

**THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH LABOUR ACTIONS IN SOCIALIST
YUGOSLAVIA (1948-1950): A CASE STUDY OF THE MOTORWAY
“BROTHERHOOD-UNITY”**

By

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Abstract:

The important role of Youth Labour Actions during the period following the Tito-Split (1948-1950) is understudied, and deserves the attention of scholarship. This thesis provides a study of the youth labour action “Brotherhood and Unity”, whose project of building the Motorway Zagreb-Belgrade began in 1948 and involved over 300,000 youth over the course of its 2-year existence. Based upon an examination of archival materials at the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade and the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb this case study provides valuable new insight into an aspect of a well-researched period of political, economic and ideological uncertainty in the history of Yugoslavia. At the same time, it shines a spotlight on the understudied importance of its impact on, and interrelationship with, a particular 5 year-plan project and the Youth Labour Action that saw it come to completion. During and after the Split, loyalty to Tito and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia quickly became of primary importance. The Motorway “Brotherhood and Unity” enjoyed continued governmental support during the crisis in large part because of its symbolic value for the Party, as well as thanks to its potential as a project of mass-mobilization of youth through participation in volunteer youth labour action.

This thesis aims to tell the untold story of this youth labour action, and its importance in the postwar period. Utilizing key concepts such as development, mobilization, homogenization and stabilization, it will be possible to assess the ways in which this youth labour action gained significance. It will be shown that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia wished to maintain loyalty among its diverse populations, and crafted policies and projects in light of its own political, economic and ideological objectives in an uncertain period. Such objectives often aligned themselves with those of existing 5-Year-Plan projects, as well as youth enthusiastic to express love of Party and Leader. This reflects on the close ties between all three levels, from the highest official, to the planned project, to the individual youth. It

will be stressed that youth labour actions were quickly recognized by official bodies as an established, useful platform of mobilizing increasingly desirable support among Yugoslav youth.

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Abbreviations:

AY – The Archives of Yugoslavia

CC – Central Committee

CPY – Communist Party of Yugoslavia

CSA – The Croatian State Archives

FPRY – Federal Peoples’ Republic of Yugoslavia

LSYY – League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia

PMT – Pre-military training

PYY – Peoples’ Youth of Yugoslavia

SYCEM – State Youth Construction Enterprise “the Motorway”

ULAYY – Unified League of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia

UNRRA - United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief Administration

YLA – youth labour action

YLAs – youth labour actions

Introduction

In July 1948, the 1st Maglaj¹ brigade won a ten-day competition on the youth labour action (YLA) the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” for their extraordinary work efforts on the construction site. Asked to give the comment on their prize, “the Third Section Headquarters’ flag”, 16 year old Bosnian Suleiman Mukić, who performed the duty of a water carrier in his troop, explained to a reporter: “Comrade, I do not have time to talk, others are thirsty, and the brigade is working hard!”² Mukić was but one of approximately 320,000 youth to work on the building of the Motorway between 1948 and 1950. This thesis is about young individuals like Mukić, the work that they did, and why it was important. It is the attempt to draw a line from the broadest political context, through to a single development project, down to the experiences of the lowest personalities on the ground. The interrelation between those three levels creates an image demonstrating how crisis caused by the Tito-Stalin split in 1948 affected Five-Year Plan projects and impacted specifically on the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” as well as on the efforts of the youth labour action that built it; and vice-versa.

The youth labour action on the Five-Year project “Brotherhood-Unity”, worked to build a high-speed motorway connecting Belgrade and Zagreb. The project lasted for two years during the reconstruction and development period of Yugoslavia and was intersected by the Yugoslav-Cominform crisis only few months after the YLA started. As is well known, the Split produced a political, ideological and economic crisis in Yugoslavia. Differences between Stalin and Yugoslav leadership temporarily “isolated” Yugoslavia from the Eastern Bloc at a time when Belgrade had bad relations with the West, which put the country in a highly unfavorable position. Since the Yugoslav partisan movement during the Second World War and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) membership afterwards cultivated almost the

¹ Maglaj is a small city in Republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina.

² “I Autoput je škola” [The Motorway is also a school], *Omladina*, July 10, 1948.

same sentiments towards both Tito and Stalin, the CPY was threatened by a possible division within the Party and among some parts of the general population. With the Cominform decision to impose an economic blockade, the situation worsened. All projects of the First Five-Year plan (1947-1951) were seriously jeopardized by the blockade of more than two thirds of Yugoslav economic exchange with the Cominform countries. This background raises important questions that direct my research.

Firstly, just how did the crisis in 1948 affect projects of the First Five-Year plan? Many projects in 1948 were either forced to slow down their operations or were completely stopped and abandoned. The Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity”, however was preserved, and in different ways supported by the state, despite representing limited economic value at a time when economics was suppose to matter the most. If only the number of vehicles in Yugoslavia between 1946 and 1950 is taken into account, building a Motorway should have been a low-priority objective. Furthermore, other road and railway connections between Belgrade and Zagreb were repaired and were functional after 1945, which makes the Motorway project even less of a necessity in the conditions of economic blockade. Despite this, the project was finished – even in the absence of all the materials it required - with only a few months’ delay. It is evident that the CPY and their economic planners were led by a different logic. Why this particular developmental project was forced to its end requires explanation.

Much of the justification given at the time for keeping the Motorway alive directly related to the growing importance and popularity of youth labour actions (YLAs). Addressing how and why youth labour actions were important, and how this importance manifested itself during this period of crisis, is at the heart of this research. What else besides its economic role made the Motorway YLA so important that Tito himself visited only 15 days after the Cominform launched its Resolution? Additionally, although the actions were voluntary and

youth provided a labour service free of charge, the expense of having them on the action was substantially high. What was it that made the CPY and the Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia (PYY) preserve this form of youth program in these circumstances?

In order to do justice to the topic, my research involved intensive and careful consideration of original materials relating to youth labour actions in the Archives of Yugoslavia (Belgrade) and the Croatian State Archives (Zagreb). By focusing on the case study of the Motorway "Brotherhood-Unity", I analyze the influence of the crisis on the project of constructing the motorway, with a focus on the relationship between changing economic, political and ideological factors and their influence on the Motorway youth labour action.

YLAs, in terms of both their domestic and international popularity, were a phenomenon of Yugoslav history. However, they have not received the historical treatment that they deserve. At present, they remain marginally mentioned in the history of twentieth century Yugoslavia. Though described in the memorial books, sponsored by the Party or their organizations and produced throughout the socialist period from 1945 until 1991, YLAs were occasionally part of the anniversary "photo albums" containing general and biased information. During the same period, sociologists developed an interest in researching youth labour actions, however, largely with a focus on exploring and attempting to explain what motivated youth to volunteer. The exception is Rudi Supek who in early 1960ies from sociological perspective offers the short theoretical analysis of the YLAs from the period 1945-1952 - though without reliance on primary source materials. More recently, only a few historical articles have touched briefly on the topic of youth labour actions. These mostly include vague references to volunteer youth workers on a particular project unfounded on the use of primary sources materials, as the focus of research was not on the actions themselves.

Consequently, in its exploration of youth labour actions, this thesis takes its place among a *limited* historiography. Because so little has been written on the subject, it looks at the very beginnings of youth labour actions in the aftermath of the Second World War, with the largest and most significant action at the time, the building of the Zagreb-Belgrade Motorway as a case study. In doing so, this thesis will also supplement a very *well-developed* historiography. In order to build on the work of Supek and treat the first phase of the Motorway youth labour action as a part of the wider social, economic and political context of the late 1940s, will necessarily involve a discussion of the internal Yugoslavian crisis, the country's evolving relationship with the Cominform and its changing international relations.

Much has been written on 1948 and the Tito-Stalin Split. Drawing youth labour actions out from the confines of the historical footnote does not only shed light on its importance during this early period, but offers a fresh lens through which to comment and provide insight into the effects of the crisis on an unexplored aspect of the everyday lives of thousands of youth in Yugoslavia. On the one hand, this thesis is the attempt to explore an almost uncharted area in Yugoslavia's history, using primary sources that haven't received comprehensive treatment. On the other hand, the experiences of the unexplored youth labour actions have to be situated within a very well-discussed political context. Consequently, this thesis is both the telling of a new story and a different light on a well-known one.

The thesis itself is broken down into 3 main chapters that each deal with a particular set of questions. It takes the form of a funnel, beginning from the very broadest look at methodology and approach, to a discussion of Yugoslavia's position in 1948 generally, its impact on a particular Five-Year plan project and finally to the internal workings of the youth labour action on the same project.

In order to understand the widest context in which the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” was built Chapter one describes Yugoslavia during the crisis in 1948 with focus on the historiography of the period. The chapter expands upon the discussion concerning the (lack) of historical treatment of youth labour actions. It also provides a provisional periodization of the youth labour actions during their existence. Most importantly, it describes the methodological approach used, before offering critical comment on the sources relied on throughout the thesis. The second chapter introduces the widest context of economic, political and ideological aspects of Yugoslav history between 1945 and 1950, explaining the emergence of the new system and its interrelation with YLAs, the reconstruction process and generally the economic role of YLAs during the period 1945-1947 and external relations which preceded and created. It steadily lowers its focus to come to the motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” as a second level. This section examines how the Motorway was planned and brings in the State Youth Construction Enterprise “the Motorway” as the technical organizer and executor of works. Importantly, it explores the organization of the Motorway project and defines the economic interrelations between the youth and the Enterprise. The final chapter goes deeper into the analysis of the YLA on the Motorway, in which first the organization of the action and the mobilization of youth are analyzed. This involves a discussion of who and how coordinated the youth and how the mobilization process went. It also includes several key attributes such as agitprop programs and pre-military trainings, the performance of youth on the construction site, with focus on the system of competitions between brigades on the construction site and how these systems were used for the benefit of the given political situation. In these final two chapter in particular, I am looking for the affects of the broader context of the political crisis, whether or not it shaped the youth labour and to what effect.

One million youth participated in youth labour actions in the five years after the Second World War. The Motorway youth labour affection alone affected thousands of youth. Their stories deserve historical treatment, and this thesis is step in that direction.

1. Forming a methodology

1.1. Yugoslavia in 1948 and 1948 in historiography

The Youth Labor Action, the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” was the biggest Five Year Plan project for 1948-1949, and was tightly related to the shape of the economy of the Federal Peoples’ Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY). Consequently, this particular YLA was connected to the political atmosphere created by officials in Belgrade. Therefore, it could be concluded that the Motorway YLA was, from both an economic and political point of view, highly affected by the dynamics of unstable relations between Yugoslavia and Cominform countries, especially after the Resolution and economic blockade following the Tito-Stalin split in June 1948. Such a conclusion would be both right, and wrong. This presents a dilemma that will be a *leitmotif* in forthcoming chapters, but before attempting to resolve it, this sub-chapter ‘Yugoslavia in 1948’ will briefly introduce important contextual information pertinent to the case of the YLA building of the Motorway.

The split between two communist leaders, Josip Broz Tito and Josef Stalin, was among the first major political crisis in the post Second World War period. The crisis, which started even before the official divorce between the Cominform and FPRY, lasted for more than five years (1948-1953). The initial shock of the split quickly affected the two most important spheres in Yugoslavia, the political establishment and the economy. A transformation of its ideological platform and a disturbance in social stability came as part of the after-shock. Four elements; political power, economy, ideology and support of the masses, were the base columns sustaining the authority of the Party in Yugoslavia. For the CPY, the omnipresent crisis represented the first comprehensive endurance test after their seizure of power in 1945. Moreover, the split represents the milestone and turning point in the history of

FPRY, considerably changing the position of this Balkan state and promoting it from a marginal border state of the Eastern Bloc into a respectable voice in international relations.

The Tito-Stalin split has been well-explored by historians, sociologists, political scientists, journalists, and other interested parties. The most famous debates and academic “struggles” center on its cause. In other words, what initiated the confrontation between Socialist Yugoslavia and the rest of the Eastern communist countries? The debate can be divided into three general groups of arguments.

Vladimir Dedijer, a Yugoslav politician and Agitprop official in charge of media until 1954, is the main exponent of the first group of arguments. He defends the position that the split was due to irresolvable economic differences between the Soviet Union and FPRY. In his book, *The Battle Stalin Lost*, published in 1978, Dedijer focuses on failed cooperation in the case of joint Soviet-Yugoslav companies.³ His theory is that through the strategically formed joint companies - which were dominated by Soviet personnel and the bank that was supposed to coordinate the companies’ finances - the Soviet Union planned to monopolize the Yugoslav economy and gradually put it under its dominance. This theory is partly accepted by John R. Lampe; though he also takes into account other factors.⁴ Since the split ended the majority of Soviet-Yugoslav economic agreements, this assumption could never be confirmed.

Dedijer’s theory was never entirely abandoned and appeared again in historical footnotes. However, a second group of authors “eclipsed” the economic thesis with the theory of geo-political bipolarization. This group emerged in the late 1980s with Ivo Banac’s book *With Stalin against Tito*.⁵ Banac bases his argument on Tito’s geo-political

³ Vladimir Dedijer, *The Battle Stalin Lost* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978), pp. 73-96.

⁴ John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History – Twice There was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 245-249

⁵ Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 3-44.

aspirations in the region with the formation of the Balkan Federation with Bulgaria and Albania, which he claims Stalin perceived as a threat and the emergence of a new communist center in the Bloc. In addition to that argument, Banac adds that aid sent by FPRY to assist the communist movement during the Greek Civil War was perceived as interference with Stalin's agreements with England and provoking new conflict. The same kinds of arguments support Dušan Bilandžić and Branko Petranović works (respectively Croatian and Serbian historians) and the geo-political thesis is generally the most accepted in the literature.⁶

The third argument sees the split as only gradually cultivated from the period during the Second World War, but escalating later. The focus here is on ideological differences between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the Parties' policies. Geoffery Swain, in his article, *The Cominform: Tito's International*, argues that Tito's Second World War strategy of forming the Popular Front from "below" secured and strengthened the power of Communist Party of Yugoslavia to the extent that Yugoslavia gained control over Cominform.⁷ His argument in 1992 enters the debate rather late, and can be perceived as an addition to Banac's geo-political theory.

What is less represented in the debate surrounding the causes of the split are its direct economic and, to the certain degree, political consequences. Besides the witch hunt for political opponents, their imprisonment on the Marble Isle and often vague information about the effects of the economic blockade, other aspects of life in Yugoslavia remain insufficiently explored. One of the reasons why the economic aspect is still neglected is due to a lack of reliable data about the amount of damage the blockade caused. Data for the postwar period in

⁶ Dušan Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest* [Croatian Modern History] (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 1999), pp. 289-298; Branko Petranović *Velika Šizma četrdesetosma* [The Great Schism Fortyeighth] (Podgorica: CID, 1999), p. 41.

⁷ Geoffrey Swain, 'The Cominform: Tito's International?', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Sep., 1992), (Cambridge: Cambridge Press University, 1992), pp. 641-663.

Yugoslavia is incomplete because the Federal Bureau for Statistics of FPRY started its work only in 1953.⁸ Another hindrance is the deliberate destroying of data during the 1948-1953 military crises, reported on by Vladimir Dedijer.⁹

Nevertheless, Josip Broz Tito in his report for the Sixth Congress of Communist Party of Yugoslavia (1952) provides certain numbers detailing the degree of economic damage caused by the blockade.¹⁰ Jozo Tomasevich also offers useful data about economic conditions in Yugoslavia his article, *Immediate Effects of Cominform Resolution of the Yugoslav Economy*, published in 1982.¹¹ The article deals with geo-political economic relations, without delving further into the conditions of industrial production or the flow of goods in the market – important factors in understanding how the big Five-Year Plan construction projects, such as the Motorway, endured the crisis. However, Tomasevich does provide important information concerning Yugoslavia's sharp turn towards the West and the source of the first foreign financial support. His arguments complement the recent comprehensive research efforts of Tvrtko Jakovina.¹² During the Yugoslav crisis with the Cominform, the CPY gradually opened itself towards the West, a move which ultimately saved their economic and political position. With this backdrop in mind, an analysis of the YLA the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” will reach deep into a discussion of the period during the Cominform crisis in Yugoslavia in order to present how the Motorway project was able endure the economic blockade that followed. Even more importantly, the role of YLAs in 1948-1949 as an existing framework for the internal mobilization of support, homogenization and

⁸ *Jugoslavija 1918-1988. Statistički godišnjak*, [Yugoslavia 1918-1988. Statistical Yearbook], (Beograd: Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1989)

⁹ Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita* [New Attachments for the Biography of Josip Broz Tito], Vol. 3 (Belgrade: Rad, 1984), 107 in: Banac, xii.

¹⁰ *VI. Kongres KPJ* [The Sixth CPY Congress], (Beograd: Komunist, 1952)

¹¹ Jozo Tomasevich, “Immediate Effects of the Cominform Resolution of the Yugoslav Economy”, in *War and Society in East Central Europe*, vol. X. ed. Wayne Vuchinich (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 89-130.

¹² Tvrtko Jakovina, *Američki komunistički saveznik. Hrvati, Titova Jugoslavija i Sjedinjene Američke Države*, [American Communist Ally. Croats, Tito's Yugoslavia and United States of America], (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2003).

stabilization of youth, as a major defensive asset at the disposal of the Yugoslav leadership, will be carefully examined.

