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The 1948 Split and a New Round of Factional Struggles within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia: Parallel Biographies and Histories

The split between Yugoslavia and the USSR gave rise to a number of changes in almost every segment of the country, starting with a whole range of political, ideological and economic reforms. Motivated by the conflict, Yugoslav communists sought new ideological pathways to respond to the challenge from Moscow, promoting the workers' self-management system as their unique and innovative ideological alternative. On the domestic front, processes were launched to politically and economically decentralize the state and efforts were invested into the weakening of the Party's role and redefining of the Soviet model and influence in general. As regards its foreign-policy agenda, Yugoslavia began to look into ways of cautiously keeping a balance between the blocks and securing its position among the decolonized Third World countries (the Non-Aligned Movement).

At the same time, the Tito-Stalin conflict also provoked dramatic changes within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). The break with Moscow induced factional strifes and large-scale purges of Party members who sided with the Cominform Resolution, i.e. the criticism from Moscow. As a result, in the period from 1948 to 1956, when the conflict ended, a total of 15,737 individuals were arrested and incarcerated in prisoner camps, 400 of whom succumbed to various diseases, maltreatment, beatings, etc.¹ Over this period, the Yugoslav secret police registered 55,663 supporters of Stalin (the Cominformists).² They were interned in a number of camps established all over the country, most of them (13,000 or almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total number) on Goli Otok (Barren Island) in the North Adriatic, where they were subjected to a brutal process of political

1 Previšić, *Broj kažnjenika*, p. 180.

2 Radonjić, *Izgubljena orijentacija*, p. 73.

re-education. The latter included forcing inmates to beat each other, snitch on real or alleged Stalin's supporters among them, exposure to hard labour, malnutrition, sleep deprivation, and other forms of mental and physical torture.³

The purge of Stalin's supporters was carried out in specific and extremely complex circumstances. Therefore, its roots should be searched for in more than one place. The great diplomatic, economic and ideological pressure combined with the war psychosis, radicalized the atmosphere in Yugoslavia, which paved the way for an extensive and relatively indiscriminate campaign of arrests of Stalin's supporters. Anyway, the Stalinist attitude of Yugoslav communists, who had been the most rigid followers of the Soviet model in the postwar period, resulted in an adamant and non-selective approach to every opposition within the Party in 1948, when the conflict broke out. During and after the conflict with Stalin, the CPY was trying hard to make all arrested and interned Cominformists look like a homogeneous anti-state group whose common denominator was radical and unconditional support to Stalin with the ultimate goal of seizing power from Tito and his followers. Moreover, they were labeled with all kinds of difamatory names, such as spies, traitors, careerists and the like.⁴ In Yugoslavia, such perception of the Cominformists lasted up until the 1980s, when the real nature and motivation, if any, of the persons commonly known as Stalin's supporters slowly emerged through fictional and nonfictional prose, and after the dissolution of the country, it was finally subjected to historiographic analyses.

Analyses of the documentation held by the Yugoslav state security and the testimonies of former prisoners showed that the Cominformists were actually a very heterogeneous group, consisting not only of those who supported Stalin and the Informburo Resolution, but also of the people who just had some questions or voiced disagreement with some of the points set out in the Resolution. Some of them opposed the idea of collectivization, others were simply confused communists unaware of the sudden clash which made them question what was going on (the wider CPY membership knew nothing about the Resolution until 28 June 1948, when it was publicly disclosed). Then there were Russophiles, those dissatisfied with the economic state of the country, supporters of the North Korean (i.e. Chinese and Soviet) side in the Korean war, and many absolutely innocent and randomly chosen individuals.⁵ The extent and dynamic of arrests of IB (Informbureau/Cominform) members had its own logic, based on a variety of ideological factors, those related to foreign policy and even the military. The number of arrests started rising in February 1949 and they went on until 1951.⁶ Although the proclamation of the Informbureau/Cominform Resolution marks the formal beginning

