 1985: 87).²

A new wave of mass arrests, convictions and deportations followed. Instructions for this strengthened “vigilance” came from the top. Tito personally ordered all suspicious persons locked up, famously saying: “Better a few innocents in jail than a single criminal roaming free” (Kovačević and Rastoder 1989: nr. 49). Whoever was not fully loyal to the authority, whoever harboured reservations or even schemed against it was the enemy and had to be rendered harmless. In the period between the publication of the Cominform Resolution of 28 June 1948 and the year 1963, Yugoslav police kept records on as many as 55,663 persons suspected of supporting the actions of Moscow and the Eastern Bloc against the CPY. Among them were 21,880 participants in the National Liberation Struggle, 4153 members of the Yugoslav People’s Army, 1673 recipients of the Commemorative Medal of the Partisans of 1941, 2616 members of various CPY bodies, 1722 members of internal affairs organs, 4008 students, 5081 secondary school pupils, and 5626 peasants (Marković 1990: 23). This meant the UDBA was tasked with a broad and stringent mission indeed. As Moša Pijade told Konni Zilliacus, an MP of the British Labour Party, the leadership of CPY had for many years been training its members in rigid orthodoxy of Moscow. After the break, they were having the devil of a time teaching them to think for themselves again (Zilliacus 1952: 248). Both ways, however, they had been conditioned into being dedicated followers of the Party line; the American researchers of communism Alexander Dallin and George Breslauer called this state of mind “passion for unanimity.” It followed the commitment to a single belief system and a single hierarchy, the practical

2 “Indeed, it was a diluted CC—the committee chosen in 1940, at the Fifth Party Conference,” recollects Milovan Djilas, “which had not been in plenary session even once: it first met only in late March 1948 to answer that critical letter of Molotov and Stalin ... Tito now claims, in the notes to his *Works*, that the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee could not assemble due to wartime circumstances. Nonsense! Three years had passed since the war!” (Djilas 1981: 73).

expression of which included the attempt to control the citizens' behaviour by leaving him no viable alternative but to comply (Dallin and Breslauer 1970: 25–6).

In the years prior to the Cominform Resolution, Yugoslavia was in many ways a police state *par excellence*. The UDBA had a reputation in the period right after the war for being virtually a law unto itself, arresting and imprisoning whomever it wished, with or without cause, and often with great brutality. During this time, these political police regularly interpreted minor offences as political crimes, interfered in government and economic affairs at will and intimidated officials and ordinary citizens alike. Furthermore, the whole legal machinery, including the courts and public prosecutors, was a part of the police terror and functioned without the thought of protecting individual rights, which, in fact, existed neither in theory nor in practice. Widespread use of informers was an integral part of the system (Hoffman and Neal 1962: 385).

Tito's regime operated from the historical view that such young revolutions that had failed to decidedly defend their initial success and maintain a firm grasp on power collapsed not only due to external intervention, but also through internal opposition in particular. The regime assessed that the strategy of blockading Yugoslavia, implemented by Moscow, granted the internal opposition a highly crucial, if not decisive role. Thus, the Party leadership wished to eliminate this vector of danger before Stalin's supporters might organise and help their idol stage a turnover in Yugoslavia (Marković 1990: 25). The Yugoslav party was thus "Stalinist in a literal meaning," ironically, that is, infused with the spirit of totalitarianism and constraint of its own, as Djilas recalled, having already a monopoly over authority within the state: tolerating, legitimising the opposition within the Party might then, given the constant pressure by the looming Soviet Bloc, easily cause the fragmentation of unity and sudden dominance of the pro-Soviet faction. The difficulty of dictatorial, especially totalitarian governance is that it cannot allow the operation of an ideological opposition without directly endangering its own existence (Djilas 1981: 74). Consequently, the threat from Moscow was answered by Tito's regime in the manner it was most versed in, the Stalinist manner, by descending immediately upon the opposition in its own ranks before it might ally with Stalin. The power of the repressive tsunami was such that the calamity engulfed many a figure of the regime, rejected by the leadership of the constricting party circles for this or that reason. Thus, for example, a great number of Slovenians who had been communists since before 1937 landed on Goli Otok nevertheless, among them Mirko Košir, Ludvik Mrzel, Cene Logar and Jože Juranič; Košir being confined there to his death (Jezernik 2013: 64).