1.2. Periodization

Before going deeper into an analysis of Youth Labor Actions, a provisional periodization of this kind of organization is needed. Based on their organizational, ideological, economical and political purpose, the YLAs can be divided into three phases. These phases are not determined simply by a chronological distinction, but also according to important transformations the YLAs underwent during their existence (1941-1989). The three phases of YLAs were borne from the inheritance of war (1941-1945) and can be categorized as: the first phase of reconstruction, development, political and ideological stability (1945-1952), the second phase of self-management (1958-1966/); and the third phase of decline (1970s and 1980s).

Wartime actions (1941-1945) can be considered as a “zero stage” in which the YLAs first emerged as a form of background support for the partisan movement. In this period occasionally organized youth brigades were tasked with supplying the army with food by secretly harvesting grain during the night in enemy territory. Such brigades were permanently helping medical centers caring for the wounded. Besides providing logistical and medical help in wartime, youth action brigades also conducted diversions behind the enemy lines, including burning grain fields or even demolishing bridges.¹³ In this stage YLAs were not yet part of a mass youth organization and operated only in conditions of war, answering to the needs of the unpredictable situations particular to guerilla warfare. Since all males capable of carrying a gun were in partisan military units, the vast majority of wartime YLA brigades were young

¹³ Toma Dragosavac, ed. *ORA – Mladost naše zemlje* [YLA – Youth of our Country] (Beograd: Poslovna Politika, 1982), pp. 9-16.

girls. Therefore, this stage of YLAs was a heritage base on which later actions found their genesis and referred to as their heroic past.

The first YLA phase of reconstruction, development, and ideological and political stabilization encompasses the period during the expansion of liberated territory in the last months of war and later, after its end. Reconstruction and development of the newly established Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia developed in the form of a series of projects that were launched all over the country. Besides obvious economic concerns, reconstruction was pursued as a part of the establishment of new communist system and served to strengthen the power of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. In both processes YLAs played an important role; from both the economic and power-strengthening perspectives. More than a million young Yugoslavs participated on over 70 major YLA projects.¹⁴ However, the period was interrupted by the Cominform Resolution in 1948, which affected YLAs in many ways. After the Tito-Stalin split, YLAs gained a new purpose and, as I will argue, came to serve as a mechanism for both homogenization and social stabilization. A deeper analysis of this first phase and the inner transformations of YLAs will be presented in the last chapter.

After 1952, YLA projects were almost completely shut down for economic reasons, since they were considered financially unprofitable. However in 1958, the Program of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia demanded the reactivation of YLA programs.¹⁵ As in the first period (1945-1952), the Party insisted that the YLAs should once again influence the formation of thought among young Yugoslavs.¹⁶ The shift of CPY's official ideology from an administrative centralized planning system into workers' self-management affected economic

¹⁴ "Statistički podaci Narodne Omladine Jugoslavije za Kongres 1953" [Statistic data for Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia Congress in 1953]. The Archives of Yugoslavia, Savez socijalističke omladine Jugoslavije [League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia] Fund 114, File 4.

¹⁵ *VII Kongres Saveza Komunista Jugoslavije* [The Seventh Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia], (Belgrade: Kultura, 1958), 71.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

structures, and consequently every sphere of life in Yugoslavia including the organization of youth labor actions. Hence, the second phase was characterized by widespread liberalization and decentralization. YLA projects lost their economic benefit for the country, but youth brigades' camps remained as schools of ideology propagated by the Party. Still, decision-making gradually became more and more decentralized and project organization more autonomous.¹⁷ For example, the responsibility for financing projects was transferred to the Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia. The PYY had to apply for project permission at the state enterprises and to secure funds for organizational expenses.

The last stage, the phase of decline, is convincingly staged in the movie *S.P.U.K* (*Sreća pojedinca – uspjeh kolektiva* [Happiness of an Individual – Success of a Collective]) directed by Milivoj Puhlovski in 1983.¹⁸ In a satirical manner, the movie presents the abandonment of most of the YLA values, such as: discipline, the importance of work, socialist ideals and dedication. Projects in the seventies and eighties were not as economically significant as they were in earlier periods and they required much less of a work force. However, the number of smaller projects was still high.

In terms of this suggested provisional periodization the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” between Belgrade and Zagreb, with all its particular characteristics, is an example of the first phase. The Motorway project was a Five-Year developmental project with major economic and political significance; and not long after construction started, the Resolution was launched. Therefore, an analysis of its dynamics will present conclusions to the questions posed in the Introduction.

¹⁷ Rudi Supek, *Omladina na putu do bratstva. Psihosociologija radne akcije* [Youth on the path to brotherhood. Psycho-sociology of a labour action] (Beograd: Mladost, 1963), pp. 7-35.

¹⁸ Milivoj Puhlovski, *S.P.U.K.* (*Sreća pojedinca – uspjeh kolektiva* [Individual's happiness – Success of the Collective]) (Zagreb: Zagreb film i Kinematografi Zagreb, 1983).

1.3. Research and sources

From the outset, youth labor actions in Socialist Yugoslavia as a subject of analysis, present a multitude of opportunities for research. The YLAs have not been systematically elaborated on the subject, either by minimally providing a full chronological overview of YLA projects, by developing a methodological and theoretical approach, or generally offering conclusions on the topic. YLAs are footnote in comprehensive works on Yugoslav history of the 20th century. However, official documents reveal that YLAs can be considered both as a separate world inside the life of Yugoslavia and as a youth organization or project which was closely related to all political, economic, social and ideological processes of the time. YLA Headquarters' and Agitprop reports, the minutes of General Staff meetings, and letters of request, all confirm that once the project started running both a certain level of autonomy, as well as the implementation of "mainstream" political and structural decisions, were present. In light of this duality, YLAs must be approached both as a semi-autonomous particularity and as a part of official structures.

The League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia (LSYY) produced memorial books and other forms of publications on Youth Labour Actions, most of which are illustrated with superficial descriptions of the projects in which youth participated. Since these publications had a propagandistic purpose - popularizing YLAs or marking different anniversaries - most contain data about notable numbers of youth involved with the actions, hours of volunteer work brigadiers shared, tones of soil they dug for certain project, or kilometers of railway they constructed. *Radne akcije Narodne Omladine Hrvatske* [Labour actions of Peoples' Youth of

Yugoslavia] and *ORA – Mladost naše zemlje* [YLA – Youth of our country] and memorial books on specific YLA projects are examples of such publications.¹⁹

Due to its interest in foreign youth who also participated in YLA, the Yugoslav news agency *Tanjug* produced similar propagandistic publications issued in foreign languages and abroad, such as its short bulletin, *Voluntary labor activities of Yugoslav Youth*.²⁰ Since all this material was used to popularize the actions, they provide limited trustworthy data. Interestingly, YLAs were being promoted in New Dehli as early as 1952 in an English-language publication. Immediately, this raises questions: Why were they propagated in 1952 when the CPY decided to stop YLA projects that same year? Is the existence of a publication describing YLAs in New Delhi in 1952 any evidence of growing Yugoslavian interest and influence in the Third World and the formation of a Non-Aligned movement? How much did the Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia promote YLAs out of the country and where did they target? Unfortunately, answering these questions is beyond the scope of the present research, however they illustrate just how much there is yet to be uncovered about youth labour actions.

Among extant propagandistic literature, perhaps the most useful is *Stvaraoci neodoljivog poleta* [Creators of irresistible enthusiasm], published in 1980 and edited by two sociologists, Srećko Mihailović and Grujica Spasović.²¹ The book follows youth labour actions until the end of 1970s, with a focus on Tito's relations with youth. Even though the book lacks a scientific and critical approach, the compilation of Tito's speeches from different occasions- on YLAs or Party Congress meetings - provides a valuable image of how the Party

¹⁹ Vera Hafner, ed. *Radne akcije Narodne Omladine Hrvatske* [Labour actions of Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia] (Zagreb: Centralni komitet narodne omladine Hrvatske, 1949); Toma Dragosavac, ed. *ORA – Mladost naše zemlje* [YLA – Youth of our country] (Beograd: Novinarsko-izdavačka radna organizacija “Mladost”, 1983); Jovan Golubović, ed., *Beograd – grad akcijaša* [Belgrade – city of work activists] (Beograd: Gradska konferencija SSO Beograd, 1985); Radmila Zdjelar, ed., *ORA Sava* [YLA Sava] (Zagreb: Gradska Konferencija SSOH Zagreb, 1984).

²⁰ Predrag Anastasijević, ed., *Voluntary labor activities of Yugoslav Youth* (New Delhi: Tanjug, 1952).

²¹ Srećko Mihailović and Grujica Spasović, ed. *Stvaraoci neodoljivog poleta* [Creators of irresistible enthusiasm] (Beograd: IICSSO, 1980).

and its leader perceived youth labour projects. It also presents a useful look into how the youth themselves responded to Tito's unplanned appearances in camps, and how the relations between the leader of the country and "conscious" youth were officially represented at the time.

Dragan Popović's recently published article, *Youth Labor Action as Ideological Holiday-Making* (2010), puts the Actions into a completely new framework, that of tourism.²² Popovic elaborates on the motivations of Yugoslav youth and concludes that the YLAs were attractive to youth, among other reasons, as providing the possibility to travel and explore parts of their country which otherwise they would most likely have never have had the chance to visit. However, the article was based entirely on secondary sources and the data it offers does not assist comprehending the structural or organizational categories of YLAs. Carol S. Lily's article, *Problems of Persuasion: Communist Agitation and Propaganda in Post-war Yugoslavia, 1944-1948*, published in 1994, has many of the same limitations.²³ Even though the subject of her research was not the YLAs, the author opens her article with cases of forced mobilization into youth labor actions. She uses such cases as examples to support a wider point about failed propaganda in Socialist Yugoslavia. However, in her evaluation of YLAs' propaganda efficacy, Lily neglects the statistics, the percentage of youth who joined the YLA voluntarily, and sections of the reports where PYY (on the highest level) discuss problems with forced mobilization and how to prevent them. In other words, it cannot be claimed that forced mobilization was PYY official policy. The example of these two articles - which are among rare historical works dealing with YLA - clearly illustrates a gap in a historiography that is not sufficiently familiar with the complexity of the actions and their context.

²² Dragan Popovic, "Youth Labor Action (Omladinska radna akcija, ORA) as Ideological Holiday-Making", in: *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side - A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s-1980s)*, ed. Grandits Hannes and Taylor Karin, (Budapest: CEU University Press, 2010), pp. 279-302.

²³ Carol S. Lilly, "Problems of Persuasion: Communist Agitation and Propaganda in Post-war Yugoslavia", 1944-1948, in: *Slavic Review* 53, No. 2, (Summer 1994), p. 395-413.

Outside the historical discipline, sociologists were the only ones who approached the YLAs with systematic analysis. However, they were mostly interested in questions of motivation, or in other words, why thousands of young Yugoslavs voluntarily dedicated their free time to hard labor. Bora Kuzmanović, a Serbian sociologist, in his article *Motivacija za učestvovanje na radnima akcijama* [Motivation for participation on labour actions], published in 1978, claims that during the first postwar YLAs youth voluntarily joined the actions and worked for patriotic reasons.²⁴ According to Kuzmanović, this kind of attitude was “reserved for the youth.”²⁵ As well as being motivated by patriotism, Kuzmanović presents an additional five reasons behind youth volunteerism: the pursuit of a specific kind of collective life, curiosity about the life in YLAs, recreational-entertaining activities doing the actions, desire for self actualization, and the possibility of finishing a course on the YLA.²⁶ While the author offers elaborate remarks on factors motivating youth, his conclusions are not convincingly located in a systematic, historical analysis of the postwar period.

Croatian sociologist Rudi Supek and his students from the Zagreb University spent four years examining the second phase (1958-1962) of the project building the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity”, and conducted a broad analysis of the period. The result of their work was published in a 1963 book, *Omladina na putu do bratstva. Psiho-sociologija radne akcije* [Youth on the path to brotherhood. Psycho-sociology of a labour action].²⁷ In the first few lines the author offers comments on the meaning of action and states that in general it is “the most dynamic form of human life.” Following Marxist thought, Supek claims that the aim of the action can be “production or work performance, reshaping the nature or creating means for life.” However as he notes, actions can also serve unproductive, non-vital objectives, such

²⁴ Bora Kuzmanović, “Motivacija za učestvovanje na radnim akcijama” [Motivation for participation on labor actions], in: *Gledišta – Časopis za društvenu kritiku i teoriju*, nr. 7-8, July-August 1978, pp. 655-675.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 671

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 670-671.

²⁷ Supek (1963).

as the erection of great monuments of culture, cases which the author describes as the “humanization of nature.”²⁸

Furthermore, Supek importantly offers a short, but useful differentiation between the actions on which he conducted his research and those from a decade or more before his period. He emphasizes that the YLAs in the second half of 1940s and in the beginning of 1950s were part of an upswing of “wider social actions” in rebuilding and modernizing Yugoslavia.²⁹ Moreover, according to Supek, though physical reconstruction was more or less “completed”, in participating in the YLAs youth autonomously strived for the wider building of socialist society, through its “material production.” In that sense, YLAs gained “distinctly socio-educational importance”, not only for teaching youth discipline and developing strong work habits, but also as a mechanism for creating the conscience of a “socialist community of young people” with creative abilities.³⁰ Using Marxist language, Supek argues that the YLAs, during the period of what Croatian historian Dušan Bilandžić calls “revolutionary enthusiasm”³¹, were part of an omnipresent “reconstruction movement” which included the almost all social groups. But, once revolutionary enthusiasm subsided, youth found a new purpose in the actions, and continued on not only rebuilding the country but also forming a new socialist man and society.

While providing an important contribution, Supek overlooked three important points in his elaboration of early Youth Labour Actions. Firstly, the reconstruction period technically lasted from 1945 to 1955 (as opposed to the shorter three-year period supposed by Supek). The continuation of these youth labour actions was arguably therefore less of an autonomously claimed role and pursuit carried out by youth, and more a *de facto* continuation after 1948 of pre-existing material and ideological trends for new recruits. Secondly, the role

²⁸ Supek, p. 7.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Bilandžić, p. 240.

of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, their practice of all-present control and official ideology (which was later gradually denounced) is left almost entirely out of the equation. Finally, by neglecting the political and economic context of the late 1940s and immense crisis, Supek fails to factor in yet another facet of YLAs in that period, namely the mechanism of social stabilization. It is with the aim of addressing these critical points that this current research project will examine the case of the YLA the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity”, based on primary sources from the Archives of Yugoslavia, Croatian State Archives and official newspapers of League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia, *Omladina*.

Since the building of the Motorway was the biggest and the most complex project the YLAs participated in, a more nuanced understanding is especially important, and five archival fonds were subjected to rigorous analysis. The core fonds identified were “League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia” and “League of Socialist Youth of Croatia”, with a focus on specific units such as: Youth Labor Actions, Congress transcripts, various reports and correspondence between higher and lower levels of the organization. All these documents provide data important for understanding administrative-organizational and ideological sphere of the YLA the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity”. Examples from both the federal and republican levels are required to represent their different fields of responsibility, as well as for comparison between decision-making on the highest level and the implementation of those decisions in practice. On the other hand, *Omladina*, as the LSYY official publication, offers numerous reports and interviews from brigadiers’ camps, construction sites and headquarters. In spite of its biased descriptions, *Omladina* serves as a window into the YLA Motorway, though requires caution in analysis.

The duality of YLAs introduced earlier marks a starting point for expanding an analysis on the links between the YLA and other state institutions. Since the Motorway was a major cross-country infrastructural traffic project, documents of the Federal Ministry of

Traffic and Federal Ministry of Construction have to be taken into account. However, the most valuable sources that connect this Youth Labour Action with the state institutions come from the archival fond of “State Construction Youth Enterprise *The Motorway*” (SCYEM). This enterprise was established by the government in mid 1940s for the purposes of planning, projecting, financing, and providing heavy machinery with accompanying staff and conducting construction works of the Motorway. Besides these links between the YLA and other state institutions, SCYEM documents highlight the complexity of the economic conditions of the project and consequently the influences of state policies on the project.

2. Building new Yugoslavia and the role of youth labor actions (1945-1950)

From the very beginning, youth labour actions (YLAs) should be clearly defined and described. It is important to first develop a clear understanding of what a youth labour action is before considering their importance in the postwar period. To this end, this chapter will lay much of the groundwork of discussion. Firstly, it will introduce youth labour actions generally, before turning to an exploration of some of the important contextual developments in the late 1940s in Yugoslavia; including the establishment of the Communist party of Yugoslavia (CPY), the reconstruction process and changing international relations. YLAs enjoyed an unprecedented amount of support from the CPY in the postwar period. They played an integral part in the reconstruction process, and their existence was justified with a need for voluntary work on rebuilding and modernizing Yugoslavia. At the same time, dynamically evolving international relations between Yugoslavia and the two Western and Eastern Blocs strongly affected the political and ideological climate in the country, and consequently impacted upon the structures in youth labor action projects. These connections will be made most clear in an exploration of the specific case of the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity”. The final part of this chapter will introduce the Five-Year plan Motorway project and its history. The fact that this particular project - and the youth labour action that worked on it - was preserved, and completed, provides a concrete example within which to evidence the affects of a broader political, economic and ideological context on youth labour actions.