3 Previšić, *Broj kažnjenika*, p. 192.

4 Banac, *Sa Staljinom*, p. 145.

5 Banac, *Sa Staljinom*, pp. 145-163; Bilić, *Goli otok*, pp. 217-227.

6 Previšić, *Povijest Golog otoka*, p. 463.

of the conflict with Stalin, it took another six months for the Yugoslavs to realize that the break was not just a mere dispute between them and the Soviets, which could be easily averted or resolved. At the Plenary Session of the CPY CC (Central Committee) held in February 1949 in response to the Resolution, it became clear that the Soviets intensified the pressure against Yugoslavia.

In addition to the ideological disqualifications, which had until then been their strongest means of pressure, the Soviets now resorted to an economic blockade as a new step of oppression. However, the Yugoslavs did not in any way contribute to the escalation of the conflict in the period between the disclosure of the Resolution and the Plenary Session. They avoided any kind of anti-Soviet propaganda. Moreover, Stalin and the USSR were glorified just as before. The initiated processes of Stalinization were intensified; Yugoslav diplomats were affirming Yugoslavia's loyalty to the USSR (e.g. at the 4th session of the OUN); the treatment of IB members did not yet become radical. For illustration, a total of 462 people were arrested in the period from the disclosure of the Resolution until the end of 1948, whereas in 1949, when the conflict escalated, this number grew to 6,146. The Goli Otok camp, established in the summer of 1949, will become the backbone of the prison system intended for incarceration of IB members.⁷

But, there is one group that stands apart from the groups mentioned above. Long before the mass arrests of real and alleged IB members right after the disclosure of the Resolution in the summer of 1948, the Yugoslav secret police arrested a group of people who had a lot in common: apart from the fact that most of them supported the criticism from Moscow and Stalin, they shared the same Party background. These were old school communists, founders of the CPY, people who had spent years in the USSR, former participants in the Spanish Civil War, veterans of the People's Liberation War, etc. Incidentally, when the leader of the Communist Party, Josip Broz Tito slandered IB members at the 6th Congress of the KPJ/SKJ, calling them "old sinful factionists and waverers,"⁸ he was actually right to some extent in his otherwise typical communist-like speech. Many of those people had indeed been participants in the "factional struggles" within the CPY and members of its leadership before Tito seized power in the CPY in 1937. Given their political and ideological backgrounds, in 1948 they interpreted and perceived the future quite differently than the younger and inexperienced communists, who were confused. Ideologically, emotionally and generationally more inclined to Moscow than to Tito, they had no doubts as to who to side with in the early stages of the conflict. Besides, their early arrests support the fact that Tito had a good reason to fear their possible role, given their background. This paper will present biographies of two old communists, typical party members with a long party history, especially prior to Tito's takeover of its leadership.

7 Previšić, *Broj kažnjenika*, p. 183.

8 *VI kongres KPJ/SKJ*, p. 36.

Vicko Jelaska was born in 1897 in Split. He spent his youth doing manual jobs. Prior to the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he was a member of the Croatian Democratic Party led by the Croatian politician Mile Smodlaka. However, in 1919, after WWI, he joined the SDRP/k (Social Democratic Workers Party/Communists).⁹ He had a 20-year long and rich Party career before he was expelled from the CPY in 1938. He was elected as a delegate to the 2nd Congress of the CPY (Congress of Unification), where the Party officially adopted the name of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. However, he did not attend as he was arrested in Klis (Croatia) by the authorities of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.¹⁰ From 1925 onwards, he was a member of the CPY regional leadership for Dalmatia and the CPY CC. The Party delegated him to the congress of the Communist International in 1927–1928, but he only got as far as the Austrian border when he was stopped together with Andrija Hebrang and Sima Marković. He was imprisoned in 1936 for one year.¹¹ However, his political fate after the Tito–Stalin split was predominantly determined by the events that took place after 1938, when Milan Gorkić (Josip Čižinski), the CPY secretary general, lost his life in Stalinist purges, as did many other Yugoslav communists. Notably, as a result of the repression imposed against the Communists by the regime of the Karadorđević dynasty, the centers of Party life shifted to prisons in Yugoslavia and to other countries, Paris in particular. The Paris-based group gathered around a line of pretenders to the top of the Party hierarchy (a parallel center), led by the old school communist and Gorkić's associate Labud Kusovac, his wife Krista and Ivo Marić.¹² In opposition to the Paris-based party “center” stood Josip Broz Tito, owing to his allies in the Yugoslav prisons and his status in Moscow.¹³ It should be noted here that this round of factional struggles within the CPY involved people that will find themselves on the opposite side of Tito both in