Because they were dealing with an especially dangerous foe, and since in defence of the loftiest aims, the end justified all means, "They", or the former "we," as a former prisoner put it, "were prepared to do anything. By the motto

‘Our morality is the interest of the proletarian revolution,’ a stew can be made from one’s own grandson for oneself and those who cultivate and water this revolution” (Popović 1988: 141). Because of this excessive, many of the former victims were convinced that “not even Hitler treated his political enemies in this way” (Markovski 1984: 31).

In its ruthlessness, the Titoist reckoning with (potential) inner opposition appeared closest to the ugliest face of Stalinism. The fear pervading the regime had giant eyes, and so the vigilance of the UDBA was massively exaggerated (Djilas 1981: 76). Once the regime had consolidated its power, Tito began, with no small degree of hypocrisy, to warn against – too much suspicion. Thus, in his pre-election speech in Split on Sunday 5 March 1950, he among other said “overwhelming distrust” cannot be the “reality” of Yugoslavia: “We shall not allow it” (Broz 1950: 18). He then detailed to the assembled crowd the difference between suspicion and vigilance, and how the latter ought to be understood:

What is vigilance? It is not a matter of distrust or suspicion. Vigilance is one thing, and suspicion another. In the socialist society, vigilance has an educational character. Vigilance means – keeping one’s eyes open, seeing what’s going on and, where there are faults, helping people address them. Vigilance means – attention to the squandering of national resources, of the people’s property. (Broz 1950: 18)

Such an all-encompassing and delicate task as “vigilance” might only be effected by a Party that was consistently Leninist or Stalinist, of course. As Milovan Djilas asserted, control over the Party using the secret police, meaning over the communists using their own party comrades was, incontrovertibly, the invention of Moscow, Lenin and Stalin; Tito and the Titoists copied it from there. Yet Djilas was convinced they would have devised such a system even without the influence of Moscow, regardless. The Party ranks, especially after its glorious victory in the war, swelled up with new members in a brief time span. The process of rapidly increasing membership was guided and funnelled by the leadership with heavy hands, since those in charge were afraid the Party might itself become the means and prey of “counterrevolutionary” and “external” currents. Such control cannot be maintained without “unwanted,” negative consequences: “the secret police becomes an instrument of the leadership used against the Party – a master of the new masters: the Party’s power weakens, and with it the activities and initiatives of its potentially unruly base” (Djilas 1981: 63).

This was well understood by the heads of the regime. Djilas mentioned to Ranković, for example, even before the Cominform Resolution: “Now we are treating Stalin’s supporters the way he is treating his enemies!” to which a visibly distraught Ranković replied: “Don’t say these things! Don’t say them!” (Djilas 1981: 74; 1985: 237).

Crushing the Internal Opposition

The decision to form a concentration camp for pro-Soviet communists was made by Tito personally, in the autumn of 1948. He did not consult the matter with the Central Committee, the Politburo or the Central Committee's secretaries. Djilas, next to Kardelj and Ranković then a secretary of the CC, learned out about it in Montenegro, where a member of the Montenegro Central Committee Andro Mugoša told him they had received orders from Belgrade to arrest "Cominformists" and send them off to the concentration camp. Ranković naturally played a part in the procedure, since the apparatus he was responsible for was charged with conducting it (Djilas 1981: 72). Members of the UDBA were told to "re-educate" the Cominform supporters, in which they should personally avoid using violence: Tito liked to say the state was "efficient at re-education." Secret police made this happen through "prisoners self-management" as they called it, the act of utilising "re-educated"—either by favour or force—former Cominform supporters who then did the dirty work of physical enforcement or "re-education." In that way, the Yugoslav communists appeared unusually two-faced: their anti-Stalinism was expressed through "all manner of spite and twisted violence" (Djilas 1981: 75). In accordance with the policy "beat them on their heads, just don't break their heads" (Djilas 1973: 192) prisoners were deprived of their freedoms and sent off to do "socially useful work" so they might be "re-educated" and made into good communists again. Such aims required new methods. These were usually administered by the prisoners themselves – for the most part, the guards, investigators and other officials of the UDBA weren't even present in the camps. However unusual this might seem, such a regime turned out to be utterly ruthless. "When people are constantly watching each other, eavesdropping, snitching, punishing and abusing one another, and if nobody apart from the 'mutually engaged' interferes in such a 'community'; so, you see, a community in hell must be formed" (Kalajdžić 1985: 83).