2.1. What were the youth labour actions?

Youth labour actions were essentially organized pools of free labour. Each Action was broken up into working units, “brigades” (units), in which participating youth (henceforth referred to as “brigadiers”) worked for a designated period of time on a particular aspect of a construction project. Internal organization of the action and life in the camp was organized according to a military hierarchy, with terms such as: headquarters, departments, brigades, troops, commanders and instructors. According to the *Rule Book for Work Brigades* from 1946, the basic tasks of labour units were:

1. To work on reviving our economy, raising industry and reconstruction of Transport network.
2. To participate in the work of raising demolished and construction of new homes, schools, enterprises, roads, bridges;
3. To help to perform permanent works as plowing, harvesting and sowing;
4. To find and apply modern methods of production as well as to assist the work of cooperatives;
5. To help poor families and families of the soldiers who fell in the *Liberation War*;
6. To initiate and perform actions for draining or irrigating the land and forestation of bare surfaces;
7. With their self-initiative to assist national authorities in organizing and carrying out social welfare for the poor, especially orphans;
8. To organize workshops working to create useful tools, repair tools and devices
9. Workgroups in enterprises are obliged to increase the production of training and storage machines, saving raw materials, to work overtime and work for free on Sundays.³²

From the list it can be seen that there was a wide spectrum of activities youth brigades performed for the country, the population and their youth organization. The reconstruction projects YLAs worked on were prepared by the interested ministry and state construction enterprise. The former provided engineers and other experts, heavy machinery and finances for the project. The rest was in hands of Peoples’ Youth of Yugoslavia (PYY). The organization mobilized the youth, organized their transportation to the camps, work

³² “Pravilnik radnih brigada” [Rule book for work brigades]. Croatian State Archives, Savez Socijalističke Omladine Hrvatske [League of Socialist Youth of Croatia] Fund 1231, File 202.

schedules, the whole camp life including education, cultural programs, specialization programs, sports and social and health insurance. On the whole, the YLAs as organized voluntary work were very popular. In the period between 1946 and 1952 a number of 1,020,300 youth participated in youth labor actions on over 70 major projects. YLA brigades built: '11 railways: Brčko-Banovići, Šamac-Sarajevo, Banja Luka-Doboj, Nikšić-Titograd [...]; 6 roads: The Motorway "Brotherhood-Unity" [Belgrade-Zagreb], Potiska-Čoka [...]; 14 industrial objects: factory for heavy machines "Ivo Lola Ribar", steel factory in Zenica, factory for hydraulic machines in Zagreb [...]; 5 hydropower-plants Jablanica, Mali Zvornik, Vinodol [...].'³³ Besides these strategically important objects youth also built river channels and student cities, worked on reclamation of infertile soil and river regulation. Among their major accomplishments were also 4000 village halls.³⁴

Despite their popularity as volunteer Actions, however, sources do indicate cases of forced mobilization.³⁵ Republic branches responsible for the recruitment of youth had local branches on regional and district levels. When these local levels received orders to mobilize a certain number of youth for a certain action, they would do their best to carry out the orders. For example in 1949, the PYY asked its branch in Croatia to provide 159 brigades containing 39,750 brigadiers for federal YLAs among which was the Motorway "Brotherhood-Unity". From that number 113 brigades were supposed to be mobilized in villages, 37 brigades in high schools and 9 brigades in universities.³⁶ In September of the same year, it was asked for a further 5,000 brigadiers to be mobilized especially from villages, and thus the republican branch was forced to ask their district levels to provide even more youth.³⁷ In practice, mobilizing a brigade was not a simple task. Parents would often forbid their children to go to

³³ "Statistički podaci Narodne Omladine Jugoslavije za Kongres 1953" [Statistic data for Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia Congress in 1953]. AY, F 114, File 4.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Lilly, p. 395.

³⁶ "Godišnji izvještaj o izvršenju plana mobilizacije na savezne radne akcije" [Annual Report on execution for the plan for mobilizing on federal labor actions], CSA, F 1231, F 202.

³⁷ Ibidem.

a distant part of the country, especially in rural parts where every member of the family was need for working on their own estate.³⁸ A brigade was supposed to contain 250 brigadiers, and if a district was incapable of mobilizing that many, their representatives would be called in the republic branch center to answer for not performing their duty. Under such pressures, lower-level officers would exploit all possible of meeting quotas; which sometimes meant forcibly mobilizing youth.

However, cases of forced mobilization apart, being part of a volunteer action came with multiple benefits for the participant, for the state, as well as for the Party. The Rule Book also provides information on how participation in YLAs benefited a young person: ‘Working units provide youth an opportunity for cultural and educational work, which can manifest as participating in alphabetic courses, reading groups, a variety of lectures, written and oral papers, various discussion groups, trivial group. This work in particular can and should develop when working units are working together and living the camp life’³⁹. The benefits of YLAs for state and Party became increasingly evident as the events of the late 1940s unfolded.

2.2. The New System

The CPY differed from the other Eastern European Parties (except the one in the Soviet Union) in having come to power without external, Soviet help. Nonetheless, Yugoslav communists had either been schooled in Moscow before the War or accepted and glorified Soviet communist practice during what came to be known as the National Liberation Struggle. As a result, they followed the same scheme of governance: the formation of a

³⁸ Lilly, p. 397.

³⁹ “Pravilnik radnih brigada” [Rule book for work brigades]. Croatian State Archives, Savez Socijalističke Omladine Hrvatske [League of Socialist Youth of Croatia] F. 1231, F 202.

single-party centralist-planned system, the abolition of free market and private property and the limitation of certain civic rights - such as freedom of speech.⁴⁰

Most of the prewar political and economic elites were prevented from claiming their former positions. Whether from interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia or wartime collaborative Independent State of Croatia, most were bourgeoisie, well educated politicians, economists, lawyers; in short, members of the intelligentsia with years of experience. Communists, on the other hand, were predominantly young people of between 16 to 25 years old. Poorly educated and often semi-literate or illiterate, most communists came from rural areas with little knowledge of how to govern a municipality, city, village or manage an enterprise.⁴¹ However, they were inevitably installed in positions demanding such skills, mostly according to their wartime credentials or influence in the Party.

It was to be expected that a new Yugoslav society, after mass-killing during the Civil War, would be riddled with serious ethnic conflicts. This explains why Dušan Bilandžić, a Croatian historian and former Yugoslav politician, was puzzled when he noted how surprising it was that the communists managed to bring six republics together.⁴² One unifying strategy was the representation of the partisan movement as a popular front (called National Liberation Front) by communists during the war, which continued to prove crucial in preserving the unity of Yugoslav peoples after 1945. According to Kermit E. McKenzie, the popular front was a dynamic system enabling the exploitation of the language and imagery of patriotism. In harnessing patriotic sentiment, Communists could assume the role of defenders; preserving national independence against fascism by promoting co-operation between parties and the creation of a government in which they might participate – without directly pursuing the end

⁴⁰ Bilandžić, p. 204.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 214.

⁴² Ibidem.

of capitalism as a final remedy.⁴³ Yugoslav communists united all parties willing to resist the occupation and in that way gained significant popularity among people. Their motto and strategy was “Brotherhood and Unity” which was supposed to represent a complete “mirror image” of what had been the case in prewar Yugoslavia with official recognition of all its ethnicities and Republics as well as their equal political rights in new Yugoslavia.⁴⁴ The CPY kept the motto for long time after the war ended, especially during the reconstruction period and political crisis that emerged after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948.

In this context youth labor actions found their first important role in New Yugoslavia. Hosting youth from all over the country, YLAs helped the CPY during an initial period of consolidating its power to spread the idea of “Brotherhood and Unity” among youth. It also helped guarantee that the idea would not become just another forgotten pre-election political slogan, but a pillar of the new Yugoslav society. On YLAs, young Yugoslavs from all over the country worked together on reconstruction projects organized by the Peoples’ Youth of Yugoslavia. The idea of a bonding “Brotherhood and Unity” was constantly promoted among, and by, the youth in the projects. On one occasion, a youth on a YLA sent a letter to Josip Broz Tito: “We have come from all over the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and are defying the same challenges and rejoicing in mutual successes [...] side by side - Members of all nations, ethnicities and national minorities of our country, we everywhere, at every step, keep developing ourselves to brotherhood and unity, the most precious achievement and attainment of the glorious struggle of our peoples.”⁴⁵ In this environment, youth from different social and ethnic backgrounds were not just reading about the idea from leaflets or newspapers, but directly *living* it together in camps and while working on construction sites.

⁴³ Kermit E. McKenzie, *Comintern and World Revolution, 1928-1943: The Shaping of a Doctrine* (London and New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 159.

⁴⁴ Dean Jović, *Jugoslavija država koja je odumrla* [Yugoslavia, the Country that withered away] (Zagreb: Prometej, 2003), 123; see: Lampe, p. 236.

⁴⁵ “Pismo graditelja autoputa Maršalu Titu” [Letter of the motorway builders to Marshal Tito], *Omladina*, December 2, 1948.

The political organization of the country was based on a dual system of governance in which the official institutions, like the National Assembly, were only nominally in charge, while the Party bodies were the actual instruments of power. The CPY Central Committee was the counterpart to the National Assembly and the Party Politburo conducted the work of the Federal Government.⁴⁶ Soon the Party was in control over all spheres of life: industry, media, education, and even religion. The Yugoslav Army and police forces (especially its secret police *Ured državne bezbednost – UDBa*) protected the existence of the system. The most important Party bodies for youth were the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (LCYY) and the PYY - which in 1945 had 106,000 members.⁴⁷ They were in charge of all the programs concerning youth, including their political engagement in cities and villages, propagating and implementing Party ideology and programs such as collectivization, helping with transferring peasant youth into industry, and more. All these programs were included in youth labor actions, either through courses or in practice on construction sites.

The Communist party faced a gargantuan task when the war in Europe ended. Yugoslavia desperately required assistance in a number of fields. The war had destroyed practically half of prewar food production and other industrial capacities. Traffic networks were disconnected between all major centers; with means of transportation either destroyed or stolen by occupying forces directly, or by their administrative personnel. Among European countries, Yugoslavia suffered the third highest number of human casualties, just behind the Soviet Union and Germany.⁴⁸ According to statistics, 1,706,000 Yugoslavs died in the Second World War - 10.9 percent of its total population.⁴⁹ A detailed list of wartime damage estimated that material damage amounted to 46.9 billion dollars, according to 1938 prices.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Bilandžić, p. 231; Lampe, p. 234.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 214.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 235-236.

⁴⁹ *Jugoslavija 1918-1988. Statistički godišnjak*., p. 191.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 192.

Around 3.3 million people were without a ceiling above their heads, as 28 percent of households were destroyed.⁵¹

Since Yugoslavia was primarily an agricultural country the damage to fields and farms had the largest economic impact. Around 290,000 farms were either completely destroyed or severely damaged. A high percentage of agricultural capacities were also destroyed: 24 percent of fruit trees, 39 percent of vineyards, 62 percent of the total number of horses were killed or stolen, the same with 56 percent of cows, 63 percent of sheep and 53 percent of pigs.⁵² With half its agriculture destroyed, one of the main priorities for the new government was to secure the food for those who were without means of producing it.

No industry was spared the war destruction. Forestry, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was notably affected by the war. It was estimated that 48.7 million cubic meters of forest was cut and destroyed, as well 300,000 hectares of forests and numerous plant nurseries by occupation forces. In total 1,150 sawmills were completely destroyed, while another 1,316 damaged.⁵³ Thanks most probably to strategic targeting, the chemical industry suffered most; with 57 percent of that industry's fixed capital either destroyed or displaced to the other parts of Europe. The textile industry was right behind with 53.4 percent of fixed capital lost, and the metal industry with 49.8 percent.⁵⁴ Even though prewar industrial capacities had been already poor and backward, with half of its industry destroyed in the aftermath of war the government was even further from being able to produce enough to satisfy the needs of its population. The country was exhausted and everyone - men, women, youth, the unemployed, and prisoners (including prisoners of war) - became part of the efforts to rebuild damaged areas, to feed and house the homeless, and to help the helpless in general.

⁵¹ *Jugoslavija 1918-1988. Statistički godišnjak*, p. 192.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 193.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

2.3. Reconstruction and external relations

Youth labor actions played a major economic role from the very start of reconstruction. The famous Brčko-Banovići railway in 1946 was the first major voluntary action on which youth provided free labour for the country.⁵⁵ From then on, YLAs were organized all over the country to help in rebuilding war-affected areas and build new facilities where they were needed. The actions were organized by the PYY which had its branches in every Republic. In February 1946 the Unified League of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia (ULAYY)⁵⁶ sent to its local branches a plan for federal projects for the coming year.⁵⁷ Among the most important aims were: repairing roads, building a railway in the Lika region, repairing the railway Zagreb-Belgrade and forest railways, and rebuilding dams on the river Sava. The importance of the spring sowing was specially highlighted.⁵⁸ The list of projects also uncovers the strategy and the logic of reconstructing the country after the war. For the state, there were two most important fields which were supposed to be operational as soon as possible: grain for feeding the people and traffic network for logistics of distribution. Youth labor actions in the period between 1945 and 1948 were, therefore, only a part of broader reconstruction, industrialization and development processes under the communists' lead.

The new communist system in Yugoslavia was highly efficient in implementing Soviet models. All the processes the Soviet Union went through during the twenties and thirties, such as: nationalization, propagating its ideology, rapid industrialization, reconstruction, and securing the power of the Party (with the exception of collectivization), began and to a significant extent were accomplished in Yugoslavia in only their first few years. Such speedy developments were the result of dedication to the “school” of the Stalin’s Soviet Union. For

⁵⁵ Dragosavac, p. 11.

⁵⁶ ULAYY, later People’s Youth of Yugoslavia (PYY), was a youth organization as part of National Liberation Front. In 1948 PYY and League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia merged into a single organization.

⁵⁷ DP II/46, CSA, F 1231, F 202.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

this reason, Western countries perceived Yugoslavia as a “Soviet firing pin” for its determination to follow Moscow’s practice.⁵⁹

Connections between Moscow and Belgrade existed from the very beginning of the war, although official cooperation was concluded later. In April 1945, Tito and his delegation went to Moscow to meet Stalin for the first time since the beginning of the war. They stayed for 12 days in the Soviet Union, even though the war - officially - was not yet won. In Moscow, the Yugoslav delegation signed *The Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Postwar Cooperation between Yugoslavia and the USSR*.⁶⁰ On that occasion Tito said:

For us this contract is the basis for peaceful building of our future and therefore it will be delightedly welcomed by all Yugoslav peoples. [...] For us this contract is one of the most solid foundations in the new Yugoslavia and the new organization of peace in Central Europe and the Balkans.⁶¹ From this it is clear that Yugoslav reconstruction and modernization projects were planned to be tied to cooperation with the Eastern Bloc. Therefore, the first Five-Year plan was based on that cooperation and depended on it.

Yugoslav fidelity to Moscow is evident in its haste to launch the first, clumsily prepared Five-Year plan in 1947. Lack of experienced, educated experts in all branches of the economy – as well as within other spheres of social life - resulted in a plan containing ambitious, sky-high prognoses of development. In only five years (1947-1951), they planned to increase industrial production fivefold, agricultural production 1.5 times, and the national income 1.8 times, with a doubled work force.⁶² Igor Duda, a Croatian historian, states: “It was a model that was supposed to transform backward agricultural countries – in which even agriculture was undeveloped – into industrial, using the strategy of forced growth.”⁶³ And the

⁵⁹ Jakovina, pp. 232-233.

⁶⁰ AY, Kancelarija Maršala Jugoslavije [Marshal of Yugoslavia Cabinet] (KMJ) Fund 836, F I-1/3.

⁶¹ AY, KMJ, F 836, F I-1/3.

⁶² Bilandžić, p. 238.

⁶³ Igor Duda, *U potrazi za blagostanjem. O povijesti dokolice i potrošačkog društva u Hrvatskoj 1950-ih i 1960-ih* [In Pursuit of Well-Being. On History of Leisure and Consumer Society in Croatia in the 1950s and 1960s] (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2005), p. 44.

CPY was aiming for the same goal: building industrial capacities that would be able to produce everything, “from locomotives to a needle.”

On the other hand, Yugoslavia was one of a number of countries who signed the United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief Administration (UNRRA) aid treaty and received 415.6 million dollars to go towards its reconstruction and meeting the basic needs of its population, until such time as the economy could stand on its own feet.⁶⁴ It was the largest sum offered to any European country from UNRRA in this period.⁶⁵ Only a few years later, when speaking at the Sixth CPY Congress, Tito said that UNRRA aid was crucial for reconstruction and feeding people in the most devastated areas of Yugoslavia, although in his eyes, the damage suffered as a consequence of war was so extensive that UNRRA aid was only ‘the balm on the wound.’⁶⁶ Even though Yugoslavia needed more help, the CPY rejected the developmental investments offered by the Marshall Plan in 1947, due to the growing Cold War divide.⁶⁷

However, despite the Yugoslav loyalty to the Soviet Union, already during 1947 Moscow started to develop cracks in relations with Belgrade. It began with plans for Soviet-Yugoslav joint companies that were supposed to be a channel for Soviet investments into Yugoslav Five-Year projects.⁶⁸ By the beginning of 1948, the plans were abandoned when Yugoslavs realized joint-companies would be highly unfavorable for their economy. At the end of 1947 already sensitive relations with Yugoslavs worsened when the Soviets rejected to sign a new trade agreement with a Yugoslav diplomatic delegation without providing meaningful explanation. Five-Year projects in Yugoslavia were tied to this agreement. Meanwhile, in February 1948 Stalin summoned the Yugoslav and Bulgarian delegations to

⁶⁴ *Jugoslavija 1918-1988. Statistički godišnjak*, p. 191.

⁶⁵ Radina Vučetić, *Koka-kola socijalizam* [Coca-Cola Socialism] (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2012), p. 49.