9 HDA, RSUP SDS SRH, Vicko Jelaska (300 118).

10 Vicko Jelaska played a significant role in the Party life in Dalmatia throughout the interwar period. In fact, he was one of the key CPY figures in that area and as such was elected as deputy to the Constituent Assembly in 1920, with quite a success, gaining 8,074 of the total 88,836 votes. Another important person in the “Dalmatian” CPY was Ivo Marić, another factional loser in the late 1930s and an IB member in 1948. *Karakteristike razvoja sindikalnog*, pp. 261–266.

11 Jelaska was sentenced to two years in prison (but served only one), when the regime authorities “broke into” the Dalmatian CPY organization: For details of the arrest, see: Jelić, *Prilog povijesti Brodogradilišta*, pp. 111–112.

12 Labud Kusovac joined the CPY in 1920. He spent five years in the USSR as an administrative clerk in the Red International. As a CI (Communist International) official, he participated in the Spanish Civil War. When Gorkić was removed from the helm of the CPY, Kusovac opposed Tito's takeover and was expelled from the Party when Tito took the lead. He was re-admitted only after the war. He then served in diplomacy until 1948, when he sided with the IB Resolution and was arrested and interned in a camp. Ivan (Ivo) Marić, member of the CPY since 1919, was one of the key figures of the CPY regional committee for Dalmatia. Having spent some time in the USSR, just like Kusovac, he participated in factional struggles for the CPY leadership and against Tito. In 1939 he was expelled from the CPY. As a supporter of the IB Resolution, he was arrested in 1951 and was interned in a camp.

Tito, *Sabrana djela*, 6:340, 344.

13 See: Pirjevec, *Tito i drugovi*, pp. 55–72; Banac, *Sa Staljinom*, pp. 74–81. Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, pp. 194–204; *Povijest SKJ*, pp. 142–156.

1938 and 1948, such as Sreten Žujović – Crni, Rodoljub Čolaković, and others. One of Tito's leading and strongest opponents in the country, and Ivo Marić's close associate, was Vicko Jelaska, the CPY secretary of the Dalmatian regional committee. But, when Tito's faction prevailed and he became CPY acting secretary general, the Parisian center was expelled from the Party, including Vicko Jelaska and Ivo Marić.

UDBA's (Uprava državne bezbednosti, State Security Administration) documents on the break with Stalin mention that Jelaska was expelled from the CPY because of "factionalism", opposition to Comintern, etc.¹⁴ He would never be forgiven for this. Before WWII, Jelaska was not involved in politics, but in 1941, in the new, wartime circumstances, he opposed the Partisan uprising, claiming that the fight had come "prematurely" and that Partisan victims would be futile.¹⁵ As a notable old communist, he was arrested in 1942 in Split by the Italian occupation forces and was taken to the court in Šibenik. There he sat side by side with the legendary communist and later People's Hero Rade Končar. Most of the accused were sentenced to death, but Jelaska was acquitted due to lack of evidence, which raised some doubt after 1945 as he was suspected of collaborating with Italians.¹⁶ He remained in Italian prisons until the fall of Italy, and then he returned to Yugoslavia to see the liberation of the country. He did not participate in the People's Liberation War due to illness.