At the "sites for socially useful work," the prisoners were being re-educated mostly based on experiences from other, in particular Nazi concentration camps. The leadership of the CPY namely studied the methods of re-educating communists and social democrats in the Nazi prisons and camps of the 1930s. The initial purpose of the concentration camps was ostensibly the "re-education" of the regime's political opposition. In these, "dangerous Marxists" were, mostly through physical violence, being "re-educated" into "good Germans." In Spandau thus, for example, the prisoners were in 1933 forced to call out in unison: "What were we yesterday?" – "Communists!" – "What will we be tomorrow?" – "National-Socialists!" (Kisch 1933: 55).

Examples came also from the experiences of communists from the prisons and penitentiaries of the first Yugoslavia. There, imprisoned communists established "cells" or "communes" as "mass organisations of the revolutionary proletariat" to manage their daily life. Through these, the "commune as the highest instance of communism in prison maintained control over convicted

communists, the same way the Comintern controls the Russian nations through the Soviet state apparatus,” stated Albin Breznik (1938: 28–9) based on his own experience from the Sremska Mitrovica penitentiary. The commune of prisoners also implemented a kind of re-education process: it established a rule that in the spirit of communist principles, anyone might be washed free of their treason should they confess their errors and fully redress them with proper “revolutionary action.” As Breznik recorded, this incited among the prisoners a proper competition who was able to “better, more enthusiastically correct their own ‘errors of judgement’” (Breznik 1938: 32).

Selfishness and opportunism, under various guises of morality, made life for the prisoners a living hell. Those jailing them certainly couldn’t have imagined that the crusaders of the red paradise would transform their own penitentiary of red brick into a red-hot inferno ... It was truly an abysmal place. (Breznik 1938: 48)

A similar “hell” was later instated by UDBA in the prisons and concentration camps for the Cominform supporters. The re-education of the inmates through a system of prison self-management enabled those in power to successfully perpetuate their “beat them, just don’t kill them” policy. Since the inmates were assaulting, torturing and brainwashing one another, they were physically and morally broken without much effort from the leadership, whereas the leaders kept their hands clean and propped up their feeling of moral superiority (Jezernik 2013: 106–7). General Jefto Šašić, the head of the Counter-Intelligence Service of the Yugoslav Peoples’ Army said to Dragoljub Jovanović: “See, what trash you Cominformists are! Only a Cominform dog could torment his own colleague. A true communist would never raise their hand against a comrade!” (Jovanović 1990: I, 173, 190).

The worst extortion was a promise that in the case of “revision,” the prisoners would be set free, that they would be rehabilitated, returned to their rank and position in society. Such self-management had an insidious trajectory: it completely paralysed the political power of the prisoners, crushing any seed of resistance before it might even take root. One has only to think of the magnificent organisation established in the Italian concentration camp on the island of Rab by the former internee Jože Juranič, who did not even try to repeat his achievement on Goli Otok, even though his four sons were imprisoned there together with him (Jezernik 2013: 105). Major-General Branko Petrović, deputy head of the chief political administration of the Yugoslav People’s Army, one of those who attempted to carry out a coup, felt the workings of these infernal mechanisms on his own skin:

Later on, in the prison, it got all mixed up in my head. It was dreadful. The constant abuse and pervasive suspicion, humiliation, helplessness made you feel like it was all for nothing, a life lived wrong, lived in vain, that you’re just existing physically now like a living ghost, walking, eating, making sure to stay alive without a reason why. The soul is no more. Everything is gone:

honour, friends, reputation, career. You live like an animal, then – unseen, on your knees. (cit. Marković 1987: 45)

Under suffocating pressure, Petrović revised his stance and the process took its inevitable course. As he decided to change, he simultaneously decided for a rigorous turn against those compatriots who had remained “firm” in their beliefs. He knew he would not be able to stay at peace from thereon, unable to exist “sitting two-faced, on two chairs” (Marković 1987: 46).