⁶⁶ *VI. Kongres KPJ*, p. 52.

⁶⁷ Vučetić, p. 49.

⁶⁸ Dedijer, pp. 74-96.

discuss the formation of a Balkan Federation.⁶⁹ The meeting ended without definite conclusions and although delegations promised to solve the federation issues as soon as they returned to their home countries, CPY Central Committee (CC) on March 1 again delayed this project with the explanation that Bulgaria is a “Trojan horse” with which Stalin is jeopardizing Yugoslav independence.⁷⁰ The Soviets responded to this accusation first by withdrawing military and civil instructors from Yugoslavia on March 18 and 19, which was followed by the famous letter addressed to Tito and CPY CC eight days later.⁷¹ Yugoslav party, its organizations and leadership were accused of having an anti-Soviet attitude, and of serious deviation from Marxist-Leninist positions with its incorporation of capitalist elements into socialist practice.

Bilandžić states: ‘The content of the letter was shocking: the whole Yugoslav inner and foreign politics were attacked. [...] Members of CYP CC on the meeting held on April 12-13 1948 were horrified, because for decades they believed in “eternal friendship” with USSR [....]’⁷² In spite of Yugoslav dismissal of all Soviet accusations, Stalin sent another letter on May 4 with an even harsher attack saying that CPY was conducting defamatory propaganda against Soviet Union. And, in what was maybe a crucial mistake, Stalin discredited the successes of the National Liberation Front in Second World War, saying that without the military intervention of the Red Army Yugoslavia would have never resisted German occupation.⁷³ With this last statement Moscow depreciated everything New Yugoslavia was standing on. Proud of their efforts during the Second World War, Yugoslav communists could only have been seriously offended and provoked by such assertions.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Bilandžić, p. 294.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Lampe, p. 249.

⁷² Bilandžić, p. 296.

⁷³ Dedijer, pp. 114-115.

⁷⁴ Bilandžić, p. 297.

On one side of the dispute, the CPY needed to rearrange their ranks and they called their members to a Fifth Party Congress in the second half of July. On the other side, Stalin summoned all Cominform parties for a meeting in Bucharest at the end of June. His goal was to drag Tito and his associates to the meeting and with internationalized force finalize their attack. However, Tito anticipated such a scenario and refused to go or to send a delegation to Bucharest. The Cominform meeting produced the Resolution in which all the accusations from Stalin's letters were summed up in one place and became public on June 28, 1948. In this unfavorable position CPY reacted very fast and used the only weapon they had at their disposal: internal mass mobilization for their own support.

Youth labor actions served as a perfectly established platform for such strategy. Thousands of youth from all over the country expressed their support in different ways, by sending telegrams, organized rallies, processions all defending CPY and Tito. During these days newspapers for youth, *Omladina*, like most of other Yugoslav newspapers, published articles supporting CPY among which was the letter from the YLA New Belgrade:

We are firmly convinced in your correct leadership in the struggle to build socialism [...], as well as we deeply believed in you during the national liberation struggle. Our lives and our happy future are inextricably bound with the work of our Central Committee and nobody can separate us from the path of building our better future. This path is only possible under the leadership of our CC and comrade Tito. With disapprove and reject all slander directed to our party our CC, because these defamations are directed towards our mutual glorious past and present.⁷⁵

Since Stalin's expectations that the CPY leadership will fall under the Cominform internationalized pressure were wrong, he was forced to use another strategy. Economic blockade was already partially established at the beginning of 1948 with an unsigned Soviet-Yugoslav trade agreement. However, after the Resolution other Cominform countries joined

⁷⁵ "Moćni talas pretkongresnog takmičenja izraz je ljubavi naše omladine prema drugu Titu i Partiji" [Powerful wave of pre-Congress competition is expression of our youth's love towards comrade Tito and the Party], *Omladina*, July 8, 1948.

Moscow in their negligence of contractual obligations towards Yugoslavia. Most of the Five Year projects were jeopardized with these measures as they depended on raw materials, machinery and other forms of economic support from the East.⁷⁶ Table 1 tracks international exchange between Yugoslavia and Cominform countries before and after the Resolution.

Country	Before the Resolution	After the Resolution
Czechoslovakia	2,700	1,500
USSR	2,641	322
Poland	600	300
Hungary	425	none
Bulgaria	192	none
Romania	150	none
Total	6,708	2,122

Table 1. International exchange between Yugoslavia and Cominform countries before and after the Resolution in millions of dinars.
(Source: *VI Kongres KPJ*, p. 54)

In that sense, the economic benefit of youth providing free labour on the actions acquired greater significance. An enormous youth work-force, in the majority of cases, compensated for a lack of modern machinery. They pledged that through their efforts they will help the country to fulfill the planned Five-Year projects:

There are thousands and thousands of shock-workers from youth railroads and other Peoples' Youth labour actions, new thousands of shock-workers and thousands who will join them in this task [...] Thanks to a good management of the Party, [the youth] expresses unseen mass labor heroism in the struggle for the realization of the Five Year Plan and in the fight for our a better tomorrow.⁷⁷

A highly unfavorable Yugoslav position caused by the Cominform economic blockade was made still worse by a military threat and the concentration of the Soviet army on its borders with Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.⁷⁸ Because of the disagreement over Trieste and

⁷⁶ *VI Kongres KPJ*, p. 54

⁷⁷ Telegram graditelja autoputa "Bratstvo-jedinstvo" CK KPJ" [The Motorway "Brotherhood-unity" builders' telegram to CC CPY], *Omladina*, July 8, 1948.

⁷⁸ "Informacije o događajima vezanim za kampanju IB zemalja protiv Jugoslavije (4.VI.1948.-25.VIII.1952.)" [Information about the events related to the campaign of Cominform countries against Yugoslavia (4.VI.1948.-25.VIII.1952.)], F 836, F I-3-C18

Istria, and a possible invasion from the West, the FPRY was constantly keeping its army mobilized and spending a substantial part of its budget on the country's defense. Following the resolution, and with a continual swelling of the Cominform army on the borders, the percentage of total budget spent on defense ratio rose from 9.5 percent in 1947/8, to 12.6 percent in 1949 to an even greater 21.4 percent in 1952.⁷⁹ In light of these increases, explaining just how Yugoslavia managed to carry out any operations at all, when it was in bad terms with the West and even worse relation with the East, is important.

Tito and his party colleges realized very quickly that after Stalin's attack, there would be few or less friends to turn to. It was clear that from the Soviet side, the issues with the Cominform would not be considered settled until they were all removed from the Yugoslav political scene. Therefore, the only logical survival path involved a sharp turn towards the West. The West however was not completely ready to embrace the country which they branded the "Soviet firing pin."⁸⁰ There were many reports coming from United States ambassadors in Belgrade and Moscow describing "cooler relations" between the USSR and Yugoslavia, but none of them were taken seriously. John Cabot, US dispatcher in Belgrade, wrote in 1947 a comprehensive analysis of the situation in Yugoslavia in which he almost predicted the future its state of affairs with the Soviet Union, and immediately suggested that the West should maximize on Yugoslavia's situation by further "driving a wedge" between the two.⁸¹ In that scenario, a Yugoslavia torn away from the Eastern Bloc could be used as a geo-political and ideological example for other satellite countries - who in future, could follow Yugoslavia's lead and weaken the monolith communist union.

The United States began to play a major role in preserving Tito's and CPY's position only a few days after the Cominform resolution. In July 1948 the US agreed to use formally

⁷⁹ Tomasevich, p. 103.

⁸⁰ Jakovina, pp. 232-233.

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 229-230.

blocked reserves of gold dating back from the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, kept in New York.⁸² The 47 million dollars generated by the gold was a lifesaving influx of a hard currency into the economy. As Vladimir Dedijer, Yugoslav politician, noted: ‘We were all keenly aware of the gravity of Yugoslavia’s situation. Economically we were in desperate straits: the Five-Year Plan had already been launched, many factories were half built, but machinery expected from Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union would not be forthcoming.’⁸³ Dedijer concludes dramatically by pointing out that when the blockade was imposed, Yugoslavia had only 10 more days of oil left in their reserves. Hence, 47 million dollars from the US was crucial in continued payment for imports and as a guarantee for foreign loans.

The US and the FPRY started systematically aiding Yugoslavia in September 1949 when the Export-Import Bank gave a first loan in the amount of 20 million dollars towards importing machinery and raw materials, and again in March 1950.⁸⁴ Aid was frequently arriving from the United States, the United Kingdom and France.⁸⁵ Indeed, financial and military support from the West lasted until the end of the crisis, between 1953 and 1956.

As well proving to be of significant political importance in maintaining the option of a defensive position in relations with Moscow, foreign aid also enabled the continuation of Five-Year Plan projects despite Yugoslavia suffering under an economic Blockade imposed by the Cominform. Famine caused by droughts in 1950 and 1952 heightened the financial crisis, and forced the Yugoslav leadership to stop its collectivization project. As some of the main export products affected were grain and livestock, Yugoslavia unbalanced its foreign exchange. In these circumstances, the government was forced to ask for additional help from

⁸² Tomasevich, p. 101.

⁸³ Dedijer, p. 197.

⁸⁴ Tomasevich, p. 109.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

the West. The request was approved, and Yugoslavia became one of the Marshall Plan recipients. By the end of 1952, Yugoslavia received 553.8 million dollars in grants and credits from the West, half a billion dollars that sheltered it from feeling the full force of the blockade.⁸⁶

Astonishingly, it is in this climate of economic uncertainty (with a reliance on the generosity of foreign interest), importantly bringing with it a blockade on the exchange of raw materials and machinery from 1948-1950, that the biggest Five Year traffic project, the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” between Zagreb and Belgrade, was finished with only few months behind the schedule. How it was possible that a 382 kilometer-long road was built in such circumstances? Why was it so important that this particular project be finished, when so many other industrial projects were forced to stop or be abandoned altogether?

⁸⁶Tomasevich, p. 102.

2.4. Tito's Motorway of "Brotherhood and Unity"

Based on the number of participants and the scope of the project, the Motorway "Brotherhood-Unity" was the biggest YLA from 1948 to 1950. Some records suggest that the building of a road connecting Belgrade and Zagreb had been a personal wish of Tito's as early as December 1945, when he hosted a delegation from the Ministry of Constructions and said:

To become an advanced country, we need to build new and modern roads. First we will start the construction of the Motorway Belgrade-Zagreb and thus link, not only our two most beautiful cities, but many of our regions, with roads that will be linked to the Motorway [...] through work we need to show which steps and on what paths will develop new Yugoslavia.⁸⁷

However, Tito's wish for the motorway's construction was not the first time anyone had proposed to address and strengthen the road connection between Belgrade and Zagreb. The heritage of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia was a 470 kilometer-long road passing through the heart of Slavonia, and climbing over its mountains.⁸⁸ In 1937, engineer Milan Panjkovic offered several possible suggestions on how to make this connection shorter (and thus faster), and more traversable, while still connecting bigger settlements between the two centers.⁸⁹

Unlike Panjkovic, Yugoslav engineers a decade later took different approach in planning the post-war traffic link between Belgrade-Zagreb. A new, "modern" Motorway was planned to *avoid* all bigger settlements, passing only through plains as well as being 90 kilometers shorter than the existing one.⁹⁰ This plan was also largely descriptive, without too

⁸⁷ *20 godina omladinskih radnih akcija* [20 Years of Youth Labor Actions], (Belgrade: Mladost, 1967), p. 79 in *Stvaraoci neodoljivog poleta* [Creators of irresistible enthusiasm], ed. Mihailović, Srećko and Spasović, Grujica, (Beograd: IICSSO, 1980), p. 77.

⁸⁸ Milan Panjković, "Uređivanje dvaju državnih cesta Beograd – Zagreb i davanje rada nezaposlenima" [Construction of two state roads Belgrade-Zagreb and giving work to unemployed], *Glasnik Jugoslovenskog društva za putove*, Stanislav Josifovic, ed., nr. 5-6, May-June (Belgrade: Štamparija Drag. Gregorića, 1937), p. 40

⁸⁹ "Ibidem.

⁹⁰ "Građenje Autoputa Beograd-Zagreb" [Building the Motorway Belgrade-Zagreb], AY, F 114, F 152.

many precise details, though more elaborated upon than Panjkovic's. From the engineering point of view, reasons for building the Motorway were divided into technical and economic. Under technical reasons, engineer M. Nearlović stated that: "roads made of crushed and paced stone on the base of large rocks or without the base cannot endure growing usage of motor vehicles."⁹¹ In other words, Yugoslav experts were aware of the backwardness of the existing traffic network. They were also aware of the economic benefit of building a modern road. Low-quality roads were a significant expense, not only because of the cost of having to maintain them, but also as a preventative measure against high amortization costs, in cases where vehicles suffered damage while passing over the road. Nearlović projected that with a new motorway, the maintenance expenses for cars and other motor vehicles would fall by 30 percent.⁹²

According to the first Five-Year Plan (1947-1951), Yugoslavia was meant to build 1,100 km of new modern roads and repair another 1,650 km of war-damaged roads - of which 1,000 kilometers was to be modernized as well as repaired.⁹³ The Motorway was to be the major artery in the new Yugoslav traffic network connecting Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia. The Zagreb end of the motorway - in the direction of Ljubljana - was a connection towards Central Europe, while at the Belgrade end, network plans aimed for Bucharest and Odessa. The road was initially planned to have two lanes with one auxiliary lane, together 12 meters in width, which could sustain the speed of 150 kilometers per hour and traffic of around 9000 cars per day.⁹⁴

While the orders for the building of the Motorway came from the Ministry of Traffic and the Ministry of Constructions, the expertise and on-site construction works were provided

⁹¹ "Građenje Autoputa Beograd-Zagreb" [Building the Motorway Belgrade-Zagreb], AY, F 114, F 152.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

by the State Youth Construction Enterprise “The Motorway” (SYCEM).⁹⁵ The Enterprise had a short history. It was founded on March 18, 1947 after which it changed its name and administrative control several times; authority over the Enterprise was exchanged between the Federal government and the Republic of Serbia twice.⁹⁶ Finally, on April 6, 1948, control over the SYCEM stabilized under the authority of the Federal government and under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Construction, until July 1950, after which it was dissolved following the motorway’s completion.⁹⁷ The SYCEM was conducting work on the Motorway “Brotherhood-unity”, supplying the site with construction materials, tools and machinery. Besides technical support the enterprise organized the distribution of labour on the construction site.

Already in 1946 “preparations” for the Motorway started near Zagreb, and in 1947 the first two of a planned 11 sections of road were under construction. Construction in 1947 aimed at completing an initial 70 kilometers before the end of the year, but managed only 28 thanks to insufficient numbers of experts and workers.⁹⁸ However in 1948 building continued with the announcement of a planned 160 kilometers that year, 120 from Belgrade and 40 kilometers from the Zagreb side. According to this plan, for that length of road 65,000 tons of cement, 1,600 tons of reinforcing steel, 25,000 cubic meters of timber, 45 million pieces of small stony cubes, 47,000 wagons of crushed stone and breakstone, 800,000 cubic meters of sand and gravel, 4,400 tons of bitumen, and 2,500 tons of gasoline and oil were needed.⁹⁹ In other words, an enormous amount of different kinds of raw materials and derivatives were required to build less than half of the final Motorway.

⁹⁵ “Ugovor o izvršenju građevinskih usluga” [Contract for Conducting Construction Services], Državno omladinsko građevinsko preduzeće “Autoput” [State Youth Construction Enterprise “The Motorway”], AY, F 61, F 4.

⁹⁶ “Državno omladinsko građevinsko preduzeće ‘Autoput’” [State Youth Construction Enterprise “The Motorway”], AY, F 61, Catalog.

⁹⁷ Ibidem.

⁹⁸ “Građenje Autoputa Beograd-Zagreb” [Building the Motorway Belgrade-Zagreb], AY, F 114, F 152.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

Besides the raw materials needed to start construction works on the Motorway in 1948, a huge amount of machines was required. In December 1947, only few months before the beginning of construction, the Enterprise lacked many machines, as can be seen in Table 2 below.

Type of machine or vehicle	Required	On stock (functional)	On stock (defective)	Still needed
Trucks (different load capacities)	120	60		60
Cisterns	29	18		11
Jeeps and transport cars	36	33		214
Bulldozers (different kinds)	67	24	26	20
Tractors	192	64	15	113
Rollers (different kinds)	26	12		14
Dredges	18	5	2	13
Dredgers (floating)	3			3
Small Locomotive	84	22	13	50
Water pumps	36	29		7
Mixer	36	16		20
Pavers for 7,5m	12	4		8
Small Wagons	2600	600		2000

Table 2. Some of machinery requirements for the construction of the Motorway in 1948.

(Source: “Iskaz potreba glavnih strojeva za izgradnju 160 km Autoputa „Bratstvo-Jedinstvo“ u 1948“ [Requirements of main machines for construction on 160 kilometres of the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” in 1948], AY, Ministarstvo Građevina FNRJ [Ministry of Constructions of FPRY] F 13, F 118)

In order to acquire the machinery still needed in 1948, the Enterprise would have to spend, and planned to receive 306,634,000 dinars worth of machinery. Judging by the list of required machinery for 1949, valued at 241,585,000 dinars the Enterprise did not receive the machines it had asked for, and thus remained far short of the totally machinery needed in 1948.¹⁰⁰ In 1949 only allocated the purchasing of 70,000,000 dinars worth of machinery abroad, 95% of which was to be bought in Western countries such as: Italy, Belgium, the United States, England and Germany.¹⁰¹ This means that most of the remaining machinery

¹⁰⁰ “Spisak građevinskih mašina koje se imaju nabaviti radi kompletiranja mehanizacije u 1949” [The list of construction machines needed for the completing the mechanization in 1949], AY, F13, F 118.