The end of the war and the rise of the communists did not change Jelaska much. Tito clearly felt an aversion and animosity towards his old party enemies. This can be concluded from the fact that UDBA placed Jelaska under surveillance immediately after the liberation: "Our surveillance of Vicko Jelaska began right after the liberation of our country because he was a well-known old opportunist and factionalist, which is why he was expelled from the Party in 1938 by the decision of the CPY CC."¹⁷ The fact that he sharply criticized the policy of Tito's followers with his friends and fellow citizens did not help Jelaska's fate either. As mentioned earlier, ever since 1945 he had been under surveillance by UDBA, whose people watched his every step though he was politically irrelevant and isolated, moving within the circle of peasants around Split and his old supporters. Among them was one of UDBA's informers who operated under the code name of "Bombarder". He noted Jelaska's remarks, particularly those related to the overly ambitious five-year plan launched in 1947 and to his strong opposition to collectivization which was yet to begin on a full scale.¹⁸ He believed that it lacked technical preconditions to be implemented and that peasants were not prepared enough for it in terms of propaganda. He also criticized the taxation policy and the dynamic of debt

14 HDA, RSUP SDS SRH, Vicko Jelaska (300 118).

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

reduction which, as he put it, “favours *kulaks*”. UDBA followed Jelaska’s moves closely. He would not have been given particular attention had it not been for the IB Resolution, which was disclosed in the summer of 1948. As had been expected, he was in favour of it and was particularly irritated by the fact that Yugoslav communists failed to attend the Cominform meeting held in Bucharest in June 1948. He strongly approved of the Resolution article which accused Yugoslav communists of pursuing a *pro-kulak* policy in the villages, and agreed with the Soviet criticism of the Yugoslav foreign-policy plans for Carinthia and Trieste.¹⁹ When Yugoslavia took a pro-Western stand on the foreign scene (General Assembly of the United Nations) *de facto* for the first time in the autumn of 1949, Jelaska interpreted it as a crossing to the side of the “capitalists”, a view typical of an orthodox communist: “In my opinion, the stand our delegation took in the OUN was wrong and in favour of the imperialist countries, clearly to the detriment of the world working class (...).”²⁰

In the spring of 1949, Yugoslavia also changed its propaganda activities. Thus, instead of the usual anti-Western caricatures and articles in the newspapers, it was now the Soviet Union and other block countries that came under attack. In the same spirit, the caricatures of IB leaders exhibited in Split irritated Jelaska: “(...) so I said that not even Hitler or Mussolini had been ridiculed in caricatures to that extent.”²¹ Jelaska did not stop at that. He then criticized Yugoslav involvement in the civil war in Greece and the new trade arrangements with the West. That did it for him. UDBA arrested him on 13 June 1950. During the investigation, Jelaska was questioned about his already described stance on the IB Resolution, but UDBA was also keen to learn more about – what is quite interesting for our subject – the period of factional struggles in the 1930s, his activities in Italian prisons, and even about his connections with the old communists who had been expelled from the Party in 1938 just like him. Obviously, those “old Communists”, who had actually been members of the Party leadership before Tito and those who had lost the factional struggles for power were a thorn in Tito’s side. Tito was aware of their loyalty to the Soviet Union. This is confirmed by the statement Jelaska gave during the interrogation when commenting on the arrests of all those who were in favour of the Informburo Resolution: “I perceived this attitude of our leadership as a struggle against the old communists, and I am specifically saying that most of the old communists were removed from the leading positions in the Party because they disagreed with such conduct and were well aware of the lack of democratism in the Party.”²² For Jelaska, all new cadres in the Party were “newly fledged”, with “no routine” or “Party experience.”²³ UDBA officers were particularly interested in his expulsion from the Party in 1938 and wanted to