Mutual beatings between the prisoners were a highly refined method of re-education. The inmates were not the tormentors of their colleagues because they hated them, or because of their own low morality, but chiefly because they were conditioned and organised top-down with stick and carrot by the overseers of the camp: these promised perks such as easier work, better food, a few packs of cigarettes – under the condition they should “clarify matters” and physically punish those inmates who refused to convert or behave, work them to the bone, prevent them from sleeping or resting, ignore them persistently or report on them constantly. Cominform supporter camps thus became the greatest sources of ever-new arrests; the most convincing way of showing one has truly “repented,” truly “revised their perspective” and atoned, was to betray some former “misguided” colleague, even a brother, a parent, a friend (Djilas 1981: 76).

Stalinist Anti-Stalinism

Using ruthless methods, the Yugoslav authorities wished to prevent the possibility Stalin might ever develop a “fifth column” to choreograph a regime change in Yugoslavia. Thus, repression initially struck nearly anyone who dared question the criticism of the Cominform or hesitated to repeat it. This did not exclude the opposition, though it was oriented in anti-communism and hoped to further its political influence with the tactical support of the West. The process was sudden and savage, causing not only vast human tragedy but ossifying into an integral part of the system, characterised by an atmosphere of fear and a tendency for monolithic cognition. Whoever was not entirely supportive of the authorities, whoever had any objections was considered to be against them. And whoever was against the authorities was considered to be “very dangerous.”

Pressure against the CPY was in this manner utilised by the authorities to lock up all those who in any way criticised its orders or its faults – the evident purpose being to eliminate all opposition to the politics of the state and Party leadership. Arrests and incarcerations reached such frequency their incidence no longer surprised the citizens. In actual fact, they lost their intimidating effect, having accelerated absurdly until people began cracking jokes at their expense.

It was why Edvard Kardelj remarked, at some Party plenary session, that the recurring and frequent jailings were no longer affecting the population, having become merely a constituent mishap of their daily social life like the seasonal flu or a physical accident. Prison terms had stopped being shameful, and Kardelj felt it was necessary to make punishment stricter so that the threat of imprisonment may once again strike fear into the population (Marić 1988: 70).

All this seemingly useless activity yet had its clear aim. On the one hand the regime represented itself as the carrier of democratic will, while on the other, through draconian means, its repressive apparatus ground down all potential opposition and instilled in the citizens a fear of fabricated accusations that might result in a “business trip” of several years. Incarcerated were members of the CPY and non-members sympathising with the Soviet Union, with many of the arrested perhaps taking down a friend, a neighbour, people who simply publically condoned the individual. The secret police also imprisoned those providing material assistance to the families of the prisoners. Conditions, thus, were eerily similar to those in Germany following the National-Socialists’ rise to power. In the 1930s, for example, people in Dachau whispered: “Quietly ... hush ... if even a whisper is heard, you might wake up in the camp yourself.” A fitting echo felt in the atmosphere shaped by Tito’s purges. Similarly, a Bavarian chant from the 1930s pleads: “Lord pray keep me mute, lest to Dachau I commute!” (Kautsky 1948: 41).