¹⁰¹ “Uvoz – Građevinsko preduzeće “Autoput” - 1949” [Imports – State enterprise “The Motorway” - 1949], AY, F 13, F 118.

required was asked to be relocated from other Yugoslav construction sites to save on spending, and that the Federal Ministry of Construction was already orientating itself according to the economic and political conditions after the Split. Despite technical/financial setbacks, construction started on April 1, 1948 and a lack of machinery was compensated for with an enormous work force. Approximately every 6 weeks, between the beginning of April until the end of November in 1948, and in 1949, an average of around 30,000 brigadier youths and 11,000 Yugoslav Army soldiers served as the work force on the Motorway construction site.¹⁰²

Besides machinery, Enterprise also lacked experts. In the early post-war period generally, Socialist Yugoslavia was in constant need of experts in all economic fields. In many cases, high-educated war and political prisoners were called to provide their expertise and fill this important technical gap. The SYCEM employed the same strategy and in 1948 the Enterprise Director Mihailo Švabić asked the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs to provide them with a number of different specialists:

Experts	Number
Engineers	10
Technicians	20
Draftsman	12
Economists and accountants	50
Car-mechanics	16
Dredger drivers	8
Auto electricians	6
Locksmiths	12
Tinsmiths	6
Electricians	20

Table 3. Required numbers of imprisoned experts for the SYCEM in 1948.

(Source: "Potraživanje stručnjaka od Ministarstva unutarnjih poslova u 1948." [Demand of experts from the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1948], AY, F 61, F 11.)

¹⁰² "Raspored dolazaka omladine i vojnika" [Schedule of incoming youth and soldiers], AY, F 61, F 11.

Prisoners were not only used as experts, but also as a free labour. While not nearly as numerous as youth and soldiers, prisoners joined in the work on the construction site, mostly in quarries where work was hardest. However in April 1948, according to the instruction from the Federal Government's Economic Council, prisoners were to be rewarded with a small monetary prize if they fulfilled their daily work quota.¹⁰³

The work of soldiers and voluntary youth brigade was not free-of-charge for the SYCEM. By their calculations, the Enterprise spent around 93.5 dinars per day for every youth brigadier and 26 dinars for every soldier.¹⁰⁴ The Enterprise was responsible for financing food, clothing, transport, health and social insurance for both soldiers and youth.¹⁰⁵ In June 1949, the Enterprise demanded a refund from the Federal Directorate of Roads to cover the expenses of the youth brigades in 1948 and in the beginning of 1949. Because of an "unfavorable atmosphere" they had spent 454,187,000 dinars on the youth brigades, which was 72 million dinars more than was planned.¹⁰⁶ According to Enterprise arguments, the difference was made during the period when works on the motorway stopped or slowed down, and youth were hosted in the camps at their expense. From this document it is obvious that the youth brigades' costs were very high and the "unfavorable atmosphere" the Enterprise referred to was the Cominform economic blockade partially affecting the construction of the Motorway, though not enough to halt the entire project.

Among one of the reasons why the Motorway was able to continue with construction during the blockade is because most of the raw materials the project required, listed earlier, Yugoslavia had.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, in the case of the Motorway, the Enterprise controlled several

¹⁰³ "Upotstvo za nagrađivanje ratnih zarobljenika" [Instruction for rewarding war prisoners], AY, F 61, F 11.

¹⁰⁴ "Kalkulacija korištenja jednog omladinca i jednog vojnika na dan" [Calculation of using one youth and one soldier a day], AY, F 61, F 11.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁷ "Glavne potrebe za izgradnju 160 kilometara Autoputa u 1948" [Main requirements for the construction of 160 kilometers of the Motorway in 1948], AY, F 13, F 118.

quarries and facilities for producing most of the needed construction material.¹⁰⁸ Oil is the only variable that might have been affected, however there are no records complaining of any shortages. General statistics indicate that Yugoslavia produced very small amounts - only several thousand tons per year - of oil derivatives in 1946 and no bitumen (needed to lay on roads) at all.¹⁰⁹ In the period between 1947 and 1950, the import of industrial and raw materials made up between 95 and 98 percent of the total number of Yugoslav imports.¹¹⁰ The amount of oil imported into Yugoslavia as shown in Table 4 indicates that it was bringing in what it needed, and thus there were no supply shortages of this raw material. Yet another conclusion can be drawn from these statistics. In the period between 1946 and 1950, Yugoslavia increased its oil imports, which alludes to a rising motorization in the country or development of industry in general. The question of motorization in Yugoslavia raises another question. Just who, and for what purpose, was the Motorway built for?

Year	Imported raw oil in tons	Share in total imports (%)
1946	4,982	0.1
1947	3,425	0.1
1948	57,339	0.9
1949	278,415	4.2
1950	405,139	4.2

Table 4. Yugoslav import of raw oil and its share in total imports (1946-1950)
(Source: Statistički godišnjak [Statistic Yearbook], 314)

When the Motorway was opened for use in June 1950, there were not many vehicles to use the brand-new Motorway. In 1947 Yugoslavia had only 10,984 motorcycles, 6,634 passenger automobiles, 751 buses, 13,922 trucks and 1,170 specialized vehicles registered.¹¹¹ The same year, the General Directorate for Motor Vehicle Production planned in the next ten-

¹⁰⁸ “Državno omladinsko građevinsko preduzeće ‘Autoput’” [State Youth Construction Enterprise “The Motorway”], AY, F 61, Catalog.

¹⁰⁹ Statistički godišnjak [Statistic Yearbook], 258.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 308.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 286.

year period to reach a domestic production rate of 20,000 passenger cars per year.¹¹² However, the number of buses, trucks and cars which would have been the main users of motorway were not substantially rising until the late fifties, when they together reached a total number of more than 50,000 vehicles. Since not only construction, but also industrialization projects were closely tied to relations with the East, presumably the production of domestic vehicles slowed after the Tito-Stalin split. It has to be taken into account that the Motorway was planned two years before the Split and the planners could not have anticipated that Yugoslavia would found itself in the difficult economic position it did once the Motorway was finished.

With basic machines, huge work-force and enough raw materials the Motorway was not under the threat of the economic blockade. It was maybe slowed down, but there were no indications that the project would be stopped or abandoned in the process. Also, besides its economic purpose, the Motorway fulfilled yet another very important political and ideological task. In 1950 it physically connected two of the most conflicting republics inside Yugoslavia (Croatia and Serbia), with plans to spread onto two more (Slovenia and Macedonia). Its name, “Brotherhood-Unity”, was not coincidental, but rather representative of a well-conceived ideological plan to strengthen and materialize the link between all Yugoslav republics and their ethnicities. But was that everything the Motorway was intended to do? During the period after Tito-Stalin split the youth labor action constructing the Motorway played a significant role in mobilizing and homogenizing youth at a time when the CPY very much needed their support. How was that support manifested and can it be qualified as additional reasons why the Motorway project was not shot down during the blockade?

¹¹² “Plan kapitalne izgradnje” [Plan for Capital Construction], AY, Generalna Direkcija Savezne Industrije Motora [General Directorate for Federal Industry of Motors] F 108, F.30.

3. “We are building the motorway, the motorway is building us!” -Youth Labor Action the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” (1948-1950)

July 14, 1948: This day will long remain in the memory of our brigade and the entire camp. In the afternoon at around 4 o'clock one brigadier came running in to the headquarters with a cry: Here is comrade Tito! We stared for a moment and jumped to the gate. From the construction site towards the camp there was already a mass of youth approaching and gathering around a couple of high officers. More and more young people came and joined the crowd. We squeezed through brigadiers from neighboring brigades, who enthusiastically chanted to Tito, Central Committee, to our Party, to the Fifth Congress, because among them there was the soul of the whole country, TITO. (10th Zagreb Brigade commander)¹¹³

Only 15 days after the Cominform Resolution was published in the daily *Borba* and read all over Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito unexpectedly appeared on the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity”. He visited the camp on the 44th kilometer of the motorway, inspected conditions of life there and, following a request to give a speech, said to gathered cheerful youth that they will hear him talking on the Fifth CPY Congress. Why, in this grievously significant moment did Tito visit a youth camp? What was so important on the motorway that Tito had to see after the Cominform had just expelled CPY from the Communist International, in the moment when Yugoslavia lost overnight most of its political and economic support from its “fraternal” countries? The answer to these questions lies behind the importance of youth labor actions. Using the example of the YLA Motorway Belgrade-Zagreb, what follows will critically examine this importance.

¹¹³ *Brigadni dnevnik X. Zagrebačke radne brigade “Marijan Badel”* [Brigade Journal of 10th Zagreb Labour Brigade “Marijan Badel”], CSA, F 1231, F 212.

3.1. Organizing the action

Almost three months before the Cominform resolution and four days after Stalin sent his first letter to Tito and CPY Central Committee, the biggest youth labor action in Yugoslavia started its operations. In first days of April 1948, around 30,000 young boys and girls arrived at one of the motorway's section headquarters, so they could be distributed into their camps.¹¹⁴ In the first project year, the construction site was divided into four sections under which there were numerous youth camps.¹¹⁵ Sections were under the management of the General Headquarters which also had its own division into seven departments for agitation and propaganda, physical education, youth courses, pre-military training, international brigades and guests, department for organization, and operational headquarters.

Among the seven departments, two of them played key roles. The first was the main decision-making body, the operational headquarters, and the other was the Party “watchdog”, the Agitprop department. While the head instructor and his team of deputies were tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that both technically and logistically youth brigades operated smoothly, the Agitprop department was in charge of organizing and monitoring all political and ideological issues arising for the Action. Yearly reports from the two bodies provide information about their duties and responsibilities. In 1948 Ilija Blanuša, the instructor delegated by the Central Committee of Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia, was the head of the action. His deputies, as well as other departments' executives, were also members of PYY, except for the head instructor of the pre-military training department who was sent from the Yugoslav Army.¹¹⁶ Since PYY was the Communist Party of Yugoslavia youth organization, it

¹¹⁴ “Raspored dolazaka omladine i vojnika za april 1948” [Schedule of incoming youth and soldiers for April 1948], AY, F 61, F 11.

¹¹⁵ “Spisak omladinskih rukovodioca na gradnji autoputa „Bratstvo-Jedinstvo“ – Glavni Štab” [List of youth executives on the construction of the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” – Headquarters], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem.

is evident that this particular YLA, as well as others from that time, were well under the watchful eye of the Party.

In 1949, between April and November, 830 brigades with 138.144 young brigadiers from all Yugoslav republics participated in the construction of the Motorway.¹¹⁷ Brigadiers were coming in six shifts and stayed on the Action according to their background. Shifts were organized by time periods – 1st shift April-May; 2nd June; 3rd July; 4th August; 5th September; 6th October-November – in which (according to rules laid down by the PYY) high school and university students were supposed to stay a month during summer break, while peasant youth worked for at least two months during the whole period.¹¹⁸ On the very first day, The Operational Headquarters for the Action faced its first real headache. The arrival of the first shift of 140 brigades proved a chaotic experience for the General Staff in 1949. Many brigadiers came without the tools they were supposed to bring with themselves to the Motorway and brigade commanders soon proved incompetent.¹¹⁹ There are reports of some brigade commanders physically attacking their brigadiers, or forcing girls to cut their hair. Even though the headquarters “hastily responded” to such incidents, organized the procurement of tools and held meetings with aggressive commanders, that was not the end of their troubles.

According to the annual report, the lack of discipline among youth - mostly caused by the absence of competent brigade staff - affected the start of construction: “Upon the arrival at the construction site of a number of youth brigades comes organizational unstructuring, they do not bring the list of members of the brigade with them, then they come without members of staff, without commander, and often incomplete, so it takes few days to gather them all

¹¹⁷ Godišnji izvještaj po organizacionim pitanjima na izgradnji Atuooputa „Bratstvo-Jedinstvo“ u 1949. godini, AY, F 114, F 152.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem.

over the site.”¹²⁰ These organizational problems were the consequences of poor preparation for the Action, and the General Headquarters, delegated from the PYY Central Committee, was unable to prevent them before the start. The mobilization and organization plan for the Action was created in the PYY federal organization. However, republic branches were those in charge of actualizing the plan. Once republic branches received the plan for mobilization they distributed the orders to their local organizations to mobilize certain number of brigades, each containing 250 brigadiers, provide them with necessary tools, assign commanding officers and organize their trip to the Motorway section.¹²¹ In most cases, local organizations failed to complete at least one of those tasks, the most problematic of which was the first step, mobilizing the youth.

3.2. Mobilizing the youth for the Motorway

Despite the economic blockade made by Cominform countries led by the Soviet Union, our working people and our organization as a whole have made and are making great efforts to build socialism under the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and Tito, to achieve a better future for our peoples for the freedom and independence of the country.¹²²

This quotation was taken from a part of the Introduction into a report on the mobilization of Yugoslav youth for two federal youth labor actions in 1949, the Motorway and New Belgrade. This propagandistic communist language hints partially at the answer to the question of the importance of organized youth labor directed by the PYY. The way in which the Yugoslav youth organization helped the CPY in resisting the pressures it faced from the East after the split in 1948 was by mobilizing the youth towards rebuilding the country and socialism in it- though not just any socialism. In 1948, Yugoslav youth were

¹²⁰ Godišnji izvještaj po organizacionim pitanjima na izgradnji Autoputa „Bratstvo-Jedinstvo“ u 1949. godini, AY, F 114, F 152.

¹²¹ *Pravilnik radnih brigada* [Rule book for work brigades], CSA, F 1231, F 202.

¹²² *Analiza mobilizacije omladine na Autoput i Beograd 1949* [Analysis of the mobilization of youth for the Motorway and Belgrade in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

building a new “transitional road” towards communism, one that was independent and answered solely to Tito and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. How were youth mobilized towards such a call in practice? How did youth themselves respond to this call?

When the mobilization campaign started, Peoples’ Youth organizations on both the republican and local level conducted numerous activities to popularize youth labor actions. For example in schools, “first, through lectures, meetings, and personal interpretations of the Communists, students were spoken to about the importance of labour actions and about the honor and duty of every good youth to participate in the building of their country according to their abilities.”¹²³ In a second wave of campaigning in schools, YLAs were promoted widely on wall newspapers, with boys and girls who had already been on an YLA sharing their experiences and reading parts of their diaries during evening parties.¹²⁴ In some cases, teachers assigned essays for homework on the subject of YLAs. Following all these activities came the registration campaign for students in classes. Registration was taken as serious commitment, as evidenced by reports in 1949 on so-called “enemy activities” during the registration campaign.¹²⁵ Cases in which a student, or group of students, signed up for the YLA and later (for whatever reason, even sickness) had not appeared on the train for the construction site were considered as cases of deliberate subversion.

In the villages from where the majority of the youth were coming to the YLAs, the agitprop held lectures for the youth and their parents. During these lectures, activists explained the importance of the action for the participants and the importance of the project they would work on. Included in the Peoples’ Youth of Croatia Agitprop departmental plan for the mobilization for 1950, targeted villages were those distant from urban areas or those to

¹²³ *Izveštaj o agitaciji za radne akcije u 1949.* [Report on agitation for labour actions in 1949], CSA, F 1231, F 138.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

¹²⁵ Ibidem.

which the youth had poorly responded during initial calls for joining the YLA.¹²⁶ Evidently, the PYY wanted to reach to every corner of Yugoslavia and engage the youth in their programs. Cooperation between youth organizations and party organizations in schools and villages enabled the Agitprop department to use all disposable possible means of propagating and popularizing youth labor actions. Extensive, organized campaigns for mobilization definitely contributed the most when it comes to accounting for the many youth volunteering for YLAs, explaining why these campaigns were considered as a crucial stage in organized mobilization.

In January 1949, all republican PYY Central Committee secretaries held a meeting after which they launched the mobilization plan for federal youth labor actions for that year.¹²⁷ According to the plan for 1949, federal YLAs, including the Motorway, were supposed to receive 171,500 brigadiers. By the end of the year, that number was achieved, breaking the quota by 16 percent with a final number of 197,302 brigadiers participating in the two YLAs.¹²⁸ All republics sent more brigadiers than were inquired, with Bosnia and Herzegovina on top, breaking the planned quota by 27 percent, and Slovenia at the bottom with 3.7 percent.¹²⁹ Despite the fact that numbers were met and the Central Committee characterized the statistics as major a success for Yugoslavia and its youth, a higher number of youth arrivals caused significant organizational problems.

Unplanned-for increased participation was an important initial organizational oversight relating to youth mobilization. When the PYY central department for planning received data from local branches, many branches presented their mobilization capacity as

¹²⁶ *Plan agitaciono propagandnih mjera za mobilizaciju omladine na ovogodišnje akcije* [Plan for agitation-propaganda measures for mobilization of youth on this year's actions], CSA, F 1231, F 138.

¹²⁷ *Analiza mobilizacije omladine na Autoput i Beograd 1949* [Analysis of the mobilization of youth for the Motorway and Belgrade in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹²⁸ Ibidem.