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

know how he felt about it. Despite his efforts to show the expected self-criticism, Jelaska did not convince his investigators. Notably, before his arrest he was in the company of friends, and among them was a secret police informer. He spoke negatively about Tito's takeover of the Party claiming that, to his knowledge, Tito had become its leader without the approval from the Comintern.²⁴ The same informer put down his exact words: "They (Tito's associates) call me, Marić and Baljkas (all ousted from the Party in 1938, M.P.) opportunists, and they call themselves Marxists. Isn't that ridiculous?"²⁵ UDBA's informer goes on to say that Jelaska commented that Ivo Marić was right when he said that Tito was not a communist.²⁶ It was quite easy for UDBA to close the investigation of Vicko Jelaska. As Tito's old opponent since the time the latter came to power in the CPY, he was kept under surveillance from 1945 onwards. In the period prior to the break with Stalin, he was very critical of the communist power in new Yugoslavia with Tito at its helm. The old antagonism could not be ignored. Jelaska supported Soviet criticism expressed in the Cominform Resolution because of his orthodox communist (Stalinist) views, but also because he hoped that the Resolution would be the end of Tito. When UDBA arrested him, they wanted to know everything, especially the details about his clash with Tito in 1936. His fate was sealed, and he was sentenced to two years of community service, which meant imprisonment in the notorious camp on Goli Otok, where he was subjected to brutal mental and physical torture. Moreover, he was isolated from younger inmates and placed together with 130 other "old communists" in the special section of the Goli Otok camp known as "Peter's Pit", and that was, according to the testimonies of prisoners, the toughest place on the island.²⁷ Having served his punishment, Jelaska continued to support Stalin. However, when he started receiving retirement pay, despite being a factionalist, as one UDBA bureaucrat commented, he also started supporting the Yugoslav system. Jelaska died in 1968.

The case and career of Ladislav Žerjavić is somewhat different. He was born in 1893 in Lobar (Croatia). A labourer by profession,²⁸ in 1912 he joined the Social Democratic Party of Austria, where he worked in tunnel construction, but was soon fired because of his political activities. When World War I broke out, he was drafted in the Austro-Hungarian army and was deployed to the Eastern Front (the Carpathians, Bukovina, Galicia). In 1915 he was captured by the Russians and deported to the POW camp in Omsk. As a prisoner, he did various farming jobs. When the October Revolution broke out, he joined the Bolsheviks and the Red Guard. In 1918 he fought with the Czechoslovakian Legion.²⁹ As a member of the Bolshevik Party he was assigned

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Jovanović, *Muzej živih ljudi*, pp. 309-318.

28 HDA, RSUP SDS SRH, Ladislav Žerjavić (303 155).

29 After defeats in the war (e.g. in Galicia), a great number of Yugoslavs (predominantly Croats and Serbs) who had fought within the ranks of the Austro-Hungarian army were interned to the labor camps all over tsarist

a number of tasks, the primary one being to motivate numerous Yugoslav prisoners to join the Bolsheviks in the war. As one of the main operatives, he made it possible for the Yugoslav regiment “Matija Gubec“ to join the Bolsheviks. Trotsky himself and Pavle Gregorić “Pajo” (later one of the key figures in the CPY) participated in the negotiations.³⁰ In 1920, the Yugoslav section of the Communist International ordered him to return to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes so as to establish party cells. In the 1920s, he did hard menial jobs in northern Croatia (mining, digging of tunnels) and at the same time participated in establishing party and trade union organizations. On several occasions he was arrested for his communist activities.