Happenings in Yugoslavia after 1948 show many other curious parallels to the trajectory of events in Germany following its respective political upheaval. Organs of repression, the secret police in particular, invaded all pores of social life, webbing the nation with their jails. Its agents were everywhere, its name spoken in hushed whispers. In the name of national strength, it barged its way into the private matters of those displaying the slightest hint of political engagement. Beyond mere terror, the point of broad repression was the actualisation of the fundamental principle of totalitarian culture: *Non cogito ergo sum*. These were times when thinking itself was dangerous, a right reserved for the highest political leadership who thought for everyone:

My, oh my: the young mister Djurić, Party member, thinking out loud at a time when orderly operation is required ... What would the country come to, should everyone chase their own whims? In this decisive moment, the Party thinks for us all. Unity of thought and action! (Simić 1990: 17)

The first response of Tito’s regime to the criticism emanating from Moscow was the radicalisation of its own Stalinist line, the deconstruction of the final remnants of capitalism through accelerated collectivisation of the countryside, the strengthening of Party authority and dreaded prestige of Ranković’s secret police. Mounting pressure and hostility from the countries of the Eastern Bloc, compounded by the painful economic embargo, jolted the leadership of the CPY into action: the Yugoslav economy had been firmly oriented towards the East, with the greater part of the trade had been with the Soviet Union and

other members of the Eastern Bloc (Maclean 1957: 397). In 1948 and 1949, the leadership claimed its policies will “prove the correctness of its course,” and spent much of its time persecuting affluent kulaks, conducting rigorous punishment of peasants hiding food surpluses to be sold to the state, nationalising shops and workshops, forcibly collectivising agricultural land (Marović 1985: 76). With this practical evidence of its adherence to “true” Marxism-Leninism, the leadership of the CPY wished to show it strove towards the same goals as Stalin, but was simply being misinterpreted. Drastic measures were accompanied by vocal and pompous propaganda on their supposed contribution to the construction of socialism proper; yet in the already difficult circumstances, many of these had catastrophic consequences (Marović 1985: 92–3).

The hope that one day pressures would ease, and the relations between the communist parties return to their former orbits seemed emptier as time went by. Thus, the Yugoslav communists required a new existential perspective. The old world in which everything fitted within the folds of Marxism-Leninism in Stalin’s interpretation, was gone. Notions of communism, capitalism, the state, the Party, the individual, life generally, now had to be reevaluated. Hoffman and Neal characterised their historical situation as that of Plato’s man emerging from the cave into the sunlight.

Few things appeared in true perspective, but it was obvious that there were new things. Something akin to pragmatism was thus forced on those who had been rigid, doctrinaire, dogmatic and impervious to reason. A comment which soon was on the lips of all Yugoslav Communists truly characterised their new situation: “We are searching for our way” (Hoffman and Neal 1962: 149). Imagining that they were good communists, and seeing that the Soviet communists were their antagonists, they could reach no other conclusion but that the Soviets were not good communists, and their type of communism not good communism. From that conclusion, then, avenues were sought into true, proper Marxism. In the summer of 1949 the leading ideologues of the CPY, Moša Pijade, Edvard Kardelj, Milovan Djilas, joined by others, took the lead in working out an ideological basis for Yugoslavia’s position as a communist state outside the Soviet community (Hoffman and Neal 1962: 150).

The first attempts at rethinking Marxism were published in 1949. Leading ideologues of the CPY initially busied themselves with an examination of communism’s problems in the Soviet Union. The central tenet posited that communism ought to be based on Marx and Lenin specifically, whereas in the Soviet Union under Stalins leadership, a course of “revising” Marxism-Leninism was underway. As Tito personally explained to Louis Adamic, he had felt obliged to show that Stalin erroneously attributed the label “revisionist” to the leadership of the CPY, that this absurd accusation was merely a projection of the guilt experienced by the Kremlin in fact (Adamic 1952: 249). Thus, in his essay published at the five-year anniversary of the people’s republic, Moša Pijade asserted the critics of the CPY were “forgetting the elementary principles of

Marxism-Leninism, which ought to be based on constant re-examination of the facts of reality.” Since they were not privy to the inner workings of Yugoslavia, its critics were “simply throwing around accusations” (Pijade 1949: 29). This was the main reason apparent for their “choosing the way of counterrevolutionary agitation against the advancements of the Yugoslav nations’ socialist revolution” (Baće 1949: 118). After a thorough review of the state of criticism and self-criticism in the Soviet Union, Makso Baće in the conclusion to his essay established that the “level of introspection and self-criticism in the USSR was abominable, nonexistent to be honest, and the ubiquitous phenomenon observed was, in fact, its contradiction – a monopoly.” The Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (b) then attempted to transpose the “monopoly method” to the international context, and especially to the relations between the socialist states. As suggested by Baće, the “counter-revolutionary agitation incited by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (b) against socialist Yugoslavia” was simply mirroring “its own inner politics” (Baće 1949: 160).