¹²⁹ It would be useful to have more precise data on the exact number of brigadiers coming from every republic, but the data given is the extent of what the report provides. *Analiza mobilizacije omladine na Autoput i Beograd 1949* [Analysis of the mobilization of youth for the Motorway and Belgrade in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

excessively small. For instance, the Kragujevac branch at the beginning of the year claimed that they will be able to send only 3 brigades, instead of the 7 they sent in the end. The same was the case with the Niš branch. First they stated that the city of Niš will supply federal YLAs with 2 brigades, but sent a total of 11 until the end of the year.¹³⁰ Cases of false estimates unsurprisingly caused organizational problems for the planners. Once local branches announced they mobilized more brigades than planned, the central organization had to make financial and logistical maneuvers which ultimately produced higher expenses. However, judging by the discrepancies between the planned number of brigades and those finally provided for, false estimates were not the result of unexpectedly enthusiastic youth or the incompetence of local branches. What is more likely is that local organizations were afraid of giving realistic numbers, lest for some reason they could not succeed in fulfilling their own planned quotas, which would create a negative image of the branch.

Again, despite their apparent success, reports also reveal cases of mismanagement during the mobilization campaigns. In these reports, the PYY Central Committee is mostly complaining about the poor organization and preparation for the mobilization campaigns in different areas. There were cases when potential youth members of national minorities in Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia were deliberately neglected, with the excuse that “they would not join the YLAs anyway.”¹³¹ These cases suggest not only negligence, but also still-present interethnic prejudices. Other incidents confirm attitudes among youth. In the report on high school and university brigades on the Motorway the General Headquarters complained about conflicts between brigades, which created the notion among certain brigades that “Serbs hate Slovenians.”¹³² The wounds of the Second World War were still fresh and it would be

¹³⁰ “Analiza mobilizacije omladine na Autoput i Beograd 1949” [Analysis of the mobilization of youth for the Motorway and Belgrade in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² “Izveštaj o političkoj situaciji kod srednjoškolskih i sveučilišnih brigada” [Report on political situation among high school and university brigades], AY, F 114, F 152.

unrealistic to assume that a CPY ideology of “brotherhood and unity” between all Yugoslav ethnicities was accepted everywhere with the same degree of enthusiasm.

During months of preparation, the pressure produced by the Central Committee plan propelled some local organizations to force youth into joining brigades. Forced mobilization was against the YLA rules and those branches applying such methods would be warned, but once those brigadiers arrived at their sections they would not be asked to leave the camp. Forced mobilization was mostly conducted administratively. In their reports to the Central Committee of PYY, the General Headquarters of the YLA the Motorway listed several examples: In brigades from Slatina (Croatia) 60 percent of brigadiers were mobilized during the night with a “written note” - in other words, with an official call for joining the action.¹³³ The Secretariat of the Peoples’ Youth in one high school in Bjelovar (Croatia) made an official decision that students will not be able to progress into a higher grade if they do not bring a confirmation note of participation in an YLA, signed by their brigade commander.¹³⁴ In Dubrovnik, the same body forbade several students to go on a summer vacation organized by the Ministry of Education with the excuse that their departure would have “hindered further mobilization of youth.”¹³⁵ In 1949 several brigades were sent to Motorway construction site with a majority of forcefully mobilized youth. Of the 128 youth in the 6th Belgrade brigade, 90 were sent to the Motorway contrary to their wishes; in the 3rd Vranje brigade the number was 40; and in the 3rd Sarajevo brigade, 83.¹³⁶

From the 216th Croatian brigade 40 brigadiers deserted the Motorway. They complained that they had been deceived during mobilization with the false story that they would be going on a three-week scout camping trip in the woods, organized by the Center for

¹³³ “Izvještaj o radu srednjoškolskih brigada na Auto-putu i Novom Beogradu 1948” [Report on work of high school brigades on the Motorway and New Belgrade in 1948], CSA, F 1231, F 212.

¹³⁴ Ibidem.

¹³⁵ Ibidem.

¹³⁶ “Godišnji izvještaj po organizacionim pitanjima na izgradnji Atuoputa “Bratstvo-Jedinstvo“ u 1949. godini, AY, F 114, F 152.

pre-military training.¹³⁷ According to the statistics for 1949 provided by the General Headquarters 2,940 youth, or 2.1 percent, deserted the Motorway YLA.¹³⁸ The official policy against desertion was prevention through propaganda and holding meetings. In other words, when brigades first came to the construction site in the introductions the agitprop representatives tried to convince youth not to desert the YLA. However, there are reported cases where brigade commanders on their own forcibly returning deserters by chasing the youth on the roads and train stations and drawing them back to the camps.¹³⁹ As with forced mobilization, forcibly stopping deserters was against official YLA policy but there are no records of radical sanctions for officials who violated official rules.

During 1948 and 1949 mobilization campaigns for the Motorway YLA, the PYY Central Committee was in charge of planning, but most of the success depended on activists from local branches. Reports offer more complaints about the work of local branches than praise, but those same records reveal how preparations and initial organization operated. Cases of deviation from the official YLA rules help to understand the operational logic of the time. Local branches were subordinated to the Central Committee, but they balanced between the CC plan and their capabilities on the ground. At the beginning of the year they informed the central organization about their predictions of the results of any upcoming mobilization campaigns. In some cases, they would deliberately underestimate their capabilities so as to guarantee fulfillment of the plan, and in other cases, they resorted to different forms of forced mobilization. The result was a major success for the YLA Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” where tens of thousands of youth ended on the construction site building the road.

¹³⁷ “Godišnji izvještaj po organizacionim pitanjima na izgradnji Atuo puta “Bratstvo-Jedinstvo“ u 1949. godini, AY, F 114, F 152.

¹³⁸ Even Headquarters states that they think desertion was more represented in 1949. *Godišnji izvještaj po organizacionim pitanjima na izgradnji Atuo puta „Bratstvo-Jedinstvo“ u 1949. godini*, AY, F 114, F 152.

¹³⁹ Ibidem.

Yugoslav youth who came to the construction site joined “international brigades.” These brigades were not mobilized by the PYY, yet enthusiasts or self-organized student brigades coming from different countries, sometimes without prior warning. In 1948 the I English brigade with 63 brigadiers from England, Jamaica, New Zealand, India, Argentina and the United States next to the Swedish student brigade with 79 brigadiers and Danish “Martin Andersen Nekse” were the most represented with foreign youth.¹⁴⁰ They worked on the Motorway together with other brigades for 30 or 40 days. Representatives of Yugoslav national minorities or emigrants from Argentina, Switzerland, Italy and many other countries also joined the Motorway action, but in much smaller groups and in some cases using the action as a way to reintegrate into new Yugoslavian conditions.¹⁴¹ In 1949 in their annual report General Headquarters reported that International brigades on the Motorway were not as numerous as they were the year before.¹⁴² The international dimension of the Motorway YLA is among the fields that yet have to be examined since they raise questions such as: What was the influence of PYY youth labor actions’ propaganda in foreign countries? What was the motivation of “international brigades” to join YLAs and their experiences?

3.3. “The right way” – Agitprop and other YLA extracurricular activities on the Motorway

The conflict between the CPY and the Cominform was in Yugoslavia for many received as a “surprise and absurdity.”¹⁴³ Perhaps the best word for the describing the state inside youth organization after reading the Cominform resolution is confusion. Why was it

¹⁴⁰ “Inostrane brigade na Autoputu “Bratstvo-Jedinstvo” [International brigades on the Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity], *Omladina*, August 10, 1948.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem

¹⁴² “Godišnji izvještaj po organizacionim pitanjima na izgradnji Atuoputa „Bratstvo-Jedinstvo“ u 1949. godini, AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁴³ Bilandžić, p. 291.

confusing? First, according to their telegrams of support to CPY Central Committee and Tito they all emphasized how they do not understand why Cominform attacked Yugoslav leadership. Second, The Party immediately started two completely opposite processes in order to preserve their position. First, to Stalin's accusations of anti-Soviet and anti-communist activities in Yugoslavia, the Party responded defensively and dismissively, trying to prove that they had always loyally followed Soviet practice. For example, as evidence of this, the CPY decided to launch stronger collectivization campaign to prove their commitment to the example of Moscow. Second, as a matter of precaution, the Party started to consolidate and cleanse its own ranks. These measures were not applied only within CPY membership, but expanded to the whole Yugoslav population. Hence, in the first months after the Resolution, at the same time as the Party was officially defending itself and attempting to prove its loyalty to Stalin in its desire to get back on friendly terms with Moscow, it simultaneously prepared for a future in "isolation" from the rest of the communist world.

The following extract was taken from a part of the Resolution of the Presidency of the Central Council of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia regarding the Cominform resolution, published in a weekly for youth, *Omladina*:

The Presidency of the Central Council of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia calls on all organizations and members of the National Youth of Yugoslavia to further strengthen their unity and to stand together around glorious Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its Central Committee led by Comrade Tito; calls all the youth of Yugoslavia to, in their efforts for fulfillment of the Five-Year plan, bring more creative enthusiasm and initiative, fighting for better fulfillment of daily and monthly tasks on the labour actions, in factories, enterprises, schools, cooperatives, in the countryside - wherever young people live and work. (July 15, 1948)¹⁴⁴

It took 20 days for the officials from the central Yugoslav youth organization to respond to the Cominform resolution, a gap which can be explained by its having to wait for

¹⁴⁴ "Rezolucija Predsjedništva Centralnog vijeća Narodne omladine Jugoslavije povodom rezolucije Informbiroa" [Resolution of the Presidency of the Central Council of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia regarding the Cominform resolution], *Omladina*, July 20, 1948, p. 3.

the consolidation of the CPY and their directions. In their document the Central Council dismisses all accusations of anti-Soviet activity, lists examples of the friendly attitude Yugoslav youth hold towards the Soviet Union, Stalin and International Communist movement, but reserves the most space in the text for the expression of loyalty to the CPY, and their leader Tito. The quote highlights how this loyalty was supposed to be expressed: ideological uniformity, political unity and dedication to hard work on the Five-Year Plan projects.

Youth labor actions were a form of organization where all these key tenets were performed in one place. In that sense, the YLA agitprop played a major role in coordinating and propagating them. The Agitprop department at the Motorway was divided into three sectors: ‘agitation and press, ideological upbringing, and cultural and educational work.’¹⁴⁵ It had the same hierarchy as Headquarters and all other departments: the central department, section level and camp level. After the organizational department’s job of maintaining work progress and providing for the basic needs of brigadiers, political and ideological work was the most important aspect of camp life. In this regard, agitprop activities are the most valuable for the analysis of the YLA Motorway in the period of Tito-Stalin split and its political and ideological effect on the attitudes of youth in its camps.

The preferred interpretation of the Resolution on the Yugoslav youth in YLAs was controlled through the work of the agitprop sector for political and ideological upbringing. During their stay at the Motorway YLA this sector organized a series of “political lectures, political informing and reading groups.”¹⁴⁶ The purpose of these lectures was the “spreading and proper interpretation of Marxist-Leninist thought among the broad masses of youth [as]

¹⁴⁵ “Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu u omladniskim radnim brigadama na autoputu u 1949. godini” [Report on agitation-propaganda work in the youth labour brigades on a highway in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem

an integral part of our struggle to build socialism.”¹⁴⁷ During their free time in the camps, brigades had organized lectures with specialized programs for peasant youth on one side, and high school and university youth on the other. According to the lectures’ program for 1949 peasant youth had six lectures: one on the topic of Five-Year plan and five on agricultural cooperatives.¹⁴⁸ However, what concerned the sector for upbringing was that the program included no topics providing ‘clarification of the essence of the dispute between the SKP (b) and [the] Party’.¹⁴⁹ Hence, from August 1949 onwards, the sector introduced a new curriculum, including such “clarification” in the very first lecture. They also made changes to the “Five-Year plan” topic, which now included the effects of the economic blockade on planned projects.

In contrast to the concerns of the agitprop, the General Headquarters assumed that the lecture on “clarification of the dispute” for high school and university brigades would not need much space, as the issue was considered sufficiently covered in schools and universities.¹⁵⁰ Student brigade officers similarly argued that going through the topic in the camps would mean unnecessary repetition. One officer for education and culture from a Croatian student brigade blandly stated that to his brigadiers this matter is “all clear.”¹⁵¹ In light of these objections, the sector for political and ideological upbringing investigated such claims and concluded they were false. Therefore, they decided (contrary to the Headquarters suggestions) to carry out the new lecture plan including the “clarification” topic with both peasant and student streams, except in the student case, instead of topics on agricultural

¹⁴⁷ “Uputstvo za rad aktiva predavača pri Narodnoj omladini Jugoslavije” [Instructions for work of lecturers’ sector at the Peoples’ Youth of Yugoslavia], AY, F 114, F 79.

¹⁴⁸ “Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu u omladniskim radnim brigadama na autoputu u 1949. godini” [Report on agitation-propaganda work in the youth labour brigades on a highway in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁰ “Izveštaj o političkoj situaciji kod srednjoškolskih i sveučilišnih brigada” [Report on political situation among high school and university brigades], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

cooperatives, the program centered on teaching Marxist-Leninist thought.¹⁵² Courses on the Motorway organized by the agitprop were closely following the political and ideological situation in Yugoslavia. The very title of the topic “clarification” provides the purpose of the lecture, and suggests that Yugoslav youth were confused with the given situation in which they had to decide whether they supported the accusations of the Resolution, or dismissed them. Unsurprisingly, the lecture advocated the latter.

As well as courses, the Agitprop implemented other measures directed at keeping youth on a desirable ideological-political path. The most important task, besides organizing lectures, was locating political enemies, or in other words, exposing those who “hesitated” when it came to supporting the Cominform Resolution. Such enemies were derisively called *Informbirovci* or *Ibeovci* (Cominformists) coming from the word *Informbiro*, the name for the Cominform in Serbo-Croatian language. Since there was no prescribed methodology of how best to find out if someone is an enemy of the state, most of the cases where groups or individuals were marked as *Informbirovci* were of a questionable nature.

For example, a Ljubljana student brigade was accused of demoralizing and unruly behavior in the camp because they protested about “poor nutrition and hard physical work.”¹⁵³ One pre-military training officer tried to mark a brigadier as an *Ibeovac* because during practices he was yelling “Ua” instead of “Ura”.¹⁵⁴ In the Agitprop department, one of the officers was removed from her position because of a “hesitant attitude” in a complaint, emphasizing her background as medical personnel in a Chetnik camp during the Second World War.¹⁵⁵ There are no records detailing the fate of those accused of having an “enemy attitude”, except that some of them were completely removed from the Action, or in cases

¹⁵² “Izveštaj o političkoj situaciji kod srednjoškolskih i sveučilišnih brigada” [Report on political situation among high school and university brigades], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁵³ “Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu u omladniskim radnim brigadama na autoputu u 1949. godini” [Report on agitation-propaganda work in the youth labour brigades on a highway in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁵⁴ “Ura” representing support and “Ua” deprecation, Ibidem.

¹⁵⁵ Ibidem.

where there was a suspicious *group* the headquarters would order to break up the group and spread them in different camps. There was one case of a group of 10-15 brigadiers who declared their support to Stalin and the Resolution during protests in Caribrod (Serbia) *before* coming to the Motorway. After the protests, they were arrested and expelled from the Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia. Coming to the Motorway YLA was a precondition for being accepted back into the PYY.¹⁵⁶

Lectures of "clarification" and actions against the "enemies of the state" were clearly policies aimed at the homogenization and stabilization of the ideology and politics of youth in the camps. The lectures were supposed to advocate the CPY's political and ideological side in the conflict with Cominform, while the acts against potential enemies were measures for preserving stability. In conclusion, stability and uniformity were given especial stress in light of the political situation of the period, where even small groups or individuals were considered capable of potentially drawing unwanted attention to the conditions of life in the Action, and thus threatening the stability of the Action's community.

The sector for agitation and press was also in charge of the popularization of the Motorway youth labour action. They covered 'work and political agitation; public relations; radio station and correspondence; publishing, film, exhibitions.'¹⁵⁷ However, even a year after the beginning of the construction works this sector had operational problems. Radio broadcasts were unable to reach all areas along the motorway. Since the Resolution distanced Yugoslavia from the Eastern Bloc in almost every possible sphere, even Soviet gramophone records were banned and the Motorway radio station lost a major part of their music selection.¹⁵⁸ A small number of staff in charge of the station could not keep a long program

¹⁵⁶ "Izveštaj o političkoj situaciji kod srednjoškolskih i sveučilišnih brigada" [Report on political situation among high school and university brigades], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁵⁷ "Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu u omladniskim radnim brigadama na autoputu u 1949. godini" [Report on agitation-propaganda work in the youth labour brigades on a highway in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁵⁸ Ibidem.

going and therefore, according to the Agitprop department, the radio station did not completely serve its intended purpose in 1949. On the other side, a lack of movie projectors and staff inability to handle film reels caused repeated interruptions or complete breaks in film screenings. Peasant youth preferred Yugoslav war movies over Soviet ones because of the language barrier. At the end of 1949, the sector for agitation and press completely abandoned Soviet movies and switched to domestic ones only.¹⁵⁹

Besides radio broadcasts and film projection this sector was also in charge of the Motorway publications. *Bratstvo i Jedinstvo* [Brotherhood and Unity] was four pages long and issued twice a week. It was used for providing the most important news from the Motorway and commenting on events outside the Motorway. However, in 1949 the department was dissatisfied with only a four-page publication and asked the central organization to allow them more people and finances for its editorial board, in order to produce papers of a higher quality.¹⁶⁰ Brigadiers were also provided with a short newsletter, *Bilten* that contained achievements from all over the Motorway, though sometimes it failed to reach a wider readership thanks to distribution delays. Delays were a frequent occurrence, ironically because all publications were printed in Zagreb, and therefore sometimes could not be distributing to all camps while the road many of which were situated along remained incomplete.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, camps for the most part were regularly supplied with all the most important Yugoslav news publications. While this might suggest that brigadiers were well informed about everything happening in the “outside world”, as they had opportunity to inform themselves by reading papers and other publications, this was not necessarily the case.