In 1927, the CPY decided to send Žerjavić to the USSR. To that end, in the Vienna-based Party headquarters, he received the cover name of Agabekov. In Moscow he enrolled in the CUNMW (Communist University of the National Minorities of the West), but he soon dropped out, “the reason being the unprecedented factionalism among our party members (...). There were discussions every day about who was on the right path, whether it was Sima Marković or Gorkić, who was in the right, Belgrade or Zagreb (...).”³¹ Factional struggles were commonplace in the life of the CPY in the interwar period. Having left the CUNMW, Žerjavić worked in several industrial plants, participated as a party activist in the forceful implementation of collectivization in the villages, and in 1931 he became director of a state farm (sovkhoz).³² In 1930 he performed various duties related to the management of various agricultural organizations. He was involved in the case of suicide of a party official and was accused of killing him, but eventually he was cleared of suspicion. However, this incident resulted in him being isolated from the Party. After the attack on the USSR, he took part in the transfer of factories to the eastern part of the USSR and worked there as a supervisor. Until the end of the war, he worked on the economic reconstruction of the country and managed several enterprises. He returned to Yugoslavia in September 1946 and found a job in the Administration for the Acquisition of Cereal and later as director of the Sugar Mill until 1952.³³

As concerns the context of his relations with the Soviets, these were not problematic when he returned from the USSR but, of course, they were called into question in 1948. Žerjavić associated with a number of Yugoslav returnees from the USSR. After all, he had Soviet citizenship and at first he lived for a while in the home of Georgijević, a Russian clerk. Among the returnees with whom he was connected was Ante Zorić

Russia. When the October Revolution began in 1917, they joined the Bolsheviks. Later on, it was they who laid the foundations for the CPY introducing Bolshevik ideas in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. See: Očak, *U borbi za ideje Oktobra*; Očak, *Jugoslaveni u Oktobru*; Banac, *I o'šo Karlo*, pp. 23-43.

30 HDA, RSUP SDS SRH, Ladislav Žerjavić (303 155).

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

(Red Army major), his Russian wife and Adolf Štumf³⁴, and he was especially close with Milan Kalafatić.³⁵ Both Zorić and Kalafatić supported Moscow policy after 1948. After the circulation of the Informburo Resolution in 1948, Žerjavić, together with Kalafatić, reproached that the CPY should have attended the IB session in Bucharest. Although he did not agree with all the accusations set out in the Resolution, he did agree with the part stating that the Yugoslav Party was semi-illegal.³⁶

Several days after the Resolution he was contacted by Lončarić, a colleague of his, who worked for the Ministry of Railroads and supported the criticism from Moscow. Here is an indicative detail: in his account of the events, Žerjavić states, “He (Lončarić) said that (...) the things set out in the Resolution are true and therefore we should get to work right away. He insisted that I immediately get in touch with all those who returned from the USSR, and there were many of them, in order to organize party cells, i.e. another party.”³⁷ It seems that Stalin supporters assumed, at least in the initial stage of the conflict, that the people who had spent a better part of their lives in the USSR might be more loyal to Moscow than to Belgrade, and that they had more ties with Moscow, emotionally, politically, and maybe even intelligence-wise. Žerjavić is just one such example along with many others. The years he spent in the USSR (1915–1920 and 1927–1946) left an imprint on Žerjavić. Among his comrades, he advocated the view that Yugoslavia had no future without Soviet help. “After all,” he said to an UDBA investigator, “I am more familiar with Russia and Russian people than with my own homeland.”³⁸ Impressed with and convinced of the success of the Soviet industrialization and the great political power personified by Stalin, Žerjavić was siding more and more with Moscow in the conflict. As the conflict was rising, Žerjavić was more and more irritated by the fact that “one can’t say a word without immediately being looked upon as an Informburo supporter.”³⁹

UDBA arrested Žerjavić in late 1949, but he was released upon the intervention of Marko Nikezić.⁴⁰ Žerjavić continued supporting the Resolution even after his release and stayed in touch with a number of Soviet citizens living in Yugoslavia, who were in some way engaged in the activities of the NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal

34 Adolf Štumf was a CPY member who spent years in the USSR. He was an instructor in the Party schools and worked in the Comintern apparatus. As a Resolution supporter, he was arrested and interned in a camp.