The Soviet system stood on the notion of Stalin’s absolute infallibility, a narrative questioned by “Tito’s clique” with increasing boldness: even to the point of accusing Stalin of “betraying the essence of socialism” (Štaubringer 1980: 24). If the principal feature of Stalin’s regime was the centralisation of power, theirs ought to be decentralised so as not to be “in conflict with the federal order, and the rights of the Yugoslav nations” (Marović 1985: 94; c.f. Maclean 1957: 413; Hoffman and Neal 1962: 150–51), as established already in 1943 in Jajce in recognition of their full equality. Central planning in the Soviet model was considered a bottleneck of economic equality (Bilandžić 1975: 6). Following extended debate after its successfully executed socialist revolution, the CPY thus identified itself with the state, even the police apparatus. In this way—recounted Edvard Kardelj—the principle of proletarian rule bastardised into the principle of a dictatorship of the leader and his control apparatus. In Kardelj’s retrospective, another reason for the nation’s poor spirit was the fact that the working masses were removed from executive power, becoming, so to speak, wage workers of the state. This was the reasoning behind the Party’s subsequent decision to revive the idea of self-management (Kardelj 1980: 133–34).

Titoism and Self-Management

In 1950, Tito presented to the National Assembly the Act on Workers’ Councils, symbolically handing the factory keys to the labouring workers, in a decree touted as a “a decisive return to the origins of Marxism, freed from Stalinist revision” (Marović 1985: 94). The hall’s galleries were packed with diplomats and press representatives when Tito, on 26 June 1950, announced his

Basic Law on the Management of National Economic Organisations and Higher Economic Associations by Work Collectives, popularly called the worker self-management factory act (Bilandžić 1975: 5), whereby putting factories into the hands of the workers realised two cardinal paroles of the proletarian movement, as Tito personally said: “Factories to the workers!” and “Land to the peasants!” The legislation was explained as a consequence of the fact the CPY was not fashioning state socialism based on a foreign template, but rather directly in line with Marxist teachings, paving its own way in the context of the specific conditions within its borders. Tito then opined the Comintern was guilty of “theoretical distortions” of the Marxist teachings (Anon. 1950: 1). It was the states of the Eastern Bloc who were distorting Marxism – while Yugoslavia was on the authentic path. With the worker self-management factory act, the state ownership of the means of production (factories, mines, railways) was entrusted into socialist hands. “State ownership is the lowest form of social ownership,” stressed Josip Broz, “and not the highest as the USSR leaders believe. You see, this is our way into socialism, and the single true way, bringing about the gradual elimination of state functions in the economy” (Anon. 1950: 3).³

After the adoption of the worker self-management factory act, the workers were at least on paper, if not directly responsible for the management of “their own” companies. In all factories, though, party cells were already operating, their mere presence clearly implying who was in charge. Among the Party membership, factory directors naturally held more weight than the common worker as they were put in charge precisely by the municipal or town committee of the CPY. In the new system there was talk of self-management and factory democracy day after day, hour after hour. The workers were told that they had the right to decide on the affairs of the enterprise because production was administered by the producers themselves. But as soon as they wanted to make use of their right they were forced to realise that in everything except subordinate details the decision lied not with them, but with the Party (Halperin 1958: 171–72).