¹⁵⁹ “Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu u omladniskim radnim brigadama na autoputu u 1949. godini” [Report on agitation-propaganda work in the youth labour brigades on a highway in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁶⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁶¹ Ibidem.

Illiteracy was a major problem in Yugoslav society - especially among older generations – persisting after the War. Therefore, the YLA Agitprop department for education, among other programs conducted and prioritized analphabetic courses. All brigades had the same motto: “Nobody will return illiterate!”¹⁶² Every brigade was supposed to bring their own teacher from the area they were coming from; though in the case of the Motorway brigades, several failed to do so. Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina had the highest rate of illiterate youth, sometimes reaching up to 60 or 70 percent.¹⁶³ When a brigade would arrive without teacher, headquarters could often only provide a literate student from another brigade, or a teacher from the local area surrounding the construction site, as substitutes. This would then often generate a problem with language, as the students offered as teachers would not always know the language required; particularly in the case of Macedonian and Slovenian.¹⁶⁴ In November 1948, when construction works for that year stopped, of the 8,277 illiterate brigadiers who had participated in the Action, all of them successfully completed the analphabetic course offered in the camps.¹⁶⁵ In 1949, the Motorway library consisted of 70,000 books distributed in camps all over the construction site.¹⁶⁶ The books were used in reading groups for illiterate brigadiers, but were also available to those generally interested in literature.

Besides providing access to recorded music and projecting films, the department for culture and education ran several of the entertainments that were a lively aspect of life in the youth camp. Choirs, plays and various kinds of social events were either organized within brigades through their own initiative, or officially by the agitprop department, receiving help

¹⁶² “Omladinski logor na 144 kilometru“ [Youth camp on the 144th kilometer], *Omladina*, May 8, 1948.

¹⁶³ “Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu u omladniskim radnim brigadama na autoputu u 1949. godini” [Report on agitation-propaganda work in the youth labour brigades on a highway in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁵ “Pismo graditelja autoputa Maršalu Titu” [Letter of the motorway builders to Marshal Tito], *Omladina*, December 2, 1948.

¹⁶⁶ “Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu u omladniskim radnim brigadama na autoputu u 1949. godini” [Report on agitation-propaganda work in the youth labour brigades on a highway in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

from headquarters. Visits by various cultural clubs from all parts of the country were organized in cooperation with the Peoples' Youth of a certain republic and its local branches. For example, in July 1949 the Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia requested that its branch in Rijeka send a maximum of 30 members of a representative cultural group either from: "a double octet, or a reduced choir with a folklore group, or a *tamburica* orchestra."¹⁶⁷ However, judging by the complaints of agitprop reports, such groups occasionally ignored requests to appear in camps, or failed to stay for the full length of time asked of them (which was usually around 15 days).¹⁶⁸

In their free time, brigadiers were strongly encouraged to engage in the extracurricular life of the camp. It was in the interest of every brigade to have as many as possible brigadiers involved in optional activity beyond required workloads. Achievements on the construction site would be summed with those on the extracurricular programs and the best brigades would compete for the headquarters' flag of shock-brigade. Shock-brigades represented an image of perfect brigade and those brigades who returned from the YLA with the headquarters flag meant a special honor for all its members. When *Omladina* reporter in May 1948 asked 16 years old Ćiro what he thinks about their recently earned flag he said: "The flag is beautiful, when we could only keep it and take it back to our commune." and his brigade commander added: "We will continue fighting to keep it in the brigade"¹⁶⁹ By fighting the commander referred to constantly be the best brigade in every sphere of the YLA program, especially on the construction site and in "physical culture" trainings.

The badge of *fiskulturnika* (for the brigadier who breached the quota in physical training) would bring the brigade closer to claim the headquarters' flag of shock-brigade.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ CSA, F 1231, F 214, 5790/49.

¹⁶⁸ "Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu u omladniskim radnim brigadama na autoputu u 1949. godini" [Report on agitation-propaganda work in the youth labour brigades on a highway in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁶⁹ "Nosioci zastavice Glavnoga štaba" [Carriers of the Headquarters' flag], *Omladina*, May 3, 1948.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem.

Physical culture was organized by the department for physical culture, and their instructors took youth for morning gymnastics and trained them for rally performances. In August 1948, the III section held its rally in Ruma, a Serbian city on the Motorway, half-way between Belgrade and the Croatian-Serbian border.¹⁷¹ Since it was only a month after the Resolution crisis and few days after the Fifth CPY Congress, the brigadiers' performances were filled with symbolic expressions of their loyalty and support for the CPY, foremost for Tito. During the rally parade, 6000 brigadiers marched in formation chanting: "Tito to smo mi" [Tito - that is us].¹⁷² The beginning of the rally opened with a demonstration, with brigadiers "in the form of a five-pointed star" surrounded a smaller group "symbolizing the working heroism of youth on labor actions."¹⁷³ Other brigades also performed gymnastic routines prepared during morning trainings. For *Omladina*, in spite of a complete lack of synchronization of movement and frequent errors in the performances of the participants, the rally was a complete success. If most of the acts were badly performed it seems it was the themes of the occasion, rather than their (flawed) specific celebrations, that made the rally successful.

3.4. Pre-military training

The presence of the Yugoslav Army on the YLA Motorway (in any period) adds a whole new dimension to the entire youth program. Taking into account that fact that during the Split, there emerged a military crisis with a threat of invasion from the East, YLA Pre-military training (PMT) organized and conducted by the Army deserves special attention.

¹⁷¹ "Tito – to smo mi" [Tito - that is us], *Omladina*, August 3, 1948.

¹⁷² Ibidem.

¹⁷³ Ibidem.

In mid-June, the Peoples' Youth of Yugoslavia Central Council supported the Federal Government's Regulation, according to which all youth, 17-year-old and above, were legally obliged to participate in PMT before having to enlist in regular army service.¹⁷⁴ Youth labor actions had (voluntary) pre-military training even before the Regulation, which was much advised for those about to enlist in active service, and open to both female as well as male participants.¹⁷⁵ According to the official report, the PMT was the most popular non-compulsory non-work activity in 1948 and 1949 among all those organized by the General Headquarters' departments.¹⁷⁶ With major funds being allocated for the country's defense in the Federal budget, (already elaborated upon in the previous chapter) the popularization of the Yugoslav PMT in this period cannot be a coincidence. As a matter of fact, the Government's Regulation proves that Yugoslavia was extensively reorganizing their defense forces and preparing for a possible war. But how did this program work in YLAs?

As with the case of the literacy program, every brigade was supposed to arrive at the Motorway with at least one person with army experience who would serve as a brigade Pre-military instructor.¹⁷⁷ These nominated individuals would take part in educational seminars given by the Yugoslav Army, where they were prepared for spreading their knowledge upon arrival at the Motorway with their brigade. The PMT program on the Motorway was divided into an educational and a practical part, and together they offered basic knowledge in: "shooting, infantry machine rule, technical training, garrison service rule and topography."¹⁷⁸ The main purpose of the training was to introduce the basics of military training to youth

¹⁷⁴ "O nekim zadacima Narodne omladine u vezi sa sprovođenjem Zakona o predvojničkoj obuci" [About some tasks of Peoples' youth on conducting the Pre-military Training Law], *Omladina*, July 13, 1948.

¹⁷⁵ „Predvojnička obuka i omladina na Autoputu“ [Pre-military training and youth on the Motorway], *Omladina*, August 10, 1948.

¹⁷⁶ "Godišnji izvještaj o izvođenju predvojničke obuke na Autoputu – 1949." [Year report on conducting the Pre-military training on the Motorway - 1949], AY, F 114, F152.

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁸ „Predvojnička obuka i omladina na Autoputu“ [Pre-military training and youth on the Motorway], *Omladina*, August 10, 1948.

before they joined the regular army service, so as to provide them with a certain degree of preparatory experience.

PMT was part of the activities' schedule organized three times a week for every brigade. The PMT course with the highest attendance was shooting practice. During only the first three months of the shooting course in 1948, a total of 29,435 youth participated, with around 15,000 finishing with excellent marks.¹⁷⁹ The next year PMT organized specialized units such as a high school unit, paratroopers and military police.¹⁸⁰ The high school unit was made up youth from the surrounding areas of the motorway construction site, between the ages of sixteen to nineteen. The aim of this particular unit was to prepare selected high school students to return to their home communities after the Action as PMT instructors. Consequently, this unit had intense training, with 2-3 hours every day dedicated to their pre-military training, on top of the 7 hours spent on the construction site helping regular brigades.¹⁸¹ The Paratrooper unit, with its 600 members, was divided into two groups. One half practiced jumping from aircraft while the other dealt with theory on the ground, without directly experiencing parachuting.¹⁸² The military police unit mostly consisted of youth who had not served in regular army service, and therefore also had intensive training during their stay on the YLA. Their purpose was to maintain discipline during PTM trainings and guard weaponry when not in use.¹⁸³ For shooting practice, brigadiers used "871 rifles of French origin, 7.5 mm [bullets]."¹⁸⁴ The report on PMT in 1949 states that not a single rifle was

¹⁷⁹ „Predvojnička obuka i omladina na Autoputu“ [Pre-military training and youth on the Motorway], *Omladina*, August 10, 1948.

¹⁸⁰ “Godišnji izvještaj o izvođenju predvojničke obuke na Autoputu – 1949.” [Year report on conducting the Pre-military training on the Motorway - 1949], AY, F 114, F152.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem.

¹⁸² Ibidem.

¹⁸³ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁴ Ibidem.

stolen or improperly used.¹⁸⁵ This could have meant two things; either brigadiers were self-disciplined, or the military police unit was doing its job on the Motorway well.

As previously mentioned, Yugoslav Army units worked beside youth on the Motorway. They were settled in their own camps, but often helped the PMTs by presenting tactical maneuvers to the youth. The actual presence of the army units must have helped to promote a serious attitude towards PMT among youth. In 1949 around 210,000 male and 70,000 female youth participated in PMT - almost 95% of the total number of participants in the Motorway YLA.¹⁸⁶ Based on these numbers, it seems that the Regulation from the year before affected almost all YLA brigadiers in 1949. From this, it appears that the only youth on the YLA were those who had not, and were not serving in the army. Whether or not this conclusion is correct would require further exploration beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say, PMT on the Motorway became, after 1948, a major, compulsory feature of life in the camps.

¹⁸⁵ “Godišnji izvještaj o izvođenju predvojničke obuke na Autoputu – 1949.” [Year report on conducting the Pre-military training on the Motorway - 1949], AY, F 114, F152.

¹⁸⁶ “Izvještaj o provođenju predvojničke obuke - statistike” [Report on conducting Pre-military training - statistics], AY, F 114, F152.

3.5. “The paver must not stop!” - Youth building the Motorway

And in the camp on the X section we arrived late. Apart from our brigade, not one other was here. In front of the leadership appeared several problems at the very first moment. [...] [F]or example, brigadiers' things were scattered in a heap and they had to be distributed. Youth, tired from the trip, lay down on the ground next to the barracks without blankets. Others in the dark were looking for drinking water [...] or they were running around in empty barracks. Then it seemed to me that here they did not find what they expected. That evening they were only looking for a bed to rest after a long trip. And the beds we made only the next day. We all have differently understood life on the labour actions. In the newspapers you read about the successes of different brigades, achievements, and outstanding young people, but about the experience of brigades gained on the first day, about this little is written.

(3rd Takovo brigade Commander Rodoljub Milovanovic)¹⁸⁷

The kinds of omissions Commander Rodoljub complained about to an *Omladina* news reporter as they were sitting around a camp fire several days after the happenings of his brigade's arrival into the new Motorway camp were certainly evident in media covering the YLAs. What the Yugoslav public could read about the conditions on the YLAs centered mostly around the theme of heroic youth performing extraordinary deeds. While the achievements of YLAs were great in many respects, many of the day-to-day lived experiences were far from praise-worthy. Commander Rodoljub went on to describe his brigade's first night in the camp, and how a lack of petroleum and lamps caused enormous difficulties in simply orientating themselves in the camp, and in finding water.¹⁸⁸ Since the brigade consisted of 250 peasant youth, the first day on a large-scale construction site was an entirely new and disorientating experience. They were all used to hard work on a field, and not as part of an organized disciplined brigade with specified tasks, daily quotas and constant teamwork.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ “Prvi dani – prva iskustva” [First days – first experiences], *Omladina*, Spetember 7, 1948.

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem.

One brigade Commander recorded in his brigade journal his thoughts about the day when Tito visited their camp, as well as some personal reflections about their first few days on the Motorway. His brigade, 10th Zagreb, arrived on June 2, 1948 after a long train ride to Ruma. The next day, the 259 youth in the brigade underwent a physical examination and were vaccinated - after which only 214 brigadiers were allowed to return to their camp.¹⁹⁰ The other 45 were sent home because they were deemed to be too young, weak or sick to remain. Due to problems in planned mobilization (elaborated upon in previous sub-chapters), local branches had sent everybody they could in order to fulfill their quotas. Youth under the age of 16 were not allowed to participate on the YLAs, yet were still arriving in significant numbers. As well as cases of premature mobilization, there were instances of youth lying about their age when signing up for the action.¹⁹¹ In 1st Banja Luka brigade, 62 brigadiers were sent back after their physical examination, including a cook who turned out to be pregnant. The brigade's commander, Fikret Džankić, sarcastically commented on the incident: "I arranged with the doctor to send her back to Banja Luka immediately with the others, so the brigade strength does not increase."¹⁹² Sending unfit brigadiers home often negatively affected the moral in brigades, and upped financial costs for Headquarters.

3.5.1. Competitions as the expression of loyalty for Tito and the Party

On the construction site, brigades were divided into troops of between 60 and to 80 brigadiers designated for different tasks. For example, 1st Valjevo brigade was divided into three troops, first in charge of planning the Motorway route, the second of laying the railway

¹⁹⁰ *Brigadni dnevnik X. Zagrebačke radne brigade "Marijan Badel"* [Brigade Journal of 10th Zagreb Labour Brigade "Marijan Badel"], CSA, F 1231, F 212.

¹⁹¹ *Analiza mobilizacije omladine na Autoput i Beograd 1949* [Analysis of the mobilization of youth for the Motorway and Belgrade in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

¹⁹² „Zašto su 62 brigadista iz I banjalučke vraćeni s Autoputa?“ [Why 62 brigadiers from 1st Banja Luka brigade were returned from the Motorway?], *Omladina*, July 17, 1948.

tracks next to the Motorway and the third of filling the railway with sand.¹⁹³ Sometimes they spent 10 or more hours on the construction site, depending on the task and weather conditions. Motivating youth to dedicate thousands of free hours in hard labour were numerous competitions invented by the General Headquarters' sub-department for competitions. Systems of competitions were the actual mechanism of social stabilization and homogenization on youth labor actions during the Resolution crisis. The ultimate goal of this system of work was creating a competing spirit between brigades for symbolic prize and the honor of building socialism, in combination with fostering further love and loyalty towards CPY and Tito.¹⁹⁴ Without the military organization of the whole structure of brigades and omnipresent propaganda, these systems of competitions could never have functioned and flourished. When General Headquarters announced that the whole Motorway YLA will "hunt" the norm - or in other words, build more than it was originally planned - these "orders" were spread on all levels in every camp. It was not a proper order *per se*, but rather an official call for greater commitment in the name of the Party and Tito, to which every brigade then responded with enthusiasm.

There were different levels of competition on the YLAs, and these can be divided into: federal, project, section and brigade levels. Federal level competitions were organized on the initiative of one YLA project. For instance, the General Headquarters of the YLA New Belgrade sent telegrams to CPY Central Committee informing them about a competition within their project, and inviting other major YLA projects join and compete with them, towards producing better results before the start of the Fifth CPY Congress.¹⁹⁵ The other

¹⁹³ "800 procenata iznad norme u čast rođendana druga Tita [800 percent above the norm in honor to comrade Tito's birthday], *Omladina*, June 1, 1948.

¹⁹⁴ "Moćni talas pretkongresnog takmičenja izraz je ljubavi naše omladine prema drugu Titu i Partiji" [Powerful wave of pre-Congress competition is expression of our youth's love towards comrade Tito and the Party], *Omladina*, July 8, 1948.

¹⁹⁵ "Telegram graditelja Novog Beograda Centralnom komitetu Komunističke partije Jugoslavije" [Telegram from builders of New Belgrade to Central Committee of Communist Party of Yugoslavia], *Omladina*, May 29, 1948.

YLAs, among which were the Motorway brigades, responded with an affirmation of their willingness to participate.¹⁹⁶ The prize for the winners was the permanent “PYY Central Committee flag.”¹⁹⁷ Project and section competitions were constantly ongoing and every ten or twenty days brigades with the best results would be promoted to the status of shock-brigade and temporarily earn the “General Headquarters’ flag”, which they would then try to defend and hold onto during the next competition.¹⁹⁸ Brigade-level competitions were a matter of internal organization. 1st Valjevo brigade developed their own competition, in which the troop members with the best result of the day would earn a badge with an image of a plane; an image of a truck for the second-best troop; and finally the least efficient members would receive a snail badge.¹⁹⁹ Despite the fact there was no material prize for the brigadiers, according to various records; youth took both their tasks and competitions seriously - as if their wages would depend on the maximal extension of their efforts. Such volunteer dedication to work was justified by patriotic feeling and a genuine belief in goal of building a better socialist future.