35 Milan Kalafatić, a Yugoslav Communist, also spent several years in the USSR. He also fought in the Spanish Civil War and participated in the French Resistance Movement. Towards the end of WWII, he returned to Yugoslavia to join the NOB. After the war, he worked as Assistant Minister of Industry. As a supporter of the Resolution, he was arrested and interned in Goli Otok. AJ, Kontrolna statutarna komisija, Dosije Milan Kalafatić.

36 HDA, RSUP SDS SRH, Ladislav Žerjavić (303 155).

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Marko Nikezić, Yugoslav Communist, participated in the People’s Liberation War (NOB), Foreign Minister in the 1960s, head of the Serbian CPY branch. HDA, RSUP SDS SRH, Ladislav Žerjavić (303 155).

Affairs – Народный комиссариат внутренних дел). He confirmed that to Kirsanov, a Soviet intelligence agent and employee of the Soviet Embassy, telling him: “I am and shall remain loyal to the Bolshevik Party (...).”⁴¹ Soviet operative Kirsanov instructed him about further contacts with the NKVD once he (Kirsanov) returned to the USSR. Notably, one of the NKVD meeting points was the seat of the association of former POWs in the USSR. And, just like in some spy movie, Žerjavić was supposed to walk around the building dressed as agreed upon, smoking a cigarette and wait for an NKVD officer to address him asking for a match.⁴²

As the conflict escalated, Žerjavić increasingly opposed CPY policy. He interpreted events such as the Korean war in the usual dogmatic manner and contrary to Yugoslav foreign policy line: “(...) I took a stand that the Russians were in the right to have pushed North Korea into war against South Korea, arguing that North Korea was a socialist country, whereas South Korea was a capitalist country. Then I said that Russians were spreading socialism further to the east (...).”⁴³ Also, Žerjavić attacked one of Yugoslav fundamental ideological objections to Soviet policy – state capitalism. He said: “I claimed that it’s the same here because here too everything is in the hands of the state, just as it is in the USSR.”⁴⁴ In conversations with his colleagues, Žerjavić went as far as to attack Tito himself. He said that he liked Tito because they both came from the region of Zagorje, that Tito was a good leader, and that they had known each other since WWI when they were captured together, but that Tito “had made a right turn” under pressure.⁴⁵ Žerjavić made many mistakes while trying to avoid arrest.

Taking into account the usual promptitude of arrests, he actually remained free for quite a long time, considering his ties with Soviet agencies (NKVD) and with the returnees from the USSR, and his criticism of CPY domestic and foreign policy. After such a long period spent in Moscow, he could hardly have felt differently. After all, even Yugoslav communists had hard time distancing themselves from Moscow because for most of them Stalinism was in the core of their ideological substance. During the Tito-Stalin Split people were arrested for much lesser violations. Nevertheless, Žerjavić was arrested on 21 February 1951 and sentenced to two years of community service. The statement of reason said: “He slandered and attacked our state and our Party leadership, kept company with Russian emigrants and spies and refused to confess even when the trial ended.”⁴⁶ Like all the others, Žerjavić was interned in the Goli Otok (Barren island) labour camp. Having failed to collaborate with the Yugoslav secret police, he was retried on 23 April 1953 and sentenced to one more year of imprisonment.⁴⁷ The minutes of

41 HDA, RSUP SDS SRH, Ladislav Žerjavić (303 155).

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.; Stevanović, *U Titovim fabrikama*, p. 155.

the investigation procedure conducted in the camp, often with a lot of violence, sum up that “his connections with the Russians were in the focus of interest,” adding that one of his assignments was to gather information on how frequently the Americans visited Tito’s residence at Dedinje. He was supposed to obtain that information from the Russian wife of Tito’s son, Žarko Broz.⁴⁸ Žerjavić was released from the camp in late 1953.