Since self-management was born from creative opposition to Stalin and the Soviet system, it became suitable as a means of new ideologisation diverging from the Soviet one, the propagandising of a new utopia. In spite of publicly proposing the workers’ self-management act, Tito was notably not particularly enthusiastic over self-management in person. He ceded that some market activity and bottom-up initiative would boost the economic machine, and understood that the ideologisation of self-management strengthened independence, rallied the Yugoslav identity. “That, and nothing more: self-management was not allowed to overstep the established boundaries, let alone

3 Though the leadership of the CPY pronounced their new system to be authentic Marxism-Leninism, Ernest Halperin assessed that it was “not longer Marxist,” as the Yugoslav formula, “Direction of production through the producers,” was “irreconcilable with Marxist dogma.” Marx’s formula runs differently: “Directions of production through society,” which can only mean a planned economy, not a free market (Halperin 1958: 132).

threaten the status quo of power shaped in the revolution according to Tito's own propensities and views ..." (Djilas 1981: 66–7).

In late 1950, the leaders of the CPY stopped referring to the Soviet Union as a socialist state. Milovan Djilas in his essay *Contemporary Themes: the Soviet System under Stalin* characterised the USSR's system as "state capitalism" (Adamic 1952: 251).

Furthermore, the Yugoslavian regime in 1951 made certain steps in the softening of the police state (Hoffman and Neal 1962: 385–86). In this process though, it was perpetually clear that the greater protection of lawfulness and the broadening of socialist democratism did not also mean "relenting in the struggle against the enemies of socialism, parasites, and all those whose actions endanger our socialist order, and our citizens' rights based upon it" (Ranković 1951: 38). The Minister of Interior Affairs and commander of the UDBA warned against such views as a "great blunder" and publicly stated the courts will continue to "swiftly and strictly address any activities attempting to harm the socialist community, or its integrity" (Ranković 1951: 33).

After 1950, the whole process of political development in Yugoslavia has been like a gradual thaw. Decentralisation of the economy and regime and the institution of workers' self-management slowly eroded the grip of the dictatorship and begun the process of building up power from the bottom (Tornquist 1966: 289). Furthermore, the Yugoslav regime in 1951 made certain real steps in the softening of the police state (Hoffman and Neal 1962: 385–86). In this process though, it was perpetually clear that the greater protection of lawfulness and the broadening of socialist democracy did not also mean "relenting in the struggle against the enemies of socialism, parasites, and all those whose actions endanger our socialist order, and our citizens' rights based upon it" (Ranković 1951: 38). The Minister of Interior Affairs and commander of the UDBA warned against such views as a "great mistake" and publicly stated the courts will continue to "swiftly and mercilessly address any activities attempting to harm the socialist community, or its integrity" (Ranković 1951: 33).

Within the rigid framework of a planned economy, such as the Yugoslav had organised after the Soviet pattern, the rights of those managing committees and works councils would have been valid only on paper, because in such a system everything from labour regulations to raw-material quotas and plans was dictated from above, by the government (Halperin 1958: 127). Democracy on factory level—the purported objective of the legislative changes – could not thrive because of the hegemony of communist factory cells. On the other hand, the communist factory cells itself could not freely develop initiative in the interest of the enterprise, because Party discipline tied their hands in relation to superior bodies (Halperin 1958: 138–39). The end result of all these changes was that, from their inception on, a small group of the Party's highest leadership in effect again maintained complete control over economy and administration.

In short, the system of socialist self-management was “nothing but camouflage for the Party dictatorship” (Halperin 1958: 171).

The official anti-Stalinism and market economy stance in time turned out to be incompatible with the bureaucratic system and the omnipotence of the police apparatus, remarked Milovan Djilas. Self-management admittedly did legalise some anti-bureaucratic criticism, stifled bureaucratic directives on the company level and bolstered a curious market economy. Still, it did not carry particular influence on the character of state authority, nor the political reality: under a monopolistic party, a “proletarian avant-garde within self-management,” with a continuing pervasive presence of the secret police and the looming figure of the autocratic leader, self-management could become neither democratic nor efficient. All the state’s major political crises thus unravelled past it: the power of the secret police grew or lessened, such or another opposition flared up within the Party, all independently of the self-management universe. More so, Djilas adds, “no strike—literally: not even one, and there were many in the recent years, sudden, economic—not a single strike was led by either the self-management bodies or the trade unions” (Djilas 1981: 66).