The convening of the Fifth CPY Congress two months before its opening was immediately recognized as a “historic moment”, despite the fact that - representatives of PYY did not yet know that the reason it was convened was Stalin’s letters to the CPY Central Committee. On the subject of the Congress, the Motorway YLA headquarters stated:

The convening of the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the second year of the Five-Year Plan, when our working people dedicated to the persistent struggle to build socialism in Yugoslavia, fills our builders’ hearts with immense joy and pride. [...] Tasks in honor of the Party Fifth

¹⁹⁶ „Takmičenje u čast Petog kongresa KPJ“ [Competition in honor of CPY Fifth Congress], *Omladina*, June 1, 1948.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁸ “Nosioći zastavice glavnog štaba” [Carriers of the General Headquarters’ flag], *Omladina*, May 3, 1948.

¹⁹⁹ “800 procenata iznad norme u čast rođendana druga Tita [800 percent above the norm in honor to comrade Tito’s birthday], *Omladina*, June 1, 1948.

Congress will be a new proof of the love and devotion of our heroic youth to the Communist Party and comrade Tito.²⁰⁰

There is a possibility that the CC of the CPY instructed the PYY, without explaining why such an instruction would be important at this time, to organize the federal YLA Congress competition (earlier discussed) as an expression of the loyalty of youth to the CPY and Tito. Whether or not they were directly instructed to organize the competition or not there are no indications that suggest that any youth organization knew the true political background of the first, largest, post-war gathering of Yugoslav communists.

After the Cominform resolution reached the Yugoslav public, no one initially reacted. However, following a few days of silence, the Congress competition gained increased significance. On July 2, 1948, the General Headquarters of the Motorway YLA sent a telegram to the CC of the CPY: "Serious accusations cannot shake us in the belief that our Party, headed by its Central Committee is going the right way. Led by the Party, we came to the Motorway, to build our future, to build socialism in our country."²⁰¹ Expressing loyalty to Tito and the Party became of *utmost* importance to the YLA headquarters. At the end of the telegram they explain how will they express their loyalty: "From now on, through our construction site needs to flow a new life, levees along the route have to be built faster, machines have to work rationally and with fewer breakdowns, bridges, passes, [...] have to grow under our hands. Where previously norms were not achieved they have to be met, and where they were met they have to be exceeded. Ideological and educational, cultural, educational and gymnastic work we have to continue developing and make deeper, richer,

²⁰⁰ "Takmičenje u čast Petog kongresa KPJ" [Competition in honor of CPY Fifth Congress], *Omladina*, June 1, 1948.

²⁰¹ "Telegram graditelja autoputa 'Bratstvo-jedinstvo' CK KPJ" [The Motorway "Brotherhood-unity" builders' telegram to CC CPY], *Omladina*, July 8, 1948.

more versatile.”²⁰² For youth, hard work and fulfillment of the daily and weekly assignments became the way of manifesting their loyalty to Tito and the Party.

Nevertheless, in a small part of the telegram, builders represented by their headquarters also point out that they will raise and educate themselves in light of, and by following, the examples of the “glorious SKP(b) and heroic Komsomol.”²⁰³ This statement is important for two reasons. Firstly, it confirms that, like most of their Party representatives, youth organizers remained unaware of the whole political background behind the Resolution – importantly from where the accusations against CPY originated -, a fact they state blandly in their telegram. Secondly, it is clear that the official attitude towards the Soviet Union and its party organization was coordinated from ‘above’, by the leadership of the CPY. Therefore, those first few days of silence can be understood as a period of preparing a coordinated response in the public relations across all party organizations.

Three days before the opening of the Congress, on July 18, the Motorway headquarters held its meeting with the director of the *State Youth Construction Enterprise “The Motorway”* (SYCEM), motorway engineers and representatives from all brigades, at which they discussed competitions.²⁰⁴ In light of an already tried and tested method of higher work targets as expressing the loyalty of you on the actions, the General Headquarters’ commander Ico Blanuša announced that brigadiers will complete 120, instead of the planned 105, kilometers of the Motorway before November 29 when the construction site works for 1948 cease. But what did these kinds of commitments mean in practice for the youth on the construction site?

²⁰² “Telegram graditelja autoputa ‘Bratstvo-jedinstvo’ CK KPJ” [The Motorway “Brotherhood-unity” builders’ telegram to CC CPY], *Omladina*, July 8, 1948.

²⁰³ Ibidem.

²⁰⁴ “Umjesto 105 km izgradit ćemo 120 km Autoputa do 29. Novembra” [Instead of 105 km we will build 120 km of the Motorway until November 29], *Omladina*, July 20, 1948.

According to the journal of 10th Zagreb brigade, already in the days leading up to the Congress the opening works on the Motorway significantly intensified.²⁰⁵ The brigade implemented an internal competition system with their own symbols - “plane, car, horse and snail” – for the troops. They were also offered the chance to perform “voluntary work”. Besides the work the troops conducted in 6 to 8 hours per day, whole brigades were also able to take up extra “voluntary work” during Sundays, night shifts, their free time in general.²⁰⁶ Both during their working hours and “voluntary” hours, brigadiers were performing difficult and dangerous tasks. At 2 o’clock in the morning on July 25, two troops from 10th Zagreb brigade were transporting railway tracks on the construction site. Their role was to load several hundred kilos of cargo onto wagons, sometimes onto piles reaching 3 or 4 meters in height.²⁰⁷

The pressures of competition affected brigadier morale in both positive and negative ways. 10th Zagreb brigade mostly worked with the paver, the machine which finishes the road by laying asphalt as a final layer.²⁰⁸ Their task was to do the groundwork before the machine passes over it with the asphalt. However, the paver’s frequent breakdowns often halted progress; sometimes for hours, sometimes for days. Therefore, the success of the brigade was depended on the reliability of their machinery and its efficiency. In the competition efficiency was the most important variable, and when the brigade was inefficient, morale would fall. Nonetheless, they used every possible situation to boost morale and to this effect their signature motto was: “The paver must not stop!”²⁰⁹ When workers from the SYCEM operating the paver would appear to falter, the brigade pushed them to work harder and to follow their tempo.

²⁰⁵ “Brigadni dnevnik X. Zagrebačke radne brigade ‘Marijan Badel’” [Brigade Journal of 10th Zagreb Labour Brigade “Marijan Badel”], CSA, F 1231, F 212.

²⁰⁶ Ibidem.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem.

²⁰⁸ Ibidem.

²⁰⁹ Ibidem.

On the first Congress day they worked with the paver for 12 straight hours from 6:00 PM until 6:00 AM - as they had lost most of the previous day on cleaning and decorating their camp for a ceremony farewelling their delegates on their way to Belgrade for the Fifth CPY Congress. On July 20, they wrote slogans all over the camp with messages of support for Tito and the CPY Congress and greeted the procession of trucks and pavers carrying their delegates and passing near the camp. The next day before work, those troops who stayed in the camp gathered around Belgrade brigade barrack to listen the radio and Tito's speeches on the Congress while waiting for the beginning of their shift. Their Commander recorded in his journal:

In Belgrade there is a chart where Congress delegates are able to see our daily progress and how we are fulfilling our obligations. Our first section is almost done, only finished road is behind us and therefore they [delegates] will be looking at our results. With these thoughts we are going through the construction site. What if the paver fails as usual²¹⁰? Party organization and sections will mobilize all forces so the paver works for 30 fields, and we more than anyone else will help and push the technical staff.²¹¹

The Commander's thoughts represents an example of successful YLA competition policies in which brigades created a new working attitude, where work was an expression of loyalty and obligation towards the country, the Party and their leader. The rush for fulfillment of the Congress competition assignments and the new major "November 29 assignment" of 120 kilometers of road needed a considerable increase in the efforts of the workforce. One way to achieve this was to encourage the implementation and participation in "voluntary work". Another option was to ask brigadiers to stay on longer on the YLA. Therefore, the agitprop department promoted prolonged stays on the Motorway among the brigades. . The 10th Zagreb brigade stayed for 2 months, from July 1 until August 31, 1948 even though they

²¹⁰ "Brigadni dnevnik X. Zagrebačke radne brigade 'Marijan Badel'" [Brigade Journal of 10th Zagreb Labour Brigade "Marijan Badel"], CSA, F 1231, F 212.

²¹¹ Ibidem.

were a student brigade and should have stayed no more than 30 days.²¹² The same was the case in 1949, when 17,000 youth from the fifth shift prolonged their stay until the end of November.²¹³

In the end it remains unknown whether the brigades succeeded or not in constructing those additional 15 kilometers announced on the meeting a few days before congress. Unfortunately, there is no precise data on how many kilometers were finished in those 7 months. However, they were presumably unsuccessful, given that there were no articles in *Omladina* with sensational titles about any such success on the Motorway. In the article which summarized brigadiers' achievements on the Motorway for 1948, there were no records on exactly how many kilometers were actually built.²¹⁴ Furthermore, the article about the plans for the works in 1949 suggests that there were unfinished parts of the motorway on the 3rd and 4th sections.²¹⁵

Whether 120 kilometers were completed or not, the efforts of youth on the Motorway were, in the final account of 1948, impressive. At the ceremonial rally in Srijemska Mitrovica, PYY officials, The Motorway YLA headquarters and Vlada Zečević (the FPRY Minister of Constructions) hosted brigades coming from the last shift. The Minister spoke about the major achievements on the Motorway in famous communist language: The brigades “unearthed 1,280,000 cubic meters of humus, built 2,800,000 cubic meters of embankments, [...] constructed 440,000 square meters of concrete road, [...] 64,000 square meters asphalt road,

²¹² “Brigadni dnevnik X. Zagrebačke radne brigade ‘Marijan Badel’” [Brigade Journal of 10th Zagreb Labour Brigade “Marijan Badel”], CSA, F 1231, F 212.

²¹³ “Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu u omladniskim radnim brigadama na autoputu u 1949. godini” [Report on agitation-propaganda work in the youth labour brigades on a highway in 1949], AY, F 114, F 152.

²¹⁴ “Graditelji Autoputa proslavili su završetak ovogodišnjih radova” [The Motorway builders celebrated the end of construction works for this year], *Omladina*, December 2, 1948.

²¹⁵ “Dogradnja Autoputa – Najveća ovogodišnja radna akcija Narodne omladine” [Completion of the Motorway – The biggest labour action of Peoples' Youth], *Omladina*, February 13, 1948.

[...] 16 concrete bridges in length of 810 meters [...]”²¹⁶ The Gerneral Headquarters’ commander closed the ceremony with the following words:

You are now going to your houses in your villages. Major tasks are waiting for you there. Our youth organizations have big expectations about you. You should be initiators, organizers of young people to work on the development of agrarian cooperatives. Do your best for a hasty socialist transformation of your village. In your villages create the same and even better successes in your political and cultural life, like the one you had on the Motorway, share your knowledge and experience to your comrades.²¹⁷

Sharing their newly-acquired experiences and knowledge was not the only path youth had after they finished volunteering on the Motorway. The YLA served as a sort of employment office for peasant youth. For 1948, the Peoples’ Youth of Yugoslavia, in coordination with the Federal Work Bureau planned to employ 14,117 non-student youth from the Motorway YLA, mostly in mining, heavy and light industry as well as military industry.²¹⁸ The plan was fulfilled and even surpassed with 14,319 youth employed, a total of 19.2 percent of 84,706 peasant youth who had participated in the Motorway YLA. The report suggests that the ratio could be even higher if the proportion of female youth and those under age of 17 is taken out of the total number, because they were unfit for the positions opened in mines, steelwork factories and military factories where most of the youth went.²¹⁹

Though successful, the employment process was sometimes rough and unpleasant for youth. Firstly, it was not always a simple matter to leave your camp and head directly to the factory, which was often situated in different regions and even in a different republic. Secondly, coordination between the PYY employment department and state enterprises was poor. In some cases, enterprises rejected whole groups of former brigadiers with excuses such

²¹⁶ “Dogradnja Autoputa – Najveća ovogodišnja radna akcija Narodne omladine” [Completion of the Motorway – The biggest labour action of Peoples’ Youth], *Omladina*, February 13, 1948.

²¹⁷ Ibidem.

²¹⁸ “Uključivanje omladine u privredu i stručne kurseve” [Engaging the youth in economy and specializing courses], AY, F 114, F 152.

²¹⁹ Ibidem.

as: “Nobody informed us that 500 youth are coming to our factory.”²²⁰ After making their decisions to go, some unfortunate boys and girls traveled across the country only to find closed doors, with no money to return back home.²²¹ But, even after such discouraging incidences, the majority of these individuals did end up participating in some PYY program helping to transform an agrarian economy into an industrialized country of workers.

This returns to the question posed at the beginning of the chapter: What was Tito doing on the Motorway 15 days after the Resolution and why was it so important for him to be there? Tito came to the Motorway to strengthen support for the Party among the youth working there. Judging from the reports in brigadier journals, for the majority of youth on the Motorway that day, it would be the first - and most likely the only - time in their lives when they would have the opportunity to see Yugoslavia’s leader. For them, Tito was the embodiment of the Communist Party, the extension of themselves. His physical presence on the construction project was the best way to garner support, and to strengthen the link between youth and Party. The Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” was a project that successfully mobilized the largest amount of youth. Thanks to a variety of political, economic and ideological factors, it was able to survive the crisis between 1948 and 1950, and serve as a platform for homogenization and inner stabilization of youth.

²²⁰ “Uključivanje omladine u privredu i stručne kurseve” [Engaging the youth in economy and specializing courses] , AY, F 114, F 152.

²²¹ Ibidem.

Conclusion

Historical research on the importance of youth labor actions, at any point during the socialist period, can only be accomplished through systematic analysis of primary sources. Secondary source literature dealing with the subject is almost entirely absent in the historiography of Yugoslavia in the 20th century, as is any developed methodology for examining the YLA. Therefore, this research had to depart from “square one”, with the introduction of a methodology and beginning at the very start by situating YLA within a broader postwar context. For the same reasons, this research focused on a case study among the first major Yugoslav YLA projects. The dynamics of the postwar period in Yugoslavia – the establishment of the new communist system, reconstruction and development of the country through the first Five-Year plan projects, and complex international relations – created an important role for the youth labor actions.

The new system strengthened their most important ideological pillar, “brotherhood and unity”, by using YLA to teach Yugoslav youth what that meant in theory and practice. Diversity among the youth population in youth labour actions attempted to alleviate the interethnic tensions heightened during the War. Brigades from every corner of Yugoslavia participated in the same projects and worked “shoulder to shoulder”. More than a million youth participated as the work force on around 70 major Five-Year plan building projects. This fact represents the undeniable economic role played by YLAs in the second half of 1940s. As the decade unfolded, and brought with it the emergence of the political, ideological, economic and social crisis following the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, YLAs gained increased significance.

The effects of the political and economic crisis caused by the disagreements between the CPY and the Cominform affected all Five-Year plan projects and therefore the Motorway

“Brotherhood-Unity” and youth labor actions. The economic blockade, as a consequence of the disagreements, slowed down the project. The machines that were supposed to be provided for the building of the motorway never arrived in the amount they were ordered. Therefore, machines were in many cases replaced with a human labour force; in the first place the youth, but also soldiers and prisoners - together around 40,000 per one two-month shift. Despite having economic merit, according to the SYCEM calculations the costs of having brigades were significantly high. However, such a huge concentration of youth served as established platform for internal mobilization in the service of expressing support and loyalty when the CPY needed it most. This can be taken as one of the reasons why the project was supported by the government regardless of its expenses.

Therefore, the example of the project Motorway “Brotherhood-Unity” revealed the importance of the YLAs in Yugoslav postwar period. There was a strong link between the political structures at the top, the project of the Motorway, and the youth labour action building it. The interrelations between those three levels were constant, and they went in both directions, from the highest to lowest level and vice versa. Firstly, the project depended on both the government support and youth’s work force. Secondly, the conditions on the YLA were changing according to the needs of the project and political circumstances. Thirdly, the Yugoslav leadership needed both youth’s voluntary economic power, but increasingly during the time of crisis, their support.

In that sense, Tito’s visit to the Motorway only 15 days after Cominform launched the Resolution was no coincidence. His appearance in front of the youth was part of a campaign in which systems of competitions on the Motorway construction site were meant to motivate the youth to work harder and through hard work express their loyalty and support to the CPY leadership. Not only did propagandistic articles in *Omladina* write about the enthusiasm and support among youth, but so too did the journals of brigade commanders themselves. On the

examples of the “Fifth Congress” and “November 29” competitions, the whole process was very clear and the conclusion is that these mechanisms of motivation worked. The lack of machines was successfully substituted and therefore the economic aspect was satisfied. On the youth labor actions there were rare examples and reports of “ideological deviations” or resistance to the competition, confirming that the stabilization mechanism worked as well.

This research on the Motorway youth labor action included comprehensive examination of documents concerning the context of the short period in between 1948 and 1950. Because of the constraints of the focus the thesis was unable to extensively deal with certain features such as the international brigades and Pre-military training that were an important part of the action. Taking into account that only this particular action had its second part in the late 1950s and beginning of 1960s (when the Motorway was upgraded and action performed under completely different conditions) it is clear that the youth labor actions present a vast field of research opportunities. In this respect, I hope that this research will be an opening for future debates on Yugoslav youth labor actions.

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