Conclusion

The Tito–Stalin split profoundly affected the CPY in that particular period, as it gave rise to a number of significant changes in domestic and foreign policy, but also in the ideological sphere. The escalation of the conflict resulted in various forms of pressure, from a military, ideological and economic blockade to fierce anti-propaganda and a wave of purges against Stalin’s followers (*ibeovci*). The Yugoslav secret police saw them as opponents of the regime coming from all walks of life. It is therefore hard to give a precise definition of *ibeovci*: some supported the Resolution unconditionally, some were utterly insignificant critics of certain Party measures often unrelated to the USSR. In hindsight, it looks like Party members actually did agree with Tito’s resistance to the pressure from Moscow, and yet only few remained indifferent to the split. Neither the power of the international proletariat nor that of the USSR leader was enough to crush Tito and the leaders of the CPY. Tito’s charisma, built on his leadership in the Partisan movement, meant much more to the broader Party base. The 1948 split fits in the typology of factional struggles within the CPY which had never stopped after its establishment. What is important for the 1948 split, and, consequently, for this paper, is the significant role and impacts of the Party’s prehistory and the 1920–1930 clashes in the alignment with either the Yugoslav or the Soviet side in 1948. Obviously, those who had not been in favour of Tito’s CPY leadership in the late 1930s, and those members who had been at the head of the CPY before Tito, remained disinclined in 1948 as well. Also, quite understandably, those CPY members who had spent most of their lives in the USSR, as well as the old Party members, now sided with Moscow. It was no wonder then that already early in the conflict, and also later on, a large number of communists with such or similar inclinations were arrested. Labud Kusovac, Dragotin Gustinčić, Dragan Ozren, Blažo Raičević, Božo Ljumović, Mirko Marković are just some of them.

The two examples presented in this work sum up why those people did not side with Tito in the conflict with Stalin. Vicko Jelaska belonged to the same generation as Tito. He had been a member of the Party since its establishment and as such he was politically independent of Tito. As a member of the faction that had opposed Tito and lost to him in 1936–1937, he was expelled from the CPY and that aroused a lot of bitterness

48 HDA, RSUP SDS SRH, Ladislav Žerjavić (303 155).

in him, which came forth in 1948. Siding with Stalin was an opportunity to get even in these merciless Stalinist struggles, but it also meant supporting an authentic, Stalin-style variant of communism. Ladislav Žerjavić reasoned in a similar way. Unlike Jelaska, he spent twenty years in the USSR and there was nothing except party discipline that associated him with Tito. Strongly tied with Moscow, politically, emotionally and intelligence-wise, he did not have much choice in 1948 either. On the other hand, Tito had enough political experience to know that those people were real opposition, loyal to the other side. The break with Moscow came as a surprise to everybody. However, Tito was well aware of exactly who his opponents and potential backbone would be once, and if, Stalin prevailed. No wonder that some 130 individuals found themselves in the worst of all camps, Goli Otok, where they went through unthinkable torture.

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Summary

Martin Previšić

The 1948 Split and a New Round of Factional Struggles within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia: Parallel Biographies and Histories

The Tito-Stalin split initiated a sequence of factional struggles in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which had been a frequent occurrence almost since the days of its founding. For most of the Party membership, the existence of the conflict, as well as its sources, were kept secret, so many Yugoslav communists were left to seek out the reasons for the conflict on their own, and who thereby often imagined their own interpretations as they were at a loss for plausible explanations. The CPY, pressed from without by ideological, military, economic and diplomatic pressures, as well as its own Stalinist substance from within, would drastically cut down any of the opposing and dissenting viewpoints. Through the presentation of several parallel biographies, such as the one of the old Yugoslav communist Vicko Jelaska, this paper will show how the split with Stalin opened up a continuation of the factional struggles which had been present since Tito's rise to power in the Party. The losers in these earlier struggles would see the split as a new chance for regaining power in the Party with Stalin's help. The CPY leadership focused their attention on these individuals before the onset of mass repression. The other "radical" faction of communists who had escaped or stayed in the USSR and other Bloc countries after 1948 will be examined in this paper. These examples and approach will help further define the complex typologies of the split within the CPY after 1948.