The over-arching step in the realisation of the CPY’s new programme was the settlement of accounts with an inherited, “imported” ideology rooted deeply in the consciousness of all participants in the Yugoslav communist movement. In the years of tension with the Cominform, the CPY therefore invested heavily in the domains of theory and ideology, publishing many texts, combing them over at countless party and public meetings. In these texts, the Soviet “state socialism” as they named the monopoly of the state in the management of society based on the administrative-centralist system of economic management, the bureaucratic party apparatus and so on, was branded as a “social system that leads the working class into a subservient position, and in its final outcome, the defeat of socialism” (Bilandžić 1975: 7–8).

At the Sixth Congress of the CPY, in 1952, the Party decided that democratically appointed state and self-management bodies must independently undertake plans and be responsible for their success before the working people. The supposed mission of the communists was then to strive for the appropriate content of socialist development, as members of these bodies, and especially with their political activity among the masses; guiding decisions rather than giving orders. Additionally, the new conception of democratic socialism in Yugoslavia purportedly allowed for greater freedom of expression, theory and opinion (Bilandžić 1975: 9–10). Still, the core inner workings remained essentially the same. I can personally remember, in the summer of 1978, observing sessions of the workers’ council in a large Ljubljana-based company. After a prolonged discussion, its members adopted a decision, confirming it at their next session. The subsequent one, though, started with the general director’s notice that the city party committee had “instructed him the matter should be solved differently.” Another solution was then accepted without much

ado or a new vote – although the director was not a member of the workers' council, nor was the issue scheduled on the agenda.

The Cult of Personality

His clash with Stalin at first hobbled Marshal Tito's personality cult, but the deliberate deconstruction of Stalin's own (as the formerly transcendent inspiration), coupled with the need for precisely such symbolism conferring mytho-poetic content upon the Party, in time only reinforced his grandeur. The age of the Cominform was thus also the age of the great rise of Josip Broz Tito. His popularity swelled at home and abroad; for his resolute opposition to Stalin he became “a near-mythological figure whose cult outshone the Eastern statesmen” (Marković 1990: 139). Yugoslavia, the political entity seen by many as a great historical opportunity, a chance to discover socialism with a “human face,” thus gravitated into its exact opposite: anti-Stalinist Stalinism.

With the iron fist of anti-Stalinism, Tito managed to dethrone even Stalin and Moscow, until then the greatest deity of all proletarian revolutions—Yugoslav included. From its dispute with Moscow the regime emerged even stronger, with Josip Broz firmly entrenching his power as the president of the Yugoslav government, its minister of defence, and the secretary-general of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The ousting of Stalin contributed massive moral capital to his persona, to a point where no one else had any chance of becoming a “new David.” All (or nearly all) members of the Party accepted decisions “from the top” as “gospel, undisputable truth” (Marković 1990: 140).

After the escalation of the clash, Tito's name was lettered all over Yugoslavia (Adamic 1952: 22), it was the symbol of the difficult present promising a better future (Adamic 1952: 406). Journalists and writers were outdoing one another in the elevation of his fame. They praised him “the first to rise at dawn, and the last to lie to rest” (Simić 1993: 100). They spoke of him as “humanity's greatest diamond,” or “a monument to everything we hold dear” (Simić 1993: 101).

Notably, the image of a less authoritarian socialism model attracted many leftists in the West, endeavouring for a socialism with a more “humane face” than the Soviet or Chinese types. In Titoism they saw an acceptable alternative to Stalinism, adding their approval to his political image. The workings of self-management in practice were themes of numerous Master's and PhD theses in the Western universities, whereas the *Praxis* school of humanist Marxism, calling upon the ideas of the young Marx, enjoyed great esteem among leftists the world over. The favour of such a school, in turn, enshrined the regime of Josip Broz with an aura of democratic socialism, from which practical Marxism might be gleaned (Bakić 2008: 142).

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Primljeno: 16. 06. 2020.

Odobreno: 30. 06. 2020.